



A QUICK TRIP THROUGH HISTORY

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It happened in 1866, in New York and New Jersey. **THE BANNER** started to wave! The press that printed it did not “groan” as presses are wont to do when they are overworked. If they groaned at all, it was only because of some “heavy” materials contained in the new religious periodical. Sixteen pages, few subscribers, and a good printing job describe **THE BANNER OF TRUTH**, as it was first called. The articles were written and chosen by the ministers of the True Protestant Reformed Dutch Church, a little denomination that had broken away from the Reformed Church way back in 1822. Rev. J. Y. De Baun held the editor’s chair, and this man, twenty-one years later, became the first minister of the LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The men who started **THE BANNER OF TRUTH** were Dutch “Yankees,” and they wielded facile pens. In fact, the first several volumes read far more easily than some of the later volumes. “Dutchisms” appeared at a later

date, when the paper was written in Grand Rapids!

The TPRDC (see paragraph one) was a small denomination in a great, cosmopolitan metropolis. Neither the denomination nor the metropolis understood the other very well. The first feared the latter more than the latter feared the former. And the writers had reasons to fear their environment. They had seen liberalism in blatant forms both in and out of the church. Their references to their world were understandably critical. They editorialized with vehemence on free-thinking, easy-religion, and Arminianism.

One would hardly know, upon reading **THE BANNER OF TRUTH**, that the Civil War had been fought, a war that must have affected them greatly, a war that had ruptured the republic almost beyond repair. Political and social problems, if they were recognized, were not discussed in their relationship to Christianity.

THE BANNER OF TRUTH was of little help to those children of God who wanted to know how to live in

One would hardly know upon reading **THE BANNER OF TRUTH** of a century ago that the Civil War had just been fought. Photo shows President Abraham Lincoln with General G. B. McClellan and his staff.



their big, wide, wicked world, to influence it, to help it solve its grave problems, and to fight for righteousness within it.

Nevertheless, the writers were men of God, and they were concerned with the inner spiritual life of Christians, with their salvation, assurance, and sanctification. They wanted no part of doctrinal heresy and immoral living, and they said so with eloquence. And it must be said that their interest in witnessing and missions was vigorous.

early days in Grand Rapids

It happened in 1903, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. THE BANNER started to wave in Grand Rapids, Michigan! Some businessmen bought it and the Rev. Henry Beets, LaGrave church's third pastor, edited it. Psalm 60:4 was on their minds as they continued the paper's name, as it had been on the minds of the founders, "Thou hast given a banner to those that fear thee, to be displayed because of the truth."

The "church in the world" was the increasing emphasis during the next three decades. The writers started to talk about "liberty" and "Americanism," and they even held forth on some social problems. During the first World War, there was demonstrated an awareness of what was going on. Some Calvin professors were even accused of pro-German leanings, and feelings in the "American" world ran so high that it was even suggested that these men be lined up along a wall and shot! Rev. Beets rose to their defense and assured the public of our church's patriotism, and all the while he did this, he said that Americanization was a "must."

On the lighter side, evidence of the paper's awareness of its environment is clear when we read the advertisements (which were not included in the early volumes). Body-braces, trusses, "nuxatediron," and an auto called the "Cleveland Six" were advertised alongside articles on predestination. And we mustn't forget the cover-photo in 1925, of William Jennings Bryan, along with a commendatory article on the unsuccessful presidential candidate.

days of Beets and Kuiper

And then, in 1928, there came the long editorial tenure of Rev. H. J. Kuiper, lasting until 1956, when he was succeeded by the present editor, Rev. John Vander Ploeg. Rev. Kuiper was a courageous editor. It would be the understatement of the century to say that not everyone agreed with him. Readers invariably knew where he stood, even though some were disinclined to stand there with him! He was kind and gracious in private life, but his pen was often sharp and cut deeply. He wrote on all major issues facing the church, on movies and money, on compendium and communion, on hymnals and honor, on architecture and archaeology, on polity and praise. You name it,

he wrote on it. And he was interested in Calvinism in its wider aspects. I can well remember a long series on translation-digests of a work of the great Dutch statesman Colijn.

It has been said that Beets was the ecumenicist and Kuiper the distinctivist, which is another way of saying that Beets helped us become aware of our environment and Kuiper helped us preserve ourselves within that environment. Both men were far more skillful with the pen than most of their fellows. Both made a tremendous contribution to our life as a Christian Reformed Church, and history will remember both of them.

Strange as it may seem, our Christian Reformed Church has actually owned and run THE BANNER during only half of its century of existence. THE BANNER was purchased in 1914, and there were 5300 subscribers in 1920, a figure that rose to 30,000 in 1947. Today the list numbers 42,000.

The paper has had influence. It "campaignned" for a permanent president for Calvin College, instead of a rotating "rector," for the opening of a Christian High School in Grand Rapids, for better catechism textbooks, for vital family worship, and for a working relationship between the Christian home and Christian school.

controversies and issues

Doctrinal controversies raged within its pages. Back in 1925 the aftermath of the common grace question was discussed months on end. Editorials, book reports, special articles (solicited and unsolicited), and a multitude of letters from readers covered the subject from every conceivable aspect. And there were a host of other questions, such as "quantity or quality?" (of converts), infallibility, amusements, and now "the love of God" which came up for extended discussion.

Some readers wanted more of this, and others wanted none. Some canceled their subscriptions, and others subscribed, because of public, written debate. Some feared the image that THE BANNER was projecting, while others wanted THE BANNER to demonstrate thus "that we were still alive." Some insisted on "speaking the truth in love," while others were quite contented to just "speak the truth."

One more thing, THE BANNER, unlike most of us, gets better-looking with age. Some of the recent covers outrival even the *Ideals* magazine, which specializes in that sort of thing. Rev. Kuiper and Rev. Vander Ploeg, particularly, have done a great deal to make it so. And we must not forget Mr. Buiten and Mr. Meeuwssen, the artist Wayne De Jonge, and the dedicated office and industrial staff, who, if compliments are in order, must come in for their rightful share of them.

1866, 1903, 1914, 1928, 1956, and 1966—these are dates we remember today. THE BANNER is still waving. It still, thank God, displays, however falteringly, *The Truth of God!*