



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,
and who is the sword of thy excellency!
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

Rev. Andrew W. Lanning



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Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

—Philippians 2:5–8

Profound mind. Man can hardly know his own mind. But who can fathom the depths—the depths of divine love, mercy, and compassion—of “this mind”?

Let this mind be in you!

The mind of Christ Jesus—he who was in the form of God.

God has no form. He is Spirit. God is not material, so he is not limited by form or extent. He is infinite and infinitely exalted as the God who inhabits eternity. *Form* refers to that which is essential and intrinsic to a thing. So the form of God is the being or essence of God. Jesus Christ possessed the being and essence of God. He is God. He is of the same essence with the Father: God of God; Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made. Jesus Christ is the Word who was with God and who was God. To be in the form of God is to possess all the rights and prerogatives of God. The honor of God is his. The glory of God is his. The riches and fullness of God are his. The self-sufficiency of God is his, so that he has need of none and is perfectly blessed as God. The blessedness of fellowship in the divine being is his. The bliss of triune life with the Father and the Spirit is his.

Jesus Christ is God.

The bedrock of the Christian faith.

All who deny it are antichrist.

Jesus Christ—the one who was conceived in Mary’s womb by the Holy Ghost; who was carried by Mary all around Nazareth for nine months; who was transported to Bethlehem by her; who was born in the same bloody way as other men are born, was swaddled by her and nursed by her; who was raised in the home of Joseph and Mary, though a prodigy, so that at age twelve Jesus debated the theologians; who walked and talked on the earth; who preached and taught the kingdom of heaven; who was captured, tried, and crucified by men—he is God. Jesus Christ is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his person. He made all things in the beginning, and he upholds and controls all things by the word of his power. He is worshiped by angels and has need of nothing.

Jesus Christ thought.

His mind.

He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Jesus Christ is God. He is of the same essence with the Father. He is equal with God. He did not think his Godhead a thing to be exploited for his own advantage. He is due all honor, praise, and glory. He possesses all majesty. He is infinite and infinitely exalted in eternity. He did not think this to be exploited for his own advantage.

Profound.

Mysterious.

The mind of Christ.

But he made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. God became a man, a man who had the form of a servant. Jesus Christ did not cease being God. He could not un-God himself or give up his divine virtues. But his Godhead, his glory, his bliss, his blessedness, and his self-sufficiency did not stop him from becoming a man. He did not cease being God, but he added another nature to his divine person, the nature of man, and he became like one of us in all things, sin excepted. He did that by the power of the Godhead. He did not use the power of the Godhead for his own advantage, but he used the power of the Godhead to take on him the form of a servant. He did not think that becoming a man was beneath his dignity as the Lord of glory!

That act of becoming a man by the power of the Godhead meant that in that form of a man the Son of God lost everything. When the second person of the holy Trinity became a man—when he was conceived and was brought forth, when he added to himself the human nature—he lost all, for he took the form of a servant. He did not become a king, a senator, or a master of men, but he became a servant. The incarnation was the loss of riches. As owner and proprietor of all, he lost all and became poor. The incarnation was the loss of bliss and blessedness, the loss of dignity and honor. As one to whom all honor and glory is due, he made himself of no reputation; he was despised and rejected, captured, and beaten. As the lawgiver he was made under the law and had to obey. As the self-sufficient one who made and upholds all things, he had to be cared for by others. As the one who knows all, he had to learn, even obedience by the things that he suffered.

Becoming a man did not yet exhaust his loss. He lost his life; but more than that, when he was forsaken on the cross, he lost the favor of God, which was dearer to him than life.

Oh, the mind of Christ! If there was an act that exhausted the divine power, it was the incarnation. But if there was an act that exhausted the divine mercy and grace, it was the incarnation because he lost everything in the incarnation. Like some great man who gives up all for a beggar exhausts human compassion. The depths of the compassion in Christ when he took on him the form of a servant became evident because he lost all. Look how much he loved his people! Look how he was not interested only in what was his by right, so that he exerted his power and used his power to receive what was his; but that he gave it up and exerted his power, all the power of the Godhead bodily, in order that as God he might pay God what God was owed in order to redeem his people.

Apart from this mind, then, there is no salvation. Because he did not think his Godhead a thing to be exploited for his own advantage, he was crucified. In that form, the form of a man and the form of a servant, he was found. And being found he humbled himself to death, even the death of the cross. Being found he was crucified.

Found by whom?

Man discovered him in that form, man who by nature hates God and his neighbor. In that form of a servant, men found one whom they could push around, and he did not strike back; they found one whom they could revile, and he reviled not again. He hid his divine majesty from men, with the result that they found him with no form or comeliness that they should desire him. Man found God in the form in which man could kill God and reveal the perversity of man's heart and his hatred for God. Man found God in a form in which man could do something to God. Man. Herod tried to kill Jesus; Pontius Pilate, Herod, the leaders of the people, and the Jews and Gentiles conspired against God to cast his bands from them. In the form of man, Jesus came. The result was that man rejected him. Man betrayed him, bound him with ropes, tried him, lied against him, put him under oath, mocked and ridiculed him, spit upon him, and nailed him to the cross, damning him. And he answered not a word, although at any moment he could have called legions of angels.

And Satan found him in that state. Satan found God as a man. Like a man discovers an emaciated and helpless old lion, which he can poke and prod with no response, so Satan found him. And Satan expressed what he thinks of God. Satan with his devils pressed upon Jesus Christ and bruised his heel. Satan and all the hosts of hell came and opposed Jesus, tempted him, and stood in the counsels of the ungodly to put him to death.

God also found Christ as a man. From all eternity he determined that Christ would come and that he would be crucified. From all eternity he chose Jesus Christ to be the head of his people and united his people to Christ by divine election. Jesus Christ is the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. He came in this form so that God would find him in the form of a servant, that God would curse him and pour out his wrath upon him and forsake him. Christ's deepest humiliation took place in the blackness of the cross, where the eternal weight of God's wrath pressed on Christ, and God forsook him and made him a curse. God found Christ in that form, the likeness of men, and on that human nature poured out his wrath upon Christ, so that he suffered the torments of hell itself upon the cross.

God found in him, in the Son of God made flesh, the perfect substitute for the lives of his people. God said to Christ, "You must die the bitter and the shameful death of the cross. My justice demands it. My love for my people demands it." Because the Son of God came in the likeness of flesh, he was the perfect substitute. In him there was the perfectly righteous man, who was also the Son of God, who was able to suffer for man according to his humanity, and according to his Godhead to sustain his humanity under the weight of God's wrath.

Willingly, deliberately, purposefully, Christ humbled himself. He became obedient unto death. The perfect obedience of Jesus Christ to God. The saving obedience of Jesus Christ to God.

Look what power it took to humble the mind of man and to make the mind of man obedient unto God: it took the power of the Son of God in the flesh. The power of the Son of God in him was to make him as a man perfectly obedient unto God and to say, "Thy will and not mine be done," and in that obedience to suffer complete loss.

By that the Son of God saved us. He willingly endured

When the second person of the holy Trinity became a man—when he was conceived and was brought forth, when he added to himself the human nature—he lost all, for he took the form of a servant.

that loss, the opposition of sinful men, the wicked assaults of Satan, and the wrath of the living God; he humbled himself and was obedient to the death of the cross to save his people. In that he looked not on his own things but on the things of others, the things of his chosen, elect people. He looked at their miserable and helpless condition. He looked on the offended honor, glory, and majesty of God and the demand of God against them that God receive his due. Christ looked to those things, and he thought nothing of his own things. He willingly gave up all things and exerted all his power for their things. There at the cross, because he was cursed and lost all, his people were delivered from the cross and made heirs of all.

Let this mind be in you! Profound mind. The mind of Christ. Profound change. This mind in us? Yes, he gives this mind to us. His own mind. He makes us Christ-minded. Being joined with us, Christ makes his abode in us and imparts his own mind to us. By the power of his grace, our sinful, selfish, vainglorious minds are crucified with him, and we receive from him the mind of Christ—a new mind, a mind that likewise minds not the things of self but looks on the things of others.

How antithetical is Christ's mind from the mind of man, a mind of strife and vainglory! Strife is politics. With this mind a man plays politics in the church of God and does things politically in the church of God, so that electioneering, influence peddling, power politics, lobbying, bribery, threats, intimidations, ambition, intrigue, nose-counting, and all manner of political calculations enter into all that he does in the church, in his family, in the school, and in his whole life.

Vainglory expresses the motivation for such politicking in the church of Christ. It is an unbelievable pride born of Satan's. Satan in pride thought to overthrow the rule of God in heaven and in the whole universe by his politicking in heaven, by which he raised schism in heaven itself and turned the very angels against God. So the man who does things by strife or vainglory is motivated not by the mind of Christ but by the work of Satan.

To be sure, those who are motivated in the church by strife and vainglory do things. They are very busy in the church. They are busy in secret meetings, private conversations, and deal making. They are busy backbiting, whispering, slandering, destroying, lying, hating, and tearing down. Paul mentions earlier in the epistle that there were those who preached Christ of envy and strife and contention, wishing to add affliction to the apostle's bonds, so that they did the most noble thing, which is to preach Christ, yet they were motivated by wickedness. So that, then, though a man preach Christ from strife, he does nothing commendable. None of what he does proceeds from the mind of Christ, though his actions appear

to glitter and gleam and he uses good words and fair speeches. All of it proceeds from the mind of the natural man, who is carnal, sensual, and devilish and who always looks on the things of self rather than on the things of others. It is all self-motivated and self-serving.

And it is easy to tell, for these preachers never suffer loss. Never do they suffer loss of name, reputation, honor, place, or dignity.

Those are the two different motivations for doing things, and they are as mutually exclusive as Christ and Belial. They do not mix. If a man is not doing things because the mind of Christ is in him, then he is doing things out of strife or vainglory; and if he is doing things out of strife or vainglory, then you can be sure that he does not have the mind of Christ in him, so that he lives out of it and his whole life proceeds from it.

The world that we live in aggressively promotes a mind of self-glory and self-fulfillment and self-image. That is because natural men are children of Adam. Very different from Christ's mind was the mind of Adam. Look what he did to his wife, his posterity, his kingdom, his garden, his home, his whole life, and the creation. He grasped at the throne of God. For the taste of one piece of fruit, he was willing to ruin himself, his wife, his children, and all of his future, indeed to bring the whole creation into the bondage of sin and death. He looked only on his own pleasure and his own desires and his own wants. The mind of the natural man is exceedingly selfish and self-seeking and self-glorifying. In the mind of the natural man, everything is done out of strife and vainglory, and he esteems no one better than himself, and he demands that all things serve him.

Is this not the mind of man, the mind that also exists in us and which by faith we hate and from which we are called to turn? As a father, he insists that everything in the home must serve him. As a mother in the home, if she stays at home at all, everything must serve her, and she will not empty herself. As children in the home, everything must be for them and the way they want. In our lives this selfish and foolish mind has time for no one and nothing that does not serve our particular interests. It is entirely wrapped up in self and is annoyed by the needs and demands of others. Husbands brutalize their wives, insult, demean, and demand that all serve and conform to them, using all their power to manipulate and destroy their nearest neighbors. Young married couples will not have children and do not desire children because children are expensive and exhausting and take away from what the couples want to do. Young women do not even desire to get married and to have a family because that would take away from their lifestyles, from their pursuits, and from their pleasures. To have children would get in the

way of their looks, their happiness, or their careers. Young men do not desire to find wives with whom they can start a family because that would take away from their pursuit of pleasures.

In the church, ministers, elders, and deacons suppose that the church exists for them and not they for the church. Men will not give up their pleasures, their comforts, or their ease for the church, or as hirelings they serve in the church only for money, power, or prestige, and they treat God's heritage as their private fiefdom!

Crucify that mind that was crucified with Christ. A man must loathe and humble himself before God. We have in us, and retain in us until our dying day, a mind that is of the earth, of Satan, and of the world, that is from our first father; and that mind will be subject to no one, not even to God. And that mind must be crucified.

Let this mind be in you: the mind of Christ. Let husbands empty themselves for their wives and take the form of a servant and love their wives. Let wives empty themselves for their husbands and be subject to them. Let fathers and mothers empty themselves for the sake of their children. Yes, not only having children but also

teaching them this mind both by word and deed. Let young people have this mind too. To make ourselves servants to those who are least and to deny ourselves. Singleness is not for selfishness. In that state singles may not look on the things of themselves but on the things of others, especially the church of Christ.

Let elders, ministers, and deacons have the mind of Christ. The apostle mentions himself and Epaphroditus as officebearers. This mind must be evident especially in the officebearer as a servant of Jesus Christ for the church. Not lords over God's heritage! Submitting themselves in everything they do to the word of Christ with the mind of Christ. So also the man who has the mind of Christ—not only the officebearer but every man who has the mind of Christ—must be church-minded. Christ was church-minded. The one who visits the sick, cares for the poor, fellowships with the saints, prays for the people of God: the mind of Christ! Let each member of the church, where it is possible and when it is necessary, empty himself for the benefit, advantage, and salvation of the other members.

—NJL

EDITORIAL

REFORMED PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Introduction

On May 28, 2021, God established a new Reformed denomination in North America: the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). At present the denomination is made up of two congregations: First Reformed Protestant Church in Jenison, Michigan, and Second Reformed Protestant Church, meeting for the time being in Calumet City, Illinois.

The federation of these two churches as a denomination took place at a meeting of the combined councils of these churches on May 28 in Hudsonville, Michigan, in a conference room rented for the occasion. Prior to the meeting, both councils and congregations had individually adopted a document entitled *Act of Federation*. That document is printed elsewhere in this issue for the reader's inspection. The Act of Federation briefly lists the reasons that impelled the two congregations to federate together as a denomination. The Act of Federation also briefly declares the resolution of the two congregations to

federate together on the basis of the word of God. When each congregation individually adopted the Act of Federation, the congregation declared by that adoption its intent to federate with the other congregation. It remained only for the two councils to meet as combined councils on May 28. By unanimous vote the combined councils adopted the Act of Federation, which established their denominational union as the Reformed Protestant Churches.

The formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches was the work of Jesus Christ to build his church (Matt. 16:18). Undoubtedly, the formation of this denomination must appear lowly and pathetic in the estimation of man. It is a denomination of only a few hundred souls. It is a denomination in its earliest fledgling stages that has hardly yet begun to stretch its wings. It has not even had its first classis meeting, which will take place on September 14, 2021, hosted by Second Reformed Protestant Church, the Lord willing. Indeed, there are many men who insist to anyone who will listen that the Reformed

Protestant Churches are not truly a denomination at all, that its churches are not really churches, and that its officebearers are not really officebearers. In the estimation of these men, the denomination does not even exist, and the people of God who make up the Reformed Protestant Churches are only an unlawful mob. However, regardless of all that man thinks and speaks against the Reformed Protestant Churches, the formation of this denomination was the work of the Son of God to build his church. It is the joyful task of this editorial to examine several aspects of this work of the Lord in the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches.

The Reformation of the Church

First, the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches was a true reformation of the church of Jesus Christ. The denomination was born as the good fruit of a fierce doctrinal controversy within the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). The controversy in the PRC will be familiar to readers of *Sword and Shield*, which has devoted the greater portion of its articles to engaging in the controversy. The doctrinal controversy in the PRC has been whether or not a man's obedience to God's law obtains God's covenant fellowship with that man. Is God's covenant fellowship with man essentially conditional, so that a man's obedience to God gains for that man a richer measure of covenant fellowship with God and a fuller experience of that covenant fellowship? Or is God's covenant fellowship with man entirely unconditional, so that a man's measure and experience of God's covenant fellowship with him is entirely a gift of God's grace through faith in Christ and not at all dependent on the measure of that man's obedience to God's law? The articles in *Sword and Shield* have insisted that God's covenant fellowship with his people is strictly unconditional, over against the position taught, tolerated, defended, and promoted in the PRC to this day that

if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do...If a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom, placing himself with his family under the rule of Christ as his Lord and Savior, he was called, he was required, to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—"Repent and believe, that thou mightiest [*sic*] be saved with thy house." (Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do...?" *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 [October 1, 2018]: 7–8)

The doctrinal controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches was as serious a controversy as a denomination could face. It was a controversy between the truth and the lie. It was the age-old battle between the lie, on the one hand, that man and his works account for man's salvation

(including his covenant fellowship with God) and the truth, on the other hand, that God's sovereign grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone accounts for man's salvation (including his covenant fellowship with God). At stake in the controversy was whether the PRC would teach and tolerate another gospel (Gal. 1:6–7) and another Jesus (2 Cor. 11:4). At stake in the controversy was whether Christ was dead in vain in the theology of the PRC (Gal. 2:21). At stake in the controversy was whether the PRC would remain a true church with the pure doctrine of the gospel preached therein and with church discipline exercised therein by the punishing of heresy (Belgic Confession 29) or whether the PRC would corrupt those marks and thus apostatize from the truth. There could be no more serious controversy for the PRC than this.

And yet throughout the controversy, the leadership in the denomination incessantly told the membership that there was no real division in the churches. Immediately after Synod 2018, the *Standard Bearer* informed the members of the PRC that

the Protestant Reformed Churches are well grounded on the doctrines of sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant. Coming to synod were not two groups of elder and minister delegates with opposing theologies. No one may imagine that in the PRC one group wants to have works contribute to salvation, and another group does not. It is not that one group has leanings toward Federal Vision theology, and another group opposes it. It is not that one group teaches justification by faith alone and another justification by faith and works. It is not that some want an unconditional covenant, while others want to make room for conditions in the covenant. All the delegates of synod, representing the churches well from a theological point of view, were and are committed to the theology of justification by faith alone and an unconditional covenant, rejecting Federal Vision and all such like heresies. (Russell J. Dykstra, "Synod 2018: Obedience and Covenant Fellowship," *Standard Bearer* 94, no. 18 [July 1, 2018]: 414)

When *Sword and Shield* was first published in the summer of 2020 and turned its attention to the doctrinal controversy in the PRC, many Protestant Reformed consistories informed their congregations that there was no controversy in the denomination. The letter from Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church is representative:

We are also concerned that the magazine is stating that there is a controversy between a "works principle" and a "grace principle" doctrine. They

contend that the controversy has “been between an error out of hell, and God’s own truth from heaven” (July 2020 issue). They state that the magazine’s desire is to engage in this doctrinal controversy. Our consistory does not believe there is a controversy that exists between these two principles in our churches. Our consistory believes that only the grace principle is preached in our churches and is part of our doctrine. (Letter from Hudsonville PR Church consistory, July 20, 2020)

If there were no “opposing theologies” in the PRC and if there were no “controversy that exists between these two principles in our churches,” then what is to explain the past six years of conflict in the churches? To this day in the PRC, a popular explanation for the controversy is that it was due only to hypercritical people who ungraciously found fault with sermons where there was no fault. These people, so the thinking goes, behaved schismatically by daring to discuss sermons and, in their discussions, to test the orthodoxy of those sermons against the word of God.

The same ministers who throughout the controversy have stubbornly refused to call heresy by its name blame the controversy on God’s sheep who will not tolerate the conditional theology that has been fed to them. When a prominent Protestant Reformed minister explicitly and unmistakably preached that covenant communion with God is conditional, God’s people alerted each other to that sermon and, in a legitimate exercise of their office of believer, discussed the error of that sermon together. How did a professor in the Protestant Reformed seminary respond? Not with horror at the damnable sermon and the hellish theology of the sermon, but with horror that God’s people would talk about that sermon with each other. In an email distributed to all the ministers of the PRC and later published in material in Classis West, the professor slandered God’s people who hated the lie in that sermon as being merely bitter radicals.

And, by the way, this is how some are listening to sermons Sunday after Sunday. They are coming to determine whether the minister said everything exactly according to their extra-confessional formula. They are not being edified. And their bitterness rises week by week. And yet they claim THEY are standing for GOD’S TRUTH.

...But to be suspicious of your fellow ministers because they say something in a different way is wrong. It feeds the radicals in the churches; it promotes party spirit and division. (Russell J. Dykstra, email dated July 1, 2019)

In a recent issue of the *Standard Bearer*, this same slander against God’s people was continued:

The church as such, and believers individually, failed to walk in those works that are required of them. She might talk theology and search high and low if her pastor is using the right words in his sermon, but is she listening to the sermon to hear what the Spirit is saying regarding her faith and walk?

...I am saddened when there are many today who listen to sermons, not to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church, but to find fault with the angels of the church. This is not so much about correct theology, but a spirit of pride. (Audred Spriensma, “Sardis: Dead Orthodoxy,” *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 15 [May 1, 2021]: 353)

As if the doctrine of God’s unconditional covenant fellowship is extra-confessional! As if that doctrine is merely a matter of the use of a right word or not! As if the whole controversy were not about correct, orthodox, Reformed theology but word games! With such misguided leadership, the churches could not vanquish the lie of conditional fellowship, and the churches would not repent of their compromise of the gospel. How could they? They were being told that there was no controversy. And they were being told that whatever controversy did exist was someone else’s fault.

And yet God’s people spent many years toiling in the churches through protests and appeals to the assemblies. These protestants and appellants received little to no help from the assemblies. Oftentimes the assemblies simply dismissed the protests as illegal through the most insufferably pedantic application of the rules. Even when an assembly would uphold a protestant, it was done only begrudgingly and always stopping far short of the full implications of the protest. All the while these protests were being made, the leadership in the Protestant Reformed Churches was in the background insisting to the members that there was no real doctrinal problem in the denomination and that they had best beware of the trouble-making radicals. All this time these churches were also industriously persecuting those officebearers who did seek to stand with God’s people for the truth.

When the Protestant Reformed Churches made it clear that they would not reform but that they would continue on in the teaching and toleration of their false doctrine, the only possibility of reform that remained to her members was to separate from the denomination and to institute the church anew. On January 21, 2021, the saints who would become known as First Reformed Protestant Church signed the Act of Separation. On May 5, 2021, the saints who would become known as Second Reformed Protestant Church signed the Act of Separation and Reformation. Both of these documents are

printed elsewhere in this issue for the reader's inspection. By the signing of their respective Acts, these saints separated from their apostatizing mother and were constituted as individual congregations.

Reform of the church through separation when the church apostatizes is a legitimate form of church reformation. Separation is a form of church reformation called for in scripture.

30. A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land;
31. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?
1. O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction. (Jer. 5:30–6:1)
2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.
4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.
5. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. (Rev. 18:2, 4–5)

Separation is a form of church reformation called for in the Reformed confessions.

And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God. (Belgic Confession 28, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 61)

The reference in article 28 to “all those who do not belong to the church” is to all those whose membership remains in an apostatizing or apostate church. For example, in 1561, when the Belgic Confession was first

published, there were many people who belonged to a church institute—the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, even though they belonged to a church institute, the Belgic Confession refers to them as “all those who do not belong to the church.” So also today, when a church institute sets itself on a course away from God's word, it is essentially and in principle no longer the true church. The Lord will save his elect in her yet, but he also comes quickly to remove her candlestick. Those who remain in her do not belong to a true church institute but to an apostatizing church institute. They may be God's people, but they are “all those who do not belong to the church” but to an apostatizing church. The calling of God's people who find themselves in such a church is “to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church” by taking their church membership out of that church institute.

Separation is the form of church reformation practiced in the church throughout history, including the reformers' separation from the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, the *Afscheiding's* secession from the Dutch Reformed Church of the Netherlands in 1834, the Christian Reformed Church's removing from the Reformed Church in America in 1857, and the Protestant Reformed Churches' expulsion from the Christian Reformed Church in 1924.

Separation is the form of church reformation called for by Homer Hoeksema in his speech, “Reformation: Option or Mandate?”:

The second form of reformation is that of secession. When the carnal element begins to dominate; when the institute itself becomes corrupt; when the word is adulterated, the sacraments are profaned, false teachers tolerated, Christian discipline not exercised, or perverted; and when your protests are not heard but are futile, for you are persecuted on account of them; then your church is manifesting the marks of the false church, and then reformation through secession becomes mandatory. In obedience to the word, when it becomes a question of denying the word of God or leaving a certain institute, the question of a certain institute or preserving the true church—no believer, beloved, may hesitate. In obedience to the word, you must either seek affiliation where the marks of the true church are already manifest, or you must act to institute the church anew. (https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=lectures)

In harmony with scripture, the confessions, the history of reformation in Christ's church, and their spiritual forefathers, the saints who would become the members of

First and Second Reformed Protestant churches reformed the church through separation from their apostatizing mother.

As the work of Jesus Christ in reforming his church, the Reformed Protestant Churches do not exist by the will of man but by the will of God. The denomination was born as the good fruit of a controversy regarding the doctrine of covenant fellowship. Without the controversy over God's covenant fellowship, the denomination would never have come into the world. When Protestant Reformed sermons and articles and neglect of discipline made God's covenant fellowship conditional upon the obedience of man, the people who would make up the Reformed Protestant Churches no longer had a place with mother. It was the truth of God's gracious, unconditional covenant fellowship that carried the denomination into the world and gave it its existence. Therefore, the doctrine of gracious, unconditional covenant fellowship is the reason for Christ's work of reforming his church in the Reformed Protestant denomination. Through this reformation the Lord Jesus Christ has brought his people to understand the truth of the unconditional covenant in a fuller development. This also means that the denomination stands over against any doctrine of conditional fellowship with God. These are the hallmarks of her existence in the world: her confession of the truth of God's sovereign, gracious, unconditional fellowship with his people in Jesus Christ and her repudiation of the lie that man's obedient working is that which in any way obtains God's fellowship.

Manifestation of the Unity of Christ's Body

The federation of the Reformed Protestant churches is also a manifestation of the unity of the body of Christ. The unity of the body of Christ is a precious gift of the Lord to his church. It is a spiritual unity, created by the Spirit of Christ, in which the members of Christ's body are united in true faith. The foundation of this unity is Jesus Christ himself as he is revealed and known in the truth of his word. Therefore, the unity of the church is not a unity of personalities, similar earthly interests, geographical location, or other earthly things. Rather, the unity of the church is a unity in Christ and his truth.

19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;
21. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19–22)

The Reformed confessions also speak of this unity of the church in the faith of Christ.

We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost.

...Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit. (Belgic Confession 27, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 58–60)

By their Act of Federation, the congregations of First and Second Reformed Protestant churches manifested this unity by the formation of a denomination, "agreeing in true faith" (Heidelberg Catechism, A 54, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 104).

That the unity of the body of Christ is universal was powerfully demonstrated by the Lord in his reformation of the church in the Philippines at the same time that he was forming the RPC. On May 16, 2021, the First Reformed Church in Bulacan, the mission fellowship in Leyte, and the two mission stations in Laguna, Manila, separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP). The church in Bulacan, which also oversees the mission fellowship and the mission stations, is now known as the First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan. This congregation is currently in communication with the RPC in North America to discuss the possibility of forming a sister-church relationship. Yes, indeed, "we believe and profess one catholic or universal church" (Belgic Confession 27, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 58).

The unity of the church is not the work of man but of the Spirit of Christ. The federation of the Reformed Protestant churches is a powerful testimony that the unity of the church is not the work of men. This point is especially significant because the members of the RPC have often been slandered as merely following men, whether this or that minister or elder. But when one considers what has happened in the space of a few short months—the establishment of a congregation in Michigan; the establishment of a congregation in Illinois; the gathering of a fellowship in Iowa; the establishment of a congregation in Bulacan, the Philippines, along with her mission fields and stations; the federation of two congregations into a denomination; and the initiation of talks toward

a sister-church relationship, just to name a few—then it becomes abundantly obvious that the formation of the RPC is not the work of man but of God. There is not a man alive, nor a whole group of men, who could accomplish what God has accomplished in these few months. Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit, has gone forth and accomplished what no man ever could. In many cases, while we men scratched our heads and wondered what we should do, God went ahead of us and built his church. Many times we were like those who dream, astonished as we witnessed God return the captivity of Zion (see Ps. 126). It has been the Lord's doing to make the stone that the builders refused the head stone of the corner, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The Lord powerfully demonstrated that the unity of the church is his work and not the work of man through the grievous illness of Rev. Nathan Langerak. With Second Reformed Protestant Church newly founded and the Act of Federation meeting looming, God laid upon Rev. Langerak a heart affliction that left him hospitalized in critical condition. We thank God for preserving our brother and for the measure of restoration that he has been given. But the Lord was pleased to afflict Rev. Langerak right at the time that, from a human point of view, we might think that we most needed men. By this, God powerfully illustrated to all within and to all without that he alone builds his church and that he alone creates her unity, not us mere men. I suppose it would be too much to ask those outside to stop slandering us as being followers of men, but at least let everyone inside lay it to heart.

The federation of the Reformed Protestant churches also demonstrates that the denomination is not schismatic. The RPC love unity and seek it. True, we are not interested in a merely formal and external unity of name without the truth, which is no unity at all. But we love true unity as that is found in the word of God.

This is especially significant because the Reformed Protestant churches in North America and in the Philippines have been subjected to constant charges of schism for their separation from the PRC and the PRCP. The charge itself is wrong, for the separation of the members of these churches from the PRC and the PRCP was not the sin of schism on their part. Their separation was certainly a separation. It was certainly division. The members of the Reformed Protestant Churches have removed

from the Protestant Reformed Churches and no longer have church membership there. But such division is the work of Jesus Christ himself, who came not to send peace on earth but a sword, and who came to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother, so that a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matt. 10:34–37). When the Lord Jesus Christ works such division by his word, those who are divided off from an apostatizing institution are not guilty of the sin of schism. Invariably, the denomination from which they depart will level the charge of schism against them. Thus it was for Luther, for De Cock, and for Hoeksema, who were all labeled as schismatics for their defense of the truth. But the charge is false and slanderous. The reality is that separation from an apostatizing denomination is not sinful schism but holy reformation. Let all who think that separation and division are schism remember the words of our Lord: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (v. 34).

The federation of the First and Second Reformed Protestant churches into a denomination reveals that these churches are not inveterate schismatics but that these churches love unity and federation in the truth and seek it. One only has to read the Act of Federation to see this desire to manifest true unity in the truth. One only has to behold the fact that these

churches are united in the common cause of the truth to see this desire for unity.

The federation of the First and Second Reformed Protestant churches also stands as a constant invitation to all those who are likeminded to join with these churches in their witness to the truth and their opposition to the lie. For all those who feel isolated in their churches because the lie is tolerated there or because one must search with a lantern to find the truth; for all those who desire to enjoy the unity and fellowship of the gospel; for all those who would confess the pure gospel without the admixture of error; for all those who would condemn the lie without equivocation; and for all those who know they must separate from their church and seek affiliation with another, there is a place for you to go with your church membership. There is a denomination for you to join. No thanks to man, who would most certainly spoil the whole thing if it belonged to him. But thanks only to God, who has reformed his church.

—AL

The unity of the body of Christ is a precious gift of the Lord to his church. It is a spiritual unity, created by the Spirit of Christ, in which the members of Christ's body are united in true faith.

Act of Separation

“And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.”—Confession of Faith, Article 28

“We believe that we ought diligently and circum-spectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church.”—Confession of Faith, Article 29

With astonishment and grief, we have observed the apostatizing of the Protestant Reformed Churches by the denomination’s corrupting the marks of the true church and manifesting the marks of the false church, as those marks are set forth in our Confession of Faith, Article 29. The glorious gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone has not been preached purely but has been polluted with the filth of conditional theology, while the defense of the pure gospel of sovereign grace has been declared to be schismatic and sinful. False doctrines and errors multiply exceedingly through heretical writings. Church discipline has not been exercised faithfully, especially in the punishment of false doctrine. Teachers and defenders of error are exonerated and protected by the church, while discipline is wrongly applied against faithful watchmen. The denomination zealously guards the empty honor of men but allows the majesty of Jehovah and his truth to be trampled underfoot by the idolatry, false worship, and blasphemy of false doctrine in God’s house. The sacraments cannot be administered purely as Christ has appointed in his Word but have been stolen away from Christ’s sheep who cannot affirm their unity with an apostatizing congregation and denomination. The Word of God as the rule according to which all things are to be managed in the church has been ignored and disdained, and the will of men prevails. The Church Order and the biblical principles of Reformed church government have not been applied faithfully or righteously but have been ignored, applied only selectively and unevenly, and twisted by the earthly wisdom of men. The church ascribes more power and authority to the ordinances of her ecclesiastical decisions than to the Word of God. She turns to man for wisdom and relies more upon him than upon Christ. She will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ in the reproofs and rebukes of his Word. She slanders and reviles those who love the truth and confess it, hate the lie and repudiate it, rebuke

her for her errors, and live holily according to the Word of God. “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa. 59:14–15).

The denomination shrewdly retains the name of the church and a certain form of the church, deceiving the unwary. Nevertheless, she departs from the pure Word of God in her teaching and her government. Though she yet confesses Jesus Christ in name, by her deeds she does not acknowledge him to be the only Head of the church (Isa. 29:13).

As God by his Spirit has graciously shown us our iniquities and pricked our hearts with grief for our transgressions, we have labored quietly and peaceably before his face and among his people to amend our ways and our doings. Through the antithetical preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by our pastor, through our cries for God’s mercy and grace to turn us, through our protests and appeals to the assemblies, through our publishing and writing, through our speaking often one to another in the fear of the Lord, and through our membership in his church, we have sought the old paths, God strengthening us. The response has been a growing storm of slander, opposition, and false charges against God’s Word and against us, along with a bolder strengthening of the hands of the evildoers that none doth turn from his way. “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:13–14).

The denomination’s opposition to the Word of God has now become plainly evident to all in the unjust and ungodly suspension and deposition of our pastor for his public testimony against the church’s sin of false doctrine and for his public rebuke against her toleration of error. In their charge of schism against him, the assemblies have painstakingly avoided an evaluation of our pastor’s sermons in light of his sound doctrine and in light of the truth of the Word of God, which would have shown his sermons to be faithful and true. Rather, the princes of the church elevated their own will and men’s honor above the plain Word of God. Judging the sermon to be sound doctrine but condemning it as evil anyway, they fulfilled the apostle’s prophecy: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Tim. 4:3–4). Adding sin to sin, the judges of our pastor willfully ignored and then twisted the Word of God to

suit their purposes, lied before God's face to God's people, and exempted themselves from the same charges that they brought against our pastor.

The unjust suspension and deposition of our pastor is a particularly stark and obvious mark of the false church, which "persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry" (Confession of Faith, Article 29). The false church has always been known and identified by her persecution of God's prophets. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10–12; see also 21:33–46; 23:34–39; Acts 7:51–53).

We desired to continue in fellowship with the denomination for as long as God gave us a place, trusting our heavenly Father to make our calling clear. By the church's expulsion of our pastor, she has made our place impossible and has effectively cast us out, for the church has shown that she will no longer hear the Word of the Lord. "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it" (Jer. 6:10).

For this reason, the undersigned, officebearers of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, now flee from the coming destruction, according to the solemn warnings of the Word of God. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction" (Jer. 5:30–6:1; see also 6:10–12). "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore

hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it" (Jer. 6:17–19).

According to the Word of God and the holy duty of believers, we separate ourselves from this untoward generation and come out from among them and will have no more ecclesiastical fellowship with the Protestant Reformed Churches until such time as God may be pleased to restore them to the true service of the Lord (Acts 2:40; Isa. 52:11; II Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4; II Chron. 7:14; Confession of Faith, Article 28). In the meantime, the Son of God has gathered us by his Word and Spirit as living members of his body and has joined us to his church in this place (I Cor. 1:2; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). We declare at the same time our desire to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed members and to unite ourselves with every gathering founded on God's infallible Word, in whatever place God has also united the same (Eph. 4:1–6; Confession of Faith, Article 28).

Hereby we testify that in all things we hold to God's holy Word and to the Three Forms of Unity founded upon that Word, namely, the Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ, we hold to the Church Order, studiously taking care in its implementation that we do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted (Confession of Faith, Article 32).

Finally, we officebearers and members of Christ's church hereby declare that we do not recognize the unjust suspension and deposition of our minister but continue to recognize him as our pastor and teacher, according to the ordinance of Christ, who calls his servants through his church (Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 4:14).

Done this day, the 19th of January, 2021

Byron Center, Michigan

signed by Elder Bryan VanBaren, Elder Dewey Engelsma, Deacon Joseph Boverhof, Deacon Keith Gritters, and Deacon Tyler Ophoff

Act of Separation and Reformation

We the undersigned office-bearers and members of Crete Protestant Reformed Church as well as other like-minded Reformed believers declare by these our signatures our separation from the apostatizing church and the reformation of the church institute from the bondage and corruption into which she has fallen. By this act we express our grievance against the Protestant Reformed denomination for her continuing departure from the fundamental truths of the Reformed faith as once held by this denomination. We ex-

press our commitment to reform the church anew according to the Holy Scriptures, the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordrecht and to join ourselves to other likeminded Reformed congregations to express the unity of the Holy Spirit in the truth once delivered unto the saints (Ephesians 4:1-6; Jude 1:3).

Further, we express our detestation for her departures in Reformed church polity which are manifested in her increasingly hierarchical actions, in her discipline of faithful

office-bearers who have shown her errors, and for her denigration of the office of all-believer. By this she holds down in unrighteousness the free course and expression of the truth of the Gospel in all aspects of her life. She values man, his name, and his reputation above the Word of God. In short, she ascribes more authority to herself than to the Word of God and persecutes the faithful in her midst, thereby denying the marks which characterize a true church (2 Timothy 3:1-13).

We have desired only the pure preaching of the Reformed faith as contained in the Holy Word of God and summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. For many years in our church the Lord provided that faithful preaching by our minister, Rev. Nathan J. Langerak, who shunned not to declare to us the whole counsel of God. We were built up in the most holy faith and comforted by Christ's gospel. Crete Protestant Reformed Church has taken to herself the marks of a departing church by the unjust use of the keys of the kingdom entrusted to her. This is clear from the suspension of her faithful minister who has without ceasing labored day and night for the spiritual upbuilding and health of the members and lambs of the congregation to which the Lord called him. Never has anyone shown from Scripture or the Confessions any errors in his doctrine or walk which are worthy of suspension throughout the time he served Christ's church.

The consistory's act of suspension is nothing less than a rejection of Christ himself as he is revealed in the faithful office-bearer of Christ and as he speaks to and teaches his church in the gospel (Ephesians 4:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:3; Matthew 10:40). This rejection of Christ is intolerable and will serve for spiritual destruction in the generations of those who remain in her fellowship. The office-bearers have thereby persecuted the truth by silencing the pure preaching of the gospel, corrupted the pure administration of the sacraments for Christ's sheep who cannot partake with her in her sins, and corrupted the mark of discipline by exercising it against the godly.

Doctrinal departure by the Protestant Reformed denomination is manifestly evident in her toleration of false doctrines that the way unto experiencing covenant fellowship with the Triune God is by our obedience unto the law.

Similarly, the benefits of salvation are presented as our motivation for obedience, which has the same effect as declaring that our experience of covenant fellowship is by obedience to the law. By these teachings, Christ is separated from His people and Christ's perfect and complete work of salvation is displaced. These teachings withhold Christ and his completed salvation from his elect people. These teachings are the true and terrible schism in the body of Christ.

For years in the Protestant Reformed denomination, we have observed the erosion of commitment to the sole authority of the Word of God and the pure Reformed doctrine. We have seen false teachers defended and the godly who rebuked the churches for their errors persecuted and defamed. We have witnessed the reputations of men honored above adherence to the truth and rejection of false doctrine. We have seen the true preaching attacked and slandered as antinomian. We have witnessed that consciences are bound by human ordinances in things that the Lord has left free. We have observed that men faithful to their callings to defend the truth and to militate against the lie have been declared sinful and schismatic. We have witnessed lies and hypocrisy in the dealings of the assemblies. We have seen the office-bearers of the church behave as lords in God's heritage by ecclesiastical brutality, intimidation, and willful disregard for good order and decency. We have suffered as faithful pastors and office-bearers have been suspended and deposed for carrying out their calling to expose lies and false doctrines by warning and rebuke. We have witnessed lies that are contrary to the pure Reformed creeds tolerated in the public preaching and writing of ministers.

Therefore, we call all those spiritually-minded persons to separate from the apostatizing church and to contend for the doctrine that was once committed unto them (Jude 1:3; Acts 2:36-42; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Revelation 18:4; Belgic Confession Articles 27, 28 and 29). We declare that in all things we hold to God's Holy Word, to the Three Forms of Unity, the accepted liturgical forms, and the Church Order of Dordrecht. Moreover, we declare that we reject the unjust suspension of our pastor and continue to acknowledge him as our minister.

Andrew T. Birkett, elder
Lee A. Wiltjer Jr., deacon

Act of Federation

1. Whereas the Councils of First Reformed Protestant Church and Second Reformed Protestant Church have separated themselves from the departing Protestant Reformed Churches for the reasons stated in their respective Acts of Separation;
2. Whereas we believe in the autonomy of the local congregation;
3. Whereas the Scriptures call us to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit, of which a denomination is an expression (Ephesians 4:1-6), and our mutually held Reformed polity teaches to us the necessity and goodness of denominational federation;
4. Whereas we are united in a common cause of the promotion of the pure Reformed truth delivered

to us by God through our forefathers concerning the unconditionality of God's covenant, the perfect sufficiency of Christ's atoning death for the salvation of his elect, and the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of his elect people, and of the rejection of the lies that have corrupted that truth in the Protestant Reformed Churches;

5. Whereas we are united in our desire to live according to the Reformed polity uncorrupted by hierarchy and human wisdom, God helping us;

Therefore, it is resolved by the combined Councils of First Reformed Protestant Church and Second Reformed Protestant Church assembled May 28, 2021 in Hudsonville, MI:

1. That we adopt as our common basis the Scripture as the infallible, authoritative Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, that in polity we hold to the Church Order of Dordrecht, and that we accept the liturgical forms, namely, Form for the Administration of Baptism, Form

for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, Form for Excommunication, Form for Readmitting Excommunicated Persons, Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word, Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology, Form for the Ordination of Missionaries, Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church, and the Formula of Subscription.

2. That we form a classis of churches and thus a denomination according to the accepted Reformed polity of the Church Order of Dordrecht.
3. That this denomination be called Reformed Protestant Churches.
4. That hereafter churches that join or are organized by us be received in the manner expressed in the Church Order.
5. That this denomination be incorporated at present in the home states of the two churches and thereafter in the home states or provinces of any churches that join us or are organized by us.

FROM THE EDITOR

The heat of summer is upon us here at the headquarters of Reformed Believers Publishing, which means that a vacation is just around the corner for many of our readers. Keep *Sword and Shield* in mind as you pack your bags, and remember that the magazine makes for excellent beach reading. Speaking of excellent beach reading, if you will pardon a brief anecdote...

Last summer the first issues of *Sword and Shield* came off the press. One of the foolish thoughts that passes through an editor's mind is to wonder whether anyone is reading the magazine. It had become apparent that more than a few were burning it or binning it, but was anyone actually reading it? On a family vacation by Lake Michigan, someone from the family exclaimed, "I just saw someone reading *Sword and Shield*!" Well, if random people were reading *Sword and Shield* on the beach, then I guess that answered my question. It is one of my favorite memories of the very early days of *Sword and Shield*. I like to think that our little magazine will grace a few beaches and campgrounds and hotel lobbies and airports again this summer.

In other news, and in all seriousness, in his sovereign good pleasure, the Lord laid a serious illness on one

of our editors, Rev. Nathan Langerak. Rev. Langerak was instrumental in the founding of Reformed Believers Publishing, and he has been a steady workhorse for *Sword and Shield* ever since. The absence in this issue of his "Understanding the Times" and his "Finally, Brethren, Farewell" seems strange, since Rev. Langerak has unfailingly produced his rubrics month after month. The reader will notice, however, that the meditation this month is still by Rev. Langerak. It is a measure of his devotion to the work that, while lying in the intensive care unit with his heart in seriously bad shape, Rev. Langerak dutifully and I'm sure joyfully typed out his meditation and submitted it on time. I imagine that someone had to wrestle the laptop out of his hands so that he could get some rest, or we would have had his other articles as well. We commit you to the care of our Lord in your convalescence, Rev. Langerak, and may the Lord speed you back to health according to his will.

And, dear readers, may God speed the truths written herein to your heart and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.—Romans 12:1

FEAR AND ANGER (2)

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.—1 John 4:18

How did the apostle Paul, the apostle born out of due time, have the confidence to face the apostle Peter to rebuke him for separating himself from the Gentiles in Antioch? How did Paul in his epistles reprove, rebuke, and admonish with such weight and force? How could he oppose the purveyors of false doctrines that had already received a welcome and supportive reception in the churches of Galatia, Colossae, and Corinth? How could he write against them so sharply and forcefully? How could he speak of rivals in the Corinthian church as “false apostles, deceitful workers,” who had transformed “themselves into the apostles of Christ” and “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13, 15)?

How did the reformers stand against all the institutional, historical, and numerical weight of the Romish church? How were they able to ignore the papal bulls that excommunicated them from the kingdom of God? How were they able to stand so resolutely and calmly in the face of the torture of persecution? How could they stand so fearlessly for the truth of scripture alone over against the authority of popes and councils? How could they stand steadfastly for the truth of salvation by grace alone without works, despite the condemnation of those doctrines by the hierarchy of the pope?

How could De Cock, Van Velzen, Scholte, and Brummelkamp maintain their positions of criticism of and defiance of the edicts of their own church, the state church of the Netherlands? How could they carry on in their work on behalf of the truth and God’s people in spite of the accusations against them of troubling the church with their actions and writings?

Fear.

Fear made them take stock of themselves, with the most surprising result: they had nothing and were nothing of themselves. They had no power. They had no knowledge. They had no courage of themselves. They had nothing of themselves to match the forces arrayed against them.

Such was the revelation of his weakness that Jeremiah had to hear from the Lord: “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?” (Jer. 12:5). Such was the

confession of the great apostle Paul about himself: “Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears” (2 Cor. 7:5).

That fear is represented in answer 127 of the Heidelberg Catechism in explanation of the sixth petition of the Lord’s prayer. The answer has two parts. The first part is a confession the Catechism places in the mouths of the children of God about themselves: “Since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment...” The second part is about the assault of our enemies: “the devil, the world, and our own flesh” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 139). The teaching of this answer is that our weakness is not merely that we have our own flesh as an enemy, in addition to the world and the devil, but the teaching is also that, measured against the flesh that is our enemy, we ourselves are so weak that we cannot stand a moment.

This teaching of the Catechism reflects scripture’s teaching in Galatians 5:17. The nature of the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh is so great that “ye cannot do the things that ye would.” The same is the instructive and applicable outcry of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:24: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Which is more powerful to instill fear in our hearts and to cause us to tremble in our members: the devil, the world, and our flesh, or our own weakness before these great enemies?

Yet to the child of God the blessedness of this fear and trembling is that God graciously uses them to lead the child of God to the Rock that is higher than he. The great blessing of grace is to be emptied thoroughly of all vain pretensions in order to be filled with the only power to stand before all these enemies.

So it must be in the midst of controversy and conflict in church and state. In all the storm of emotional, fiery exchanges, this must become very clear: there is no real safety or peace in the institutions of men. Only when nations begin to crumble in their foundations do we realize how foolish we were to put any trust in them at all. Only when controversies and strivings rock church institutions do we realize that our trust was foolishly

misplaced in those institutions rather than in the word of God alone. How much more clear our folly becomes when threats of trials and punishments are employed in hopes of maintaining order and submission.

How could it become clearer?

Indeed!

Why is it not clear to everyone? Why do so many still cling to institutional strength and character, unwilling to see the shifting sands that somehow have replaced the sturdy foundation? Why are so many willing to cling to domineering, abusive structures of power and to suffer for it?

One reason is history. Historically the institutions of church and state had been strong and greatly beneficial to their members by providing order, justice, peace, and stability. For many years and generations the members enjoyed these benefits. That past may so overshadow the present that some deny outright their present circumstances. That past may be so strong that some cling to the hope that present troubles will soon vanish and the benefits of the past will reappear after the storm is gone.

Another reason is that the institution has presented itself in all its dominance to its members. The state or the church has held sway for a long time. In that length of time it has held itself out as the only possibility and allowed no rivalry or competition. Therefore, there can be no other institutions, ecclesiastical or political, that can even be compared. There can be no higher standard attainable. Patriotism or loyalty can have only one object: the current institution in the current state of affairs. Criticism is disloyalty. Questioning is treachery.

These reasons, properly understood, must only increase the fearfulness. What a great evil to cling to what is corrupt and passing away! What deception to exchange the kingdom of God that is heavenly, perfect, glorious, and everlasting for anything of the earth, earthy!

Beset and burdened with all these fears, the child of God must flee them all, exchanging them for the one proper and holy, saving fear: the fear of the Lord.

In the fear of the Lord is all safety and all peace from all other fears. In the great and glorious light of his fear, all other fears become inconsequential. What is man? What are these institutions? What of their threats and accusations? What of their charges, hearings, judgments, and bulls? What of their torture and abuse? What of their deceits and manipulations?

“Perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.”

What is that perfect love?

It is of no earthly origin. No earthly institution, even the church, can contain it. The best any earthly church can do is point its members to it.

Perfect love is the love of God determined in the foreknowledge of God from all eternity (Rom. 8:29). It is the love of God carried out in the propitiatory sacrifice of his only begotten Son and demonstrated and accomplished in the gift of his Son's life. It is the love of the Father that gave up his only begotten Son to that accursed death, when those for whom the Son died were only the enemies of God, hateful and hating one another (Rom. 5:10; Titus 3:3). It is the love of the Father that effectually calls and draws each beloved elect out of darkness into the marvelous light of God's eternal kingdom (1 Pet. 2:9). It is the love of the Father that ensures that the beloved are brought into that kingdom, no matter how great the testing and trials of their faith, so that they are able to rejoice in them all (James 1:2).

How does perfect love cast out fear?

The last part of 1 John 4:18 gives the explanation: “because fear hath torment.”

That torment is the torment of the outer darkness of hell. It is the torment of everlasting punishment of body and soul, the

punishment that is due the sin of the individual being tormented. It is the punishment of nations, societies, and cultures that have labored in the very fire to cast off their obligations to serve and worship the true God of heaven and earth.

Fear is fear because it has this torment. Fear is the appropriation of the necessity of this torment. Torment explains why fear is such a powerful matter. Torment explains why a fearful people are easily cowed and manipulated. Torment explains why fear is so debilitating.

Fear must also be explained by all self-reliance. Self-reliance must bring about this fear that has torment. Such is the fear that was exemplified not only by Adam as the sinner before God but also by Adam's attempting to cover himself with fig leaves. “Verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed.” The Confession continues the same thought regarding sanctification: “It is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary, without it they would never do anything

In all the storm of emotional, fiery exchanges, this must become very clear: there is no real safety or peace in the institutions of men.

out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation” (Belgic Confession 23–24, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 52–53).

First John 4:18 also explains why there is only one power to conquer fear: the perfect love of God in Christ Jesus, which easily and handily conquers fear because this love is complete redemption from torment. The perfect love of God in Christ Jesus is complete redemption, leaving nothing undone. The sacrifice of the cross means that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Christ’s sacrifice also means that nothing can be against the redeemed, but all things must be for them and that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus (vv. 31–32, 38–39).

The perfect love of God in Christ is deliverance *from* all inordinate, illegitimate fear. It is deliverance from the fear of man and what man can do. It is freedom from fear of perishing due to the believer’s own weakness or the strength of his enemies. It is freedom from the slavish fear of men and respect of persons. But at the same time it is deliverance *to* another, proper, godly and holy fear, the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is the conscious, believing appropriation of the cross of Jesus Christ and the everlasting love of God that it demonstrates. For all the infinite greatness of that love, making the child of God weak in himself by its consideration, he treasures and adores it. His great desire is to know that love in all its fullness, as is the prayer of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:17–19.

The preaching and believing of the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ are growth in the fear of the Lord. For the sake of that gospel, the child of God must take a proper

account of himself and his circumstances in this world. Let him take hold of the law and appropriate it to himself to show him his sin and his entire inability to perform the law because of his depravity. Let him understand that he simply cannot do the things that he would. Let him take hold of the power and abilities of his enemies—the devil, the world, and his own flesh—and make a proper reckoning of their deep hatred. Against those powers and abilities, let him reckon with his own weakness and helplessness. All these together must drive him far from himself to seek all his hope from the God who has graciously given him the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ.

By that cross the child of God must find the strength of his salvation near to him. God’s gracious gift, just like the gospel of the cross, is sent to him for him to know its power and peace by the gift of true faith. In and with the cross, let him find all its power of grace within him. In his heart it must be the power not only to stand before every enemy but also to suffer from all their malicious devices for the sake of the kingdom to which he belongs. Surrounded and filled with that love of God in the cross of Christ, what can his enemies do to him? By the grace of God, they become the very means to bring him nearer to his God!

That fear of the Lord is freedom from the slavish fear of man and of every institution of man. The fear of the Lord is blessed freedom from the fear of our own weakness and from the fear of every enemy. The fear of the Lord is freedom of heart to direct oneself to serve the Lord in all the joy and gladness of his redemption. The fear of the Lord is freedom to sanctify oneself to the Lord, to offer himself a living sacrifice of thanksgiving.

—MVW

CONTRIBUTION

ON REFORMED PROTESTANT EDUCATION

We love the Protestant Reformed schools where we were raised and where we have raised our children. God has given us much over the past years, for which we are deeply grateful. Even as we leave the Protestant Reformed Churches with tears, given an open door we would be happy as parents to continue the use of the Protestant Reformed

schools to train our children. In the current environment many of us no longer have an opportunity to guide these schools by membership and active participation in an association for Protestant Reformed education, and so we seek to form our own association. We hold no bitterness against these schools but are deeply thankful for the education we have received in them and the years we

have been able to participate with fellow saints to teach our children.

Having been given an opportunity by God to make a new beginning, we joyfully and in love for our God join as like-minded believers to continue to seek the best education for God's children. As we make this beginning, we must start by reflecting on the past approximately eighty years of Protestant Reformed education. We must be honest in our evaluation to acknowledge and follow what is good and to seek focused improvement where Protestant Reformed schools have shown weakness.

As a part of this reflection, I would like to share my evaluation of two things that are right and two things that could be improved in Protestant Reformed education.

The Protestant Reformed schools have the right basis and foundation for education. The basis is the word of God and his covenant relationship with his people. The history of Protestant Reformed education is our history, and the principles of Protestant Reformed education are our principles. We must know and recommit to these principles before we take a single move as our own association, and as a part of that, each of us, especially parents, ought to reread the book *Reformed Education* by Prof. David Engelsma.

The Protestant Reformed schools have the right ownership. Each school belongs to the parents, because the parents are those who have taken the baptism vows and are required to teach their children in the fear of God's name. The school board operates the school, but the board members answer to the association of parents. The teachers stand in the place of the parents and must have the support of the parents in order to teach effectively.

The Protestant Reformed schools have two practical shortcomings that we ought to consider and learn from as we consider how to move forward in training our children.

The first practical limitation is that these schools are structured in such a way that teachers are incentivized to move to larger communities and schools, especially for more specialized roles in the junior high and high school grade levels. Because of the number of students in these regions, teachers can prepare for fewer, specialized courses in their areas of expertise, which courses are delivered multiple times daily. By contrast, in Protestant Reformed schools in smaller communities, teachers need to prepare for a wide variety of courses delivered daily, often outside of their fields of expertise. For committed teachers this preparation necessarily consumes evenings and summers, in addition to the side jobs frequently required to make financial ends meet.

The second limitation is that the Protestant Reformed schools are structured to operate almost entirely independently of each other. Although there is some coor-

dination through the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies, the key challenge for small communities is not merely coordination with larger schools but the basic need of having enough teachers and finding a way even to support and maintain a school. By passive incentives that encourage teachers to move to larger communities, the larger schools do more to harm the formation of smaller schools than they do to help these weaker communities who have dramatic difficulty in getting schools off the ground.

While historically our parental schools have been organized and operated entirely locally, the principles of Reformed education do not require local control. The principles of Reformed education require parental control. This parental control of the school should be considered in light of our age of constant development in communication and technology, rather than assuming that because schools have always been local, that remains the only option to us. In our recommitment to the principles of Reformed education, we ought to consider moving forward in a way that is good for all Reformed Protestant believers—for our brothers and sisters in smaller communities and for our teachers without regard to the communities in which they live.

Starting schools will be challenging. Godly teachers are a precious and rare resource, and in order to have a school we must have a minimum number of qualified teachers. We are starting from nothing from the viewpoint of material possessions: we have precious few options for suitable buildings and nothing in terms of capital or assets.

Yet God has given us a new beginning, and we should not squander the opportunity that God has given us. We do not need to redevelop the principles of Reformed education, having a deep understanding of these principles from our forebears. We are not encumbered with the last eighty or so years of Protestant Reformed educational history. God has blessed us with children, and with the responsibility God has given us to teach them, he will surely provide the means to do so.

As we consider this new beginning, we may well struggle to consider the difficulty of the way in which God has placed us. By way of encouragement, I leave you with several considerations for a path forward.

First, we live in a world where transportation and communication technologies have made massive progress. These have been used broadly in higher education and in the corporate world. Thanks to God's providence, these technologies have also made inroads into our communities and our education in the last year. We ought to consider how the use of these God-given technologies could be developed to potentially even share teachers regardless of the communities they call home. As an extension

of this concept, we ought to consider carefully how we could help families in very small church communities, providing options for remote learning instead of home-schooling or using nominally Christian schools. This idea may be a better option for high school and junior high, where teaching is somewhat more specialized and students are more mature. There are challenges to overcome here; we should not focus on the challenges themselves but on how they might be overcome to provide the best education for our children.

Second, we ought to consider pursuing broad organization and cooperation with all like-minded believers who have the same goal of solidly Reformed, principled education. Since we share the same principles and basis of Reformed education and the God-given means of technology to teach across distances, finding ways to organize together and to invite participation from families outside of our local communities will provide a foundation by which stronger communities might support the weaker, and especially by which the broader community of believers might support those who are isolated. This may take a variety of forms, but the difficulty of such a concept should spur us on to determine how we can work together toward the goal of Reformed Protestant education. The benefits of such a concept will certainly help to build closer ties among our children, far more than could an annual convention of our children.

Third, let us consider the question of where we seek to begin, considering the resources God is pleased to provide. Do we follow the path of history and begin with primary school, following with high school years later? Or do we

put our first focus on our children who are maturing into their teenage years and for whom a solid Reformed Protestant grounding and godly friendships will leave them with a foundation that they do not need to question? As we consider the path forward, I leave you with a quote from Herman Hoeksema from the *Standard Bearer* in 1937:

The age when our boys and girls attend high school is the period in their life when they begin to reflect, to think for themselves, when, more than in the years of their childhood, they are able to imbibe and understand definite principles and doctrines, when it is of utmost importance, that, both with respect to their thinking and to their conduct they are guided in the right direction. (Herman Hoeksema, “Our Own Christian High School,” *Standard Bearer* 13, no. 22 [September 15, 1937]: 508)

We are a small group with limited resources, but God has blessed us with unity—we are not in this as individuals. Our beginning is small. The blessing of God is not in making our efforts to appear great in the eyes of men; rather, he will bless our efforts by giving us to keep our vows in the raising of our children.

The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? (Zech. 4:9–10)

—Michael Vermeer

LETTER: OUR PRESENT CONTROVERSY

Dear Editor Rev. Lanning,
April 1, 2021

I write regarding your editorials “Our Present Controversy (7)” and “(8)” in the February and March 2021 *Sword and Shield* issues.

One of the points you make on page 6 is in direct reference to the bewitching of the Galatian churches by the Judaizers. “The churches of Galatia were bewitched by the Judaizers to believe the false gospel that they obtained righteousness and salvation by Christ and their keeping of the law. The false doctrine into which the Protestant Reformed churches fell is essentially the same false gospel that the Judaizers taught. Paul wrote against the lie with a very specific and sharp rebuke of the Galatians: O foolish Galatians...”

Just prior to the rebuke of the Galatians, Paul reports his necessary rebuke of the apostle Peter for the same thing, the compromise of the gospel. We learn that Peter and Barnabas “walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.” They brought works of the Jewish law into the picture, adding to Christ, and compelling others also. We read of this in Galatians 2:11–16.

In Exodus 32:1–6 we read of Aaron’s complicity, facilitation, and participation in Israel’s idol worship, a story so familiar I will not take the space to quote the scripture here.

My question is, with these examples in mind, please explain your statements that so many office-bearers be deposed (March 2021 Vol.1 No.13 “Our Present Controversy (8)” pgs. 6,7); “When the church of Jesus Christ identifies false doctrine in her midst, it is her solemn,

holy, and urgent duty to discipline the office-bearers who taught and / or defended the false doctrine.” And further, “By an official decision of the church through her consistory, the church must depose her office-bearers.”

Your view is that office-bearers must lose their office if they “taught and /or defended the false doctrine.” You do not say *continue* teaching and *continue* defending. You mean *if ever*. You are looking back at what men did during a time before the error was even clearly identified and condemned by judgment of the PRC Synod in 2018. You must also have in mind committee reports, consistory decisions, or the way a man voted on an appeal or protest. We know that from your sermons also. Should we stop all voice votes and rule that all voting is recorded so we have evidence of a man’s defense of false doctrine and can depose him?

You leave no place for development of clarity of the truth on the part of assemblies or in the minds of individuals. Depose, you say.

In your view it is not enough that they be corrected by the judgement of Synod, not enough that they subscribe

to the settled and binding judgement of the classis or Synod, not enough that they repent, not enough that they do not militate against the decision or continue in the error, and not enough that they discontinue teaching and discontinue defending the false doctrine.

Peter or Barnabas or Aaron did not lose their offices, nor were they removed from service. Your singular path of “discipline equals deposition”—is that really all there is? Or are there other ways of discipline the church can use with sanctified judgment to exercise God’s correction of repentant office-bearers?

I see correction through exposing the error, proclamation of the proper doctrine, rebuking, and repentance with amendment of teachings as an appropriate way.

Please give your thoughts on the Peter/Barnabas/Aaron examples and the fact that God did not relieve them of their official callings and duties on account of their episodes of gospel compromising, and why you see deposition as the only way now.

In Christ,
Barry Warner

REPLY

Your letter addresses my argument that officebearers who teach or defend false doctrine must be disciplined by being deposed from their offices. You argue for a different approach than deposition.

Your singular path of “discipline equals deposition”—is that really all there is? Or are there other ways of discipline the church can use with sanctified judgment to exercise God’s correction of repentant office-bearers?

I see correction through exposing the error, proclamation of the proper doctrine, rebuking, and repentance with amendment of teachings as an appropriate way.

You base your argument on the examples of Aaron, Peter, and Barnabas, all of whom fell into the public sin of departing from the truth and walking not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. Each of these men was rebuked, apparently repented, and maintained his office without being deposed. Your argument is that deposition was not the only way to deal with their compromise of the gospel, and so it should not be the only way to deal with Protestant Reformed ministers, elders, and professors who compromised the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches’ present controversy.

In general—but only in general—I agree with the point that you make. I believe that it is possible for an

officebearer in the course of his work temporarily to fall into the sin of teaching false doctrine through ignorance, carelessness, laziness, lack of clarity, fear of men, flattery of men, misspeaking, or some other such reason. When that officebearer’s error is exposed, when he is rebuked, and if he repents and repudiates his false doctrine, that officebearer could retain his office. It would not be necessary to depose him for his temporary fall into the sin of false doctrine. Your example of Peter is a good illustration of this. Peter publicly fell into the sin of not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. Paul withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed. Peter apparently repented of his sin, so that he was not deposed but remained an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. By implication, an officebearer today could fall into the sin of false doctrine and be disciplined in the way you suggest without being deposed: “I see correction through exposing the error, proclamation of the proper doctrine, rebuking, and repentance with amendment of teachings as an appropriate way.” Van Dellen and Monsma’s commentary on article 80 of the Church Order is to the point when they describe the sin of “false doctrine or heresy.” “Nor is it the implication that one who unintentionally, through the use of a wrong term or otherwise, states a matter erroneously, thereby makes himself worthy of discipline. The deviation must be conscious and deliberate” (Idzert Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church*

Order Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941], 331).

Thus far I agree in general with the point that you make.

However, I do not agree that your suggestion may apply anymore in the present controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches. After all, the editorials that occasioned your letter were not a general discussion about how to deal with a temporary, one-time fall into false doctrine. The editorials were about “Our Present Controversy.” They were addressing the all-out assault of the devil upon the Protestant Reformed Churches, which assault aims to establish in the churches the false doctrine of conditional covenant fellowship. By the time these editorials appeared, the controversy had been raging for years in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The editorials were not a general or academic question about deposition but laid out a specific path for the denomination to follow in her present controversy to rid herself of the dreadful lie that has taken hold. That specific path includes this: depose your ministers, professors, and elders who have taught or defended the lie in your midst. Depose them as part of your defense of the truth and as part of your contending against the lie. My call to deal with the lie by the discipline of the liars was explained on the basis of scripture and the confessions. Interested readers can find all of this in the March 2021 issue of *Sword and Shield*.

The path that you lay out only works if we were back in the year 2015, let’s say, when a Protestant Reformed minister preached, regarding the “way” of John 14:6, that our obedience is the way to the Father, even though Jesus says that he alone is the way to the Father. If the consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church would have rebuked her minister for the sin of false doctrine in his sermon and required him publicly to repudiate his false doctrine, and the minister had repented of his sin and anathematized his error and had taken up the sword against his own error, then that minister could remain a minister and not be deposed. In fact, that minister would probably even be known in the churches today as the foremost champion of truth and the fiercest foe of error in utter gratitude to God for having rescued him from the lie into which he had fallen. Yes, then a case could be made for the path of correction that you lay out that stops short of deposition.

What actually happened in the Protestant Reformed Churches was that the consistory of Hope church, so far from rebuking the minister for his false doctrine, defended the minister’s false doctrine as true doctrine. The consistory did not merely stand behind the minister, but the consistory stood behind the sermon and the doctrine of the sermon. The consistory labored tirelessly to prove that the sermon was true and that the false doctrine of

the sermon was historic Protestant Reformed theology. One elder stood against the sermon and stood for the truth. The consistory turned on that elder, charged him with being an antinomian, deposed him from office, and placed him under discipline that would end up dragging on for three years. The consistory of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church concurred with Hope’s persecution of her one faithful elder by adding its approval to the elder’s deposition. When the case came to Classis East, the ministers and elders of Classis East defended the false doctrine of the sermon. When the case came to Synod 2016, the ministers, elders, and professors of synod failed to condemn the false doctrine of the sermon. Shortly thereafter, seventeen more sermons of the minister were brought to light that taught the same errors. And on and on it went. I and others have already written and spoken about this controversy at length, so I will not rehash it all now.

The time to follow your suggested path of correction was back in 2015 at the first instance of the false doctrine. When the one faithful elder objected to the sermon on John 14:6 as the heresy of a conditional covenant, that was the time for the minister to repent of his error, repudiate it, and contend against his own sermon. Now that the case has developed to where the Protestant Reformed Churches are today, it is entirely too late to follow your suggested path, which stops short of deposition.

How is one to know, then, when it is time to depose officebearers for false doctrine?

First, when officebearers refuse to acknowledge the heretical character of their false doctrine. A man may unwittingly fall into false doctrine and still be corrected. But when he continues in it and defends it, then he must be deposed for it. Take any of the examples that you cited: Aaron, Peter, or Barnabas. They all kept their offices when, in the first instance of their departure from the truth, they were rebuked and they repented and turned from their sin. But they cannot be used as a justification for men keeping their offices who persist in their false doctrine and defend their false doctrine. What would have happened to the men you cite if, instead of repenting after the rebuke of Moses and Paul, they had continued to dance around the golden calf or to remain withdrawn from the Gentile believers? What would have happened if, instead of repenting, they had convinced their consistories to defend them in their actions for years? Is it conceivable that these men would have remained in their offices?

God’s word is clear about how the church is to deal with heretics: “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Titus 3:10–11). The Protestant Reformed Churches were called to admonish the false teachers in their midst, not to

defend them and their false doctrine for years. When consistories and classes and synods defend a heretic and refuse to reject him, then every officebearer involved in that defense becomes entangled in the heretic's error himself.

To quote from Van Dellen and Monsma's explanation of "false doctrine and heresy" again: "However, though one has not taught or spoken false doctrine deliberately and consciously, yet if he should maintain the false views in question and refuse to acknowledge their heretical and erroneous character, the error becomes conscious and wilful, and worthy of discipline" (331).

And if I may be allowed to quote myself from the editorial in question:

All false doctrine must be taken in hand by the church, and the teachers and defenders of it must be confronted. And all men who continually repeat the error, or who repeatedly defend the error, or who repeatedly refuse to acknowledge the heretical character of the error, must be disciplined by the church. ("Our Present Controversy (8)," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 13 [March 2021]: 7)

Second, one knows that it is time to depose false teachers when those teachers continue in the doctrinal error after that error has been condemned by ecclesiastical assemblies. When the Synod of Dordt ruled that the doctrine of the Remonstrants was the old Pelagian error out of hell, that ruling forbade anyone from teaching Arminianism, whether ignorantly or otherwise, on the pain of losing his office.

Likewise, Synod 2018 declared the errors of the sermons to compromise the gospel, displace the perfect work of Christ, compromise justification by faith alone, and compromise unconditional covenant fellowship. Although that ruling was shot through with weakness, as a letter in the June 15 Letters Edition of *Sword and Shield* made clear, that ruling at least forbade any Protestant Reformed officebearer from teaching those false doctrines.

But what actually happened after Synod 2018? The minister of Hope Protestant Reformed Church taught the same errors in November and December of 2018, and the consistory of Hope defended him in those errors for over a year, until January 2020. Even when Classis East in January 2020 finally said there were errors, classis refused to acknowledge that they were the same errors that had already been condemned by Synod 2018. To the date of this writing, the position of the Protestant Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies on those errors is that they had nothing to do with Synod 2018.

No, now is not the time in the Protestant Reformed Churches to be arguing for some sort of correction that

stops short of deposition. Back in 2015 a case could be made for it. Now that so many ministers, professors, and elders have either taught the same error themselves, or have defended the error, or have connived at the error by their silence, or have bloodied their hands by casting out those who did oppose the error, the turning of the denomination will only happen by putting all of those men out of office. Now is not the time to find a way around deposition of officebearers; now is the time to apply deposition rigorously for the recovery of the truth and the salvation of Christ's sheep.

If I may make one final observation on your letter, I find your letter to be quite ironic. You argue against the deposition of the officebearers responsible for the lie in the Protestant Reformed Churches by proposing a path that stops short of their deposition. However, the officebearers responsible for the lie in the denomination have never once been in danger of being deposed by the denomination. The denomination has never shown the slightest inclination to apply any discipline to them whatsoever. Not a single one of the teachers or defenders of false doctrine in the Protestant Reformed Churches has suffered so much as the beginning of discipline against him.

What makes your letter so ironic is that, from the very first moment of this controversy, the Protestant Reformed Churches have shown themselves perfectly willing to depose officebearers. There has been a vigorous and sustained exercise of discipline against officebearers, just not against those who taught or defended the lie in the Protestant Reformed Churches. At the time my editorials in question appeared, six officebearers had been suspended, deposed, or relieved of the duties of their offices. By now, a seventh has been suspended. All of these officebearers have been on the side of the truth and have stood against the lie.

It is my personal opinion that the Protestant Reformed Churches will not turn from their false doctrine and will not exercise the Christian discipline of deposition against those officebearers who have led the churches astray. I would love to be proven wrong, but these churches have been clear and consistent throughout this controversy that they do not stand with those who defend the truth but stand with those who lead them astray into the lie.

I urge you to reconsider the position that you put forth in your letter. Ask yourself the question whether at this stage of the controversy, it is truly sufficient that the teachers and defenders of error not be deposed.

Let us all beware lest we defend those who ought not be defended, thus strengthening the hands of the evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness.

—AL



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. — Romans 16:17–18

Brethren, there are men in the church whom you must mark and whom you must avoid. These men are difficult to mark and avoid because they have won over the hearts of so many in the church. These men have good words. They know the Reformed vocabulary, and they use it: *sovereign, unconditional, grace, covenant, Christ, faith*. The simple in the church—who are inexperienced in spiritual warfare or are deliberately naïve about the possibility of error within the church—sit under the preaching of these men with all their good words and read their articles with all their good words, and they are deceived.

These men have fair speeches. They know what the people like to hear and what will keep the people on their side. They know exactly what speech will reassure the man who objects to their false doctrine: “Well, all I meant by that statement was this well-known and much-beloved Reformed doctrine, although I maybe didn’t say it so clearly.” They know exactly what speech will flatter the people and make the people love them: “After all, we belong to the best of all denominations, you know. Does anyone really think that we, of all people, could get this doctrine wrong?” They know exactly what speech will turn the people against the “troublemakers” who are trying to mark them: “The real problem is that certain people in our midst are way too critical. They don’t listen to sermons to worship but only to find fault.” The simple in the church hear these fair speeches and are deceived.

Nevertheless, these men whom you are to mark can be clearly known. The standard for evaluating them is the doctrine which ye have learned. The doctrine of the scriptures, which, through much controversy and strife and contending against the lie has been set down in the Reformed confessions and developed and confessed in this Christian church. These men depart from the doctrine which ye have learned, and they lead the church to depart. By their departure from the doctrine, they cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.

Brethren, mark these men. Mark them by truthfully observing their departure and by acknowledging what is so hard for so many to admit: These men (regardless that we love them!) have caused divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned.

Brethren, avoid these men. Avoid them by putting them out of their offices and by putting them out of your assemblies, except they repent.

Urgent matter for the brethren! I beseech you! Mark them and avoid them!

For these men are spiritual predators. They do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ. They have not spoken their good words and fair speeches at the command of Christ but in the service of themselves. Their own belly, which stands for all of the carnal lusts and appetites of their own flesh, has been their master, and they have served their own belly well. In serving their own belly, they will prey upon you and devour you.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them!