

Crete PRC has recently published a document entitled "Explanation of the Doctrinal Controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches."

I want to express, first of all, how excellent this document is. I see at least three things that make it exceedingly helpful in explaining the seriousness of the controversy.

First, it thoroughly exposes the false charge of antinomianism and the unjust treatment of Neil Meyer. Two significant points in this connection: the quote from Hope's consistory that reads, "[The] fact that you [Mr. Meyer] have a problem with Rev. Overway's preaching is reason *in itself* to suspect that you have antinomian leanings" (emphasis added) is extremely disturbing and borderline abusive. It makes the *mere* questioning of a minister's teaching, justified or not, into a censurable sin. The other important point is the document's treatment of Prof. Cammenga's protest to Synod 2017. The fact that the professor of dogmatics appealed to a conditional theologian who takes as a basic premise that denial of conditions in the covenant *is* antinomian (VI. E. 5. d.), and appealed to him in order to maintain the charge of antinomianism against Neil Meyer should have raised MANY alarm bells in the PRCA from 2017 onwards.

Second, the document is extremely helpful because of how focused it is. It constantly draws the reader's attention back to the John 14:6 sermon which was *the* issue and which *did* contain false doctrine. All the distractions about antinomianism, all the vilification of Mr. Meyer, all the making of distinctions between salvation and the *experience* of salvation arose out of a committed defense on the part of many, many office bearers over the course of several years of the doctrine of the John 14:6 sermon. That is shocking. That is horrible. We had many, many office bearers who were dead wrong on an issue that touched the heart of the gospel. The document demonstrates this by showing how all the documents that took issue with Mr. Meyer's theology and certain statements he made failed to grasp that the sermon had corrupted the gospel of Christ alone. "I am the way!"

Third, the document demonstrates what an awful state the PRCA was in going into Synod 2018. Sermons preached by Rev. Overway had corrupted the creeds left and right. H.C. LD 23, 24, 45; B.C. Art. 14, 23, 26; and Canons III/IV 5, 6, 16, not to mention a dozen other places. These corruptions of the creeds were defended to the hilt by Hope consistory, the committee to assist Hope, and ultimately Classis East against the sound theology of Neil and Connie Meyer. It is very significant that the document identifies the errors that were being taught and defended, namely justification by faith and works (IV. B. 5. C., and VIII. A. 2.) and a conditional covenant, even the theology of Rev. DeWolf(!) - so much so that the unconditional covenant was charged as antinomian (IV. B. 3. i., VII. B. 8., and VIII. B. 1.) What a horrible state we were in! What awful sin! And therefore what brokenhearted repentance we ought to have

seen throughout all the churches once Synod 2018 exposed all this corruption, our corruption! The document from Crete consistory makes all of this very clear, and for that this work of the consistory is to be commended.

I have laid out three elements which I think are praiseworthy about this work, but now I believe there is also an urgent warning that must be sounded in connection with it. As we all know, the story does not end with Synod 2018. Although perhaps the consistory does not realize it, what this document does is lay out the case for the absolute necessity of Sword and Shield.

Consider the claims made in the document: The errors that were identified and condemned by Synod 2018 were justification by faith and works and a conditional covenant theology (see the same citations I gave above). Compare that with what we were all told by Prof. Dykstra in the Standard Bearer immediately after Synod 2018. "Let this be clear. Anyone who, from this date on, concerning the minister, consistory, committee to assist the consistory, or Classis East, anyone, I say, who alleges that those individuals or ecclesiastical bodies taught heresy, or justification by faith and works, or Federal Vision, or a conditional covenant, is guilty of slander. Such a one must be rebuked. Slander against officebearers, such serious slander, is the devil's tool to divide the church of Jesus Christ. This is the sin of schism, a sin so serious that officebearers are deposed for it. And members excommunicated for it." (July 1, 2018 SB editorial "Synod 2018: Obedience and Covenant Fellowship" emphasis added). I hope the consistory realizes that according to Prof. Dykstra they must all be deposed for this document they have written.

Consider another example: When Crete's own minister, Rev. Langerak, wrote in response to Rev. Koole's editorial "What Must I do...?" which was also written in the immediate aftermath of Synod 2018, he (Rev. Langerak) maintained that the issues dealt with by Synod did not have to do with antinomianism, but rather, questions like, "Are [good works] fruits of faith or do works along with faith obtain? Is fellowship with the Father by faith and by the good works that faith produces? Is salvation by faith and by the works of faith?" Rev. Koole's response granted the first two questions, but about that third question he says, "As if that was what Hope's consistory was approving, what was being preached from their pulpit, and most of its members were oblivious to? And that this is what Classis East was willing to defend by its decisions? That is a serious misrepresentation. *That* was not the issue before synod. To indicate that it was is not honest or helpful" (Nov. 15, 2018 SB editorial "A Charge Answered," emphasis original). Yet this document points out in numerous places, "Synods 2017 and 2018... make clear that the sermon [on John 14:6] stated and declared as the gospel of the text that Christ

and the obedience that Christ works in us are the way to the Father.” (II. C. 4. b.) and “The sermon [on LD. 23 and James 2] makes justification in the conscience depend on works. That is justification by faith and by works, faith and faithfulness, or justification by an obedient faith” (IV. B. 5. c.). Rev. Koole maintains that to characterize the issues at Synod 2018 in that way is neither “honest nor helpful.” (Nevermind that I thought we were all being told that we aren’t supposed to make public charges of sin against people, as it is surely a sin against the 9th commandment to be dishonest and to “seriously misrepresent” the truth of events). Therefore surely the men of the consistory must recognize that Rev. Koole would accuse this fine document they have produced as being dishonest and unhelpful. So if he has his way, he will add sins against the 9th commandment to Prof. Dykstra’s charge of schism against them.

Yet one more example. In the document they twice express the place of good works in the Christian life in very significant terms. “Our part in the covenant is the fruit, strictly the fruit, of the infallible realization of God’s covenant promise in us” (VII. B. 5.) and, “The good works of the believer are fruits and only fruits of faith” (VIII. E.) This is very significant because Prof. Cammenga has repeatedly taken issue with this language. I was present at Synod 2019 when he took the floor to speak at length against a protestant who repeatedly called our good works “fruit and only fruit.” More recently he has written, “In conclusion, we may not deny that our good works are *always* fruit. But Scripture does not allow us to say they are *only* fruit” (Feb. 15, 2021 SB response to letter, “Good works as fruit”). So the gentlemen of the consistory must realize that by approving this document they are entering into a doctrinal dispute with their professor of dogmatics. Indeed, in his view, they are setting forth a teaching that “Scripture does not allow.” So they find themselves guilty of schism according to Prof. Dykstra, dishonesty according Rev. Koole, and presumably some kind of antinomian, hypercalvinistic stocks-and-blocks-ism according to Prof. Cammenga. Surely their deposition can’t be far off at this point.

Let me more clearly define the point I am making. The very things this document identifies as the essential issues of the doctrinal controversy (namely, that many senior ministers and office bearers, the whole of Classis East, and thus, corporately, the whole denomination taught and defended the heresies of justification by faith and works and conditional theology and wrongly characterized the controversy as being about antinomianism) are *denied* by the leadership of the churches as having anything to do with the controversy. Moreover, anyone (Crete consistory now included) who would try to address the essential issues of the controversy is threatened with all kinds of charges of sin. The primary means by which all of this took place was through a magazine, the unofficially official voice of the PRCA, the Standard Bearer.

By now anyone who agrees with Crete's document should be realizing what a group of some 30 men realized in the aftermath of Synod 2018. The Standard Bearer was not leading us in the right direction. The denomination was not being led in the right direction. The essential doctrinal issues of the years-long controversy were being covered up. The sin we had fallen into was being minimized. No one was being encouraged to repent now that Synod 2018 had shown us our sins. The doctrines and decisions of the assemblies were being twisted into threats against anyone who actually said we had sinned and fallen into heresy and were being rebranded as heroic stands against the antinomian bogeyman.

Thus I repeat: When one looks at this document and its analysis of the controversy, and then looks at the examples I have given (which could be multiplied) of what the senior clergy of the PRCA said about the controversy, one sees the absolute necessity of Sword and Shield. The Standard Bearer was leading the denomination in the wrong direction, as Crete consistory must surely admit when they compare what they themselves have written and approved of with what these ministers and professors have written. Crete must have the courage to say as much when these men come knocking on their church door as I expect they will be doing very soon. Crete must have the courage to say that to them when they threaten them with suspension and deposition, as Crete will admit they surely must if they still believe their own words.

Crete must also realize this: The absolute necessity of Sword and Shield means that the writing in Sword and Shield of Rev. Lanning and Rev. Langerak was and is absolutely essential for the well-being of the denomination. Therefore the overwhelming opposition to Sword and Shield which existed from the very beginning speaks to a deep sickness within the denomination. The desire of many to spit out Sword and Shield (as they have spit out Rev. Lanning from the denomination) is to spit out essential medicine. In addition, Crete must see the truth of this: Without Sword and Shield, there was no voice with a wide enough reach to combat the mighty sway of the Standard Bearer, which, again, as anyone who agrees with this document must admit, was leading the denomination in the wrong direction. But a new magazine had that power, had that voice, had that platform from which to instruct the denomination and lead them in the right understanding of Synod 2018 and the important doctrines defended there.

Now let me get right to the point. Crete has just voted to suspend Rev. Langerak, presumably with a view to his deposition. The occasion for this is his continued involvement with Sword and Shield. And yet at the very same time as they were contemplating and accomplishing this action, they also produced this outstanding document which correctly identifies the issues at stake, and also exposes the failures of senior ministers and professors

regarding the very issues that the document expounds. Thus they demonstrate how badly the Standard Bearer was leading the denomination in the wrong direction, and thus they (perhaps inadvertently) show why Sword and Shield (and their minister's involvement with Sword and Shield) is absolutely essential, lest the iron chariot that is the Standard Bearer should resume its uncontested place on the battlefield, trampling underfoot anyone who expresses concern for the direction it is setting for the denomination (Crete consistory now included, thanks to this document).

If Crete consistory believes their own words, then they also must realize what awful sin the denomination was guilty of. Then they must realize that the leaders of the PRCA actively led us away from repentance, actively led us away from acknowledging the seriousness of the errors that were defended, and actively opposed the witness of Sword and Shield when it tried to instruct God's people in the truth. This was the wickedness that Rev. Lanning rightly identified as "walking in lies" in his Jeremiah 23 sermon. If Crete agrees with what they have written in this document, they must also agree that the claims made in the Jeremiah 23 sermon were true, and that an exceedingly urgent call to repentance was necessary.

In short, if Crete actually believes what they have written, they must confess that Sword and Shield was an absolute necessity for a denomination that was being led astray. Therefore, opposition to Sword and Shield was and is a symptom of the PRCA continuing to "walk in lies." If Crete believes what they have written, they must realize how corrupt the PRCA has become. They must reinstate Rev. Langerak as their minister and vigorously fight to overturn the deposition of Rev. Lanning, thereby leading the denomination in heartfelt repentance and seeking of God's mercy for their sins and for the despising of his word and of his prophets.

If Crete fails to do this and instead proceeds towards deposition of Rev. Langerak, let this above all be clear in everyone's minds. They knew better.

Thus the warning. It should be clear that this document cannot be allowed to become the accepted narrative. This document cannot coexist in a denomination with Prof. Dykstra, Rev. Koole, and Prof. Cammenga. It seems to me that Crete will receive massive pressure to withdraw this document. So long as it exists, it puts the lie to all of the protestations that "we repented of all that." It has to die. If and when Crete lets it die, it will be an outstanding testimony to their hypocrisy. Knowing the truth, but then recanting on their confession under pressure from the very people who led us away from the truth.

So also with anyone who reads the document and agrees with it, but then remains in the PRCA and tolerates or justifies the deposition of Rev. Lanning and the suspension of Rev. Langerak. Now you know better.