

Explanation and stance on the present controversy

While there are many different issues that have arisen in the last five years and especially since the publication of *Sword and Shield*, this outline attempts to follow the one central thread of the whole controversy and thus explain the positions we have taken.

1. Neil Meyer was disciplined and deposed for his defense of the truth over against the preaching of Rev. Overway. His theology was branded as antinomian. Synod 2016 said he wasn't antinomian, Synod 2017 said he wasn't antinomian, and Synod 2018 said that his theology was correct and Rev. Overway, Hope consistory, and the Doctrinal Statement were in error. Antinomianism is not and never was the issue. Neil's discipline was unjust.
2. The Doctrinal Statement was drafted by four senior ministers, and it is reported that it also was sent back and forth to seminary many times. Thus this error was deeply rooted in our churches and specifically among our respected ministers.
3. An analogy:
 - a. Synod 2018 was like an MRI that looked deeply into a patient and discovered a cancerous tumor in our churches.
 - i. The tumor was deadly - it displaced the perfect work of Christ and compromised the doctrines of the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone.
 - b. Synod 2018 was *only* an MRI. It only *identified* the tumor. It then became the job of the doctors (the ministers) to *cut out* the tumor. The next step was for the ministers to take their scalpels to the pulpit and begin cutting out that tumor from their own hearts and the hearts of their congregations.
 - c. This *did not happen*.
 - i. As far as the denomination knows, the four authors of the doctrinal statement did not apologize for authoring it. (If they have repented in their hearts, praise God, but the public is unaware of this).
 - ii. The next meeting of Classis East rejected a motion to condemn the Doctrinal Statement. They said it was sufficient merely to acquiesce to Synod's decision.
 - iii. The Prof. Dykstra editorial in the next issue of the *Standard Bearer* said, essentially, "Yes, the MRI found a tumor, but it wasn't really *cancer*, it was more of a benign tumor. Yes it was a problem, but not so deadly serious as cancer. Now that the MRI identified it, we know about it and can be

more careful in the future. However, if any doctors say that it was cancer, they are lying, and we revoke doctors' medical licenses for the sin of lying." (The actual language used was along these lines, "Yes, Synod identified an error, but no one may call it heresy, conditional theology, justification by faith and works, or anything like that. In fact, if you do say that, that is slander, and we excommunicate people for slander.")

1. Following the analogy, Prof. Dykstra's editorial was saying, "Put your scalpels away, this isn't cancer. Now that we've had our MRI we know about it and can move on from it. No need to worry, and no need to undergo painful surgery."
- iv. In the October 2018 issue of the Standard Bearer, Rev. Koole wrote the "What must I do...?" editorial which again framed the controversy in terms of antinomianism.
1. He said we tend to underestimate "What the Holy Spirit makes of a man." Also, "If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do." "There was something they had to do, and they did it."
 2. Rev. N. Langerak wrote in saying that the editorial "missed the point" by talking about antinomianism again, which was never the issue at hand. Rev. Koole said that Rev. N. Langerak's assessment was neither honest nor helpful.
 3. Rev. Lanning wrote in, pointing out that Herman Hoeksema's sermon on the Phillipian Jailor said that we do "nothing" to be saved. Rev. Koole's response was to call the exegesis that we do nothing "nonsense."
 4. Herman Boonstra wrote a letter defending Herman Hoeksema on the Phillipian Jailor sermon, and Rev. Koole said he was "sliding towards the antinomian ditch."
4. A Group of Concerned Men was dissatisfied with the work of the editors, and the attack on Herman Hoeksema's exegesis of the Phillipian Jailor text as well as the attack on Herman Boonstra were the last straw. They drafted a letter detailing their grievances and sent it to the editors and to the RFPA board asking that the board take action. The grievances in the letter, stated briefly, were as follows:
- a. The editorials don't develop much doctrine, they are weak in polemics, and it appears that the editors are taking the magazine in a different direction.

- b. The editors have engaged in censorship of letters and articles, not allowing open dialogue in the magazine.
 - c. The new relationship policy has changed the historical relationship between the RFPA and the SB. It violates a unanimous 2011 board decision that says that the RFPA through the board has final control over the content of the magazine.
 - d. Last of all, the editors gave no leadership through the doctrinal controversy. Once Synod 2018 settled the controversy, the editors did not instruct the readers regarding the error that was condemned, but rather began attacking antinomianism all over again. And finally they attacked Herman Hokesema's exegesis on the Philippian Jailor and attacked Herman Boonstra for defending Hoeksema.
- 5. The editors charged Revs. Lanning and VanderWal with schism and slander for their involvement with this group of men. This case was just dealt with at Classis January 2021 (It was not sustained). The board also refused to listen to the group's concerns, and when the group followed the constitution and called for a special meeting of the RFPA at the request of 15+ association members, the board denied them the meeting, claiming that they were being slanderous. This indicated that the group was at the end of the road with the RFPA. A new publishing association was necessary. RBP and Sword and Shield were born.
- 6. Sword and Shield was necessary because the RFPA refused to listen to the concerns of members of its own association. It was also necessary because Synod 2018 and the doctrinal error that it exposed were not being explained to the denomination, and the Standard Bearer was turning people's attention away from the sin we committed and focusing back in on imaginary antinomians.
- 7. Beginning in the second or third editorial in Sword and Shield, Rev. Lanning discussed the controversy that the PRC is in and explained that it is a matter of the truth vs. the lie.
 - a. Many have seized on this in their criticism of Sword and Shield. "If there is a lie among us, tell us who the liars are! Tell us who is preaching the lie! Tell us who is writing the lie! You're just harping on a dead issue because you're dissatisfied with some decisions of the assemblies and you have an axe to grind! Synod 2018 settled the issue and we could all move past it if you would stop talking about it!"
 - b. My response to those accusations is that, first of all, the purpose of Sword and Shield is not to make personal charges of sin against any individuals. It would be

highly inappropriate for Rev. Lanning to take to the pages of Sword and Shield and say “You know, I don’t think Rev. VO or Rev. Eriks have repented of their sin of authoring the Doctrinal Statement.” That would be absurd. Rev. Lanning cannot see their hearts, and that kind of writing would not be edifying for the readership. The kind of writing that is edifying is to instruct the readers in what the error was, why it was so bad, why we must continue to condemn it, and what is the truth over against that error.

- c. Second, regarding the challenge that Sword and Shield should “tell us who the liars are,” I would say that Sword and Shield is not interested in any individual persons. It does not have an axe to grind with Prof. Dykstra or Rev. Koole or Rev. VO or any other individual. Its purpose is not to judge the hearts of any of these men and say, “These men believe and are teaching a lie.” Rather, Sword and Shield has been calling the denomination to consider this question: “WHERE ARE THE SCALPELS?” Synod 2018 showed us that we had CANCER! And yet the denomination has not undergone surgery! The denomination does not know if the authors of the Doctrinal Statement have repented! The denomination could not depose Rev. Overway for false doctrine even when he went and preached the same error condemned by Synod 2018. Instead, he was allowed simply to resign and now is a member in good standing! The denomination has been told through the Standard Bearer that we don’t really have cancer and people who say we do are bad, slanderous people! At every opportunity the message is “We don’t need surgery. Surgery is painful and divides the body. Stop talking about surgery, it scares people and gives the impression that we aren’t healthy.” Where are the scalpels? Where was the instruction to God’s people about the sin we committed and encouragement to repent and learn the truth that condemns that sin? And the elephant in the room that no one wants to admit is this: The absence of the scalpels reveals that there are people who don’t think we really have cancer! The results of the MRI aren’t a big deal! Now that we have the results, we can move on! The real problem isn’t conditions, it’s antinomians! Rev. Overway was on the right track! He was trying to encourage holy living among God’s people. Maybe he got his words mixed up, but the thought was good! And we need to continue on that road, the road that tells God’s people that there really is something they have to do to be saved, and that’s what will get people to live holy lives.

8. The appearance of Sword and Shield sparked a storm of opposition. Consistories condemned it, the SB editors continued with their charges of sin against the Group of Concerned Men, Gary Boverhof brought charges of sin against Rev. Lanning, and public opinion was largely against it.
 - a. The question is, why such opposition? Sword and Shield loves the PRC and wants to instruct God's people in dealing with the cancer in our midst. The widespread opposition to Sword and Shield indicates this: The PRC in general doesn't think we have cancer either. The PRC in general thinks we can just move on from Synond 2018, and things would be all better if people would stop talking about it.
 - b. The opposition to Sword and Shield culminated in Byron Center consistory requiring Rev. Lanning to step down as editor. In essence, this was the PRC saying, "Stop telling us we have cancer, we don't want to hear about it."
 - c. This prompted Rev. Lanning to preach his Jeremiah 23 sermon, "Shepherds to feed you." The broad message of the sermon is, "The PRC has cancer! But the doctors in the PRC refuse to do surgery! In fact, they say that no surgery is necessary and the tumor isn't really that bad. We must repent! We have cancer and we need extensive surgery! And the only place where surgery is being conducted is in one magazine, and the PRC is opposing that magazine! Repent, or this cancer will kill you!"
9. Rev. Lanning has now been deposed for that sermon (and two others). By this, the PRC has rejected Christ's call for repentance and turning, which is the only cure for its cancer. It will not submit to surgery. The cancer remains. Worshiping in a PR church is like visiting a deathly ill cancer patient who claims they aren't even sick and won't take any medication. Yes, there are still signs of life. But those will also disappear soon unless something is done.