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Magazine**

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Reformation
Issue**



*The
Reformation
of
1924*



Herman Hoeksema
(The Reformer of 1924)

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In This Issue ...

This is our annual Reformation issue of the *Standard Bearer*. By it we
join in the celebration of Christ's reformation of His blood-bought church in
the 16th century.

This great work of Christ, particularly in the Reformed branch of the
Protestant church, must be carried on, defended, and developed.

There is a great deal of loose talk today about "ongoing reformation,"
about the necessity of the churches "always reforming." Often, this is in-
tended to justify novel, grievous departures from the doctrines of the Refor-
mation.

We in the Protestant Reformed Churches take "ongoing reformation"
seriously.

The church history of 1924 was ongoing reformation.

The gospel of salvation by grace alone — sovereign, particular grace —
was defended against the subtle attack on it, in the *Reformed sphere*, by a
universal gospel-grace.

The Reformation-gospel (which is the gospel of the Bible) was devel-
oped. The particularity of sovereign grace of predestination, of the cross,
and of regeneration was applied to the preaching of the gospel and to the
covenant with believers and their children.

The salvation of sinners under the gospel does not depend upon his
acceptance of a well-meant, but powerless offer. The salvation of believers'
children does not depend upon their performance of a condition.

Salvation is of, by, and to the triune God and Father of Jesus Christ.
Alone!

In this issue, we members of the PRC celebrate the 16th century Refor-
mation in its continuance and development.

Let no one take this ill of us.

Our desire is that other Reformed and Presbyterian Christians, indeed,
other Protestants, share these grand truths and their comfort with us.

Even, should God will it, by this special issue.

—DJE

Jehovah's Goodness*

The Lord is good to all ... but all the wicked will he destroy.

Psalm 145:9a, 20b.

Emphatically, according to the Hebrew original, the poet, who is the inspired author of this psalm, puts it: "God is Jehovah."

The Lord is goodness essentially.

Apart from any relation to His creatures, conceived all by Himself, in Himself, for Himself, as the absolutely Self-existent, Self-sufficient, Independent One, the Lord is good. His essence is goodness; His eternally adorable Divine Being is only good. Could we enter into the amazing profundity and explore the fathomless depths of His infinite Being, the deepest depths of the incomprehensible divine essence would reveal nothing but goodness.

He is the Light and there is no darkness in Him. He is Truth, Righteousness, Holiness, Purity, Love, Grace, Mercy, and Eternal Life, and there is no lie, unrighteousness, defilement, corruption, and death in Him.

He is *Summum Bonum*, the Highest Good, not in a mere superlative sense, not in a sense that would compare Him with other goods or goodnesses, that might perhaps be conceived as existing next to Him

though in a far inferior degree; but in the sense that He is the Sole Good, that there is no good apart from Him or without Him. He is the ultimate and absolute criterion of all good. He is not good in the sense that He answers to a certain standard of goodness that might be applied to Him, but Himself is the only Standard of all that is called good.

He is good because He is God.

Very perfection in all His adorable virtues.

Good is Jehovah!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

The Lord is good!

And because the very Being of His adorable Godhead is goodness, the Divine Nature in all the glorious attributes thereof is purest perfection and immaculate goodness. Neither is there any reason of want in God why He should need an object unto which to reveal and upon which to lavish His goodness. For as the Triune God He lives from everlasting to everlasting the perfect life of infinite goodness in and through Himself. Never does there arise from the unfathomable depths of His perfect Essence the slightest thought that is not good, perfect, true. Never the faintest thrill of imperfection is there in the will of Jehovah. Never the most imperceptible discord is there in His divine feeling. Never is there the tiniest ripple of evil on the stream of life flowing from His divine heart.

No shadow of darkness ever bedims the light of life, perfect and infinite, of the Divine Family. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each eter-

nally subsisting in the unchangeable Essence of limitless goodness, thinking in the perfect mind, willing with the perfect will, are living in absolute Self-sufficiency an uninterrupted divine life of purest goodness, dwelling in a Light that is never in any wise bedimmed.

Yea, good is Jehovah!

Everlastingly, solely, unchangeably good!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Because the Lord is good, the absolute good in Himself, He is also good to all His creatures.

Good is Jehovah to all!

He is the overflowing Fount of all good.

All the good His creatures ever receive is solely from Him and is only good because He is good and because He assumes an attitude of goodness to them. He is full of richest benevolence, which He lavishes in profuse abundance upon all the wide creation. His goodness perfuses the silvery lustre throughout the starry heavens and arranges their marvelous harmony night upon night. His goodness decks the sun with that glorious attire of wondrous gold, day after day. His goodness adorns the lily of the field with purest beauty such as Solomon never possessed and clothes the royal cedars of Lebanon with strength and majesty. His goodness causes the royal eagle to renew its strength as it sweeps the firmament with powerful wing, and fills the mouth of the young raven crying to Him for good. His goodness remembers the roaring lion and the chirping spar-

* Reprinted meditation of Rev. Hoeksema from the October 1924 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1. This was the first piece printed in the *Standard Bearer*.

row on the housetop. His goodness clothes the meadows in velvety green and covers the fields with golden grain. His goodness made man a little lower than the angels, adds keenness to his mind and strength to his arm, and fills his heart with gladness.

Surely, all the works of His hand speak of His goodness.

Good is Jehovah to all!



Nor is this the last word that is to be said about the goodness of Jehovah.

It may be the last in the estimation of a natural religion that knows of no sin and speaks of no grace.

It might be the last word, had Paradise not been lost. There in the midst of that Edenic virgin beauty of creation, in that original state of unmarred perfection, where sin had not dropped her stain, and misery had not left her scar, and the groan of the sufferer was not heard — there God's goodness displayed itself simply as goodness, overflowing riches of benevolence, poured upon every creature according to the measure of its capacity.

The single light-beam of God's goodness had not resolved itself into the many-colored rays of His grace, tender mercy, and loving kindness in contrast with His holy wrath and faultless justice.

But sin entered. And in the wake of sin came death. And with death followed suffering in all its awful forms, agony of soul and body, pain, sorrow, grief, fear. And the curse of God was pronounced upon the creature and subjected it to vanity; the chilling breath of a good God, maintaining Himself in His goodness over against a sinful world, caused the whole creation to groan and travail together in pain. And even thus the creature, made subject to vanity, and man in his guilt bending under the cruel scourge of suffering and death, are testimonies that the Lord is good and that there is no evil in Him.

But more must be said.

Suffering creation, sin and guilt and misery and death and all the thick darkness from hell only became the occasion for God to manifest His goodness more abundantly. Darkness was employed by Him as a prism through which to resolve the pure white beam of His goodness into wonderful rays of manifold perfection. First of all there is, on occasion of sin and suffering, the beautiful and rich manifestation of God's wonderful mercy and loving-kindness. His tender mercies are over all His works. Radiating from the cross of God's beloved Son, this tender mercy beams its warm glory first of all upon His chosen people, whom He loved with love everlasting, with a love that is always first. Upon them He lavishes His tender mercy in the blood pouring from the heart of His only begotten, and in these streams of mercy He cleanses them from guilt, heals them from sin, redeems them from the power of death, comforts them forever for their misery, and makes them heirs of a glory unspeakable, of a life incomparably richer, fuller, deeper than ever First Paradise knew. They taste His lovingkindness and tender mercy, speak of it and sing of it, showing forth the praises of Him that called them from darkness into His marvelous light. But even as the awful darkness of sin and misery spread from the first Adam till it enshrouded an entire groaning creation in its horrors, so the glad light of redemption radiates from the Second Adam, falls first upon the elect, thence to spread again over the whole creation. Remembering His groaning creatures with bowels of mercy and compassion, the Lord stretches the rainbow of an everlasting covenant over all. His tender mercies are over all His works.

The creature is made subject to vanity. It is subject to the yoke of bondage. It is travelling in pain together until now.

But in hope!

The whole creation shall be liberated from the bondage of corrup-

tion and be made to partake of the glorious liberty of the children of God!

Bowels of mercy!

The Lord is good to all! His tender mercy is over all His works!



Good is Jehovah.

But all the wicked will He destroy.

Seemingly there is irreconcilable conflict here. The Lord is good, and yet He destroys. Many a sinful mind will not have it so. Many would dream of a goodness without righteousness, of a grace without justice, of a benevolence without holy wrath. And yet, upon closer investigation, this apparent conflict disappears, dissolves itself into most sublime harmony. He will destroy all the wicked because He is good. The destruction of the wicked, God's wrath upon them, is but another aspect of His perfect goodness.

The wicked are the vessels of wrath, fitted unto destruction. They are those that love iniquity and hate righteousness. God is not in all their thoughts. They say within their hearts, they express it in their words, they reveal it in their ways — that there is no God. They are God's enemies and children of their father the Devil. They dwell in darkness and love it. They crucify Christ and persecute His people. They make the measure of their iniquity full.

So are all the wicked.

But the Lord is good. And because He is good and there is no evil in Him, because He is a light and there is no darkness in Him, therefore His soul loves the righteous and loatheth the wicked, His face beams with tender mercy upon those who love Him but burns with fierce wrath upon them who love iniquity, He preserves the righteous but destroys all the wicked.

The Lord is good. Therefore there are in Him bowels of mercy and consuming fires of holy wrath!

Hallelujah! □

The Reformer of 1924: “Doctor of the Covenant”

Life

In the reformation of the church begun in 1924, the reformer was Herman Hoeksema. This is not a slighting of Henry Danhof and George Ophoff, the two ministers who were deposed with Hoeksema by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Danhof was influential in developing the doctrines that have come to distinguish the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), as his profound treatise of 1920 on the covenant, *“De Idee van het Genadeverbond”* (“The Idea of the Covenant of Grace”), clearly shows. But Danhof soon abandoned the churches in which the reformation would be worked out to go his independent way. Besides, Hoeksema was the more prominent of the two in the controversy in the early 1920s.

Ophoff was Hoeksema’s loyal colleague from the beginning. In the struggle in the early 1950s within the PRC to maintain the reformation, it was Ophoff who clearly saw the threat to the PRC in the covenant theology of Klaas Schilder and who insisted that this theology be rejected, whatever the cost. But originally it was Hoeksema, five years older than Ophoff, who decisively influenced the younger pastor. Even in the schism of 1953 by which the gospel of sovereign grace was preserved in the PRC, Hoeksema came to play the leading role. Ophoff was content always to work in the shadow of his towering contemporary.

Hoeksema was born near the city of Groningen in the Netherlands in 1886, the date of the birth also of Karl Barth. He was the child of a broken, poverty-stricken home. His father was an unbeliever, an adulterer, and a drunk who abandoned his wife and their four young children. Herman Hoeksema is evidence that God establishes His covenant with the children of but one believing parent (I Cor. 7:14). He is also evidence that God delights to make something out of nothing in His church, thus “to bring to nought things that are” (I Cor. 1:28). It is intriguing that this child of a failed marriage, who saw firsthand the misery of the deserted wife and mother, later opposed the Reformed tradition by teaching that marriage is an unbreakable bond, so that even the deserted, “innocent” party is forbidden to remarry.

A godly mother had powerful influence upon her son for his own salvation and for the good of the church of Christ.

Having emigrated to the United States in 1904, Hoeksema sought the ministry in the CRC. He was trained at Calvin College (then, Calvin Preparatory School) and Calvin Seminary. In 1915, at the age of 29, he was ordained into the ministry in the CRC. When the conflict involved in the reformation reached its climax in 1924, Hoeksema was no brash novice, but a mature 38 (Luther was

34 in 1517).

Although he never engaged in graduate study or obtained an advanced degree, indeed this was impossible for him in the press of his work, he was a brilliant, well-read, and highly disciplined preacher, theologian, and author.

Hoeksema was a man of many gifts. He was physically strong and athletic, a good ice-skater and a swimmer who loved to disappear over the horizon on Lake Michigan and remain there for hours. An artist, he wrote poetry, hymns, and moving devotional pieces. His meditations in the magazine of the reformation, the *Standard Bearer*, are the motions of the heart that knows the great and good God. They demand to be published in book form. He was a painter whose oils are lovely. As an adult, he learned the organ sufficiently to accompany his singing of the beloved Dutch psalms.

More importantly, he was a faithful, loving husband and a solid family man.

Preacher/Pastor

Friend and foe alike recognized Rev. Hoeksema as a truly great preacher. His enemies tried to denigrate the reformation of 1924 as merely a matter of people mesmerized by an orator. There was stirring oratory in a deep voice from a commanding presence. There were also penetrating exegesis, excellent homiletics, and solid doctrine. There

was also the mysterious unction of the Holy Spirit that alone makes the great preacher.

The power and worth of his preaching are evident in the published volumes of collected sermons, e.g., *When I Survey ...*, sermons on the suffering of Christ.

Hoeksema developed his theology in connection with, through, and for the sake of preaching.

Never would he surrender his pulpit, not even when the synod of the PRC offered him a full-time professorship, so that he could devote more time to study and writing. As far as he himself was concerned, he was not Prof. Hoeksema, but Rev. Hoeksema. All of his lifelong training of men for the ministry in the PR Seminary aimed solely at the production of good preachers for the churches. He had no interest in theological scholarship for its own sake. This emphasis on preaching stemmed from his conviction that the preaching of the gospel is the Word of God. He took seriously the Reformed confession that preaching is the chief means of faith, grace, and salvation. When an ordained man preaches the Word of truth, Christ Himself speaks with His living voice to His church.

In the earlier days of the reformation, before the demands of preaching, writing, teaching, and missions took their toll on his time and energies, he was an active, effective pastor in his congregation of some 500 families.

He was a tireless worker, who poured himself out for his congregation, the churches, and the truth. Gertrude Hoeksema tells of the 20-hour days and the sleepless nights in her fine biography, *Therefore Have I Spoken*. The ingratitude of many of his congregation and especially of his former students must have cut him to the quick in the cruel days of 1953, although he never said a word about it in the years of my own seminary training under him, 1960-1963, a mere seven years later.

Theologian

If you ask me what, in our time, our people need above all, in the first place, my answer is: Doctrine! If you ask me what they need in the second place, I say: Doctrine! If you ask me what they need in the third place, I say: Doctrine!

This was Hoeksema's published conviction already in 1921 when he was still in the CRC.

The necessary doctrine was the Reformed faith as set forth in the Reformed confessions. Central was the sovereignty of the grace of God in the salvation of elect sinners. Hoeksema drew out more clearly than had been done before the implication that grace is particular. Grace both as favor toward men and as actual power working deliverance is intended for and given to the elect alone. Hoeksema, like Paul in Ephesians 1 and like Christ in John 10, saw salvation in Christ as founded upon God's eternal predestination. G. C. Berkouwer has remarked that no one has developed theology consistently with predestination as has Herman Hoeksema.

Hoeksema's main contribution, however, has been the development of the distinctively Reformed doctrine of the covenant. He explained it as a living relationship of fellowship between God and the church in Christ. Rooted in God's own triune life, it is the goal of the work of salvation, not merely a means to final bliss. Hoeksema viewed the covenant in the light of the gospel of grace, teaching that God establishes the covenant with Christ and the elect in Him and that the covenant promise is unconditional, not dependent for its realization upon man or his work.

In the turbulent time leading up to the schism of 1953, Hoeksema told the as yet united churches that "the most peculiar treasure of the PRC (is) their peculiar view of the covenant." Confidently (and accurately), he stated that "he that has been captivated by this beautiful Re-

formed truth must have nothing of anything that smacks like Heynsian theology, nor will he ever retrogress into a traditional conditional theology."

As other theologians were the "angelic doctor," or the "doctor of grace," Hoeksema was the "doctor of the covenant."

Within the framework of the confessions, Hoeksema claimed liberty to differ from the Reformed tradition. He corrected the tradition in such doctrines as the image of God in man; the covenant with Adam in Paradise; and marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Theologians express their theology in writing. Hoeksema published, among other works, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *The Triple Knowledge* (a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism), *Believers and Their Seed*, and *Behold, He Cometh!* (commentary on Revelation). In addition, he wrote many pamphlets and brochures. A veritable treasure-trove of editorials, meditations, and articles fills the first 41 volumes of the *Standard Bearer*. Much of this remains untranslated in the Dutch language. It is now time for a PR man, working through this mass of material, as well as many unpublished sermons, to make the theology of Herman Hoeksema the subject of a doctoral dissertation. This would benefit the PRC and the rest of the catholic church.

Churchman

On principle, Herman Hoeksema was not a professional theologian, but an ardent churchman. He loved the church. He loved her above all in the PRC, but he loved Christ's church. He worked in and for the church. He founded, guided, suffered for, and devoted himself to a denomination of churches. As a churchman — a *Reformed* churchman — he insisted on, and submitted to, the Church Order of Dordt, not only as regards the government of the local church by elders but also as regards the govern-

ment of the churches by the major assemblies. No independent, he! The result has been a distinctive, workable, beneficent church polity in the PRC, a fine balance of the autonomy of the local congregation and the real authority of the major assemblies.

As he had opportunity, Hoeksema manifested wider interest than only the PRC. His effort at reform in the early 1920s had the welfare of the CRC in mind. The CRC rejected its reformer. But where would the CRC be today, had it hearkened to Herman Hoeksema? In the 1940s, Hoeksema enthusiastically promoted a conference with the Reformed Church in the U. S. In the late 1930s and again in the late 1940s, Hoeksema extended the hand of fellowship to Schilder, when other Reformed churches in the United States were at pains to distance themselves from the Dutch theologian and even to ostracize him. In the early 1950s, when some of his colleagues opposed the idea, Hoeksema urged acceptance of the invitation from the

Reformed Ecumenical Synod to send observers to Edinburgh, saying that "we ought to rub shoulders with other Reformed men."

Reformer

Against this background of preacher, theologian, and churchman must the reformer of 1924 be seen.

Christ did not use him to reform a church ravaged by theological modernism, as was the case with Machen, although the consequences of the error of the common grace that Hoeksema fought would be sheer modernism.

Hoeksema purified the church of the destructive heresy of common grace. He did so in two main respects. He condemned the teaching that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to all who hear, *offering* them salvation with the wish that all will be saved. This is the introduction of the Arminian doctrine of preaching into the Reformed churches. Second, he repudiated the teaching that there is a work of grace

in the unregenerated, unbelieving world that produces good culture, so that the church may cooperate with the world and allow herself to be influenced by it. Against the first error, Hoeksema asserted that the grace of God in the gospel is particular. Against the second, he posited the biblical truth of the antithesis.

As a reformer, he stood. He was a man of courage.

As a reformer, he suffered. He was hated, cursed, deposed, isolated, betrayed, and, thus, killed. He paid the price.

As a reformer, he is being vindicated, not by men but by God in history. His warnings and prophecies are fulfilled. It becomes more and more difficult to oppose, or even ignore, the truths that he proclaimed.

As a reformer, he ought to be honored for the truth's sake.

This, we gladly do. For, with many others, we have loved our reformer.

For the truth's sake. □

— DJE

Prof. Herman Hanko

To Win the Battle But Lose the War — Common Grace and the Janssen Controversy

The controversy over the error of common grace, which marks the beginning of the history of our Protestant Reformed Churches, did not begin in 1924 when Revs. Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof were ex-

pelled from the Christian Reformed Church for refusing to express agreement with this erroneous doctrine. Although common grace had been taught for some time in the history of the Dutch Reformed Churches, it became an issue in connection with the controversy which swirled around Prof. Ralph Janssen, professor of Old Testament studies in Calvin Theological Seminary.

Prof. Janssen was appointed to the faculty of Calvin Seminary in 1914 after he completed his studies and earned his degrees from various universities in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Although he was a very gifted teacher, and although he had a great influence on his students, suspicions arose among other members of the faculty concerning his teachings. His colleagues

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asked the Theological School Committee for an investigation, and after much maneuvering, his case was presented to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1920. That Synod exonerated him, but the suspicions continued. A study committee, of which Revs. Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof were members, was appointed to study his teachings and report to the Theological School Committee. Although the committee was divided in its report, the majority advised that Dr. Janssen's teachings were contrary to Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. This report was submitted to the Synod of 1922, and Dr. Janssen was found guilty and deposed from his office of theological professor.

It was this controversy which brought to the attention of the churches the doctrine of common grace. Dr. Janssen himself was responsible for this. In all his writings in defense of his position he appealed to common grace and insisted that his views would stand or fall on the one question of whether common grace was Reformed.

It is an interesting sidelight of history that neither the Theological School Committee, nor the study committee, nor the Synod of 1922, although they were all fully aware of Janssen's appeal to common grace in support of his position, entered into this aspect of the case. It was not so much as mentioned in all their material.

The reason for this was undoubtedly that the Theological School Committee and the study committee were divided on that question. Revs. Hoeksema and Danhof opposed common grace, while most if not all the other members of the committee held to the doctrine. All seemed to agree that to enter into the question of common grace would so badly divide the TSC and the study committee that no condemnation of Janssen would then be possible.

Rev. Hoeksema later expressed regret over this failure and said that it was a serious mistake on the part

of the committee and Synod to ignore the question of common grace. In fact, so he wrote, because common grace was ignored, the Janssen controversy was really never settled, even though the Synod of 1922 condemned him.

Dr. Janssen was condemned for teaching higher critical views of Scripture. He, in the judgment of the Synod of 1922, denied the divine inspiration of Scripture, denied the miracles, and did serious injustice to important aspects of Scripture's truth. All this was, by his own insistence, on the basis of common grace. When the Synod of 1922 condemned these views, but refused to enter into the question of common grace, it left the latter issue hanging. It was that issue which, immediately after the Janssen controversy, arose again in the form of objections to Rev. Hoeksema's denial of common grace; and the Synod of 1924, in adopting the three points of common grace, opened the door for Hoeksema's condemnation.

Rev. Hoeksema, after he was set outside the Christian Reformed Church, and when reflecting on the entire Janssen controversy, spoke prophetically when he wrote that the failure to condemn common grace would result in the views of Janssen ultimately prevailing. His prophecy proved correct, for every view which Janssen taught concerning Scripture has now been accepted in the Christian Reformed Church. And, strikingly, often times this has happened with a specific appeal to the doctrine of common grace.

Because of the importance of this issue, we must inquire more carefully into what precisely Dr. Janssen taught and how he connected his teaching with common grace.

Dr. Janssen insisted on an organic view of inspiration as over against a mechanical view. While this was certainly proper (we too believe in the doctrine of organic inspiration and repudiate mechanical inspiration), he meant by organic inspiration a kind of inspiration which allowed room for a human element.

And this human element in inspiration became the launching pad for all his erroneous views.

Basically, Dr. Janssen firmly believed that much of what the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets believed and taught was borrowed from heathen sources. Abraham lived in Ur in the middle of heathens. Moses was brought up in the palace of Pharaoh. The nation of Israel and the prophets were constantly surrounded by heathen people and influenced by them. The result was that much of Israel's beliefs was received from Babylon, Egypt, and other pagan sources. The creation account came from Babylon, although it may have been purged of some mythological elements by inspiration; the law and the Psalms show Babylonian influences; the name "Jehovah" may have come from heathen sources; Israel's belief in God was not a pure monotheism, but was mixed with pagan polytheistic elements. The stories of Samson were not historical, but were patterned after the heroes in the pagan world, for Israel needed its hero-myths just as the heathen did. The patriarchs' views of the resurrection from the dead and the immortality of the soul were imperfect and incomplete because they were taken from the heathen who did not understand these things perfectly. And David's desire to build a temple was nothing but an effort to imitate the temples of the heathen, all of whom worshiped in them.

Janssen also denied the supernatural character of the miracles. Here his emphasis was on scientific research. Science gave the clue to the explanation of miracles, which were to be explained in a natural way. The walls of Jericho fell because of a severe earthquake; the manna was not miraculously sent in the sense that God directly brought it, but it was rather the food found on bushes which grew in the wilderness; the water from the rock was there all the time in the rock, and Moses only happened to hit a thin piece of rock with his staff which

released the water; the sun and the moon did not stand still at Joshua's command, but reappeared after a very dark storm or an eclipse.

Because Scripture was not completely inspired by God, and because of a human element in Scripture, one had to approach Scripture empirically, i.e., with the approach of science, to discover which parts of Scripture were actually of divine origin. Thus parts of Scripture were not the Word of God at all. Ecclesiastes contained the ponderings of a very pessimistic philosopher; the Song of Solomon was nothing but an oriental love song; Daniel was not written by the prophet whose name the book bears; and the Pentateuch was composed by many different authors, some of whom were nothing but editors.

It is evident that Janssen robbed Scripture of its divine character in most of its parts.

But all these views were connected to common grace. In fact, Janssen used the doctrine of common grace as his sole support, and he charged his accusers with denying what to him was at the heart of the Reformed faith.

How did he do this?

The doctrine of common grace which Janssen embraced was that taught by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. One must not conclude from all this that Dr. Kuyper would have agreed with Janssen in his views of Scripture. He would have protested them vigorously, because Kuyper held to a very strict view of Scripture. Nevertheless, imbedded in Kuyper's views of common grace were surely the conclusions to which Janssen carried them.

Kuyper believed that the common grace of God so operated in all men that sin was restrained by an internal working of the Holy Spirit, so that the heathen were able to do good works. Specifically, they were able to know God, retain knowledge of good and evil, do the good in a measure, and accomplish much in the way of scientific advancement.

Taking hold of these views of

Kuyper, Janssen taught that general revelation (God's manifestation of Himself in creation), a product of common grace, gave to the heathen some knowledge of God which Israel borrowed in the development of its religion. Thus, although the elements of religion found in Israel's belief in God were taken from heathen sources, they nevertheless had their origin in God because God, by His common grace, bestowed upon the heathen these crucial elements of the truth.

Janssen's denial of the miracles was also connected to common grace. Science, so Janssen taught, was the product of common grace because the heathen, full of this strange grace, could understand God through general revelation. Hence, the believer had to accept the products of science as God's work and receive it into his own faith. As applied to the miracles, this meant that, to do justice to science (the fruit of God's common grace), one had to explain the miracles in scientific terms. Creation had to be explained in such a way that it did no violence to science, which discovered that the earth was very old. Science has shown that the amount of matter and energy in the creation is constant. Thus, God, having once created, could not and would not create any more matter than He created at the beginning. And so the manna was already in the creation, for God could not create something not formed at the beginning. The water in the rock had been present from creation, and could not have been created by God at the time of Israel's wandering, for this would make a mockery of science. And such miracles as the passage through the Red Sea, the fall of the walls of Jericho, and the standing still of the sun, could not contradict the discoveries of science, lest God's work of common grace be spurned.

And so, common grace became the doctrinal root of a vicious and unprincipled attack on Scripture which left God's holy Word in tatters.

Janssen was rightly condemned for his teachings on Scripture; and the Christian Reformed Church, due primarily to the work of Herman Hoeksema, gained a victory in a significant battle.

But the issue of common grace was not settled and was, in fact, ignored. The result was not only that common grace continued to be taught in the church, but that three faithful ministers were ousted from the denomination for denying it. Only two short years after Janssen was condemned, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted the very views of common grace which Janssen used as a basis for his denial of Scripture.

Herman Hoeksema's prophecy was fulfilled. Because common grace was not repudiated and was, in fact, officially adopted and godly men deposed and set outside the denomination, in but a few decades Janssen's views of Scripture with all their horrible consequences were openly taught in the church and have now received official sanction within the denomination.

The battle was won, but the war was lost!

There is a lesson from history here. Let those who are troubled by the apostasy in the Christian Reformed Church learn this lesson of history. Common grace lies at the root of this apostasy. To reform the church requires that the evil be plucked out, root and all. □

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The Preaching of the Gospel: Promise and Command

From the very beginning of their history and continuing to the present, the Protestant Reformed Churches have been accused of teaching and defending "hyper-Calvinism." Because the Protestant Reformed Churches deny that God is gracious to all who hear the preaching of the gospel, that God sincerely desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel, and that God freely offers salvation to all who hear the preaching of the gospel, the Protestant Reformed are dismissed by many as "hyper-Calvinists." It is charged that the Protestant Reformed preach only to the elect, regenerated sinner, that the Protestant Reformed do not believe in missions, and that the Protestant Reformed refuse to call everyone to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. My esteemed colleague is precisely correct when he insists, "This is total, and usually inexcusable, misrepresentation."¹ To put it bluntly, the Protestant Reformed Churches are *not guilty* as charged. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach and practice missions vigorously both in North America and in foreign lands. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach and vigorously defend the truth that God calls all men everywhere to repent of their sins and to believe in the Lord Jesus.²

What the Protestant Reformed Churches deny, and that too most emphatically, is that the preaching of the gospel is an offer in the

Arminian sense, i.e., an offer to all which depends on the free will of the hearers. Further, what the Protestant Reformed deny is that God is gracious to all who hear the gospel preaching and that God desires the salvation of all who hear the preaching of the gospel.

The synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 adopted three points of doctrine by which she expressed belief in the error of common grace. The first point as adopted by the CRC synod of 1924 reads:

Relative to the first point which concerns the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect, synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the Confession that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scriptural passages quoted and from the Canons of Dordrecht, II, 5 and III/IV, 8 and 9, which deal with the general offer of the Gospel, while it also appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our Reformed writers from the past favored this view.³

The latter part of this first point (sometimes called "the little point of the first point"), "This is evident from the Scriptural passages quoted and from the Canons of Dordrecht, II, 5 and III/IV, 8 and 9, which deal with the general offer of the Gospel," is the CRC's official teaching of a well-meant offer of the gospel.

To this teaching the PRC object on biblical and confessional grounds. We shall have to limit ourselves to a discussion of the confessional references and biblical texts cited by the 1924 synod.

Canons II, 5 reads:

Moreover the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.

This article teaches that the promise of the gospel must be preached promiscuously to all nations and men without distinction. It teaches that the gospel goes where God in His good pleasure sends it. The content of the promise of the gospel, according to this article, is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

¹ David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), p. 21.

² Anyone who is sincerely interested in what the Protestant Reformed teach and what they deny relative to the points under discussion ought to read Engelsma's book *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* and the doctrinal part of Herman Hoeksema's *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*.

³ Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America* (Grand Rapids: The Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1947), p. 317.

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Note well that the article presents the promise of the gospel as strictly particular, for it is to them that believe in Christ, that is, the elect. The gospel is not presented as a general offer which can be rejected or accepted at will, but as a command! The article certainly does not teach that the preaching of the gospel is grace of God to all who hear it.

Canons III/IV, 8 states:

As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in his Word, what is pleasing to him, namely, that those who are called should come to him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.⁴

This article teaches that the calling of the gospel is unfeigned. This calling is to repent and believe. God is serious when He sends this calling to any man. No man has the right before God to remain in his sin and persevere in unbelief. God reveals in the gospel what is pleasing to him, viz., that the ones called should come to Him. God seriously promises eternal life and rest, not to all who hear the gospel, but to as many as believe and come to Him. The promise of the gospel, therefore, is strictly particular. Certainly the article does not teach that the preaching of the gospel is grace to all the hearers.

Canons II/IV, 9 states:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the word, refuse to come, and be converted: the fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the word by perplexing cares, and the

pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. — This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower, Matthew 13.

It should be noted that the article speaks of Christ being "offered" in the gospel. The word translated "offered" is the Latin verb, *offero*, which has as its first and primary meaning, "to present."⁵ With this no Reformed person has a problem. Christ is presented in the preaching of the gospel to all who hear that preaching. The fault and guilt of the rejection of the gospel by the reprobate is not God's, nor Christ's, nor the gospel's, but wholly the sinner's. This article does not even come close to suggesting that the presentation or offering of Christ in the gospel is grace to all who hear.

The CRC synod of 1924 cited three passages of Scripture in support of its contention concerning the "well-meant offer" of the gospel. The first, Romans 2:4, reads, "Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The text does not say that it is the *intention* of God to lead to repentance, but that God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering actually *leads* to repentance. The apostle is addressing the "O man" of verses 1 and 3, and "man" here cannot be understood as an individual, for then the text would be saying of the same man that God's goodness leads him to repentance, while that very man does not know this, despises that goodness, and gathers to himself treasures of wrath. This is impossible. If God's goodness leads a man to repentance, that man does not despise that goodness. And, if a man despises the goodness of God, surely that goodness of God does not lead him to repentance. We must, therefore, understand "man" as a class, collectively. It is true that the goodness of God leads man, that is, elect man, to repentance. It is also true that man despises the goodness of God and gathers for himself trea-

sures of wrath, not knowing that the goodness of God leads man to repentance. This is true of the ungodly, reprobate man.

The synod also cited Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11. These texts read, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" (18:23). "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

These texts do not teach that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to the reprobate wicked. There is no offer of grace and salvation in these texts. In both passages there is a direct statement by the God of Israel that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live. In 33:11 this statement stands in the form of an oath, "As I live, saith the Lord God," and therefore is no offer, but a most emphatic divine assertion. Note too that both passages are addressed to the "house of Israel," the typical manifestation of God's church. God, because He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, comes to His church through the prophet and calls them to turn from their evil ways and live. By the power of that Word of God the elect do indeed turn from their evil ways and live. What a rich, abiding comfort there is in these passages!

No, God is not gracious to the reprobate in the preaching of the Word. God does not come with a

⁴ The phrase translated "that those who are called should come to him" is incorrectly translated as "should comply with the invitation" in some English editions of the Canons. The Latin original is, "*ut vocati ad se veniant.*" (Cf. Philip Schaff's *Creds of Christendom*, vol. III, pp. 565-566.)

⁵ Cf. *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary*, by D.P. Simpson.

well-meant offer in the preaching of the Word. God's promise is always particular. But, most emphatically, God does "command all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). To every single one of His laboring and

heavy-laden sheep Jesus comes with the command, "Come unto me, I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And when those sheep hear the voice of Jesus they come to Him and find rest! (John 10:27, 28). Those who

are not of Jesus' sheep also hear the voice of Jesus, but they believe not, because they are not of His sheep (John 10:25-26). □

Rev. Russell Dykstra

1924 and the Antithesis — A Reaffirmation

You may not know exactly what the antithesis is, but that is not because it is new. The antithesis is as old as the human race. In the dawn of time God placed in the middle of the garden the two well-known trees — the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God set before Adam the daily obligation to serve God antithetically by eating of the fruit of the tree of life — and enjoying covenant life with God; and, by rejecting the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is the life of the antithesis in a nutshell — saying 'Yes' to God and to all that He requires, and saying 'No' to what God forbids, and to all that opposes God.

The antithetical requirements became more pronounced when Satan came to tempt Eve with a lie that contradicted God's command. Clearly Adam and Eve had the responsibility to uphold God's law and to reject Satan's slander. But they failed, turning against God, and joining with God's enemies. This failure of man was *not* a failure of God's plan, nor an unexpected turn of events to God. Rather it was sovereignly determined by God to serve His purpose, namely, the glory of His Name. For God knew that His

holy majesty and glory would appear in all its radiant beauty if it were revealed against the black background of sin, death, and hell. The lines of the antithesis, between light and darkness, would be unmistakable.

By his disobedience, man brought upon himself the horrible darkness of total depravity, God's curse, and death. Yet this too was according to God's eternal purpose to establish His covenant of friendship with a people chosen and gathered out of a fallen and sinful race. Thus from Adam and Eve would come forth two seeds, as God announced in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." God Himself promised to establish the antithesis between the two seeds ("I will put enmity between..."), and that by making the elect seed of the woman to be *His* covenant friends.

God's plan was now ready to be unfolded throughout history. His people, though from the same stock of Adam as the ungodly, and living in this world, would be called to live antithetically. They must do this, not by attempting to flee out of this world; rather, as they live in and among the ungodly seed of the serpent, the friends of God are to live for God, and stand against sin and the ungodly.

Thus the people of God lived antithetically. Abraham lived in Canaan, but as a pilgrim and stranger. Israel lived surrounded by the nations, but were enemies of the heathen, separated from them, a holy nation of priests consecrated unto God. The believer's antithetical confession is heard in Psalm 139:21, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee?"

The antithetical calling is reinforced by the Holy Spirit in II Corinthians 6, "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

Historically, the church understood this calling and continued to insist upon it, though not without periods of inconsistency. The early New Testament church rejected the flight from the world as advocated by the Manicheans. But she gradually slipped into both world conformity on the one hand, and world flight on the other, in the dark days before the Reformation.

God used men like Luther and Calvin to set the church back on the proper, antithetic path. On the one hand, they rejected both the monastic life of Rome and the Anabaptist world-flight. On the other hand,

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while rebuking sin in all its forms, the Reformers maintained the total depravity of fallen man. Believers were called to *spiritual* separation from the ungodly, from their entertainment, from their corrupt living.

The Reformed churches established this teaching in the creeds by maintaining the total depravity of man, the sovereignty of God's grace, and the believer's calling to live a new and holy life, separate from sin.

Yet, in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, the antithesis was significantly compromised by the theory of "common grace" — the idea that God is gracious to all men, elect and reprobate alike. This particularly affected the believer's attitude toward the ungodly because common grace often included the thought that the unbeliever could do good. The question then arises, why must the believer be opposed to the unbeliever, why cannot they be friends? After all, *God* is gracious to the reprobate, why cannot the believer be the same? And if the reprobate can do much good, the Christian should feel at ease to enjoy the "good" that the wicked produce, and even join activities to accomplish common (good) goals.

Although these ideas were proposed and believed by many, it was not until 1924 that a church officially adopted the doctrine of common grace. In that year the Christian Reformed Church not only formulated and adopted the "Three Points of Common Grace," but also deposed three ministers and their consistories for refusing to sign the same. That action was the immediate cause for the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

In many ways, the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924 must be considered a reformation of the church. That is emphatically true in the area of the antithesis. Early on in the controversy, the founders of the PRC recognized the destructive affect of common grace on the doctrine of the antithesis. The first issue of the *Standard Bearer* contained an article by Rev.

H. Hoeksema entitled, "The Antithesis in Paradise." In this and succeeding issues Rev. Hoeksema explained the historical development of the antithesis through Adam, the fall, and the promise of Genesis 3:15. In issues three and four, Rev. B. J. Danhof, in a discussion of the progress of God's revelation, declared and proved that God revealed Himself antithetically. Rev. G.M. Ophoff likewise understood and set forth the importance of the antithesis over against common grace.

It is striking that from the beginning these men explained the antithesis in light of God's eternal covenant of friendship with man — the covenant being the most significant doctrine developed within the PRC. They also continued to reaffirm the truth of the antithesis over against common grace. In a masterful article entitled "Antithesis, Synthesis, and Dualism," Rev. Hoeksema explained his opposition to common grace, and then added:

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 those to whom the Lord is gracious? Certainly, the outcry of the poet must be eliminated from Scripture: "Should I not hate them, Lord, 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.... 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!

He remained equally opposed to world-flight. In the same article he wrote, "But this is not the only way in which the principle of the antithesis is destroyed. It is denied just as well by all those movements that would separate themselves from the world in the sense that they would go out of the world."¹

But, sad to say, the theory of common grace continued to bear its fruit in the mother church of the PRC. The first noticeable problem had to do with the entertainment, or the "amusement problem." In response to various overtures, the CRC Synod of 1927 appointed a committee to report the next year on movies, dancing, and card playing. Rev. Hoeksema was pointed in his criticisms, not only because part of the report was based on common grace, but also because he believed the report gave legalistic rules that failed to set forth the antithetical life required of the believer. In 1928, Rev. Hoeksema predicted that "presently you may see consistories investigating whether or no a play or movie is good or bad, in order to determine whether or not anyone becomes subject to the discipline of the church by attending it." And he added that "within a short time we will see the day that the whole matter of the theatre ... is dropped, or their frequenting is sanctioned by some Synod."² Thirty-eight years later it happened, and at least part of the reason why a believer could

¹ *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 4, pages 356, 357.

² "Dr. Martin Luther on the Stage," *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 4, page 198.

view movies was that "sin is being restrained by common grace."³

Eleven years later the CRC approved of dancing on the same basis as movies had been. The point of this is not simply to criticize the CRC. Rather it is to show that the denial of the antithesis, by adopting common grace, has produced these disastrous, un-Reformed fruits.

The list goes on. In other areas, the "good" of unbelievers can be used by the church to interpret the Bible. Sociologists can be cited to allow for homosexual tendencies, despite the condemnation of the Bible. They can also be used to deny the headship of the man in the home and church. The conclusions of ungodly scientists on the origin of the earth can be used to interpret Genesis 1 and make room for evolution. The destruction of the antithesis by common grace bore bitter fruits.

Again, the purpose is not simply to be critical, nor is it to say, "We told you so" to the mother church, a wicked response indeed.

Rather the point is that the formation of the PRC in 1924 was a *needed reforming* of the church of Christ in this area, among others. The truth of the antithesis was reaffirmed in 1924, and developed in the years after. But most importantly, it could be, and is yet *preached* in the PRC! The antithesis preached means that the people of God are called to a life of obedience, loving and serving God, over against the sins of every age. The entertainment of the world, the friendship with the world, dancing, movies, worldly music, are condemned in the preaching and writing. Participation in them still results in personal admonitions from the pastor and elders. The members of the PRC do not claim to be "better" than other Christians. But the rejection of common grace by the PRC means that sins can still be exposed, rebuked, and disciplined in her midst. The doctrine of the antithesis being inseparably interwoven with the glorious doctrine of the covenant, the result is that the preaching con-

tinues to call all believers to live antithetically as covenant friends of the holy God. Almost seventy years ago Rev. Hoeksema wrote:

Hence, we must maintain the antithetic view of life and the world. God establishes His covenant with us antithetically. We cannot serve Him without rejecting and fighting mammon. In the world and not of the world, living in all the domains of life, but from the principle of light, condemning the darkness, such is the purpose of God with His people and our calling, till the victory is won!⁴

That is the privilege of the PRC. May God keep her faithful. □

³ Acts of CRC Synod, 1966, quoted by H. C. Hoeksema, "Prediction Fulfilled," *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 43, page 173.

⁴ "Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism," *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 4, page 357.

Rev. Barrett Gritters

Reformation of Church Government

The minister is a heretic. Or schismatic. Or walking in disobedience to one of the other commandments. What shall be done? Shall the next meeting of classis proceed to his suspension, and then deposition? Shall the synod exercise this discipline? May the classis and synod exercise this authority? ... If the synod advises the minister's consistory to discipline the minister, but the consistory ignores that advice, may

the synod proceed to depose the whole consistory? These questions bring out the issues of church government involved in the separation of 1924.

The reformation of 1924 was a return to the historical and biblical roots in the church's government. When gatherings of classis of the mother church of the PRC deposed ministers and consistories, they were guilty of hierarchy — taking to themselves authority and power which belong to the local congregation alone. For anyone today to think that this is not an important

aspect of Christ's church, let him only observe the current hierarchy of some Reformed synods, as well as the (understandable) over-reaction to this abuse of power.

The PRC hold to the autonomy (self-rule) of each local congregation. While the PRC, faithful to the Reformed tradition, vehemently oppose *independentism* (witness our strong denominational ties and our stand regarding the *real* authority of the broader assemblies) we just as strongly oppose *hierarchy* — both the misuse of the authority which the broader assemblies rightly possess,

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and the taking to themselves of authority which belongs only to the local congregation.

The error of the churches early in this century was that of hierarchy.

The error to avoid in reaction to this sin is that of independentism.

What was that early error of hierarchy? When the teaching of common grace was made official denominational dogma by the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924, the ministers of the churches were called by the Synod to conform their teaching to that dogma. When the fathers of our denomination refused, Classis Grand Rapids East, in November, 1924, began the process of discipline of the Rev. Herman Hoeksema, suspending him from his office of minister of the gospel, and declared the consistory of Eastern Avenue CRC outside of the federation of churches. On January 24, 1925, Classis Grand Rapids West deposed the ministers and consistories of Hope CRC (the Rev. George M. Ophoff), and Kalamazoo I (the Rev. Henry Danhof).¹

The stand of the PRC is that no classis and no synod has the right from Jesus Christ to exercise the keys of the kingdom. Only the local congregation and consistory may exercise discipline.²

The wrongful taking of power by broader assemblies in 1924 was only a continuation of a long history of departure from the right way of synodical behavior. As in all reformation, there is a long process of deformation and misbehavior that must finally be corrected.

The history of the church in the Netherlands is our history. As early as 1816 the decrees of King William I gave the synod of the Reformed churches there the power to discipline officebearers.³ In 1834, Rev. H. DeCock, of Ulrum, was suspended by the classical board of Middelstum, and then deposed by the Provincial Board at Groningen. Thirty-two years later, five ministers, forty-two elders, and thirty-three deacons in the Dutch Reformed

Church in Amsterdam were deposed by the 1886 synod. In the CRC in this country, Classis Muskegon deposed the consistory of Muskegon CRC in connection with the Bultema heresy in 1918. Dr. Geelkerken (who denied the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis) was deposed by the Synod of Assen in the Netherlands in 1926. Because this practice continued in the Netherlands, Rev. Klaas Schilder was deposed by these same churches in 1944.

Neither "surprising" nor "justified" should be the words that describe the discipline of the PRC's spiritual fathers in 1924 and 1925. The actions were violations of Reformed church polity, not without opposition in the churches.

All along, God's people in the churches cried out at the injustice of broader assemblies exercising discipline. Committed to the truth of the autonomy of the local congregations, these voices called the church back to the historic Dutch Reformed practice which allowed no "broader assemblies" but only consistories to exercise discipline.

Be clear on the issues here. In 1924 there was disagreement on the question of the rights of classis. But already then the disagreement was not over the essential issue. For, although one party opposed a classis deposing a *consistory*, they defended the position that a classis may depose a *minister* or an *elder*. We maintain the issue to be this: may a classis (or synod) exercise the keys of the kingdom at all?

In defense of classis and synod exercising discipline, appeal was always made to Articles 36 and 79 of the Church Order. The decision of Classis Grand Rapids West in 1925 read: "Classis Grand Rapids West deposes the aforesaid Consistory by virtue of its jurisdiction over the consistory as expressed in Art. 36 of our Church Order — 'The Classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the particular synod has over the classis and the general synod over the particular.'" The

logic is clear: since the classis has *jurisdiction* over the consistory, classis must be able to *discipline* and *depose* consistory members. In addition, because Article 79 requires the *sentence* of a neighboring consistory and the *judgment* of classis for deposition of a minister, the conclusion is reached that these other bodies *discipline* a minister.

The logic is clear. It is also mistaken.

Article 36 of the Church Order gives to the classis jurisdiction (authority) over the consistory, the

¹ For this history, see *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, by Herman Hoeksema (Grand Rapids, 1936, second edition 1947).

² The question may be raised here, but not answered because it is beyond the scope of this article, whether these ministers were bound by Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt to consider settled and binding the synodical decisions of 1924, and therefore not agitate against them. On the one hand, dogmas were declared, and the ministers called to conform their teaching to them. On the other hand, Synod of 1924 also decided to "urge the leaders of our people, both ministers and professors to make further study of the doctrine of common grace; that they give themselves carefully (sic) of the problems that present themselves in connection with this matter, in sermons, lectures, and publications." Even if the judgment is made that the public opposition to these synodical decrees was unjustified and sinful, our contention here is that the classis had no right to exercise the power of discipline to depose ministers and consistories.

³ This is a long, complicated history that is worth pursuing. For a beginning, and a good bibliography, see Richard DeRidder's "A Survey of the Sources of Reformed Church Polity and the Form of Government of the Christian Reformed Church in America," Calvin Theological Seminary Syllabus, 1983, pages 83ff. The development of church government in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands cannot be understood apart from the church's relationship to the civil government, just as Presbyterian distinctives must be understood in the light of the civil government in England and Scotland.

same jurisdiction as the synod has over the classis. What often fails notice is that the article does not give classis and synod the same *kind* of authority that the consistory has over the congregation — the authority to exercise the keys of heaven's kingdom. The classis has authority, but not to discipline the officebearers in the member churches.

That also becomes plain from Article 79. Unquestionably, the consistory may not act *alone* in discipline. The beauty of Reformed church government is the safety of the multitude of counselors and the mutual supervision of the churches. (We grieve that the independent churches do not really have this.)⁴ Without the concurrence of the neighboring consistory, no consistory member may be suspended or expelled, and without the judgment of the classis, no minister may finally be deposed. Nevertheless, the consistory suspends and the consistory deposes, not the classis or synod.

Defense of synod's authority to exercise discipline, in spite of the fact that Article 79 does not give this authority, on the reasoning that the Church Order does not address itself to all the possible situations that might arise, is weak. The authority to depose an officebearer is no small, nor rare, matter. Besides, the Church Order *does* speak of the involvement of Classis and Synod in discipline, and *limits* their power to the approval of a consistory's decision to depose. Nor is it possible to claim that the deposition of ministers was a matter Reformed churches considered to be a detail, a matter too infrequently occurring, to address; and that, had they addressed the issue, they would have written into the Church Order permission to depose. The churches did face the question early in their history, resulting already in 1581 in the Church Order change requiring the concurring judgment of a neighboring classis when an officebearer was deposed.⁵ *Deliberately*, the early Dutch Reformed synods did not cod-

ify for themselves the right to exercise discipline.

This interpretation of Reformed church polity has staunch defenders in Reformed church history.

Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676), one of the young Dutch delegates to the Synod of Dordt, staunch defender of Reformed Calvinism and champion of Reformed church government, supported the right of the synod to excommunicate a consistory, but meant by excommunication not their formal discipline and deposition, but the setting of them outside of the fellowship of the churches.

Since then, the general Reformed stand has disallowed the right of discipline to the broader assemblies. Shortly after the hierarchical actions in 1924 and 1925, a Rev. G. Hoeksema (not to be confused with the Rev. Herman Hoeksema) wrote a pamphlet defending the right of a classis to depose a minister and consistory. In it, he does our cause service by admitting that "Formerly it was considered fundamentally unreformed to depose a consistory, through classical or synodical action." Referring to the deposition of the heretic Dr. Geelkerken, Rev. G. Hoeksema said, "The synod of Assen has done what the authorities in the Netherlands had, since the time of the Doleantie, condemned as hierarchy."⁶

Although Abraham Kuyper's son, Prof. H.H. Kuyper, defended synod's right to discipline, Abraham Kuyper himself believed it wrong. So did the recognized church order authorities H. Bouwman and F.L. Rutgers. In a published, personal letter to a Rev. Van Lonkhuyzen, who also opposed synod's right to discipline, Dr. H. Bouwman wrote: "Your question whether I have ever in my lectures said that a classis can depose a consistory, surprises me somewhat. I do not remember ever having taught this and I would say that this is impossible. The Classis can help the consistory in the position of an elder. The Classis can also, when a consistory is completely in error or acts contrary to the

right of the Church and her confessions, help the congregation in the election of another consistory, but the Classis may not act without the congregation.... The churches in general must not do what belongs to the consistory. According to Reformed Church Right, if the whole consistory is corrupt and there is no normal way to rectify it, the power of the church reverts back to the congregation, and the denomination can and must then offer help so that another consistory is chosen in the place of the unfaithful one."⁷

The best known English language authority on Reformed church order, VanDellen and Monsma's *Church Order Commentary*, takes the strong view that, to be true to Reformed principles, no synod and no classis may ever exercise discipline over officebearers.⁸

Standing with us in this are also the American and Canadian Reformed Churches (Liberated, or *vrijgemaakt*) and the Free Reformed

⁴ As they are constituted now, the brothers and sisters in the newly forming congregations that have separated from an apostate mother church are less Reformed with regard to church government than the congregationalists, if congregationalists can be considered Reformed at all with regard to church government. Adherents to the Cambridge Platform of 1689 (which was considered radically *un-Reformed* by the Presbyterians of that day) would stand aghast at their independency. For the Cambridge Platform, see *The Reformation of the Church: A Collection of Reformed and Puritan documents on Church Issues*, selected with introductory notes by Iain H. Murray, Banner of Truth, 1965, reprinted 1987.

⁵ See VanDellen and Monsma's *Church Order Commentary*, pages 327-329.

⁶ Find reference to his brochure, "Can a Classis Depose a Consistory," chapter 1, translated into English in part by Rev. G.M. Ophoff, in a long series of articles in the *Standard Bearer*, beginning in volume 4, page 179.

⁷ Quoted in the minority committee report to the CRC Synod of 1926 regarding the question at issue.

⁸ See pages 327-329.

Churches of Australia (also “liberated”). Their W. Meijer, in his *Young People’s History of the Church*, repeatedly teaches the children of his churches the danger of hierarchy of synods who take to themselves the power to depose ministers.⁹

Presbyterian students of Reformed church government recognize this as the Reformed view, which they see to be the significant difference between Presbyterian and Reformed church government. Edmund P. Clowney puts his finger directly on the difference when he says, “Some aspects of Reformed order, as distinct from Presbyterian polity, reflect the primacy given to the local church and its consistory. Ministers of the gospel are members of the local church and are *subject to the discipline of the consistory*” (emphasis mine, BLG).¹⁰ The Presbyterian brother recognizes this to be Reformed, in distinction from Presbyterian, where ministers are subject to *the discipline of the presbytery*. He is correct in his analysis of what is properly Reformed.

Related is the question whether the local congregation is the church or whether the broader assembly is the church. Note the PRC’s repeated reminder that we are Protestant Reformed Churches and not Protes-

tant Reformed Church. If the gatherings of the local congregations have the right to discipline, they also have the right to baptize, administer the Lord’s Supper, and preach. We believe the Lord gave these rights to the local congregation alone. Our Presbyterian brothers would disagree. Presbyterian church polity has the credentials and membership of a minister in the classis, with ordination by the classis (presbytery). Thus, rather than discipline by the congregation, discipline is exercised by the classis (presbytery), which is also considered the church.

As the *Church Order* gives authority to discipline to the local consistory alone, so does the Scripture. To no one else is this authority given.

Acts 15, the basis for all appeals to the authority of broader assemblies, indeed gives authority to broader assemblies. We thank the Presbyterian brothers for reminding us of that and emphasizing that. But Acts 15 does not give authority to the assembly of churches to discipline.

I Corinthians 5 gives the authority to discipline to the local congregation at Corinth. In a worship service of the church (“when ye are

come together”) the local congregation exercises discipline over her members.

The Reformed Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons has it straight. In Jesus’ instruction to the apostles as to how discipline must be exercised over any member of the congregation, the “church” that must be told is the body of elders in the local congregation.

In reformation, the churches must never over-react. Needing attention was the un-Reformed practice of hierarchy. But we must not reject all the authority of, and blessings from, the broader assemblies.

May God save us from abusive, hierarchical synods and classes. May God also save us from neglecting to show the unity of the body of Jesus Christ. □

⁹ Publication Organization of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (not to be confused with the Free Reformed Churches in America) Launceston, 1973. See Volume 3, pp. 16, 63, 93-95, 108ff., and 118.

¹⁰ “Distinctive Emphases in Presbyterian Church Polity” in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the OPC*, C.G. Dennison and R.C. Gamble, editors, Committee For the Historian of the OPC, 1986.

Rev. Charles Terpstra

“The Development of the Covenant of Grace: A Rich, Consistent Reformed View”

Rev. Terpstra is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

But I ask, what is the heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches? Is there any part of the truth which they have emphasized and further developed in distinction from other Reformed Churches?

...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 particular conception?

It stands closely connected with their denial of common grace, and with 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 First-begotten 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.¹

So wrote Herman Hoeksema in 1950 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, revealing what he believed to be the distinctive contribution of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed faith, as well as their distinctive stand in the Reformed church-world. And he would have known, not only because he had served as a pastor in these churches for all of those twenty-five years and preached this truth, but also because he was personally responsible for the development of the covenant of grace in these churches as her leading theologian. The heart of this development was the application of the Reformed doctrine of God's sovereign, particular grace to the doctrine of the covenant. The result was a doctrine of the covenant which was profoundly rich in and thoroughly consistent with all the doctrines of the Reformed faith.

The reasons for this development

The development of this distinctive view of the covenant of grace in the PRC did not take place in a theological or ecclesiastical vacuum. There were specific, contemporary factors which contributed directly to this development, factors which made this development a true continuation of the Reformation of the church and her doctrines.

In the first place, there was the prevailing view of the covenant in the Reformed church-world. The Re-

formed faith had always been covenantal over against the dispensational, Baptist views of the radical right of the Reformation. But the view of the covenant which held sway in the Reformed churches was not thoroughly biblical nor consistent with the whole of Reformed doctrine. Basing their view on contracts between men and treaties between kings and subjects, Reformed theologians defined God's covenant of grace with His people in terms of a mutual agreement, in which God and man as co-parties agreed to certain terms and conditions (cf. even J. Calvin himself on Gen. 17:2, 4, 7). The establishment and realization of the covenant, then, depended on God meeting the demands of His conditions, but equally on man fulfilling his conditions. They were careful to teach that these conditions were fulfilled on behalf of elect sinners by the work of Christ, and in them by the work of the Spirit in the heart, and therefore by God's grace alone. Yet, the ideas of mutual agreement and conditions were seen as essential to the covenant. With this Hoeksema and others in the PRC took issue.

In the second place, and more specifically, there was an errant view of the covenant in the PRC's mother church which contributed to this development. In connection especially with the Reformed doctrine concerning God's covenant with the children of believers, Prof. William Heyns, a professor of theology in the Christian Reformed Church, taught that this covenant of grace is essentially a promise which God offers to all the children of believing parents on condition that they repent and believe. God offers to all these children that He will be their God if they turn to Him and believe on Him.² Hoeksema saw in this view not only the same errors of agreement and conditionality, but also the added error of the well-meant offer of salvation which he had condemned as part of the first point of common grace in the controversy of 1924 within the CRC.

In the third place, the development of a distinctive view of the covenant of grace was prompted by a specific controversy in the PRC over the nature of the covenant. This took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and was related to developments in the Netherlands. Dr. Klaas Schilder, a prominent minister and professor in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), was deposed from these churches and formed the "Liberated" Churches because he objected to the GKN's position that infants of believers are to be baptized on the basis of their "presupposed regeneration" (the view of Dr. Abraham Kuyper). Schilder stressed that God's promises to these children are *promises*, not *suppositions*. But he went on to teach that these promises of God are also conditional, dependent for their fulfillment on the faith of the child.³ Hoeksema initially had sympathized with Schilder and his struggles, but when Schilder took this position, Hoeksema was deeply disappointed and strongly opposed it, calling it "pure Heynsianism." The truly sad thing, however, was that Schilder's view of the covenant found ready acceptance among many ministers in the PRC. Without seeing the plain contradictions to the faith they professed, they openly embraced and publicly taught a conditional covenant with its general promise. The outcome was a split in the PRC in the early 1950s over the doctrine of the covenant. As sad as this controversy was, it was nec-

¹ "Protestant Reformed," *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 26, March 15, 1950, p.269. Also quoted in *A Watered Garden*, by Gertrude Hoeksema, Reformed Free Publishing Assn., 1992, p.163.

² Cf. H. Hoeksema's treatment of Heyns' view in chapters 1, 2 of *Believers and Their Seed*, RFPA, 1971, pp. 9-33.

³ Cf. the pamphlet "The Main Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant," which is a speech given by Dr.K.Schilder in 1944 (translated by T. vanLaar, 1992, and available from Inheritance Publications).

essary for the development of the doctrine of God's covenant of grace with His people along truly biblical and Reformed lines.

The main lines of this development

The development of this view was along the following main lines. First of all, the very *essence* of the covenant was re-defined. Instead of the traditional idea of the covenant as an agreement or as a promise, Hoeksema found the essence of the covenant to be that of a *relationship*, the bond of friendship and fellowship between God and His people in Christ. This is how he described it:

The idea of the covenant is neither that of a pact or agreement, nor that of the promise, nor that of a way of salvation; but it is the eternal and living fellowship of friendship between God and His people in Christ, according to which He is their Sovereign-friend, and they are His friend-servants.

By friendship we mean a bond of most intimate fellowship, based on the highest possible likeness of nature by personal distinction.⁴

This rich, warm, and personal concept he saw in the Scriptures themselves in such places as Exodus 29:42-46, Psalm 25:14, Matthew 1:23, John 1:14, James 2:23, and Revelation 21:3.

Secondly, the fundamental *nature* of the covenant was thus also re-defined. Rejecting the idea of the covenant as a *bilateral* (two-sided) agreement, Hoeksema spoke of it as a *unilateral* (one-sided) relationship. According to this view, there are not two parties in the covenant, but only one, God Himself, who takes His people into His own party (side). This does not deny that God's people have a part in the covenant, as our "Baptism Form" speaks of it (to love and obey God), but it rejects the Pelagian synergism inherent in the agreement idea and preserves the biblical truth that God alone establishes His covenant with His people (cf. Gen. 6:18; 15:8-18; 17:2-8).

Closely related to this, Hoeksema condemned the idea that the covenant is *conditional* and maintained that the covenant is *unconditional*. Repentance and faith are not conditions which man fulfills in order for the covenant to be established and realized, but the God-bestowed *means* by which the bond of the covenant is applied to the sinner, and received and enjoyed by him. The PRC see in this notion of conditionality the insidious error of Arminianism, since it was the Arminians who talked so proudly of conditions the sinner must fulfill by his free will in order to be saved. With the Canons of Dordt we condemn this idea out of hand as contrary to Reformed teaching (cf. Canons, I, B, 4, 5, 7; II, B, 3; V, B, 1).

We do not deny that there are conditional clauses in Scripture, but we do deny that these "if" clauses mean that God is dependent on the willing and working of us or any sinner. As Calvin stated in his response to those who wanted to use these conditional sentences to advance free will, God speaks with "ifs" to "prick the consciences" of unbelievers and make them understand that because of their sins they are "justly excluded from those blessings due the true worshippers of God." And contrariwise, God uses them for believers to "apprize us of our misery and how wholeheartedly we disagree with his will," and then to "prompt us to call upon his Spirit to direct us in the right way."⁵

Thirdly, the development of the doctrine of the covenant in the PRC also involved the application of God's *particular* grace to the covenant. Rejecting the theory of "common" grace, Hoeksema understood that the idea of a general, covenantal promise offered to all children of believing parents, or offered to all sinners in general in the gospel, is contrary to the Reformed truth of double predestination. He rightly believed that the doctrine of election and reprobation meant that God's saving grace revealed in His

covenant and promises was not for all men or for all children of believers who are baptized, but only for the elect. God's covenantal grace is particular, in its intention, in its objects, and in its effect. Hoeksema stated it in summary form in this way:

Historically this covenant is realized in the line of the continued generations of believers. These generations receive the sign of the covenant, circumcision in the old, baptism in the new dispensation, and, in general, are addressed and treated as the real covenant people of God; yet, God's election and reprobation cut right through these generations, and "God is merciful to whom He will show mercy, and whom He will He hardens."⁶

It was in the way of this development that the PRC defended, preserved, and advanced the *absolute sovereignty* of God in the salvation of His people. According to this doctrine of the covenant, it is the Triune God, as the *Sovereign* God of salvation, who alone establishes, preserves, and realizes His covenant with His people. It is this which makes the covenant a work of true and pure *grace*. All the other conceptions ultimately make the covenant one of *works* — *man's* works. Precisely at this point the great Reformation fought its fundamental battle. Precisely at this point the PRC have carried on this battle with regard to the doctrine of the covenant.⁷

⁴ *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 22, March 15, 1946, p. 269.

⁵ *Institutes*, J. McNeill, ed.; F.L. Battles, trans.; Westminster, 1960, Vol. 1, II, V, 10, p. 328.

⁶ *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 22, March 15, 1946, p. 269.

⁷ These main points of the covenant of grace received official standing in the PRC with the adoption of "The Declaration of Principles" at the Synod of 1951. If any of our readers are interested in obtaining a copy of this, they may contact the *Standard Bearer* office. PRC members may consult their "Church Order" books, pp. 110ff.

The on-going relevance of this development

And still the Reformation continues; still the battle on the "front" of the covenant goes on. This is evident from the fact that many in the Reformed community still view the covenant of grace as a conditional agreement or as a general promise. In the August, 1995 issue of *Tabletalk*, for example, editor R.C. Sproul, Jr. compares God's covenant with His people to the game "Let's Make a Deal": "When we make a deal with Him, when we choose the covenant of grace, we do so because He first chose us. We sign the deal because He sends His Spirit to change our hearts, because He predestined that we would sign" (p.2). Such an attempt to give a Reformed slant to a wrong idea of the covenant fails miserably.

In the same issue Mark Seeley states that it is time for Reformed Christians to "slay the sacred cow" of defining the covenant in terms of God's relationship to man as the Westminster Confession does, and rather define it as "a commitment confirmed by an oath." This idea,

he claims, is supported by Scripture and "Near-Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties" (p. 22). But according to this conception the covenant again becomes a bilateral agreement, since it depends on the commitment of both God and man. This the Reformed faith must emphatically *not* have; this is the "sacred cow" we must slay. So the battle goes on in defending the truly biblical and Reformed conception of the covenant of grace.

But defending this truth is not sufficient. It is also our calling to battle for the continued development of this truth of the covenant. The truth of God is never stagnant or static; it marches forward. So those who hold to the truth of God's sovereign covenant of grace must never be satisfied with the development of the past; they must go on to develop it according to the truth of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Hoeksema himself stated this at the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the PRC:

But rather than go backward, he
(the Reformed Christian who loves

this truth — CJT) will go forward and continue to develop the pure Protestant Reformed truth of God's eternal covenant.

To do this is the specific calling of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Failure to do this is our death. It is the end of our distinctive existence.⁸

May the Lord give us grace to rise up and face this challenge in the years ahead. □

Recommended Books on the Covenant of Grace:

A Watered Garden, A Brief History of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, Gertrude Hoeksema, RFP, 1992.

God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace, Herman Hanko, RFP, 1988.
Believers and Their Seed, Herman Hoeksema, RFP, 1971.

⁸ *Standard Bearer*, Vol.26, March 15, 1950, p.269.

Rev. Cornelius Hanko

Where We Stand Today

A glance at our history may well cause us to exclaim, "What has God wrought!"

These past 70 years plainly testify that the Lord has richly blessed us, even numerically.

In the early part of 1925 three churches, Eastern Ave., Hope, and Kalamazoo, organized as the Protest-

ing Christian Reformed Churches. It was only in 1926, after their protests against their expulsion had been rejected by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, that our present name, Protestant Reformed Churches, was adopted.

Soon after, we became a denomination. In June of 1925 the seminary was opened with three professors, Revs. Danhof, Hoeksema, and Ophoff, and ten students.

Gradually other churches were

organized: Byron Center and Hudsonville in Michigan; South Holland in Illinois; Hull and Doon in Iowa; and Redlands in California. From time to time other churches were added.

In 1927 two of the older students were ordained to serve as pastors in Sioux Center and Hull, Iowa. They returned to school to finish their studies in 1929, when the first class of the Seminary, consisting of six students, graduated and were ordained

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into the ministry in our churches.

By 1952 we had 24 churches and 28 ministers. Although the split of 1953 greatly reduced our numbers, today, after 70 years, we have 27 churches and 27 ministers, with a total membership of 1,514 families and 6,281 souls.

Our Seminary also has experienced the blessings of our Lord. We now have, in Grandville, Michigan, our own seminary building, which has recently been enlarged. And during the course of the years 69 students have graduated into the ministry, some of whom have passed on into eternity, and some have left us. Four professors have entered into the Rest, and today we have still three professors with 10 students.

Our *Standard Bearer*, as well as other of our literature, is being sent out to many areas beyond our churches. A number of our local churches are active in sending out pamphlets and other material.



God's blessing is most evident in our doctrine. A rich heritage has been entrusted to us as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

As would be expected, in our early history the preaching was polemic. Hardly a sermon was preached that did not mention the denial of the theory of common grace and of the free, well-meant offer of the gospel; and stress was laid on the sovereignty of God.

Gradually it became evident that the doctrine of God's sovereignty also stood in close relationship to the truth of God's covenant.

Various views of the covenant existed in the Reformed church world. An elder of our Southwest congregation advised me at the time of my entering into the ministry not to preach on the subject of the covenant for a long time. The reason he gave was that there were various views and he was not sure if any were correct. Soon the Rev. Herman Hoeksema developed the doctrine of

the covenant from the aspect of the relationship of friendship between God and His people in Christ. This beautiful and thoroughly scriptural view of God's covenant has become the hallmark of the Protestant Reformed teaching and preaching.

This truth was challenged by many of our leaders before 1953. The resulting split saw many former members leave us. It must be granted that our churches had gathered in its membership a lot of dead wood, much of which left us at that time; but it must also be admitted that some very good members were led astray by those who wished to introduce into God's covenant the theory of a conditional promise. Yet the positive result has been that we see, more clearly than before, the unconditionality of God's covenant, especially because it is God's covenant.

Because the view that regards God's covenant as a relationship of friendship is so thoroughly scriptural, a truth that runs as a golden thread through the entire Word of God, it has warmed the hearts, not only of our own people, but also of many outside of our churches.

We are not a church with a negative message, merely proclaiming what we do not believe, but we are entrusted by Christ with the calling to preach the positive truth of God's sovereign grace, also as it applies to the covenant. This enriches the truth of the covenant far beyond any other teaching. It is our calling to hold that which we have, that no man take our crown.

The question might be raised: Is there a difference between the preaching in our churches now and the preaching in our early years? To that the answer surely is that basically the same truth is preached from all our pulpits. The remark is often made that whether we hear one minister or another, the truth that is proclaimed is basically the same. We can be extremely grateful for that. Yet it must also be admitted that there has been a shift in emphasis in the preaching. Anyone who will lis-

ten to a tape or read a sermon or the *Standard Bearer* of fifty or more years ago will immediately recognize the strong emphasis on doctrine. An example of that can be found in the sermons of Rev. Herman Hoeksema in *God's Eternal Good Pleasure*. We were advised in the seminary: "When the truth is preached, God's people can and do apply it to their own lives." Or again, "Preach to the most intelligent in your audience; the others will also be edified."

Today the preaching often emphasizes the problems we face as believers in an evil world, especially problems related to the family. And a more serious effort is made to reach the young people and the children of the congregation. The question, however, may well be raised, "Has the pendulum swung too far the other way? Are our people being as thoroughly indoctrinated as they should be?" We must maintain the one, but not at the cost of the other.



What can be said about the spiritual life of the churches then and now?

As is usually the case in any reformation, a great enthusiasm was evident among our people in the early years of our existence. Even before we separated from the CRC, large crowds attended our evening services in the Eastern Avenue church, even to the extent that chairs were placed along the aisles and on the pulpit, and some people had to remain standing. The fire chief occasionally paid us a visit to clear the hallways.

Common grace, the well-meant offer, and related subjects were in the minds and on the lips of young and old. Since Grand Rapids at that time was heavily populated with church members, common grace was a point of interest for many. If you saw a group of people engaged in earnest conversation, either on a street corner or in the grocery store,

as often as not you would find that the subject of their discussion was common grace and related matters. Sunday evening and week-day visits were occasions for lively discussions of the issues of the day. Even the Grand Rapids *Press* reported on the front page the happenings at the Classis of the CRC.

I think of the time when we met in the St. Cecilia building in downtown Grand Rapids. Most of the members of the church walked about three miles to get there. Automobiles were not common in those days. Yet three Sunday services were well attended. Or I think of the congregation I served in which there was always nearly 100 percent attendance at the divine worship services and catechism classes, and even at the various society meetings.

Although this first enthusiasm settled down considerably, the interest in the truth remained. Not only in the local churches, but also throughout the country, a call went out for more information on the issues of the day. Rev. Herman Hoeksema made a number of lecture tours throughout the Midwest and the West explaining the doctrinal issues in the churches. New congregations arose in Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and as far as the west coast.

The *Standard Bearer* was not only widely read, but studied and

passed on to others. Church services and lectures were well attended. There was a zeal for maintaining the truth, even though it often meant rifts and problems in families and among friends.

It was to be expected that this first enthusiasm could not last indefinitely. Through the years we have lost our enthusiasm for and interest in the truth. A certain complacency has settled upon the members of our churches. We take for granted our inheritance, those rich and blessed truths of the Scriptures entrusted to us. Many slight our calling to maintain and defend the truth, to teach it to our children, and to be willing to suffer and to die for it.

Repeatedly the remark is made by those who visit other churches in our own country or overseas, "We certainly may be thankful for the preaching we hear every Sunday in comparison with what is brought in other churches." But the question is: Are we thankful? Is our faith a matter of preference or of conviction? Would we, as will be true in the time of the reign of the Antichrist, be willing to see our children suffer hunger for the truth of God's Word? Are we willing to die for it? Or would we be tempted to compromise and take the consequences?

Are there reasons for concern for

our future? I think there are. One of them is the complacency which has settled over many of our people. There is an obvious lack of knowledge of sound doctrine and lack of interest in our own history and the reason for our existence. God warns us in His Word, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Another cause of concern is the poor attendance at the worship services on special occasions, and the lack of interest and enthusiasm among young and old for our society meetings.

Also reason for concern is the fact that some among us repeatedly clamor for change. They want something new, something different, so that the preaching of the Word is no longer of primary importance. Some are unwilling to stand alone. They are tolerant of new movements that arise in the church-world round about us. They can readily be swept along with every wind of doctrine. Our Christ calls us to "Hold that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

These present times of lawlessness warn us that the end of the ages is not far off and that Antichrist will soon make his appearance. Our Lord urges us now, stronger than ever: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

Earlier this year we informed you that our Hull, IA PR Christian School Society approved plans to add two classrooms and restrooms to their school building. On August 28, supporters of Hull were invited to an Open House to come and see the new addition, complete and

ready for this school year.

September 15th marked the ten-year anniversary of the Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI. Exactly ten years before, on the same date, the dedication of Heritage was held. The tenth anniversary was commemorated with a combined program, celebration, and Open House. Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville PRC, was the featured speaker and he addressed the good-sized crowd of supporters on Nehemiah 2:17-20, "Strengthening

Our Hands for This Good Work." Rev. Gritters spoke of our building the walls of the church of Jesus Christ, the walls of truth. After the outside program, coffee and cake were served inside, where visitors could check out displays and a video.

On July 19, the Lacombe PR School Board in Alberta, Canada asked Mr. Rick Span to speak regarding his experience as a teacher in the Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA.

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Congregational Activities

By the time you read this, Rev. J. Slopsema will have completed almost two months as pastor of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. On Sunday, August 13, he was installed as First's seventh undershepherd, with Rev. D. Kuiper leading the service. On the following Lord's Day, Rev. Slopsema preached his inaugural sermon entitled, "Preaching Christ Crucified," based on I Corinthians 1:23, 24. Earlier that week First's congregation formally welcomed the Slopsemas with a program and a get-acquainted hour.

The Consistory of the First PRC in Holland, MI has, through its Building Committee, been actively looking for suitable building sites on which they could one day relocate. Finally, after many disappointments, First's Council called a special congregational meeting for mid-August to vote on one possible building site. The result of that meeting was that First has purchased seven acres of land on 104th Ave. between Riley and Quincy Streets, next to Hunters Creek development. A quick check of my Ottawa County map shows me that this location would put First just slightly north and west of Zeeland, MI, or just east of Holland. A proposal to hire an architect to do preliminary plans was also approved. But don't go changing the address of First in your 1995 Yearbook just yet. According to Rev. Bruinsma, First's pastor, construction cannot begin before late 1996 at the earliest.

Denominational Activities

On September 19, the annual Mr. and Mrs./Adult Bible Societies' League Mass Meeting was held in the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Rev. D. Kuiper, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, spoke on the subject, "Angels."

The Reformed Witness Hour Radio Committee announced that Rev. C. Haak, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL, has agreed, and has received permission from his Consistory, to be the full-time radio

pastor of the R.W.H. According to the R.W.H. Radio Committee, this is the first full-time radio pastor since the late Rev. Hoeksema. In addition to preparing approximately 40 messages a year, Rev. Haak will also be advising the committee in its work. Rev. Haak was to begin his work, the Lord willing, on October 8.

While many of our church choirs are just now beginning to get back into the fall practice schedule, one choir, the all-male Hope Heralds, from our west Michigan churches, has already given two concerts; one at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI and the other at the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, as part of their annual pre-society program.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center, MI PRC just recently purchased a tape duplicator.

The Evangelism Committee of the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL informed their congregation that they had obtained some Spanish literature for distribution. They had "Our Only Comfort" by Rev. Haak, "The Faith and Practice of the PRC in America," "Whosoever Will" by Rev. Hoeksema, and *The Sovereignty of God* by A. Pink.

Related to this news item, the

Evangelism Committee of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA has obtained for distribution a Spanish translation of our three forms of unity. Evidently a lot of this literature has been made available by the Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI. If you are interested in this or other literature, drop them a note at 290 East 18th St., Holland, MI 49423.

Minister Activities

Rev. R. Dykstra declined the call he received from the Grace PRC in Standale, MI. Grace's new trio was Revs. Bruinsma, denHartog, and Candidate Kuiper. They called Rev. Bruinsma.

Hope Church in Walker, MI formed a new trio consisting of Revs. denHartog, Dykstra, and Koole. Rev. Dykstra received the call.

Candidate Allen Brummel has received the call from the Edgerton, MN PRC; and Candidate Douglas Kuiper received the call from Byron Center, MI PRC.

Food for Thought

"The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, but He does not encourage our idleness; He loves active believers."

— C.H. Spurgeon

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses sincere sympathy to Mrs. Joyce Kooiker in the recent passing away of her sister,

MRS. ARNETTA VAN TOL,
and her brother,

MR. JOHN MULDER.

May she and her family find comfort in God's Word from Psalm 29:11: "The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace."

Rev. R. Moore, president
Mrs. Jack Andringa, secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to Joyce Kooiker in the loss of her brother,

JOHN MULDER.

Our prayer is that she and her family be comforted with the Word of God in Lamentation 3:22, 23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness."

Rev. R. Moore, President
Judy Brummel, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands expresses their sincere sympathy to fellow members Janice Feenstra, Beth Feenstra, Sarah Feenstra, and Michelle Buiter and their families in the sudden loss of their father and grandfather,

MR. ABE DE HEER.

May they find comfort in the words of II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. A. denHartog, Pres.
Beth VanUffelen, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 1, 1995, our parents,

MR. and MRS. EDWIN GRITTERS,

celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful for their godly example and covenant instruction and pray that the Lord will hold them in His care.

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6).

- ❖ Jerry and Shirley VanderKolk
 - ❖ Ed and Jeanne Karsemeyer
 - ❖ Rev. Barry and Lori Gritters
 - ❖ Mike and Brenda Gritters
 - ❖ Roger and Hilda Gritters
 - ❖ Rick and Shari Gritters
- 24 grandchildren

Redlands, California

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 1, 1995, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. ALVIN RAU, celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for giving us God-fearing parents and for the Christian love and instruction we have received from them in these many years. It is our prayer and hope that the Lord will continue to keep and bless them in the years that He may give them. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ❖ Jim and Lois Rau
Dan and Carol Boeve
Kimmy and Cheryl Kooiker
Christina, Brady
Jeff and Kim Scholten
Rod
- ❖ Rev. Kenneth and Pat Koole
Justin, Bruce, Catherine,
Audra
- ❖ Dave and Mary Kregel
Lisa, Brent, Jason, Ryan,
Emily
- ❖ Dave and Norma Rau
Dawn, Kevin, Lydia, Renae
- ❖ Mike and Elaine Rau
Nathan, Benjamin, Erin, Joel
Grand Rapids, Michigan

REFORMATION LECTURES

Grand Rapids area:

Southwest PRC
4875 Ivanrest
Grandville

Friday, Nov. 3
8:00 P.M.

What Was the Reformation?
Rev. R. Cammenga

Saturday, Nov. 4
8:00 A.M.

Luther: Man of Conviction
Prof. D.J. Engelsma

10:45 A.M.
*Luther: Theologian
of the Glory of God*
Prof. D.J. Engelsma

Chicago area:

*The Reformation's
Great Temptation*
Prof. H. Hanko

Thursday, Nov. 2
7:30 P.M.

Grace OPC
1510 Green Brook Blvd.
Hanover Park

Friday, Nov. 3
7:30 P.M.
South Holland PRC
16511 South Park
South Holland