

# THE STANDARD BEARER

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## 100TH ANNIVERSARY

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

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100 years is a long time. 100 years is a *very* long time to publish in print a semi-monthly or monthly magazine of distinctively Reformed content. There are very few print publications today that have maintained the significance they held when they began. Very few can last more than a few decades. So many print periodicals have failed for lack of financial support and meaningful content, ending their ongoing influence.

After you read through this anniversary issue, you will be moved to consider the mercy and faithfulness of our God who has been pleased to keep the witness of this magazine alive and strong for 100 years. Not merely 10 or 20, or 50 or 60—which would be something—but 100 years! God



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has been so good. God be thanked for all—both dead and alive—who have contributed in so many different ways since October 1, 1924. It is an honor and privilege to labor on behalf of this magazine, which stands in the service of God's most holy truth.

100 years of history is a lot of history for one issue. We present to you a thematic overview of the past century and a few glimpses into some of the fascinating details. Thanks to all who contributed, and I hope they found it as exciting as I did to dig around in the old volumes of brittle pages bound in blue or black.

In terms of referencing within this issue, you should know that after a quotation from past issues of the *Standard*

*Bearer* you will see three pieces of information in parentheses. For example, (11.9, p. 198), which should be read as volume 11, issue 9, page 198.

You have noticed by now that the *SB* as a monthly magazine is bigger, each issue expanded from 24 to 32 pages. If the one you hold in your hands feels even heavier, it is. We bumped it up to 36 pages for such a special occasion.

Finally, take note of the special cover design by Erika Kiel that displays the history of the magazine's front covers. You can see the evolution in design as you work from the bottom left-hand corner and move clockwise until ending in the center.

B. Huizinga

## EDITORIAL



## A CENTURY OF THE *STANDARD BEARER*

**REV. JOSHUA ENGELSMAS**

pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

### INTRODUCTION

On October 1, 2024, the *Standard Bearer* (*SB*) celebrated a century of existence. For one hundred years the *SB* has been written, typeset, edited, mailed, read, and discussed. That is one hundred thick, black-bound volumes. Thousands of individual issues. Tens of thousands of articles. Millions of words.

This is a milestone worth commemorating. Certainly it is not a cause for proud boasting; to the naked eye the *SB* has always appeared as a small, despised magazine. But this is an anniversary worth celebrating because of the faithfulness of God that is revealed through a century of the *SB*. For one hundred years God has given the *SB* a little place in the world, using her to defend, develop, and broadcast the precious truth of His sovereign, particular grace.

In this article I intend to describe the birth of the *SB*, mention briefly her growth and development in the one hundred years that followed, and conclude with a few words about her future.

### BIRTH

The *SB* was born in the Christian Reformed Church

(CRC) in 1924. There were many periodicals in the CRC at that time, all revealing differing mindsets and catering to different audiences. There were two official, denominational magazines: *De Wachter* (*The Watchman*) and *The Banner*. But there were a number of other magazines as well, including the Dutch magazines *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* (*The Reformed American*) and *Onze Toekomst* (*Our Future*) and the English magazines *Witness* and *Religion and Culture*. The appearance of another paper hypothetically should not have caused much of a stir.

To understand the origins of the *SB*, one has to go back a few years and understand something of the plight of two CRC ministers: Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof.

Hoeksema was ordained in 1915, and within a few years was acknowledged as a gifted writer. Since *De Wachter* and *The Banner* were denominational papers, the appointment of editorial roles was made by the synod (which met every two years at that time). In 1918, three years into his ministry, Hoeksema was elected editor of the important *Banner* rubric "Our Doctrine" and was reelected by Synod 1920. In addition, in the

fall of 1919 he was also chosen to be the editor of a new monthly publication for young people called *The Young Calvinist*.

Hoeksema was not a man to “pull punches” in his writing. He was becoming increasingly concerned about the laxity in doctrine and practice in the CRC, and used the pages of *The Young Calvinist* to address these concerns. But many were dissatisfied with the direction he was setting, so, in 1921, Hoeksema resigned as editor of *The Young Calvinist*.

At that same time, the case of Dr. Ralph Janssen (professor at the CRC’s Theological School) and his higher critical views of Scripture was before the denomination, with the outcome yet to be determined. Hoeksema used the pages of *The Banner* in 1921 to write against the teachings of Janssen. But, again, there was growing dissatisfaction with his writing. The minutes of the Synod of 1922 indicate how opposition had been building against Hoeksema in the months before the synod. Article 50 states: “The Second Clerk is instructed to answer and seek correction concerning an article appearing in the *Grand Rapids Herald* that reflects unfavorably and unjustly upon the editorship of Rev. H. Hoeksema concerning the department of ‘Our Doctrine’ in *The Banner*.” There was also an overture to synod from a classis regarding a series of articles in “Our Doctrine” that asked synod to “see to it that under the department of Our Doctrine no important part of our doctrine be denied as is happening now.” While synod did not enter into the overture, its presence clearly indicated a dissatisfaction with Hoeksema. It is not surprising then that, when synod voted for an editor of the rubric “Our Doctrine,” Hoeksema was replaced by another minister. Although the official record does not say so, there are indications that Hoeksema was in fact asked to resign from the position before synod met.<sup>1</sup>

Hoeksema found an outlet (temporarily) for his views in a new magazine called the *Witness*. He spearheaded the creation of this new magazine, along with Henry Danhof, three other ministers, and two seminary professors. The *Witness* first appeared

in December 1921, and its purpose was partly to counteract the influence of another magazine that had recently appeared (*Religion and Culture*) which was supposedly more “broadminded.”

The writings of Hoeksema and Danhof in the *Witness* were not popular. One fellow minister wrote that the two ministers were “sons of Zeruiah,” akin to Joab and his brothers who were hard men.

Hoeksema and Danhof also did not see eye to eye with their collaborators on the *Witness*. When in the fall of 1922 they suggested to the rest of the staff that they set forth in the magazine their views on common grace, the staff decided that they did not want the subject addressed. Hoeksema and Danhof subsequently resigned. In a later publication, they explained why:

This is the essential difference between us and the men of the *Witness*, as well as the reason for our independent action. We believe there is no essential basis for cooperation of believers and unbelievers in a good sense, not in any common grace worked in the heart of the sinner by a wonder of God immediately after the fall, nor in something the sinner retained after the fall. The men of the *Witness*, however, apparently prefer not to express an opinion. In light of their unwillingness, we find it necessary to withdraw as coworkers and to leave the consortium. Understand what we say. No one forced us to do this. No one has any objection to working jointly, our opinion is that to work together properly there must be unity of conviction. Nor do we want attributed to others an opinion that only *we* have.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact that Hoeksema and Danhof had no periodical in which to write did not stem the flood of their writings. A flurry of pamphlets from their pens soon appeared. It began with CRC minister J.K. VanBaalen attacking their views in a pamphlet entitled *De Loochening Der Gemeene Gratie, Gereformeerd of Doopersch?* (*The Denial of Common Grace, Reformed or Anabaptist?*), which he published shortly after the Synod of 1922 had condemned the views of R. Janssen. Hoeksema and Danhof responded to VanBaalen about three months later with their own pamphlet, *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd (Not Anabaptist but Reformed)*. In this work they mentioned that they were in the process of writing a larger work setting forth

1 Cornelius Hanko states, “Hoeksema no longer had a voice in the *Banner*, as he was forced to resign as the author of the rubric, ‘Our Doctrine,’ in the early 1920s in connection with the Janssen case.” Quoted in *Less Than the Least*, ed. Karen VanBaren (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2017), 63.

2 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *For the Sake of Justice and Truth in The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2015), 288.

their views. This larger work appeared in July 1923 and was entitled *Van Zonde en Genade (Of Sin and Grace)*. VanBaalen quickly responded with his own book *Nieuwigheid en Dwaling (Innovation and Error)*, which was published in the latter part of 1923. The two ministers responded again to VanBaalen with a work entitled *Langs Zuivere Banen (Along Straight Paths)*, which was probably published in the early part of 1924. They then followed this up with another work, *Om Recht en Waarheid (For the Sake of Justice and Truth)*, which was published right before the CRC Synod of 1924 met in June to treat a number of protests against their teachings regarding common grace.

The publication of *Langs Zuivere Banen (Along Straight Paths)* in early 1924 was the first introduction to a new organization, the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). Previously, Hoeksema and Danhof had published their works themselves. But their supporters had formed an organization and with this pamphlet assumed responsibility for publishing the works of these two ministers.<sup>3</sup>

Already at that time the RFPA was making plans for the publication of a monthly periodical in which the two ministers could regularly set forth their views. The “Foreword” to this pamphlet indicated this:

The publishing association...hopes in the not-too-distant future to execute its plan to present to the world a periodical each month. We envision a periodical that will provide instruction and assistance in a simple and appropriate manner. It will treat in an orderly fashion every matter of interest in the development of the truths of holy Scripture according to established and truly Reformed lines of thought, without pursuing the many divergent paths that lead away into error. As much as possible it will provide light so that all may have a right understanding of the Christian's life on earth, to the honor of God and his name.<sup>4</sup>

With the publication of a second pamphlet in 1924—

*Om Recht en Waarheid (For the Sake of Justice and Truth)*—the RFPA again mentioned its plans to publish a periodical. In the pamphlet itself, Hoeksema and Danhof noted the criticisms of the planned paper but also their resolution to see the project forward. They stated that their intentions were not to “limit ourselves only to the subject of common grace.” They continued, “On the contrary, it is our purpose to instruct the Reformed child of God and to enable him to live a full, deep, all-encompassing Christian life for his Lord in every relationship, in every area, and in every sphere of life.”<sup>5</sup>

After much labor by the editors and the association, the *SB* made its appearance into the world on October 1, 1924.

## DEVELOPMENT

To record the birth of the *SB* is easy enough, but how does one summarize its growth and development for one hundred years? We can only touch on a few things briefly.

The appearance of the *SB* was the cause of both appreciation and indignation in the CRC. In the months that followed its appearance, it would play a part in Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff being ousted from the denomination and their forming of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

In the years that followed, the *SB*, while never an official publication of the denomination, was instrumental in setting the direction for and shaping the thinking of the PRC.

In its eleventh volume, the *SB* faced pressure to drastically transform its character. The desire was for a “church-paper,” a magazine that was “of a more popular and practical nature.” This pressure was resisted, and the *SB* maintained its character as a “semi-scientific theological paper” (11.9, p. 198).

In the controversy over the unconditional covenant that rent the denomination in half in the 1950s, the *SB* played a critical role. Boldly the magazine defended the truth of the unconditional covenant over against the conditional covenant theology being espoused by a number of ministers in the denomination. The continued existence of the PRC after that split is due in part to God's use of the *SB*.

The *SB* continued to set the direction for the PRC in

3 The pioneers in this work (as much as they can be known) ought to be recorded. The original publication committee of the association was: C. VanEllen, Arthur Wyma, J. C. Moerman, R. H. Timmer, W. Verhil, and Ralph Wolthuis. A few months later the publication committee was made up of the following men: G. Vos, G. VandenBerg, W. Verhil, A. VanTuinen, J. H. VanderVennen, and G. VanBeek (cf. *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, 161 and 242).

4 *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, 160-161.

5 *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, 280.

the years of struggle that followed the split of 1953, as well as the years of stability and growth that followed in later decades.

To paraphrase the evaluation of the *SB* by one former editor, “Surely it is a living, [one hundred-year] record of a true church of Jesus Christ doing battle, struggling, wounded, yet persevering in the spiritual warfare. It is a record, therefore, of God’s faithfulness” (81.3, p. 55).

## FUTURE

A question that must be asked when reflecting upon the past one hundred years of the *SB* is: does the *SB* have a *future*? The subscription numbers are never as high as one might wish. It seems that people do not read as much as in the past. Those who are interested in learning are increasingly turning to things like audiobooks and podcasts. Does this mean that the days of the *SB* are numbered?

I remain convinced that the *SB* does have a future, even in an increasingly digital age. I believe it still *can*, and *must*, and *does* fulfill its original purpose: “the maintenance, development, and promulgation of our distinctively Protestant Reformed principles by means of the printed word.”

It is my judgment that for the *SB* to continue to serve its purpose going forward, it must maintain certain traits from its past. Consider, briefly, these five things:

**Doctrinal:** The *SB* has always leaned in the direction of being a doctrinal magazine, a “semi-scientific theological paper” as Hoeksema put it. This must continue. The *SB* must continue to be a forum in which doctrine is discussed, defended, and developed.

**Polemical:** The *SB* has its origins in polemics, and

has maintained this character throughout its history. There seems to be for some an increasing hesitancy to maintain this character going forward. Certainly the *SB* must engage in polemics in the right way. But the paper may not neglect to warn against errors in doctrine and practice, both within and without the PRC.

**Practical:** While the *SB* has always had a strong doctrinal bent, its purpose from the beginning was to guide the practice of the Christian in every sphere of earthly life. This also must continue to flavor the magazine. God’s people must be helped to see how right thinking governs right living.

**Timely:** The *SB* has historically sought to address not merely issues of bygone generations but to address issues that are current for God’s people. Our rich doctrinal heritage must not be merely appreciated like some dusty artifact in a museum, but must be developed and applied to the present day issues and struggles of God’s people.

**Ecclesiastical:** The *SB* is not an official publication of the PRC, but it has always served to speak *to* the PRC and to witness to the broader church world *about* the PRC. This also must be maintained. The *SB* can and must continue to help set the direction for the denomination and shape the thinking of its members, and continue to serve as a witness to others in the broader church world.

If the *SB* continues in this rich tradition, then I believe it will continue to have a necessary place for generations to come.

God be thanked for a century of the *SB*!

And may He grant the *SB* many more years of faithful witness!



## THE STANDARD BEARER’S EXPOSITION, DEFENSE, AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE REFORMED FAITH

**REV. RONALD HANKO**

minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches, and member of Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship in Spokane, Washington

## HISTORY

In *Om Recht en Waarheid* (*For the Sake of Justice*

and *Truth*), an early publication of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (Dalm Printing Co., Kalamazoo,

Michigan, 1924: 55 pp.), Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof not only laid out the history of the common grace controversy in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), but expressed their intention to begin publication of a magazine in which the truths of God's Word would be defended and expounded. This intention became a reality in October 1924, when the first issue of the *Standard Bearer* was published.

H. Hoeksema makes reference to this in *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*:

Although the first issue of this periodical appeared in October 1924, the purpose to publish a paper devoted to the development and dissemination of the Reformed truth, was conceived much earlier. In fact, in their brochure: *Om Recht en Waarheid* (For Justice and Truth), the Reverends Danhof and Hoeksema already announced their intention to publish a monthly paper in which they might develop the truth.<sup>1</sup>

The publication of the *SB* became a matter of protest and was a factor in the deposition of these ministers by decision of Classis Grand Rapids East of the CRC. But thus, in the providence of God, began 100 years of exposition, development, and defense of the truth in this Reformed magazine.

## POLEMICS

The early issues of the *SB* were largely polemical. They were especially critical of the doctrines of common grace and of the well-meant offer of the gospel as adopted by the CRC in 1924; but many other doctrinal issues were addressed as well. Already in the first two issues there are articles on the nature of God, God's goodness, the antithesis, and the image of God, some of them polemical. Nevertheless, the main polemic in the early volumes is against common grace and the well-meant offer. That polemic against common grace and the well-meant offer has continued through the *SB*'s history. The many articles dealing with these subjects in the early volumes<sup>2</sup> is matched by many more

articles in recent volumes against these erroneous and dangerous doctrines.<sup>3</sup>

The *SB* has engaged in doctrinal polemics on many different issues. In a volume picked at random, volume 75 (1998-1999), there are polemical articles against Anabaptism, conditional theology, Kuyper's doctrine of presupposed regeneration, the theology of Charles Hodge, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Christian Reconstructionist views of the second coming of Christ, the doctrinal statements of "Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together" (ECT), Schilder's doctrine of election and the covenant, and the heresy of preterism.

The most important polemical issue in the *SB*, besides its polemic against the erroneous doctrines of common grace and the well-meant offer, has been the issue of conditional theology and the notion of a conditional covenant. This polemic is found especially in volumes 24-30 and is part and parcel of the PRC's history in the late 1940s and early 1950s when the churches were split by doctrinal controversy over the issue of conditionalism and a conditional covenant. At that time a large part of the denomination left, eventually to return to the CRC. That polemic, too, continues in recent issues of the magazine in articles affirming the doctrinal stand of the *SB* in the 1950s<sup>4</sup> and rejecting the similar errors of the Federal Vision heresy.

There have been and are those who do not like polemics and who have opposed the *SB*'s willingness to engage in polemical debate, especially under the

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this is not surprising in that a denial of these false doctrines had become a ground for the deposition of three ministers and their consistories. When the first volume of the *SB* was published in 1924-1925, the deposition of these ministers was under protest to the CRC Synod, which would not meet until 1926, but which would eventually confirm their deposition.

3 The Index for volumes 1-100 of the *Standard Bearer* has eleven pages of entries (representing approximately 600 articles) on the subject of common grace.

4 Already in 1944, because the PRC stood firmly against conditional theology under the leadership of Herman Hoeksema, H.C. Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and Cornelius Hanko, those who were pushing conditional theology in the PRC began to publish their own magazine called *Concordia*.

1 Second ed. (Publisher Unknown: Grand Rapids, MI, 1947), 134-135.

2 There are, by my count, 143 articles, responses to others, questions and answers in the first two volumes (24 issues) of the *Standard Bearer* that focus on the erroneous doctrines of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel. But

leadership of Herman Hoeksema, Homer C. Hoeksema, and David Engelsma. The magazine must continue to be polemical, however. Our Formula of Subscription requires of all officebearers the promise that “we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors.” Since most of the writers in the magazine are officebearers in the denomination, it seems to follow that keeping the Subscription promise involves engaging in doctrinal polemics in the *SB*.

The issues that have been debated in the past continue to be of relevance also. The recent heresies of Federal Vision show that the long debate over conditionalism in the PRC is not outdated and meaningless. Likewise the fruits of common grace in the doctrines and practice of the CRC demonstrate the importance of the *SB*'s polemic regarding that issue over the years.

## EXPOSITION

The *SB* has not only been polemical in its defense of Reformed doctrine but has also been influential in teaching and explaining the doctrines of the Reformed faith. Almost every aspect of theology has been treated over the years, and a perusal of old volumes of the magazine is often a course in theology. The first pages of the Index to volumes 1-100 include such topics as Adam, adoption (as part of the order of salvation), the after-life, agnosticism, amillennialism, Amyrauldianism, anabaptism, angels, God's creation of the animals, Adam's fall, Antichrist, antinomianism, the antithesis, Arminianism, atheism, the atonement, and the attributes of God. There are often many and varied articles on these topics.

As part of its exposition of Reformed doctrine, the *SB* has featured articles on the creeds. There have been three complete expositions of the Heidelberg Catechism, two of the Belgic Confession of Faith, and one of the Canons of Dordt (now published in book form as *Voice of our Fathers*<sup>5</sup>). Along with the Three Forms of Unity, the *SB* has featured expositions of the Apostolic, Nicene, Athanasian, and Calcedonian creeds, the Reformed liturgy for baptism and for the

Lord's supper, and is currently publishing an exposition of the Second Helvetic Confession.

This is one of the principle reasons for the existence and continued publication of the magazine. From the very beginning the *SB* has featured these doctrinal expositions, and the continued emphasis on doctrinal exposition is one of the ways in which members of the PRC as well as others are built up in the faith. Doctrinal exposition was one of the expressed purposes of the *SB* from the beginning:

We now announce with delight that we have been assured of sufficient support to proceed easily and quickly to the publication of a periodical, which will be devoted to the development of the truths of Holy Scripture.... Nor will we address ourselves to only a few, or to a specific group; nor will we limit ourselves to the subject of common grace. The latter is not at all our intention. Rather, we are concerned with teaching and helping the Reformed child of God to live a full, deep, all-sided Christian life for his Lord.... [To do this] God's Word must teach us about God, ourselves, and the creation around us.<sup>6</sup>

They even speak of some of the topics they intend to cover in the new periodical:

We put ourselves in the company of Moses in the desert and of John on Patmos. From their mouths we want to hear what God says of Himself, His counsel and purpose, of creation, man, the covenant, of Satan, the temptation, the fall of man, the mother promise, the Mediator, the organic development of all things, the two sexes, the struggle of the ages, the people of God in contrast with the kingdom of man, the Antichrist, Gog and Magog and their company, the final apocalypse, the renewal of all things, the eternal separation of righteous and wicked, etc.<sup>7</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT

In the above quote Danhof and Hoeksema mention the organic development of all things. This area of doctrine is one of the areas in which the *SB* has been a forum for the development of the truth. Other areas of theology in which the magazine has led the way are the doctrine of God's perfection (aseity), a clear and consistent conception of the image of God in man both before and after the

5 Homer C. Hoeksema, (Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1980).

6 *Om Recht en Waarheid* (trans. mine), pp. 45-48.

7 *Om Recht en Waarheid* (trans. mine), p. 51.

fall, a view of regeneration and calling that is consistent with Scripture, the preaching of the Word as a means of grace, and a consistent and biblical amillennialism. These are in addition to the *SB*'s contributions on the subjects of particular grace and the call of the gospel, the doctrines that led to its beginnings.

Of even greater importance, though, are the developments of doctrine in the matters of the antithesis and covenant. It is interesting that these are mentioned in *Om Recht en Waarheid*, as part of the doctrinal purpose for publishing the *SB*:

We hope to dwell on this glorious covenant conception for a considerable time in the future. We must learn to know God from His revelation to man concerning Himself and in contrast to the word of deception of the devil, the adversary of God. In this way we begin to think along the lines of the antithesis.<sup>8</sup>

The view that the covenant is first of all the relation among the three Persons of the Trinity, a rejection of

8 *Om Recht en Waarheid* (trans. mine), p. 49.

the traditional view of the covenant of redemption and of the covenant of works, as well as the great truth that there is only one unconditional, eternal, unilateral covenant of grace, are clearly taught in the pages of the *SB*, and are a notable and valuable contribution to the doctrine of the covenant, a doctrine that lies at the heart of the Reformed faith.

That the *SB* has been used mightily in the development of the truth is the principle reason, though not the only reason, for celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There is much to celebrate, then, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *SB*; but the celebration must not be without the resolve that the magazine continue to be doctrinal, polemical, and a leader in the development of the truths that make up the Reformed faith. Without this resolve, the continued publication of the magazine will make it just another bland and wearisome magazine.

May our faithful God grant us that resolve in the years to come so that the distinctive witness of the *SB* may continue.



## SCRIPTURE AND THE STANDARD BEARER

**REV. JACOB MAATMAN**

pastor of Southeast PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

Perusing the volumes of the *Standard Bearer* from its inception, one perceives a commitment to Scripture in the veins of the magazine. Such a commitment becomes a magazine that takes the name Reformed, for the Reformed faith has *sola Scriptura* written into its DNA. As our (Belgic) confession says, “The truth of God is above all.”

The main purpose of this article is to consider the mighty principle of *sola Scriptura* and its bearing on the *SB*. But first, we go on a brief, far-from-complete journey through the volumes of the magazine and reflect on the *SB*'s history of biblical exposition.

The first thing that met the readers' eyes in 1924 was a meditation on Scripture by Herman Hoeksema entitled “Jehovah's Goodness” (Ps. 145:9a, 20b). The meditations—homilies in print—have been a staple of the magazine ever since. Many of them have been compiled in books (in particular, meditations by H. Hoeksema and Gerrit Vos, the inimitable). Exposition of Scripture in series form has also been a regular feature of the *SB* from the beginning (H. Hoeksema on Genesis, George Ophoff on the types of Scripture).

On September 1, 1945, the editor announced that, for various reasons, the *SB* would begin rubrics. Interestingly,

the changes announced in this issue were partly due to the start of *Concordia* (a magazine in the western PRCs). Among the rubrics were the meditations, The Day of Shadows (Old Testament history), and From Holy Writ (exegetical, verse-by-verse exposition through books of the Bible). We will consider the history of these rubrics in a little more depth.

In The Day of Shadows rubric, G. Ophoff wrote extensively on Old Testament history, from Genesis to David's return from exile. The rubric was somewhat interrupted due to the controversy that culminated in 1953, as Ophoff joined himself (and his typewriter) to the battle. In volume 28, he wrote a series of articles entitled, "The Protevangel as the Unifying Idea of All the Scriptures." After this, he commented on the prophets (his stellar series on Zechariah, for example, that reached its conclusion in 1958 in his second-to-last contribution to the magazine). Ophoff's writings manifest a deep understanding of redemptive history, the unity of the covenant of grace, and the typology of Scripture that centers in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Not only that, but he had a free and colorful way of writing. From some of his articles on Old Testament history, you might think he was there when it happened. Although his series on Old Testament history was never published, in a way some of it has been published: Homer C. Hoeksema freely acknowledges his indebtedness to his teacher, and in his *Unfolding Covenant History* (RFPA, 2000-2003) you will find lengthy sections of Ophoff's writings quoted verbatim. That in itself testifies to the quality of the work.

In 1958, the rubric changed to Cloud of Witnesses, with Bernard Woundenberg at the helm. He began with the birth of Isaac and carried us into the reign of Solomon. One of the fruits of his labors is his fine book on Moses, recently (and posthumously) published (RFPA, 2021), in which the author writes as though he were standing by Moses' side during his arduous mission. In 1971, the rubric got its old title back, and John Heys took up the work, commenting, among other things, on the book of Esther, which is not the easiest task, although the author does express himself quite forcibly regarding Esther and Mordecai. In 1993, the *SB* began publishing Homer Hoeksema's seminary lectures on the Old Testament, which were later published under the title *Unfolding Covenant History*. In 2001, Ophoff's

articles on the types of Scripture were republished. And then, the rubric on Old Testament history came to a close, or at least went on hiatus into the present.

From the beginning of the rubric From Holy Writ in 1945 into the 1990s, G. Lubbers systematically, indefatigably, and capably expounded the Scriptures, mainly the New Testament. The fruits of his labors include commentaries on Hebrews (*The Glory of the True Tabernacle*) and Galatians (*Freeborn Sons of Sarah*). The rubric ended around 1993 when it either merged into or gave way to the rubric Search the Scriptures, which was originally designed to aid Bible studies, containing study guides and outlines. In 2003, Search the Scriptures, while retaining its name, returned to the form of From Holy Writ: systematic exposition of books of the Bible. Out of this rubric, more recently, emerged *The Coming of Zion's Redeemer* (RFPA, 2014), a commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi written by Rev. Ronald Hanko, and *Ecclesiastes: A Reflective Exposition* (RFPA, 2022) written by Rev. Thomas Miersma. Other commentaries appear to be brewing.

Another rubric dedicated to exposition of Scripture, and that in a distinct way, is that titled Word Fitly Spoken, the idea of which is to survey the Scriptures along the line of a particular, biblical word or concept, to examine the facets of the diamond, to see the beauty and unity and richness of biblical revelation as manifest in these particular words and concepts that run through the Bible. The rubric began in 1990, with Dale Kuiper considering that great word "reconciliation," and it continues to this day. Perhaps the rubric can be broadened, or an additional rubric designed, to track the great concepts of redemptive history through the Scriptures as they appear in Genesis, are unfolded in the Old Testament, find their fulfillment in Christ, and culminate in the new creation—concepts, for example, like covenant, kingdom, rest, tabernacle, marriage, exile and return, the glory, and more.

We have been considering various rubrics and their history, but the commitment to Scriptures is evident not only from the rubrics, but also from the amount of effort given to properly exegeting texts that factored largely in the controversy out of which the *SB* was born. The book *God's Goodness Always Particular*, for example, written by Herman Hoeksema, first published in 1939 and republished in 2015, was originally a

series of articles in the *SB*. The table of contents shows it is largely a work of exegesis, in which the author examines the texts that were (and still are) adduced to support the idea of common grace, rebuts the erroneous interpretations attached to the texts, and presents the positive teaching of Scripture concerning the sovereign and particular grace of God.

It seemed fitting, on the occasion of the magazine's centennial, to tell some history; but the point of it is not and may not be self-congratulation. When it comes to the labors of writers for good, it is as the apostle confesses: "I labored...yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). That great principle must ever be observed: "That no flesh should glory in his presence" and "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:29, 31). *Soli Deo gloria*—to God alone the glory, and not to the clay jars He is pleased to use as means in spite of their weakness and frailty. Nor is the point, history for the sake of it—nostalgia. Let us beware an empty traditionalism, lest we should play the scribes and Pharisees who garnished the tombs of the prophets but not in spirit. Not history for the sake of it, but history that evidences a commitment to Scripture, a commitment that is incumbent upon a magazine that has the name Reformed on the cover page, and a commitment that must continue to be held and practiced going forward, for the Word of God is above all, including the *SB*.

*Sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone as the ultimate authority and infallible rule, the touchstone upon which all things must be tried and whatever does not agree with it rejected. This great principle God restored to His church in the Reformation. At a time when tradition was put on a level with the holy Scriptures, when the holy Scriptures were practically given a backseat to the church, when the interpretation of the holy Scriptures was restricted to the pope and the bishops, when the members were effectively told to believe what the church says and do not question her—at such a time, God raised up Martin Luther and gave him access to a Bible and the Word of God had its effect.<sup>1</sup>

In 1520, Luther wrote, "If we are all priests...why should we not also have the power to test and judge

what is right or wrong in matters of faith?" And, "We ought to become bold and free on the authority of all these texts, and many others...we ought to march boldly forward and test all that [the popes] do, or leave undone, by our believing understanding of the Scriptures." And, "It is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error."<sup>2</sup> A radical proposition at the time, and one that shook the foundations of the Roman Catholic Church. And Martin Luther practiced (or, more accurately, was practiced by) what he preached: hear him at the Diet of Worms in 1521 when he was asked to recant, with empire and papacy threatening:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.<sup>3</sup>

The Word of God is not something we can master but it is something that masters us—that takes us captive. It is not a subject we can treat like we do other subjects, but something that subjects us to itself. The power is the Word of God; it is not in men. As Luther himself confessed, "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."<sup>4</sup>

This principle of *sola Scriptura* is expressed in the Reformed creeds. The one we have quoted from already is the Belgic Confession, Article 7:

Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider

1 See Herman Hoeksema, "The Reformation and the Bible," 17. 15, pp. 341-47.

2 Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, pp. 135-136.

3 "Luther at the Diet of Worms," *Luther's Works*, vol. 32, pp. 112-113.

4 Martin Luther, "The Second Sermon, March 10, 1522, Monday after Invocavit," *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, p. 77.

custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.

This means the divine Scriptures are above the *SB*. This means that the *SB*, too, not only can be but must be tried against the touchstone of the divine Scriptures and, if, which may God graciously forbid, there should be anything on its pages that does not agree with this infallible rule, it must be rejected. And as a Reformed magazine, in harmony with her Protestant origin, the *SB* ought not to discourage but encourage this exercise of judgment that is the right and privilege and duty of all believers. And that the divine Scriptures are above the *SB* means that all the writing must be governed by the Word of God, and the Word of God alone.

It can be said that the *SB* owes its existence to

the Word of God. For, at bottom, the founders were convinced by the Word of God of the error of the three points, and the magazine was formed because the Word of God is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9). Because of this conviction, they could not give an inch when it came to the truth. May it be that the same will be said of the *SB* in the twenty-first century. Let us hold fast to this principle of *sola Scriptura* and cleave to the Word of God. Thus will it be shown that we are children of the Reformation, not only in name, but in truth. Let the writers write, not merely to carry on a tradition in letter but not in spirit, or because “this is what our forefathers did,” but as convinced by the Word of God. Thus will it be shown that this magazine is Reformed indeed. For, while years and writers change, the Word of God remains the same in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. From Genesis to Revelation, from the protevangel to the consummation, the holy Scriptures bear witness of and are united in Him, the Word made flesh who came down to us, in whom God has revealed Himself to us as the God of our salvation.



## THE *STANDARD BEARER*'S ATTENTION TO CHURCH HISTORY

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In God's providence and grace, the *Standard Bearer* has completed its 100<sup>th</sup> volume year. Over 17,000 articles have appeared in 2,125 issues.<sup>1</sup>

How has the *SB* engaged with church history in the last 100 years? Answering this question is the burden of this article.

### SURVEY

The index to the *SB* indicates that writers have paid attention to a wide variety of church historical topics. The following grouping includes articles that were part of a larger series. In addition, many single, stand-alone articles regarding persons, events, or doctrinal developments were published.

#### *Persons and events*

*SB* writers have given attention to numerous significant persons and events in church history, from A-Z. The first four entries in the subject index include

<sup>1</sup> Twelve issues appeared in volume 1; seventeen in volume 2; twenty-four in volumes 3-8; twenty-two in volumes 9-28; and twenty-one in volumes 29-100. I have assumed an average of eight articles per issue.

three church historical figures: “à Becket, Thomas; à Kempis, Thomas; Abelard.” The last two entries are “Zwemer, Samuel; Zwingli, Ulrich.” Not surprisingly, one finds many articles devoted to Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, and to events that represented church reformation.

George Ophoff wrote more than eighty articles devoted to church historical topics. These included a survey of medieval church history (vols. 19-24) and Reformation church history (vols. 16, 18, 27-28).<sup>2</sup>

Herman Hanko wrote an extended series about faithful men in church history and another about heretical men and movements in volumes 68-83. Fifty-two articles are brought together in his book *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (RFPA, 1999), and almost eighty are reprinted in *Contending for the Faith* (RFPA, 2010).

Many special issues were devoted to church historical topics. In the 1990s, Reformation issues were devoted to the Anabaptist controversy (1991), the Reformation of 1924 (1995), the Reformation of 1953 (1996), the Synod of Dordt (1997), and Abraham Kuyper and the Reformation of 1886 (1998). Reformation issues in the first decade of the 2000s covered John Knox, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Calvin's 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, John Wycliffe, and the Reformation in the Netherlands. From 2010 on, special issues featured the Reformation of 1857, the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, Augustine, the pre-Reformers, various aspects of Luther's work, the Zurich Reformation, and the French Reformation.

This category also includes attention to missionaries, including several articles on Saint Patrick (vol. 79) and short biographies of various missionaries (vols. 85-88), Samuel Zwemer being one of them.

### *History of specific topics*

Some writers developed the history of a specific topic. Volume 45 included nine articles on the history of Christian missions. “Concern of the Reformation for Christian Education” ran for ten articles in volumes 47 and 48. The subject index topic “Common Grace, History” includes fifty articles, many of them in the first three volumes of the magazine. A history of the office

of deacon appeared in volume 75, and of the office of elder in volumes 88-89. The history of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Australia is covered in three articles in volume 85.

### *Doctrinal development*

Church history includes the church's development in understanding doctrine and rejecting its errors. Again, from A-Z, the *SB* has covered “Amyrauldianism,” “Apollinarianism,” and “Zionism.”

From its inception, the *SB* intended to address this topic. The second issue of the magazine includes an article by B. Danhof, “History of Dogma: Introduction.” Danhof then devoted three articles to developing the concept of the history of dogma, then nine articles to the doctrines of sin, grace, and predestination in the time of Pelagius and Augustine.

With Danhof's departure from the editorial staff and the PRCA, Herman Hoeksema took up the subject, writing sixteen articles under the theme “Sketches in the Development of Doctrine” in volumes 5 and 6. In the first twelve articles he treated the development of the doctrines of sin and sovereign grace through Augustine, Gottschalk, Luther, Calvin, and the fathers at the Synod of Dordt, over against Pelagius, semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, Amyrauldism, Wesleyanism, and Kuyperian common grace.<sup>3</sup> Then he devoted four articles to the development of the doctrine of Christ, opposing fourth-century heresies, and concluding with a survey of the doctrine at the time of the Reformation.

Herman Veldman's series under the rubric “Contending for the Faith,” spanning volumes 29-51, is another instance of presenting doctrinal history. His first six articles treat the idea, necessity, and benefits of doctrinal development. The next 219 (!) articles (vols. 29-41) trace the historical development of the doctrines of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. He then notes the historical development of other doctrines: Scripture (eleven articles, vol. 41); creation (fourteen articles, vols. 41-42); providence (seventeen articles, vols. 42-43); sin (forty-five articles, vols. 43-46); atonement (forty-nine articles, vols. 46-49), and eschatology (sixteen articles, vols. 49-51). This was the

2 For a list of these articles, see Douglas Kuiper, “George Martin Ophoff: A Bibliography (2)” in *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (April 2018): 97-101.

3 Between his articles on 6:10 and 6:303 Hoeksema took a hiatus, turning his attention to his series “Calvin, Berkhof, and H. J. Kuiper: A Comparison.” Technically these did not regard development of doctrine but theological comparisons.

longest running church-historical series in the history of the *SB*—377 articles over the course of twenty-three years. Yet, in a sense, it died prematurely. Veldman's last article examined the view of some early church fathers who denied that souls went to heaven immediately after death. He left the reader with the expectation that he would treat Tertullian's view in his next article, but no such article appeared.

This category includes articles regarding the history of the Nicene Creed (three articles, vol. 59) and the seven ecumenical councils (twenty-three articles, vols. 96-100).

It also includes attention to present-day issues, such as observations about developments in Rome (during the Second Vatican Council, see volumes 40-42), as well as in the CRC, RCA, PCA, OPC, and other denominations.

#### *Protestant Reformed church history*

In the *SB* one would expect to find articles regarding the history of the PRCA or its member churches. Look in the subject index under "Anniversaries," "Protestant Reformed Churches, History of," or the name of a particular congregation. Also, check out the "Church News" section of many issues.

The Danhof controversy, including both the history and the issues, was the subject of many articles in volume 3. Seven articles in volumes 84-86 present the forgotten history of Henry Danhof himself. H. Hoeksema devoted thirty articles in volumes 7-10 to a catechism of the history of the PRCA.

The Declaration of Principles was treated in volumes 26-28 and later years. The same volumes included coverage of the history and issues in Hamilton, ON. See the August 2000 issue for an issue devoted to the PRCA's seventy-fifth anniversary celebration. And the deaths of PRCA ministers often occasioned an article of remembrance, including their historical significance to the PRCA. Since volume 91 one finds an ongoing series on the history of Protestant Reformed missions.

The events of 1924-1926 (the origins of the PRCA, and the Danhof contention) and 1951-1953 (the Declaration of Principles and the related schism) receive press, especially in the years immediately following these events. And articles are devoted to the organization and history of congregations.

## OBSERVATIONS

*Church history has been consciously integrated.*

The *SB* has borne witness both to church history and to doctrinal development. It has borne witness to both of these matters apart from their relation to Protestant Reformed church history and also in connection with Protestant Reformed church history. This was an aim and goal of the magazine.

#### *The purpose of integrating church history*

While each writer had his own purpose in recounting the history that he treated, a collective purpose is apparent. Many church historical articles record God's *sovereign grace* in preserving and defending His church throughout history. The vast majority, if not all, of the doctrinal development articles regard doctrines that relate to *sovereign grace* and are foundational to the Reformed faith.

This comes as no surprise. The *SB* was borne out of a desire and need to promote sovereign, particular grace over against common grace. Sovereign grace was also at the core of the later controversy regarding a conditional covenant. It follows that the record of any doctrinal development would note this point. But review the "Persons and Events" section with which this article begins: most of them regard those who either attacked or defended sovereign grace.

#### *The frequency of integrating church history*

How many of the 17,000 articles of the *SB* are devoted to church and doctrinal history? The first two categories in the above survey referenced over 430 articles, and the third category, doctrinal development, over 460. To simplify, at least 900 articles, or about five percent, addressed church historical matters not directly related to the PRCA. Articles that regard PRCA history and doctrinal development are many; an educated guess is that this category is as at least as large as the previous three categories combined. In that case, ten percent of *SB* articles in the last century have been church historical.

The first three categories—church and doctrinal history that do not bear directly on the PRCA—appear to have been more frequent during the *first fifty* years of the *SB*'s life than during the *last fifty*. If it were not for H. Hanko's extended series that are now republished in book form, and the special issues addressing Reformers

and reformations, the second fifty years would be even less robust in recounting church history.

The *SB* editors and staff should resurrect a rubric specifically devoted to the history of the development of the doctrines of sovereign grace. They should also consider a rubric that regularly covers church historical matters.

### *Making church history*

Many articles have recorded church and doctrinal history. A different point must be made in conclusion. By virtue of its being a denominational magazine, even if not officially so, the publishing of the *SB* is itself church history in the making. A student of the history of Reformed churches, and more particularly of faithful and confessional Reformed churches, and even more narrowly of such churches in North America, ought to use the *SB* as a primary source. It is a main source regarding PRCA history primarily, but also regarding the history of the CRC, of the PRCA's sister

churches, and of other churches with whom the PRCA had contact.

The same can be said regarding doctrinal development. On the one hand, the *SB* observed doctrinal development throughout history. On the other hand, many doctrinal articles have addressed controverted doctrines, and many articles explaining Bible texts have exposed errors. Take, for instance, articles dealing with common grace and related doctrines, God's covenant, and others. And think of entire series such as "Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel," appearing in volumes 50-53. By engaging the issues and defending the truth, these writers *were developing doctrine, and therefore making history*.

May God continue to use the *SB*, not only to witness to the history of His sovereign grace in gathering, defending, and preserving His church, but also to contribute positively to that history!



## ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH

### PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA

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The *Standard Bearer* (*SB*) is not a church-magazine. It is not published by, and under the auspices of, a church, or a denomination of churches, identified though it commonly, and rightly, is as the magazine of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA). Rather, the magazine is published by an association of Reformed men that is free from church control: the Reformed *Free* Publishing Association (RFPA).

At the same time, the magazine is definitely a church magazine in the sense that it was founded for the sake of the church—the church's defense, the church's preservation, the church's development, and the church's witness to the world, especially the Christian world. Nor was "church" in this purpose exclusively

the church of the PRC. It was the Christian church in its widest extent, although the emphasis fell on the Reformed manifestation of the church—the purest and soundest manifestation.

That the purpose of the magazine was churchly, and that, therefore, the *SB* was in this respect a church-magazine, Herman Hoeksema (HH), founder and long-time editor of the magazine, expressed in an article in 1926, soon after the creation of the magazine. Explaining his opposition to the doctrine of common grace and his defense of the particularity of the grace of God, which were the main content of the magazine at its beginning, HH wrote that he felt himself called to this opposition to the false doctrine of common grace

in view of the fact that “as a minister in the Reformed churches he had promised to contend with all heresies repugnant to the confession of the churches, to reject and to oppose them.... [A] teacher was called, in the first place in his own congregation, but then also on behalf of the entire church, to contend with and to oppose these heresies” (3.4, p. 90; the translation of the Dutch is mine).

Noteworthy is not only HH’s sense of a divine calling to oppose the doctrine of a common grace of God, but also his conviction that he carried out this calling on behalf of “the entire church” inasmuch as, whether they know it or not, the truth of particular grace is the confession of the “Reformed churches.” In his life-long controversy with the doctrine of a common grace of God, HH tirelessly proved that particular grace is, in fact, the confession of all Reformed churches by his constant appeal to the Reformed creed, the Canons of Dordt. In this creed, not only is there no confession of a common grace of God, but also the very idea of common grace comes under the Christian and Reformed hammer.

Noteworthy also is that the article from which this quotation is taken was part of a long series in the *SB*, in 1924-1927, titled, in Dutch, “The Recent Church Struggle”—not “Christian Reformed Struggle, nor “Protestant Reformed Struggle,” nor even “Reformed Church Struggle,” much less, “My Struggle,” but “*Church Struggle*.” To the mind of HH, his controversy over the doctrine of a common grace of God was not parochial. The issues were fundamental to the confession of the Christian church in her fullest manifestation, especially the “little point of the first point” of the doctrine of common grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1924: God’s loving will for the salvation of all humans, expressed in the preaching of the gospel as a gracious “well-meant offer” to all.

The controversy of HH in 1924, as also the controversy of the PRC one hundred years later, over the heresy of a common grace of God, especially over a “well-meant offer,” are of fundamental importance to the Christian church, and to the Christian church in her totality, since it concerns nothing less than the gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God. This made, and still makes, the *SB* significant, as the only

magazine, certainly in the crucial sphere of Reformed churches in North America, devoted to the common grace controversy, and in such a way as to condemn the popular theory of common grace and to defend the truth of particular grace.

HH indicated the importance of the *SB* as the magazine that was carrying on the struggle against the heresy of common grace by his judgment of the error of common grace and of the inevitable consequence of this error wherever it prevails. Wrote HH, in the published form of several public lectures given shortly after his expulsion from the CRC in 1924/1925:

The three points [of the doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924] are also distortions and corruptions of the Reformed faith. Secretly, and for that reason more effectively, they will complete their word of corruption in the churches until it is too late to save them from drowning in the Arminian waters into which their synod plunged them in 1924 (Herman Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, RFPA, 2015, 373).

This quotation is taken from a book that does not receive the attention it ought to have both within and without the PRC. It is a volume that contains all the fundamental, early writings of HH and of Henry Danhof, who was in the early years of the controversy over common grace a colleague of HH, on the issues at stake in the conflict. No Protestant Reformed aspirant to the ministry in the PRC can consider himself properly trained for his office in these churches who has not read the book. Every member of the PRC ought to set himself or herself the purpose to read it. As the editor of the book remarked about one of the works included in the book, the book as a whole is “foundational writing for the PRC.” Every Reformed believer the world over, regardless of his church affiliation, owes it to a sound, intelligent confession of the faith to read it. The title is *The Rock Whence We are Hewn: God, Grace, and Covenant*, RFPA, 2015 (hereafter, *Rock*). The book contains a number of articles by Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, mainly concerning the doctrinal and ethical aspects of the doctrine of common grace and concerning the controversy that the Reformed doctrine of particular grace has with this error. Included are chapters on “On the Theory of Common Grace,” “Not Anabaptist but Reformed,”

and “The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel,” and more.

The *SB* was conceived as an instrument in the “progressive reformation” of the church with regard particularly to the truth of salvation by sovereign grace (*Rock*, 442).

Emphatically, the magazine was intended also to be an instrument of defending and promoting the antithesis in the church. “Danhof and Hoeksema contended for the spiritual separation of the church from the world. The theological term they used to express this separation and warfare was *antithesis*” (*Rock*, 5). Advertising the coming appearance of the *SB*, Danhof and HH declared that “we have placed on the foreground of our world-view the idea of the absolute antithesis” (*Rock*, 247). The purpose of the *SB* was stated strongly: that “we must assimilate this antithesis into our consciousness and desire to hold it in love and deny and hate Satan’s opposing position. In so doing we are actively of the party of the living God” (*Rock*, 284).

Already in 1919, when he was still a respected member of the CRC clergy, Danhof lectured a gathering of his colleagues on “The Idea of the Covenant of Grace.” In his lecture, he contended for the “absolute antithesis”: “the idea of the ‘absolute antithesis’ must be placed emphatically on the foreground in our world view” (*Rock*, 15).

The antithesis is spiritual separation and warfare between the church and the world. It is necessary to emphasize “spiritual” because the advocates of common grace invariably defend their friendship with the world by virtue of this common grace by charging the antithesis, with its rejection of common grace, as “Anabaptism,” that is, world-flight. A long section of the *Rock* consists of HH’s denial that the rejection of common grace is Anabaptism, or world-flight (*Rock*, 86–155). HH insisted that the Reformed Christian, without the stimulus of a common grace of God, is called, and able, to live and serve God, *antithetically*, in every sphere of earthly life (*Rock*, 86–155).

Loss of the antithesis is fatal to an instituted church. The threat is synthesis—conformity to the world of the ungodly. The theory of common grace is theological synthesis. It *is* synthesis. It is this explicitly: world and

church supposedly share a grace of God that unites them in one grand, spiritual calling of making the world “Christian.” Where this synthesis prevails, the antithesis goes under: “the doctrine of common grace obliterates the antithesis” (*Rock*, 83). “When one travels the path of synthesis, the antithesis will be obscured, and they [confessing Christians who are influenced by common grace] will live the life of the world that has turned from God” (*Rock*, 246).

The concern of Danhof and HH was not theoretical but intensely practical. It had to do with the preservation of the church from being swallowed up by an enticing world.

Already in the early 1920s, they saw this synthesis in the CRC, and “this stream of [synthesizing, common grace] thought fills us with dread” (*Rock*, 245).

The evil was world-conformity, or synthesis. Its doctrinal power was the theory of common grace, whose influence was aided and abetted by its origin in part in the renowned Abraham Kuyper. The *SB* was created to withstand this world-conformity and to promote the antithesis—in *the church*.

What is important for the *SB* today, a hundred years after its founding, is that the magazine is still called by God and by the PRC to contend for, develop, and promote the antithesis, both theologically and practically. The world is still too much with us, including churches that inexcusably ignore where the doctrine of common grace has brought Kuyper’s Reformed churches in the Netherlands and the CRC in North America. The world is also too much with the members of the PRC.

The struggle over the antithesis is not yet over for Reformed church members and for the Reformed churches world-wide, including the PRC.

To our calling with regard to the antithesis, editors and writers of the *SB*, as well as the RFPA itself, must devote themselves in AD 2024—on the *SB*’s hundredth anniversary.

On behalf of the church!



# RIGHTEOUS WARFARE: THE REFORMED POLEMICS OF THE *STANDARD BEARER*

**REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK**

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Part of our centenary celebration of the *Standard Bearer* must include its commitment to polemics. Polemics comes from the Greek word to fight, battle, or war. It is found in Scripture, most often in Revelation. In Revelation 2:16, Jesus warns the church at Pergamos that if they will not repent of their toleration of the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, He will “*fight* against them with the sword of my mouth.” Revelation 16:14 refers to “the *battle* of that great day of God Almighty.” And one of the last references to polemics is Revelation 19:11, where we behold Jesus in heaven on a white horse, who “in righteousness...doth judge and *make war*.” This is polemics.

The *SB* engages in Reformed polemics. Reformed polemics is righteous warfare, meaning it is conducted only by, for, and in the manner of Jesus, the righteous (1 John 2:1). Reformed polemics is simply a form of the ascended Christ making war in righteousness astride the steed of His holy gospel throughout the world, unleashing the arrows and wielding the sword of His Word, conquering and to conquer (Rev. 6:2; 19:15). The sole object of Reformed polemics, therefore, is doctrinal or practical error contrary to the Word, and whoever believes, promotes, or lives in those errors (including ourselves). The sole instrument of Reformed polemics is Scripture, and creeds as faithful expositions of Scripture. The sole target is the heart, and the aim is to divide soul and spirit by exposing, condemning, and refuting the evil thoughts and intents of the heart with the righteous and holy truth (Heb. 4:12). In short, Reformed polemics is spiritual warfare against that which opposes the Word, and conducted with a righteous motive and manner according to the Word and in harmony with the gospel that man is righteous only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Polemics has been an undeniable characteristic of the *SB*. One proof is that over the last 100 years, there has been no more frequent criticism of the magazine

than its polemics. This criticism has come in various forms, constructive and destructive, in love and hatred, from the world and church, and outside and inside the PRCA, of which most of its writers are members. The *SB* attempts, not always successfully, to take and view such criticism in the Spirit of Jesus. That meant as evil, God means for good (Gen. 50:20); we are called to be fools, weak, and despised, and take pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, and distresses for Christ’s sake (1 Cor. 4:10; 2 Cor. 12:10). And, being written by mere men, the *SB* can shrink back from polemics, or conduct unrighteous polemics, which has undoubtedly happened, dishonors Christ, demands repentance, and about which its authors must plead the mercies of God. By grace are we saved. And by grace we conduct polemics.

Although criticized, the polemical character of the *SB* should not be surprising since it was born out of doctrinal controversy. At the time of its inception, Abraham Kuyper’s novel, widely-publicized doctrine of non-saving, universal grace was used to justify attacks on the inspiration of Scripture as Spirit-inspired science, and to promote unholy ecclesiastical union with the world as Spirit-worked Americanization of the church and Christianization of the world. It also developed into a resistible, saving grace by binding it to a well-meant, but oft-rejected promise of salvation to all by the Spirit. When CRC ministers Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof could not find publications in which to conduct polemics against these errors, the RFPA was conceived to publish the *SB*.

In the first issue, Danhof explained that the magazine’s name reflected its intention to be polemical:

[The RFPA] feel there must be a striving for the cause of the Lord not only against the enemies who stand outside their church fellowship, but, under the present circumstances, no less against the enemy within the gates. Therefore, they want men to raise

the “standard” and teach the people of God and lead them in the inevitable strife that must be fought. A need is felt for leadership on ecclesiastical questions, disputed points of doctrine, prevailing views, and practical application in life of the principles on which they are based. And although they do not intend to limit themselves in this struggle to publishing this magazine, they nevertheless want the *Standard Bearer* to lead the way in this difficult strife (1.1, p. 3. Translation mine).

This polemical character of the *SB* has continued by the grace of God throughout its history to the present. Using Scripture and the confessions, it has engaged in untold number of controversies, and exposed, condemned, and refuted countless errors regarding virtually every theological doctrine and practice in Scripture and the creeds, including attacks upon Scripture itself, whether they have appeared in the United States or abroad, in other denominations or even in the PRCA, by individuals, groups, or churches.

This is not to say the *SB* is above criticism. The magazine, because sinful men write it, is as prone as they are to pride, folly, and fear, can be mistaken, or unrighteous in its polemics. The *SB* is not free to conduct polemics as it pleases, as the world, or even as its professing Christian opponents. The officebearers who write in the *SB* may not be brawlers, that is, pugnacious, fighting for sake of winning or personal glory (1 Tim. 3:3). The servants of Jesus who write, and whose polemics He may use to bring repentance, must “be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2 Tim. 2:24-25). The *SB* must speak the truth in love, may not backbite or slander, judge or condemn any man rashly or unheard, and must avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as devilish (Eph. 4:15; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 112). This is all part of conducting righteous polemics by the grace of our Lord Jesus.

Although polemics indeed characterizes the *SB*, it is unfair to charge that it is exclusively polemical or polemics is its main purpose. This simply ignores the vast amount of the magazine deliberately devoted to other material: Meditations, world and ecclesiastical events, history of dogma and heresies, ecclesiastical biographies, book reviews, biblical observations of the natural world, commentaries on the creeds and books of the Bible (many later published as books), and positive instruction and development in doctrines both

theological and practical, such as Christian education, marriage and divorce, labor unions, the antithesis, evangelism, the Christian life, and personal witness.

In keeping with the polemical character of the magazine, and for a number of reasons, including criticism of this polemical character, along with the real temptation that we join in the criticism due to weariness, weakness, or fear, we conclude with some polemics on that score.

The underlying reason for the polemical character of the *SB* is its main purpose and desire to be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ, which is impossible without engaging in polemics or being polemical in character. What follows is a brief explanation.

First, Jesus, of whom we witness, is polemical. Jesus is the truth, the Son and glorious revelation of God. God has an enemy, Satan, the once glorious creature who lies against that truth. This means war, the war of Reformed polemics. This war is not new, and did not begin with us, but has been waged in heaven and earth since the beginning when Satan declared war against the truth in Jesus. It is the enmity God put between the seed of the woman and seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:17). It is warfare against principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). Satan and his hosts (the world, devils, and our sinful flesh) making war with the Lamb, who, in return, with His church, holy angels, and saints, “in righteousness doth judge and make war” (Rev. 17:4).

Second, the instruments of our witness, Scripture and the creeds, are polemical. The infallible, inspired written Word is polemical because it reveals the incarnate Word, who conducts this war. Scripture not only presents, develops, and explains the truth of Jesus, but exposes, refutes, and condemns the lie against Him. This is undeniable. Jesus in His ministry was polemical. He was crucified for it. Every human witness to Jesus, Moses, historians, psalmists, prophets, and apostles were polemical. All will suffer, be hated, and many killed for it. The reason is that the Word is light, righteousness, and life that exposes Satan’s darkness, sin, and death, so it is always contradicted. To God’s yes and amen, Satan says no and not so. The Scriptures, likewise the creeds, are polemical because every word, command, promise, warning, and exhortation of God

is contradicted by Satan. And these weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down his strong holds (2 Cor. 10:4).

Third, the salvation of Jesus the Christ is polemical in character. God appointed Jesus as Christ the Savior of all whom He chose in love. Jesus is the truth, the way, and life (John 14:6) who saves from the enemy, the lie, sin, and way of death. Jesus the truth saves from the lie. Jesus the wise saves from folly. Jesus the righteous saves from sin. Jesus the holy saves from corruption. Jesus the light saves from darkness. Jesus the life saves from death. To save, the Savior must entirely defeat and destroy Satan, his lies, unrighteousness, corruption, sin, darkness, and death (Mark 3:27). His salvation is victory in warfare (Ps. 81:1).

Fourth, those Jesus saves are polemical in character. Polemics belongs to the antithetical character of union with Christ by faith, which believes the truth and rejects the lie; conversion, the mortification of the old and quickening of the new man; and regeneration from death into life, darkness into light. The church on earth is “the church militant,” and one mark of true Christians is they “fight against” their own “great infirmities... all the days of their life (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). A Christian is a soldier equipped with spiritual weapons and armor to fight against sin and Satan (Eph. 6:11-13; HC, Q&A 32). “Our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh cease not to assault us... in this spiritual warfare,” so we pray God “preserve

and strengthen us...that we may not be overcome...but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory” (HC, Q&A 127). And so Jesus calls us to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Lastly, although this war has been since the beginning, the necessity of polemics is urgent. We live in the perilous last days, when the devil is come down with great wrath, because he knows the time is short, when scoffers mock, and men are lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient, unthankful, unholy, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good (Rev. 12:12; 2 Pet. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:2-3). And in the church. Ironically, this spirit of the world has infected the church in part through the false doctrine of common grace that was impetus for the *SB*. That spirit, like the world from which it originates, moves the church to tolerance of all but the intolerant, and under the guise of peace, love, and unity, to ignore, accept, and promote this wickedness in her fellowship. In such an age, we may expect polemics against this to be scorned and mocked as unloving and divisive. By the grace of God and in love for Jesus Christ, the *SB* must press on. May God be gracious, and give us strength and zeal to conduct righteous warfare in this battle of the ages until He returns in perfect victory, when there shall be no need ever again for polemics.



## OUR PERISCOPE: AN EARLY HISTORY OF THE “ALL AROUND US” RUBRIC

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### AN INTRODUCTION

A periscope, as you probably know, is a long tube containing lenses and mirrors and is used to look over or around something. A submarine officer uses a periscope to see above the surface of the water and look all around him.

On October 1, 1945, after exactly twenty-one years of existence, the *Standard Bearer* (*SB*) introduced its readers to a new rubric called “Periscope.” Then, eight years later in the February 15, 1953 issue of the *SB*, the editor, Herman Hoeksema, informed the readers of some changes in the editorial staff and content of the magazine,

and wrote, “And seeing that henceforth all the rubrics will have English titles, we thought it fitting to bring the title of Periscope in harmony with the rest. Periscope, as you probably know, is a Greek title, meaning ‘viewing around.’ And instead of this we have now chosen, ‘All Around Us’” (29.19, p. 220).<sup>1</sup> The “All Around Us” rubric (formerly Periscope) continues to this day.

All the writers in Periscope, ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches, used this rubric to help readers look east and west, north and south, near and far, in both the church and world. Periscope peered down into the Christian Reformed Church and its seminary, and looked far away into countries like China and Russia. It looked at doctrinal issues like the covenant and practical issues like watching movies. Often it even looked right into the PRC to comment on events within the churches. How did the writers know what was happening all around them? They subscribed to or gained access to various periodicals and read widely and broadly, so that one of the first writers in the rubric once noted, “While ‘periscoping’ around through the various periodicals we receive, the following quotes struck our attention...” (23.7, p. 166).

In the space allotted to me, I cannot possibly provide a substantial review and evaluation of nearly eighty years of “All Around Us,” and so in what follows I have decided to narrow my historical scope to one decade. I will consider the more distant and unfamiliar years dating from Periscope’s debut on October 1, 1945 to its ten year anniversary on October 1, 1955. During that period, the primary writers were the following PRC ministers: Walter Hofman, James Howerzyl, Herman Hoeksema, and Marinus Schipper. M. Schipper assumed responsibility for the rubric, beginning with the March 1, 1953 issue and would write for about seven and a half years. After Schipper, other PRC ministers wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Hoeksema also informed the readership that the *SB* would be dropping the Dutch language. Up to that point, some of the opening mediations and book reviews were still being written in Dutch. Rev. G. Vos’ meditation entitled *De Behoudenis Des Levens* (“The Preservation of Life”) from Matthew 16:25-26 was the final article ever submitted in the Dutch language. Although the contributing writers would no longer write in Dutch after 1953, the language would linger for a little while as the *SB* continued publishing letters that some of the readers were submitting in Dutch.

Herman Hanko would write for some fifteen years, Herman Veldman for a year, and then Gise VanBaren for longer than any writer—over twenty years, beginning in 1976. After G. VanBaren, many different PRC ministers have written for the rubric, and some continue to do so to this present day.

### 1945-1952 (HOFMAN AND HOWERZYL)

From October 1, 1945 (Periscope’s origin) to November 15, 1952, the two main writers were W. Hofman—mostly during the first half of this seven-year period, and then mostly J. Howerzyl thereafter. On rare occasion another would write. The writers brought news from nearby: the CRC (often from its magazine, the *Banner*), the PCUSA, the Roman Catholic Church, the northern Baptist Convention, and even the Mennonites. They reported on events from far away: missions in China, the state of Calvinism in France, persecution in North Korea, Baptist seminaries in Russia, Reformed churches in Japan, Hinduism in India, and the Free University, the GKN, and the Hervormde Kerk in the Netherlands. They brought reports on the meetings of the synods in the CRC and RCA, and from the general assemblies of the OPC and Southern Presbyterian Church. They touched topics ranging from “shows” (movies), Christmas trees, a one-world government, Boy Scout membership, labor unions, the Amish debate over horses vs. tractors, the military draft, and the penning of letters to one’s congressman. They also addressed matters right at home, for example, reports from PRC synods.

Three things stand out about this early period of Periscope. First, as to frequency, this rubric regularly appeared in *every* issue of the *SB*. However, it became sporadic and even disappeared for many issues in the early 1950s. Likely this was due to the increasing tension in the PRC that would lead to a split in 1953, for at this time the magazine was full of letters, articles on the Declaration of Principles, and polemics against conditional theology.

Second, a very popular subject for Hofman’s articles was “Home Missions,” as he often used Periscope to keep the readership informed of the expanding footprint of the PRC.

Third, Hofman produced an extended and fascinating series spanning six issues in 1946 (vol. 23) in which Periscope did not look *out* and *around* but right *into* the PRC as Hofman reported on the Second Annual

Conference between the PRC and the Reformed Churches in the US (RCUS), meeting in Hull, Iowa, October 1-3, 1946. The conference was very well attended by ministers and lay people from both denominations as capacity crowds packed the auditorium of Hull PRC. Ministers representing each denomination took turns giving speeches that unfolded the theme chosen by a committee: “The Idea of the Church.” After each speech, anyone in the auditorium, beginning with the ministers, could ask questions of the speaker or ask follow-up questions to previous questioners, resulting in spontaneous, comprehensive, and rigorous doctrinal discussions that went late into the night. What a fascinating event to attend for those interested in Reformed theology!

Hofman took careful notes during the conference, transcribing the questions and answers. He used Periscope to share the contents of the conference as best he could. Recognizing the possibility of misquoting someone, he added this note to his first article, “If we misquote any of the brethren in this or the following articles, we would be pleased to hear from them to make corrections and apologies.” (23.2, p. 46).

After one speech by H. Veldman on “The Tension of the Church” (the church being a heavenly reality still on earth) the discussion afterward turned to Romans 7 and the internal tension experienced by the regenerated Christian. Hofman reports how H. Hoeksema, after many exchanges between the participants, eventually mounted the platform, opened his Bible to Romans 7 and gave extended exposition of the text. Then, following some more discussion among the ministers, the evening concluded with Hoeksema and G. Ophoff going back and forth. Does the Christian have “two ego’s” (an ‘I’ that sins and an ‘I’ that hates sin—Ophoff), or “one ego in two natures” (old body of death and new man in Christ—Hoeksema)? What are the implications for personal responsibility (accountability and liability) for sin? When I sin, am ‘I’ to blame or my old man? Additionally, how does this all relate to justification and Christ taking responsibility for our sin? Included in the exchange was Ophoff’s caution, “We must guard against antinomianism” (23.3, pp. 68-72).

On another evening, Rev. Steubbe of the RCUS spoke on the “The Distinguishing Marks of the Church,” and after a long discussion with contributions from many delegates, Hoeksema again assumed a position

of leadership and spoke up, saying, “There are several questions here and since the subject is of importance we should come to some conclusions.” He then spontaneously delivered another mini-speech on the marks of the true church, concluding with his conviction that everyone must join himself to “the purest church” and be able to say in his own consciousness “that he belongs to the purest church and if he does not, he helps along the progress toward the false church.” (23.5, p. 120).

I find it interesting that what generated the most discussion during this conference were two perennial theological issues intensely debated in Reformed circles in every generation to this present day—how exactly are we to understand the old man versus the new man and the true church over against the false church.

### NOVEMBER 15, 1952—FEBRUARY 15, 1953 (HOEKSEMA)

H. Hoeksema filled the Periscope rubric for six consecutive issues toward the end of 1952 and into 1953. There is no word of explanation for the disappearance of Hofman and Howerzyl from the rubric. However, we know that their departure was occasioned by the controversy raging over conditional theology in the PRC, for both men would soon be writing for *Concordia*<sup>2</sup> and then *Reformed Guardian*.<sup>3</sup>

2 *Concordia* was a magazine produced by PRC ministers in the Iowa/Minnesota area, beginning on February 21, 1944. It intended “to complete and not usurp the *Standard Bearer* in the heart and home of the Protestant Reformed family” (*Concordia*, 1.1, p. 1). When later reflecting on *Concordia*, H. Hoeksema wrote, “The reader will remember that, personally, I gave it a hearty welcome in the *Standard Bearer* and recommended it to all our readers. I thought that there was room for a publication of this nature next to the *Standard Bearer*. Little did I surmise that, before long, it became evident that it was the purpose of some of the leaders in the West and of some of those that initiated this new publication to compete with the *Standard Bearer* and to replace it, if at all possible. Not only this, but before long it began to sound a very un-Protestant Reformed note, became the champion of conditional theology, defended the Liberated, and instigated schism in our churches...” (*SB*, 31.11, p. 244).

3 *Reformed Guardian* began as a small pamphlet first published on July 21, 1953 by ministers who had recently left the PRC in the schism. They were aggrieved by the suspension and deposition of Rev. Hubert DeWolf and wrote in his defense. On April 25, 1955, the pamphlet joined forces with *Concordia* and became a

It fell to Hoeksema to maintain Periscope for a little while. During his short stint, his contributions included the following subjects: labor unions; his challenge of claims made about the PRC in the Dutch periodical *De Reformatie* (Dr. K. Schilder's magazine); the relation between science and the Bible; a discussion on common grace in *Torch and Trumpet*; a report on smoking's link to cancer; a discussion some were having in the CRC on the merits of a fourth Reformed confession for the task of missions; a discussion in the *Presbyterian Guardian* on the necessity of church discipline; commentary by a Dutch paper on the election of General Eisenhower as President of the USA; writings by James Daane of the CRC on the well-meant offer; what the Liberated in the Netherlands were saying about the PRC; the second coming of Jesus; what was being said about a new Bible translation—the “Revised Standard Version” (published Sept. 30, 1952); and what various Christian scientists were saying about the age of the earth. It was in the February 15, 1953 issue that Hoeksema penned his final submission for Periscope, which was also the issue in which he announced the new name of the rubric, “All Around Us.”

Hoeksema's contributions to Periscope, when studied in their context, are fascinating and instructive. When he began writing for this rubric, sharp doctrinal differences were coming to a head in the PRC and an agonizing split was imminent. Hoeksema was in the middle of the storm, writing prolifically in other rubrics in the *SB*, facing a barrage of letters against him, and contending valiantly for the truth of God's sovereign, particular grace. Yet, even during the intensity and ferocity of the storm, Hoeksema kept peering through his periscope. As important as the PRC controversy over conditional theology was—and in Hoeksema's heart it was the most important matter in the world, for the gospel was at stake—he still wanted the *SB* readers to know there is much more to church and life. God gave him abundant grace so that amid all his other work he somehow made time and had the energy to keep reading a wide variety of English and Dutch periodicals and wrote on topics ranging from the appearance of a new Bible translation to what the Dutch were saying about Eisenhower's election!

Hoeksema never lost perspective in controversy. He did not retract his periscope as a submarine officer content to see, know, and speak about nothing more than the happenings connected to his own little capsule. He remained convinced that God's people need to know what is happening *all* around them.

### MARCH 1, 1953–SEPTEMBER 1, 1955 (SCHIPPER)

After Hoeksema penned his final article for the February 15 issue, M. Schipper took over the rubric with the March 1, 1953 issue. Looking only at Schipper's first two and a half years, bringing to completion the rubric's first decade, one thing stands out. His periscope usually did not look very far. Occasionally he treated broader issues such as a Billy Graham crusade in England or a *Time Magazine* report on an atheist in an American court who refused to conclude his oath with “so help me God.” Nevertheless, most of his forty-seven articles over two and a half years focused on issues in the CRC or writings in *Concordia* and *Reformed Guardian*.

For example, he began 1955 with five consecutive articles responding to an essay in *Concordia* entitled, “What Really Happened in our Churches,” written by a former PRC minister, J. Blankespoor. Schipper subjected the essay to a scathing critique, contending that the “schismatics” who supported DeWolf “fell in love with the Liberated and their doctrine” and that they “hate Hoeksema, Ophoff, and the *Standard Bearer*” for standing “in their way of becoming big, of realizing their ‘ecumenical’ desire” (31.7, p. 168). Schipper also contended that “it was the secret hope of the schismatic leaders that they would take along with them the entire denomination. The Lord, however spoiled their plans” (31.8, p. 189). It is very clear that the schism had a deep impact upon the denomination. Because the doctrinal issue of a conditional covenant with an ineffectual grace and promise wider in scope than election was so serious and had caused such widespread damage in the churches, Schipper was convinced that his periscope must contest the claims of *Concordia*.

### VALUE

Periscope has always been and remains a valuable rubric in the *SB*. It keeps us informed of significant current events all around us in society and the church, near and far. It

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full-size magazine, maintaining the name *Reformed Guardian*.

also provides sober-minded guidance for how to interpret these events in the light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Periscope will remain valuable, especially as it keeps an eschatological eye and helps us see how all

events belong to the “things which must shortly come to pass” (Rev. 1:1) for the return of our Lord. Christ gave us an important command in this respect: Watch!

Periscope helps us watch—all around us.



## GRACE AND GODLINESS: THE *STANDARD BEARER*'S DEFENSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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### FROM A TO Z

From A to Z—or, for many of our foreign subscribers, from A to Zed. From A to Z and everything in between, the *Standard Bearer* has throughout its history applied the truths of the Reformed faith to the lives of its readers. From abortion to Zionism, God's people were pointed to their calling in the light of the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

From abortion to adiaphora, from alcoholism to amusements, from anger to anti-Semitism, from assisted suicide to astrology—and these are just some of the A's. Nearly every conceivable topic with application to the Christian life has been addressed in the one hundred years during which the *SB* has been published. Editors and writers have changed. Rubrics and subjects covered have been diverse. But always there has been the endeavor to apply practically the great truths of the gospel. The perusal of the *SB* indices bears this out. Any high school student who must write a paper on some subject of current interest can likely find that topic addressed in one or more articles in the *SB*.

Often the *SB*'s articles used abbreviations or acronyms. Sometimes these identified groups defending truth and right; at other times they stood for evil groups. Sometimes they stood for churches and ecumenical organizations; often they represented denominations that had departed from the faith and bodies that promoted heresy. How many, besides PRC and *SB*, can you identify? RCC, WCC, NCC, AIDS,

WW 2, KJV, NIV, ESV, AACS, CRC, RCA, CanRC, NAPARC, RCUS, NRC, GKN, CGK, FMC, DMC, TSC, CC, RWH, RFPA, BL, CPRC, ERCS, PRCP, WCF, SHC, DKO, ACC, ARC, CLA, FOF, RES, CRA, AIG, YMCA, YWCA, LGBTQ+, JW's, LDS, SDA, PCA, PCUSA, OPC, UPC, and more.

Other periodicals were frequently mentioned, either because issue was taken with what had been written or commendation made of an article that appeared in one of these magazines. Magazines frequently referred to include *The Banner*, *Clarion*, *Torch and Trumpet* (which later became *Outlook*), *Christian Renewal*, *Reformed Perspectives*, *Christian Observer*, *Reformed Herald*, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, and others.

Without doubt, the first interest of the *SB* was the defense of the faith. Sound doctrine and the importance of sound doctrine has always been the hallmark of the *SB*. The magazine was born out of doctrinal controversy—the common grace controversy. Even before there were Protestant Reformed Churches, there was the *SB*, which pointed out the error and defended the truth. But just as the magazine never shied away from a vigorous defense of sound doctrine, neither did it draw back from a spirited polemic against the evils that threaten the Christian life. The sword of the Spirit was wielded to expose practical error—the temptations that confronted Christians, whether old or young.

From its inception, the *SB* demonstrated that truth is practical. Doctrine impacts ethics. What one

believes determines how one lives. The truth is never purely abstract—ideas that float about in the upper atmosphere. Doctrine must promote godliness and it must be shown *how* doctrine promotes godliness. As the apostle exhorts Titus, “And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful” (Titus 3:14). At the same time, “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine *which is according to godliness*” (1 Tim. 6:3), he is to be rejected. For, “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Therefore, the Christian is to “follow after...godliness” (1 Tim. 6:11).

### STRUGGLE FOR THE ANTITHESIS

What drove the *SB*’s endeavor to be practical was its denial of the antithesis-compromising doctrine of common grace. As we have noted, it was the common grace controversy in the Christian Reformed Church that moved the first editors to publish a new magazine.

This was not the only threat to the Christian life, as the first editors freely acknowledged. There was the threat from within—the sinful nature against which every child of God must fight. That sinful nature was the fifth columnist, the enemy within the city’s walls. There was also the threat from without—the worldliness of human society as sinful men gave themselves over increasingly to the spirit of lawlessness. In that connection, the *SB* has always denied that the Christian life consists of anabaptistic world flight. Believers are called to live *in* the world, while not becoming part *of* the world. Not world *flight*, but world *fight* is the Christian life. Asceticism, physical withdrawal, living in an isolated commune at some isolated location is not the Christian life. But the Christian life consists of involvement in every legitimate earthly endeavor, whether marriage and family, an earthly vocation or profession, dealings in business and commerce, education, society, and government.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of common grace, with its teaching of the natural man’s capacity for good, altogether apart from the regenerating grace of God, promoted cooperation with the world—common cause with the enemies of the gospel. That was the origin of the theory of common grace. Its origin was in Abraham Kuyper’s defense of his political alliance

with the Roman Catholics in the Netherlands. He made common cause with those whom the Heidelberg Catechism says are guilty of “accursed idolatry” (Q&A 80). According to the teaching of common grace, God “so influences [unregenerate] man that he is able to perform civil good.” Since unregenerate persons can do good, it follows that the child of God ought to make common cause with the children of this world. Such cooperation falls under the scathing rebuke of God’s prophet in 2 Chronicles 19:2, “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?”

That the teaching of common grace would lead to a breakdown of the antithesis was the warning oft repeated and the reality clearly documented on the pages of the *SB*. Early on this was the prediction of Herman Hoeksema, the *SB*’s first editor-in-chief. In a significant article entitled “Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism,” published in the May 1, 1928 issue of the *SB*, Hoeksema alleged that common grace would undermine the antithesis. It is worth quoting Hoeksema at length:

It is not many years ago that it was a rather generally accepted principle with Reformed people, that in this whole life, in every sphere of life in the midst of the world, the Christian was called to assume an antithetical attitude towards the world of darkness. For what did righteousness and unrighteousness have in common: Or what concord is there between Christ and Belial? The natural man minded the things of the flesh, and the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be. Hence, he cannot see the Kingdom of God and will not seek God, but loves the darkness rather than light. But the spiritual man, who has been renewed by the Spirit and grace of God, according to the inner man of the heart, lives from the new principle of regeneration and reveals himself as a child of light. It is, therefore, not his calling to leave the world, but to live the whole of life from a different spiritual-ethical principle than the natural man. He is in the world but not of the world (4.15, p. 353).

Later, Hoeksema pointed out:

Now this antithesis is denied in more than one way. It is denied first of all by the pernicious doctrine of Common Grace. Also this theory attempts to offer a life-view of the things of this present time. Its fundamental conception is after all, that the devil struck a hole into the work of God as He originally formed it and would have destroyed it, were it not for the intervention of common grace. If God had not

intervened through the power of common grace, so is the supposition, man would immediately have been sent into eternal death and destruction and the whole world would have returned to its original state of chaos, or perhaps been annihilated. But God prevents this devilish scheme. He carries through the original purpose of creation. This world must develop. The powers of this world must be brought to light, may not be destroyed by sin. Not until all the forces of the world have been developed and it has become manifest how beautiful a world God formed in the beginning, can the world be destroyed to be replaced by the final restoration of paradise lost. For this purpose God sends a twofold grace, a temporary grace and an eternal, a general and a particular. By virtue of the former, which is God's lovingkindness over all men, the righteous and the wicked alike, human life is preserved and not immediately destroyed, the curse is tempered in its tendency to destroy, and the earth and its fullness are preserved. Moreover, the power and progress of sin are checked. If this general grace had not come, man would have been wholly a child of darkness, a pronounced enemy of God, only committing sin and never doing anything good. He would have been wholly like the devil. But now it is different. True, it is maintained, the natural man of himself is only a sinner and he cannot do anything good while he is inclined to all evil. But common grace improves upon him, to such an extent that he can still do much good, even though it is no good that saves him. In all the spheres of life that pertain to this present world, in the home, in the state, in society, in business and commerce, in science and art, he lives from this principle of a common and general temporal grace and is able to will and to think and to accomplish much good (4.15, p. 356).

And Hoeksema concluded:

But we are not so much concerned with the criticism and exposition of the errors of this conception as with the clear fact that it destroys the antithesis. If it is true that in this present life, and with a view to their earthly development, God is gracious to all, and has a covenant of friendship with all men, what business have we not to be friends with all men, what business have we not to be friends with those to whom the Lord is gracious? Certainly, the outcry of the poet must be eliminated from Scripture: "Should I not hate, Lord, them that hate thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred!" God is the friend of all, be it only for the present and with a view to the affairs of the present time. We have no business to be enemies of those that are in this life the friends of God. Besides, do we not live from a common principle of life in this world? The world does good. Not saving good, it is

true, but good in the sight of God. It does so from the grace of God wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit of God. Shall we then separate ourselves and condemn the good and lovely works of the world? No, but we shall rather unite with them, and do things in common. Together we can labor for the building up of the home, of society, of the state, of commerce and industry, of science and art. It is only a matter of tradition that we still have Christian Schools. The school also belongs to the sphere of common grace. The calling of God's people to live from a different principle than the world is denied. The antithesis is absolutely destroyed! We may be in the world and of the world both, for together we live of the power of common grace! (4.15, pp. 356-57).

As Hoeksema and the other *SB* writers demonstrated over the course of the 100 years since the adoption of "The Three Points," those churches who are committed to the pernicious error of common grace have sold out the antithesis for a mess of worldly pottage. This was demonstrated in many different areas: worldly amusements, the movie and drama, the labor union, membership in the lodge, concessions to evolution, its impact on Christian education, acceptance of higher critical views of Scripture (where common grace started in the CRC), feminism, and more.

### **NOT ONLY NEGATIVE, BUT ALSO POSITIVE**

But never was the *SB* only negative, despite the accusations of its enemies. From the beginning, there was a concern to develop the Christian's calling positively. God never only prohibits; He also commands. His will for the Christian life is never only "Thou shalt not!," but it is also "Thou shalt!"

In no area is this more evident than marriage, the Christian home, and covenant family—all the fruit of God's covenant with us and our children. The articles in the *SB* are not only against immorality, against birth control for purely selfish reasons, against divorce and remarriage, against pornography, against homosexuality, against physical and sexual abuse, whether of one's spouse or children. But the articles promote the lifelong bond of Christian marriage, promote godly living in the covenant home, promote Christian education, promote the calling of the godly husband and father, promote the calling of the believing wife and mother, promote childbearing.

The *SB* inveighs against the desecration of

the Sabbath, but it also promotes proper Sabbath observance. The *SB* not only decries dancing, but it promotes the proper relationship between those unmarried. The *SB* not only condemns the many different forms of gambling in our society, but it promotes Christian stewardship. The *SB* not only condemns alcoholism (drunkenness), but it encourages moderation—not abstinence. The *SB* not only condemns worldly music, whether rock, heavy metal, or the latest genre, but it promotes a sanctified use of Christian liberty in musical enjoyment, as well as the singing of the Psalms. The *SB* not only condemns smoking—or at least calls smoking into question—but it promotes the Christian’s consciousness that his

body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The *SB* not only points out the moral implications of modern medical technology, but it promotes the use of the means of science and medicine with which God has provided us. The *SB* not only warns against being unequally yoked with unbelievers, but it encourages godly friendships and Christian dating.

May God continue to use the *SB* for the defense and development of the truth—grace and godliness. And may our magazine continue to call God’s people to “come out from among them, and be ye separate,” joined to the promise of God, “And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).



## HEARTY SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

**PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA**

former editor of the *Standard Bearer*, professor emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, and pastor of Byron Center PRC in Byron Center, Michigan

From its inception, and for a century thereafter, the *Standard Bearer* has manifested keen interest in, and support for, Christian schools. That hearty support is grounded on the key distinguishing doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). That distinguishing doctrine is the doctrine of God’s everlasting covenant of grace in complete harmony with sovereign particular grace. Herman Hoeksema expressed this conviction in 1950:

If you ask me what is the most peculiar treasure of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I answer without any hesitation: their peculiar view of the covenant.

And what is their peculiar conception?

It stands closely connected with their denial of common grace, and their emphasis on the doctrine of election and reprobation.

Moreover, it emphasizes and carries out the organic idea.

Briefly stated it teaches that God realizes his eternal covenant of friendship, in Christ, the Firstborn of every creature and the Firstbegotten of the dead, organically, and antithetically along the

lines of election and reprobation, and in connection with the organic development of all things.

That is, in a nutshell, the peculiar Protestant Reformed heritage (26.12, p. 269).

From the beginning of the common grace controversy, Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, ministers in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) who would later be leaders in the PRC, brought out significant implications of common grace that touched on the truth of God’s *covenant*. In the spring of 1924, foreseeing the storm over common grace that was coming to the CRC Synod of 1924, Danhof and Hoeksema published the pamphlet *For the Sake of Justice and Truth*. The pamphlet briefly introduced the idea of the covenant, pointing out that the covenant is the life principle out of which the Christian lives. The believer in God’s covenant, they wrote, “is of the party of the living God. God’s child is God’s friend.” The authors noted that even prior to 1919 they had been developing that “controlling thought of the covenantal conception...in a series of articles, lectures,

and particularly in its most fundamental implications in Danhof's pamphlet *The Idea of the Covenant of Grace*.<sup>1</sup>

That development of the concept of the covenant continued in the *SB*. In 1927 Hoeksema started a series of articles in the *SB* on believers and their seed (written in the Dutch language). Here Hoeksema clearly set forth what he had before identified as the “peculiar treasure” of the PRC.

That correct emphasis on the doctrine of God's covenant is *the reason* for the *SB*'s promotion of the Christian school. The first issue of the *SB* included an article by Mr. G. VanBeek addressing an upcoming proposed amendment on the November ballot that would banish all nonpublic schools in Michigan. (That was the second time it was on Michigan's ballot, and it failed again.) VanBeek's defense of the existence of the Christian school was grounded on God's everlasting covenant of grace, and he specifically referenced Danhof's pamphlet on the covenant (1.1, pp. 14-16).

This concern for the Christian school continues in the pages of the *SB* to the present day. The articles' titles are enticing. *Christian Education* (H. Hoeksema, 3.23, p. 532); *Eigen School*, (G. Vos, 10.21, p. 491); *Our Own School Movement* (C. Hanko, 20.13, p. 292); *Off to School—the Covenant Way* (H. Veldman, 22.4, p. 90); *Training for Life's Calling* (J. Heys, thirteen articles starting at 25.2, p. 44); *Concern of the Reformation for Christian Education* (D. Engelsma, eight articles starting at 47.1, p. 20); *The IRS and Private Schools* (H.C. Hoeksema, 55.13, p. 293); *Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed, Covenant Education* (A. Lubbers, nine articles, starting at 75.4, p. 90); and hundreds more.

In its support of Christian schools, the *SB* stood in a strong tradition. Throughout the ages, the church stressed the importance of parents instructing their children in obedience to God's emphatic commands (Deut. 6, for example). Under the weight of that command, the Reformation pushed hard for Christian schools, not only so that all could read the Bible, but

also so that the whole man may be trained to serve God through a broad education. In the Netherlands beginning in the late 1800s, two notable Reformed theologians pressed the cause of Christian education, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. In their writings they laid a foundation for Christian education. However, that foundation always included the error of common grace. They viewed education as equipping Christians to have influence in the Netherlands, working in cooperation with unbelievers to develop the powers of the creation (the cultural mandate).

Early on, Hoeksema wrote eleven articles evaluating the principles of the Christian schools governed by common grace (*Christian School Movement: Why a Failure?* 8.4, p. 100ff.). In these he critiqued eight principles of the Christian School Union adopted in 1925. Hoeksema noted frequently that the principles were vague, often shaped by common grace. A very obvious influence of Kuyper's common grace is found in principle five, summarized by Hoeksema as follows: “The task of the school is to enable the pupil to realize himself as God's image bearer, to equip him for this calling; and to reconstitute a sin-perverted world by realizing the Kingdom of God” (8.10, p. 223). After critiquing this, Hoeksema gave his Reformed principle for education:

It is the objective of the Christian School to furnish the pupil with an education which in all its branches is rooted in the principle of the fear of God as the beginning of wisdom; and thus to co-labor, in its own proper domain, alongside of and in distinction from the home and the Church, to equip the pupil with that knowledge and wisdom which is necessary in order that he may be able to walk in the midst of the world worthy of the vocation wherewith God calls His people, and that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (8.20, p. 464).

Rejecting common grace as a founding principle, the *SB* laid the proper biblical foundation for Christian schools, namely, God's covenant with believers and their children. H. Hoeksema's ground-breaking work in the *SB* began in 1927 with the publication of his sermon on Deuteronomy 6:7 (*Christian Education*, 3.23, pp. 532-536)—a sermon he preached in 1916 when he was still a minister in the CRC. In the introduction, Hoeksema noted that “as Reformed Christians we will also insist

1 “For the Sake of Justice and Truth” found in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, Translated by Marvin Kamps; Ed. David J. Engelsma. p. 247. Also in this book is the translation of the pamphlet of Danhof, *The Idea of the Covenant of Grace*, pp. 1-58.

that our children must receive a religious education of a very marked type.” He said concerning believing parents who recognize that the aim of their children is the glory of God that “then you will aim your education at the perfect man of God, knowing the will of his God for every sphere of life and for every step he takes upon the path of life, and you will take care that in his life he is well equipped with a clear and concise knowledge of all the precepts of the Most High.”

Hoeksema defined education as “the impartation to the child of knowledge regarding his material and spiritual relation to the world.” He added, “The education of the child must give him an answer to the question: Who am I? Who am I in relation to the world in which I live? Who am I in relation to my God?”

Developing the text, Hoeksema preached that “we must teach these precepts and none other to our children. For the Lord established his covenant with us and our children in the line of generations. With us and our seed the God of our salvation raised His blessed covenant. We and our children are His covenant people. And, therefore, very logically, the man of God comes to this injunction: And thou shall teach them unto thy children.”

The third point of the sermon is the “Basis of the Instruction.” There Hoeksema reiterates that the command to instruct children “is based upon...the covenant relationship of the people of God.” He speaks of the demands of the covenant and that “from the same covenant obligation follows also their duty to educate their children, always, in the fear of the Lord, so that also they may know His precepts, understand their covenant relation, and learn to walk in the way of that covenant that God has established with them.”

A few years later, Hoeksema continued to explain the proper place of the school, printing his lecture entitled *The Place of Doctrine in the Christian School* (12.6, pp. 139-142). First of all, Hoeksema stated that the school is “to be considered as an extension of the home as an agency for the training of its child. We are all agreed that the duty of bringing up the children rests primarily and principally upon the shoulders of the parents.” Therefore, the school is “an institution properly controlled by the parents.” He noted also that “the purpose of school instruction is chiefly to instruct the children in those subjects the knowledge of which

is essential to prepare them for their place in society in general,” thus distinguishing this from instruction that is given by the church.

In the same article he reminded his readers that “the natural and the spiritual cannot and may never be separated,” and the Christian must serve the Lord in all spheres of life. He then concluded,

If this be true, it must also be evident that a Christian School is not merely a copy of the public school except for the addition of some biblical instruction, and religious exercises, but that it purposes to be Christian throughout, Christian in all its instruction and training of the child. The principle of the fear of the Lord must permeate all the instruction and discipline and life of the school that is really Christian.

Hoeksema rejected the notion that the school should teach Reformed doctrine as a separate subject. Yet, he insisted, the school “must apply the principles of Reformed doctrine to all its teaching.” He added, “in one word, the place of...Reformed doctrine in the Christian School is basic. It determines the religious character of all the instruction and life and discipline in the school.”

With that insistence that Reformed doctrine govern instruction in the school, it is not surprising that the *SB* pressed for *Protestant Reformed* schools. Hoeksema wrote,

There is a fundamental difference between the Christian Reformed and the Protestant Reformed Churches since 1924; and this fundamental difference, as officially expressed in the “Three Points,” profoundly affects the education in the schools. And this is the reason why we should have our own schools wherever possible, in order that our children may be “brought up in the aforesaid doctrine,” and that we may cause or help them to be brought up in that doctrine to the utmost of our power.

The promotion of Protestant Reformed schools in the *SB* was done in a way that was wise and balanced. First, in his evaluation of the schools of the CRC, Hoeksema points out “that these articles do not at all aim at the destruction of the Christian School, but at its upbuilding.” And again, “Do not imagine that I write these things to induce our people to send their children to the public school.” He added, “I would rather warn our people that they should not abandon the principle

of Christian instruction, nor remove their children from the Christian School, even as it is today” (8.6, p. 125). Also, recall his emphasis that a school be opened *whenever possible*—that is, where there is sufficient support for a Protestant Reformed school and sufficient number of students.

One article does not do justice to the 100 years of the *SB*’s support for Christian schools. So much more can be found in the hundreds of articles, including: many strong warnings against taking any money from the government; the desire for distinctively Protestant Reformed instruction; the importance of Protestant

Reformed teachers and the need for good, solid instruction of these teachers; the church’s responsibility in light of Church Order, Article 21; and so much more.

The history demonstrates that the *SB* laid the foundation for Protestant Reformed Christian schools. The language and perspectives in the articles became the language of PRC members and their schools. The solid foundation of God’s everlasting covenant of grace has, by God’s grace, sustained the school movement for generations. May we continue to build on this foundation.



## ONZE ZENDING! OUR MISSIONS!

### PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

former editor of the *Standard Bearer*, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, and member of Hudsonville PRC

With that title, the *Standard Bearer*’s writing about missions began. *Onze Zending* is Dutch for “Our Mission (Work)” and much of the *SB*’s writing in the early years was in the Holland language, as they referred to Dutch in those days.

Very soon, the writers of the *SB*, ministers mostly, were committed to giving instruction to the young denomination about *zending*—“sending” or “missions.”

Not immediately, but very soon. Not immediately, because there were only three writers (the three editors: H. Danhof, H. Hoeksema, and G. Ophoff) and they were busy penning polemical articles about common grace and the injustice of being deposed for their refusal to subscribe to common grace doctrine. Although the editorial staff soon increased to four and then five, almost as quickly it was reduced to three when the Danhofs departed, and then increased again in 1928 when W. Verhil and G. Vos—two newly ordained ministers—joined the staff. But only four or five writers, and all were busy as ministers and with teaching seminarians.

None had any special education or experience in

missions, but they sensed that writing about missions was an important part of a *doctrinal* magazine. Missions, after all, is an aspect of ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church.

Another reason that compelled them to write was criticism: “A church that denies the well-meant offer of the gospel is unable to do missions. And what little mission work the PRCA does is preaching to other Reformed Christians, particularly members of the CRC.” As to the former, a denial of the well-meant offer does not make missions impossible, but it does very carefully *clarify* its message. As to the latter, the young church knew its responsibility to go *out*, but she was especially eager to show the truth to their brothers in their former church. Responding to this criticism not only occupied their time, it also set the tone for much of the early writing about missions. But they wrote.

In January of 1930, Hoeksema wrote a long article explaining the principles of missions. Letters to the editor about his article prompted Hoeksema to respond in print, and then do two more things. First, in March of 1930 he published in the *SB* a speech on missions

given by Mrs. J. VanderWall to the ladies' society in his congregation. In "The True Meaning of Missions," this capable mother in Israel first ably handled the criticism that Reformed folks cannot do missions because of their doctrine of election, and then carefully explained the content of mission preaching, the motive of missions as love for the Lord, and the objects of missions as both "Jew" and "Gentile" (but that we ought to start "at home," presumably among our erring neighbors). Was her assertion that the calling to do missions belongs *officially* to the church but *practically* to *all* the members provocative? She must have seen, already then, the mentality that because only ordained pastors may *preach*, the common members need not concern themselves with evangelizing their neighbors and probably have little to do with missions at all. Hoeksema liked her speech.

Second, in September of the same year, Hoeksema asked W. Verhil to write a series of articles on missions. An interesting sidenote to Verhil's writing is that he and G. Vos had just been "called back" to Grand Rapids to complete their unfinished seminary training, and an educated guess is that Hoeksema assigned his student to write on missions as part of the training.<sup>1</sup> Verhil wrote seven substantial articles entitled *Onze Zending*. In 1931, the other student, G. Vos, both studying in seminary and pastoring Hudsonville PRC, wrote two shorter articles, "Our Missionary Actions."

Then the magazine went relatively quiet regarding missions. In 1932, only a short question and answer about the distinction between missions and witnessing may be found in the *SB*. A few years later a young minister wrote three articles in Dutch (English translation: "The Missionary Task of Our Churches") which ended in a suggestion to have a missionary *teacher*.

The quiet continued through the late 1930s into the early 1950s. Yes, there were a few missions articles (and important, too, like: "Will You be One of Them?"), but what little energy and manpower the churches had was channeled from *writing* about missions to *engaging* in it. Already in 1931, a Mission Committee was constituted;

in 1936 the first missionary was called; and three others accepted calls to full-time mission work in the 1940s. Yet, writing about missions did not stop, even if they were not submitting articles to the *SB* about missions. Mission-minded ministers wrote pamphlets, published books, gave lectures, and produced a radio program—all of which were aimed at witnessing outside of the PRC.

After the schism of 1953, mission writing in the *SB* gained momentum, especially when G. Lubbers was called as missionary in the USA, and later served in Jamaica. With regularity, the *SB* carried news items about Jamaica, mostly from the missionary. At the same time, men wrote more about missions generally because the churches were facing hard questions about missions from the real-life experience of a missionary in a foreign culture.

In addition to the missionaries who wrote—too many to name—the non-missionaries C. Hanko and R. Decker did a great deal of writing on missions from the 1960s through the 1980s and 1990s. Other contributors to mission writing included members of the mission committees, elders of calling churches, and wives of missionaries.

Since 1980, the *SB* has published five special issues on missions, evangelism, and witnessing. (It's high time for another!) And for the past thirty-five years, a rubric entitled "Go Ye Into All the World" has been devoted to mission subjects. For the most recent volume year, one article per month is devoted to that rubric, written by current and former missionaries, Revs. W. Bruinsma, J. Laning, and R. Smit.

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If one looks through the printed Index to the *SB* (the last *printed* Index does not include the past 18 years), he will find almost 8 pages of entries, almost as many as under "common grace" and slightly more than "covenant." The three most frequently addressed topics in the magazine (if the topical index is accurate) are, in order: Common grace, missions, and covenant. This says something about the *SB*'s desire to promote the church's call to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

The subjects are as wide-ranging as could be.

First, and high in importance, ministers established the principles of mission work. What H. Hoeksema wrote in his seminary lectures in the 1950s, shortly

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<sup>1</sup> The churches had so few ministers that after only two years of training, Verhil and Vos, in their mid-thirties already, had been ordained on the condition that after more ministers were ordained, they would return to Grand Rapids to finish their education.

after reading J.H. Bavinck's newly published book on missions<sup>2</sup> was essentially what had already been written in the *SB* for 20 years: Missions is the work of God in Jesus Christ, through the church and her officially ordained ministers, to gather God's elect out of the nations by the instrument of preaching. These principles were spelled out already by young ministers Verhil and Vos in the 1930s, repeated by C. Hanko in the 1960s, and further developed by R. Decker in the 1980s and 1990s. Very little was written to contradict or question these principles, with the possible exception of whether *all* mission work is performed *only* by preachers. One might believe so, since preaching is the tool God uses to gather His people and only ordained men may preach. This is the question Mrs. VanderWall raised already in 1930 in her speech to the ladies' society, which Hoeksema did not try to correct. The *SB*'s voice, including that of her earliest ministers, said that although official preaching is the heart and essence of missions, the labors of missions ought not be limited to preachers. Already in volume 6, G. Ophoff weighed in, calling for teams to be sent to mission fields.

The connection between missions and the doctrines of Calvinism held the attention of writers. How can a missionary preach to all men if he teaches sovereign election and limited atonement, denies the well-meant offer of the gospel, and teaches that the love of God is not for all men?

While principles, and the harmony between missions and Reformed doctrine, are one thing, expounding mission methods is another, and more difficult. Over the course of five years (from 1980-85), R. Decker explained mission methods. Having read many of the classic works on mission methodology, Decker wrote twenty-eight articles about how properly to conduct mission work, both domestically and internationally. Since then, our missionaries have written scores of articles on mission methods and the hard questions that missionaries face. Would that we had the ability to recognize all of them by name who put hours and days into research and writing for the *SB*! The Lord knows and will not forget.

Since the days of Jamaica, the *SB* has always carried

*news* about the happenings on mission fields both to promote missions and to help the members pray with understanding. Mission committees sent out pleas for financial help, expressed thanks for the members' support, and sometimes had to caution against helping wrongly. Missionaries took time out of their busy work to type long reports and newsletters, and the news from a far country was like cold water to our thirsty souls. We learned the joys and sorrows of the Lubbers and Bruinsmas in Jamaica; the denHartogs and Korterings in Singapore; of the Bekkerings, R. Miersmas and Moores in Ghana; the Spriensmas, Smits, Kleyns, and Holsteges in the Philippines.<sup>3</sup> From his pop-up camper that he towed around the country, Rev. Tom Miersma informed the churches of potential fields, from Washington state on the west coast to Pennsylvania on the east. Missions news has continuously been a part of our paper.

Always important for a Reformed church is the history of a matter, and the *SB* has not been silent on mission history. Treatment was given to the history of missions in the book of Acts, in the early church, the Middle Ages, and in Reformation times. Luther's views on missions were explained, as were Calvin's. Early missions in Europe, in the Americas, in Asia and Africa. What can we learn from history? That is, what can the churches learn from God's work through others who have gone before us? Most recently, former missionary Rev. W. Bruinsma has been writing a valuable history of PRC missions, which has never been done to the depth he goes. He began in 2016 with four articles headed "Small Beginnings: Mission Methods Established," then wrote of four other periods of our history.<sup>4</sup> God willing, he can continue up to the present. Rev. Bruinsma took the time to dig deeply into early Mission Committee minutes and other hard-to-access documents to paint, without covering over any warts, a fascinating portrait of PRCA missions. We learn much "from history's light."

The *SB* looked out at mission work conducted by

2 At the students' request, Hoeksema pressed himself to create a course on missions in the 1950s; there was no missions course before this.

3 I would have liked to but did not dig up the names of all those who assisted them in the fields.

4 The Depression Years: Mission Methods Developed (1932-1939); The War Years: Mission Work Flounders (1940-1946); Years of Trial: Missions Threatened (1947-1953); Years of Rebuilding: Missions Revived (1954-1961).

other denominations and learned from them. Writers were also polemical, and necessarily so. Mission *methods* changed—paradigm shifts were taking place—and needed to be examined. Preaching as the heart of mission *methodology* was questioned because mission *theology* was changing. The new mission theology in the broader church world was the social gospel in the 1950s, liberation theology in the 1960s and 1970s, and the new and current form of the social gospel in transformationalism—the doctrine that the goal of missions is not first of all gathering the elect and establishing churches but transforming society. In this work, the church might be a “sign” of God’s kingdom, but the real kingdom is the renewed *earthly* creation. If mission work aims at that, gospel preachers are not as important as politicians, social workers, and economists. Today, in this writer’s estimation, polemics in missions must address this error regularly and clearly.

This article on the *SB*’s history of writing about missions cannot do justice to all of those who have written—well over seventy different writers—and what they wrote, especially in the recent decades. But you may learn about them by using the *SB*’s search function at [sb.rfpa.org](http://sb.rfpa.org). Type “mission” and hit “enter,” and see 1,300 plus results. Enter “Smit” or “D. Kleyn” or

“D. Holstege” to find many—more recent—articles on missions. Key in “three self” to find articles by Decker, Kortering, or Smit describing the goal of a missionary to plant a church that is *self*-supporting, *self*-governing, and *self*-propagating. For that matter, search subjects like “church planting” for description of what others have said about that topic, and maybe whether it is a good term to use in Reformed mission work. The list of subjects is unending; you will find just about any mission subject you can think of. How to approach unbelievers, whether to have a special mission to national Jews, should missionaries always go “two by two,” being all things to all men, the Macedonian call, the relationship of covenant to missions....

Over the past 100 years, the *SB* has tried to do its part to instill mission thinking in the minds of the PRC membership, even embed it in her DNA, should the Lord will that. Whether missions *has* such a place among her readers depends on factors beyond what they read in this magazine. But to the extent that it does have that place, I am thankful for the part played by the *SB*. May the Lord continue to use the printed page for the promotion of the church being what she is: witness of Jesus Christ!



## OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD: THE RFPA AND ITS *STANDARD BEARER*

**MR. JEFFREY KALSBECK**

member of the RFPA and of Hope PRC in Walker, Michigan

The *Standard Bearer* is a unique magazine in many ways. This is true in format and content. This is also true in its relationship to its publisher, the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). The RFPA meets once a year to elect new Board members and make any decisions regarding the Association. However, the *SB* has its own board (editorial staff made up of the writers) and its own editorial committee (editors and managing editor). How do these bodies work together?

To understand, consider the history and origin of the RFPA and the *SB*. Both entities have a history that begins with a meeting of Herman Hoeksema and a few men in the parsonage of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

In 1922 and 1923, H. Hoeksema and Henry Danhof, both ministers in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), were in the midst of a battle on the printed page. The ministers were frequently writing and

publishing rebuttals to pamphlets and articles that were being written against them. Why? Because these two men maintained the doctrine of sovereign, particular grace, and denied that God has a common grace for all men.

As the controversy escalated, CRC magazines decided to cease publishing Hoeksema and Danhof's writings. One possible reason is the numerous public accusations that the two ministers were un-Reformed and spreading heresy. For example, CRC minister J.K. VanBaalen publicly called for them to repent of their denial of common grace.<sup>1</sup>

A number of men, convinced of the importance of open discussion on theological matters, suggested to Hoeksema and Danhof that a publishing organization be formed. At the first formal meeting of all these men in 1923, in the parsonage of Eastern Avenue CRC, the association's purpose was declared: "...the support of the brethren [Danhof and Hoeksema]...in the publishing and sending out, as well as also the bearing of expenses in connection with the publishing of brochures, and, if possible, of a paper" (26.1, p. 5). This "paper" began a year later, in October of 1924, and was named *The Standard Bearer*.

The experiences of these men affected their outlook and thus the relationship between the publisher and the new magazine. From the beginning, there was a strict separation between RFPA Board and editorial staff. All were agreed that the editors would be under the jurisdiction of no one. The Board could make suggestions and observations to the editorial staff, which they did regularly. However, what was written in the *SB* would not be controlled by its supporting organization and publisher, the RFPA. The magazine would be, in a sense, "free"—as well as "free" from ecclesiastical control. This is illustrated by the treatment of a letter to the RFPA Board in 1925. An individual had written regarding the magazine's content as well as the workings of the Board. He was advised to separate his concerns between the two spheres (Board and editorial staff) and to take matters to each separately.

Establishing this relationship proved a master stroke for the RFPA, as well as being profitable for

the witness and development of the Reformed faith in the *SB*. During controversies, when emotions tend to gain the mastery over many, the *SB* could not be instructed to take a side, nor could it be forced to shut out a certain viewpoint. This also allowed for public comment and writing through the years on issues that warranted free discussion. Hoeksema used the *SB* to develop, in writing, the doctrine of the unbreakable bond of marriage, and fielded many comments about it from readers. As the labor union membership question was worked out, discussion and debate regarding the Christian Labor Alliance continued in the *SB* for a number of years. Similarly, the *SB* was able to host open discussion about conditions in the covenant and the "hymn question."

Another positive consequence of the *SB* and RFPA's unique relationship was that such an arrangement required interdependence. This fostered obedience to the exhortation of Romans 12:16, "be of the same mind one toward another," which invariably entailed lowering oneself in mind and heart as the one goal of God's glory was pursued in the publication of God's truth. Such an environment, by the Lord's blessing, attracted quality men whose desire was simply to be of service in this work, and not for personal preeminence.

This was manifest in the editors, first of all, and also in those who helped in this endeavor. Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and, later, Homer C. Hoeksema, the editors for the first sixty-plus years, did not say much about their workload, but it was substantial. What today is divided into two positions (editor and managing editor) was the sole job of the editor-in-chief in those days. Besides the amount of writing they were called to do, it was also the editor's duty to solicit articles from the other writers, receive these submissions through the postal service, mark up each submission with the editor's pen, then deliver the compiled and marked up articles to a company for typesetting.<sup>2</sup>

It does not appear that H. Hoeksema had much reprieve during his forty years of editing the *SB*. At the beginning of one editorial in 1941, he writes,

2 Incidentally, the editor would not see the final version after this point until it appeared in his mailbox, as with all other readers. The typesetters did the proofreading, then delivered each issue to the printing company.

1 *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, ed. D. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2015), 108.

About three hours ago undersigned arrived home again from a visit to all our churches in the west.... Just called up the printer of the *Standard Bearer* to find out how much copy was still wanted for the issue of May 15. Seventeen typewritten sheets, was the answer! I confess my negligence in this case. For two issues I left sufficient copy before I left.... But I should have written more.... From now on we hope to do better again (17.16, p. 364).

Fourteen years later, in 1955, he printed a notice:

Although I expect to be on my vacation, the copy can be sent to my address as usual, provided it is strictly on time, i.e., on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month (31.17, p. 387).

Though subsequent editors received more help in this respect, the weighty responsibility was felt by them all, as expressed by Prof. David Engelsma: “I recognize it’s a privilege.... But it’s also a burden...It weighs on me that the magazine has to make a clear, wise witness twice a month...” (81.3, p. 58).

The RFPA Board committed itself to assisting wherever possible. Early on, the RFPA treasurer was a permanent position, rather than a Board member. In actuality he was a business manager, taking care not only of the finances, but picking up and dropping off each *SB* issue as it went from editor to typesetter, to printer, to post office.<sup>3</sup> He also collected membership and subscription payments that involved going door to door much of the time.<sup>4</sup> When one early “treasurer,” Ralph Schaafsma, died at the age of 55, he had served eleven years in the position, never taking any payment for his labors. Gerritt Pipe then took on the work, and he too would not hear of receiving any payment for it. These men of the RFPA, being convinced as to the worthiness of the cause, were willing to work for nothing rather than see the publication of the *SB* suffer.

The RFPA Board sought to help in other ways as well. On one occasion, editors H. Hoeksema and G.

Ophoff received from the RFPA a writer’s most prized possession in those days: new typewriters.

Just as the RFPA Board often offered suggestions to the editorial staff, the *SB* editor was very involved in suggesting changes or new ideas to the Board. From correspondence around the world, the editors would frequently apprise the RFPA Board of potential places to send sample copies of the *SB* and would suggest other marketing strategies, which was a help to the Board.

Surely most gratifying for the editors was to do the work knowing that each Board and staff shared the same goal and accomplished that goal with mutual love and respect one towards the other. *SB* editor Prof. Engelsma spoke for many when he wrote to acknowledge, “with greatest appreciation,” the work of business manager Don Doezema and typesetter Judi Doezema: “...we simply cooperated to make it the best magazine we could make it, both in content and in appearance” (81.3, p. 58).<sup>5</sup>

For their part, the editors consistently emphasized the *SB* as a joint work of both writers and publisher, with the purpose of publishing the truth of God as He has made it known in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Positive letters to the *SB* were often shared with the RFPA Board, which was encouragement to the men who took care of the magazine’s publishing, marketing, and finances out of a love for the Reformed faith. Though the RFPA expanded into book publishing in 1995, which endeavor now takes up the majority of its time, the well-being of the *SB* holds a special place within the hearts of Association and staff. The magazine remains the focal point of the RFPA.

May God continue to bless the work of the *Standard Bearer*, one hundred years later.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

3 Ralph Schaafsma would put a notice in the *SB* ahead of time: “Mr. R. Schaafsma will be in Byron Center, Kalamazoo, and Hudsonville, during the month of October in behalf of the *Standard Bearer*” (10.1, p. 16).

4 The Board later attempted to lighten the treasurer’s load by enlisting collection agents, as noted in the *SB*: “New *Standard Bearer* Agents are: Mr. J. Oomkes, West of Eastern Ave. from Wealthy to Hall; Mr. D. Rietema, South of Hall; Mr. Wierenga in Oak Lawn, Illinois. Membership or subscription fees can be paid to them or be collected by them” (17.15, p. 341).

5 Don performed the *SB* managing editor duties first with Homer C. Hoeksema, and later with editors D. Engelsma, R. Dykstra, K. Koole, and B. Gritters. During much of that time, he was also the RFPA’s business manager. Judi has been getting the magazine to its printable form since the 1980s.

## THE STANDARD BEARER

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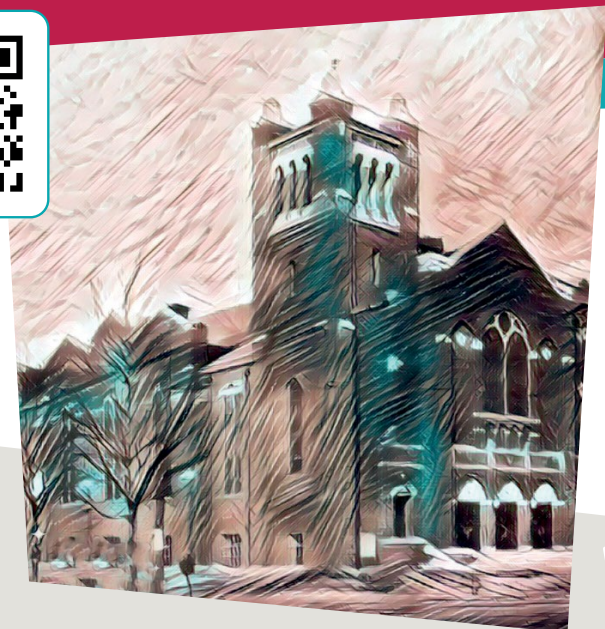
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#### SB FOR BINDING

The September 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 100. If you would like your own issues of volume 100 bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of November. For additional orders, call the RFPA at (616) 457-5970.