



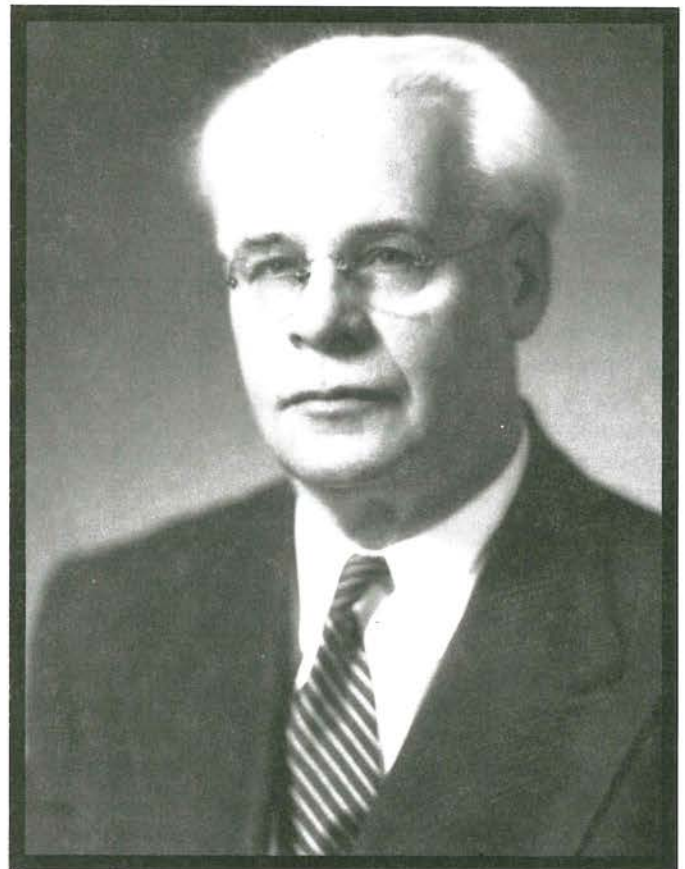
The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

**Special
Reformation
Issue**

**Reformation
of 1953**

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George M. Ophoff

**Vol. 73, No. 2
October 15, 1996**

October 15, 1996

In This Issue ...

This special, Reformation issue of the *Standard Bearer* is a follow-up and companion-issue of the special issue of October 15, 1995 ("The Reformation of 1924").

On the cover appears a picture of the Rev. George M. Ophoff, a founding father of the PRC and a mighty instrument of God in the controversy of 1953 to keep the PRC in the way of the gospel of grace.

In order to include all the articles, we have had to change our format and leave out the church news and some of the requested announcements. Our readers will understand.

—DJE



**The
Standard
Bearer**

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.
Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.,
4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. Periodical Postage
Paid at Grandville, Michigan.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer,
P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

Meditation

Herman Hoeksema

By Grace

For by grace are ye saved through
faith; and that not of yourselves:
it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

For!

Let us not overlook this little
but significant word!

For by grace are ye saved! The
conjunction presents the truth here
expressed as a reason for some-
thing else, an explanation of some-
thing that has been mentioned in
the context.

It informs us of the fact that
this statement does not stand
alone, that it is not an isolated
truth which one can accept or not
accept without much effect for the
rest of the contents of his faith,
which one can either deny or con-
fess as of little or no practical sig-
nificance and importance.

For by grace are ye saved!

It means that salvation by
grace, and by grace only, is an in-

dispensable condition for some-
thing else, a ground, a foundation,
without which that something else
cannot stand. Denying it is like
destroying the foundation of an
edifice: you pull down the whole
structure. It is like cutting away
at the root of a tree: you kill the
tree.

That for which this statement
is the reason may be read in the
immediately preceding verse:
"That in the ages to come he might
shew the exceeding riches of his
grace in his kindness toward us
through Christ Jesus"!

God is rich in mercy!

And He saved us! Even when
we were dead in sins, He quick-
ened us together with Christ; and
raised us up together with Him,
and made us sit together in heav-
enly places.

All this in order that He might
show the exceeding riches of His
grace!

Through our salvation the
riches of His grace must be dis-
played.

But how is this possible unless
salvation be by grace?

By grace only!

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In grace your salvation has its
source.

For the eternal fountainhead
whence the whole blessed stream
of your salvation gushes forth is
sovereign election.

Chosen you are unto salvation
before the foundation of the world.
The motive of God's election of His
people is grace, sovereign, abso-
lutely free grace.

Pure grace!

Nothing else determined God
in predestinating you unto confor-
mity unto the image of His Son.
There are, indeed, those who find
the reason and the determining fac-
tor of God's election in man. They,
too, would emphasize that salva-
tion is all of grace, not of works.
It is grace that God sent His only
begotten Son into the world, and
grace that you may become par-
taker of the blessings of salvation
in Him. Nay more, they, too, speak
of election unto faith, and election
unto glory. It is only the elect that
actually become heirs of eternal sal-
vation. But election itself? Is it,
too, according to them, of mere and
pure and sovereign grace? Ah, no!
It is not of grace, say they, but of
works! Yes, indeed, of *works*,
though they themselves would use

*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of
the Standard Bearer. This meditation
was taken from the June 15, 1942 issue
of the Standard Bearer.*

other terms to describe their view of election. Or is it not an election of works, which teaches that God found or foresaw in the elect a willingness to accept Christ and the terms of His salvation, in distinction from others whom He foreknew as stubborn and unwilling to come to Christ?

Then it is not of grace!

For then it was man, his goodness, the foreseen choice of his will to receive Christ, that determined God's choice. Then it is not grace that makes the elect acceptable to and beloved by God in His eternal counsel; but it is some element of goodness in man that induced the Most High to prefer him above others. And when God shows forth the riches of His grace in the salvation of the elect, they will always be mixed with this excellency of man.

But God forbid!

For you are saved by grace!

This implies that your salvation is of God from beginning to end, from its eternal source in the counsel of God to its final manifestation in glory in the day of Christ.

It was grace that ordained you unto salvation. This signifies, not that God's election is arbitrary, but that it has its reason and motive in God alone. Of Him are all things! God is gracious! Full of grace is He in Himself, apart from any relation or attitude He may sustain to the creature. For He is good, the sole Good, the implication of all infinite perfections. As the supreme and only and infinitely Good, He is the perfection of all beauty. He is pleasant and altogether lovely, and there are pleasures at His right hand forevermore. Eternally He is attracted by His own beauty. For He is God Triune, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, God knows Himself, beholds Himself, His grace and beauty, and inclines unto Himself in eternal and infinite divine favor!

This infinite loveliness and divine pleasure in His own beauty is God's grace.

By grace you are chosen!

By the knowledge of an attraction to the loveliness of His own perfection God was divinely urged to ordain His people!

A people that would be perfect even as He is perfect, lovely as He is lovely. For whom He has foreknown, them He also did predestinate to be conformed according to the image of His Son.

A people upon whom He might look with eternal good pleasure, and who might taste that the Lord is good!

A people in whom He might show forth the infinite riches of His grace!

For by grace are ye saved!

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Blessed grace!

For by grace are you reconciled unto God!

That same grace that motivated the Most High to ordain you unto salvation, according to which it was His purpose to make you altogether lovely even as He is lovely, explains that and why He reconciled you unto Himself through the death of His Son!

For, mark you well, *saved* you are by grace!

That means that you were lifted from the deepest depth of sin and shame, of guilt and condemnation, of corruption and death, to the highest possible bliss of an eternal righteousness and life and glory.

Saved you are.

Created you were, with all the elect, in the first man Adam who was made a living soul; who, indeed, had life, but not in himself; who lived without being the lord of life; whose glory was corruptible, whose righteousness was amissible, whose life was mortal; and who was of the earth earthy. In him we violated God's covenant, became guilty, liable to death and damnation, subject to corruption, children of wrath.

And our condition was, as far as we were concerned, hopeless. For in Adam we could sin, but we could never pay a ransom for our sin; we could die in him, but had no power to regain life in God's favor; we could turn away from the Fount of life, but never could we return to Him. We could only increase the guilt of our sin every day, through every word we spoke, by every deed we performed, with every breath we took. Enemies of God we had become, hating Him and hating one another!

Saved we are!

Saved by grace, by free and sovereign grace!

For even then, when we were dead in sin, objects of God's righteous wrath who could never be restored to the favor of God unless we would willingly take our way through the depth of hell, He loved us, and reconciled us unto Himself!

Us He reconciled. Do not express this differently. Do not say that He reconciled Himself to us. For to reconcile is to restore a relation of love and faith and friendship that has been violated and broken, the relation of the covenant. And on His part that relation was never violated. He is the eternal I AM, that changeth not. With an eternal, immutable, sovereign love He loved His own, even when they were rebels in themselves. But us He reconciled. Us He restored to that state in which we were once more the proper objects of His favor and blessing, the state of eternal righteousness!

For such is reconciliation: restoration to favor in the way of perfect justice!

And justice required satisfaction!

Satisfaction of the justice of God with respect to our sin could be accomplished only by a voluntary act of perfect obedience even unto death. No, not merely to suffer the punishment for sin is satis-

faction. Even the damned in hell suffer the agonies of death, yet they do not atone for their sin. God demands that we shall love Him. And for the sinner who violated His law and trampled under foot His covenant, this means that he must love Him in His righteous wrath, love Him in death and hell, if ever He is to atone!

This act of perfect obedience we could never perform.

Reconciled we are by grace!

For when in sovereign grace God chose us, and ordained us to be conformed according to the image of His Son, He chose us in Him. By grace He ordained His Son to be the Head of the church, to become flesh, to assume the burden of our sin and guilt, to enter into our deepest woe, to become sin for us, that we might become righteousness of God in Him!

By grace He was sent into the world!

By grace He chose the way of suffering and death, the way through the depth of hell, there to lay upon God's altar the sacrifice that would be sufficient to satisfy the justice of God.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself!

That He might show forth the riches of His grace!

For by grace you are saved!

By grace only!

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Mighty grace!

For grace is also the power of God by which you are delivered from the dominion of sin and death!

Reconciliation alone is no salvation, nor could it possibly lead to salvation if the operation of grace ceased at the cross. It must be applied, so that from darkness we are translated into life, from sin into righteousness, and with cords of love we are united once more with the heart of God!

How could this be accomplished?

Shall we say that from the cross onward salvation becomes

the work of man: God has done His part, now man must realize what God has accomplished? Or, at least, shall we allow the grace of God and the will of man to mix at this point, harmoniously and sweetly to work together in order that the salvation manifested on the cross of Christ may be perfected? Shall we say that on God's part He is willing now to save all men, that the reconciliation accomplished on the cross is offered by God to all with the intention to save, and that, for the rest, it depends upon the choice of man's will?

God forbid!

The riches of His grace must be revealed!

By grace are ye saved!

Through faith. Mark you well: *through* faith it is that we are saved. It is not on condition of faith, a condition which we must fulfill if God is to bestow the blessings of salvation on us. There are no conditions unto salvation at all! It is not because of faith, as if faith is the new work which God requires of us by which salvation may be obtained. There is no work unto salvation, not even faith, nor the work of faith. For by grace are we saved, *through* faith.

Faith is the *means* unto salvation.

For it is the spiritual tie that unites us with Christ, the spiritual faculty whereby we may know Him, taste Him, long for Him, trust in Him, rely on Him, appropriate Him, live out of Him as the young tree draws its life-sap out of the ground through its roots.

Through faith!

It is God's means, a means of grace, a power that is wrought in your inmost heart by the mighty grace of God. By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God!

For by grace He unites us with Christ!

By the power of grace He quickens us together with Him, making us new creatures.

By grace He calls us, powerfully, irresistibly, sweetly, out of darkness into the light of the gospel.

By grace He implants the faith in us whereby we embrace the Christ of God and all His benefits!

It is not of ourselves; it is God's gift.

Salvation is of the Lord!

Wonderful grace!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Abiding grace!

For ye *are* saved!

And because it is by pure and sovereign grace that you are saved, you will surely be saved even unto the end of eternal glory.

Always salvation is of the Lord, never does it become of us. Always it is by grace, never does it become of works. Even as it is in free, divine, absolutely sovereign grace that He chose us and ordained us to become conformed according to the image of His Son; even as it was by that same grace that He reconciled us unto Himself through the death of His Son; and even as it was by pure grace that He wrought the faith within us whereby we do lay hold on the Christ of God; even so, it is by grace that we are preserved unto the final salvation that shall be revealed in the last time!

By grace ye are preserved!

And through the power of that gracious preservation ye *persevere*!

For, on the one hand, even our perseverance is not by works, or on account of works, or by virtue of our cooperation with the grace of God. It is of pure grace. Yet, on the other hand, this preserving grace of God is not a power that remains external to us, so that we are passively, unconsciously perhaps, carried into glory. It is a power within us, that causes us to hold on to the God of our salvation.

Grace preserves, and we persevere!

And who shall separate us?

Unchangeable grace! □

1953: Continuing Reformation

1953 stands for the doctrinal controversy that convulsed the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The controversy concluded with the schism in 1953 in which a majority of churches, members, and ministers left the PRC, soon to return to the Christian Reformed Church (CRC).

The issue was the doctrine of the covenant, no minor matter, especially for Reformed churches. The issue came to a head in two statements in two different sermons by one of the ministers. A classis judged the statements heretical. But the real issue was the introduction into the PRC of a doctrine of the covenant that held that God makes His covenant with all the physical children of believing parents alike. God makes His covenant with all alike by promising every one of them salvation at his or her baptism. This promise depends, however, on the child's performing the condition of believing when he or she grows up.

Implied is a grace of God — a covenant grace of God — for all the children of believers, those who perish as well as those who are saved, and a desire of God to save them all. Expressed is the failure of the promise of God in many cases and the dependence of salvation, in the final analysis, on the will and act of the child.

One of the patriarchs of the PRC, who also played a leading role in the struggle, the Rev. Gerrit

Vos, impressed upon me that the issue was this doctrine of the covenant. During my seminary days, which began only seven years after the schism, Vos told me, "People argue about the two statements. They were bad statements. But they were not the issue. The issue was the conditional covenant with all the children. We all knew that this was the issue."

The struggle was fierce, as only a church struggle over doctrine between former brothers and sisters can be. Although I was only 14 in 1953, I remember vividly the tense church services, depending on who was preaching; the loud, heated arguments on the church grounds after the services; and, especially painfully, the rage and shouting that broke up family gatherings of long standing and reduced bewildered children to tears.

Close friends separated; families divided; schools and churches emptied.

One needs only to read the issues of the *Standard Bearer* of that period to sense the intensity of the conflict.

Not all the fire was holy. Not on the side of the PRC either.

The struggle spilled over the borders of the little PRC. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands followed the controversy. One of the Dutch denominations was indirectly involved since it was their covenant view that occasioned the struggle. A prominent Baptist preacher in Grand

Rapids advertised his Sunday evening sermon topic in the *Press*, "Who is right: Hoeksema or De Wolf?" There is disquieting reason to suspect that conservative Christian Reformed ministers, then in power in the CRC, were secretly involved with the Protestant Reformed ministers responsible for the conflict already before the break took place in 1953.

The outcome of the doctrinal controversy was the declaration by the PRC in a synodical decision that the covenant promise of God, particularly at baptism, is made to the elect children alone. The faith of the child is not a condition upon which the promise and its salvation depend, but is itself part of the blessing given by the promise. The covenant grace of God is particular, not general. It is for the elect alone. In its bestowal and reception, this grace is sovereign, not dependent on the sinful child, nor effectual, even in part, by virtue of the child's will and deed.

By grace, the children are saved in the covenant through faith, and that faith is not of themselves, but is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). As is the case with all others who are saved, the origin of the salvation of the covenant children is God's eternal election in Christ (Eph. 1:4).

This official declaration by the PRC on the covenant is called "The Declaration of Principles." As the appropriate and necessary response to controversy, it expresses the faith of the PRC as to the teach-

ing of Scripture and the Reformed confessions on the covenant.

The controversy over the covenant ended with the churches' official condemnation of a conditional covenant (in classis' judgment that the two statements were heretical) and in the churches' official adoption of the doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grace (in the "Declaration").

This was continuing reformation of the church.

It was continuing reformation of the PRC. The PRC carried through, consistently, in the doctrine of the covenant the truth of sovereign, particular grace that they had confessed from the beginning of their existence as churches.

Make no mistake, the churches had always taught, and been taught, the doctrine of an unconditional covenant. Those ministers who in the late 1940s and early 1950s became enamored of a conditional covenant and were determined to introduce it into the PRC knew full well that they were overthrowing what the PRC had always stood for.

As early as 1927, in a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer* that were soon published as the booklet, *Geloovigen en Hun Zaad (Believers and Their Seed)*, Herman Hoeksema had set forth in detail the covenant conception that he insisted was fundamental to the very existence of the PRC. At the same time he sketched the conditional theory of the covenant with which the doctrine that threatened in 1953 is essentially identical and damned it as "the old Pelagian error applied to the doctrine of the covenant" (*Believers and Their Seed*, RFP, tr. and repr. 1971, p. 20).

This was in 1927!

The schismatic preachers in the PRC were dishonest when they

told the people that Hoeksema himself had earlier advocated a conditional covenant and that the PRC had no definite covenant doctrine.

But before 1951-1953, the PRC had not officially adopted the doctrine of the covenant that they had always believed and confessed. Men could, therefore, contend that the prevailing covenant doctrine was merely that of Professors Hoeksema and Ophoff. So also, I suppose, prior to the adoption of the Lutheran creeds men could say that justification by faith only was merely the view of Luther, and

prior to the Synod of Dordt men could say that double predestination was merely the view of Calvin.

In 1951-1953, the doctrine of a particular, unconditional covenant, in Christ the head of the covenant, with believers and their elect children became the *official* doctrine of the PRC.

In formulating and adopting the doctrine, the PRC simply applied to the covenant the truth of sovereign, particular grace for which they contended in their controversy with the CRC over the "well-meant offer of the gospel."

Thus, the teaching of universal, ineffectual grace in the covenant was purged from the PRC.

There was consistency.

There was development of the truth.

There was rejection of the opposing false doctrine.

There was continuing reformation of the PRC.

1953 represented also the continuation of the great Reformation of the 16th century. Churches and theologians will dismiss this claim as ridiculous, but the fact remains.

The Reformation of the 16th century restored to the church Augustine's gospel of particular salvation by sovereign grace alone,

while developing this truth in the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The Synod of Dordt defended the Reformation's gospel of salvation by grace alone through (not: on account of) faith alone against the universal, conditional grace of Arminian free-willism. It did so in such a way as to make the prevailing doctrines of the Reformation the official teachings of the Reformed churches worldwide.

But Dordt did not explicitly address the issue of grace in the covenant, that is, in the family of believers.

After Dordt, two opposite teachings appeared in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Often, they contended with each other in sharp conflict, as in the churches of the Secession in the Netherlands in the 19th century. The one holds, in one form or another, that God makes His covenant with every physical child of believers by conditional promise to each of them. The other holds that God's covenant is with Christ and, in Him, with elect believers and their elect children, by unconditional promise.

The former is, in reality, the teaching of universal grace in the covenant, grace wider than Christ and His elect church, grace dependent upon man's will and work (faith as a condition).

The latter is, in reality, the gospel of particular grace in the covenant, grace as wide as, but no wider than, Christ and His elect church, grace dependent only upon the promising God and inclusive of the gift of faith.

This latter, the PRC, through the fire of white-hot, fierce, painful church struggle, have been guided to believe and confess.

This is genuine continuation and development of the Reformation of the 16th century.

Here we stand! □

— DJE

“Amice Schilder”

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

The Rev. Herman Hoeksema felt a deep sense of friendship for Dr. Klaas Schilder, calling him as he did, *Amice* (Latin for “friend”). This from a number of close similarities and some striking differences.

Both of these men were masterful scholars in their own right, relying not on the opinions of others but laying their own groundwork, doing their own study, and coming to their own conclusions. And both were speakers of an extraordinary kind — but in quite different ways. With Schilder it was not his oratory (he could speak indistinctly and be difficult to hear); but he was a superb rhetorician. Artistic in nature, he could take a subject or a passage of Scripture and find within it nuances of meaning which no other had ever imagined, and with words that drew pictures in the air he would hold his audience enthralled in rapt attention no matter how long he spoke. In the eye of their imagination they could see exactly what he meant, and feel it in their heart. But with Hoeksema it was different. He was an orator by nature. His very appearance in a pulpit, or even in a room, was sufficient to draw the attention of everyone, while with a look from his piercing eyes he could pin a person to his chair; and his voice rang clear with the timbre of a trumpet which no one would fail to hear. But the rhetoric was not there. He was a logician instead. His illustrations, when he used them, were of a homely kind, used only to make a difficult point clear. His goal was to lead his audience clearly with simple words to understand the subject or text on which he spoke. Audiences loved

both Hoeksema and Schilder, hanging on their every word, and remembering what they said.

As with their speaking, so was it with their theological thought, the same and yet so different. Both were deeply committed to the creeds, to Scripture, and to the Reformed faith; but their theologies were certainly not the same.

Schilder was of the *Afscheiding* (Secession) tradition, with its strong emphasis on *bevindelijkheid* (the view that with careful Christian living one would come to feel within himself the true Christian experience of the heart), together with the conviction that they, having left the apostatizing National Reformed Church, were now the true church of God and all others false. It was from this tradition that Schilder had come, and to it he spoke with his considerable rhetorical abilities to arouse within his hearers true Christian feelings, and by means of promises, warnings, and threats move them to live as Christians ought.

Hoeksema, however, was Kuyperian, having grown up under Abraham Kuyper, and as a young man having followed him admiringly about; and that was in many ways quite a different thing. Kuyper agreed with the *Afgescheidenen* as to their basic commitments and goals, but differed as to how it should be brought about. He was a scholar who sought his strength not in works and feelings, but in the *quietness* and *confidence* of studying and understanding the Word. And so was it with Hoeksema too. He was not opposed to feelings, and he certainly recognized the necessity of good works; but he believed those works came best from understanding God’s

Word, rather than by emotional stimulation from without. His effort was to find out in his study the true meaning of Scripture, and lead his congregation through it in terms the least could understand, letting the Word then do its own work. His sermons were masterworks of careful exposition, and little else, but presented in such a way that they created a close bond between him and those who heard.

As different as these two were, they had a common bond. And both did what they did well, to the point that they aroused the envy and jealousy of their peers who could not do the same. But these colleagues held the seats of power; and both Hoeksema and Schilder in time felt the lash of their jealous sting. Hoeksema in 1924 had been deposed by those who felt his growing influence and power; and Schilder was just beginning to know what it meant when he visited America in 1939.

It had seemed a good idea to Mr. William Eerdmans, the American publisher of Schilder’s writings, to sponsor him in a lecture tour here. But already before Schilder came, his colleagues in the Netherlands had sent a warning to the leaders of the Christian Reformed Church that he should not be welcomed, and the people should not be encouraged to give him their ear. In the end, it was Hoeksema who gave him the warmest welcome, providing the large and convenient auditorium of the First Protestant Reformed Church as a place for him to speak, and on no less a subject than that of common grace, a subject on which he and Schilder disagreed. To Hoeksema it was simply a matter of openness. He believed it

was better to have the subject openly discussed than suppressed as it had been by his opponents for so many years. And graciously he assured Schilder that he was free to express his honest opinion regardless of what it might be.

But the matter went deeper than that. With Schilder, Hoeksema had met, almost for a first time, a true scholar willing to discuss the basic problems of Reformed theology openly with him. This he appreciated greatly; and, when they parted, it was as friends determined to continue working together through the coming years.

But that was not to be. To the sorrow of them both, providence intervened in the form of the Second World War. Speaking out almost alone against evils of the Nazis, Schilder was forced to go into hiding, and meaningful communication was cut off. Try as he might, Hoeksema was able to learn little about the status of his friend, until at last, as the war came to its end, he learned that Schilder was alive and well — but that during the war he had been deposed from office and dismissed from his church. It was a shock almost too great to imagine, and yet to Hoeksema it was striking as well, for Schilder's deposition had occurred in much the same way as Hoeksema's — only far worse, for Schilder's had been done even more cowardly, under the cover of a terrible war, when it would have been expected that Christians would have pulled together against this common enemy. But in a special way it drew them even closer together, except for one thing — Schilder had been deposed for defending a view of the covenant which Hoeksema had been taught in seminary by Prof. W. Heyns, and which he had opposed all of his life, because that view lay at the heart of the CRC view of common grace. Instinctively he knew that this would always limit his relations with Schilder; and yet, still he persisted

in his love for this friend, and continued to long for a day when they might sit down and talk things over again — always in the hope that possibly something could be found to bring their theologies together in the end.

And then it looked as if it might happen. One day, in a round about way, Hoeksema heard that Schilder had made a speech in Kampen repudiating his former view on common grace. That was a conundrum to Hoeksema. Schilder's view of the covenant, as he saw it, was the epitome of common grace in itself — and now he was claiming not to believe common grace at all? How could it be? It did not make sense — unless, that is, somehow he and Schilder were missing each other in a basic way. In any case, this much was clear, they had to get together once more and talk it out face to face. So Hoeksema took up his pen and invited Schilder here once again. And Schilder immediately agreed to come. There was so much to be talked through.

But neither was that to come to pass. Schilder's trip was planned and its schedule set, when, in the summer of 1947, Hoeksema, always the picture of strength and health, was struck down by a massive stroke. It was too late for Schilder's trip to be canceled. He came; but Hoeksema was not there to meet him or to engage in that theological dialogue they had planned. Instead, Schilder traveled among our small churches to lecture and preach, but without Hoeksema by his side to fill things out and bring them to the focus they ought to have had. That made all the difference.

The lectures and sermons Schilder gave were superb, everyone thought. Those who could understand the language came; and what he said was remembered and talked about for years. But that was not where the real action took place. It was after the public was gone, and Schilder retired to the

living-rooms and offices of the local manses, that the meaningful meetings took place. Almost invariably the discussion soon gravitated to the subject of the covenant. Schilder would explain how and why he was cast out; and then came the turn of the local pastor to try in his own words to set forth the problems we saw with the Liberated covenant view which Hoeksema had so often explained, especially over against our view of common grace and the doctrine of predestination. But these men were no match for Schilder, overwhelmed by him as they were. And now the old openness was no longer there. Schilder remained calm and gracious as always; but with that a certain bitterness entered in. "I despise your view," he is known to have said, and vehemently objected to linking the covenant to election and reprobation, or to common grace. And so it went, from place to place, until the time of his visit was over and as many as were able came to Grand Rapids for a closing conference on precisely the subject of the covenant of grace.

Almost miraculously Hoeksema had recovered sufficiently by then to take part in that conference too. He was still weak, quite naturally, and far from his old self. But he was there and able to read a paper which he had prepared. Schilder gave answer to it in a rather surprising way. First, he affirmed that he did not agree with Heyns' view of the covenant. Secondly, he was sure that the differences between our covenant view and his was more a matter of terminology and historical background than anything else. And finally, he was convinced that we were the "true church" in America, so that anyone emigrating from the Netherlands ought to join with us.

These were kind words, and far from the "I despise your view" which he had privately expressed. Whether it was out of consideration for Hoeksema, or politeness,

or because he had not really come to terms with our differences, it is hard to say. But everyone was pleased — except, that is, Prof. Ophoff, who was convinced the real problems were simply not being addressed. He therefore gave to Dr. Schilder a meaningful list of questions which needed answers. Such insistence at that point, however, had little general sympathy, and Schilder merely thrust the list into his pocket, promising to answer it in *De Reformatie*, which he really never did. In fact, once he arrived back in the Netherlands, very little was heard from him as to our doctrinal differences. His only concern was to urge the Liberated Churches to establish a sister-church relation with us, and their emigrants to settle down in our midst.

Here it was different. Rev. Hoeksema did return to nearly full strength amazingly soon, and took up his old duties again. But the satisfaction in this was in many instances muted. Things had changed. Clearly, with many, the old respect was slipping away. It was as though they had taken a new mentor; and a kind of open testiness toward Hoeksema and his views had set in. They, after all, it seemed to be thought, had come of age; and, having matched wits with no less a figure than Schilder, were as worthy of being heard as he — as the privately expressed reflections of Schilder began to pour from their lips. Hoeksema was too doctrinal. He talked about predestination too much. More practical preaching was needed, with promises and threats and conditions which must be met. Our distinctives were really not as essential as we had thought, but merely a matter of terminology and words. All across the denomination, the privately expressed thoughts of Schilder were being echoed again. The fruit of his visit was a division deep through the heart of our churches.

And then the Netherlands was heard. In spite of the silence of Schilder, our doctrines were not being ignored over there, so that finally a pastor, ashamed to let us think everything was going well, wrote concerning Hoeksema's covenant view, "I am going to oppose that view, my colleague, because I am of the opinion that this view is untenable on the basis of the Word of God and the accepted Confessions.... We accept the doctrine of Prof. Heyns. (There may be a difference in conception here and there: in the main, all our ministers are thinking in that direction)."

To Hoeksema it was almost a relief, for here was confirmation of what he had always thought, but which Schilder at their meeting had denied; and so he replied, "We do not want Heynsians in our churches, still less, to organize Heynsian churches in Canada. If your members are really Heynsians, they must either become thoroughly Reformed, or they had better join the Christian Reformed Churches. In them there is plenty of room. Or, better still, they could organize churches of their own, and call their own ministers from the Old Country." Clearly, Prof. Ophoff had been right: the problems were real and had not been met.

But by this time a ball was rolling — or, to borrow Schilder's figure, the knitting of a common stocking was begun — howbeit not in the way that had been planned. It is impossible for us to know what was said privately between Schilder and the various parties with whom he met in his visit here. And we have no idea what communications might have been carried on with him and other Liberated leaders later on. But at this point we cannot but take seriously what Prof. Holwerda reported concerning a visit of two of them, "They said this: Indeed, we have much to be grateful for to Rev. Hoeksema. But his conception re-

garding election, etc. is not church doctrine. No one is bound by it. Some are emitting a totally different sound. Their opinion was that most (of the Prot. Ref.) do not think as Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff. And sympathy for the Liberated was great also in the matter of their doctrine of the covenant. They do accentuate differently in America, considering their history, but for the conception of the Liberated there is ample room."

One may suppose that he had misunderstood; and by many it was maintained that he had. But history has pretty much borne out that what he said was the way it finally fell out to be. In the end a division had been driven by Schilder's visit through the heart of our churches which only the Declaration of Principles could set straight, maintaining as it did that, given our rejection of common grace, the Liberated view of the covenant could never have a place in our midst. And, sadly, only then in 1951 did Schilder begin to write publicly what he thought of our covenant view, in a bitterly crafted series of articles entitled, *Boven Schriftuurlike Binding: Een Nieuw Gevaar* (Above Scripture Binding: A New Peril). It was almost as though he was offended that, with the tenacity he had held to his views in 1944, Hoeksema and the PRC should hold to theirs.

And yet, through it all Hoeksema maintained a certain affection for Schilder, to the point that (almost ruefully, as though if the old openness they had known originally could be regained, things might still be worked out) his last words to him were — so shortly before Schilder's death — "Vale, Amice Schilder" (Farewell, Friend Schilder). And one has to wonder whether, from his visit here on, Schilder had actually done the part of a true friend. □

Through Warfare To Victory

Prof. Herman Hanko

Introduction

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth is sometimes called the church militant. The name is apt, for Christ calls His church to warfare as long as she is in the world. God Himself has put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan, and that enmity can only result in open and perpetual hostilities.

The church is called to fight, however, with spiritual weapons, for the battle is spiritual. The enemy is Satan and his allies — the world of wicked men. Their weapons are worldliness and false doctrine.

Sometimes the enemy is outside the walls of the city of God; sometimes the enemy appears within the walls. False doctrine can be defended by wicked men outside the church; more often, though, false doctrine is taught by men within the church. The latter is what happened in 1950-1953.

The Enemy and His Weapons

The enemy were men within the Protestant Reformed Churches who introduced into the teachings and doctrine of the churches ideas and views which were directly contrary to what the churches had always taught and to what was, in fact, the truth of Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

The men who were responsible for this were ministers of the gospel who occupied pulpits throughout the denomination, elders and deacons who supported these erroneous teachings, and people in the pew, many of whom were men of influence and stature, who openly encouraged such teaching.

The weapons they used were,

in general, the doctrines of a conditional salvation, and, in particular, the doctrines of a general and conditional promise in the covenant.

When the Protestant Reformed Churches were founded, they were established because the truth of God's sovereign, unconditional, and particular grace had to be defended over against common grace. The errors now introduced in the PRC were the heresies of conditional salvation, i.e., that man had to fulfill the condition of faith before he could be saved.

The Battlefields

While no single congregation, and indeed no single home was left unaffected, the battle raged particularly in the church papers; in First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI; and on the ecclesiastical assemblies of the churches: Classes and Synods.

The battle was fought particularly in First PRC because one of the three pastors there, Rev. Hubert De Wolf, openly taught heresy from the pulpit in the course of his preaching. It was fought on the broader assemblies because "The Declaration of Principles" was hated for its clear statement of the truth. It was fought in the church papers because conditional theology was defended by the supporters of Hubert De Wolf in public writings in a paper called *Concordia*.

The Course of the Battle in the Church Papers

It was really in the church papers that the long and difficult battle began.

When some of the ministers in the PRC began to defend conditional theology, they made use of

Concordia to do it. The magazine had appeared already in 1944, but, ironically, in defiance of its name, which means "Harmony," it sowed discord and division in the church. Because it entered nearly every home in the denomination, it sought to introduce false doctrine into every home. And because PRC homes were, above all, covenantal homes, an open defense of a conditional covenant was a direct attack on the spiritual structure of the home.

It was no wonder, then, that Rev. Herman Hoeksema, editor-in-chief of the *Standard Bearer*, engaged in a defense of a sovereign and unconditional covenant in the columns of the paper for which he was responsible.

The polemics continued throughout the controversy. Perhaps no other aspect of the battle involved the membership of the churches more than the conflict in the church papers.

The Course of the Battle in First Church

First Church could have been called the flagship of the denomination in those days. It was the congregation in which Rev. Hoeksema was pastor at the time of his suspension from office for refusing to agree to the three points of common grace. It was far and away the largest congregation, numbering some 560 families. It was the mother church.

Because of its size, it had three pastors, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Rev. Hubert De Wolf, and my father, Rev. Cornelius Hanko. While both Revs. Hoeksema and Hanko were strong defenders of unconditional salvation, Rev. De Wolf was not of that mind at all. He was intent on promoting in the

congregation a conditional theology.

While De Wolf promoted his theology in catechism classes and personal contact, he finally brought it to the pulpit on April 15, 1951, when he made the bold statement in a sermon on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "God promises to every one of you that if you believe you will be saved." Here was the clearest possible defense of a general and conditional promise in the covenant.

The statement brought protests from members of the congregation and put the controversy squarely in the hands of the elders. The consistory of First Church found it difficult to deal with the problem, chiefly because the elders reflected in their own ranks the divisions in the congregation. But with the passing of the months, the battle grew in intensity.

The congregation was affected by it, of course. Although discussions over the issues and heated debates over the doctrines involved took place at every occasion, the worst, from my viewpoint, was the difficulty in worshiping. My father often spoke of the difficulty in preaching because the absence of the Holy Spirit from the congregation was palpable. But the worship of the congregation was also noticeably affected.

Our home life was also affected. While we did not know what was taking place in the consistory meetings, we could tell the toll the battle was taking on my father — and we were constantly worried about his well-being.

After almost a year and a half, the struggle in the consistory had somewhat faded into the background, and some expressed hope that the whole difficulty could be solved in such a way that the congregation would remain intact. But then, on September 14, 1952, De Wolf, throwing caution to the winds, openly reaffirmed in the most emphatic way his commit-

ment to conditional theology. In a preparatory service, held with a view to the administration of the Lord's Supper, he preached on Matthew 18:3 and defended the proposition: "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter the kingdom of heaven."

The congregation nearly exploded, and once again the elders took up the issues. In February of 1953 De Wolf was subjected to an examination of his orthodoxy. Because of a majority in the consistory, his examination was approved and he was cleared of all heresy charges. Some elders protested this decision exonerating De Wolf, and appealed to Classis East of the PRC.

And so it came to Classis.

The committee appointed to study the matter was composed of three ministers and two elders. The ministers prepared a report defending De Wolf's statements as not necessarily heretical. The two elders, in a minority report, recommended the condemnation of the statements by Classis. After De Wolf himself repudiated the majority report, Classis decided that the statements of De Wolf were literally heretical and that De Wolf had to apologize for them or be subject to the discipline of the consistory.

A committee was appointed to bring the decision to the consistory of First Church, which it also did in June of 1953. By a majority vote the advice of Classis was accepted. Shortly afterward De Wolf made a statement to the congregation in which he apologized for offending some in the congregation, but did not apologize for his heresy. A meeting of the consistory on June 21 ended in chaos. But on June 22, the faithful elders, along with Revs. Hoeksema and Hanko, met with the consistory of Southeast PRC and proceeded to De Wolf's suspension and the deposition of the office bearers supporting him.

De Wolf's supporters took over the church property, changed

the locks, and proceeded to make use of the premises. The faithful remnant, less than half of the congregation, worshiped in the chapel of Grand Rapids Christian High School.

The Course of the Battle on the Assemblies

The battles on the assemblies concentrated in "The Declaration of Principles." Because the PRC were working among Dutch immigrants in Canada who were for the most part from "Liberated" churches in the Netherlands, where conditional theology was maintained and defended, the missionary, Rev. Andrew Cammenga, asked the Mission Committee of the PRC for a statement concerning the doctrinal position of the PRC to be used on the mission field. This request came to the Synod of 1950 and a document called "The Declaration of Principles" was drawn up, provisionally approved, and sent back to the churches for examination and discussion with a view to final approval at the Synod of 1951.

The document set forth the biblical and confessional teachings over against such key doctrines as common grace, the well-meant offer, and conditional salvation. Although adopted nearly unanimously by the Synod of 1950, it stirred up bitter debate throughout the churches when the supporters of conditional salvation began to understand what was implied in it.

Although the Synod of 1951 officially adopted the Declaration, by a vote of 9-7 (reflecting the split in the churches), the controversy continued unabated.

Classis East, as we noticed, became a battlefield when it considered protests against De Wolf from First Church. It became a battlefield at the next Classis when delegates from De Wolf's consistory and delegates from First Church both appeared and requested to be seated. When Classis decided to

seat the delegates from First Church (after lengthy debate that lasted days), De Wolf and his supporters, also from other congregations, walked out of Classis. The split then took place in the member churches.

Classis West was the scene of struggle when the announcements of De Wolf's suspension were sent to the churches. Classis West, most of which favored De Wolf, repudiated the decisions of First Church. That was the occasion for the rift to spread through the congregations beyond the Mississippi.

And so the battle resulted in a schism which rolled through the denomination like a deep chasm in the ground brought about by an earthquake. All the congregations were affected and some congregations were lost completely to the PRC.

The Aftermath

When the dust of battle had settled, it became obvious that the results of the split were, from an earthly point of view, disastrous.

The membership of the denomination was sharply reduced. The *Yearbook* of 1952 lists 24

churches, 29 ministers, 5449 individuals. The *Yearbook* of 1954 lists 16 churches, 14 ministers, 2353 individuals.

Families and friends had been separated, and the bitterness which all controversy engenders remained for years.

The work of the churches was made much more difficult. Mission work ceased. The Seminary continued, though with a sharply reduced enrollment. The energy of the churches was in a measure devoted to legal battles rather than the work assigned to her by Christ. The Christian schools, supported by the parents of the denomination, were hard hit and had a more difficult struggle to continue. A great battle-weariness settled over the saints. Though victorious, the troops were wounded and bleeding.

Was it worth it?

Well, in a sense the question is inappropriate. For in the final analysis it does not matter at all what happens to us or the churches of which we are a part when the truth of God is the issue. Whatever has to be done must be done when God's glory,

revealed in the truth of His sovereign and particular grace, is threatened by false doctrine. What the cost may be is immaterial and of no account. To ask whether the price was too high to pay is to ask the wrong question.

Nevertheless, God gave the PRC the victory even though at times it seemed as if the denomination was to be reduced to rubble. The victory was, so to speak, by the skin of our teeth; but this is the way God often works. From the controversy emerged, through the work of the Spirit, a denomination stronger, more deeply devoted to her own distinctives, more determined than ever to get on with the work of the Lord, purged from those who troubled her, and ready to move forward when once it had caught its collective breath.

God has blessed us. He rescued us when our cause seemed to be defeated. He has been with us since that time and has given us countless tokens of His favor and love. And above all, He has preserved us in the heritage of the Reformed faith for which our fathers fought so valiantly. □

God's Unconditional Covenant

Prof. Robert Decker

In April of 1951 the Rev. Hubert De Wolf, one of the three pastors of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, made the statement in his sermon, "God promises every one of you that, if you believe, you will be saved." About a year and a half later Rev. De Wolf made another statement in his sermon, "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the Kingdom of God." Protests were lodged with First's consistory against both of these

statements. When Rev. De Wolf refused to apologize for and retract the two statements, a split occurred in First Church in June of 1953. The split soon spread throughout the entire denomination with some two thirds of the clergy and membership leaving the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

While the two statements of Rev. De Wolf certainly became the immediate cause of the split, the deeper cause was the fact that a good number of the ministers were

enamored of Dr. K. Schilder's view of the covenant. This was the doctrinal issue which made the split in the Protestant Reformed Churches inevitable.

To present an accurate summary of Dr. Schilder's view of the covenant is no easy undertaking. "It should therefore be stated immediately that nowhere in any of his numerous writings did he offer a detailed and systematic exposition of his views on the covenant. The situation is rather that the covenant constantly crops up

in his theological writings, sometimes unexpectedly."¹

Schilder was concerned with two matters. In opposition to those (Herman Hoeksema among them) who insisted that one's point of departure in understanding the biblical teaching concerning God's covenant should be the eternal decrees of God, Schilder preferred to make his point of departure the historical deeds of God. In this connection Schilder was determined to do full justice to the responsibility of man.

While Schilder taught that the covenant is unilateral (one-sided) in its origin, he emphasized that the covenant is bilateral in its existence. The covenant originates in God. God establishes the covenant. What Schilder meant was that God unilaterally establishes a bilateral relationship between Himself and us. The covenant according to Schilder is a mutual agreement between two parties, God and man: two immeasurably unequal parties, but two parties nonetheless. In the covenant, God treats man as an actual and responsible partner. The covenant, according to Schilder, is a legal arrangement that confers a legal status upon the members of the covenant people. In the covenant, God's gifts of love come to us in a legal relationship and with legal guarantees.

Further, the covenant which is a bilateral relationship with a legal character contains two parts, *viz.*, the promise and the demand. With the promise, Schilder said, comes the assurance of reward (salvation) in the way of faith, and with the demand comes the threat of punishment in the case of unbelief and disobedience.

In answer to the question whether such an emphasis on the responsibility of man does not undermine the certainty of the covenant, Schilder stressed that the promise of the covenant can never be separated from the demand of the covenant. If one would sepa-

rate the promise from the demand, he would change the promise into a mere prediction. If one would separate the demand from the promise of the covenant, he would introduce a new law. Promise and demand are inseparable.

It is in this connection that Schilder introduced what he called a "Reformed doctrine of conditions." Baptism seals in a sacramental way the promise of the gospel. But this promise demands from us that we in faith appropriate for ourselves what is promised and so make it our own. Faith, which Schilder insisted is God's gift to us, is the condition of the covenant. God has decreed that salvation can never be realized without faith. One's baptism, therefore, does not imply a dogmatic proclamation that God confers salvation on the elect. But in baptism, Schilder taught, one receives a concrete address from God, a message that God proclaims to everyone who is baptized, personally: if you believe you will be saved.

The PRC, following the leadership of Herman Hoeksema, reacted strongly to Schilder's covenant views. The view of Schilder regards the covenant as a means to an end, the end being salvation. The PRC regard the covenant as the highest end in itself. As to its idea, the covenant is the bond of friendship which God unilaterally establishes, maintains, and realizes with His elect in Christ.

That the covenant is a bond of friendship between God and His people in Christ is clearly taught in Scripture. In paradise God revealed Himself to Adam and spoke with him as a Friend with His friend, and Adam knew God in the cool of the day. Enoch and Noah walked with God, implying friendship and fellowship (Gen. 5:22; 6:8-9). Abraham is called the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). To Moses God spoke as a man speaks with his friend (Ex. 31:11). In the tabernacle and temple God

dwelt with His people. In Psalm 25:14 Scripture declares that "the secret (familiar acquaintance) of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." The Lord promises to dwell with the church, walk with her, and be her God (II Cor. 6:6). God's covenant of friendship will be realized in heavenly perfection in the new creation. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). In the new Jerusalem God's people shall walk in the light of the glory of God, and they shall see His face (Rev. 22:4).

Scripture makes unmistakably clear as well that God establishes and maintains and realizes His covenant unilaterally. God said to Noah, for example, "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth" (Gen. 9:9-10). And to Abraham God said, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7).

With whom does God establish His covenant of friendship? With the elect in Christ, believers and their children. The Lord Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is be-

¹ S. A. Strauss, "Schilder on the Covenant," in *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, J. Geertsema, editor. (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publishers), p. 19.

fore all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell" (Col. 1:15-19). To Christ are given the elect, conformed by God's choosing to His image (Eph. 1). For these sheep Christ, the Good Shepherd, lays down His life at the cross and takes it again in the resurrection (John 10).

Are all the children of believers elect, friends of God in Christ? We know better. There are Esaus born of believing parents as well

as Jacobs. In the Old Testament era these Esaus were circumcised and in the new they are baptized. Does this mean that God promises them salvation if they believe? Never! The sacrament, like the preaching of the Word, is to the reprobate a savor of death unto death (II Cor. 2:16).

Does this biblical view of the covenant deny the responsibility of man? Again, never! The fact that God establishes His covenant of friendship with the elect in Christ obligates them to new obedience. To use the language of the Form for the Baptism of Infants, they must cleave to their God, forsake the world, crucify their old na-

tures, and walk in a new and holy life! This life of sanctification is not to be conceived of as a fulfilling of conditions in order that the covenant may be realized. This is the fruit of God's marvelous grace and love at work in the hearts of His covenant people. □

For further study of this important subject the reader may consult: Herman Hanko, *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace*; Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge*, vol. 2, pp. 495-527; J Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant* (this book presents the "Liberated" view).

Advice or Jurisdiction (the Authority of Major Assemblies)

Rev. Gise VanBaren

In the controversy of 1924, the question was raised concerning the authority of the Classis or Synod over the local consistory. The Synod (1924) of the Christian Reformed Church, meeting at Kalamazoo, MI, adopted what was known as the "Three Points of Common Grace."¹ The decision was taken in answer to protests which were made against the teaching of the Rev. Herman Hoeksema of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. That same Synod declared that the Rev. Herman Hoeksema was Reformed, howbeit somewhat one-sided.² It also refused to adopt a motion demanding that that pastor submit to the decisions concerning common grace or be suspended or deposed from office.³

Later, when additional appeals were made by members of Eastern Ave. Chr. Ref. Church to the Classis East of Grand Rapids of the CRC, that Classis finally sus-

pended the Rev. H. Hoeksema and deposed his elders from office. The small minority of members of that congregation who opposed Rev. H. Hoeksema managed, through court action, to strip the majority of their property and name.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have expressed their disagreement with the above action by maintaining: 1) that the Synod had declared Rev. H. Hoeksema Reformed though "one-sided," but had refused to demand his submission to the adopted "Three Points of Common Grace"; 2) that the Classis Grand Rapids East had no legal authority to suspend or depose officebearers of a local church; this right belongs only with the consistory of the church.

The Protestant Reformed Churches adopted the name ("churches" — in the plural) to express the truth that the local church is autonomous. It is not

the denomination that is the "church," but the *local* church is the manifestation of the body of Christ. That is in distinction from the Christian Reformed Church — the name implying that the *denomination* is itself the "church." A large number of those who are leaving the Christian Reformed Church in recent years to establish independent congregations have come to understand this distinction too — and some have now repudiated this position of the CRC.

This question surfaced again in the split of 1953 in the Protestant Reformed Churches. There was a question of the binding nature of decisions of Classis or Synod (Article 31⁴ of the Church Order). There were questions concerning the idea and significance of the *autonomy* of the local congregation. While both sides claimed to adhere to the *principles* maintained at the time of the 1924 controversy, there

were obvious differences of opinion how all of this applied in the situation of 1953.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider all of the questions raised and issues presented. By the nature of the case, there was a very unusual situation within the churches. Schism of this sort affects decisions taken. A careful analysis of all the events of that time might be profitable — but would involve a very lengthy article — or even a book.

The court case of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI before Judge Taylor reveals some of the diversity of opinion. Both sides agreed on the autonomy of the local congregation. But the two sides obviously disagreed on the relationship of the local church to the classis or synod and how Article 31 applied.

The Rev. Bernard Kok expressed what seemed to be the general view of the dissidents. His statements under oath show strikingly the driving force behind many of the decisions made by the “De Wolf group.” I quote from the court records:

Q. (by lawyer Linsey): Well, let us assume, as in this case, that Classis advised the suspension or deposition of DeWolf if he did not apologize, would it be up to — would the Consistory have to follow that advice?

A. No, sir.

Q. If they refused to follow that advice, would that have any effect upon the local property or congregation?

A. No.

Q. Here, as this has been interpreted, this law has been interpreted in your church, the church is autonomous churches?

A. Autonomous churches, yes.

Q. Is there any penalty if you should refuse, if the Consistory should refuse to follow the advice of Classis or Synod?

A. No penalty whatsoever.

Q. Now, then, if the Classis in this case would call in a neighboring Consistory and suspend

DeWolf if he doesn’t apologize, do I understand the Consistory would not have to follow that advice?

A. May I hear that Question again? (Question thereupon read by the reporter.)

Q. Consistory of the First Church, do they have to follow that advice?

A. No, sir, and Classis has no business giving that. In the question of suspension, Classis has nothing to say whatsoever; in the suspension and deposition of elders and deacons, Classis has nothing to say. In the suspension of the minister, Classis has nothing to say. The only stipulation in the Church Order is that the minister may not be deposed without the advice of Classis, but in the suspension, the Classis has no voice at all.

Q. Well, how about the deposition?

A. The deposition is to be done by the Consistory, but according to the Church Order, may not be done without the advice of Classis. They may suspend a minister without the advice of Classis, by the preceding sentence of the consistory and the neighboring consistory, but they may not depose the minister without first having obtained the advice of Classis and the approval of the synodical delegates.

Q. Now, in this case, it appears that Rev. Hoeksema — strike that out — it appears that the consistory of the First Church approved the doctrine of Rev. DeWolf as explained by him, and it appears that Rev. Hoeksema took an appeal from that decision to Classis upon the question of doctrine. Did that give classis any authority, under the law as it is interpreted by your church, to depose or suspend the minister?

A. No, sir.

Q. Or even advise it?

A. Not even advise it.⁵

Under cross examination by Attorney Tubbs, Rev. B. Kok provided further explanation of his views:

Q. The Church Order, itself, however, is the constitution of your church, is it not?

A. And the Church Order, Article 31, allows, when it states that all decisions by majority vote shall be binding unless — that means unless in my conscience it is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order, then it is not binding.

Q. Is the word “conscience” in Article 31?

A. That is our interpretation of Article 31.

Q. Whose interpretation?

A. Rev. Ophoff.

Q. What is your interpretation?

A. The same as Professor Ophoff.

Q. What is the interpretation of the synod of your church?

A. I don’t think we have any, do we — let me look up Article 31. (Referring to Church Order) Doesn’t say anything about it.

Q. Now, the use of the word “proved” in that article has meaning, does it not?

A. Yes, do you want me to read from Professor Ophoff what it means?

Q. No, I want you to answer my question.

A. Yes, it has meaning.

Q. To whom is the proof given?

A. How?

Q. To whom is that proof given under Article 31?

A. You must attempt to give that proof to either classis or synod.

1 *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, Herman Hoeksema, 1947 edition, page 85.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

4 Article 31 states: “If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order, as long as they are not changed by a general synod.”

5 *The First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, a Michigan Corporation*, Plaintiff, vs. Hubert De Wolf, etc. Vol. 1, p. 124ff.

Q. You must not only attempt, you must actually furnish the proof, must you not?

A. Not necessarily. If I do not actually furnish the proof that is satisfactory to the synod or classis, I still have the right of my opinion.

Q. Under Article 31?

A. Under Article 31.

Q. You reserve the right to have your own opinion?

A. That is right.

Q. But action of synod or classis is binding on you?

A. It is not.

Q. You mean you can flaunt a decision of classis?

A. Yes, guaranteed by my contract.

Q. And still remain a minister of the gospel of the Protestant Reformed Church?

A. Of the Protestant Reformed Church, of a Protestant Reformed congregation, yes. Whether they want to put me out of the association, that is their privilege. They have a right to deny me the fellowship, but they have no right to touch my office as minister in the Protestant Reformed Church of the congregation I represent.⁶

The above quotes give an idea of the erroneous view presented of Article 31 of the Church Order. It appears, according to this pre-

sentation, that anyone may ignore the decisions of classis (or synod) if he proves to his own conscience that he is right and classis is wrong. The only thing a classis can do, if the matter is of sufficiently serious a nature, is to sever relationships with the congregation which refuses to follow its advice. The statements of Rev. B. Kok go a long way to explain what occurred both in Classis West and some of the churches of Classis East. These would not be bound by Article 31 of the Church Order.

The Protestant Reformed Churches *do* maintain the autonomy of the local church and its consistory. These churches do make a distinction between "broader" (correct) and "higher" (wrong) bodies when speaking of Classis or Synod. These churches *have* insisted that only the consistory can suspend, depose, or otherwise discipline its office-bearers or members. But surely they have not taught that Article 31 means one need merely to prove *to one's own conscience* from Scripture and the Church Order that a decision of Classis or Synod is wrong in order then to ignore or violate that decision. Such action would result in anarchy in the

churches (as was seen also in 1953). According to Article 31 of the Church Order, the decisions of the broader bodies are *binding*. Those who disagree with the decisions of the broader gatherings must prove from Scripture and the Church Order *to the satisfaction of those bodies* that the decision is wrong. If that is not thus proved, and if the church or individual refuses to abide by the decisions of the broader gatherings, they put themselves outside of the pale of the churches — and these gatherings must declare them to be out. If one can do as he pleases despite the decisions of the broader gathering, then protests, appeals, overtures would mean nothing anymore.

If our churches learned one important lesson in 1953, it was surely this: we must abide by the Order adopted by the churches and not have each do what is right "in his own eyes." Decisions taken by the broader gatherings must be binding in the churches — or there would be anarchy and surely no denominational unity. □

6 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

"The Declaration of Principles" What? When? and Why?

Rev. Dale Kuiper

The closing years of the 1940s were years of unrest and change. The United States was welcoming home her servicemen from active duty in the European and Asiatic theaters of operations. Many thousands of her soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen did not return, or returned only to be buried in home soil. Huge factories which had been

turning out tanks, planes, trucks, ships, and munitions were being retooled for domestic production. There were many shortages: cars, appliances, apartments. Of course, all these things affected the members of our churches as well. But there were winds of unrest and change of a more important, doctrinal nature rustling in the churches as well.

Dr. K. Schilder had visited the

United States in 1939 and again in 1947. Rev. H. Hoeksema suffered a severe stroke in 1947. Canada, with its open immigration policy, was welcoming many immigrants from Europe, especially from the Netherlands. Among these were many from the Liberated Churches of which Dr. Schilder was the leader. After a visit to the Netherlands by the Revs. J. DeJong and B. Kok, during which visit the Lib-

erated brethren were assured that there was no official view of the covenant held by the Protestant Reformed Churches, the immigrants to Canada were advised to join these churches; there was room for them there. Missionary work was carried out by our churches in the Province of Ontario and two congregations were organized there: Hamilton (1949) and Chatham (1950). By 1952 these congregations had left our denomination. This short history was not harmonious nor the relationship smooth.

In 1951, with one dissenting vote, the Synod of our churches adopted a rather lengthy document entitled "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches" (cf. *The Church Order*, pp. 110-134). This document became the focal point of much discussion for several years throughout the churches and her assemblies, and revealed basic differences in doctrinal positions between the Liberated and us not only, but also between our own members and clergy. When the smoke cleared in 1953, our churches remained intact with the same precious doctrines we always maintained, but we had lost about half our membership and clergy.

Before we analyze the contents of the Declaration we want to note two things. First, the contention of some that our churches never had an officially adopted view of the covenant had some truth to it. No classis or synod had ever spoken to this issue from 1924-1951. There was no need for such a decision since no protest or appeal had ever been brought for adjudication; it was assumed that all held the same view. However, it must be remembered that the view of the covenant embodied in the Declaration and defended successfully by our churches in 1951-1953 against all other views was inherent in our history and positions since our churches began. Particular grace, not common grace, ap-

plied to the area of the covenant certainly meant for our churches a particular, unconditional covenant that God establishes only with His particular people, the elect. Secondly, the charge was made repeatedly against the adoption of the Declaration that it was a new confession which we did not need. We hope to show this charge to be false, and that it was a wise, masterful, and necessary compilation of articles from our existing Three Forms of Unity under certain points or principles "as these have always been maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches" (Preamble to the Declaration).

The Contents of the Declaration

A brief outline of the Declaration will show the truth of the above statement. There are four main points.

First, the PRC repudiate the errors of the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the Synod of the CRC in 1924, and over against them maintain that the grace of God is always particular, i.e., only for the elect, never for the reprobate; that the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, (and now notice) nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith; and that the unregenerate man is totally incapable of doing any good, wholly depraved, and therefore can only sin.

The second main point sets forth our confessional stance that election is the unconditional, unchangeable decree of God to redeem in Christ a certain number of persons, and this election is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation. Further, Christ died only for the elect, and the saving efficacy of His death extends only to them. After quoting Canons II,

A, 8 for proof, the Declaration states:

1. That all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone.
2. That God's promise is unconditionally for them only: for God cannot promise what was not objectively merited by Christ.
3. That the promise of God bestows the objective right of salvation not upon all the children that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, not upon all that are baptized, but only upon the spiritual seed.

When the Heidelberg Catechism is quoted in proof (L.D. XXV and XXVII, the Means of Grace), the Declaration makes the points that the promise of the gospel sealed by the sacraments concerns only believers, that is, the elect; and only the spiritual children of believers are meant, for little infants cannot fulfill any conditions, and if God's promise is for them, the promise is infallible, unconditional, and therefore only for the elect. The final point made under the second section is that faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, the God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ.

The third main section repudiates the teachings that the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all that are baptized and that we may presuppose that all the children that are baptized are regenerated. Contrariwise, the Declaration maintains

1. That God surely and infallibly fulfills His promise to the elect.
2. That the sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness, but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer.
3. That the ground of infant baptism is the command of God and

the fact that according to Scripture He establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations.

The last brief point states that the PRC believe and maintain the autonomy of the local church.

This brief survey shows that our original, historical position that the grace of God is sovereign and particular can only lead to the conclusion that the covenant of God with us and our children is a covenant that is sovereignly established and maintained, that it is unconditional and without human prerequisites, and that it is indeed a covenant that is dominated, defined, delineated, and controlled by God's eternal election of His people! We plead guilty to the charge, if indeed that be a charge.

This brief summary also shows that the Declaration, though officially adopted by our Synod, is not the *full* expression of our covenant view. It sufficed to safeguard the truth in the conditional covenant dispute with the Liberated brethren, but it does not reflect the development of covenant doctrine which had already taken place among us at that time, and which continues to be developed. The word friendship, which denotes the heart and essence of the covenant, is not found in the Declaration. The relation of friendship between God and His people in Christ is not described in terms of the covenant life of the Triune God, the most basic consideration in our covenant view. How the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity is manifest in God's saving of believers and their seed is not entered into at all. We repeat, the Declaration sufficed for the task at hand, but it is not the final, complete word on our covenant position.

The Nature of the Declaration

That the Declaration is not a fourth confession is clear from two considerations. First, approximately ninety percent of its con-

tents is made up of quotes from the Three Forms of Unity, our Liturgical Forms, and the Church Order. Really, the Declaration breaks no new ground, but brings the Reformed confessions to bear upon the vital subjects of the promise of God, the covenant of grace, and infant baptism. Secondly, that this is no fourth confession is brought out by the Preamble to the Declaration which sharply limits its use. A church's confession is not limited in its use; the Declaration is. "The Declaration of Principles (is) to be used only by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospective churches on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions...."

Note that word "only." If a member of a congregation is not satisfied with the preaching of his minister, complaining that it is not Reformed, he has no right to use the Declaration to show that his minister's preaching is not Reformed. He must use the *confessions* in an attempt to show that. Officebearers when ordained into office are not required to sign the Declaration of Principles; they are required to sign the Formula of Subscription, which signifies their agreement with the confessions and the Church Order.

On the other hand, when a missionary is laboring with a group of people with the view to organizing a PR congregation, he not only *may*, but he *must* include the contents of the Declaration in his teaching. And the calling consistory of the missionary as well as the Mission Committee that oversees the work for the churches in common must judge the progress of the work, the spiritual growth of the people, and their readiness for organization *for one thing* on the readiness of the group to embrace, confess, and rejoice in the contents of the Declaration.

We may not allow the Declaration to lie at the back of our Church Order book as a dead

document of little historical significance. It was adopted because the very basis of our churches was at stake! It was adopted only after a long and bitter struggle for the truth of God's sovereign particular grace! It was adopted after hard toil, through broken friendships, and with a split denomination as the result. To refuse to use the Declaration as it was intended would be a betraying of our fathers of 1951-1953, and a lack of appreciation for the reformation which the Spirit of Truth worked in our churches just after the war.

What Authority?

Does the Declaration of Principles have authority in our churches? If so, what or what kind? Even though the Declaration is not a creed, even though its use is limited to the mission field that groups of believers who wish to be organized as PR congregations may know that we do have an official view of the covenant, the Declaration does have authority over every member of the denomination. Synod has taken a decision. And the decisions of Synod are settled and binding throughout the churches. Do *you* want to sharpen your understanding of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant? You may study the Declaration. Do *you* have opportunity to speak with others about the most important distinctive we have as churches? You may say to them, "Here, this is what we believe about the promise of God, the covenant of grace, and holy baptism."

As we reflect on the necessity for ongoing reformation in the church of Jesus Christ, as we understand that controversy and struggle in the church always lead to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the truth, let us not fail to appreciate what was safeguarded and gained in the early fifties, especially for our work in preaching the Reformed faith to the nations. □

How We View the Children of the Covenant

Rev. Arie denHartog

We believe that the doctrinal controversy of 1953 has practical importance. It did not involve theological issues that are so abstract that they are of no real spiritual value for the daily lives of God's people. The two great doctrines that were especially involved in the controversy of 1953 were the doctrines of God's sovereign elective grace in the saving of His people and the doctrine of the covenant of God with His people. These two doctrines are absolutely central to the Scriptures. No truly Reformed believer would dispute that. It must also be said that the two sides which were engaged in the controversy of 1953 desired to maintain these doctrines. Which side actually has remained most faithful to these great doctrines must be judged in the light of the Word of God. Through the stormy history that always accompanies doctrinal controversy, the church is led by God's grace and Holy Spirit into a deeper and richer understanding of the Word of God. We humbly believe that God has so led our Protestant Reformed Churches.

We shall focus especially on the significance of the doctrinal controversy of 1953 for how we view our children in God's covenant. This is a subject very dear to the hearts of Reformed believers because we love our children as covenant children of God. May the Lord keep us from carnality in that love for our children, from a love merely for our own flesh and blood, and from the proud imagination that our children are better than those of the world simply be-

cause they are ours. We confess with our baptism form that we conceive and bring forth our children in sin. There is no more hope for our children by nature than there is for the poor, wretched, miserable sinners that are the parents of these children. Our only hope is in the grace of God.

More specifically, in connection with the subject under discussion, our hope is in the sovereign, gracious covenant of God with believers and their children. We bring forth our children as our covenant calling before God. Our faith in regard to them is antithetic to the world's philosophy of birth control. There are still many large families in our churches for this reason. We take confidence in God's covenant purpose in our calling. Without this confidence we would despair at bringing children into the ungodly, wicked world in which we live. We bring our children to church to be baptized as infants because we believe that God in His gracious purpose has very really included the children of believers in His covenant.

How we view our children in the covenant is of vital importance for how we raise our children. It is first of all the basis for our hope for their salvation. We lay hold by faith on the promise of God to Abraham that He will be our God and the God of our children after us. We find our hope in the promise announced at Pentecost: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). We plead on the basis of the promise of the covenant when we pray for our children.

We admonish our children daily to turn from their sins, in repentance to God. We exhort them to crucify their old sinful nature and to live a new and godly life only when we properly understand the truth of God's covenant. We are convinced that we are right in bringing our little ones to Jesus, because to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. We comfort our children with the promises of God's Word based on the truth of the covenant. We assure them that the promises of the gospel belong to them as well as to us as adults. We also admonish even those who are of our own flesh and blood that if they lead a wicked and carnal life they have no part in the covenant and kingdom of God and they stand exposed to the wrath of God unless they repent and turn from their wicked ways.

The most excellent confessional expression that we know of the truth of covenant with regard to our children is the one found in Lord's Day 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism. "Are infants also to be baptized? Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant." This beautiful confessional expression of the biblical truth of the covenant of God as it

applies to children, we believe, cannot be read to mean that God makes only an objective promise to covenant children which is conditioned on their own personal acceptance later in life. The children of the covenant are as much in the covenant from birth as their covenant parents are.

The promise of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks includes the promise of redemption from sin, by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith. God does not promise these things to covenant children merely objectively or externally. He promises to apply the blessings of salvation to the hearts of the children of the covenant by the working of His Holy Spirit. The faith of covenant children is a gift of God to His elect. It is not the condition which covenant children fulfill later in life. This God-given faith is not dependent for its fulfillment on the action of man but on God alone. God gives faith to covenant children by His sovereign, effectual operation of the Spirit in their hearts. This truth cannot find any other basis than God's election. Without such a sovereign effectual working of the Spirit of God none of our "covenant children" would ever have faith and none would ever be saved.

This is all very practical. We have these things in our minds and hearts when we bring our children with us to church. We do not go along with the modern-day fad of "children's church" that separates children from families before the beginning of the sermon. We believe that our children very really belong to the church of Jesus Christ already as infants. We believe that the preaching that takes place in the congregation is addressed to children as well as to adults. For this reason also the inspired apostles of the Lord addressed children as well as adults in the letters they sent to the churches. God gives spiritual re-

ceptivity to children in the covenant. Though their understanding of the preaching is no doubt less than that of adults, covenant children can and do receive spiritual blessing in the worship service when the Word of God is faithfully preached and properly applied.

We believe that the church must maintain a solid and thorough program of catechism instruction for covenant youth. Such programs are a rarity today in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. If there is still any significant measure of instruction of children in many churches, it is done in superficial Sunday School classes, many of which are at best very shallow and some of which are simply Arminian in their approach to covenant children. The purpose of catechism instruction is to bring covenant children to maturity in the faith. This would not be possible if the Spirit of God was not given to them in their hearts.

Our covenant convictions constrain us to establish our own covenant Christian day schools wherever possible. We do all in our power by the grace of God to keep the covenant perspective of these schools. We do not consider these schools little missionary institutions to bring people from the outside world into the church. Mission work is the calling of the church through the preaching of the gospel and the testimony of her members, but not of the school. We do not throw open the doors of our schools to anyone in the community who might be attracted to the excellent academic character and discipline that characterizes our schools. We believe that these schools are for covenant children. They are not in existence to convert the children of the world, if that were possible. All of this we say with thankfulness to God, to illustrate of what great practical importance the doctrine of the covenant is and how important it is to maintain this doctrine in all

purity for the glory of God and not the praise of men.

There are two errors which we have sought steadfastly to avoid in the covenant perspective from which we strive to raise our children. We have repudiated the error of "presupposed regeneration." This view holds that all children born of covenant parents are presupposed to be children of God until in later life they reveal themselves by a wicked life-style as not being part of that covenant. It is simply not true to the Word of God that all children born of covenant parents are God's elect; nor may we simply assume that they are. We have always rejected this error, even though some have falsely accused us of holding to it. The error of presupposed regeneration has had evil consequences in many Reformed churches. It has given the carnal seed in these churches the idea that in spite of an ungodly life-style they may assume that they are children of God. Because of this false teaching, wicked, ungodly young people who grow up in the church are not warned and admonished as God's Word requires. This false doctrine has over the years filled many Reformed churches with carnal members and tolerated the grossest iniquity among the youth of the church.

We also reject the idea that the covenant of God in the church is conditional. This is the idea that God really makes His covenant with all the children of covenant parents. In spite of the fact that God's covenant is with them, some of these covenant children are still lost through their own unbelief and rejection of the covenant promises offered to them. According to this scheme the covenant promise is conditioned on the faith confessed in later life by covenant children. The reason why we reject this perspective of the covenant is that the conclusion of this teaching is that God's covenant is based ultimately on the

work of man and not completely on God. Though the proponents of this theory have often denied this, the conclusion is inescapable. God is then not sovereign in realizing His covenant promise in the hearts of covenant children. For some covenant children the promise of God is made of none effect. God, from their birth, promised to be their God but in the end failed to save them.

We believe that the covenant of God with the children of believers is limited by God's purpose of election. This is not a truth that we have come to by some sort of evil rationalism independent from a study of and meditation on the Word of God. The Bible teaches that in the sphere of the covenant there are born Esaus and Jacobs. In the Old Testament day, both of these were circumcised according to the command of God. Both of these were given the same instruction in the sphere of the covenant home and in the nation or church in which they were raised. It was revealed later in life that Esau was a carnal and profane reprobate. Jacob was by God's grace, in spite of his sinfulness, an elect child of God with whom God by sovereign grace continued His covenant.

The inspired apostle Paul answers the question in Romans 9 to 11 whether the Word of God was made of no effect by the unbelief of the majority of the Jews. The answer of the Word of God is that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). In Romans 11 he answers the question whether the unbelief of many in Israel means that God has cast away His people, with the strong statement, "God forbid!" The purpose of election shall stand. The promise of God is sure to all of God's elect. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." We believe that these and other passages of Scripture clearly teach that God's covenant purpose is controlled by His purpose of

sovereign eternal election. We read the limiting clause of Acts 2:39, "as many as the Lord our God shall call," as a reference to the realization of God's purpose of election in the generations of God's people.

We acknowledge that we bring forth a twofold seed, a carnal and a spiritual. This is a very difficult truth about the way of God's working. It is nevertheless the way of His sovereign purpose. Sometimes carnal seed in the church are clearly revealed in connection with total carelessness on the part of parents to fulfill their covenant obligation in nurturing their children in the fear of the Lord. This is not always the case. It is very difficult to live with the possibility that one of your own children may be carnal and reprobate. Paul said that he could wish that he were accursed from Christ for his brethren's sake. We pray for our children until the day that we die. Only God knows those who are truly His. But even when it seems that we have carnal children, our final comfort and assurance is in God's sovereign purpose, which we know is always good and will serve for the glory of His name. Believing this truth takes great faith. But that faith alone comforts in the deep sorrow of impenitent, rebellious children in the covenant home. Almost every pastor has been called upon to advise and to comfort godly parents in situations such as these. It is not an easy task but one that can only be performed with sound teaching of the Word of God (sound doctrine)

When we sit around our table with our covenant children we address them from the perspective of the covenant of God, even though we do not know that every one of them is definitely an elect child of God. Only God knows that. Scripture gives us the direction to address our children from this perspective. The minister in church addresses His con-

gregation from this same perspective. This is not the same as presupposed regeneration. In our dealing with our children we admonish them about sin. We call them to daily repentance and conversion. We warn our carnal children with grief and sorrow of heart, that if they live an ungodly life they have no right to be called the children of God. We warn them about the severe judgments of God that shall come upon those who were taught the way of the Lord and then forsook that way when they came to years of responsibility. We leave the effect of such warning up to the Lord. For some this warning will be unto repentance; to others, to hardening and judgment.

The mighty incentive to godly living for the children of the covenant is not the admonition that, if only they will fulfill the condition of faith, the covenant promises of God will first really and spiritually become theirs. Such admonitions will only leave these children with the fear that at some point in life they might fail to fulfill the necessary condition and still be lost. The mighty incentive to godly living for covenant children is the wonderful, blessed, sure covenant promise of God in Christ Jesus realized from beginning to end only by the sovereign grace of God. We have the solemn obligation to live godly lives because we are by the grace of God members of His covenant. We are moved to do so in humble gratitude to God for all that He has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ. We do not become God's covenant people by our own action of faith. Our faith is a chief part of the blessings of the covenant which He bestows upon us and our children. We teach our children that because of our sinful nature even as children of God we are daily prone to sin. Our love and thankfulness to God must cause us to abhor that sin and flee to the cross daily for forgiveness.

It is such teaching that God uses and applies to the hearts of the true children of the covenant as He realizes His sovereign, gracious covenant purpose with them. When we and our children sometimes fall into sin, and we do all too often, we must not despair of

God's mercy or continue in sin, knowing that God has established an eternal covenant of grace with us. The teaching of God's sovereign grace does not lead to carelessness in the lives of God's people, no matter how often it has been falsely charged. This teaching will do that only if it is wrested

by evil men unto their own destruction. Teaching God's sovereign elective grace in His covenant to our children will by the grace and Spirit of God be the mighty incentive to them to live godly lives. This is the calling of God to His covenant people. □

The Split of 1953

Rev. Cornelius Hanko

Forty-three years later it is still painful for me to think back upon and write about the split of 1953. This is because I was personally involved in all that took place, sat through many difficult meetings of consistory, classis, and synod, experienced that there were those, among whom were my most intimate friends ever since the student days in the seminary, who now were out to destroy our churches by opposing the truth that we held most precious. I recall the nights after consistory meetings when Rev. Ophoff and I would walk the streets of Grand Rapids in utter weariness, how I would receive unpleasant phone calls just before going to the pulpit, and how difficult it often was to preach, knowing that there was so much opposition in the congregation.

In times like that, the devil seems to work overtime. He knows how to create dissension, arouse suspicions, gossip, backbiting, and slander, stirring up bitterness, wrath, and even hatred. These were also times of much prayer, fervent prayer, pleading with God. To put it in the words of the psalmist:

With steadfast courage I design
no wrong to speak or do;

Thy path of life I choose for mine
and walk with purpose true.
For help, O God, I cry to Thee,
Assured that Thou wilt answer
me."

The question often arises, was this split unavoidable? The answer is that, under the circumstances, it was inevitable.

In 1945, when I was still in Oaklawn, Illinois, I accepted a call from Manhattan, Montana, which brought me out of Classis East and into Classis West. Soon after attending classis meetings a few times I noticed a spirit of discontent.

Some of the ministers were unhappy that their congregations failed to grow. They had looked forward to a more or less rapid growth, and yet there seemed to be so little outside interest.

Contact had been made with the German Reformed churches in South Dakota, and conferences were held between both groups. But Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff discovered that some of the German churches were far from Reformed, judging from the remarks made at the conferences and from the literature they distributed. These ministers discouraged any effort to join with them, which was likely a contributing factor that brought an end to these conferences. It was quite obvious that, particularly in the west, the ministers resented the leadership of

Rev. Hoeksema, even accusing him of being domineering.

There was also an effort toward independentism, that is, members of Classis West were unwilling to cooperate in the work that was being carried on in Classis East. A radio broadcast had been started in Grand Rapids over radio station WFUR, called "The Reformed Witness Hour," which was also aired over other stations. But men of Classis West began their "Sovereign Grace Hour." In Grand Rapids a weekly paper was published known as *The Church News*. Our churches in the midwest began to publish *Concordia*. Still worse, the synod had adopted catechism books to be used in our churches, but in the midwest they prepared their own catechism books.

In 1948 I received a call from First Church. Since Rev. Hoeksema had suffered a stroke in June of 1947 the consistory decided to call a third minister. While I was considering the call I received a letter from Rev. Hoeksema, explaining the need for another minister, adding that there were serious problems in the congregation which he hoped I would not ignore in considering the call.

After I accepted the call and came to Grand Rapids I soon discovered that the problems referred to by Rev. Hoeksema were far

more serious than I had realized.

From the very beginning of our existence as Protestant Reformed churches some individuals had joined us, not for the sake of principle or out of conviction, but for various other reasons. Since First Church was a large congregation it demanded no sacrifice to join us, so that various outsiders, some of whom married a member of the church, joined without actually desiring the truth that was preached. In fact, these outsiders, and possibly others, complained that the preaching was too doctrinal, the society life too formal and lifeless. They wanted skits and other forms of entertainment. A spirit of worldmindedness was creeping into the church.

On family visitation I discovered that there were people who showed no interest in the church or in spiritual matters. There was a lethargy, but also a cold indifference. They objected to solid Reformed preaching, and they especially shied away from the idea of being distinctly Reformed. Many objected to having our own school. In fact, there were a few who were members of the labor union, but had managed to remain undetected.

All of this came to a head with the visit of Prof. Klaas Schilder to America. He sought contact with us, was heartily received, and spoke in our various churches. Many of our ministers and members of the congregations found him to be a very congenial person, whose visit and interest in us was greatly appreciated.

In the effort to be more practical in their preaching, to lay more emphasis on man's responsibility, many of the ministers began to preach the "conditional" theology of the Liberated Churches. Articles appeared in *Concordia*, not only defending the idea of "conditions" unto salvation, something that man must do, emphasizing the "must," but also defending the idea that faith is a condition unto

salvation. No matter how they tried to defend that, it had the Arminian connotation of man's part in the work of salvation.

What brought this to a head is the fact that immigrants began coming into our country and into Canada, many of them from the Liberated Churches and seeking to join with us. These Liberated had just gone through a doctrinal struggle in the Netherlands, which had resulted in the birth of the Liberated Churches in distinction from the *Gereformeerde* (Reformed) churches. These individuals were determined to cling to their conception of the covenant and "conditions" in the covenant even when they joined us. This was evident, for example, from a protest that was sent to our consistory from two young men who had come from the Liberated Churches and now were protesting against the sermons of Rev. Hoeksema and me as not being Reformed.

All this forced the Mission Committee to propose to synod to adopt a Declaration of Principles in which would be clearly expressed the specific truths maintained by our Protestant Reformed Churches in regard to common grace, the general offer of salvation, and the covenant. Especially this truth of God's covenant, following out of our stand for God's sovereignty, as developed by Rev. Hoeksema, we considered to be our peculiar mark of distinction among the churches.

This Declaration was adopted by the synod of 1950 with but one dissenting vote. It was only later that serious opposition arose among our ministers and members.

In fact, in Canada two churches were organized under the pretense of agreeing with us doctrinally. I was personally told by more than one of the immigrants that the people in Hamilton had deliberately deceived us. When they felt strong enough numerically and financially to be on their

own they left us and organized their own churches.

Obviously the split of '53 was inevitable.

We may also ask: Was the split necessary for the welfare of our churches?

This question could also be formulated to read: Did God have a divine purpose with this split for our good? The answer is: We would have lost the very truth of God's sovereign grace for which we have always striven. Today we can plainly see that, had it not happened, we either would no longer exist or we would have no right of existence as defending the truth of God's sovereign grace.

It is indeed true that we were decimated at the time. In fact, we lost more than half of our ministers, churches, and membership. Yet the Lord has turned that to our good. The Lord has plainly sent a purifying trial as by fire, through which our churches not only survived, but also were spiritually blessed.

Our view of God's covenant friendship established with His people in Christ has not only been preserved, but also delivered from any taint of "conditions" that might have been found in it before the conflict.

Still more, that truth has been more fully developed. We see more clearly than ever that this covenant view is entrusted to us to cherish and to find our comfort in it. The very idea is worth giving our lives for, for we are sons and daughters of the living God, having a rightful place in God's house as part of that blessed family that will be completely united in heavenly perfection before the throne, forever reflecting the glory of God and living in intimate communion of life with Him to the praise of the glory of His grace!

Are there lessons to be learned, danger signs that must be heeded as a result of this experience?

Having lived through the reformation that took place in 1924

and the split in our churches in 1953 I cannot avoid comparing the events that led up to both.

In both instances there was a strong opposition to sound doctrine. Before 1924 there were those in the churches who emphasized the general, well-meant offer of salvation. The Arminian theory of the free will, so strongly condemned at the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, was again lifting its vile head in the church. In the '53 controversy the truth of God's sovereignty was challenged by the ambition to introduce conditions unto salvation which man must fulfill.

In 1924 there was the evil of worldlimindedness. There was the common grace theory holding that natural man can do much that is good in the sight of God. A bridge was being spanned between the church and the world, striving for a certain synergism, or working together. In 1953 there were many

in our churches who showed no desire at all to be distinctively Reformed and to manifest that in a truly sincere Christian life and walk.

Along with this, there was a cold lethargy preceding both the reformation of '24 and the split of '53. Church attendance was for many a mere formality, something that was expected of them. Societies for Bible study in many cases languished. There was no longer a keen interest in the study of God's Word. Few prepared for a lively Bible discussion. Instead, in order to retain interest in the church, there was a clamor for entertainment in the church activities. Church papers that emphasized the truth, like the *Standard Bearer*, were either not desired, or laid aside unread. Along with all this, there were those who felt that they were spiritually benefited by some outside meetings or activi-

ties which they could not obtain in the home church.

As a result, the preaching and teaching became less doctrinal. God did not receive the emphasis but *man* did. There was in both instances an emphasis on man's responsibility, man's part in the work of salvation, man's activity of faith. People did not know, nor were they interested in, sound doctrine. Religion became a mere formality for many, setting themselves wide open for heresy.

Is there among us today a lack of interest in sound, doctrinal preaching? Do we clamor for less emphasis on doctrine and more emphasis on daily living?

Is there a trend among us toward worldlimindedness, even though we may not be aware of it?

Have we become lethargic?

A bit of self-examination may be beneficial to all of us. □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FREE CLASS

"The Role of the Church in Society"

- ☐ Does the church have a calling in the modern world?
- ☐ Is the church a social institution among others?
- ☐ Is it necessary to join oneself to a church?

These questions and others will be discussed in the light of God's Word. Class is free and open to the public. A short lesson will be followed by refreshments and a question/answer period. Take a friend with you!

Thursday, October 24

8:00 P.M.

Muskegon Community College
High Ed Center, Rm 1200
Sponsored by Faith PRC of Jenison
and First PRC of Holland, MI.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 14, 1996, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. JOHN DE VRIES,
celebrated their 40th anniversary.

We give thanks to our heavenly Father for His faithfulness toward us all. We pray that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care in the years ahead.

"For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- ❖ Herm and Lorraine DeVries
John, Sarah, Amy, Laura, Timothy
- ❖ Don and Shelly DeVries
Kari, Daniel, Abigail
- ❖ Byrant and Ruth Cox
Eric, Scott, Kyle, Anna
- ❖ Tom and Brenda DeVries
Jeffrey, Jared
- ❖ Mike and Amy DeVries
Kiley, Casey

Grand Rapids, MI

PUBLIC LECTURE:

"The Reformation Betrayed"

Thursday, October 31, 1996

7:30 P.M.

Lynden Prot. Ref'd. Church

315 N. Park St.

Lynden, WA 98264

and

Friday, October 25, 1996

8:00 P.M.

Immanuel Lutheran Church

3232 272 St.

Aldergrove, BC, Canada

Speaker: Rev. M. Joostens

Pastor of Lynden PRC

*Cassette Tapes requests (free) can be sent to above US address.