

A stylized illustration in orange and white. A hand is shown holding a sword diagonally across the frame. Below the hand, a shield is depicted with several circular patterns on its surface. The background is white, and the text is centered over the illustration.

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

SEPTEMBER 2021 | VOLUME 2 | NUMBER 6

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



Sword and Shield is a monthly periodical published by Reformed Believers Publishing.

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All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Quotations from the Reformed and ecumenical creeds, Church Order, and liturgical forms are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), unless otherwise noted.

Every writer is solely responsible for the content of his own writing.

Signed letters and submissions of general interest may be sent to the editor-in-chief at lanning.andy@gmail.com or

2705 48th Ave
Zeeland, MI 49464

Sword and Shield does not accept advertising.

Please send all business correspondence, subscription requests, and requests to join Reformed Believers Publishing to one of the following:

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Byron Center, MI 49315
Website: reformedbelieverspub.org
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And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. — Isaiah 6:9–10

Solemn and sober commission to preach the word of Jehovah God! Who is sufficient for these things? Who can be a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death?

It is a commission. It is of God to that prophet upon whom God has first impressed his holiness, sovereignty, might, and glorious excellence. Who is a God like unto the thrice-holy triune God? Before him the mighty seraphim cover their faces with their wings. Before him the prophet is undone and becomes nothing. Before the exalted holiness of God's tribunal, the prophet is made intensely and personally aware of his own sin and the absolute worthlessness of all his deeds. He is a man like other men and like the people to whom Jehovah will send him. None are worthy of the presence of Jehovah God. Every sinner must be consumed out of God's presence. No man can approach unto Jehovah God as the seraphim—those sinless creatures—who must yet cover their faces with their wings before the incomparable holiness of God. The prophet—and every preacher—is a man of unclean lips who dwells among a people of unclean lips and that before the Holy One.

That one whom God has impressed with his own exalted holiness, Jehovah also comforts with the gospel of his salvation. That one is cleansed of his sinfulness; he is justified, and all his sins are forgiven; and he is consecrated in love to Jehovah. The prophet—and every preacher—must be intensely and personally aware that he stands before Jehovah God by God's grace alone and that all glory for salvation belongs to Jehovah alone. Only such a one can bear the commission. He must bear it in the grace of God himself. No other man can speak the words of Jehovah.

Sober commission! “Tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not”!

Because *this* is the word of Jehovah about the preaching of his word, many a prophet refuses to go, refuses to speak the word of the Lord, and so also is confounded and undone in the fire of judgment along with the people of Jehovah's judgment. Many suppose they have a better word and a better way. They have not been impressed with the awesome holiness of Jehovah that makes angels tremble. They have utterly forgotten that salvation is gracious. They deny first that they are men of unclean

lips who dwell among people of unclean lips. Ignorant of sin—their own ongoing sinfulness—and equally ignorant of the way of salvation—intensely and personally ignorant—they reject *this* word of God about his word. They have never stood before Jehovah. They have never been undone. They know nothing—intensely and personally—of the perfect sovereignty of Jehovah God, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy and who hardens whom he will.

To the one whom God has undone and comforted in his grace, God says, “Go! Tell this people.” Sovereign commission of God. “Go to this people to whom I have sent you.” Not to all people but to such people to whom Jehovah himself has determined to send the prophet. Go to this people here and that people there, for Jehovah has a word for them.

Jehovah himself gives the prophet his word: “Tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat...lest they...understand with their heart.”

In that commission the prophet—minister—is wholly engaged physically, mentally, spiritually, and psychologically. But who can bear it? A word sufficient to crush any man. Is it true, Lord? Jehovah sent me to accomplish *this* purpose? Did not he send me to gather many people; to save many people; to keep many people; and to do that by instruction, warning, rebuke, and encouragement? Surely, not me, Lord! For me there will be a *different* purpose! But does not Jehovah, in fact, say that to every minister? When it happens, is it not devastating; and does not the prophet—minister—cry out with Isaiah, “Lord, how long?” A cry this is, indeed. Surely, he submits to this sovereign word of God. Surely, he is not rebelling against Jehovah when he asks that question. But he is stunned at his commission.

And is not the answer more stunning still? Will not Jehovah say, “Until this people bow and acknowledge my sovereignty,” or “Until this people learn a lesson,” or “Until this people turn to me”? But what an answer the prophet receives: “Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant...and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land”! Preach until the cities are laid waste and left without inhabitant. Preach until the houses are devoid of men, the fields are unplowed, and the vineyards are

unkept. Preach until the hedges are broken down, the forests are chopped down, and the rivers are dried up. Preach until the ground is seared and burnt, until dust devils swirl across the forsaken landscape, until dragons and bitterns inhabit the land. Preach until the smoke from desolate cities and the stench from decaying bodies rise up to heaven and the laments of the dead for their dead fall silent. Preach until men, women, and children; young and old; rich and poor; bond and free are carried away captive and there is a great forsaking in the land. Preach until the scene in the land is one of utter desolation. Preach until death—individually, ecclesiastically, and generationally—is the result! Of the preaching!

Go! Tell this people. Preach to them and speak unto them in my name. Say to them, “Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not”!

Surely, God does not intend the prophet to repeat that specific message. The prophet might never say those exact words. The minister—like Isaiah—preaches the whole counsel of God. He preaches of God, God’s glory, God’s works, and God’s words as they are all given to him both to know and to speak. He speaks of sin and of righteousness and of judgment to come. He speaks of wisdom and of salvation. He will speak of Jehovah’s excellent majesty and of his omnipotent power; he speaks of God’s promise and of his wonderful grace; he will call to faith and to repentance; he will open up heavenly things hidden in a mystery. Men will hear the very thoughts of God; men will see the wonders of God; and God himself will even come to them to speak with them, for the word preached by the prophet—minister—is in truth the very word of God. Mysterious.

The prophet—minister—must speak the word of the gospel. It is the word that abases man as without good in himself. That word comes condemning man. It warns that there is no peace of God to the wicked. It threatens with eternal damnation all who do not turn to the living God. The gospel ever is the preaching of the promise of God to all and sundry, wherever God in his good pleasure sends it, to this people and to that people. The gospel sets forth Jesus Christ in the glory of his person, natures, and work. The gospel declares that God’s promises are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. The gospel calls all men everywhere to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ. Ever the same. Ever the heavenly message of good news concerning Jesus Christ to a sin-cursed people of unclean lips and unclean hearts with no way out of their condemnation. Always the call is to come to him. Always the message is that Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ alone, is the way, the truth, and the life. Always the promise is that all who do turn from their sin and believe in Christ will be saved. The promise is of salvation, of righteousness, of escape from judgment,

and of blessed fellowship with the living God forever and ever in Jesus Christ alone to those who are wholly and completely unworthy of it. Always the promise is that all who do not come to Christ shall be damned, the absolute certainty of the eternal destruction of the ungodly, whose souls Jehovah hates. A beautiful sound that all hear. A beautiful sight that all see. And that over against the ugly cacophony of their own wickedness as heard in the preaching and over against the ugly sight of their own iniquities laid so clearly before them.

And in all that speaking, God will say to this people who hear his word, “Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.” With whatever word of the prophet—whether a sober message of man’s depravity or a joyful recounting of the faithfulness of Jehovah; whether a somber declaration of the vanity of all things or a fleeting glimpse in a few words of the glory of heaven—whatever the message, in all of the prophet’s speaking, Jehovah God will say to this people, “Hear, but do not understand; see, but do not perceive.”

This people must hear. There is no hiding of his word. There is no speaking by cryptic words or in mysterious phrases. Emphatically, they must hear. They must hear all that Jehovah has to speak unto them. This people must see. Emphatically, they must see. Jehovah gives the sights of heaven and hell to them in order that they might see them. They must see with the eye of the mind and so also comprehend in the natural sense of the word what the prophet—minister—is saying. They must be enlightened and taste the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. The minister—prophet—must preach the word of God with crystal clarity so that wherever and to whomever God in his good pleasure sends his word they hear the word of God and know it to be the word of God, and they see with the eye of the mind all the sights that God will have them see.

And because Jehovah says, “See and hear,” they hear and know, and they see and understand. Absolutely, they know: there has been a prophet among us. Did not Christ himself explain his parables in this way? He taught them in parables so that the meaning of his words and the heavenly content of his messages could not be misunderstood. It was so clear that a child—or an idiot—could understand it.

In Jesus’ parable there are three types of unfruitful ground. A *hard path* where the word makes no impression, but the birds—the devils—steal the word away from those hard hearts. The hearers turn from the word with hardly a thought, pass by Christ, and pass on through their lives into eternal perdition. *Thorny ground* in which the word springs up but is choked by the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this world, and the hearts of

the hearers become unfruitful. They hear the word. Emphatically, they hear the word. They themselves testify that they have heard the word, that Christ has been among them, and that the doctrine they have heard is true. They will even say, "We believe in Christ; we do not reject Christ." But when the Word—Christ—says, "Me or your business; me or your friends; me or your comfortable lives that you have established for yourselves in the world," then they choose the world and its deceitful riches. When Christ calls them to forsake this world and to come heavenward, then the cares of this world win out in their hearts and minds. Turning their backs on Christ, they go one to his farm and another to his merchandise, and the rest take Christ's servants and entreat them spitefully and slay them. The *stony ground* where the word is received by some with what appears to be instant and rich joy, but they have no root. The hot sun of persecution arises, and by and by they are offended and scorched. The word they had heard and received—because it will cost them in gold, in friends, in standing, in name, and, indeed, their lives—becomes the most hateful word in the world, a word they cannot get away from or send out of their country quickly enough.

And about all those hearers Christ says, "Speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive" (Matt. 13:13–14).

The spiritual, the heavenly, the saving worth and meaning of the word of the gospel they never come to. Professing much love for this truth and that truth, coming to church and singing and giving and praying, they do not believe. They are not saved by the word. Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what they saw and to hear what they heard! When Christ himself is the prophet—or comes through a preacher today by Christ's Spirit—and though he does so many miracles before them—or speaks so clear a word unto them—yet they believe not on him. They do not receive the blessed knowledge of and saving fellowship with Jesus Christ and with his Father. They never know Christ's righteousness and go about to establish their own; they never know the power of his resurrection; they never know the blessed fellowship of his suffering.

Shall we say that men rejected the word? Oh, yes, indeed, they consciously, deliberately, and maliciously, oftentimes with violence, rejected the word. This people do that, even Israel and the church, as the earthly manifestation of God's people, as those to whom God sends his prophets—and preachers.

Terrible sin, for in so doing they reject salvation, which

is to reject Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father and to reject the Father himself, who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Special kind of sin! The heathen hold under in unrighteousness the truth of God manifested in creation and bring upon themselves the wrath of God revealed from heaven against that form of unrighteousness and ungodliness. But what shall we say of those who have heard Christ speak to them, who crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God and put him to an open shame, who have trodden underfoot the Son of God, who have counted the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing, and who have done despite to his Spirit of grace? Cursed people.

And how is it to be explained that men reject so beautiful a sight as God in Jesus Christ and such beautiful strains as the sweet music of the gospel? Did not Christ say, "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed" (Matt. 13:15)? And so Paul warns the Jews of his own day, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers...the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed" (Acts 28:25, 27).

A fat heart stuffed as a fat person with many rich things. Engrossed by the deceitfulness of riches, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Engorged with the abundance of this earth, having more than heart could desire, and loving mammon, the heart of this people has no taste for heavenly meat and drink, no hunger and thirst for righteousness, and no desire to see God.

Their ears are dull of hearing—hard and insensitive ears—and have no power to discern the truth from the lie, blessing from cursing, or the word of God from the word of man. Like the atonal ears of the musically incompetent who cannot discern the various notes of the tune and cannot carry a tune in a bucket, so these theologically atonal souls cannot discern between the blessed sound of the gospel and the oppressive lie of Satan. Indeed, it is worse; for they desire the sound of the serpent, and the beautiful music of the gospel is an utter weariness to them, as the worldling prefers the cacophony of the world's music to the singing of the psalms.

Their eyes are blind, and so they have no capacity to see anything spiritual in the preaching of the gospel. The minister—or prophet—so gloriously portrays Christ before their eyes, crucifying him among them; arrays their sins before their eyes; and illustrates the peril in which ungodly men stand; and it is no different to them than if one would hold a painting before a blind man. He will tire of it and be unmoved by it.

The natural man can only ever reject the word of God

and react against it with opposition and rebellion. The natural man does not and cannot receive the things of the Spirit any more than the blind eye can perceive sights or the deaf ear can hear sweet music or the dullard can understand science. Surely, as man by nature exists in the sphere of sin and ungodliness and as he thus is devoid of grace, this is all he can do with the word.

And yet this people, hearing and seeing, also close their eyes and shut their ears and make their hearts fat. There is a hardening that takes place under the preaching of the word, a going from bad to worse. The more clearly, sharply, emphatically, and persistently the word of God comes, the more clearly, sharply, emphatically, and persistently that word beats upon their ears, stands before their eyes, and divides asunder their hearts. Then those wicked, ungodly, unbelieving hearts are exposed, and the more clearly, sharply, emphatically, and persistently they set themselves against the word of God with all its power. The carnal Israelites were hardened at the sound of the revelation of God's word in the Old Testament—by means of sacrifices and ceremonies and prophecies and predictions—until in vile hatred they killed the prophets. Those who rejected the word of God in the Old Testament were cut off and cut down. How much more is that true when God speaks by his Son—whose voice is ever heard in his church and ever hardens the ungodly and unbelieving church member and officebearer—until they cast him out, as they crucified him in his own day.

Both Paul and our Lord, both Isaiah and the Holy Ghost come in their explanation of the word to *God*. And John—especially John—said of Jesus, “Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him” (John 12:37). Christ had testified to the Jews of the kingdom of heaven, of the fulfillment of all righteousness, and that all things that the patriarchs saw and the prophets foretold were being fulfilled before their eyes. He confirmed his testimony with powerful wonders from heaven: healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, making the lame to walk, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead—so many miracles! Yet they believed not on him. Terrible unbelief! “They could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart” (vv. 39–40). They could not believe. It was not possible. The astounding unbelief of the Jews of Christ's own day, of the nation of Israel in Isaiah's day, and of the church of our own day—to whom Christ speaks as the Son from heaven by many infallible testimonies of the Holy Spirit—is to be explained by God. God blinded their eyes, shut their ears, and hardened their hearts. God did not will that they believe. God did not will it according to his eternal and sovereign counsel of reprobation. In appointing a remnant to salvation, he passed by many

with the grace of election and appointed them to eternal condemnation. So they could not believe!

And we must observe a distinction in this work of God, for some perish never having heard the word, without excuse for their inexcusable madness of holding the truth of God in creation under in unrighteousness. Yet in order to make sin exceedingly sinful, the hatred of men exceedingly clear, the hardness of men most plain, and the sovereignty of God in salvation and damnation perfectly clear, he sends the word out with crystal clarity; so that one would say that if salvation were in any sense in the power of man, by the will of man, or by the running of man, surely this people would believe. For God sent to them Isaiah and Jeremiah and many of his servants the prophets, and at last he sent his Son. They murdered his servants and crucified his Son. Now also God sends out the word of the gospel, of rebuke and reconciliation, and of sin and salvation. The Son speaks now from heaven with a clarity that no man can deny. And seeing they do see, and hearing they do hear. But they do not understand. They do not convert and are not healed. Astounding unbelief! For salvation is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Jehovah is the potter, who is able to make of one lump one vessel to honor and another to dishonor.

The Lord gave the word. Great was the company that published it. The word carries out the will of God. He sent the word for this very purpose, for does not God say to Isaiah in that sober and solemn commission, “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest [in order that, for the purpose that] they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed”? *Make*, the word is *make*! Oh, yes, there is an operation of sin and of wickedness in those hearts. They are not the objects of grace, and so they operate solely and exclusively in the sphere of sin and wickedness. But you may not say merely that *they* closed their hearts, and so in response God hardened their hearts. There may not be so much as an inkling of the idea that they first rejected the word or that God first made to them an offer, and only after they rejected—or received—the offer, the call, or the command, then God worked—whether to harden or to bless. God is absolutely sovereign in the preaching of the word. Such is the astounding word that in causing them to see and to hear, he also makes their hearts fat and their ears heavy and blinds their eyes. Regardless of the particular subject of the prophet's—or minister's—message. God will speak unto them in his wrath, “Seeing do not see; hearing do not hear. Let your hearts be fattened for the slaughter and your ears hardened against the word and your eyes blinded to the wonders of the

gospel. Do not understand and do not perceive and do not convert. I do not will it. I will not heal you.” They could not believe. For that very purpose the word was sent unto them.

Who is sufficient for these things? To be a savor of death unto death: perhaps to a friend, a lover, a dear companion, a family member, a fellow church member, nearly an entire congregation, a denomination, or a generation. One could wish himself accursed for his brethren according to the flesh. Great tears of grief fall: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if you had only known the things that belong to your peace!”

How long, O Jehovah? Until the cities be wasted... Many congregations; many denominations; many families and generations; many hundreds, thousands, and millions fallen away! Powerful word. Infallible purpose. Just severity. Solemn commission. “Go! Tell this people!” Who is sufficient? I think that with that word we have entered the darkness of Golgotha. What desolation the Word brought when he himself came to speak in the flesh. The word so hardened the Jews that they crucified the Lord of glory, and in his crucifixion not only Israel but also the whole world and the entire universe were plunged into desolate darkness. Cut down and cut off.

Yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return. Always the remnant is saved according to Jehovah’s eternal good pleasure. Like a great tree is cut down, so the people—a denomination, a congregation, and a generation—is cut down to the ground. But the holy seed is the deep life

and imperishable root of the tree. The holy seed, who is Christ. The holy seed, which is all those who are elect in Christ and are infallibly engrafted into Christ by a true faith. The holy seed, which is eternally precious and dear to Jehovah God. The tenth is the remnant according to the election of grace, and so the full number of those appointed by God to salvation shall be saved.

The announcement of their salvation out of desolation is a ray of heavenly grace radiating to the earth from the awesome glory of divine sovereignty. A resurrection from the dead. Jehovah will not utterly cast off. A stump is left when the tree is cut down, the root still in the ground. Christ. He arises. He is its everlasting life; no matter how often it is cut down—Israel, many churches, many denominations, many families and generations—life is always in the stump. Israel grows as an organic whole in the world; so also the church grows as an organic whole; the earthly manifestation of the people of God is a tree that springs up out of the root. But it is full of dead branches; indeed, the whole trunk and all the branches are dead, consumed by a loathsome disease. Finally it is cut down. The life is only in the root beneath the stump that is left. This is Christ and all those who are Christ’s.

And even that tree shall be eaten; infected already with the disease that will eventually devour it again as it springs up.

Go! Tell this people...

Until the final judgment.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

The reader will notice that Rev. Nathan Langerak has returned to all of his usual rubrics in this issue: *Meditation*, *Understanding the Times*, and *Finally, Brethren, Farewell*. This indicates the measure of recovery that the Lord has given him, for which we are thankful. As his health, and all of our health, comes and goes, we say with Job, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

The reader will also notice that the other two editors have no articles in this issue in order to make room for an outstanding contribution by Mr. Philip Rainey. Mr. Rainey is a founding member of Reformed Believers Publishing, and his article demonstrates that the current errors in the Protestant Reformed Churches are not new but were addressed by Rev. John Heys already many decades ago. In his article Mr. Rainey makes reference

to an exchange in which he participated on the blog of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). The RFPA would not publish Mr. Rainey’s final response in that exchange. That response ought to be published. Due to space constraints, we plan to publish it in the October issue of *Sword and Shield*, the Lord willing.

Mr. Rainey’s article in this issue also highlights that *Sword and Shield* belongs to believers as a believer’s paper. Rather than shorten or break up his article to leave space for the other editors, the magazine carries his article in full. Not only does the voice of another writer add to the interest and flavor of the magazine, but the content of the article is doctrinal and polemical, which we believe will be greatly edifying to the believer.

May God speed the truths written herein to your heart and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.—1 Chronicles 12:32

SYNOD'S LETTER OF RECONCILIATION: AN EVIL BUSINESS

Some Observations

As I noted in my August 1 article, Prof. H. Hanko and Prof. D. Engelsma addressed an urgent “appeal” to the 2021 Protestant Reformed synod. In their appeal the professors called for a special committee to be formed to seek reconciliation with the newly formed Reformed Protestant Churches. The professors’ appeal was a dream at best for the reasons I stated in that article.

The synod shabbily dismissed the professors’ request for a special committee and instead adopted a letter addressed to those who had left the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), which letter was given to Protestant Reformed consistories. (The synod’s letter is printed following this article.)

My suggestion to the Protestant Reformed consistories is that they shred synod’s letter and protest it as an offense against everything Christian and decent. Better, add the letter to the evidence that increasingly shows the corruption of the denomination at every level, and leave.

I must confess that when I first read the letter I thought it was satire. It captures exactly the smug self-righteousness and corruption of the gospel within the denomination. I thought that the synodical delegates and professorial advisors who represented the denomination could not be that conceited, tone-deaf, and blind. They could not think that little of the intelligence and spirituality of the former members of the PRC so as to foist such a transparently hollow and insincere confession on them, confess themselves to be humble, say they have done no wrong regarding the deposition of Rev. A. Lanning, and then admonish those who have left to boot, and expect to be taken seriously.

Then I realized that the letter is not a joke. Twenty supposedly intelligent men, along with several professors of the Protestant Reformed seminary, actually assembled in a room and adopted this letter. Some minister, no doubt, or several of them, actually drafted such folly and presented it to his colleagues not only as a good idea but also as wisdom from God. Those ministers, elders, and professors had the audacity to grace the letter’s carnality with the word of God and with heavenly words such as *reconciliation*, *humility*, *healing*, and *grace*. Those men were so shameless that they handed the letter out

to consistories and published it publicly in the *Standard Bearer*.

Though not a spoof, the letter is a shame. It is nothing more than an echo of the presentations held by many churches and of the lying *Standard Bearer* articles of Prof. B. Gritters supposedly lamenting the schism. Such laments are as fake as a three-dollar Rolex. The PRC obviously glories in her decision. Never has any decision by the PRC produced so many meetings, lectures, and articles as the deposition of Rev. A. Lanning. The letter touts synod’s careful adjudication of many protests regarding the deposition, but all of them were moot in light of the meetings that many churches had held trumpeting the righteousness of the decision to depose. In light of all those meetings, the decision to reject the protests and to affirm the decision to depose Reverend Lanning was a *fait accompli*. The PRC should glory in her decision if the charges against him be true.

The PRC has put out of the church and the kingdom of heaven men who by her judgment are schismatic, bearers of false witness, preachers of the dread plague of antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism, rebellious violators of the Church Order, oath-breakers of the Formula of Subscription, and violators of the fifth commandment. And she has put out those who agree with these ministers. Now the PRC should have the courage of her convictions to operate and to write from the viewpoint of those decisions and not make a sham lament and confession, while at the same time wiping her mouth and saying she has done no evil. If the synod wanted to write to those who left, synod should have reiterated its charges against those officebearers and members and called all of them to repent.

All the charges in these instances are laughable, and the synodical delegates and advisors know this. Simply reiterating the charges makes that clear. Consider what the PRC—not God—has declared and what she maintains. One is barred from the kingdom of heaven for preaching that Prof. R. Dykstra minimized the doctrinal error condemned by Synod 2018. It is mortal sin to preach that Classis East of the PRC by its atrocious and sophisticated doctrinal decision committed a sin that is more heinous to the Lord than sodomy. It is gravest disobedience in the

PRC to write for *Sword and Shield* magazine and to be a member of Reformed Believers Publishing. To leave the PRC is to be held in “the snare of the devil.” But it was not sin when we did these things, it is not sin now, and it will not be sin in the day of judgment. The men who were involved in the decisions to condemn us know this and seek to soothe their own troubled consciences by loud self-justification and vacuous letters.

The synodical letter is also a church political novelty. This calls for some commentary because the *church orderly way* is frequently cited by the churches of the Protestant Reformed denomination as that which governs all her decisions. Having zealously upheld the Church Order in rejecting all the protests against Reverend Lanning’s deposition, the synodical delegates and advisors promptly forgot the Church Order in the space of a few hours.

The letter purports to be a synodical admonition to those who are no longer members of the Protestant Reformed fellowship and have formed their own denomination! Imagine the Christian Reformed synod’s addressing several hundred individuals in 1939 instead of addressing the Protestant Reformed classis. The Protestant Reformed synod conceivably could have addressed the first classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches. But by addressing individuals whom it lumped together in a homogeneous mass, the synod opened a conversation with several hundred individuals. May those several hundred individuals now address the Protestant Reformed synod? Very curious church polity is this.

The letter is also hierarchical. In the name of synod, the letter states lessons learned and weaknesses exposed but does not name them and foists all this on the consistories. Are consistories implicitly to subscribe to this letter? If I were a member of Trinity’s consistory or Byron’s consistory or a delegate of Classis East, I would be seriously offended by that statement. Those elders and ministers have spent the previous six months telling everyone who would listen that they had done God’s justice and judgment. And then through synod’s letter they find out that weaknesses have been exposed and there are lessons they should learn!

In this same vein, the letter treats the Protestant Reformed consistories as a mailing service. Synod did the work of admonishing, confessing weaknesses,

acknowledging lessons learned, denying any sin, and calling for repentance. All the consistories have to do is mail the synodical letter. The elders do not even have to meet with those who left their churches. Just mail another form letter!

Still more, by the letter synod took to itself a great deal of power. Synod took to itself the power to form into a group several hundred individuals who have left the denomination. They are a denomination and churches, but the Protestant Reformed synod would not deign to state that. Worse, the synod took to itself the power of the keys. Recognizing the impropriety of this, the letter seeks to have it both ways. Having admonished in the name of synod, the letter pedantically instructs convinced individuals that they are supposed to go to the consistories of the churches they have left and repent. However, the

letter is not from the consistories but from the synod. The letter is signed “Synod 2021 of the PRCA.” The letterhead is from the PRCA and includes the names of the synodical treasurer, the stated clerk, and the assistant stated clerk. But then again, desperate times call for desperate measures, and the denomination shows yet again that she is not above bending a few rules and ignoring some principles in the Church Order if it serves her purposes.

Then there is this church political curiosity: the synodical letter was sent to the consistories as a suggestion. They may use it, or they may not use it. Are we to suppose that the consistories may or may not also subscribe to the unnamed weaknesses and unstated lessons learned? Must we suppose that the consistories are implicitly to receive without proof or substantiation what the synod has said? Are the consistories to make up what *they* suppose the lessons and weaknesses are, or may they disagree and say that there are no weaknesses and lessons learned? What about settled and binding? Did not the synod adopt this letter? Is it not *the* synodical statement about those who have left the denomination? Must not the letter be mailed to those who have left as the settled and binding decision of synod? Curiouser and curiouser.

All the church political novelties and curiosities aside, this all shows that there is no conviction behind synod’s letter. The letter is transparently insincere. The letter admits that the PRC learned some lessons, but she will not go into these lessons for her own benefit or for the

The PRC should have the courage of her convictions to operate and to write from the viewpoint of [her] decisions and not make a sham lament and confession, while at the same time wiping her mouth and saying she has done no evil.

benefit of anyone else. The letter points out that the Lord “has graciously exposed weaknesses” in the denomination but quickly adds that those weaknesses are “more than we can get into by way of letter.” Surely, if the synod intended to confess weaknesses and lessons learned in the name of the denomination and if it felt that there was not enough room in the letter, synod would have included an explanation of those weaknesses and lessons learned somewhere. It seems a rather important matter for the synod to spell out, so that all the consistories of the denomination can subscribe to the settled and binding decision and instruct their members—perhaps by more lectures—concerning the weaknesses and lessons learned. This would seem to be extremely important if, as the letter says, it was the *Lord* who was doing the showing. Besides, if a denomination has had the Lord expose her weaknesses and confesses this before the world, would she not also honor the Lord’s work not only by naming the weaknesses but also by stating the steps that are being taken to remedy these weaknesses? Or have all these lessons learned and weaknesses secretly been communicated to only the delegates of synod, and the rest are just supposed to take synod’s word for it? Only those who do not mean what they say would cite lessons learned and weaknesses exposed and be unable or unwilling to elaborate on them.

Adding folly to hypocrisy is the entirely circular logic of the letter: the Protestant Reformed synod approved the evil business of deposition, and so the evil business must be right because the synod approved it. The letter does not pass Logic 101.

More serious, the letter does not pass the basic ethical test, something that would seem to be a very important concern for a denomination that is bent on driving out antinomians of every stripe. A judge cannot sit in trial of his own judgment, unless the judge is God. So, for instance, in the Old Testament the ruling of a local judge was able to be appealed to another court. The same judge did not sit in judgment of his own ruling on appeal. But at synod, trumpeting their own righteousness and holiness before the world, many of the men of Classis East, the synodical deputies of Classis West, and the professorial advisors—all of whom played a very large role in the destruction of Reverend Lanning—sat in judgment of their own judgment. They were the instigators, the judges, the jury, the appeals court, the supreme court, the executioners, and the media team all wrapped up into one. The world—the ungodly world—would blush at the corruption of justice in such a system. And such judgment is repugnant in the church of Christ, where justice and mercy are to be preserved with the greatest fidelity.

But really, all these are merely observations from one who went through this history.

Corruption of the Gospel of Reconciliation

Worse, the letter says what it does in the name of *the gospel of reconciliation* but corrupts that gospel. This corruption began already in the professors’ letter to synod, in which they argued that seeking meetings with the newly formed denomination would be in harmony with the gospel of reconciliation. I suppose that I could go along with that under the right circumstances, for instance, that the synod, which might have adopted the professors’ proposal, also gave concrete evidence that the churches have repented of their sin of brutally abusing the key power of discipline, sheltering false doctrine, and twisting the Church Order and Formula of Subscription. The synod could have done this especially by advising the discipline of the men who were responsible either directly because they were ringleaders of the evil or indirectly because they stood in the background and pulled levers. The professors did not mention the denomination’s repenting of sins or even any persons’ repenting of their sins. In fact, the professors did not mention *sin* at all.

In light of their letter, one could perhaps be forgiven for supposing that what has transpired in the PRC was a big misunderstanding. However, separation happens because of sin, not merely because of misunderstandings and weaknesses. Misunderstandings and weaknesses we endure with much love. But false doctrine, suppression of the truth, lording, abuse of power, manipulation of facts, manufactured charges of sin, corruption of the laws and courts of the church, and hypocritical proclamations to all and sundry of your righteousness when you did evil are sins. Either that or the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches are at fault and the PRC is right, has not sinned, and does not need to repent. It matters very little to me against whom the charges of sin are lodged. The point is that reconciliation involves charges of sin against someone for something because someone is responsible for the heinous crime of destroying in God’s church, and whoever destroys in God’s church, him will God destroy. To suggest reconciliation apart from these things is a denial of the gospel of reconciliation. For the gospel of reconciliation includes the calling to repent *from sin*, to turn to God, and to seek him—all of which point to the fact that reconciliation involves serious repentance and that an attempt at reconciliation without serious repentance is a denial of the gospel of reconciliation.

This corruption continued in the letter adopted by the Protestant Reformed synod. The synod wrote, “We earnestly seek reconciliation in the biblical way of confession and repentance.” So far so good. But then the wheels started to fall off: “The gospel of Christ demands that we

try to reconcile.” The gospel of Christ does not demand of two warring parties—ostensibly brothers—that they *try* to reconcile. That is man’s corruption of the gospel of grace, his superficial efforts with the glorious name of *reconciliation*, all the while failing to do the hard work of self-examination and true repentance. The gospel demands that the two warring parties *reconcile*. There is no *trying* to reconcile. Both with God himself and with the neighbor whom you sinned against, the word of God is “be ye reconciled” (2 Cor. 5:20). That reconciliation demands the repentance of the sinner who has caused the breach. The sinner who will not repent of his sin and who thus stands in the way of reconciliation will be damned. That is the word of God.

Synod’s corruption of the gospel of reconciliation continued: “We attempt to begin a healing of the breach between us.” I have no idea what an attempted beginning is, but you can be sure it is not an all-out effort at reconciliation. It is rather a kind of dipping one’s toes into the water to see if the plunge into reconciliation will be worthwhile and to determine if the other party is going to require real and substantive change and a clear, specific, consistent confession of sin, or whether sins can be swept conveniently under the rug and those who committed them can be congratulated for their earnest efforts at reconciliation. This, synod said is all to be done “in submission and obedience to Christ.” However, Christ did not say, “*Attempt to begin* to heal the breach,” but Christ said, “Repent.” Christ said, “Go and tell your brother his fault” or “Go confess your fault to your brother.” If you tell your brother his fault and he does not repent, then you are to put him out of the church and the kingdom of heaven. If you do not confess your fault—sin—then you are to be put outside the kingdom.

But perhaps we can overlook these things for the moment. Perhaps the delegates and advisors were not very good theologians and were not very precise in their language, and what Christ said is really what the synod meant.

In the letter synod confessed, “We come to you in humility.” Notice that synod tells the world, “We come... in humility.” I was always taught that if someone has to tell you that he is doing something, he more than likely is not doing it. For instance, if someone begins his sentence with “I am not being proud,” then you can be pretty sure that what follows will be dripping with pride. If someone

tells you that he is being honest, then he probably is being colossally dishonest. The word of God is “be humble,” not “tell everyone that you are humble,” which is pride. Let your actions speak, and let another man praise you, which means let the one whom you are approaching judge whether you are humble or not.

The letter makes plain that it indeed originated out of something other than humility. Just before proclaiming its humility, the synod wrote that it was seeking “reconciliation in the biblical way of confession and forgiveness,” so we might expect a confession of sin. Instead, we get this subterfuge: “We have humbly reflected on the lessons God is teaching us. He has graciously exposed weaknesses, which is more than we can get into by way of letter.” Then this rich line: “We would ask you to approach us with this same humility and desire to confess where you

have been wrong.” Note that the synod did not confess any wrong and would not elaborate on the weaknesses. Synod confessed to having learned lessons but would not enumerate them. There was on the part of synod a deliberate avoidance of any confession whatsoever. Rather, the letter is a series of deceptively crafted phrases to create the appearance of repentance without actually repenting of anything. It is the technique known as distraction, and all of synod’s confessions

about humility, forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation are persiflage.

In fact, synod told us as much: “We cannot confess that we have sinned in the suspension and deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning.” There are a number of things wrong with this line. First and foremost is the assumption, really a charge, that all who left the PRC left because of sin in the deposition of Reverend Lanning. What the PRC should recognize, if a miracle occurs and she becomes serious about reconciliation, is that the Reformed Protestant denomination was not formed because of sinful suspension and deposition. Those sins were the end result of a concerted effort to bring false doctrine into the church, undermine a synodical decision, and carry on slander against the truth of God.

What that line does make clear is that the PRC is not so earnest and humble as to confess sin. Of course, she could not, for that would mean the deposition of several professors, ministers, and consistories. What is clear is that the learned lessons did not involve any sin on their part—they are perfectly righteous in their works, and the

By synod’s letter the Protestant Reformed denomination has shown herself to be hardened in her departure from the truth, in her persecution of the faithful, and in her sheltering of the evil in her midst.

synod said so—and none of their weaknesses that God so graciously exposed to synod involved any sin on their part either. Synod could have left out all condescending banter about its humility, having learned many lessons, and having been shown many weaknesses. In the interest of brevity and honesty, synod could have started with the statement, “We have done nothing wrong, and we are calling all those who left the denomination to repent.” Rather, synod wrote a letter that fools no one and sounds like a smarmy used car salesman who wants to butter up his customer right before he takes advantage of him. This letter is a disgrace, and it disgraces all who voted for it and all who do not condemn it. The letter formulizes by synodical decision a total corruption of the gospel of reconciliation as though that gospel may be prostituted to make men’s impudence look good.

The letter is eerily familiar. I have seen many such letters suggested, written, and approved by Protestant Reformed consistories long before this synodical letter. These letters appeared almost without fail in every abuse case that I am aware of in the Protestant Reformed churches. These letters have been penned sometimes by the elders themselves, sometimes by the abusive man, and sometimes by the abusive man’s friends or family. The letters are crafted to be sent to his abused wife to show his repentance but are in reality nothing more than image management by the abusive husband and the consistory. By writing or agreeing to such a letter, the abusive man is heartily congratulated by the members of the consistory, his friends, and other flying monkeys for his humble spirit and his willingness to seek reconciliation with his wife. In these letters the abusive husband will vaguely mention some lessons learned and some sorrow for grave weaknesses. But he never gets into specifics in his letter about what he has learned or what his weaknesses are. Almost invariably in the same letter, he will attack his wife more or less subtly for not being submissive and for violating her marriage vows and fluff his feathers by assurances to her of his great love for marriage. He will urge his wife to be humble like him and come back to him.

All his wife’s very serious accusations are swept away, and none of them are taken seriously at all. She is not consulted about what she thinks about his apology. The husband and the elders are not interested in what she thinks about the apology, for all know that it is as worthless as the paper it is written on. By means of pious-sounding platitudes in the letter, the husband whitewashes the history of the marriage and his own wicked actions in the marriage that drove his wife away from him through his repeated murder of her soul and body. When his wife rebuffs his evil letter—according to the apostle, the letter is “the sorrow of the world” that works death—she is

smearred as vindictive and unforgiving. She is maligned as being blinded by hatred to the obvious change in her husband that everyone else sees and of which he has now given abundant testimony by his letter of reconciliation.

Ensnared in the falsehood that the husband is actually repentant because he wrote his letter, driven by the idea that reconciliation would be a wonderful testimony to enhance the image of the man and consistory and church, and desiring to protect the sanctity of the hollow image of a good marriage, the elders will meet repeatedly with the woman. Often they meet under the guise of helping her and comforting her in her distress. At these meetings the elders will pound on the table to intimidate her and demand that she receive her husband’s worthless letter of reconciliation and castigate her for being so unforgiving and vindictive. The elders will point out without mercy that she is a sinner too. They will threaten her that if she does not forgive, she will not be forgiven, thus using the word of God and God’s own promise of forgiveness as a threat and a club. They will rattle the keys in her face, telling her that failure to forgive her obviously repentant husband—have you read his letter of reconciliation?—will result in her own excommunication. The elders will grace their meetings with Bible texts to impress on the woman that what they are demanding is godly and biblical. They will tell her that they know! Oh, how they know what true repentance is! They will puff themselves up that they and not the woman can determine if her husband is repentant. They have, after all, carefully reviewed the whole case.

In the consistory room the elders will slander the woman to their fellow elders by indicating how easy it is to work with the man and how eager he is for reconciliation and how hardhearted and unforgiving the woman is. The elders are incredulous that she does not want to hear about reconciliation until there is true repentance. The evil of all of this passes by these incompetent, shallow, and unrighteous judges. The very best of them, while sympathetic and confessing that the man bears most of the blame, will say that the wife must take at least a sliver of the blame for being beaten mercilessly by her husband by words or fists or both and having to endure other forms of degrading and destructive behavior. She should take some of the blame because, after all, she is hard to deal with, and why did she make her husband angry? The man, then, comforted in his wickedness—both of abusing his wife and of his evil letter for reconciliation—is received into the bosom of the church, and his wife is driven away, often having been put under discipline herself.

I have seen many of these kinds of letters. Almost my entire pastoral ministry in the past four years has been devoted to dealing with the evil fruits of such evil letters. I have seen a sickening idolatry of a merely formal

reconciliation and a merely outwardly together marriage, a monstrous sweeping of sin under the rug, and a corrupting of the gospel of reconciliation by means of worthless repentance. I have seen a smug ignoring of sin, especially if the man belongs to a prominent or well-connected family. I have been baffled by this. It does not bear any resemblance to the gospel, even though ministers and elders and members of the church who act this way have the words *gospel*, *repentance*, *reconciliation*, *mercy*, and *grace* readily on their lips. Now I see why. The churches themselves at their broadest assemblies behave the same way and are populated by men who either do that themselves or think that it is fine that other men do it. The synod really could not have acted any differently. Synod is led by men who have written or approved these kinds of letters in consistories and who are captive to this kind of carnal thinking. *Reconciliation* is only a word that sounds good when you mouth empty assurances that you are, after all, interested in it, only not in the way of true repentance at all.

Calling Evil Good

By this letter and by all of its recent decisions dismissing protests against its evil actions, the broadest assembly of the Protestant Reformed Churches has now declared to be righteous its decisions to cast out faithful men and officebearers, as well as those members who cannot abide such wickedness. By synod's letter the Protestant Reformed denomination has shown herself to be hardened in her departure from the truth, in her persecution of the faithful, and in her sheltering of the evil in her midst. The letter, then, is an evil business and stands in the service of an evil purpose.

It is an evil business because it is a sham. It is a sham because the majority of men who adopted this letter have zero interest in true reconciliation. If they did, the first decree of the Protestant Reformed Synod 2021 would have been to rebuke Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Crete Protestant Reformed Church, and Peace Protestant Reformed Church for their evil discipline of and concurrence in the evil discipline of faithful ministers. I only write these names so that they may live in infamy, at least on these pages, until the cases are adjudicated in the final judgment before the awesome and righteous Judge who had experience with such courts that not only met in secret but also at night. If the denomination were interested in reconciliation, through her synodical delegates and advisors she would not have dealt with such an important subject as reconciliation by means of such a stupid and transparently insincere letter.

The letter is wicked because it lies against the truth. The letter speaks of humility, but the humility is the false

humility of the unrepentant. It is the humility of the world's sorrow that works death. The letter speaks of the Lord's exposing weaknesses, but the Lord has exposed lies; hypocrisy; false doctrine; ignorance; lack of love for his truth and a great love for the names and reputations of men; a brutal use of discipline; and trampling on the law of God, righteousness, and truth. All the while those who do it scream, "The antinomians, antinomians, antinomians are coming!" In short, hypocrisy on a grand scale! The so-called weaknesses touch the very marks of the church and thus the very existence of the PRC as true churches of Christ. The gravity of the so-called weaknesses does not call for an empty claim to have learned some undefined lessons but for repentance.

The letter is evil because it is legerdemain to deceive the simple. It is a cunning sleight of hand. Having no real interest in reconciliation and desiring to make many simple in the PRC and outside the PRC suppose that the denomination desires reconciliation, this letter was adopted. It is a trick, simple as that—a clever trick but a trick nonetheless. All its language is deceptive. It mentions *humility* but shows none. It mentions *reconciliation* but gives no evidence of genuine interest in reconciliation. It uses the Bible but abuses the Bible for synod's own purposes. Let no one be deceived; and if any do listen to the trick, they will be like the abused wife who is ensnared again by her abusive husband's lying letter and sham repentance.

The letter is an evil business because it calls good evil and evil good. The good that it calls evil is the act of leaving the apostatizing denomination of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The evil that it calls good is the denomination's sinful discipline of the godly, her rejection of the word of God, her departure from the truth, and her being ruled by the wisdom and counsel of men.

When the pope excommunicated Martin Luther, Luther held a public ceremony to burn the pope's ban. I now publicly burn all the decrees of suspension and deposition and all the letters and admonitions delivered by the Protestant Reformed Churches against faithful ministers of the gospel, elders and deacons, and members who have departed from those apostatizing churches in obedience to the command of Christ, "Come out from among them and be separate." As Luther's act was not an act of showmanship, so mine is not an act of showmanship. Such an act is necessary to declare before God, Christ, his holy angels, and the world that what the Protestant Reformed denomination has bound on earth is not bound in heaven but is rejected by the Lord Jesus Christ as evil and contrary to his word and that what the Protestant Reformed denomination has loosed on earth—herself—is bound in heaven.

Since the synod by implication addressed me, I now address the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches: "Repent, now also, of your evil letter."

—NJL

Letter Adopted by the Protestant Reformed Synod 2021

Dear brothers and sisters who have left the PRCA over the recent controversy,

We write to you out of the sincere love we have for you in our Lord Jesus Christ and the deep grief we have over the division between us. Knowing it to be our solemn duty before God, we earnestly seek reconciliation in the biblical way of confession and forgiveness because such reconciliation is a reflection of the very heart of the gospel of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-21). When reconciliation is sought and accomplished God is glorified, which is our shared goal in this life and the life to come. The very gospel of Christ demands that we try to reconcile. In submission and obedience to Christ we attempt to begin a healing of the breach between us.

We come to you in humility. In the events of the recent controversy and the departure of many families we have humbly reflected on the lessons God is teaching us. He has graciously exposed weaknesses, which is more than we can get into by way of letter. We would ask you to approach us with this same humility and desire to confess where you have been wrong.

At the same time, we cannot confess that we have sinned in the suspension and deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning. Synod 2021 carefully adjudicated many protests concerning the deposition and the approval of the Synodi-

cal Deputies from Classis West. The synod has determined that this deposition was just and right before God.

Your departure from true churches of Christ and your following of a lawfully deposed man concern us deeply, and lead us to issue an earnest call that you repent of your sin and return to our fellowship, even as Jesus prays this for His church in John 17:21. This plea is sent with the desire of II Timothy 2:25-26, “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” We plead with you to reconsider what you have done and return to us. Be assured that we will humbly and mercifully receive you, as those who know the undeserved grace and mercy of our faithful covenant God.

The right way for this to happen is that you would return to the consistories from which you left and begin the process of reconciliation with them. Please prayerfully consider our plea for the glory of God and the witness of Christ’s church in the midst of this world. Reconciliation would be an amazing witness before a divided world and church world of the beauty of the gospel of reconciliation.

In Christ’s service, Synod 2021 of the PRCA

CONTRIBUTION

FAITH AND REPENTANCE AS CONDITIONS: A RETURN TO THE MIRE

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. —2 Peter 2:22

Beginning in September 1953 Rev. John Heys, one of our fathers in the faith, wrote a twelve-article series in the *Standard Bearer* (SB) entitled “Afraid of the Gospel.” In the series he did battle with the conditional theology that had crept into the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). His motivation for writing was to answer the charge against the theology of a free

gospel—of salvation not dependent in any sense upon the activity or works of man—that such a gospel would make men careless. It is the charge of antinomianism, the charge that is always made against the gospel. In answering this charge Heys gets at the heart of conditions in salvation. Like his contemporaries, Rev. George Ophoff and Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Heys thoroughly understood

conditional theology. In his series he aims a veritable laser-guided missile against that doctrine of the devil and utterly destroys it. Heys concentrates on that which is essential to all conditional theology, namely that faith and repentance are not only our duty but are also seen as requirements that we must meet before we can receive benefits of salvation. In other words, there are activities of man that must precede activities of God. It is my objective in this article to apply what Heys wrote then to the controversy that has recently engulfed the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Heys on Faith and Repentance as Requirements for Salvation

In the fifth article of his series, Heys gets to the very heart of what a condition is. What he writes there is, I believe, so crucial to the whole issue of conditions that I urge everyone to read (and reread) this article.¹ In it he sets forth what Rev. M. Gritters wrote in 1943, when he was orthodox with his teaching of conditions. In 1953 Gritters and others made faith a condition to salvation. Heys contrasts this with what Gritters wrote only ten years before. Key to Heys' evaluation of Gritters is a statement in Canons 3–4.10 upon which the latter had written at that time: "That others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted... must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168).

Heys points out that what Gritters wrote regarding this article was orthodox. At that time Gritters taught that both the covenant and its salvation were all of grace and completely unconditional. He taught that faith and repentance are required for salvation. They are requirements, and Heys agrees they are. But Gritters also taught that faith and repentance are requirements that God fulfills in us: he "confers upon them faith and repentance."²

Then Heys explains the Protestant Reformed position on faith and repentance as requirements for salvation. I want to quote the whole paragraph since in it he defines the orthodox position; and since he is contrasting this with the conditional theology of 1953, it follows that anyone who contradicts Heys is not Protestant Reformed.

This passage, surely, shows us that the conditional theology that is maintained so tenaciously today by the Rev. Gritters and his colleagues who have left the Protestant Reformed Churches and who are afraid of the Gospel we preach (the *only* Gospel for it preaches a complete salvation that is

unconditionally obtained by the elect), that this conditional theology was not at all known by the Rev. Gritters ten years ago. Not even when he writes, as above, that faith and repentance are the *requisites* for salvation. At that time he embraced the truth of Scripture and of the Canons, for he declares that *God confers these gifts upon the elect*. Note that he does not say that God requires faith and repentance *of man* in order for him to attain to salvation. With a mind and heart that was pure of the Arminian taint of conditional theology he says that faith and repentance are requisites for salvation. No more! Well, yes he does say more. He says that GOD CONFERS THEM upon His elect. And hence, ten years ago, he writes by implication that God requires these OF HIMSELF, for *He* confers what He requires. Faith and repentance are required because God has elected us to salvation. Thus GOD'S DECREE OF ELECTION requires faith and repentance IN US but not OF US. God CONFERS these upon us and does not set them *before* us as pre-requisites. ("Afraid of the Gospel (5)," 63–64; Heys' capitalization and emphasis)

The point is, if you say that my act of faith is necessary for salvation; specifically, that my act of faith meets a requirement of God, you still teach conditions. This is precisely how Heys understands the statement that God confers upon the elect faith and repentance. He says this means "that God requires these OF HIMSELF, for *He* confers what He requires." He further explains this: "Thus GOD'S DECREE OF ELECTION requires faith and repentance IN US but not OF US." Heys concludes this section by declaring that if one says these are required *of* us—so that God sets them before us as demands or requirements that we must meet—he makes them prerequisites.

As we shall see, this error is being taught in the PRC today, albeit the words *condition* and *prerequisite* are not used. To put it simply: If you say faith and repentance are necessary for salvation *as my act*, you teach conditions. Faith and repentance are necessary for salvation as *God's act*. That is the meaning of Canons 3–4.10, 14. Article 14 is even more explicit, for it connects God's conferring faith and repentance upon us with God's *producing* the act of believing in us. That is what the Canons teach, and that *alone* is what they teach. If a man will not confess this, he is but an Arminian still.

In line with the Canons, we understand that God

1 J. A. Heys, "Afraid of the Gospel (5)," *Standard Bearer* 30, no. 3 (November 1, 1953): 63–64; <https://cdn.rfpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/01180718/1953-11-01-1.pdf>.

2 J. A. Heys, quoting from M. Gritters' book *The Testimony of Dordt*, in "Afraid of the Gospel (5)," 63.

“confers upon [the elect] faith and repentance.” Heys says, “God requires these OF HIMSELF, for *He* confers what He requires.” The idea here is that God gives what he requires, that the one who confers these things is the one who meets the requirements. Heys is saying that the only Reformed and confessional position on faith and repentance as requirements for salvation is that God performs in us that which he requires. Then Heys goes to the heart of the meaning of conditions. What he is saying is this: if faith and repentance are required *of me* for salvation, then it follows that *I* am the one who performs them because the one who meets the requirements is the one who performs them. And this flatly contradicts the Canons, which make clear that faith and repentance are gifts precisely in the way of God’s conferring them upon us, working them in us, or producing them in us.³ *God performs his own requirements in us.* That and that alone is the Reformed truth of faith and repentance.

The confessional position is clear: God produces faith and repentance in us. It ought to be clear that something is a requisite for the one who produces it. If I am intending to travel to the United Kingdom, the passport officer there will require my passport. The production of my passport is a requisite for me; and if I don’t produce it, I will be sent back home. Similarly, faith and repentance are requisites for God because he is the one who gives and produces them in us. For Heys, the difference between the truth and Arminianism is whether or not faith is man’s work. Either faith and repentance are part of salvation, in which case God both promises them to and produces them in the elect; or they are required *of us*, so that they are requirements we must meet *before* we can obtain or receive blessings of salvation.

Again, I draw your attention to what Heys writes in criticism of Rev. M. Gritters:

God requires these [faith and repentance] OF HIMSELF, for *He* confers what he requires. Faith and repentance are required because God has elected us to salvation. Thus GOD’S DECREE OF ELECTION requires faith and repentance IN US but not OF US. God CONFERS these *upon* us and does not set them *before* us as pre-requisites.

Heys belabors this point precisely because it takes us to the heart of conditions in salvation. I believe he saw, perhaps more clearly than anyone else in 1953, the deviousness and

trickery of the majority. Seeing this, he aimed a torpedo of truth at their lie, one of pinpoint accuracy. He refers to the truth that God confers faith and repentance upon the elect as “beautiful truth.” He continues,

That beautiful truth means exactly that these things are not conditions which man must fulfill. They are however, things which he will and must ENJOY. And they are required not in order that he may be saved, but they are requirements for salvation because THEY ARE PART OF THAT SALVATION! They are not, even by the teachings of the Rev. Gritters, PRErequisites but requisites. He did not dare in those days say that these had to be there BEFORE salvation could be given us. He said that God confers them upon us *as part of our salvation*, AND AS THE THINGS UNTO WHICH WE ARE ELECTED. (“Afraid of the Gospel (5),” 64)

The whole idea that faith and repentance are things we must do, specifically things required *of us* for salvation, Heys rejects. The idea that God requires them of us *before* we can receive blessings of salvation he condemns as Arminian. Faith and repentance are either part of salvation or they are prerequisites to salvation. And no amount of doublespeak can get around that, specifically the doublespeak that they are required of us before we can receive blessings of salvation but that faith and repentance are also the fruit of God’s grace. That is abject nonsense. Heys calls it “misleading doubletalk.”⁴ If God’s grace is the reason for faith and repentance, then they are conferred by God and are not then requirements I must meet before I receive anything. That intelligent men, men who know the issues, can continue to talk this way is troubling. They must be warned: this is false doctrine, and if you continue in it, God will judge you with more false doctrine.

This was also Augustine’s doctrine. He wrote:

This is the house of the children of promise, not by reason of their own merits, but of the kindness of God. For God promises what He Himself performs: He does not Himself promise, and another perform; which would no longer be promising, but prophesying. Hence it is “not of works, but of Him that calleth,” lest the result should be their own, not God’s.⁵

Augustine taught all that which God promises his people he also performs. Since God promises to give all that

3 Canons 3–4.10: “God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so *He confers upon them faith and repentance*”; 3-4.12: “So that all in whose heart *God works* in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and *do actually believe*”; 3–4.14: “Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God...because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, *produces* both the will to believe and *the act of believing* also” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168–69; emphasis added).

4 J. A. Heys, “Afraid of the Gospel (3),” *Standard Bearer* 30, no. 1 (October 1, 1953): 16.

5 Augustine, “On the Spirit and the Letter,” *Anti-Pelagian Writings, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 5:99.

is included in election, and since faith and repentance are included in election, it follows that God performs faith and repentance in the elect.

Conditional Theology Alive and Well in the PRC

In the *SB* we find a detailed and specific treatment of the activity of faith. Purporting to explain the Canons' doctrine of the activity of faith, Rev. Kenneth Koole cites both Peter's Pentecost hearers and the Philippian jailor. The *SB* even gave weight to Koole's words by printing them in bold in a highlight box in the middle of the page. There we read:

There was something they were called to do. And they did it. Of themselves, apart from grace? No! But they themselves did do it—they repented and believed. Grace enabled them to do it. Or more correctly, God the Holy Spirit graciously enabled them to do it....And in so doing, God was praised and grace glorified.⁶

Now it ought to be obvious from this statement alone that when the Pentecost hearers and the jailor did that "something they were called to do," they were saved. That is, after all, what the text says: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" To which Paul responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." There was something they were called to do. And they did it. And they were saved. That is what Koole writes. And that emphatically is not the gospel. Rather, the gospel is that only that which Jesus Christ does is necessary for salvation.

That Koole teaches that our act of faith is not a requisite but a *prerequisite* is clear from the same article. He claims that the writers of the Canons

confessed and taught that 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. ("What Must I Do...?") 8)

The requirement to repent and believe Koole further elaborates as "something they were called *to do*" ("What Must I Do...?") 8; his emphasis).

That faith is required *of* us (remember this is what Heys explicitly denies) is clearly Koole's position. He explicitly teaches this in the *SB*. There he argues that our act of believing precedes salvation; specifically, our assurance of salvation.⁷ He goes on to answer an objection to the effect that if our act of believing is necessary for salvation, then elect infants cannot be saved. He agrees that "no believing as an obedience is required of them" ("Response," 254). The implication is that believing as an obedience *is* required of everyone else. What is implied is made explicit in what he writes next: "Elect infants are in a unique category as those who have simply been granted the *faculty* of faith. We are talking about unbelieving adults. And such, we maintain, are *required* actively to believe for their salvation" ("Response," 254). There you have it as clear as the noonday sun—God requires faith *of* us for or unto salvation. Our act of believing is something that we must do before salvation can be given us. That makes faith a prerequisite, according to Heys. And that is precisely the doctrine of the PRC today!

That the *SB* published those articles in which Koole teaches this is instructive in itself. The *SB* represents the popular mind of the Protestant Reformed Churches. That which fills the pages of the *SB* reflects the thinking of the denomination. So if it is taught in the *SB* that faith is our obedient doing for salvation, that we are required to repent and believe before we can be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom, then we may be sure that is also the mind of the denomination.⁸ Not only so, but another Protestant Reformed minister—Rev. M. McGeown—wrote two lengthy articles at the time endorsing what Koole had written.⁹

Of course, both men know that to say that our acts of faith and repentance are required before we can be saved and enter consciously into the kingdom of God sounds very much like the conditional theology of 1953. In an attempt to escape being branded with teaching such theology, they claim that those of whom they spoke were already in the kingdom. Referring to the Philippian jailor, Koole writes, "As one in whom the Holy Spirit was working, the jailor was *in* the kingdom already ("Response," 254). Supporting Koole in this tactic, McGeown writes, "Remember that Rev. Koole clearly presented the Philippian jailor *as in the kingdom already, that is regenerate*, although not yet enjoying the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins"

6 Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do...?" *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 8.

7 See Kenneth Koole, "Response" [to Andy Lanning, "Obedience to the Call of the Gospel"], *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 11 (March 1, 2019): 254.

8 "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 be saved with thy house.' Covenantal salvation is to be found in no other way" (Koole, "What Must I Do...?") 8).

9 Martyn McGeown, "Faith: A Bond, a Gift, and an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 52, no. 2 (April 2019): 3–32; Martyn McGeown, email dated May 7, 2019, in which he answers "a number of critical responses" to his journal article. This email was widely circulated and is available from the office of Reformed Believers Publishing.

(Email, May 7, 2019). Their attempted fix amounts to this: faith and repentance are necessary to enter the kingdom, but we are already in the kingdom before we repent and believe! That is misleading doubletalk.

This tactic has characterized those who have smuggled their conditional theology into the PRC. When someone exposes their error, they immediately change tack. Their change of tack is carefully disguised. Often they appeal to other Reformed doctrines in an attempt to disguise where they have departed in Reformed doctrine. Koole and McGeown's appeal to regeneration in an attempt to disguise that they were really teaching that our act of conversion is required before we can be saved and enter consciously into the kingdom is a case in point. When in the pages of the *SB Rev.* Andy Lanning exposes Koole's teaching that the Philippian jailor and those mentioned in Acts 2:37–38 were required to repent and believe before they could consciously enter the kingdom, which was to make our repentance and believing prerequisites, Koole simply changes tack.

In his reply to Lanning, Koole claims that he was actually teaching regeneration and not conversion. In this way he could still say that God was first in the matter of our entering the kingdom:

In other words, we are speaking of the regenerated, those in whom *God* has worked *first*. And of such men and women, born-again by the Spirit of Christ... In other words, we are not speaking of *man* doing something *first*, but of a man in whom *God* has done something *first*. (“Response,” 253)

According to Koole, when he said in his first article regarding the jailor and those in Acts 2:37–38 that their repenting and believing “was something they were called *to do*” and that “if a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom...he was called, he was required, to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—‘Repent and believe, that thou mightiest be saved with thy house,’ he was actually referring to those who were already in the kingdom (“What Must I Do...?” 8). In another article, he says this of the jailor: “As one in whom the Holy Spirit was working, the jailer was *in* the kingdom already (because the kingdom life was in him)” (“Response,” 254).

In his wholesale defense of Koole, McGeown approves of this change of tack, for he quotes the former with approval (Email, May 7, 2019, 5). Apparently for him too, when one's error is exposed, rather than admit it, one just changes the theological goalposts. For this is exactly what Koole does. He writes that something we do, namely our faith and repentance, is required of us before we can be saved and enter into the kingdom. Then he comes under pressure from Reverend Lanning's letter; so that in Koole's response, he claims that the jailor and the

Acts 2 hearers were already saved and in the kingdom by regeneration; and since regeneration is exclusively God's work, that means God is first and not man. There is just one problem for Koole and McGeown with all of this: Acts 2:37–38 and Acts 16:30–31 do not speak of regeneration but of conversion, that is, of the first act of faith for salvation. And Koole teaches (and McGeown defends him) that faith is something we do, a requirement we must meet for salvation and entry to the kingdom. And that is to make faith a prerequisite.

Without doubt, that which Koole writes in his article “What Must I Do...?” is that which Heys opposes in “Afraid of the Gospel,” namely that faith and repentance are not conferred upon us, but God sets them before us as requirements we must meet. Consider the following elements of Koole's teaching:

1. Faith is something we do: “There was something they were called to do.”
2. Faith is something we do *for salvation*. This is inescapable since the text to which he appeals speaks of the salvation of the jailor. This is also clear from the second statement I quoted from Koole: “If a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom...”
3. If we are to enter the kingdom, there is a requirement we must meet: “He was required to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—‘Repent and believe, that thou mightiest be saved with thy house.’”
4. The requirement we must meet in order to enter the kingdom is faith. And this faith that is required of us is defined by Koole as our doing.

We may state all this in a syllogism: Faith is required of us for salvation; faith is something we do; therefore, something we do is required for salvation. And that makes faith a work. Both premises of this argument are wrong. First, faith is not a requirement we meet for salvation but is itself part of salvation. Second, faith is not something we do.

To teach that faith is something we are called to do for salvation is to make faith a work. It is to make faith a condition; for as a something we do *for salvation*, it is a cause of salvation (specifically the experience or assurance of salvation). As such, the *SB* articles in which Koole openly teaches this position on faith are completely heretical. That which he teaches there is an outright denial and repudiation of not only the three forms of unity but also of all that our fathers in the faith fought for in 1953. Everywhere, the word of God, the Reformed confessions, and the orthodox fathers of 1953 teach that faith is a gift of God. It is a gift that God confers upon us and works in us by his Word and Spirit. As such, faith is part of salvation and is never a condition for salvation. This is the crux

of the matter. It really is not that complicated but is made complicated and obtuse by men and their sophistry. It is made complicated by men who speak out of both sides of their mouths at the same time. Beloved reader, the whole controversy over faith and repentance and their function in salvation is simply this: faith cannot be both a gift of salvation and something I do for salvation.

It is the glorious truth of the Reformed faith that God not only acquires the gift of faith for me through Christ's atonement and calls me to it in the preaching of the gospel, but he also confers it upon me *by working it in me*. It ought to be evident that in the first analysis the one to whom God gives faith (and in whom he works it) is passive. As to salvation, the activity of faith is essentially passive. This is the truth of both scripture and the confessions. Answer 20 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that faith is a graft. In answer to the question, "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?" the Catechism says, "No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90). In the act of grafting, that which is grafted is acted upon by the horticulturist; that is the figure. In the spiritual reality, when we are grafted it is the Spirit of God who performs the activity; we are acted upon. Thus it is only by virtue of faith as, first of all, the graft or bond of union with Christ that I have any spiritual activity at all. This is also the teaching of Jesus in John 15, where he describes our union to him under the figure of a vine and its branches. Faith is our abiding in him *because* faith is the bond of union with Christ. Because faith is my graft to Christ, I live one life with him. What we call our activity of faith is nothing other than the life of the risen Christ flowing into us. Remember, before the Catechism gets to our activity of faith—our knowledge and confidence or trust—it establishes emphatically that the first activity of faith is God's: God puts me in union with Christ.

To say the activity of faith is essentially passive is to say faith as the alone instrument of salvation is always and only a receiver. Faith does not do something or give things to God; rather, faith receives things from God. We may and we must certainly speak about things that faith does. I do good works by faith. Good works are the fruit of faith. But faith itself as the instrument of salvation never does something for or unto salvation.

Faith as an Activity but Not Man's Act for Salvation

Reverend Heys alludes to Canons 3–4.10 in support of his polemic. There we read,

That others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is not to be ascribed to

the proper exercise of free will...but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168)

That God confers faith and repentance upon the elect is crucial to the whole question of the nature and function of faith and repentance in salvation. Properly understood, the truth that God confers faith and repentance completely demolishes any idea that they are requirements or demands that *we* meet for salvation (irrespective of whether you add "as the fruit of grace," which, as we shall see, does not make it Reformed).

For God to confer both the right and the possession of salvation upon us, he must also meet all requirements for salvation, including faith and repentance. *Confer* here does not mean potential. The idea is not that God merely gives us a certain power or ability to perform an act, an act that meets a requirement for salvation. In that case our act of faith stands outside or apart from that which God works in us; it is no longer God's act. It cannot be both: faith cannot be both God's act by which he meets requirements for salvation and my act by which I do what is necessary for salvation. If it is the latter, it follows that faith is requisite *of me*, in which case I also must be said to perform or *produce* the act of faith, and that the Canons flatly condemn.

None of this is to deny the activity of faith. Faith is the bond of union with Christ, and as such, faith is an activity of the believer. The activity of faith is to come to, to know, and to trust Christ as revealed in the gospel. The activity of faith has Christ as its only object; faith always looks away from oneself to Christ. The essential nature of faith as an activity of the believer is not that faith gives anything to God; rather, the essential nature of faith as an activity is that it receives things from God. That faith is an activity is not the point here. No one in the Reformed camp denies that faith is an activity, but the question is this: as something that God requires for salvation, does God meet that requirement, or does man meet that requirement? And God confronts every man with a choice here. God will not permit us to evade this choice. It is this: as a requirement for salvation, is faith God's act or my act? Does God produce faith in me, or do I produce faith? The former is the answer of the Canons of Dordt; the latter is the answer of Arminianism. That I produce the act of believing (faith) is also the answer of the PRC today. If it is not, then let men in the PRC have the courage to openly, publicly, and unambiguously repudiate the doctrine of Koole, McGeown, and Cammenga, as explained below.

Rather, *confer* means to actually put in possession of. Canons 3–4.11 says that God works faith and repentance in us, for speaking of the elect it says, "God...works

in them true conversion” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168). And in the previous article, the Canons teach that our conversion consists in faith and repentance. When God works things in us, we have those things; we enjoy those things; they are ours. Every blessing of salvation is God’s. Christ acquired and obtained them by his perfect work of obedience. Christ purchased both the blessings and the means necessary to bestow them upon us. Thus Christ purchased not only faith but also the means necessary to confer it. The means necessary to confer faith is the Holy Spirit, whom God gave to Christ as the reward for his obedience (Acts 2:33). Thus in Christ God met his own requirements for the bestowal of salvation upon us. All the salvation we receive is requisite of God, not in the sense that God is subject to some obligation imposed upon him. God is never subject to any necessity that does not arise from his own will. But having freely willed the salvation of the elect, having given them to Christ in election, and having promised in his word to save them, God realizes his decree and makes good his promises in the death of his Son. It is this of which Heys speaks when he teaches that “God requires these [faith and repentance] of HIMSELF, for *He* confers what He requires. Faith and repentance are required *because* God has elected us to salvation.” It is because of election that God will and must confer faith and repentance upon us. God has engaged his own triune, holy being to perform and realize in us all his salvation. Faith and repentance are required *in* us because they are part of salvation. If they are required *of* us, they are things we must do before or in order to obtain salvation, and then they are not part of salvation.

Not only do the Canons teach that faith and repentance are requirements for God and therefore not requirements for us; the Belgic Confession teaches the very same thing. Regarding faith, the Confession declares in article 22:

We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either *that all things which are requisite to our salvation* are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 49–50; emphasis added)

The Confession teaches *that all things which are requisite to* (or required for) *our salvation* are in Jesus Christ. Now it is certainly the case that faith is one of the things required for our salvation, and thus it follows that Christ has met that requirement together with all the other “things which are requisite to our salvation.”

Koole and McGeown do not and cannot teach that which article 22 of the Confession declares. They would have to rephrase the Confession something like this: “All things requisite to our salvation are in Jesus Christ, BUT we must repent and believe in order to possess that salvation.” Elsewhere, I have analyzed the error of the preceding statement.¹⁰ There I argued that the essential error of the statement is that it places God’s activity and man’s activity over against each other in a relationship of opposition. This is characteristic of Protestant Reformed theology today, so that for anyone left in the denomination who has any Reformed antennae, such language should set off spiritual alarm bells. This language of contrast and qualification is expressed in the following statements.

It is not enough for salvation that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It is not enough, that there is a Jesus. It is not enough, that this Jesus was born of a virgin; that this Jesus lived a perfect life; that this Jesus taught and defended the Word of God; that this Jesus suffered under the wrath of God in an atoning death; that this Jesus arose with his body from the grave on the third day; that this Jesus is ascended in power at the right hand of God in the heavens. Not enough for salvation. God must not only have sent Jesus into the world, *but* I must come and you must come to Jesus. I must become one with him so that I enjoy his fellowship and share in his salvation. For salvation it is necessary that I come to him. And if I do not come to him, there is no salvation and no enjoyment of the blessings of salvation.”¹¹

Jesus loved Peter, but Peter had to weep bitterly with tears of repentance—which were the fruit of God’s grace—*before* he came to the renewed assurance of Jesus’ love for him.¹²

God is first in the aspect of the experience of salvation but in such a manner of working that He causes us to draw nigh to Him in order that in this

10 See my response to McGeown’s defense of a statement he wrote on the RFPA blog, in which he made Peter’s act of repentance a prerequisite to his restoration to God. Although the RFPA published McGeown’s defense, at his request the RFPA refused to give me the right to reply on the blog. I was censored. This response will be published in the October *Sword and Shield*.

11 Ronald Cammenga, “Jesus’ Call to the Weary (1),” sermon preached in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, October 12, 2003. See agenda of Classis East September 8, 2004, 9; emphasis added.

12 Martyn McGeown, “Abiding in Christ’s Love (3),” RFPA blog post, November 18, 2019; <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/abiding-in-christ-s-love-3>.

way He may draw nigh to us. He is first, but in such a way that our drawing nigh to him consciously precedes His drawing nigh to us in our experience.¹³

The statement of article 22 is the complete antithesis of the above statements. Far from setting the activity of faith in an adversarial relationship to Christ's work, a most beautiful harmony is established. The article emphatically teaches that it is precisely *because* all things required for our salvation are in Christ that faith is the alone instrument of salvation. It is precisely *because* all things requisite for our salvation are in Jesus Christ that "the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him."

In complete antithesis to the above statements, there is the most beautiful harmony between God's activity and man's. It is not "Oh yes, we believe in election, BUT we have to do something." It is rather this: God elects us to salvation, AND we believe and repent; Christ accomplished all our salvation on the cross, AND we believe and repent; the Spirit of Christ produces faith in us, AND we believe and repent; God is always first in salvation, AND we experience that he is first in our experience of returning to him.

Statements that place *but* or *however* between God's activity and man's; between election and man's activity of faith; or between Christ's work of salvation and man's activity of faith are a seminal way for the child of God to detect error. It is always characteristic of conditional theology to make our faith and repentance stand in a relationship of contrast and qualification to God's election and/or to Christ's accomplishment of our redemption. In contrast to this, Heys expresses the Reformed position: "Faith and repentance are required *because* God has elected us to salvation."

The language of Heys is that of the orthodox theology of our Protestant Reformed fathers. It is not orthodox to say, "We believe in election, *but we must also repent and believe.*" When we place election and our calling to repent and believe in such a relationship of contrast (even opposition), we make them to be two independent principles of activity for salvation. This explains why certain ministers present election and man's calling to repent and believe as though they are two sides of the truth. In this way they make the Arminians' argument for them. The Arminians argued that the doctrine of sovereign, unconditional election is incompatible with man's responsibility. They argued that if one teaches that all salvation flows from election, so that all a man's salvation is entirely by grace—including faith, which is itself a gift of God—one makes man a stock and a block. For the Arminians such a doctrine leaves no

room for a conscious, active response from man; specifically, a conscious, active response of faith and repentance.

Their answer was to pay lip homage to election while they taught man's free will, by which he could choose to believe or not believe the gospel. Not in the way of faith worked by irresistible grace flowing from election but in the way of faith as a free-will choice of the sinner was man's responsibility possible for the Arminians. Their position was that man cannot possibly be said to act freely and consciously if his salvation (including faith and repentance) is caused by election. When Protestant Reformed men refuse to teach what Canons 3–4.14 declares, namely that God produces the act of believing in us; when they refuse to teach that God performs in us that which he requires; and when they refuse to teach faith is a gift precisely in the way of God's working the act of believing in us, their position is in principle no different from the Arminians'. Furthermore, when conversely the Reformed Protestant Churches teach the orthodox truth of a single track in salvation, namely election, so that all of the believer's spiritual activities are worked in him by God, this has consistently drawn the charge of antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism from the PRC. It ought to be obvious that if God does not produce and perform in us all our spiritual activities, then we must produce them. And this is no different from the Arminian position that faith is merely a spiritual enabling. The Canons describe the Arminian position on faith in 3–4.14: faith is to be considered as the gift of God "because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 169). Mark well, this is all you are left with when you deny (as the leading spokesmen of the PRC do) that God produces the act of believing in us. You are left with the same position as the Arminians.

It is also true of the statements (the "but" statements) that they fall under the condemnation of Heys. Namely, they present faith and repentance not as part of salvation; rather, God sets them before us as requirements we must meet for salvation. Doing so, they make faith and repentance prerequisites. The statements by Cammenga are perhaps the most egregious example of the error. They are an open, unapologetic, unashamed repudiation of the person and work of our Savior. He says that Jesus is not enough. Jesus personally is not enough, he claims. Neither is our Savior's cross enough, for "it is not enough... that this Jesus suffered under the wrath of God in an atoning death." You might ask, how could such a wicked denial of our Savior and his work be tolerated in the PRC? How could the Heidelberg Catechism's ringing affirmation of Jesus as "a

13 "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum, Terry Dykstra, and Andy Lanning, June 21, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021), 31.

complete Savior” (Q&A 30) be so blatantly denied and the minister get away with it? The answer is that by the year 2003 the theology of our Protestant Reformed fathers had already been undermined in the PRC. Already a generation had arisen who knew not the Lord—a generation by whom the theology of Hoeksema and Ophoff was rejected for being, in their view, too one-sided, overemphasizing the sovereignty of God and consequently minimizing the responsibility of man. In other words, conditional theology was once again alive and well in the PRC. For what Cammenga preached in Southwest church eighteen years ago is exactly what Heys had condemned as Arminian in 1953.

According to Cammenga, Jesus and his work are not enough for salvation, but I must come to Jesus. Something else is also required for salvation in addition to Jesus’ work, namely that I come to Jesus. Since coming to Jesus is the activity of faith, faith is that which is required for salvation in addition to Jesus’ work. According to this view, faith cannot be part of Christ’s work of salvation, for if it is, then Christ’s work would be enough. And if faith is not a part of salvation, then it stands apart from salvation and is thus a condition I must meet for salvation. But what does Heys teach? He says faith and repentance “are required not in order that [we] may be saved, but they are requirements for salvation because THEY ARE PART OF THAT SALVATION!” And he denies that they “had to be there BEFORE salvation could be given us.” But “God confers them upon us *as part of our salvation*, AND AS THE THINGS UNTO WHICH WE ARE ELECTED” (“Afraid of the Gospel (5),” 64). His point is that faith and repentance flow from election. As such, they are included in all the blessings Christ purchased by his death. Therefore, my coming to Jesus—my faith—is part of Jesus’ work and not something required of me in addition to Jesus. In which case Jesus is enough, and Cammenga’s sermon is a denial of Jesus the only savior. And remember, all of this resulting from the dread heresy of conditional theology.

At this point I draw attention to a tactic used by men in the PRC to disguise their conditional theology. You will notice from the above statements that when these men teach that faith and repentance are requirements we must meet for salvation, they like to qualify this by bringing in grace. Take McGeown’s statement: “Jesus loved Peter, but Peter had to weep bitterly with tears of repentance—which were the fruit of God’s grace—*before* he came to the renewed assurance of Jesus’ love for him.” This statement teaches that repentance is a condition in salvation. It says that Jesus’ love is not enough to restore Peter to assurance. No, Peter had to do something—had to repent—*before* he could receive assurance once again. But that parenthetical statement saying that Peter’s repentance was “the fruit of God’s grace” is supposed to make the statement Reformed. At one and the same time, the statement teaches that Peter

had to do something before he could receive a blessing of salvation, *and* that which he did was the fruit of salvation. We are asked to believe that Peter’s act of repenting had to precede an aspect of God’s salvation, and at the same time his act was due to an act of God’s salvation. A very subtle tactic indeed and one employed to great effect by those who have smuggled conditions back into the PRC.

Heys spotted this same trick back in 1953. Opposing those who promoted conditions in the PRC at that time, he writes:

We are told that our act of conversion is required *before* we enter into the kingdom of God.

Do not say, “O, but we mean that we perform that act of conversion only and entirely by God’s grace. We are speaking of those already in the kingdom.” Listen! You put that grace of God before our act of conversion and you have taken the “pre” away from your requisite. It is misleading doubletalk to speak of prerequisites we fulfill by God’s grace. (“Afraid of the Gospel (3),” 16)

Similarly with McGeown’s statement, repentance cannot be both an act of Peter’s necessary before he can receive salvation (for assurance is certainly part of salvation) *and* be part of salvation. If repentance is part of salvation, it cannot also be a requirement we must meet *before* we receive salvation. Such statements are misleading doubletalk.

A recent example of the tactic is from the pen of Professor Engelsma and based on James 4:8: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” Again, what was said regarding this text fits the pattern that has developed in Protestant Reformed writing and preaching, namely an act of ours must precede an act of God’s. As always, this order of man first is said to be limited to the experience of salvation. This has always baffled me. It is as though we are meant to experience something different from how things are, namely that “of him [God], and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36). With these men it is supposed to be acceptable to establish an order of experience in which man is first, while at the same time affirming God is first theologically. We are asked to believe that from God’s side (theologically) his activity is always first and causative, but from our side (experientially) our activity precedes God’s. This establishes a fundamental contradiction in the knowledge of God, a contradiction every bit as pernicious as that established by those “Calvinists” who promote the theology of the well-meant offer of the gospel. They ask us to believe that from God’s side there is a decree of predestination, and yet the preaching of the gospel is an expression of God’s desire to save all who hear.

The professor writes,

The issue is the call of the gospel, particularly whether in God's issuing of that call there is an important sense in which God's drawing us to Himself consists of His causing us actively to draw nigh to Him (which is our believing and repenting) preceding His drawing nigh to us in our experience, or consciously.

After restating his position, the professor claims,

This is the plain meaning of James 4:8... This is the plain meaning of the text as it stands in all its perfect clarity before every reader, especially before a minister of the Word. Our drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to us. ("Professor Engelsma to Forum, Terry Dykstra, and Andy Lanning, June 21, 2021," 30–31)

It is not at all plain that "this is the plain meaning of the text." In fact, to teach that in the matter of believing and repenting our activity precedes God's activity is the same error that Heys condemned in 1953. Outlining that error, he writes,

Now what is defended is that we must do something BEFORE God bestows the next installment of our salvation. Understand it is not requisites but PREREQUISITES that are being defended. We are told that our act of conversion is required *before* we enter into the kingdom of God. ("Afraid of the Gospel (3)," 16)

Explaining that faith and repentance are not requirements that we must meet, but rather they are conferred by God upon the elect, Heys refutes Gritters:

They are not, even by the teachings of the Rev. Gritters, PREREQUISITES but requisites. He did not dare in those days [in the days when he was orthodox] say that these had to be there BEFORE salvation could be given us. He said that God confers them upon us *as part of our salvation*, AND AS THE THINGS UNTO WHICH WE ARE ELECTED. ("Afraid of the Gospel (5)," 64)

What Heys is saying here is that to teach that faith and repentance as our activities must precede God's activity is to make them conditions. The essential idea of a condition is always this: something (or some activity) is required of us *before* God does something. Always in defense of this error in Protestant Reformed circles, we are assured that our activity precedes God's only in our experience. This has been trotted out so many times it has become a kind of present-day orthodoxy, or even a kind of Protestant Reformed bandwagon. Far from questioning the idea, everyone rushes to clamber aboard.

The cry goes up, "Oh, but we are not stocks and blocks; faith and repentance are conscious activities of ours." Indeed, faith and repentance are conscious activities of the believer and are such in our experience. But do any of those who cry to the rooftops of an order in our experience ever call to mind that the Bible and the Reformed faith everywhere define faith and repentance as gifts of God—gifts of God IN OUR EXPERIENCE? So that it is precisely in giving them to me in my experience that I know that God is first.

Moreover, what the professor writes is self-contradictory and is more "misleading doubletalk." In the same circular email he writes:

In salvation as the matter of our consciousness, or experience, of God's drawing nigh to us in the assurance of His love and the sweet experience of the covenant of grace, God draws us to Himself (thus He is first in the matter of experience) in such a way that we actively draw nigh to Him by a true and living faith (which faith as a spiritual activity of knowing Him in Jesus and trusting in Him), so that in the way of this our drawing nigh to Him He may draw nigh to us in the experience of His nearness in Christ. In this specific sense, our drawing nigh to Him precedes His drawing nigh to Him [*sic*].

We are told that God causes us in the call of the gospel to draw near to him; "thus He is first in the matter of experience," according to the professor. Well and good, completely Reformed, and to which Heys and all of like mind would say a hearty and thankful "Amen!" But the professor is not done yet. He goes on to insist that our act of drawing near to God, which is the activity of faith, precedes God's act of drawing near to us. So, according to the professor, God draws us to himself and "is first in the matter of experience," and at the same time he is not because "our drawing nigh to Him precedes His drawing nigh to [us]" in our experience.

The question is not and never has been the reality of a believer's experience; the question is, what is the theology of faith? Christian experience is the wrong starting point. Because the starting point is wrong, the conclusions are also wrong. Because Cammenga, Koole, McGeown, and others begin with the activity of faith, they get the theology of faith wrong. Inexcusably wrong. For these men know very well that a Reformed man starts with theology and then gets to questions of Christian experience and obligation. Let them just reach up and take down Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* and turn to "The First Locus," and they'll see what I mean.

—Philip Rainey



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?—Hebrews 2:3

Shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great salvation? The word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward. That word is the law of Moses, which was delivered by angels to Moses and through Moses to Israel. That law is a lovely divine revelation of God and what man must be in relationship to his neighbor and to God. It had a shadow of good things to come, a promise of what God would do in Christ to fulfill his covenant and abolish the laws of ordinances. How lovely! No wonder then that he who despised the law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. That was just. No one could find fault with that. Sin against the lovely requires an ugly punishment.

How shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great salvation as has been manifested to us in the person of the Son of God by the everlasting gospel? Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who has trodden underfoot the Son of God and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Many, many stripes in comparison to the heathen. The lot of the heathen is terrible. What did God do to Sodom and Gomorrah and to Tyre and Sidon? But what did they have? They had the manifestation of God in creation. Christless revelation. It is enough. In the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, they will be without excuse for holding the truth under in unrighteousness. The heathen do not escape! Look around and see God's judgments in the earth! The heathen prosper in their sin. God gives them over to a reprobate mind, and they have sin upon sin. And they die and are punished everlastingly in hell. Why? The truth of God was manifested unto them, even his eternal power and Godhead!

The lot of the one who neglects so great salvation will be worse than the lot of unbelieving Israelites too! Certainly, they received the revelation of the oracles of God, a sure word concerning what they must believe and for what they must look. All who despised that word perished without mercy!

But how shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great salvation? The crime expressed in these words is almost beyond description. The one who neglects so great salvation has the Son of God come to him. The Son of God gives himself to be crucified in front of him. The Son of God speaks to him of the full and free forgiveness of sins; of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; of the life to come; and of the hope of glory.

If *you* neglect that, you count that word of the Son of God as nothing. But a man who does that cannot stay there. The word of the one who speaks in the house of God as a Son is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword: it divides, pierces, exposes, hardens, and enrages the neglectful hearer. And the Word—who always comes in a form in which man can kill him—allows himself to be trodden underfoot, and the Spirit who brings that Word allows himself to be insulted and mocked. Is there a worse crime?

The men of Israel who perished in unbelief and without mercy beneath the word of angels will shake their heads at that man. Nay, more, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will rise up to condemn him. For if so many mighty words and deeds as the mighty words and deeds of the gospel had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have repented long ago.

—NJL