

1 **Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Investigate**
2 **“the Genevan Commons Facebook Group and attendant matters”**
3 **Presbytery of the Southeast, October 16-17, 2020**
4

5 Dear Fathers and Brothers,
6

7 At the postponed Spring 2020 meeting, held July 9-10, Presbytery passed the
8 following resolution: “That the Presbytery erect a committee of five men, at the Moderator’s
9 appointment, consisting of at least one man from each of the Shepherding Committee and
10 Judicial Matters Committee, to investigate the matters pertaining to the Genevan Commons
11 Facebook Group and attendant matters, and report back with recommendations at the October
12 2020 stated meeting.” The Committee has completed the task set before it and now presents
13 its findings. The report contains the following areas for consideration:
14

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25
26 **A. The Composition of the Committee**
27

28 The members of the committee were appointed at the moderator’s discretion. They
29 consist of ministers Ken Montgomery (Christ OPC, Marietta, GA), Matthew Holst (Shiloh
30 OPC, Raleigh, NC), Mike Myers¹ (Heritage OPC, Royston, GA), Lowell Ivey (Reformation
31 OPC, Virginia Beach, VA), and Mr. Vernon Shoaf (ruling elder, Covenant Community OPC,
32 Greenville, SC). Mr. Holst was elected to be the committee’s chairman and Mr. Myers was
33 elected clerk.
34

35 **B. The Scope of the Committee’s Work**
36

37 Given the broad remit granted the committee by the Presbytery’s motion, the first
38 matter the committee faced was determining the scope of its work. Four categories clearly
39 presented themselves before the committee: first, the activity of GC and attendant matters,
40 which included some ministers and ruling elders in the Presbytery of the Southeast (PSE), of
41 whom the most prominent were Mr. Shane Anderson (ruling elder, Providence OPC,

¹ Mr. Myers is a member of Genevan Commons and made his membership in the group known on the floor of the July Presbytery. The moderator was aware of this when he appointed him to the committee. Mr. Myers contributed roughly three dozen times over two years, including only a few times on matters germane to the current controversy, none of which (to our knowledge) have been deemed offensive by anyone.

42 Greensboro, NC), Rev. Bennie Castle (Pastor, Grace OPC, Lynchburg, VA), and Rev.
43 Michael Spangler (Teacher, Providence OPC, Greensboro, NC);² second, the Genevan
44 Commons Screenshot website (SSW); third, the Open Letter published on
45 www.aimeebyrd.com and signed by concerned officers in the OPC; and fourth, the published
46 and online writings of Mrs. Aimee Byrd.

47 The committee quickly determined that Mrs. Byrd’s writings were too voluminous to
48 assess fully and judiciously especially given the relatively short period of time available to
49 investigate and report (July – October 2020). However, the report is not completely silent on
50 Mrs. Byrd’s writings. Thus, the committee determined to focus its work on the conduct of
51 some of PSE’s officers who were members of GC, the SSW, and the Open Letter.

52

53 C. The History of the Committee’s Work

54

55 From July to October the Committee met thirteen times by Zoom. Its first task was to
56 read all the available screenshots and full PDFs published on the SSW. The committee
57 believed this to be the most obvious starting point since the SSW was the means by which the
58 matter came to wider public attention. While reading through all the available information,
59 the committee made note of material it deemed objectionable and worthy of discussion.

60 Early on in its work, the committee encountered the challenge of having to deal with
61 fallout from ongoing online activity related to the matters under investigation. During the
62 process of examining the screenshots, the committee received telephone calls, emails, and
63 text messages alerting us to numerous social media posts from all parties. This included
64 concerns over a sermon Mr. Spangler preached on July 26, 2020 entitled “[Perfect Hatred](#)”.³
65 For the sake of peace and to aid the focus of the committee, in mid-August we requested that
66 Messrs. Anderson, Spangler, and Castle refrain from posting on social media about matters
67 related to the controversy until the completion of our work. The committee communicated the
68 same request to the clerk of the session of New Hope OPC (Frederick, MD) where Mrs. Byrd
69 is a member, asking if they would be willing to forward the request to her as well.

70 After working through all the information on the SSW, the committee met by Zoom
71 with Messrs. Spangler, Castle, and Anderson, respectively, on August 27, 2020. Having
72 completed its discussions with these brothers, the committee sent a request to Mrs. Aimee
73 Byrd asking her to speak with us. She politely declined this invitation, given that by that time
74 ecclesiastical charges had been filed against the above officers.

75 Throughout July and August, the committee communicated with members of the New
76 Hope Session and Messrs. Anderson, Castle, and Spangler in order to facilitate an in person
77 reconciliation meeting. Messrs. Anderson, Castle, and Spangler readily agreed to meet. The
78 men of the New Hope session whom the committee contacted responded with a *tentative*
79 willingness to meet if the committee served as mediators. In spite of numerous attempts to
80 arrange a meeting, our efforts toward reconciliation ceased when the committee received
81 notice on September 3 that charges had been filed by members of the New Hope Session
82 against Messrs. Anderson, Castle, and Spangler. The committee remains disappointed that
83 for nearly two months it attempted to bring this meeting to pass, only to find its efforts ended
84 by the filing of charges.

² Rev. Spangler’s contributions to GC at the time of the committee’s formation were minimal (see below).

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZawEvoQGqs&feature=youtu.be>

85 In order to come to a fuller understanding of the origins and purpose of the Open
86 Letter, the committee met with Rev. Cal Keller (organizing pastor, Harvest OPC, Winston-
87 Salem, NC) on September 2 and Mr. Mike Shields (ruling elder, Covenant Reformed, Mt.
88 Airy, NC) on September 4. The committee also interviewed Rev. John Shaw (General
89 Secretary of the Committee on Home Missions & Church Extension) and Rev. Al Tricarico
90 (Associate General Secretary of the Committee on Home Missions & Church Extension) on
91 September 22. All four of these brothers were signatories of the Open Letter and assisted in
92 its formation.

93 94 **D. The Committee's Findings**

95 96 **1. Genevan Commons and Attendant Matters**

97 Because the committee began its work with a full review of the content of the
98 Genevan Commons screenshot website (SSW), it is necessary here to report a general
99 observation before addressing particular findings. GC is an online discussion group that has
100 been in existence since approximately 2014. As such, the GC discussions cover a wide range
101 of topics over a substantial length of time.

102 The SSW focused upon a relatively narrow selection of topics within the significantly
103 broader stream of interaction over the course of several years. If one's only exposure to GC is
104 the material published on the SSW, it would be easy to form a conclusion that the group had
105 a fixation only upon a narrow set of issues. This conclusion would be inaccurate of GC as a
106 whole.

107 However, the committee did find frequent themes of sarcasm and disparagement
108 within the published screenshots. The majority of this behavior falls outside the purview of
109 our report, given that it was conducted by people either unknown to us or outside the PSE.
110 Notwithstanding, in the committee's estimation, the PSE brothers who served as
111 administrators of the GC website, namely Messers. Anderson and Castle, share responsibility
112 for the ethos and rhetorical atmosphere of the online forum they administered. What follows
113 represents the interviews we conducted with Messers. Anderson, Castle and Spangler.

114 115 **a. Mr. Shane Anderson**

116 In response to the committee's request (August 13) for a temporary abstention from
117 social media posts about matters related to our work, Mr. Anderson replied that he would
118 think about it, stating he would be more cautious in his posting. However, for example, on
119 both August 20 and 23 he posted on Twitter directly about Mrs. Byrd.

120 A most significant observation the committee made after our interview with Mr.
121 Anderson was how vastly different his interactions were with us in person than they appear
122 online. Through the discussion, he carefully articulated his perspective, explained and
123 nuanced various points of doctrine related to the issues, and conducted himself honorably.
124 When asked about what the committee deemed objectionable, even sinful, at times he
125 provided clarification that changed the perception of the committee. At other times he did
126 express regret (particularly for comments about Mrs. Byrd's appearance in a promotional
127 video), and for those cases we encouraged him to repent and make appropriate amends.

128 It should also be noted that Mr. Anderson has shared with the committee that he has
129 been the object of online harassment. This includes threats over Twitter, anonymous text
130 messages to him and his wife, and multiple examples of offensive accusations.

131 The committee inquired about Mr. Anderson’s use of the term “thirsty-white-knights”
132 because we had been informed of its sexual connotations. Additionally, having spoken with
133 some signatories of the Open Letter, this term caused the most offense and concern. The
134 committee found that in common internet usage, the phrase *can* be sexually perverse in
135 meaning, but not always. According to Urban Dictionary “Thirsty” can either refer to
136 someone who is sexually aroused or to someone deliberately looking for compliments.⁴
137 Likewise, “White Knight” refers to “a man who stands up for women’s rights to be an
138 absolute equal, but then steps up to rescue her any time that equality becomes a burden.”⁵ In
139 response to the committee’s questions, Mr. Anderson stated unequivocally that he did not
140 have a sexually explicit meaning in his mind nor was it his intent for it to be so interpreted.
141 The committee takes Mr. Anderson at his word, but this example highlights the committee’s
142 concern with his online conduct.

143 At best, words and phrases like “thirsty white knights” are an example of ad hominem
144 speech which the committee considers to be unwise and unedifying; at worst they are vile and
145 ungodly. The Apostle Paul urged Titus to be a pattern of “sound speech that cannot be
146 condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you”
147 (Titus 2:8). It is the committee’s conclusion that Mr. Anderson ought to have demonstrated
148 more prudence in his speech and refrained from a provocative use of social media. We
149 counseled him to invest his time and ability in more thorough and substantial work consisting
150 of more careful demonstration rather than mere assertion.

151 In the committee’s estimation there are serious and substantive theological issues
152 related to this controversy. For that reason the committee questions whether social media is a
153 suitable platform for theological dialogue and debate. The platform itself tends to facilitate
154 provocative and needless speech. It is in this respect that the committee recognizes and agrees
155 with part of the concern expressed in the Open Letter, namely that such conduct does in fact
156 “encourage a culture of disrespect and derision in the very body which is to be known for its
157 love (John 13:35).” The committee related these thoughts to Mr. Anderson, urging him to
158 reconsider his online approach. Nevertheless, he stated his resolve to continue using social
159 media for theological debate.

160

161 **b. Rev. Bennie Castle**

162 In response to the committee’s request for a temporary abstention from social media
163 posts about matters related to our work, Mr. Castle agreed and, as far as we know, has to date
164 so abstained. He has articulated his primary theological concerns related to these issues in his
165 review of Mrs. Byrd’s most recent book. He published this review on his blog [Calvinist](#)
166 [Ruminant](#).⁶ After reading through all the material available on the SSW, the committee found
167 relatively few comments made directly by Mr. Castle overall, and only two of them gave any
168 cause for concern. One comment in particular garnered wider public attention. In January
169 2018 he said in a discussion thread, “Gynocentric has two disadvantages over the term
170 feminism. Not only does it male [sic, make] one who uses such a term sound pretentious, the
171 term itself is jarring to the ear and the stomach. Why can’t these women just take their shoes
172 off and make us sandwiches!?! 😊.” Mr. Castle’s response to this was to point out that it had

⁴ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Thirsty> (scroll down for the second definition).

⁵ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=White%20Knight>

⁶ <https://calvinistruminant.wordpress.com/2020/05/22/mrs-byrds-yellow-wallpaper/>

173 been something of a running joke in the wider GC context, a joke in fact made by the then-
174 current hosts of the *Mortification of Spin* podcast ([here](#)).⁷ The other objection the committee
175 laid before Mr. Castle was his defense/rationalization of a man’s dishonorable and ungodly
176 call for Mrs. Byrd’s husband to tell her to “shut up.” We believe a call of this manner has no
177 place in public or private discourse. Mr. Castle agreed.

178 The committee exhorted Mr. Castle to consider what would be his appropriate
179 response, due to the now-public nature of these issues. He was receptive and expressed his
180 willingness to consider the committee’s counsel.⁸

181

182 c. Rev. Michael Spangler

183 At the time of the publication of the SSW (June 18, 2020) and the Open Letter (June
184 22, 2020), Mr. Spangler had contributed very minimally to anything within GC. His five-part
185 series of articles “[Feminism in the Reformed Churches](#),” published from May 12-25, 2020,
186 garnered far more attention.⁹ None of this was mentioned on the SSW. The committee also
187 considered Mr. Spangler’s [open reply](#)¹⁰ to the Open Letter, his sermon preached on July 26,
188 2020 entitled “Perfect Hatred,” and a significant number of social media posts on both
189 Facebook and Twitter. In response to the committee’s request for a temporary abstention
190 from social media posts about matters related to our work, Mr. Spangler refused. He also
191 misconstrued our request for a “social media ceasefire” as an attempt to silence him,
192 describing it as a “profound abuse of authority.” Subsequently on August 30 he delivered a
193 sermon entitled, “[We Cannot But Speak](#).”¹¹

194 In the discussion with Mr. Spangler, the committee heard what he considered to be
195 significant and weighty objections. This included the emphases and trajectory of the work of
196 Mrs. Byrd and the danger of an encroaching feminism and androgyny within the Church. He
197 articulated these concerns most fully in his five-part series and revisited them in his sermon
198 “Perfect Hatred.” The committee proceeded to interact with Mr. Spangler concerning his
199 writing, preaching, and online conduct.

200 With respect to his articles, the committee is of the opinion that some of the matters
201 he raised are important and worthy of careful consideration. Notwithstanding, the committee
202 also raised several critiques. First, in important places, the articles lack necessary nuance and
203 care (examples include his simplistic definition of feminism, insufficient
204 definition/description of patriarchy, and his militant language). Second, while the committee
205 recognizes the legitimacy of some of Mr. Spangler’s critiques, the manner of his writing is
206 sectarian. That is to say, his writings have not advanced the matters presently before the
207 Church; rather, they have deepened the divide. Third, the committee takes serious issue with
208 his referring to Mrs. Byrd, among others, as “ruthless wolves.” In his [fifth article](#) he wrote,
209 “If you are a conference organizer who called on our new feminists, who hosted them, who
210 paid their speaking fees, you must reckon with the fact that you, even if without intent,
211 exposed Christ’s lambs to ruthless wolves.”¹² The committee understands that the Scriptures

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59WSMFwcaD0&feature=youtu.be&t=810>

⁸ The screenshots were compiled over two and a half years, and the only two objectionable comments from Mr. Castle reviewed by the committee were from January 2018 and February 2019.

⁹ https://www.thedailygenevan.com/blog/2020/5/12/Feminism_In_The_Reformed_Churches

¹⁰ <https://www.thedailygenevan.com/blog/2020/6/23/ReplyToOPCBrothers>

¹¹ <https://youtu.be/kAoU2S7otu0>

¹² https://www.thedailygenevan.com/blog/2020/5/25/Feminism_In_The_Churches_5_Call_To_Arms

212 reserve the title “ruthless wolves” exclusively for unbelievers and asked if Mr. Spangler
213 believed this a fitting term for Mrs. Byrd. Mr. Spangler responded in the affirmative. The
214 committee strongly disagrees.

215 The committee also spoke with Mr. Spangler regarding his sermon “Perfect Hatred,”
216 asking a series of questions and providing points of critique and brotherly rebuke, which the
217 following observations represent. As in his articles, we believe he left important terms either
218 undefined or ill-defined, particularly God’s hatred, and the distinction between man’s
219 righteous and unrighteous hatred. In the committee’s estimation it is difficult not to conclude
220 that Mr. Spangler used this occasion in the pulpit as an extension of his online polemics and
221 has come perilously close to leveraging the pulpit for his own ends. The aforementioned
222 sermon “We Cannot But Speak” (delivered on August 30) represents yet another example of
223 this pattern, which the committee finds deeply troubling.

224 The committee has no joy reporting that our interactions with Mr. Spangler have been
225 unfruitful. He informed the committee that he has no retractions and that he has walked in the
226 sincerity of his heart. Though Mr. Spangler was cordial during the committee’s interview, his
227 only expression of regret was *deleting* a Facebook post in which he dedicated a sermon on
228 Proverbs 21:19 to Aimee Byrd, Rachel Green Miller, and Valerie Hobbs entitled “A
229 Quarrelsome and Fretful Woman.” Sadly, we have found him to be impervious to our counsel
230 and wise in his own eyes. The committee’s conclusions regarding Mr. Spangler are reflected
231 in our recommendations.

232

233

2. The Genevan Commons Screenshots Website (SSW)

234 The [Genevan Commons Screenshots Website](#) describes itself as “an archive of
235 reviling, cyberbullying, harassment, sexism, and racism among church officers and
236 laypeople.”¹³ Evidently the originator(s) of the website designed it in order to substantiate
237 these claims. Therefore, in considering the SSW itself, the committee was particularly
238 interested in the website’s provenance and reliability.

239 With respect to the timing of the website’s origin, using an internet archiving website,
240 the committee determined that the creator(s) of the SSW made their information public on
241 June 18, 2020. Articles written by Mrs. Byrd ([Genevan Commons and the Qualifications for
242 Church Office](#)¹⁴) and Mr. Ed Stetzer ([Complementarians in Closed Rooms](#),¹⁵ which links to
243 the previous article) published on June 19, 2020 both corroborate this by referring to the SSW
244 as being published “yesterday” and providing links directly to the SSW. The committee has
245 been unable to determine who created, owns, and continues to manage this website.

246 The committee believes it is necessary to comment on how the information for the
247 SSW was obtained. First, as with any private group, only members have access to the content
248 of GC. All prospective members voluntarily committed not to share information from the
249 discussions outside of GC without permission. In discussion with the administrators of GC, it
250 is clear that the gathering and disseminating of the information through screenshots and the
251 creation of the PDF files was by duplicitous means. For example, those who collected the
252 information from GC did so contrary to the group’s membership agreement and rules.
253 Second, while the group was fairly large at one time, the discussion was clearly not intended

¹³ <https://gcscreenshots.wordpress.com/>

¹⁴ <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/06/19/genevan-commons-and-the-qualifications-for-church-office/>

¹⁵ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/june/complementarians-closed-rooms-aimee-byrd-beth-moore.html>

254 for general public consumption. The committee recognizes that our speech and conduct
255 changes according to the context in which we find ourselves. If the members of GC had a
256 reasonable expectation of privacy, then the manner of their conduct will reflect that. Though
257 accountable before the Lord for every word we speak (Mt 12:33-37) we would note that, in
258 general, everyone tends to be more casual in private expression than in public. However, we
259 hasten to add that even a “semi-private context” (in the case of GC, a context which included
260 hundreds of people) never excuses inappropriate, coarse, or insulting speech. Such speech,
261 whatever the context, is a greater aggravation if it is the speech of an officer in the Church of
262 Jesus Christ (WLC 151).

263 With respect to the website’s reliability, the committee has several concerns. Since its
264 original publication, there have been both retractions and additions. While this is natural for
265 any website, the changes that occurred on the SSW were important. When the website first
266 became public, in addition to initial screenshots featured on the home page, the “members”
267 tab contained personal information of all members of Genevan Commons as of October 2019
268 and May 2020, respectively. This action, referred to as “doxing,” resulted in several members
269 being contacted and questioned regarding GC.¹⁶ Some members had family and even
270 employers contacted by strangers who held strong opinions about GC. On June 22, 2020
271 Todd Pruitt and Carl Trueman published an article entitled “[Coarse Joking, Doxing, and](#)
272 [Forgiveness](#),” criticizing both GC and the doxing that occurred on the SSW.¹⁷

273 As far as the committee could discern, after the owner(s) of the website removed the
274 list of names on or around June 22, 2020 they added the following notice:

275

276 **“Many of the screenshots have been taken from long discussion threads. To capture a flavor of**
277 **the kinds of comments being made in a thread, a selection of screenshots from one thread have,**
278 **in some posts, been arranged into a collage.**

279

280 **To allow viewers to view comments and sets of comments within their original context, most**
281 **posts include full discussion threads. These threads were [printed to pdf files](#) in full from the**
282 **Genevan Commons group. Please click on the ‘Full Thread’ link in each post to view comments**
283 **in context.”**

284

285 Additionally, the committee is concerned that manipulated data may have been a key
286 influence for many who signed the Open Letter. It took our committee a significant amount
287 of time to study carefully the linked PDFs containing full conversation threads. It seems
288 unlikely that visitors to the SSW took the time to examine the broader context of the
289 comments presented in the PDFs. Indeed, three of the four original signatories of the Open
290 Letter interviewed by this committee, confirmed that they had not read the PDF threads, but
291 instead had mainly viewed the SSW collage. Additionally, the collage at the top of the SSW
292 is, in our estimation, arranged in a very misleading way. We limit ourselves to two particular
293 examples, although it would be possible to give more. In one instance, the casual reader
294 would easily assume that one commenter insulted Mrs. Byrd’s face and that in the second
295 instance another commenter referred to her as a “whore.” The full PDFs of the threads prove
296 that the GC members who made these comments were, in fact, not referring to Mrs. Byrd at

¹⁶ “Doxing” or “Doxxing” is the practice of researching and publishing private or identifying information about someone which was not previously public, or was difficult to obtain. In some jurisdictions, “doxing” is a criminal offense.

¹⁷ <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/coarse-joking-doxing-and-forgiveness>

297 all. Based on the committee’s reading of all the available information, we conclude that this
298 representation was neither charitable nor true. Thus, we can only conclude that the initial
299 publication of the SSW made public the worst possible interpretation of the online speech of
300 GC members.

301 To summarize, concerning provenance, the originator(s) remain anonymous;
302 concerning reliability, the judgment of the committee is that the content for the SSW was
303 obtained covertly and duplicitously, selected carefully out of a far larger body of discussions,
304 and then edited purposefully.

305

306 3. The Open Letter

307 The Open Letter was the final focus of the committee’s work. As part of our labors
308 we interviewed Messers. Calvin Keller, Mike Shields, John Shaw, and Al Tricarico, original
309 signatories of the Open Letter. Additionally, members of the committee had informal
310 discussion with other signatories. The committee presents the following findings.

311 **Origin:** The committee learned that the published letter is a revised and edited version
312 of an original draft whose author remains unknown to us. Through the course of its
313 investigation, the committee found that the author of the original draft requested that his
314 name remain unaffiliated with the letter itself. The author also did not sign the Open Letter.
315 The committee was informed that either the first twelve or first fifteen signatories were
316 responsible for the final form of the letter.

317 **Concerns:** The letter expresses four primary concerns, which we could label as
318 speech, secrecy, misogyny, and silence. Here are the committee’s findings with respect to
319 each area. First, as noted above in section D.1.a, there are instances of unacceptable speech
320 and derisive language. We agree with these concerns expressed in the letter, especially
321 concerning the comments made in reference to Mrs. Byrd’s physical appearance.

322 Second, the Open Letter denounces GC as “a group that pledges itself to secrecy.” GC
323 expected members to ask permission before taking information from within the group, a
324 reasonable rule that any private group is entitled to maintain. Since the committee believes
325 the Open Letter’s authorship is an important issue, we asked each brother we interviewed if
326 they knew the identity of the letter’s original author. The answers we received ranged from an
327 unwillingness to disclose the author’s identity (based on the author’s desire to remain
328 anonymous) to ambiguity. In other words, the original author’s identity remains unknown to
329 the committee. We find this to be a point of glaring inconsistency.

330 Third, the letter expresses concern over “the overtly misogynistic tone of the critiques
331 leveled at women authors.” This section of the letter also expresses the signers’ dismay that
332 “rather than thoughtful critique” members of GC resorted to “deriding and mocking.” The
333 committee acknowledges and agrees with this latter assessment. Nevertheless, to level the
334 charge that many of the members are misogynistic and behave in a manner that is “the
335 opposite of love” is troubling. Simply defined, misogyny is the hatred of women. One may
336 disagree with certain theological emphases and with biblical interpretations regarding men
337 and women in the home, church, and state, but to identify “many Genevan Commons
338 members” as those whose tone expresses a hatred of women is at best a significant
339 overstatement.

340 Fourth, the committee affirms the right, and even the responsibility, for anyone to
341 speak righteously in a just cause. However, the Open Letter addresses an anonymous group
342 of men and women with respect to their private behavior made public. During our interviews

343 with the Open Letter signatories, each indicated that he had specific men in mind, namely
344 Messers. Anderson, Castle, and Spangler. On several occasions Galatians 2:11-14 has been
345 utilized as a justification for the Open Letter. The committee would simply point out that Paul
346 did not write an open letter to Peter—or about Peter—without naming him. Instead, due to
347 the public nature and potential (even inevitable) harm of the sin, Paul went to Peter before all
348 and rebuked him firmly, fittingly, and directly. Two of the four signatories interviewed
349 indicated their desire to speak directly with these brothers in GC, prior to signing the Open
350 Letter, but never did. Another signatory called several members of the PSE, but not the GC
351 men about whom he had concerns. In sum, the committee has deep reservations about this
352 Open Letter as the appropriate vehicle for addressing the concerns of its signers.

353 **Location:** The framers of the Open Letter coordinated its publication with Mrs. Byrd
354 on her website.¹⁸ The committee inquired into the reason behind this. The answer we received
355 was that the framers of the letter wanted to utilize an online platform that would make it
356 widely accessible and conducive to rapid publication. It is the committee’s judgment that it
357 was extremely unwise for the Open Letter to be published on the website of a principal party
358 in the controversy. Mrs. Byrd’s website is not neutral ground. The original signatories ought
359 to have carefully considered not only *what* they wished to say, but *where* they wanted to say
360 it. Furthermore, they should have considered the potential consequences of posting such
361 serious accusations in a forum that would, first, be beyond their control; and second, invite
362 comments that would further contribute to division and discord in the church.

363 **Signatories:** As of October 10, 2020, there were 92 signatories of the letter, all of
364 whom are either active or retired officers in the OPC. As such, the committee esteems each of
365 these men as fellow officers in the Church of Jesus Christ, worthy of all due honor in the
366 Lord. In speaking more broadly to other signatories, the committee is concerned that the basis
367 upon which many signed the Open Letter was the SSW collage and/or that of Mrs. Byrd’s
368 article on her website, rather than a full investigation of the published PDFs.¹⁹ The committee
369 readily acknowledges that, had these brothers read all available information, they would still
370 have signed the Open Letter.

371

372 **E. The Writings of Mrs. Aimee Byrd**

373

374 It is the united perspective of the committee that the work of Mrs. Byrd warrants
375 thorough, substantive, and careful review and critique by the OPC. Regardless of one’s
376 position on the merits of Mrs. Byrd’s publications, they are obviously closely related to this
377 present disruption to the external peace and order which Christ has established in the Church
378 (WCF 20.4). Although there have been many reviews written, both positive and negative,
379 none exist authored by any of the courts of our church. The questions of exegesis,
380 hermeneutics, anthropology, the roles of men and women within the Church, and
381 relationships between the sexes generally, are significant and important topics, particularly in
382 our day. They are matters related to the order and witness of the Church, and our faithfulness
383 to the Word of God.

384

385

¹⁸ <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/06/22/an-open-letter-from-concerned-ministers-and-elders-in-the-opc/>

¹⁹ <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/06/19/genevan-commons-and-the-qualifications-for-church-office/>

386 **F. Concluding Observations**
387

388 Throughout its work the committee has encountered a similar theme with respect to
389 all parties involved. Each “side” in this controversy has been very quick to point the finger of
390 accusation to the other, while seemingly very slow to engage in careful, humble, self-
391 reflection. Let us remember that our standards define sin as “any want of conformity unto, or
392 transgression of, the law of God” (WSC 14).

393 The members of Genevan Commons who have been guilty of ungodly speech need to
394 humble themselves and consider how they have offended brothers and sisters in the Lord, and
395 repent.

396 The creator(s) and promoters of the Genevan Commons Screenshots website who
397 have carefully selected information over the course of years, taken by pretense, and edited the
398 images to cast GC in the worst possible light need to consider the effects of their actions,
399 intended or not, and repent.

400 The signatories of the Open Letter that cited WLC 145 need to consider whether they
401 were influenced by a body of information that misconstrued “intentions, words, and actions”
402 and whether they were too hasty to “admit of an evil report” (WLC 144).

403 The anonymous originator of the letter and the original framers need to consider
404 whether this Open Letter is consistent with the government and discipline of the OPC, not to
405 mention a biblical ethic of rebuke.

406 Finally, all need to consider how their respective actions have contributed to this sad
407 blight upon the name of Christ and the peace of His Church. In this sorry affair, on many
408 occasions, there seems scarcely any difference between the church’s conduct and that of the
409 world.

410 The Presbytery of the Southeast (PSE) formed this committee as a response to, and in
411 the midst of, controversy. Its members received the mandate to investigate GC and attendant
412 matters, which required a great deal of reading, inquiry, and consideration of all available
413 information. Not surprisingly, the committee found serious disagreement among those
414 involved concerning who is most responsible for the conflict. Thus, in the midst of
415 conflicting opinions and in full awareness of the public scrutiny likely to follow this report,
416 the committee commends the following wisdom from Dr. J. H. Thornwell:

417
418 “It must be remembered that no spirit is more unfriendly to that indifference of mind so
419 essential to freedom of inquiry than that which arises in the conduct of controversy.
420 When we become advocates we lay aside the garb of philosophers. The desire of victory
421 is often stronger than the love of truth; and pride, jealousy, ambition, and envy,
422 identifying ourselves with our opinions, will lend their aid to pervert our judgments and
423 to seduce us from our candour. A disputatious spirit is always the mark of a little mind.
424 The cynic may growl, but he can never aspire to dignity of character. There are
425 undoubtedly occasions when we must contend earnestly for the truth; but when we
426 buckle on the panoply of controversy, we should look well to our own hearts, that no
427 motives animate us but that love of truth and zeal for the highest interests of man.”²⁰
428

429 We are convinced that preeminent among those “highest interests of man” are the honor of
430 the Lord Jesus Christ and the peace, purity, and unity of His Church. Throughout our work,

²⁰ James Henley Thornwell, *Whatsoever Things Are True: Classic Discourses on Truth*. (Birmingham, Ala: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 59-60.

431 the committee remained fixed in its purpose of seeking to maintain and promote these high
432 ends.

433
434

435 **G. Recommendations**

436

437 1. That the PSE erects a committee of three presbyters to contemplate bringing a charge
438 or charges of an offense against Rev. Spangler (BOD III.8.a).

439

440 2. That the PSE asks Mr. Shane Anderson to meet with the Committee on Shepherding
441 to discuss his online conduct.

442

443 3. That the PSE petitions the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic to erect a study-committee
444 to examine the writings of Mrs. Aimee Byrd and publish its findings.

445

446 4. That Presbytery dissolves this committee.

447

448

449 Respectfully submitted,

450

451 Rev. Matthew Holst

452 Rev. Lowell Ivey

453 Rev. Ken Montgomery

454 Rev. Mike Myers

455 Mr. Vernon Shoaf

456

