

The following document was prepared in anticipation of a visit from a committee of elders from Southwest PRC who met with my wife and I following our request for our membership papers. We had been informed in advance by others that at this meeting all the elders would do was read a letter from the consistory that charged us with various sins, and that they specifically would not enter into any discussion. I wanted to have something on hand so that, barring the opportunity for discussion, I could at least give something that would make a compelling case that they would have to reckon with as they returned to the consistory room after having “worked with us.”

The document centers around the word “heresy” and the use of that word with regard to the error that came to Synod 2018. The reason for this approach is that one of the elders coming to visit us had submitted an appeal to the January 2021 meeting of Classis East. In that appeal, the man charged Rev. Lanning with militating against Synod 2018 by the “extreme” language that he used in *Sword and Shield* to describe the error. In the early issues of *S&S*, Rev. Lanning’s editorials described the error as “heresy,” “an error out of hell,” and such like. The man’s argument was that Synod 2018 had used “precise” language that told us exaaaaactly how bad the error was, and to use language that is stronger than Syond’s language is militancy. “Rev. Lanning’s language is not merely strong, it exaggerates the character of the error set forth in Synod’s precise language.” “If Rev. Lanning insists on using that language publicly... the (sic) he would have been duty bound to protest those decisions of Synod 2018 and argue that the language is not strong enough...”

Knowing that a man with this view of the error was coming to my house, and having been informed that the elders were specifically forbidden from having any discussion at our meeting, I wanted to have *something* with which to try to open their eyes. So I had this document on hand. I do not know if he brought it back to the consistory or not. He told me he would read it. That’s the last I heard of it.

Incidentally, when I presented this document to him and explained that it was specifically prompted by his appeal to classis, his only question for me was how I had seen his appeal, since classical agendas were only given to office bearers. Oops.

Synod 2018 said that the errors identified in the sermons by Rev. Overway and the Doctrinal Statement compromised the doctrine of the unconditional covenant.

Synod 2019 said that “departure from [the doctrine of the unconditional covenant] would be regarded as heresy.” (Acts of Synod 2019, page 30)

Surely “compromising” the doctrine of the unconditional covenant would constitute “departure.” Therefore, the official position of the PRC is that the error identified at Synod 2018 was heresy.

This means that:

- Rev. Overway and Hope consistory believed, taught, and defended heresy.
- The four authors of the Doctrinal Statement believed, taught, defended, and led the churches in teaching heresy.
- Classis East failed to identify or condemn heresy, and if the protestant had not courageously persevered to appeal to Synod, Classis East would never have been corrected.

Does the behavior of the PRC in the aftermath of Synod 2018 look like what we would expect for a denomination that understands that it promoted heresy, is horrified by that reality, and now repents in dust and ashes? Does the behavior of the PRC reflect an understanding that Synod 2018 was a gracious gift to an unworthy denomination which identified heresy in our midst, and by identifying it gave the denomination the opportunity to repent and turn, rather than proceed headlong to become a synagogue of Satan where heresy is proclaimed as the truth, to the destruction of souls?

Overwhelmingly the answer is no.

- Prof. Dykstra following Synod 2018 said that the error condemned was *not* heresy, and if you say it was you are a slanderer and a schismatic who deserves excommunication. (Standard Bearer Editorial, July 1, 2018)
 - Important note: In Rev. Lanning’s Jeremiah 23 sermon he says, “I’m not united with the prophet who says ‘that wasn’t heresy.’” In the deposition material, this was made out as if Rev. Lanning was charging Prof. Dykstra with sin. But this is not true. Rev. Lanning merely declared what is true of all of us who agreed with the settled and binding decision of Synod 2019, that departure from the doctrine of the unconditional covenant would be regarded as heresy, and therefore the necessary implication that the error identified by Synod 2018 was heresy. No one in the PRC who agrees with Synod 2019’s decision has unity with one who says “that wasn’t heresy.”
- The September meeting of Classis East (EDIT: I believe this in fact took place at a special meeting of Classis East held in July following Synod 2018) had a motion to officially condemn the Doctrinal Statement on doctrinal grounds. This is to say that Classis had the opportunity to take sword in hand and officially condemn the heresy that they had permitted to take root. The motion failed, with the argument voiced that Classis

cannot declare itself on something that Synod has already dealt with. Since Classis was adopting Synod's decisions as their own, Classis couldn't speak any further on the Doctrinal Statement.

- Remember that this Classis should be characterized by the utmost grief and penitent sorrow now that the heresy that they either positively taught or at least failed to address has been exposed. In light of that, there are two ways to look at this reasoning. Perhaps it is a sincere and legitimate application of a point of procedure. Charitably, one would hope so. In that case, moving forward, this grief stricken, penitent Classis, should nevertheless be characterized by a fiery condemnation of the heresy, especially in the preaching. The other way of looking at it is that this bit of reasoning was a convenient way to avoid the issue, sweep the Doctrinal Statement under the rug, have everyone claim to agree with Synod, not demand any apologies from the authors, and never concretely address the fact that four senior ministers had taught heresy. In that case, this Classis who had forgotten how to blush would move forward as if very little had changed, and without any serious reckoning with the fact that they had fallen into heresy. Let all of us who have watched the aftermath of that Classis judge which of those views appears better supported by subsequent events.
- As Rev. Lanning took seriously his calling to "Exert [himself] in keeping the church free from... errors" (Formula of Subscription), he became emphatic in his preaching that the PRC needed to reckon with the sin they committed and repent. In his sermon "The Flood" he said that the PRC had committed the worst sin it was possible for a church to commit - compromising the gospel. In his sermon "The Tears of Bochim" he warned against the sin of minimizing the error that Synod 2018 identified.
 - In response to these gospel messages, this heavenly balm for the putrefying wounds of the PRCA, public sentiment began to turn against Rev. Lanning. He was evilly characterized as "having an agenda." Worse, there were churches where he preached these gospel messages which refused to post the recordings on sermon audio. Worse still, there were churches that refused to have Rev. Lanning fill their pulpit, even when it was his classical appointment, if he was going to preach about "the controversy." The unavoidable implication of these actions is that the word that Rev. Lanning brings is not the gospel, and/or Christ does not have a word for Protestant Reformed churches with regard to the controversy. In case of the former, decency and proper church polity would demand that someone protest his non-gospel sermons, which evidently didn't happen. In the case of the latter, the church and consistory that believes such folly positively oozes with arrogance. To think that the King does not have a word for his church? To think that the church does not need to hear a word from their King on the most important issue of the day? Arrogance.
- When Sword and Shield came onto the scene, one of its stated purposes was to educate God's people regarding matters pertaining to Synod 2018 and the heresy that was identified there.
 - For having this good and holy purpose, Sword and Shield was widely condemned, and its editors were evilly characterized. "There's no lie in our

churches, you're stirring up old issues, you have an axe to grind, you're upset that the assemblies didn't go your way and now you're airing your grievances," etc. etc.

What is to be made of all this? What conclusion is to be drawn? A denomination that fell into heresy and was graciously corrected proceeded to show nothing by way of repentance? That minimized the error, evidenced by widespread refusal to acknowledge and condemn it as heresy? That denied their pulpits to the minister who brought the gospel call to repent of the heresy we fell into? That despised the labor of concerned believers and writers who wanted to see God's people educated on the most important issues of our day and instructed in the truth over against the lie? What conclusion is to be drawn from all this?

The denomination walks in lies.

That was the message of the Jeremiah 23 sermon.

How else do you call a denomination to repentance? Was Rev. Lanning supposed to follow Matthew 18 with every office bearer (perhaps 50 or more) who had a hand in allowing the heresy to take root in the churches, and then judge whether each office bearer was sufficiently penitent, and then take the matter to each man's consistory if necessary? That would be absurd. Was Rev. Lanning supposed to write an overture to Synod making his case that the denomination was not sufficiently penitent and perhaps we need to declare a denomination-wide day of repentance? He would be laughed at. The appropriate and obvious way to call the denomination to repentance is to preach it! And for doing so he is characterized as "preaching that most office-bearers are unrepentant unbelievers in contrast to himself and those who stand with him" (Summary of Classis East, Jan. 2021). This is a gross misrepresentation. Rev. Lanning pointed out the denomination's sin and gave evidence that they were walking in it impenitently. He called them to repentance. He preached the gospel of the forgiveness of sins to the denomination. He showed true love for the denomination.

The denomination would not hear it. They walk in lies.

By the deposition of Rev. Lanning, the denomination has committed itself to an impenitent walk. They refuse to be rebuked for the sin that they committed and which they, as a denomination, never sincerely repented of or rooted out. This is a corruption of the marks of the true church and a taking on of the marks of the false church. God's people are free to leave such a church to reform and reinstitute the church anew.