

**Ryan Schipper**  
<rym.schipper@gmail.com>

Jun 26, 2021,  
7:45 PM

to Russell

Dear Prof. Dykstra,

Attached is a letter to the editors of the *Standard Bearer*. I'm making an assumption that emailing you directly is an acceptable way of submitting it. Please let me know if another method is expected.

One note. I understand this letter exceeds the 600 word limit. Please notice two things in this regard. First, "in the way of" appears 30 times in the letter, amounting to 120 words taken up by that phrase alone. Second, the bulk of this letter is made up of the quotations and citations necessary to make my case. The actual substance of my concerns takes up a minority of the word count. There simply is no way to make my case and express my concerns within the 600 word limit. Nevertheless, I believe the case I make is sound, and I believe it would be edifying to the readership to correct any inaccuracies or misrepresentations contained in previous issues of the *Standard Bearer*.

Kindly,

Ryan Schipper

Dear Editors,

I wish to address a concern I have regarding the *Standard Bearer's* setting forth of the recent history of the PRCA, specifically with regard to Synod 2019.

Immediately after Synod 2019, Prof. Dykstra wrote regarding its work, "Of particular importance is the 2019 Synod's decision not to reject the phrase 'in the way of.'" (*Standard Bearer* 7/1/2019 "Highlight of Synod 2019")

Some months later, Rev. Koole defended the necessity of his editorials against antinomianism with an appeal to Synod 2019. "A significant amount of time had to be spent by [Synod 2019] dealing with protests and appeals that continued in various ways to challenge the legitimate use of that phrase ['in the way of]." (*Standard Bearer* 11/15/2019 "Faith as a doing?")

Most recently, Rev. Griess has written, "A proposal came to Synod 2019 to do away with the expression 'in the way of.'" (*Standard Bearer* 6/1/2021 "The instrumental cause of our salvation (5)")

My concern is that I do not believe that any of these three analyses of what took place at Synod 2019 are supported by the facts.

There were two protests at Synod 2019 which pertain to the phrase "in the way of." I have read them carefully. Neither of them calls for a rejection of "in the way of," neither of them challenges *legitimate* use of "in the way of," and neither of them proposes that we "do away with" "in the way of."

The protest of Mr. Koops took issue with the inclusion of a single word, "and," in the decision of Synod 2018. His protest is very brief, and I suspect was not the protest held in mind by the three writers in the *SB*, so I won't take the space to quote him. Pages 234-235 of the 2019 *Acts* can easily be pursued to reveal no call for rejection of "in the way of."

The more substantial protest, and I suspect the main target of the three authors, was that of Miss Doezema. Let us hear from her.

"Synod 2018 identified erroneous doctrine, but... this decision of synod leaves room for confusion with respect to what is truth and what is error and also leaves room for the error to be implicitly taught in our churches using ambiguous language that has been declared to be Reformed... I ask that [Synod]... replace all inconsistent and ambiguous language... with distinctive and clear language... that leaves no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding" (*Acts of Synod 2019* p. 201).

"I [SD] contend that the phrase 'in the way of obedience we experience covenant fellowship' itself is not distinctive language. Synod [2018] sets forth this phrase as the good and proper way to express the relationship between our experience of covenant fellowship in the

covenant and our life of obedience in the covenant. However, a whole consistory and classis has misunderstood it, so it evidently is not a clear expression of the truth. The problem throughout this controversy is not just that Rev. Overway and Hope's Consistory used other phrases instead of 'in the way of,' but the problem lies in their explanation of and use of 'in the way of'... Considering that there is much confusion and misunderstanding with respect to the meaning of the phrase 'in the way of obedience we experience covenant fellowship,'... I believe that it is important and would be helpful for synod to replace all such indistinctive language with distinctive language..." (p. 213-214)

"While 'because of' is clearly wrong and cannot be interpreted any other way than that obedience is the basis for the experience of covenant fellowship, 'in the way of,' on the other hand, is not clearly correct, but rather ambiguous. On the one hand, 'we enjoy covenant fellowship in the way of obedience' could mean that while we are walking in obedience, we are also enjoying covenant fellowship, which is true. On the other hand, it could be understood to mean that we must be living in obedience before covenant fellowship will or can be enjoyed, which is false... Therefore, 'in the way of obedience we experience covenant fellowship' is not always necessarily correct, but rather 'in the way of' needs to be further explained to mean 'inevitable fruit of' before the use of 'in the way of' can be clearly correct." (p. 215, emphasis SD)

As is plain from these quotes, Miss Doezema's request was a desire for clarity and a sharpening of the decision of Synod 2018 on account of the ongoing confusion regarding "in the way of." Never does she call for a rejection or a "doing away with" that phrase. What she does call for is doctrinal precision and a clarification of phrases that have a Reformed sound but whose ambiguity could be exploited, allowing the lie to creep back in. I wish I could quote more of the protest, but for want of space I urge you to also review pages 212, 216, and 219-220.

The legitimacy of Miss Doezema's desire for clarity regarding "in the way of" is supported by writings both before and after Synod 2019. In Mrs. Meyer's exchanges with Hope's consistory during the leadup to Synod 2018 we do well to take notice that "I [CM] have observed that the words 'in the way of' have come to mean different things to different people" (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 224). More recently, from a PR consistory, "We must be warned that ['in the way of'] cannot be used without explanation... its use does not automatically guarantee it to be orthodox." And, "In this controversy the phrase was twisted and used in support of false theology that made obedience a condition to covenant fellowship with God" (Crete PRC "*Explanation of the Doctrinal Controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches*" 4/15/2021 p. 23). These are evidences that throughout the controversy, both before and after Synod 2018, "in

the way of” has been not so much a soothing balm of doctrinal precision, but an ambiguous phrase loaded with controversial baggage.

Miss Doezema also wrote in to the *Standard Bearer* following Synod 2019, saying, “As I see it, the question before Synod 2019 was not ‘Is ‘in the way of’ Reformed, and can it be used clearly and distinctively to express the relationship between anything in Reformed theology?’ but rather was, ‘Does the specific phrase ‘we experience covenant fellowship with God in the way of obedience’ clearly and distinctively express that obedience is only the *fruit* of experiencing covenant fellowship by faith?’” (*Standard Bearer* 9/1/2019 “Help in understanding ‘in the way of”)

Mind you, these are the protestant’s own words about what her own protest was doing, about what her protest was asking Synod to judge. From her own words we learn that it was *not* the case that her protest was asking whether ‘in the way of’ is Reformed, as if she herself answered “No, it’s not Reformed, we should reject it” while Synod answered “Yes, it is Reformed, we should continue to use it.” Rather, the question was whether, in light of the false doctrine that had arisen in the churches which gave works an improper place and function - which false doctrine had been defended with appeals to “in the way of” - does “in the way of” in fact clearly and distinctively maintain the proper place and function of good works as fruit? That is, does “in the way of” adequately guard us against falling again into the same error? This is no call for rejection or doing away with “in the way of.” When a phrase used properly by orthodox men has been used improperly to defend false doctrine, it is well worth our time to reevaluate and clarify what constitutes a proper use of that phrase and whether continued use of that phrase is helpful. To redescribe a desire for clarity and distinctiveness as a call for a rejection of orthodoxy and a sliding into the antinomian ditch is a misrepresentation of the facts and an injustice to the protestants.

The *Standard Bearer* has used its powerful platform to craft the dominant narrative of the controversy, with its analysis of Synod 2019 being a significant piece of that narrative. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, the *Standard Bearer’s* framing of what happened at Synod 2019 is not supported by the facts. Insofar as this is the case, the narrative is misleading and misrepresentative. I ask that the *Standard Bearer* give an account for these misrepresentations and set the record straight.

Sincerely,  
Ryan Schipper

Jun 30,  
2021, 9:46  
AM

**Russell Dykstra**  
<dykstra@prca.org>

to Barry, Kenneth,  
me

Good morning, Ryan.

I write to inform you that I am no longer an editor of the SB. I forwarded your email with the letter to Prof. Gritters and Rev. Koole.

Cordially,

Prof. Dykstra

Wed, Jun 30,  
2021, 12:57 PM

**Barry Gritters**  
<gritters@prca.org>

to me, Kenneth

Dear Ryan,

The *Standard Bearer* will not be printing your letter. Letters to the editor must be 600 words or fewer, and should respond to a recent article. Your letter is neither (your letter being over 1400 words). Instead, as your email indicates, it is an attempt to correct what you perceive to be inaccuracies and misrepresentations over the last two years.

You have joined a group that condemns the Protestant Reformed Churches, the *Standard Bearer*, and the editors. Your letter is an attempt to have your anti-Protestant Reformed viewpoint published. This, the *Standard Bearer* is not willing to do.

The editors

Sat, Jul 3,  
2021, 9:39 PM

**Ryan Schipper**  
<[rym.schipper@gmail.com](mailto:rym.schipper@gmail.com)>

to Barry, Kenneth

Dear editors,

I thank you for your timely response. I would like to address a few points that you raise.

First, you claim that my letter is not a response to a recent article. I disagree with that. My decision to write the letter was occasioned by the article in the June 1, 2021 issue of the *SB* by Rev. Cory Griess in the I Believe rubric, entitled “The instrumental cause of our salvation (5).” Specifically, it was occasioned by and sought to address his claim that, “A proposal came to Synod 2019 to do away with the expression ‘in the way of.’” (pp. 402) You might rightly suggest that I could have addressed my letter to Rev. Griess specifically, and indeed I would be quite happy to have Rev. Griess respond to my concerns and either support or reevaluate his claim. However, as I demonstrate in my letter, Rev. Griess is not the only one to have made this kind of claim, and with this now being at least the third explicit statement of this kind in the *SB*, I thought it would be appropriate to address my concerns to the editors.

Second, regarding the length of the letter, I understand the magazine has a finite number of pages, and therefore when it comes to letters, brevity is a virtue. That being said, please understand that I do not make the claim lightly that the *SB*’s presentation of recent events is not supported by the facts, and therefore it is only with substantial documentation and evidence that I dare to arrive at or publicize that claim. Also, I feel it is worth noting that the *SB* has published letters in excess of 600 words even in the recent past. Letters from Rev. N. Langerak in the 11/15/2018 and 7/1/2019 issues and from Rev. A. Lanning in the 3/1/2019 and 6/1/2019 issues weighed in at 1900, 1720, 1266, and 2598 words, respectively. I presume these were published in accordance with the editorial policy that “More extensive exchanges on a significant topic of

broad interest may be included as guest contributions at the editors' discretion." There is no question that the recent history of the PRCA is of broad interest, and the specific matter of "in the way of" is unquestionably at the heart of much of the present debate. Having a right understanding of these matters is vital for the readership, and therefore I humbly submit that discussion on these matters and a clear setting forth of the facts are worthy of a place somewhere in those 24 packed pages.

Third, I do take polite exception to your assertion that my letter is "an attempt to have [my] anti-Protestant Reformed viewpoint published." This is false. I ask that you not give any place in your minds to this view of me or my letter. There is nothing "anti-Protestant Reformed" about the viewpoint expressed in my letter. I believe I can demonstrate this.

Seeing your description of my letter, I carefully reevaluated it in search of what portions may have given you this perception. The first chunk is simply setting the quotes from the *SB* next to the quotes from Miss Doezema (I am confidently assuming that it is her protest that the *SB* has been referring to). Nothing about this could be regarded as "anti-Protestant Reformed" since it is just the bare facts of the case - here's what the writers in the *SB* have claimed, and here are the facts on which they base their claims. Next are quotations from Mrs. Meyer going into 2018 and from a PR consistory in the aftermath of Synod 2018 demonstrating that throughout the controversy, "in the way of" has in fact been a significant source of confusion rather than a helpful clarification. The fact that I quote favorably from a PR consistory's current stance on the issue should decisively show that there is nothing "anti-PR" about the case I am making.

Then follows a brief analysis of Miss Doezema's overall question and goal in light of both her protest and letter to the *SB* following Synod 2019. I do not see how anything in this analysis could be seen as "anti-PR." Much of it is not so much analysis as stating things that everyone agrees on. "In the way of" has been used properly by orthodox men. Recently, it was used improperly in support of error, or false doctrine. In light of this, it is entirely legitimate that one might ask whether we should reexamine "in the way of" as to its proper and improper use, so as to ensure that we do not make similar errors in the future. For Miss Doezema to maintain this was not anti-PR at the time, and my demonstrating this to have been her position is not anti-PR now. And if you object to my ascribing to your writings an "injustice," please note that this too is not "anti" anything. It is objective. If my case holds, and I believe that it does, then Miss Doezema's words and position have been misrepresented, and that is objectively an injustice. There is nothing bitter, biting, or anti-PR about pointing that out.

Last of all you have my concluding remarks. I claim that the *SB* has created the dominant narrative of the controversy. I don't state this as a good or a bad thing, I just state it for the fact that it is. (One can argue that the public presentations in recent months have also made

significant contributions, but they are different from minister to minister and church to church, so I'm inclined to believe that the more consistent message of the *SB* more or less holds the rudder.) In light of the *SB* as a dominant force in the public mind, it readily follows that it is very important that the magazine portray things accurately. That is why I felt burdened to write. There is nothing anti-PR about a desire to correct what I see as inaccurate claims made in the *SB*. My letter is sincere. I impugn no motives, I call no names, I twist no words, I condemn no person or institution, PR or otherwise. I just deal with the facts.

If you would be willing to point out what parts of my letter contain an "anti-Protestant Reformed viewpoint," I would happily scrutinize my writing more carefully and proceed accordingly.

Last of all, - and I thank you for your patience with this lengthy response - if your discretion is such that my letter is indeed unpublishable, I would nevertheless appreciate it if Rev. Koole and/or Rev. Griess would do me the kindness of showing me where in the documents that came to Synod 2019 were there "protests and appeals that continued in various ways to challenge the legitimate use" of "in the way of" (Rev. Koole's claim) or where it was proposed "to do away with the expression 'in the way of.'" (Rev. Griess' claim). My careful reading in preparation for my letter has yet to find any such challenges or proposals. If I can be corrected it could significantly change my perspective on some important issues.

Kindly,

Ryan Schipper

Jul 22, 2021,  
6:20 PM

**Ryan Schipper**  
<[rym.schipper@gmail.com](mailto:rym.schipper@gmail.com)>

to Barry, Kenneth

Dear editors,

I write to follow up on my email from a couple of weeks ago. I have no doubt you are busy men, and no doubt my correspondence is somewhat less than a top priority. I just want to make sure this matter doesn't fall to the ground, as I think it is of some importance. Whenever you have the opportunity, I'd be grateful to receive a response to my email from July 3rd.

Kindly,

Ryan Schipper