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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

# CONTENTS

3 MEDITATION  
A Man to Stand Between

---

4 FROM THE EDITOR

---

5 FROM THE RAMPARTS  
Force and Cruelty

---

16 HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S BANNER ARTICLES  
Article 91: The New King and His Kingdom: The Covenant with Noah

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Editor: Rev. Andrew Lanning  
*From the Ramparts* Editor: Dewey Engelsma

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And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

—Exodus 20:18–21

### A Man to Stand Between

**T**he living God spoke with his people Israel face to face.

And what a presence they saw! Lightnings flashed, and the heavens boiled with clouds. The crown of Mount Sinai was ablaze with searing fire that billowed out a thick darkness of smoke. The fire and smoke were not a forest fire but the living God, who is a consuming fire and who had come to speak to his people Israel.

And what a voice they heard! The people, standing at the base of the mountain outside the borders that had been erected, heard the very voice of their God. With a voice as big as thunder and as resonant as a trumpet, God spoke his holy law to his assembled people.

The people saw. The people heard. The people ran.

And no wonder! God's law pressed home to God's people exactly what they were: sinners. God's presence and God's voice left no doubt in the people's minds that they were wretched creatures before him who is great and holy and a consuming fire. Having removed a long way off, the sinners pleaded with Moses, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:19).

But there was a problem. If God would not speak with his people, how would they hear the voice of their God? They must hear the voice of their God!

The people needed a man to stand between them and God. The people needed a mediator. "And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear" (Ex. 20:19). "I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire" (Deut. 5:5).

Ah, the mediator. It is a great truth of God's dealings with his people. In fact, it is the first truth and really the only truth of God's dealings with his people: God deals with his people through the mediator that he himself provides. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus is the man who stands between! Jesus is the mediator! Jesus carries God's word to God's people, and Jesus carries God's people to God through his own body and blood.

And what is the first thing that Moses the mediator says as a type of Jesus the mediator? "Fear not"! (Ex. 20:20). Fear not: ye shall not die before God! Fear not: ye shall live before God! God had not come to destroy his people but to teach his people. God proved them; that is, he revealed what they were as sinners. God set his fear before their faces; that is, he revealed what he was as their almighty God, who had brought them before him to live as his covenant people. God directed them; that is, he showed them who they were and who he was that they might live before him in gratitude—"that ye sin not" (v. 20).

It is the great truth of the mediator. And now, behold the mediator as he goes unto God

on our behalf. “And Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was” (Ex. 20:21).

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

**A**nother year has dawned!  
Another year in which God is our only dwelling place (Ps. 90:1).

Another year in which to abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Ps. 91:1).

Another year in which to give thanks unto the Lord (Ps. 92:1).

Another year in which the Lord reigns (Ps. 93:1).

Another year in which God, to whom vengeance belongs, will show himself (Ps. 94:1).

In this new year, then, “O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (Ps. 95:1–3).

From the writers and editors of *Reformed Pavilion* to our readers, near and far, Happy (Blessed!) New Year.

This first issue of 2025 features an article in *From the Ramparts* that will bring great relief to God’s oppressed people. Having reviewed the

book *Bully Pulpit* in a previous issue, the editor of the rubric now applies the lessons to some bullies in the pulpit. The article is not so much an exposé of what happened in the Reformed Protestant Churches in the last year as it is a tracing of God’s exposé of that denomination. The article will be of comfort to those who have lived in fear of the Reformed Protestant Churches and their cruel ways. The strength of the article is that it properly applies the judgment of God’s word to violent men among God’s sheep: “with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them” (Ezek. 34:4).

I would advise our readers to drop everything and read the article, but I would guess that you are already doing so! In fact, a fair number of our readers have probably already finished *From the Ramparts* and are only now coming around to *From the Editor*. (In the undersigned’s opinion, you have read in the correct order!)

So find your favorite blanket (in frigid Michigan), your favorite breezy window (in sweltering Singapore), or your favorite piping cup of tea (in the snowy UK) and settle in for a bit with the year’s first issue of *Reformed Pavilion*.

—AL



### Force and Cruelty

I ended a book review in the November 23, 2024, issue with these words: “Having reviewed this book on spiritual abuse, I hope in the next article to apply what we have learned.”<sup>1</sup> In this article we will make such application to the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Based on the evidence, it is clear that the RPC are spiritually abusive. The leaders do not lead as Christ leads. This started in 2023 when a few of the leaders determined that worship would be according to their rule and not God’s rule. Such rule of man continues to this day. The RPC have fallen “into the hand of man” (I Chron. 21:13). Being in the hands of man results in spiritual abuse, and the rule of the RPC is characterized by “force” and “cruelty” (Ezek. 34:4).

In July, after being given a clean set of dismissal papers from their church that had closed, a man and his wife were granted membership at First RPC. One month later they were excommunicated.<sup>2</sup> This created a stir within the church, and in response the church released a summary and a number of documents.<sup>3</sup> From the documents we can see that the couple was charged with committing four sins:

1. After their church closed, the couple accepted the payment that represented the remainder of the wife’s teaching contract. For receiving these funds the teacher was charged with stealing.
2. After having been paid this money, the teacher finished out the contract by teaching

for the last few months of the year. This was later deemed to be sinful because the children she was teaching were the children of one of the officebearers who had been deposed from the church that had closed.

3. It was seven months from the time that their church closed to the time that the couple joined themselves to another church in the Reformed Protestant denomination. For this they were charged with despising church membership; the consistory also criticized them for this because they judged seven months to be a “long delay.”<sup>4</sup>
4. The couple continued to have fellowship with the deposed officebearer and his wife. The consistory judged this to be a violation of the antithesis.

I think it is fair to say that the consistory of First RPC thought the release of all the information relating to this case would bolster its position. I am surprised by that. The information reveals a church that is absolutely adrift. As we will see later, the release of this information did have one important function, but it was not the one the consistory expected. What is striking is that in this whole sordid affair, the only people who come out looking even remotely righteous are the couple that was cast out of the church. The charges against them reveal more about the church making the charges than they do about the individuals being charged. And what they reveal is a church that is governed by the spirit

<sup>1</sup> Dewey Engelsma, review of *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* by Michael J. Kruger, *Reformed Pavilion* 2, no. 33 (November 23, 2024): 8–13.

<sup>2</sup> The consistory deceitfully called this a rescission of membership. This idea is found nowhere in the creeds or Church Order. So we will call it what it was.

<sup>3</sup> This material has been widely circulated and is available upon request. It includes a summary document, along with several supplements. In this article the summary document will be referred to as “Summary,” while the supplements will be identified based on their content and source.

<sup>4</sup> Summary, 10.

of man and not the Spirit of Christ. It does not take much effort to expose how scurrilous each of the charges against the couple is.

1. The church had approved paying out the remainder of this money, and a duly appointed committee of the church had authorized the distribution of the funds. One would think this couple had broken in at the dead of night and pilfered the money box, rather than depositing a check at their local bank (or maybe they used mobile deposit—we can't be sure about that; the material doesn't speak to it). The man who would later charge them with stealing these funds was the man who signed the check.
2. I do not know what led to the men's being deposed from office at the church that closed, but let's grant the consistory's position that the deposition of these men was just and that from henceforth and forever they are to be viewed as enemies of the kingdom of God. How are we to treat such people? Although it is contrary to the RPC's view of the antithesis, which can be summarized as shunning and hating, the child of God knows that we are to love such people; to do good to them; to bless them; to pray for them; and, when asked, to give and not ask that it be returned (see Luke 6:27–35). In this instance it would mean teaching the children of that deposed officebearer so that the parents would not be left in the difficult position of having to find another school for their children for the remaining three or four months of the year. You show love to those parents and children when you do that, even, and maybe especially, if your church tells you they are your enemies. After all, if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks do you have for that? Even sinners do that. Perhaps that means dying to self, but that almost sounds like the Christian life, doesn't it?
3. If seven months is considered a "long delay," how should we characterize the eleven

months that it took Elder Tom Bodbyl to join the RPC or the fifteen months that it took Elder Dave King to leave the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and join the RPC? That was at a time when all these men had to do was turn their vehicles left instead of right and take one street instead of another street, much less move from one state to another, as this couple had to do. For the elders now to reproach someone else for not joining their church quickly enough is hypocrisy. If they wanted to be consistent, what they should have done is allowed the couple to join and then put the man up for elder.

4. Here you have more hypocrisy but this time sprinkled with some partiality. Why are some members, including officebearers, allowed to fellowship with Protestant Reformed members and with members from First RPC who are under discipline? Why are they allowed to do this, when this couple is publicly excoriated for it? The answer is simple: hypocrisy with a healthy dose of partiality.

The whole business was a sham. Even if you concede, for the sake of argument, that the couple was guilty as charged, a regular modern-day Bonnie and Clyde, the consistory is still shown to be a pack of wolves and spiritual sons of Diotrephes. Here is a question for you: guess how many times the consistory met with the couple from the time that they were received as members to the time that they were excommunicated. Five times? Three times? Once? How about none. The consistory never once in that time sent a committee to meet with the couple to bring the charges, to discuss the charges, or to call to repentance, and all of this in spite of the couple's offer to meet to discuss the charges. That is some kind of love that was shown.

There was one elder who objected during this whole sham process. He expressed that objection by not shaking the minister's hand after a sermon.<sup>5</sup> He did what the minister at the end of his sermon had told him to do: if you agree with the sermon, shake my hand; if you

<sup>5</sup> Tyler Ophoff, "The Carnal Church," sermon preached on October 20, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJicA8Gfp5k&t=2456s>.

don't agree, then don't shake my hand. So the elder didn't. He was suspended from his office by the time of the evening service. This certainly helps clear up future consistory agendas, as it takes away that elder's right to protest that sermon or the other shenanigans in which the consistory was engaged. It is also a novel approach, as during a previous controversy two elders were given weeks to submit protests after they refused to shake the minister's hand. What will happen the next time this comes up? I guess you'll just have to wait and see.

### Deceit

As you would expect in any church ruled by the will of man, the proceedings have been characterized by lies and deceit. This was never so clear as with the minister of First RPC, Rev. Tyler Ophoff. To see that, you must understand a bit of the background of the case. The minister of Second RPC, Rev. Nathan Langerak, had protested the decision of First RPC to receive the couple as members. The consistory saw his protest for what it was, "hierarchical, uncharitable and an extremely unfair treatment and judgment of the case."<sup>6</sup> So it was the case that on August 12 the position of the consistory was to maintain its original position of granting the couple membership and of disagreeing with the protest of Reverend Langerak, which they had received a month before. Yet the very next day, August 13, Reverend Ophoff came with a minority report that represented a complete 180-degree shift from the majority opinion of the consistory the night before. Now, suddenly, the advice was to "uphold the protest of Rev. Nathan Langerak that the consistory sinned grievously, being lords in God's church"<sup>7</sup> in granting membership to the couple. What could have caused this sudden shift, literally overnight? The question was put to Reverend Ophoff whether he had talked to Reverend Langerak. The response he

gave disqualified him from any longer serving in office in Christ's church, much less as minister. He lied and said no, he had not spoken with Reverend Langerak. It was only at the end of the meeting that he admitted that he had lied and had indeed spoken with Reverend Langerak.

The consistory would have you think that Reverend Ophoff confessed and repented for this sin. But that is only the consistory itself walking in lies. Reverend Ophoff is not sorry at all that he lied. He may be genuinely sorry that he got caught, but he is not sorry that he lied. The consistory is not sorry he lied, either. I know that because the consistory excused the minister's lying. In its summary of the case, the consistory went on for some time giving all the reasons that Reverend Ophoff lied. There was a sentiment that Second RPC was responsible for the trouble, and there was suspicion and distrust in the consistory that someone "might break rank and side with the protestants and their opposing view of the case."<sup>8</sup> That spirit, which was only whispered before, was now being vocalized, such that it was the "atmosphere in the consistory room that made Rev. Ophoff feel he should conceal his phone call with Rev. Langerak."<sup>9</sup> This makes the entire consistory, Reverend Ophoff included, not only liars but also hypocrites. This is not only according to II Corinthians 7:11 but also according to the consistory's own words. You see, it was only a few months earlier that a man had protested to First RPC's consistory, part of which protest included plagiarism. After he was called out for it, the man apologized but then went on to explain why he had felt it necessary to plagiarize. The consistory judged the man's apology to be insincere, so they berated him for it.

However, immediately after this acknowledgement and apology, you attempted to explain and justify your dishonesty by blaming the leadership of the RPC with

<sup>6</sup> Summary, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Supplement: "Minority Report in Response to Rev. Langerak's Protest."

<sup>8</sup> Summary, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Summary, 7.

what you perceived as “harsh dealings and judgements” with protestants in the past.

A true and heartfelt apology does not apologize for a “lack of clarity” nor seek to explain or blame others for one’s own actions.<sup>10</sup>

Now, in a stunning turn, the consistory goes further than that man ever did in its excusing and explaining away the sin of the minister. Here is the truth: Reverend Ophoff stands today as an unrepentant liar. He is unfit to serve in any office in the church, much less minister. He and his consistory would have you think that he is sorry that he lied, but that too is a lie. He and his consistory are not sorry at all.

What was it that caused the consistory to flip its position overnight? Was it the creeds? The Church Order? The word of God? No, it was a phone call. One phone call caused Reverend Ophoff to see not that their position was unbiblical or disorderly but that it was “untenable and unsustainable.”<sup>11</sup> Reverend Ophoff was broken with one phone call, and the consistory went along with it.

## Violence

What if we assume for the sake of argument that Reverend Ophoff was truly sorry for his sin of taking on his lips a work that properly belonged to the devil (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 43)? That kind of turn would be evident in his ministry, wouldn’t it? Isn’t it a biblical principle that those who have received great mercy will, in turn, show great mercy? What Reverend Ophoff did, from that moment on, was turn around and take the couple—and the congregation—by the throat (please see Matt. 18:23–35).

Reverend Ophoff has spiritually abused the couple from the pulpit. Or, because you will not find the term *spiritual abuse* in the Bible, perhaps

you prefer the word *murder*, which is exactly what he did. Here is a sample:

You would say, “Thief!” And you would say, “Thief,” and if the man would come back, you would kick him out of church too, with some animus. “Get out of here, you thief! You took from God’s kingdom! You gave it to the kingdom of man to teach a deposed officebearer’s son! Thief!”<sup>12</sup>

Remember, he is saying this about individuals who are not even members of his church. He is calling them thieves, even though all they did was cash a check that the church approved writing and that was signed by the man who would later charge them with sin. Remember, Reverend Ophoff’s position up until he had his epiphany (I mean, phone call) was that Reverend Langerak was wrong, and the church should maintain the decision to receive the couple as members. Now, after all that, he turns around and excoriates and murders the couple *from the pulpit*. *Animus*, for those who do not know, is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a usually prejudiced and often spiteful or malevolent ill will.” Not being satisfied with his own malevolent ill will toward the couple, the minister of the church worked to stir up such animus in his congregation.

Why is this congregation not more incensed at what happened? Why are you not outraged? Why are you defending what happened there?<sup>13</sup>

And later,

You ought to be angry! Mad at that, that it was taken from the Lord. Instead of being angry and outraged, there’s those that are defending [name] and [name]. I’ll tell you what’s going on. You’re strengthening the hand of the evildoer,

<sup>10</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, September 19, 2024, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Summary, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Tyler Ophoff, “No Stealing,” sermon preached on November 24, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9KguH7xhpY&t=4224s>, 1:10:07.

<sup>13</sup> Ophoff, “No Stealing,” 1:10:26.

that none doth turn from his way. You're strengthening them in their sin.<sup>14</sup>

Reverend Ophoff was not satisfied with simply abusing the couple. He went after his congregation. After reading Reverend Ophoff's lie and the fact that he considered himself to be forgiven for that lie, one would think that Reverend Ophoff would be humbled by this fact and abashed. One would think that Reverend Ophoff's message to the congregation, on account of his lying and the consistory's wavering, would be one of contrition and sorrow for his and the consistory's sin. But one would be wrong. After lying to the consistory and to the Holy Ghost, Reverend Ophoff turned around and preached a sermon titled "The Carnal Church." He made no mention of the fact that he had lied. What was the real problem, according to the minister? The church. The church was carnal.

After all the chaos the consistory had visited on its congregation, this was Reverend Ophoff's message against the congregation: "You are carnal." In case they were slow to get the message, he said the word *carnal* (or some derivation) 126 times. They were carnal, the consistory was carnal, he was carnal, everyone was carnal; but the real message was clear: the *congregation* deserved a whole heaping of abuse on account of *their* carnality. So in all this controversy, were he and the consistory at fault, or was the congregation at fault? "I preached to you nothing but the gospel for ten months, and you're carnal."<sup>15</sup> In the midst of all the abuse, Reverend Ophoff did make sure to take the opportunity to defend his own name and honor. In a total imposition into the sermon, he made sure to defend a speech he had given a few weeks earlier on the antithesis. Some had said that his speech lacked the gospel.

Reverend Ophoff's response? Those people are "Carnal. Babyish."<sup>16</sup> For people to reject his speech "stands as evidence of [their] carnality."<sup>17</sup>

Further proving that he was not sorry he had lied, Reverend Ophoff preached a sermon the morning of December 1, 2024, on—of all things—the ninth commandment, titled "Bear No False Witness."<sup>18</sup> In this sermon he made sure to talk about men in the congregation who were hardening themselves against the truth and the fact that those who were not receiving his preaching are reprobate, and those who were receiving it are elect. He made sure to admonish the people, "You don't rail against this preaching!" But he was quiet about the fact that he had been guilty of lying before the face of God, which lie had been made public and about which lie he was not sorry.

What wickedness. The elders, and Reverend Ophoff as well, could not find it within themselves to stand on principle and do the right thing but found themselves bullied into changing their position based on a phone call. So whose fault was it? The flock's fault, that's who.

The elder who was later deposed properly identified what was going on when he wrote,

In this whole matter we have witnessed the exercise of abusive spiritual power by office-bearers in the condemnation of innocent members and the casting out of these brothers and sisters.

The consistory must repent of this and decide whatever measures are needed to correct these failures. If we do not, we will be ruled by the will of men and not the rule of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ophoff, "No Stealing," 1:12:19.

<sup>15</sup> Ophoff, "The Carnal Church," 1:11:16.

<sup>16</sup> Ophoff, "The Carnal Church," 1:08:11.

<sup>17</sup> Ophoff, "The Carnal Church," 1:09:16.

<sup>18</sup> Tyler Ophoff, "Bear No False Witness," sermon preached on December 1, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CipVOhUSak&t=4331s>.

<sup>19</sup> Supplement: Henry Kamps, "Protest re FRPC Consistory decision to remove [names] as members of FRPC," September 3, 2024, 21. The fact that this line was missing from the protest when it was resubmitted only a few days later is revelatory, but it does not change the truth as it was stated the first time.

The devastating effect of spiritual abuse cannot be overstated, as it causes profound damage to men’s hearts and souls. This is why the language God uses to describe it is especially graphic. In Micah 3:1–3 God condemns the wicked leaders of the church for what they do to God’s people, and they are depicted as those who “pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.”

But don’t bother bringing evidence of abuse to Reverend Ophoff. He has already said what he would do with it.

If someone comes to me and says, “Reverend, you need to read *Bully Pulpit*,” I’m going to shrug it off. I’m already starting to hear that. “You’re abusive. The sermons that you’ve preached over the last so-and-so weeks, the sermons that Reverend Langerak has preached, they’re abusive. You’re whipping us.” The next step is to give me that book. I tell you, I won’t read it, and I’m going to reject it.<sup>20</sup>

### Protest and Appeal

What about the protests that came in? Did they have any truth to them? The answer to this question really does not matter all that much. The consistory flipped not because of a protest but because of a phone call. But perhaps the elders landed on the right side of the issue by accident, and the protests did show the error of their way? No, the protests were laughable. Reverend Langerak was one who protested. He was incensed that the consistory of First RPC did not allow for a period of approbation before receiving the couple as members. This was “lording” on the part of the consistory of First RPC, which “is one of the most egregious sins that a consistory or officebearers can commit,” and it was a

trampling on the office of all believer.<sup>21</sup> What Reverend Langerak did here was remarkable. He made something up and then excoriated the consistory for not doing that made-up thing. There is no such thing as approbation when receiving members in a case like this. It is not in the Church Order, and the RPC does not practice it, as Reverend Langerak himself admitted. That almost sounds like an abuser’s tactic, to make something up and then verbally abuse someone for not doing it. From declaring that First’s announcement of receiving the couple as members was a “lordly pronouncement” to declaring that the denomination’s schools were made a party to the teacher’s sin because she used the school’s grading system, Reverend Langerak’s language was, in typical fashion, hyperbolic and over the top. His whole protest was a farce, as the consistory knew, up until the point that they were bullied into sustaining it. The fact that they ended up sustaining this protest will be to their lasting shame.

### Gaslighting

What would a case of spiritual abuse be without some gaslighting? Gaslighting occurs when someone seeks to deceive and manipulate another person by causing that person to doubt his own recollection of events or experiences. The abused finds himself asking, “Am I remembering that correctly, or am I losing my mind after all?”

On July 29, 2024, Second RPC sent a letter to First RPC, in which Second protested the decision of First to accept the couple as members. That protest was formally adopted at Second RPC’s consistory meeting when they filed a “notification of protest with the consistory of First RPC concerning the acceptance of [names] as members of their congregation and to request all material pertaining to this decision.”<sup>22</sup> Based partly on this letter and the protest from Reverend Langerak, First RPC decided to postpone the

<sup>20</sup> Tyler Ophoff, “No Adultery,” sermon preached on November 17, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbjs-aR9DuA>.

<sup>21</sup> Supplement: Nathan Langerak, “Protest to First Reformed Protestant Church Consistory,” July 31, 2024, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Supplement: Second RPC council letter dated July 29, 2024.

Lord's supper. Second RPC responded to that decision by writing,

The decision that you took blames the fact that you postponed the Lord's Supper on charges of sin from the consistory of Second RPC. The consistory of Second RPC has no charges of sin against you. We sent you a notification about your decision to accept [names] as members of your congregation and requested minutes in order that we might judge that decision by which we feel ourselves aggrieved. The grounds of our decision were sent to you why we believed it necessary to ask for the minutes and were not charges of sin. We hoped and still hope that your minutes will put to rest our concerns.<sup>23</sup>

Was that all it was? A request for minutes so they could make a judgment? No, that was not all it was. The consistory of Second RPC is guilty of gaslighting, which is to say, lying. Notice how they phrased in this letter what they had sent First RPC earlier. "We sent you a notification about your decision." That does not even make sense. "We sent you a notification about your decision"? (Oh, okay. Thank you for the notification about our decision.) But that is *not* what they had sent. This is what they had sent: "Motion is made to file a *notification of protest* with the consistory of First RPC concerning the acceptance of [names] as members of their congregation and to request all material pertaining to this decision."

Is it true that Second RPC had no charges of sin against First RPC? Compare the statement "The consistory of Second RPC has no charges of sin against you" with the letter that consistory had sent less than three weeks earlier.

First RPC larded it over their congregation, and in effect, over the entire denomination by accepting individuals outside of the denomination into membership without a period of approbation so that there was no opportunity given for any objections to come.<sup>24</sup>

That is as clear a charge of sin as can be made. This also exposes as a lie the statement from Second's elders that they wanted the minutes from First RPC so that they "might judge that decision by which we feel ourselves aggrieved."<sup>25</sup> Their judgment was already made. We know that because they said so.

Most abusers who engage in gaslighting do it about things that cannot be proved. "I never said that!" Or "You told me that you accepted my apology." The abused begins to question her sanity, wondering if she really isn't remembering things properly. Second RPC is brazen. Or bumbling. They gaslight about things that can be easily proved. The documents are all readily available, but that doesn't slow them down at all.

Like any accomplished abuser, the elders and minister of Second RPC do not allow any type of rebuttal against them to stand. No, they need to affect outrage that someone would question them and their motives. "We have not judged, especially not judged rashly or without a hearing. What behavior are you foisting on us?"<sup>26</sup> This is more gaslighting. Second RPC made the judgment that First RPC larded it over Second RPC and the entire denomination, *all before Second RPC had the minutes from First RPC.*

In typical abuser fashion, Second RPC persisted in its attempts to browbeat First RPC. When First RPC pointed out that Second RPC was breaking fellowship by supporting its minister's refusal to preach at First RPC, Second RPC's

<sup>23</sup> Supplement: Second RPC consistory letter dated August 17, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Supplement: Second RPC council letter dated July 29, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Supplement: Second RPC consistory letter dated August 17, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Supplement: Second RPC consistory letter ("Response to First RPC's letter concerning Reverend Langerak not Preaching at First RPC") dated August 17, 2024, 1.

consistory feigned indignation and claimed to be aggrieved. They asserted, “In fact, it is a boldfaced lie about the consistory of Second RPC. Why do you impinge on the good name, reputation, and character of this consistory?”<sup>27</sup> Ignoring the fact that this attempt to save its name, reputation, and character is incredibly Protestant Reformed, First RPC was correct.<sup>28</sup> For Reverend Langerak to refuse to preach on the pulpit of First RPC was not only petty and small, but it was also a breaking of the relationship because what else characterizes churches that enjoy communion than that those churches share their pulpits with pastors other than their own? For Second RPC to support Reverend Langerak in this was a further expression of the breach.

### Threats

As in any abusive relationship, threats had to be made. These threats came from both Reverends Langerak and Ophoff. As far as threats go, they were rather bald. There really was no attempt to mask them. The sheep of their flocks were the recipients. There is no instruction as to the issues, no sorrow from the pastors for the disastrous situation that they as leaders have put the people in, and no acknowledgment that the flocks have been getting yanked around from one position to the next. That doesn’t matter. What matters is that the congregations get on board *right now*.

The word comes. You had that at First today. I want you to understand that. I want you to know where I stand on that. And I want you to know, too, if there’s any disagreement in that in this congregation, we’re going to deal with it.<sup>29</sup>

But know this—and this is a warning. If you’re obstinate in this, and you dig your heels in on this, the consistory is going to deal with it. We’re going to use the remedy that Christ gave the church, and we are going to begin disciplining.<sup>30</sup>

I wonder how many protests will come in after hearing that. This is language more fitting for a mafia boss than a pastor of a church. But I can be more specific, and accurate, than that. This is language more fitting for a man who abuses his wife; who constantly tears her down and makes her to be nothing; who gaslights her and torments her; who constantly changes his approach with her so nothing is predictable; and then, after all of that, who threatens her not to stand in the way of his will or even to disagree with him because if she does, then he will “deal with it.” Can’t the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches see the tyranny they are under?

### Disorder

The whole thing has been marked by disorder. To justify the man who charged the couple with sin, First’s consistory had to go along with the deceit that although his church was disbanded and no longer existed, the man continued to function in his office of elder. This meant that the man was not violating the principle of Matthew 18 when he publicly charged what should have been dealt with privately; rather, it meant that the letter that he sent to all and sundry charging the couple with sin was to be seen as a “letter of testimony” and “an addendum” to the clean papers that were given to the couple.<sup>31</sup> This recalls Voltaire’s famous remark about the Holy Roman Empire, that it was “neither holy,

<sup>27</sup> Supplement: Second RPC consistory letter (“Response to First RPC’s letter concerning Reverend Langerak not Preaching at First RPC”) dated August 17, 2024, 1.

<sup>28</sup> How well don’t we remember the elder from Grandville Protestant Reformed Church saying at the meeting of classis where Reverend Van Overloop’s theology was under (a sham) trial, “We have to save Reverend Van Overloop’s name and reputation!”?

<sup>29</sup> Nathan Langerak, “All Men Under Sin,” sermon preached on October 20, 2024, [https://www.youtube.com/live/L685Ohe4N-U?si=y5-4DhUFjy\\_Syb\\_x](https://www.youtube.com/live/L685Ohe4N-U?si=y5-4DhUFjy_Syb_x), 1:32:50.

<sup>30</sup> Tyler Ophoff, “Honoring Authority,” sermon preached on November 3, 2024, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9S3vfkpR\\_4&t=4770s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9S3vfkpR_4&t=4770s), 1:18:44.

<sup>31</sup> Supplement: First RPC response to Reverend Langerak’s protest, August 20, 2024, 3.

nor Roman, nor an empire.” Or, to multiply examples unnecessarily, to call the man’s letter a “letter of testimony” is like the doublespeak of George Orwell’s 1984, where a ministry devoted to the propagation of lies is called “The Ministry of Truth.” I wonder why the consistory did not apply this same illogic to the couple: that because they were staying to fulfill the rest of the wife’s teaching contract, they were still members (somewhat) of the closed church, at least until they had a chance to move. If you are going to make something up for the one person, why can’t you do it for two more people?

To find justification for rescission of membership, the elders of First RPC went back to their mother. They appealed to a 1961–62 decision of the Protestant Reformed Churches that was never implemented. As if that matters. They used the same grounds to rescind membership as those given by the PRC. Those grounds were Church Order 84 and Matthew 5:23–24. Read those, and see if they support a new category of removing someone from membership in the church. This whole thing is reminiscent of the church visitors plus Reverend Spronk, the minister of Faith Protestant Reformed Church, twisting article 14 of the Church Order to try to remove Reverend Lanning from the pulpit at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.<sup>32</sup> It is remarkable how quickly the RPC became the PRC.

## Doctrine

What about doctrine? The RPC have their doctrine right, don’t they? The reformation that took place in 2021 is still alive today in the RPC, isn’t it? First, what the RPC teach about doctrine does not matter in the least, whether from the pulpit or the printed page. Just as you don’t listen to an abusive man when he tries to give you marital advice, you don’t listen to an abusive church when it tries to teach you about God. Second, it is clear that the RPC have become the PRC not only in their walk but also in their doctrinal apostasy. The theology of the PRC is the theology of the

RPC. That can be seen in an exchange between the couple and the consistory of Second RPC.

After being instructed by the consistory of First RPC to go to Second RPC to resolve the charges against them so that they could be considered for membership, the couple did exactly that. They wrote a letter to Second RPC requesting information regarding their request for membership. Second RPC, instead of providing that information, played games with them. The consistory responded with this:

Tell us from your perspective where the sin lies. What are the sins that lie in the way of your membership which need to be resolved. With whom are there conflicts? What occasioned these conflicts?<sup>33</sup>

What brutality. This couple had just been excommunicated in a matter of a few weeks; they had been pilloried and abused from the pulpit; and then, after doing what their former consistory had told them to do, they were mocked with this response, asking them what sins they thought were an impediment to their membership.

The couple responded appropriately. Instead of playing games with the consistory, they exposed the spiritual character of the consistory and of the man who leads that consistory. They used Reverend Langerak’s own words to expose him as a hypocrite. You see, it had been only a few months earlier that Reverend Langerak had exploded in a fit of pique when a man had pointed out in his protest that Reverend Langerak’s public writings were the same theology as that found in the PRC. This section of the couple’s letter is worth quoting at length.

In Rev. Ophoff’s October 20 sermon, *The Carnal Church*, we were mentioned by name, thus trying and convicting us even though we have yet to see the charges. We find some of the words of Second RPC’s letter to Classis very fitting. We have not only been placed on trial, but

<sup>32</sup> See Dewey Engelsma, “Article 14,” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), March 8, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixtwo.com/2021/03/08/article-14/>.

<sup>33</sup> Supplement: Letter of Second RPC to [names], September 24, 2024.

“massively on trial” before the entire denomination (Sept. 19 Classis Minutes, page 14). We have been called to repentance and even asked by some to stop attending church services. Yet no one has shown us proven charges of sin from which we must repent. We firmly believe that “This is so wrong. It is no love at all. It does not show one ounce of respect for brethren” (Sept. 19 Classis Minutes, page 14). Indeed, if the consistory of Second Reformed Protestant Church has charges of sin against us, they should “have the common decency to inform” us of these charges (Sept. 19 Classis Minutes, page 14). Despite the lack of proven charges, we have been effectively excommunicated.<sup>34</sup>

In its September 24 letter, not only did the consistory decline to provide any information, but it also decided to get doctrinal. The only problem was that the doctrine was the doctrine of its mother. Again, I will quote the couple’s response.

While we are troubled by your lack of transparency and common decency, we are even more deeply troubled by the doctrine in your letter. In your letter you state, “Be assured that there is forgiveness with God and with men when we confess our sins and turn from those sins. It is our heartfelt desire that you both may be restored to fellowship with God and also with His church.” This statement is the same gross heresy for which we left the Protestant Reformed Churches. By taking the decision to send your September 24 letter, you have made this heresy the doctrine of your consistory. You told us that we lost fellowship with God and that to be restored to that

fellowship we must first repent. This is Protestant Reformed doctrine and indeed the doctrine of Rome. We thoroughly despise this heresy and are horrified to see that it yet lives on in the Reformed Protestant Churches.<sup>35</sup>

What does all of this mean? What is the significance of this event, and why is it worth discussing? We know the RPC apostatized when they refused to bow their necks to the rule of Christ in worship. Not God’s will but man’s will was enthroned. Now it has been shown that the doctrine of Second RPC is the doctrine of the PRC. This shows that the spiritual heir of the reformation that took place in 2021 is not the Reformed Protestant Churches. That reformation has now bypassed entirely the RPC, such that the reformation continues elsewhere.

### Juggleries

What is striking about this whole event and the release of this information is that the RPC have been finally and fully exposed. God has torn away the mask of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Up to now there was a claim by the leaders of the denomination that their cause was that of righteousness and the cause of Jesus Christ. They still had their doctrine right! It was not possible for a church that had such a glorious reformation in 2021 to apostatize in a matter of months, was it? So the rest of us went along with it and treated the RPC with a certain level of seriousness. But that mask of piety has been torn off. That has all been stripped away from them now. God has seen to it. Their unmasking is complete. As in the days of Nahum, so it is today. God has taken away, “as it were by force, the mask, under which they hide their base proceedings; ‘They are,’ he says, ‘meretricious arts, and they are sorceries and juggleries.’”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Supplement: Letter of [names] to Second RPC, October 29, 2024, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Supplement: Letter of [names] to Second RPC, October 29, 2024, 2. For a proper understanding of repentance and forgiveness, the reader is encouraged to listen to this sermon preached at Remnant Reformed Church: Andrew Lanning, “The Forgiven Sinner,” sermon preached on December 1, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkEOYApTTWg&t=2s>.

<sup>36</sup> John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 485.

Many have wondered what has been going on in the RPC this past year. Those questions have been answered by the release of documents by First RPC. What it reveals is a clown show. Or perhaps, like John Calvin, you prefer the word *juggleries*. If you look to Merriam-Webster for the definition of *juggling*, you will find that it is to perform the trick of keeping multiple objects in motion in the air simultaneously. You will also find that to juggle is “to practice deceit or trickery” or “to manipulate or rearrange especially in order to achieve a desired end.” God has exposed the juggleries of the RPC. What has also been revealed, by way of a phone call, is the identity of the ringmaster of this carnival.

The tragic reality is that if we went to an actual carnival together and observed the tricks, perhaps at the expense of some hapless member of the audience, we would all have some laughs. When this goes on in a place that claims to be the body of Christ on the earth, what you have is not funny. It is monstrous. When juggleries are performed in the church, souls and lives are torn to shreds. That is what is going on in the RPC.

This article only scratches the surface of the tricks, the lies, the deceiving, and the abuse that

has gone on in that denomination this past year. But it has been going on for more than a year. Truly did the man say—a man who continues to maintain his membership in First RPC—soon after the denomination settled on man’s will for worship that “when Reverend Lanning left, Christ left.” That describes the condition of the RPC today: Christless.

The book that I reviewed a few weeks ago is a good resource to educate yourself on spiritual abuse. The word of God, however, is our true guide. The definition found in the book is okay, as far as it goes. However, the definition provided in the Bible is what must be applied to the workings of a church. There were a few different examples I could have chosen. Zephaniah 3:1–4 would work, as it accurately describes the spiritual condition of the leaders of the denomination, who are “light and treacherous,” who have “polluted the sanctuary” and “have done violence to the law.” However, Ezekiel 34:4 accurately captures spiritual abuse because that is how abusers operate: with force and cruelty. It is that spirit that governs the RPC today.

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**Article XCI. The New King and His Kingdom: The Covenant with Noah**

There can be no question about the fact that in the covenant as it was revealed to Noah after the flood we find a new and very important phase of development. Before the deluge, so we found, the light of grace actually pierced the darkness of sin. God's covenant was established, the life of the covenant was lived, there were men that walked with God and bore witness of their faith, there were sons of God who grouped together and were known in the world as such. But the flood terminates that old world, and after the flood we meet with new conditions. The change wrought by the flood and especially the events immediately following are pregnant with significance, and a right conception of these things is extremely important. Whatever may be our conception, whether we see in the covenant that was established with Noah and his sons and all the earth something altogether new, something that has merely temporal significance, a manifestation of common grace; or whether we maintain that also the covenant with Noah is essentially the covenant of grace only in its universal, all-embracing significance, the fact remains that in either case Gen. 6–9 constitute an important part of Scripture, well worthy of our closest attention and study. The very fact that the Word of God after having devoted just five chapters to the narration of the history of creation and the fall and the development of the lines of Seth and Cain, now relates in no less than four chapters the single event of the deluge already suggests that here we have something of importance.

The passage is, undoubtedly, well-known.

The measure of iniquity of the prediluvian world had been filled with astounding rapidity.

Sin had had its course, and the principle sin of paradise had developed in the line of Seth till in the judgment of God the time is ripe for destruction. Especially the amalgamation of the sons of God with the daughters of men had hastened this development of iniquity. The result was "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), a passage designed to picture not so much the general depravity of the human heart as the fullest development of sin immediately before the flood. The result is that Jehovah decrees that he will destroy man and beast. "And Jehovah said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground; both man and beast and creeping things and birds of the heavens; for it repented me that I have made them" (Gen. 6:7). It may attract our attention from the outset that the visible creation goes with man to destruction. Even as for man's sake creation is cursed when he sins, so for the sin of man carried to its full development all the visible earth must suffer destruction.

However, in the destruction God saves. And again, not only is the organism of the human race saved in Noah and his family, but all the earth, man and beast, creeping thing and bird are perpetuated in every living creature. But so is the salvation universal. In the ark all the living earthly creation is preserved.

Noah, who found favor in the eyes of Jehovah, who was in the midst of the general apostasy a righteous man and perfect in his generations, who walked with God in the midst of a corrupted earth, receives the command to build the ark, and detailed instructions how to build it. The reason why this ark is to be built is intimated to

him in 6:17, 18: “And I, behold, I do bring the flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is in the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou and thy sons, and thy wife and thy sons’ wives with thee.” It cannot escape our attention that in this passage God already speaks of his covenant before the flood is an accomplished fact. Still more, it appears that on the one hand the flood that will destroy every living creature, and on the other hand the fact that God will establish his covenant with Noah constitute the reason why he must build the ark. Of any particular covenant there is no mention in the passage. God will establish, raise up his covenant with Noah. That is the reason why he must be saved, and that is the reason why he must build the ark. But he must not enter with his family alone. On the contrary, he must take with him into the ark of every sort of living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive. Cattle and bird and creeping thing must be saved with Noah in the ark (Gen. 6:19–21).

At the appointed time the flood commenced. And in minutest detail its history is described. Precisely the day and the month and the year are mentioned, the seventeenth day of the second month of the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, when the windows of heaven and the fountains of the great deep were opened. We are told that the rain was upon the face of the earth forty days and forty nights, and in very vivid language the tremendous destruction wrought by the raging waters is pictured to us in 7:17–24: “And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased and bare up the ark, and it was lifted above the earth. And the waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the

earth and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, of all that was on the dry land, died. And every living thing was destroyed that was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle and creeping things and birds of the heavens; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only was left and they that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.” True, there is in this description no picture of the terrible suffering and agony and despair of man and beast as they perished in the flood. To draw such pictures that might appeal to our dramatic imagination is not the purpose of Scriptures. But with surprising minuteness the Word of God describes the flood as such, and with strong emphasis it impresses upon us that the flood was of a general nature and the destruction universal. Again, the same care as to detailed description may be noticed in regard to the rest of this history of the deluge. Carefully the process of the flood is narrated. One can see how the waters subside. Precisely five months after the flood commenced, that is, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, we find the ark resting on Mount Ararat. The waters continuing to decrease, the tops of the mountains are seen on the tenth month, the first day of the month. Then, forty days after, Noah begins to send out his birds, first a raven, which does not return; then a dove which found rest nowhere for the sole of her foot, and returned to Noah in the ark. Seven days later the dove is sent out once more and this time returns with an olive leaf plucked off in her mouth, and when after still other seven days the dove is let out once more, she returns no more, so that Noah knows that the waters had abated from off the earth. In the six hundred and first year, the first day of the first month, we are told that Noah removed the covering from off the ark and saw that the ground was dried. And after waiting for almost two months more, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, Noah receives the command from God to leave the ark. “And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth from the ark, thou, and thy wife and thy sons and thy sons’ wives with

thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee of all flesh, both birds and cattle, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the face of the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, whatsoever moveth upon the earth, after their families went forth out of the ark" (8:15–19).

Then follows the narrative of Noah's offering and Jehovah's response: "And Jehovah smelled the sweet savor; and Jehovah said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, for that the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (8:20–22).

And finally, after the blessing has been pronounced upon Noah and his sons, and special commands have been given as narrated in 9:1–7, we find that God establishes his covenant with Noah, and as a sign gives the bow in the clouds. Characteristic of the covenant is in the first place, that it is universal in its scope: it embraces no particular family as when the covenant is established with Abraham, but the entire human race; furthermore, it embraces all flesh, every living creature, yea, the whole earth. Even as the flood outside of the ark was universal, destroyed

all flesh; and even as the salvation in the ark was universal, saved all flesh; so also the covenant God establishes with Noah is universal in its scope: it embraces all flesh, we would say: it embraces the whole kingdom of the world. In the second place, it is particularly stated that no flood shall ever again destroy the earth and every living thing. And in the third place, the rainbow is set in the clouds as the sign between God and all flesh, that he shall remember his covenant (9:8–17)

The question arises, how must we conceive of this covenant of nature?

Is it a covenant essentially different from the covenant of grace? Are there two covenants, one with the human race in Christ and one with the human race by nature?

Or must we with some older interpreters hold that the entire passage (Gen. 6–9) must be spiritualized, and find even in this covenant nothing but the salvation of the soul?

Or must we, perhaps, hold still a different view, and while refusing to believe in the dualism of the two covenants as well as in the anabaptistic view of a purely spiritual covenant, must rather maintain that the covenant of God is truly all-embracing, comprehends the whole human race, rightly conceived, and all creation, the whole kingdom, and that is the covenant in this all-embracing scope that is revealed to Noah?

To my mind this question is fundamental.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

