

Dear Rev. VanderWal,

I have read your post closely and with great interest.

Although you do not make direct application to events or make clear exactly which specific events you are referring to, I believe conclusions can be made from your post so that it would be fair to say that you are making the following points about the recent meeting of classis:

- Classis overstepped its bounds by trampling on the authority of the local congregation
- There were two agendas, one public and one private, and the fact that there was allegedly a second, private agenda, resulted in chaos and confusion and a violation of the rule of the local congregation.

I disagree with your conclusions and your analysis of what took place at classis.

The matter of two agendas dominates much of your post so I think it is fair to say that the fact that some men spoke of a second agenda, God's agenda, grieves you the most.

Being now a few weeks removed from classis, I too speak of two agendas. There was the public agenda that was distributed a few weeks before classis convened. But there was also God's agenda. I can say that not because I know the secret things of God, but because of what actually took place at classis.

This is what the public agenda stated:

1. Opening Devotions – Rev. Nathan Langerak
2. Presentation of credentials and roll call
3. Signing of the Formula of Subscription by first time delegates
4. Declaration that Classis is constituted
5. (and so on)

This is what took place, or put differently, this is what God's agenda looked like:

1. Opening devotions
2. Reading of the credentials
3. Two credentials will be received from Sovereign RPC and debate to ensue as to how to properly treat this matter
4. Delegates will treat the matter of Sovereign's credentials and in the course of the work, two delegates would be subjected to a Formula of Subscription exam

So what I mean when I say there were two agendas is that we had our agenda for what would take place at our meeting (earthly), and God had his own agenda for what would take place at our meeting (spiritual).

No man engineered this. No man could.

(Although I did have one unsavory moment before classis started which someone who is not so inclined to charity could interpret as a delegate trying to do classis work outside of classis. Before classis convened one delegate from Sovereign RPC (who was later subjected to a Formula of Subscription exam) tried to talk to me about what was going to be coming very shortly. I told him that I had no idea what he was talking about, but that I didn't think it was proper for him to be bringing me these things,

but rather that we should wait until classis convened and then make righteous judgments about these things based on the word of God and the creeds).

So what I mean by the two agendas is that God had plans for classis that we as delegates did not have.

I had no idea what was coming.

Did you?

Now if by two agendas you mean that there were certain delegates who had an actual, separate, secret agenda for what would transpire at classis then you should come out and say that. Or you should pursue charges either individually (if you feel it was private) or by laying it at the feet of the consistory (if you feel the sin was public).

So to say that there were two agendas is not nefarious or a trampling under foot of good church polity. It is to state a spiritual reality that has become clear over time.

As to trampling on the local congregation, that was simply not done.

When delegates from one congregation give contradictory answers to the questions of Article 41, classis is duty bound to assign a committee to investigate and then bring advice to the body. That is proper church polity. Not only is that proper church polity but that is love for the congregation. Especially in the absence of church visitors (shudder), classis absolutely can investigate matters like this so that classis may by her "advice and assistance help direct all things unto the peace, upbuilding, and greatest profit of the churches" (Article 44).

That investigation led to two Formula of Subscription exams.

Which is exactly what should have happened.

We are so used to a Formula of Subscription exam never being applied that we can be shocked when it is used. But that is not the problem of the Formula of Subscriptions, that is our problem.

You know the Formula of Subscription better than I do, so you know that it forbids public or private militating against the creeds and that it speaks of either consistory, classis, or synod doing the examining, and that it says that those who are to be examined should be ready always to cheerfully submit to the judgment of the consistory, classis, or synod.

That is what happened.

That is what must happen.

To give an example, if during the course of serving on a subcommittee of classis to prepare advice for the classis, I say to the other two men on the committee, "I don't think we should use the creeds to support our position because I think the creeds are weak," then what those men ought to do is smile at me, nod their heads a few times, and then the very second that classis reconvenes make a motion to subject Dewey Engelsma to a Formula of Subscription exam.

And what Dewey Engelsma ought to do is to be the one that one seconds that motion and asks that the Formula of Subscription exam be given immediately, or as soon as is humanly possible.

That must be done not only because that is proper church polity. But that is because the Formula of Subscription exam is one way that the church can identify and rid the church of wolves who would rend the flock of Jesus Christ.

So I reject your conclusion.

Never was the autonomy of the local congregation trampled and never were matters handled in any other way other than by the word of God.

There was not one moment in time at classis when there was chaos.

Whether there was confusion is up to debate, but the way that confusion was handled was to have a committee give advice, which advice the classis considered, and then voted upon. So I would make the case that there was never chaos, and if there was confusion, it was handled in the proper, God-glorifying way.

The Holy Spirit reigned at the meeting of classis in a way that I have never before witnessed.

The word of God reigned.

That word of God that is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,” which sword pierced “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,” and in a way that decisively discerned (revealed and judged) the thoughts and intents of men’s hearts (Hebrews 4:12).