

June 1, 2000

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

REFORMED MONTHLY

PUBLISHED BY THE REFORMED FREE
PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

Communications relative to subscriptions should be addressed to G. Vos, 707 Thomas St., S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich.
Communications relative to contents of Magazine should be addressed to Rev. H. Hoeksema, 524 Eastern Ave., S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Subscription Price \$1.50

“The lines are
fallen unto me in
pleasant places; yea,
I have a goodly
heritage.”

English poet, William Blake, wrote of this psalm in "Good Friday" (1796):

The Lamb that feeds the sheep,
Apparition of the Son of God,
by His Father's Spirit,
Self-existent, independent One,
is good to all that call on Him.
Divine, His eternally admissible
amazing, we would enter into the fathomless depths of
His being, the depths of the "eternity"
of His essence would reveal nothing but good.

He is Supreme Good, not in a mere superlative sense, but in that He is the only Good. He is not to be compared with other goods, but He is the source of all other goods. He is the only Good, the only Being that is not good in comparison with Him, but He is the source of all other goods. He is the only Good, the only Being that is not good in comparison with Him, but He is the source of all other goods.

The Lord
And by the overflowing of His adorable Godhead
is goodness. Owing to all the glorious
attributes thereof is purest perfection and immaculate
goodness. Neither is there any reason of want in God
why He should need an object unto which to reveal and
upon which to lavish His goodness. For as the Triune

No shadow of darkness ever bedims the light of life, perfect and infinite, of the Divine Family, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each eternal, subsisting in the unchangeable Essence of limitless goodness, thinking in the Perfect Self, dwelling in the eternal Light, living in the perfect Self-sufficiency an uninterrupted divine life of purest goodness, dwelling in a Light that is never in any wise bedimmed.

Because the Lord is good, the absolute good in Himself

Page. 11

field with purest beauty, such as Solomon never possessed and clothes the royal cedars of Lebanon with strength and majesty. His goodness causes the royal eagle to renew its strength as it sweeps the firmament with powerful wing; and fills the mouth of the young raven crying to Him for food. His goodness remembers the roaring lion and the chirping sparrow on the housetop. His goodness clothes the meadows in velvety green and covers the fields with golden grain. His goodness made man a little lower than the angels, adds keenness to his mind and strength to his arm and fills his heart with gladness.



In This Issue:



Editorially Speaking	386
Meditation	
Gerrit Vos	
Absolute Sovereignty	387
Editorials	
Prof. David J. Engelsma	
Reformed in ... The Fundamental Truths	389
Synod of the PRC, 2000	391
Letters	392
Special Articles	
Herman Hoeksema	
Our Calling	393
Henry J. Danhof	
The Idea of the Covenant of Grace	396
Homer C. Hoeksema	
The Strength of Our Churches	398
Rev. Cornelius Hanko	
Reformation Comes to Eastern Avenue	400
Mrs. Lois Kregel	
Growing Up in That Parsonage	402
Book Review	407

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

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

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezeema@prca.org)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US \$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFPA: www.iserv.net/~rfpa

Editorially Speaking...

With this special issue, the *Standard Bearer* celebrates both the 75th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and the earlier 75th anniversary of the SB (October 1999).

We include appropriate articles, or excerpts of articles, by some who have gone before in the history of the churches and on the pages of this magazine. We regret that many others could not be recognized. Rev. C. Hanko, whose ministry dates back to 1929, pro-

vides his reminiscences. A daughter of Herman Hoeksema, Lois Kregel, gives a glimpse into the parsonage at 1139 Franklin St. in Grand Rapids. One of the two anniversary books is reviewed. As for the editorials, one informs our readers of some of the main matters that must be treated by the synod of the PRC. Synod convenes on June 13. The work of the denomination goes on regardless of celebrations. The other editorial reflects on a remarkable testimony to

the origin and doctrine of the PRC in the recent (April 2000) issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*, the journal of the Christian Reformed Theological Seminary.

The design for the special issue is the work of Mr. Jeff Steenholdt.

Thanks from the heart to the triune, covenant God for 75 years of the PRC and of the SB as bold, faithful witnesses to His sovereign grace by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

—DJE



Absolute Sovereignty

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Romans 9:18-20

There is more and more religion in this world, but less of the fear of God. There are more and more churches built and congregations organized, but less true calling on the name of Jehovah.

God is becoming more and more the Great Stranger among men.

Millions of Bibles are printed and distributed, but few of them are read.

Many read the Bible, but few believe.

Many believe the Bible, but very few believe all of Scripture. They conveniently omit parts, because they hate them.

My text is one of those parts of Holy Scripture that are hated, hated very cordially.

There are some in this God-forsaken age who know that no man can be saved except he believe the whole Bible, and so they set themselves to corrupt portions such as this one. They then believe their corruptions, thinking they believe the Bible.

But it is not true.

As a child I heard men say that ministers should preach the whole counsel of God! Well, portions such as this belong to the whole counsel of God. Men should believe them, and worship. Portions such as these

teach a God that is God indeed. There can be no other God. It belongs to the Godhead to be this terrible.

Elihu sensed this, and cried out, "With God is terrible majesty" (Job 37:22).

Yes, it is so: with Him is a terrible majesty. He is the only One who is majestic. He is the only Sovereign. He doeth all His good-pleasure.

God grant that we choose not pretty speeches when talking about this terrible text. In short, our Maker would destroy us.

We must, we shall, let God be God.

The absolute Sovereign.



Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy!

How beautifully simple is the matter of election! It is so simple that even a child can grasp it. It is the diamond of God's love and lovingkindness that is eternal.

I may put it this way too: God has mercy on the elect.

Yes, there are elect, and there shall be elect always on this sorry earth.

What is election? Election is this: God loves some men, and He loved them before they were born. He loved them before the world was made. He loved them from all eternity. As old as God is, so old is the election of some certain men.

In the quiet wakes of eternity,

before the world was, God said within Himself: I love you, My elect, and I will love you unto all eternity. I will reveal all My glory unto you and unto you alone. I will make you vessels that shall be filled with all My glory, and you shall be glorious yourselves unto all eternity. And since I will show My glory in your salvation from eternal death, I shall be very merciful to you. For My mercy is love for the object in mercy.

Oh, yes, the elect have been elected to be strangers on the earth. When they are strangers and pilgrims they will be in great pain and misery. Then the love of God shall turn to them. And love turned to the miserable is mercy.

The number of those elect who will be recipients of the mercy of God is determined. Their number cannot be increased; nor can it be decreased. God knows them that are His. He said from all eternity: You are My child! You shall be My child unto all eternity! I will have mercy on you! And you shall be deliriously happy in the gift of My mercy.

Oh, yes, blessed be God, He is absolute in His willing! He is the absolute Sovereign in His election.



He is also absolute in His reprobation.

"Whom he will he hardeneth!"

Have foolish men corrupted election? Yes, that is awful. But wait. Wait until you see what they have done to His reprobation. They have

so smoothed over His reprobation, they have so polished away all the harsh lines and sharp corners, that one cannot anymore recognize the biblical truth of reprobation. When these men are through, man has reprobated himself. God did never reject man; man rejected himself.

I have heard it often: It is his own fault that wicked man is reprobated. This is utter nonsense. Man ought to say: God works out His reprobation of man through the wickedness of man. That is correct. But man ought never to say: It is man's own fault that he is reprobated. How could that ever be? Reprobation took place before man was born, or had done either good or evil. Men, a certain number of men, were reprobated before they were born. Men, a certain number of men, were reprobated before the world was made. From all eternity God, who is the absolute Sovereign, said within Himself: For this cause shall I raise you up, for to show in you My power, and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth!

Thus reprobates are born. Attend to this: ages before Judas was born, the Holy Scriptures said of him, "Let his habitation be desolate...." Baby Judas was not yet born, but the Holy Scriptures in the home of the mother and father of Judas said, "and his bishoprick let another take...."

Let us not mock, but rather worship with fear and trembling. For, indeed, with Him is a terrible majesty.

So, I would beg of you, let it stand: "And whom He will He hardeneth." I know, I know, that it really makes no difference whether you let this word stand or not. He will do His good-pleasure just the same! But I would beg it of you for your own sake. It does not pay to mock the Almighty.

Oh, yes, God hardeneth. How, you ask? I do not know. And I am persuaded that no one knows. In II Corinthians 2 we read of the same thing. The beauteous strains of the word of the Almighty are for some a savor of death unto death. Some en-

ter the house of God; they listen to the sermon; and when they leave the house of God they are deadlier than when they entered. God hardened their hearts while they were in church. We read the simple story in Exodus. God assured Moses that He, that is, God, would harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the people go. And it happened according to God's word. It happened ten times.

The reprobates are hardened by God all through the ages. All of them are hardened.

Yes, I know that they harden themselves too. But only after God has hardened them. Even as with Pharaoh, so also with all reprobates: they are hardened by God first, and then they harden themselves.

Terrible truth, you say? Yes, but it is the truth nevertheless. It is the same truth that is trampled underfoot by the church of our day. Where do you find a church today that dares to confess the hardening by God of the reprobate? All through the ages the Lord had it written down, and, later, printed in a million Bibles.

Still God is the absolute Sovereign.

He sovereignly loves, and the objects of His love receive His mercy.

He sovereignly hates, and the objects of His hatred receive His hardening.

But He is sovereign. With Him is a terrible majesty!



"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?"

That is an objection, a wicked objection to God's absolute sovereignty with respect to His decree of reprobation. It shows that I have explained it correctly. The way other men explain it would never evoke such an objection as we have to treat here. The way reprobation is explained, there is no reprobation left. And the audience bows the head politely, and says: Thank you, so very much! It sounded barbarous to me at first, but now that you have so ably explained it, Reverend, now it does

not offend me anymore.

But that is not the way the apostle Paul explained it. The apostle Paul so explains reprobation that the wicked objections must come, do come, and he even anticipates them. Paul anticipates the wicked rejoinder of natural man. Natural man has listened to the explanation of reprobation especially, and it has aroused his ire. He saw himself used unto the glory of God. And according to Paul he could do nothing about it. In other words, wicked, proud man was dethroned by the Word of God. And he hated it. But he will try to catch the Lord in His own truth of reprobation. If God willed my reprobation, why does He cry out about my wickedness? Why does He find fault with me when I live out my reprobation? Is there a man who can resist the will of God unto reprobation? Well then, why does He then upbraid me for the fruits of His own reprobation? Such is the argument.

And what is the answer?

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"

In other words: God is sovereign.



God is sovereign.

And He is so absolutely.

He is so absolutely sovereign that He really does not answer the objection. God really does not enter into the argument. You believe, don't you, that this answer is God's answer, even though it came from Paul's pen? It is the answer of the triune God through the Holy Spirit of the exalted Christ who dwelled faultlessly in Paul, so that he wrote the Word of God infallibly.

Oh, yes, here is God's answer to the reprobate who criticized Him.

To criticize God. Isn't it terrible?

I said once to a young man: Do not find fault with God. You lose before you start.

So it is here. God does not even deign to enter into the arguments. He says to us: I will love My elect, and I will hate the reprobate. That

is the meaning of the first part of my text: I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and whom I will I harden! God's love comes to the elect in the adornment of mercy; and the hatred of God comes to the reprobate in their hardening.

God said that. And man, proud man, reprobate man, does not like it. He hates this absolutism. (Where did I hear this, long ago?) And so he dared to start an argument with God.

But God is God. And He shall give the fitting answer to this arrogancy. Nay but, O man, who art thou?

O man! That is really the answer.

O man! That is, a handful of clay. And a soul or spirit that is like a mist. It is seen for a few hours, and it vanishes.

What is man? Man is nothing. No, he is less than nothing, and vanity. All the nations together are nothing and less than nothing and vanity. What, then, is one dissenter?

Is my brain capable of following all the works of God?

Attend to this: O the depth of

the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever, Amen.

So the Lord says really to the offended reprobate: Be still! Remember to *whom* you are talking. You are replying to the great God who made the heaven and the earth. You are finding fault with Him who shall be the song of perfect angels and of righteous men unto all eternity.

I am the Sovereign of the universe.



God is sovereign, absolutely sovereign.

What is man? A speck of dust. A filthy speck at that. It is his filth that makes him take God to task. We shudder when we say it. God is God.

Yet there is argument in the

clause: Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? There is a beautiful argument in it. It is this: God is above all reproach. God is above all evil. God is wholly and exclusively beautiful and lovely, attractive and comely. He cannot do anything that is wrong!


Do you not see that the question of the reprobate casts a slur on the beautiful Godhead? Do you not see that, if it were true what this man said, there would not be a God?

Attend to this; it is the most important sentence in this whole meditation: *It is impossible for God to be anything but good; it is impossible for God to do anything but good!*

What has the wicked rejoinder proven?

This: the reprobate has shown in his wicked question that he has a reprobate mind.

If holy angels in heaven cover their faces because of so much beauty in the Godhead, what shall we then do?

Let us worship. Oh, let us worship! 

Editorials

“Reformed in... the Fundamental Truths”

The occasion for the forming of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) 75 years ago was the adoption of three points of common grace by the 1924 synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). As part of its official treatment of the common grace controversy, the synod gave a remarkable testimony to the orthodoxy of the two Christian Reformed ministers who were opposing the doctrine of common grace. The two ministers were Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof. Both were deposed by Christian Reformed classes a scant

six months after the 1924 synod concluded its meetings. The testimony was this: “It cannot be denied that they are Reformed in respect to the fundamental truths as they are formulated in the Confessions.” This testimony was not negated, or even significantly weakened, by the added phrase, “... even though it be with an inclination to one-sidedness.”

“Reformed in ... the fundamental truths”!

There can be no question that the reference was to the specific truths that the two ministers appealed to against the then-popular doctrine of

common grace: the truths of sovereign, particular grace in all the saving work of God, rooted in God's eternal predestination.

Inasmuch as the PRC have to this day faithfully confessed and taught the truths defended by Danhof and Hoeksema before and at the 1924 synod of the CRC, the splendid testimony by the CRC has followed the PRC the past 75 years to the present moment.

“Reformed in ... the fundamental truths”!

To this remarkable testimony has very recently been added a testi-

mony out of the CRC that is even more remarkable. Indeed, it is astonishing. It comes in the form of two articles in the April 2000 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal (CTJ)*. This is the journal of Calvin Theological Seminary, the seminary of the CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The articles are written by two Christian Reformed theologians. These articles are the result of a decision by the editorial committee of the journal to remember "the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1924 Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo and its significant decision on common grace." A third article, on the third point of the common grace dogma adopted by the 1924 synod of the CRC, is to appear in the November 2000 issue of the *CTJ*.

The first of the two articles in the current issue of the *CTJ* reflects on the history of the synod of 1924 and the subsequent deposition by Christian Reformed classes of Hoeksema, Danhof, and others. The second article is doctrinal. It examines one aspect of the first point of common grace: the "general offer of the gospel," or well-meant offer of salvation.

In this editorial, I present the thrust of the first of the two commemorative articles, mainly by quoting the author himself. Although accurate in giving the gist of the article, the quotations do not intend to be comprehensive. The interested reader should obtain the journal in order to read the articles in their entirety. The *CTJ* can be ordered from Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton St., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4387. All quotations in this editorial are from the first of the two articles on the common grace controversy of 1924 in the April 2000 issue of the *CTJ*. Following editorials will summarize the second article and reflect on the two articles.

The History of the CRC Synod of 1924

The historical article is by Dr. John Bolt, professor of theology at Calvin Seminary and editor of the *CTJ* at the time that the two articles

were written. The title is, "Common Grace and the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo (1924): A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective." In effect, the subject is the origin of the PRC in the history leading up to, including, and immediately following the Christian Reformed synod of 1924. It is Bolt's contention that the adoption of an official doctrine of common grace in 1924 was ill advised; that the synod of 1924, although it adopted the doctrine of common grace, definitely did not intend that those who dissented from common grace be disciplined; and that the deposition particularly of Herman Hoeksema was unjust.

The synodical adoption of the three points of common grace was ill advised, according to Bolt, for two reasons. First, the issue came before the synod by church political procedures that were "extraordinary." This was especially the case with the protest of Rev. J. K. Van Baalen. Himself a member neither of Classis Grand Rapids East nor of Classis Grand Rapids West, he was permitted personally to call "a special meeting of Classis Grand Rapids West on June 10, 1924." This classis allowed Van Baalen to "address his protest [against Danhof's rejection of common grace] to synod directly." Synod met eight days later.

Second, the churches were not ready for a binding declaration on the doctrine of common grace. Bolt expresses agreement with the view of Rev. Daniel Zwier, addressed formally to the 1924 synod, that

the doctrine of common grace, according to [my] judgment, has not been sufficiently thought through, and the dispute which has arisen in our churches concerning the above mentioned three points, which are connected to it, have not come to a sufficient ripeness to warrant an enticement for a decision through which, in principle, the standpoint of the Brothers Danhof and Hoeksema stands condemned.

Having taken the decision adopting common grace, the synod made

plain that it did not intend that Hoeksema and Danhof be disciplined for their rejection of common grace. This concerns what Bolt calls "the mystery of the missing advice." Included in the advice of the committee of pre-advice that brought the common grace issue to the floor of the synod of 1924 was advice that urged synod sharply to admonish Hoeksema and Danhof and bluntly to threaten discipline. Synod did not adopt this part of the advice of its committee. But, as Hoeksema had noted in his own history of 1924, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, this part of the advice was not printed in the acts of synod of 1924. This omission obscured the fact that synod was not of a mind to discipline the opponents of common grace. As Bolt observes, the failure to include in the printed acts the advice to discipline Hoeksema and Danhof lends credence to Hoeksema's charge, in his own history of the events, that "the subsequent action against the two pastors by the Classes Grand Rapids East and Grand Rapids West [was] 'a most wanton assumption of authority and violation of the decisions of synod in this case.'"

Both in the history leading up to the synod of 1924 and in the history that immediately followed, there was a determined, orchestrated, and hurried effort on the part of leading Christian Reformed ministers to destroy Herman Hoeksema and his theology in the CRC. Writes Bolt:

More important than the missing advice is my strong sense that justice and the church's well-being were violated in this controversy by the orchestrated haste with which Hoeksema was removed from the CRC. It looks for all the world, as I described it earlier, like an ecclesiastical blitzkrieg, a hurried and well-orchestrated attack on the person and ideas of Herman Hoeksema.

In part, the motivation of the clandestine campaign to put Hoeksema out was the desire for revenge on the part of the supporters

of Ralph Janssen. Two years earlier, Hoeksema had led the way in the synodical condemnation of Janssen's higher-critical teachings as a professor at Calvin Seminary.

Bolt laments and condemns the injustice. For this, as for Bolt's overall judgment that Hoeksema behaved honorably in warding off the attacks on himself and his beliefs, the members of the PRC must be grateful. But Bolt's sorrow over the events goes deeper: "I am also disturbed by the misuse of the doctrine of common grace and consider the loss of Herman Hoeksema's prophetic voice in the CRC to have been a major loss for our denomination."

One important aspect of the history of the origin of the PRC, Dr. Bolt does not consider: what the purpose of God was in the ecclesiastical separation of 1924/1925. Specifically, he


does not ask the question, whether in light of the past 75 years of history of both the CRC and the PRC the meaning of 1924/1925 is that expressed by Joseph in Genesis 50:20 concerning the evil deed of his brothers.

Bolt does intend that his and Raymond Blacketer's articles open up lines from the CRC to the PRC. He begins by stating that the two articles

are offered in the hope that genuine ecumenical conversation may yet be possible between the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Church (*sic*), a family conversation that should never have been stopped in the first place.

He concludes similarly, in a

brotherly spirit:

This article is offered to brothers and sisters in the Protestant Reformed Church by someone in the Christian Reformed Church as a gesture of Christian goodwill and attempt at understanding. I am too much of a Kuyperian neo-Calvinist to deny or repudiate the doctrine of common grace, though I share Randy Blacketer's reservations in his article in this issue of CTJ about Kalamazoo's first point.... At the very least, I hope that today, seventy-five years after Kalamazoo, for the sake of a prospering Reformed faith in North America, open and constructive conversation between our two churches can still take place. This article is offered as an opening to such a discussion. 

— DJE

Synod of the PRC, 2000

The Protestant Reformed synod that meets this month, God willing, is not the 75th synod. The first synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) convened on May 22, 1940 at the First PRC of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Rev. Herman Hoeksema preached the pre-synodical sermon on Acts 15:28a: "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us." Rev. Gerrit Vos was president of the first synod. Rev. C. Hanko was a minister delegate.

Among its decisions were the following: that the official language of synod would be English; to advise the churches to take offerings for the relief of war-torn Netherlands; to petition the Christian Reformed Church to discuss "in a brotherly spirit" the history and doctrines that resulted in the separate existence of the PRC; to approve the theological examination of seminarian John A. Heys and ad-

mit him to candidacy in the PRC; and to assess each family in the churches 25 cents a year for the

Emeritus Fund.

Synod of 2000 will consider reports by the Domestic Mission Com-



PRC Synod, 1940

mittee on the works in the British Isles; Spokane, WA; and Pittsburgh, PA.

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) reports on the work in Ghana, Africa. The committee requests approval to continue work in the Philippines with a view to calling a missionary for full-time work there in 2001. The FMC intends to send two delegations to the Philippines during the next year.

The Contact Committee (CC) recommends that synod implement sister-church relations with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. The committee proposes that synod advise Hope PRC, Walker, MI to call a minister to replace Rev. Jay Kortering as minister-on-loan to our sister churches in Singapore. The plan is that this man would work with Rev. Kortering in Singapore for a year, until Rev. Kortering's term expires in June, 2002. The CC requests approval of its holding another conference with the United Reformed Churches in the fall of 2000. It recommends that the PRC seek no further contact with the Hungarian Reformed Churches (HRC). Grounds are that the HRC contain a wide variety of factions, including Pentecostals and extremely liberal and modernistic elements; that the HRC are officially a member of the World Council of Churches; and that the HRC allow women to be

ministers.

The Theological School Committee (TSC) reports that Mr. Mark Shand graduates from the seminary, having completed a special, three-year course of study. The committee proposes a public graduation program the evening of June 15. Mr. Shand will seek admission into the ministry of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. The TSC is requesting synod to approve partial sabbaticals for Prof. Decker and Prof. Engelsma for the 2001/2002 and 2000/2001 school years respectively.

The Board of Trustees recommends that synod declare that it is appropriate for the PRC to receive gifts of life insurance policies.

A synodical study committee presents its recommendations changing a number of articles of the Church Order.


The synodical Emeritus Committee overtakes synod to rescind the decision of 1999 ("Acts of Synod," Art. 72) concerning support of retired ministers according to Article 13 of the Church Order. This decision of last year's synod made \$15,000 available to every retired minister "with no questions asked [about need]."

The 75th Anniversary Committee reports that all is in readiness for the celebration of the anniversary of the PRC, June 19-23, 2000, immediately following the meeting of synod. The celebration will be held on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rap-

ids, MI. Evening programs will be held in the auditorium of the Sunshine Community (Christian Reformed) Church at 3300 E. Beltline, NE, a few miles north of Calvin. The annual Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention will be held at the same time and place as the anniversary celebration. The committee reports that already as of the end of March, registration for the anniversary celebration exceeds the original estimation. There is room for more. Synod should express a hearty thanks to the committee on behalf of the denomination. The committee consists of David M. (chairman) and Nancy Ondersma, Ken and Machele Elzinga, Sid, Jr. and Lisa Miedema, Hank and Deb VanderWaal, and Greg and Vicki VanOverloop.

In addition, the agenda includes five appeals against decisions of the classes and a protest against a decision of last year's synod. The churches must exercise Christ's power of judging.

The report of the Yearbook Committee shows that the churches continue their steady numerical growth. Total membership is nearing the biblical 7,000.

Synod will hold its meetings at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Synod will convene on Tuesday, June 13. Rev. Ron Cammenga will preach at the pre-synodical worship service the evening of June 12 at the Georgetown church. 

— DJE

Letters

■ Love for the SB from "Far Off"

On behalf of all those who love the *Standard Bearer* from "far off," I express my heartfelt thanks to all those involved in the production of this most excellent periodical. I have learned so much from its pages. It stands as a beacon for the Reformed faith in an age of backsliding and apostasy among those who claim the title "Reformed."

It is good for us to know that

we are not alone or isolated in holding to the truths of sovereign election, the covenant, reprobation, and the denial of a common love of God for the reprobate, among other doctrines.

Congratulations to the Protestant Reformed Churches on 75 years of faithful witness! May your celebration of God's goodness be a truly blessed time for all of you.

Robert K. Burford
Frankston, Victoria, Australia

■ Good Use of Trees

I look forward to every issue of the *Standard Bearer*. In my opinion, it is the best use of trees in the country.

(Pastor) Richard Bacon
Rowlett, Texas

■ Monumental Research into Hoeksema's Theology

A recent issue of the *Standard*

Bearer (April 1, 2000) has given the Reformed world heartening news. According to the editorial, "Hoeksema's Romans Sermons," we are soon to have the pleasure of reading for the first time 96 sermons by one of the century's foremost Reformed theologians. The RFPA is to be commended for this project, even more so if it is expeditious. Hoeksema's theology is roundly condemned as "hyper-Calvinistic." Some of the charges are completely malicious, but others, I believe, stem from ignorance. If the only systematic theology is one which denigrates

the Reformed theology accentuated by Hoeksema, or the only academic writings are those which transpose Hoeksema and those who are often viewed as the apotheoses of hyper-Calvinism, is it really any wonder that the Reformed world is opposed to particular grace, the covenant, the antithesis, etc.? I think not.

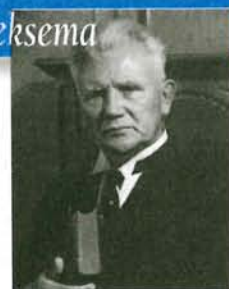
What have the Protestant Reformed Churches contributed to the exoneration of Herman Hoeksema from these opprobrious charges? A letter to the *Standard Bearer* (Jan. 15, 1996) suggested that doctoral research was needed into Hoeksema's

writings. As far as I am aware, such work has not been undertaken. In this the 75th anniversary of the great denomination so dear to Hoeksema's heart, is it not time that the Protestant Reformed synod consider releasing one of its four professors to undertake pioneering and monumental research into Hoeksema's theology? What better tribute not only to the past 75 years, but, more importantly, to the next 75 years!

The challenge is to you, the Protestant Reformed Churches. No one else shall do your work for you.

Raymond A. Kemp
Republic of Ireland □

Herman Hoeksema



B. Woudenberg

Our Calling*

On this occasion it is fitting to reflect on our calling. What is the general calling of the church in the world, both as an organism and as an institute? And what is the specific calling, if any, of the Protestant Reformed Churches, considered in the light of their history?

In general we may say that it is the calling of the church as the body of Christ and of believers individually to realize their part of the covenant of God, to live antithetically in the midst of and over against an ungodly world from the principle of regeneration, to love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, to trust in Him and cleave unto Him, to forsake the world, to crucify their old

nature, and to walk in a new and holy life, to glorify the God of their salvation.

God establishes His covenant with us. And that covenant is, at least as far as its establishment is concerned, absolutely unilateral. God establishes it alone, and we have no part in its establishment whatsoever.

This covenant is, according to the Protestant Reformed view, not a mere way of salvation in which God leads the elect to eternal glory. For a way is a means to an end. And the covenant which God establishes with His people is not a means, but is the end itself, the eternal tabernacle of God with men. Nor is it an agreement between two parties, or a contract between God and men or between God and the elect sinner. For although it is true that there are two parts in the covenant of God and that God establishes His covenant with us as rational, moral beings, yet man can be no party over against the living God. The creature is no party in relation to the Creator. Nor can the latter fulfill any conditions or stipulations

in order to enter into the covenant of God. He is not only a creature, but also a sinner, dead through trespasses and sins, and of himself has violated and can do nothing else than violate the covenant of God.

According to our view, the covenant of God is essentially the everlasting relation of friendship between God and His elect people in Jesus Christ our Lord in which He is their sovereign Friend and blesses them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, receiving them by His grace in His family, and they, on their part, are His friend-servants, called and willing to love Him with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, to be to the praise of His glorious virtues antithetically in the midst of the world, and presently praise and glorify Him forever in His eternal tabernacle.

This covenant God establishes alone and unconditionally.

This is the plain teaching of Holy Writ, which always uses the formula, "I will establish my covenant."

This covenant is established chiefly, and in the first place, with

*This article was written on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It appeared in the "Souvenir Album" of the celebration of the 25th anniversary. The article has been edited for publication in this issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

Jesus Christ our Lord, and in Him with all the elect. It is realized objectively in the incarnation, which is the perfect union of God with man. It is established further in the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. For in His cross He lays the basis of righteousness, which is indispensable for the covenant of God; and in His resurrection we find God's own revelation of this basis of righteousness as a gift of God to us: "For he was delivered for our transgressions, and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). It is further realized in His exaltation at the right hand of God and the reception on His part of the promise of the Holy Spirit, whereby He becomes the quickening Spirit, capable of realizing God's covenant with us and within us. And this same covenant will be fully revealed in all its glory when the Lord shall come again, God shall make all things new, and His tabernacle shall be with men forever.

But also in the subjective sense this covenant of God is realized and established by Him alone. He does so in the way of regeneration, by which He implants the new life of Christ in our hearts. And further, He realizes this covenant in the way of the effectual calling, faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and final perfection in the resurrection of the last day. All this is God's part in the establishment of the covenant, not ours.

It is in virtue of this establishment of God's covenant with us that we receive and are capable and willing to fulfill our calling in the midst of the world as of the party of the living God. The work of God for us and in us and through us never renders us stocks and blocks, but treats us always as rational, moral beings. God calls us, and we come. God gives us the living faith, and we believe. God justifies us, and we stand in righteousness. God sanctifies us, and we love Him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, for-

sake the world, and crucify our old nature, walking in a new and holy life. God preserves us unto the end, and we persevere and fight the good fight even unto the end. Our part in the covenant is the fruit of God's part.

And as we thus live in the midst of the world as of the party of the living God, it is our calling as a church and as individual believers to keep His covenant, to live from the principle of regeneration, and to stand antithetically as God's people in every department of life.

This calling the church as an institute fulfills especially through the preaching of the Word. It fulfills this calling in the narrower sense in the proclamation of the gospel, which is the chief distinguishing mark of the church. For where the gospel is preached, there

Christ is. And where Christ is, there, and there alone, is the church. This calling the church fulfills in a wider sense also in the administration of the sacraments according to the Word of God, in the instruction of young and old in the truth of the Word of God, and in the drawing up of its confessions, which serve as the church's banner in the midst of the world and in which, at the same time, the truth of the gospel is preserved and maintained.

Such is the calling of the church in general.

But we may ask: is there not a specific calling which we as Protestant Reformed Churches have in the midst not only of the world, but also in the midst of other churches? And our answer is affirmative. We cannot deny our his-

Prayer

To Thee, our father's God, our refuge strong,
For rich inheritance of truth secure,
Of everlasting love and mercies sure,
Of Thy eternal bond of friendship, long
Before the world was formed, with Thine elect
In Jesus Christ our Lord, Thine only Son;—
To Thee our thanks we bring, and take upon
Our lips Thy praise; and from the heart direct,
On this occasion, Lord, our humble plea:
Preserve us, gracious God, that we may flee
From youthful lusts, from ways of false renown,
Dorsake the world, and keep our garments pure,
May faithful be, e'en though the world allure,
And may held fast, that no one take our crown.

H.H.

This sonnet was written by Herman Hoeksema for publication in the 25th anniversary issue of Beacon Lights (May, 1950). It was published, as above, in the author's handwriting. Since our 75th anniversary celebration is held conjointly with the Young People's Convention, the poem is fitting for this 75th anniversary issue of the Standard Bearer.

tory. For also that history is not of our making, but is of God.

That history is well known.

But it is not superfluous to recall it on this twenty-fifth anniversary of our churches.

A controversy had arisen about the question of common grace. In the churches in which we used to have a place more and more emphasis was gradually placed on the false conception that God in this present life is the Friend of all and therefore is gracious to all men. Righteous and unrighteous, godly and ungodly, elect and reprobate stand on a par, according to this presentation, at least as concerns the things of this present life. From this fundamentally false conception of God many other errors followed, as might be expected. For our conception of God is always predominating. First of all, there followed from this conception a false presentation of the natural man. Man is in actual fact not totally depraved. In the abstract it was conceded that the human nature through sin is totally depraved. But in the concrete sense it was different: in reality there are no totally depraved men. The common grace of God prevents this. There is a restraint of sin through the common influence of the Holy Spirit. There is an influence of God upon the heart of man which, indeed, is not regenerating, but nevertheless improves him in regard to the life of this world. Hence, he does many good works. Another result was a false conception of the relation between the righteous and the ungodly in this world. On the ground of common grace there was also a common sphere and fellowship between the godly and the ungodly. The antithesis is not absolute, according to this presentation. In the sphere of this present life light and darkness meet each other in the twilight of common grace. The chasm between church and world was bridged. This false conception of God also implied an erroneous presentation of the execu-

tion of His counsel, of the real character of the work of Christ, of the preaching of the gospel, of the development of history and of the future.

We know the outcome.

The Christian Reformed Churches in 1924 took a standpoint over against us in regard to this question of common grace. They adopted three declarations in which the particular nature of the grace of God and the total depravity of the natural man was clearly denied. And on the basis of those three declarations, known as the Three Points, they attacked us. With the confessions they could not possibly expel us from their fellowship. But the Three Points served this purpose. We tried to avoid schism, but they would not let us. They demanded subjection to or acquiescence in the Three Points. We refused: for we could not in good conscience before God sign those declarations. The result was that they cast us out. And thus we remained on the basis of the Reformed confessions, repudiating the additions to the confessions which the synod of 1924 adopted.

That is the history.

When we firmly trust that in spite of all the unrighteousness that accompanied our expulsion from the fellowship of the Christian Reformed Church this expulsion was nevertheless the work of the Lord our God, it stands to reason that we have a very specific calling. And this calling stands in connection with our separate existence.

Therefore we do not doubt that it is our very specific calling in the midst of all the churches in the world, and even in the midst of the Reformed churches, to preserve the

truth that the grace of God is always particular, to defend that truth with all our power, to develop it in all its riches, to impart it to the generation to come, and to give testimony outside of the pale of our churches of that very truth in word and in deed, in the midst of the church and in the midst of the world.

Our calling is not only the denial of the erroneous theory of common grace. We cannot live negatively. But it is certainly our specific calling to preserve and to develop the truth that the God of the covenant establishes His covenant along the line of particular grace.

This we must emphasize.

We must not expect to become great in number. For therein does not lie our strength. But rather must we insist on the maintenance of the truth which God has entrusted to our care.

To do this we must, of course, preach that truth and testify of it within and without.


For the realization of this calling we must emphasize that our children must be instructed in home and school and catechism according to the doctrine that is taught in our churches.

For this purpose we must certainly maintain and develop our own theological school, in order that the truth of God's sovereign grace may not only be preserved but developed in all its riches and implications.

We must emphasize and preserve that truth even in our missionary endeavors, wherever the Lord calls us.

This is indeed a serious calling. It is from a human point of view an impossible calling, for certainly the Reformed truth of God's particular grace is not popular, especially not in the world of our time.

But it is also a glorious task and calling.

And let our prayer be that the Lord our God will preserve us in the future, as He has preserved us in the past. 

*It is certainly
our specific
calling to preserve
and to develop
the truth that
the God
of the covenant
establishes
His covenant along
the line
of particular grace.*



The Idea of the Covenant of Grace

The covenant rests in the Holy Trinity. God is the God of the covenant. He is such, not only according to the counsel of His will in His relation to the creature, but first of all in Himself, according to His own nature. The divine life in itself is a covenant of friendship among Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. That divine love-life is then the basis for every covenant relation between Creator and creature and between the creatures mutually. The absolute covenant conception is hidden in the family life of the Holy Trinity.

No one, therefore, will ever succeed in fathoming the covenant-idea in all its depth. Still, one can see fairly easily that all relation, reciprocal action, and mutual fellowship among Father, Son, and Holy Ghost must necessarily be, happen, and take place according to the nature of the covenant. For God is one in being, but in persons, three. The three persons are all equally possessors of the same divine essence. In their personal substance, they are equal with each other. But in their individual, personal prop-

erties, they differ from each other. Their oneness of essence gives harmony. The identical substance of the persons implies agreement. At the same time, in the difference of their individual, personal properties is found the possibility for the highest fellowship and cooperation. The oneness and difference of the persons give eternal, divine harmony. And the love-life of God, welling up out of the unfathomable depths of the essence, and decreed by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, pours itself forth in the multiplicity of the forms of the individual, personal properties, manifesting in the most glorious hue the full riches of the eternal friendship of the Trinity.

In all the outgoing works of God, something of this covenant of friendship is necessarily revealed outside of God. For even though these outgoing works are free and decreed, they are, nevertheless, works of a self-revealing God. Because the absolute covenant-idea is grounded in God's own nature and manner of life, all revelation must necessarily be revelation of the God of the covenant, since it can be nothing other than self-revelation of the Trinity. And although we may not suppose that God exhausts Himself in His self-revelation, still we shall certainly have to assume that an impression of the absolute covenant-idea in the Trinity is found in the highest creature, since God created man according to His image.

In my opinion, this covenant-idea in man is not wholly identical with the religious idea. Yet, as man was created according to God's image immediately at creation and by virtue of this could attain at once to active religious fellowship with His Creator,

thus his religion finds its goal in the fellowship of the covenant. Through the band of the covenant, God lets His own absolute covenant life continue to vibrate in the creature, and by the vibrating of that band man echoes the life of God in his life.¹ In his most sublime fellowship with the Eternal One, man is friend of God. The covenant causes God and man to dwell together as friends. In this, the covenant-conception is realized fully. Accordingly, in his wonderful vision of the kingdom of glory John saw the tabernacle of God with men.

Man is friend of God. God Himself has conceived him so. That is His will concerning him. Toward the fellowship of friendship with God, he has been directed. In this he finds his destiny. He can truly rest only in the fellowship of friendship with his God. To be sure, as a moral-rational being he can turn into his very opposite and by this become a covenant companion and friend of Satan. But even then, in his formal, covenantal life he still shows his origin, nature, and original destiny. The damned in hell is the complete opposite of the man of God in the kingdom of glory. In the man of God in the kingdom of glory, God's covenant-conception has been fully realized in a positive sense. According to the measure of his comprehension, the life of the friendship of the Trinity continues to vibrate in him. The God of friendship is known,

¹ Danhof's figure is unusual and vivid. The covenant between the triune God and (elect) man is a kind of spiritual string, as of a musical instrument. Along it God's own covenant life vibrates (Dutch: "natrillen") in man. God "plucks" the string so that His own life may echo in man.

Henry Danhof was a Christian Reformed minister who was put out of the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1920s with Herman Hoeksema and George Ophoff in the common grace controversy. In 1920, Danhof published a booklet on the covenant that was important for the unique development of the biblical truth of the covenant in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Prof. David Engelsma has translated Danhof's work. The translation appears in the April 1997; November 1997; April 1998; and November 1998 issues of the Protestant Reformed Theological Journal. The excerpt published here defines the covenant as the living friendship of love. It finds the ultimate source of the covenant in the triune life of God Himself. The explanatory footnotes are by the translator.

enjoyed, mirrored, and reflected by him. With his whole heart, with his whole soul, with his whole mind, and with all his powers, he responds to the act of friendship on the part of the Eternal that penetrates, qualifies, arouses, and provokes him. God's friend is of God, through God, and to God.


In the covenant God finds the most excellent form for the revelation and bestowal of His friendship. The covenant of friendship exalts the reciprocal relationship of life and fellowship between God and man to the highest order and greatest intimacy. In no other relation than that of friend of God would man ever be able in a more perfect way to show forth the praises of Him who called him out of darkness into His marvelous light.

God then has also undoubtedly willed the covenant first of all for His own sake. It serves Him in His highest self-revelation and self-glorification. Since He reveals and glorifies Himself by it as the God of love and friendship and by it exalts man as His own covenant companion and friend, therefore, in my judgment, this divine, sovereign will loses all the apparent lack of feeling and coldness that, according to the impression of some critics, adheres to the sovereignty of God (as that is understood by the Reformed faith), in contrast to the love of God. We may not say, with James Orr (*Progress of Dogma*, Lect. IX, p. 292), that Calvin "errs in placing his root-idea of God in sovereign will rather than in love. Love is subordinated to sovereignty, instead of sovereignty to love." For with Calvin we must very really explain the entire creation from a free act of the will of God. Also the covenant, therefore, although grounded in God's own nature, is no less a fruit of His will. Strictly speaking, the one presupposes the other. Nevertheless, this sovereign will of the God of the covenant is a willing to reveal and glorify the life of the friendship of the triune God. It is, therefore, entirely encircled in the glow of love.²

This will of God includes also the forms of the covenant and, further, all

means and ways for the complete realizing of the covenant-conception. Also the forms of the covenant are of God. The covenant of works was not replaced by the covenant of grace, but according to God's ordinance the covenant of God changed from the form of the covenant of works into that of the covenant of grace.³ For God's sake! It was He, first of all, who willed the deeper way through the fall and rising again of man for the most perfect development of His covenant-conception. His purpose was that the life of the friendship of the Trinity would shine the more gloriously. From the counsel of peace—the agreement³ among the three persons in the divine being for the redemption of man (*Korte Schets der Geref. Dogmatiek*, pp. 45, 46, by Prof. Ten Hoor)—radiates to us, first of all, God's own love-life. And exactly

therein seems to be found the explanation for God's will in this. And, further, in this then rests also God's covenant of grace with man in Christ. That covenant cannot fail, since it is grounded in the agreement of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, which in turn roots in the very love-life of God and has as its purpose the revelation and glorifying of the same.

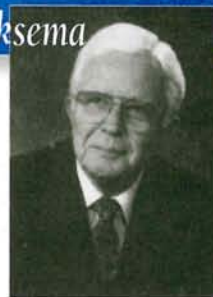
From this viewpoint, Christ and the Holy Ghost must also be explained from the will of the God of the covenant. The same holds for the regeneration, faith, struggle, and victory of the people of God. And even though, ultimately, the will of God in reprobation is somewhat different from what it is in election, nevertheless He wills reprobation no less than election. God realizes His covenant-conception according to His eternal counsel of election and reprobation. 

2 This is a remarkable insight. Obviously, Danhof is rejecting the charge that the sovereignty of God as conceived by the Reformed faith is cold and unfeeling. His defense, however, is that the sovereign decree (of creation and redemption) is centrally the decree of the covenant, which is essentially warm, intimate friendship between God and His people. Apart from this, Danhof suggests, sovereignty might well be cold and unfeeling. The covenant "saves" the sovereignty of God from the charge of such as James Orr. Is it perhaps the case today that Reformed people fail to proclaim and defend the sovereignty of God in predestination and providence, indeed *cannot* proclaim and defend the sovereignty of God, exactly because they do not see the sovereignty of God as freely ordaining and realizing the covenant of grace as fellowship with God. They do not conceive the divine sovereignty as "entirely encircled in the glow of love" (Dutch: "*geheel gehuld in den gloed der liefde*").

3 Here is a different view of the relation between the covenant with Adam in Paradise and the covenant of grace with Christ and the elect church after the fall from the view which has been traditional with many Reformed theologians. The covenant with Adam was not a completely different covenant from the covenant of grace. Rather, it was a form of God's one covenant with man. Clearly

implied is the sovereignty of God in the fall of Adam governing also this aspect of history in the interests of His covenant. At the time of the writing of this booklet — 1920 — Danhof still accepted the traditional *name* of the covenant with Adam, although he differed radically with the tradition as to the *nature* of this covenant. Later, Herman Hoeksema would reject the name as well.

4 The reference is to the source of the covenant of grace in God Himself, what in Reformed theology has been called "the covenant of redemption." Mistakenly regarding Zechariah 9:13 as biblical basis for the origin of the covenant in God, Reformed theologians also spoke of the "counsel of peace." Traditionally, this was presented as an agreement either between the Father and the Son or among all three persons of the Trinity. Danhof still accepted the tradition's view of the source of the covenant as an "*agreement*." Herman Hoeksema would radically rework the doctrine of the source of the covenant. The covenant of grace has its origin in God, but this origin is the decree of the triune God appointing Jesus Christ as head and mediator of the covenant, in whom God will establish His covenant with the elect church. Hoeksema called this eternal source of the covenant — this reworked "covenant of redemption" — the "decree of the covenant" (see his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Grand Rapids: RFPA, 1966, pp. 285-336).



The Strength of Our Churches*

If someone asked you what is the single, most important factor in the life of our Protestant Reformed Churches which has served to keep us what we were from our beginning and which still distinguishes us as a denomination today, what would you answer?

Some would undoubtedly answer: our insistence upon doctrine, the doctrine of our Reformed confessions. Undoubtedly this doctrinal emphasis has played and still does play a significant part in the stance of our churches – especially in an age which is averse to sound doctrine, and, in fact, averse to any doctrinal emphasis whatsoever. For doctrine, after all, is nothing other than the teachings of the Word of God; and what the Word of God teaches constitutes the *content* of saving faith. Faith has as its content all things promised us in the gospel and briefly comprehended in the articles of the Apostles' Creed. Moreover, Christian life without doctrine, practice without principle, is like a ship without a rudder, or like a skyscraper without a foundation. Reformed doctrine is without doubt of great importance, and has undoubtedly been of great importance during the fifty years of our history which we thankfully commemorate this year. Well may we thank our faithful covenant God that He has given us pastors and teachers who instructed us and our children diligently in the truths of

our Reformed creeds. The thousands of sermons in which we were systematically instructed in the truth according to our Heidelberg Catechism and the thousands of hours of catechism classes are so many thousands of reasons for thanksgiving – not to men, but to our God!

Some might probably answer: the most important factor is the readiness of our churches to rise to the defense of the faith and to oppose militantly every departure from and attack upon the Reformed faith. In other words, they would say that our readiness to engage in apologetics and polemics was the key factor throughout these fifty years. Now no Reformed man in his right mind would ever minimize the importance of defending the faith and of warding off every error repugnant thereto. It is simply a matter of record that a Reformed church which refuses to stand fast in the defense of the faith of the gospel and which refuses to warn against and to ward off heresies is not worthy of the name *Reformed*. Just read our Church Order and our Formula of Subscription, and you will soon discover this. Besides, the whole record of church history supports this claim. Above all, how often the Scriptures emphasize this! True, there have been those who have pointed to this militant stance of our churches and who have then claimed that our Protestant Reformed Churches live by reaction, live by negatives. But those who make this claim either do not know what they are talking about, or they are deliberately lying; and neither of these is a happy state in which to be. The fact of the matter is that no church can live by negatives; and the

very fact of our fifty years' existence obviously gives the lie to this suggestion of our detractors.

Nevertheless, however important the above factors may have been in our history and still are today, I would not point to either one of them as the *chief* factor.

What, then, is, by God's grace, the strength of our churches in my opinion?

The preaching of the Word!

Understand, there is no disjunction between doctrinal emphasis and the preaching of the Word. Nor is there a disjunction between the preaching of the Word and the defense of the faith. Properly conceived, there is perfect harmony between these three; in fact, they may never be disjoined. Moreover, sound and pure preaching of the Word will undoubtedly bear fruit in that the people of God become well founded in doctrine. And it will bear fruit, too, in that we and our children become equipped not only to discern and to guard against false doctrine, but also to eschew error and to love with all our heart the truth.

Yet it is the *preaching* that constitutes the spiritual strength of our churches. If ever we lose that preaching, it will be the end of our churches and the end of our right of existence as a communion of Protestant Reformed Churches.

This is, of course, a patent truth according to our confessions. Our Belgic Confession singles out the preaching of the Word as the first mark by which the true church may be discerned. Our Heidelberg Catechism, while it does not elaborate on the subject of preaching, nevertheless speaks of it as the means

*This article was originally an editorial commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It appeared in the April 15, 1975 issue of the *Standard Bearer* under a different title. Homer Hoeksema was the second editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

whereby the Holy Spirit works and strengthens faith. Even our Canons of Dordrecht more than once emphasize the importance of the preaching of the Word.

But this is also a matter of experience.

I remember well that in the days of my youth this was always a source of wonderment to me. I never quite believed it. I thought that if you could go out and convince people by stringent argument and clear proof from Scripture of the rightness of our doctrinal position, you would win them and they would be compelled to join our Protestant Reformed communion. If you could only go out and show people, say, that the Three Points were all wrong and that the doctrine of the well-meant offer is essentially Arminian, they would have to be convinced and would have to join the fray against these false doctrines. Indeed, such instruction is necessary and is part of the calling of the church. But I was always a little surprised when my father would return from a home missions tour in the earlier years of our history and say, "After all, it's not the lectures, not the exposition of doctrine, not the exposing of the errors of common grace – however important these may be – which attracts people to our churches. But it is the preaching! When God's people hear the preaching of the Word in which the God of our salvation is central, in which there are sounded the clear notes of sovereign grace and of God's everlasting and faithful covenant, then their hearts are warmed and they realize that they have been missing something which they sorely need and desire; and then they are attracted to our churches." In later years I learned to know this by experience in my own ministry.

Let us remember, too, that this is true not only on the mission field, but in the established congregation as well. The preaching of the Word is central! It is all-important. It is the chief thing. Take it away, and the church cannot survive. Corrupt it, and the church will soon become

corrupt and decadent. Remove its sharp edges and dull its ringing tones, and a congregation will become spiritually lethargic and somnolent.

Understand, I am not thinking of preaching in general, of much that passes for preaching today. I mean *proper* preaching, that is, the authoritative proclamation of the Word of God according to the Scriptures and in the service of the Word of Christ.

Such preaching is, in the first place, emphatically preaching of the *Word*, and that, too, according to the Scriptures. This is really the crux of the matter. Any preaching that is worth its salt must be preaching of *the Word of God*. Preaching that departs from this key characteristic has been bastardized.

This means, secondly, that proper preaching is *exegetical*. It expounds and proclaims the Word of God *according to the Scriptures*. The preacher must say, "Thus saith the Lord!" But woe unto him if he says, "Thus saith the Lord," when the Lord has not spoken! Woe unto him if he, so to speak, puts words in the Lord's mouth! The preacher is bound to the Scriptures throughout. He must unfold those Scriptures to God's people. He must proclaim to them the gospel of grace, the gospel of the promise, the riches of salvation, sin and grace, faith and repentance, atonement and justification, regeneration and calling, sanctification and perseverance, eternal life and glory, woe and weal, heaven and hell, blessing and cursing – all according to the Scriptures, and that, too, the Scriptures as conveyed on the wings of a particular text.

In the third place, this implies that preaching must be *specific*. It must be sharp! It must never engage in generalities. Let me add: if the preacher sticks to his text and makes it his purpose to set forth all the riches, all the meaning and significance of his text, his preaching *will be specific*. But I mean, too, that the preaching itself, the *proclaiming* of the Word, must be *sharp*! In this respect there must be a certain amount of

"over-kill" in the preaching. Preaching must not suffer from the "blahs." It must be calculated to jolt people, to make them listen, to pay attention, to make them hang on every word!

Why is this?

Is it because the keen exegesis, the clear organization, the compelling logic, the ringing oratory of the preacher, or his persuasive conversational approach – is it because these must do the work of saving God's people and building His church?

We know better.

No, it is because the preaching of the Word is the cutting-edge of the Spirit of Christ, because it pleases God to call His people and to gather His church through preaching that is exclusively and emphatically preaching of *His Word*. And all the exegesis, the logic, the clarity of organization, the simplicity of explaining deep and rich truths, the talents of speech – all these must be subservient to this purpose of God through the Spirit of Christ.

Hence, in the first place, *preach*, preacher! Preach!


That means: *work*, preacher, work! Work with the Scriptures. Work incessantly. Let nothing deter you from this aspect of your ministry. If you fail to devote your energies to this, if your exegetical labors and your sermon preparation begin to get second or third place in your pastoral life, if you "pull one out of the file" or "turn the pile over" when you move to a new congregation, you are doing despite to the Word of God which you are called to preach. You could better resign from the ministry. God hates a lazy preacher!

It means, too, that you must constantly examine your own preaching critically. A preacher ought to be his own severest critic. It is a very easy and natural course for preaching to become dull, to become humdrum. To prevent this requires constant vigilance and conscious effort on the part of the preacher. It requires consecration and prayer and listening to the Word of God.

Consistories and congregations: expect and demand and insist upon

this kind of preaching! If there is anything in the church that you must guard zealously, anything that is in-

dispensable in the life of the church, anything that has been for fifty years and will be in the future of the ut-

most importance for the spiritual health of our churches, it is the preaching of the Word! 

Rev. Cornelius Hanko



Reformation Comes to Eastern Avenue

*Now Israel may say, and that in truth,
If that the Lord had not our right maintained,
If that the Lord had not with us remained,
When cruel men against us rose to strive,
We surely had been swallowed up alive.*

The church of Jesus Christ is a militant church. I can testify to that from my own experiences, from my earliest memories. During my teens there was in fact great unrest and upheaval in the church.

That was true also in the world at large. The world was at war. A few Civil War veterans were still marching or riding in the Memorial Day parades when World War I broke out. In 1916 our country became directly involved in the war through the sinking of the Lusitania. Every able-bodied young man was called "to serve his country." This became clearly evident in the church, but also in the fact that in the windows of many homes appeared a small rectangular flag with stars signifying that one or more, even to the extent of four members of that family, served in active duty.

Somehow even the churches became deeply involved in the war. The national flag appeared on pulpits; political speeches were held in churches; and various church societies were engaged in activities connected with the war. On a national election day, one minister spoke on

the radio on "Adam, where art thou?" Patriotism was stressed from the pulpits. The people were made very war-minded.

In 1917 the churches and the schools were closed in mid-winter because of what was called a "fuel shortage," since so much fuel was being sent across the Atlantic. The following year, at about the same time, the churches and the schools were closed and all public meetings were called off because of the severe influenza epidemic. Since there were sick in almost every home, and no cure was known, business had come virtually to a halt. We had our Sunday services in our homes with a few neighbors. Very few pedestrians were on the streets. Grocery stores had but a few customers, who bought only the daily necessities. Ministers were kept busily engaged in visiting the sick, usually through windows, sometimes even on the second story, which was reached only by ladder. Funerals became a common occurrence. I recall that when a neighbor child died, the casket was placed by the front window and funeral services were held for the family on the front lawn.

Also in the churches there was growing unrest. In 1918 Rev. H. Bultema, a minister in the Christian Reformed church of Muskegon, Michigan, was deposed from office for his denial of the kingship of Christ in the church of the new dispensation. He was a pre-millennialist.

In 1920 a protest was brought

against Prof. Ralph Janssen, an instructor in Calvin Seminary. He was charged with denying the inspiration of the holy Scriptures and the miracles. He denied, for example, the ten plagues and the falling of the walls of Jericho, and he claimed that the story of Samson developed out of folklore.

This same year, 1920, Rev. Herman Hoeksema became the minister of our Eastern Ave. Christian Reformed congregation. For eighteen years Rev. Johannes Groen had been our pastor. He, along with Prof. Janssen, who with his family was a member of our congregation, and many others had fallen under the influence of Dr. Abraham Kuyper's erroneous common grace theory. The congregation of approximately 500 families had been lulled to sleep under Groen's preaching. Even then there were "those who feared the Lord and spake often one to another" (Mal. 3:16) about the "liberal" and "modern" tendencies that were creeping into the church. But for the most part the members had become quite complacent.

It was like a great awakening when Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who had served a congregation in Holland, Michigan, accepted our call and became our minister. The trumpet gave a new and refreshing sound when already in his inaugural sermon our new pastor proclaimed the gospel message: "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is as grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of

Rev. Hanko, an emeritus minister, served as pastor of various congregations in the PRC from 1929-1977.

the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever" (Isaiah 40:6-8).

Certainly there were those who opposed and were even offended by his preaching, but almost the entire congregation experienced an amazing revival and began to show a new and growing interest in the preaching of the Word. The change did not happen over night, but gradually more and more individuals saw the truth of God's sovereignty in a new light. I recall the numerous discussions that took place in our own home, especially when visitors came to spend an evening of fellowship with us. It was a good time to be alive!

Especially I remember the discussions concerning this truth among the various members of our family of ten. My father was of the *Hervormde Kerk* (the State Church) of the Netherlands, which even then was at best very superficial. Recognizing the liberalism and other evils in the church of the Netherlands and finding those same evils here, he had become very concerned. He experienced a remarkable change in his own spiritual life. At first a bit reluctantly, but with increasing interest, he became an enthusiastic supporter of our new minister. My mother was of the Secession. She had experienced the trials and persecutions of those who had broken with the State Church, and she was a bit hesitant to give up the infra-lapsarian views which had been drilled into her from her earliest youth. There were often differences of opinion, but always an eager striving for the truth of God's Word.

What we experienced at our home was similar to the experience in most other homes of the congregation. Even as there were differences of opinion in the families, there were also differences among the members of the congregation. Across the street from the Eastern Avenue parsonage were two stores: a tin

shop and a shoe store. In the tin shop various members of the church, now retired, met to discuss their agreement with the new pastor. Next door, in the shoe store, various individuals met to discuss what should be done in regard to the "erring preacher," who denied the cherished theory of common grace that was making inroads into the churches.

Especially as pamphlets appeared in favor of and opposed to the teachings of Prof. Janssen and, later, in favor of and opposed to the theory of common grace, these discussions became more widespread throughout the many churches in Grand Rapids and environs. I was attending Grand Rapids Christian High School on the corner of Madison and Franklin, which had opened its doors for the first time in 1920. As might be expected, the teachers used their influence to defend the theory of common grace and inculcate this error into the minds of the students. This resulted in a rather warm debate, usually at the supper table, between me and members of my family who were still at home. It reached a point where my father told me that I should consider leaving the Eastern Avenue congregation and joining Sherman Street Church, if I wanted to maintain a defense of this error. That confronted me with a new problem. This was no longer merely an interesting subject for debate, but a question of personal conscience. Therefore I decided to ask Rev. Hoeksema to explain certain matters in regard to the entire issue. He readily did so after the catechism class I was attending. The more I spoke with him the more convinced I became that the whole common grace theory was a serious error. That settled matters as far as our home was concerned.

But it was evident by this time that many people in the broader community were waking up and becoming involved. Even before the synod of 1924 met, many strangers began attending the services, especially the evening services, in our Eastern Avenue Church. After the synod

adopted the theory of common grace and the general, well-meant offer of salvation as the official doctrine of the church, many more came to hear this "heretic who spoke so vehemently against the churches." They could not help but be impressed by his powerful oratory, his thorough interpretation of the Scriptures, and his profound defense of the truth. The aisles were filled to capacity, the platform held as many of the overflow as possible, and some even stood in the halls. The fire chief made periodic visits to clear particularly the halls. Even the professors of Calvin College paid us a visit. Among them was the Greek professor, who complained the next day in his class that once more "our beloved Socrates" was dragged through the mud. He also said that if Rev. Hoeksema were not so stubborn, he could serve the churches well.

Classis East, which met from time to time during at least a four-month period, held its first meeting after the synod in the Eastern Avenue Church. The classis soon became aware of the ire of the members. At mealtime one of the ladies complained, "We should not feed you men who are determined to kill our minister!" Whether for that reason or another, the classis moved to Sherman Street Church. There, as before, large audiences were gathered to await the outcome.

It was at the meetings in the Sherman Street Church that Rev. Hoeksema made the remark that "the truth was to be sought with a lantern" in that classis. When a motion that he be required to apologize for that statement was being discussed, he offered an amendment, "unless he can prove it." Thereupon the matter was dropped.

On a Friday in early December, Rev. Hoeksema was suspended from office. On that Friday morning I had an early class in Calvin College. Upon my arrival I was told by those who were in the know that "today your minister will be put out of the church." I was asked, "What are you going to do?" I replied, "When they

put him out, they will be putting me out also." There was a solemn parting of the ways right there and then! But no regrets, as far as I was concerned.

When the split did come, many families were divided on the issue, many friendships were broken up. Many individuals said with the inspired Poet of old: "Friend and lover are departed, dark and lonely is my way." However, though there were some individuals missing when the Eastern Avenue congregation met for worship on the Sunday after their minister was suspended from office, the congregation was almost completely intact, and we sang with greater enthusiasm than ever before, until the rafters rang:

*Thou art, O God, our boast, the glory
of our power;
Thy sovereign grace is e'er our fortress
and our tower.
We lift our heads aloft, for God, our
shield, is o'er us;
Through Him, through Him alone,
whose presence goes before us,
We'll wear the victor's crown, no more
by foes assaulted,
We'll triumph through our King, by
Israel's God exalted.*

(Psalm 68)

Through the church periodicals, including the *Standard Bearer*, and especially through the brochures that were being written, the entire denomination became acquainted, at least in as far as they were interested, with the controversy that raged throughout the denomination. This was no longer a local affair. It involved the entire church.

There was some wavering among the ministers of the denomination. At first it appeared as if Rev. Hoeksema had the support of many others, but when the separation actually took place many drew back. One minister, who preached for us on the Sunday evening before Rev. Hoeksema was suspended from office, strongly emphasized that our minister stood for the truth and that we should take a stand with him. But he himself did not. Another minister preached for us even after the

suspension, but he soon after apologized to his classis for having done so. There were others who said that they "had changed their mind." Whether they did so because the movement was not as earth-moving as they had anticipated, or for some other motive, it can only be that the Lord did not consider them proper material with which to carry on His reformation in the church.

The first eleven months after the deposition we still met in the church edifice on Eastern Avenue. By court decision in December of the same year we were forced out. For a short time we met under crowded conditions in the community building at the old Franklin Park (now Martin Luther King Park), but as soon as possible we moved to the St. Cecilia building in downtown Grand Rapids, where we met for over a year. That involved a three-mile walk to the services and another three-mile walk back home. But the congregation, with the exception of the infirm and feeble, eagerly walked these miles for two services on the Lord's Day to be fed with the pure milk of the Word and to enjoy the renewed communion of saints.


I cannot recall a single word of complaint about the distance that we had to walk every Lord's Day, not even in the winter when the sidewalks were slippery; but I do remember joining a group of young people who were happily engaged in discussions concerning the struggles of the church, a group that gradually dwindled as each one turned to go to his own home. It was an exciting, blessed experience.

In those trying times, when Rev. Herman Hoeksema was deposed by Classis East and Rev. Henry Danhof by Classis West, one minister took a valiant stand with them. That was the Rev. George Martin Ophoff, who had a congregation at River Bend, just outside of Grand Rapids. He remained faithful to the truth and a respected colleague of Rev. Hoeksema until his dying day.

These men were burdened with far more work than the average per-

son could bear, yet they struggled on for years, giving their all for the cause of the truth. Besides the responsibility of a large congregation, Rev. Hoeksema, along with Rev. Ophoff and a few others, had to write for the *Standard Bearer*, in order to instruct, but also to keep others informed of what was happening in the churches. There were also requests for lectures in our area and in various parts of the country — lectures which God used to inform others of the awakening that had taken place in Grand Rapids. Whenever possible Hoeksema made trips to Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and California, lecturing and organizing new congregations. Within two years three congregations were organized in the Grand Rapids area, two in Illinois, one in Wisconsin, four in northwest Iowa, and one in Redlands, California.

Only a few months after they were deposed, Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff, along with Rev. Henry Danhof of Kalamazoo, started a seminary for the training of students, in order to satisfy the demand for preachers in the new churches. Ten students enrolled that first year. Rev. Hoeksema taught four classes on Monday, Rev. Ophoff taught four classes on Wednesday, and Rev. Danhof took eight classes on Friday. Men had to be prepared as soon as possible to preach the Word in the churches. Therefore, after two years of training, two of the older men, Wm. Verhil and Gerrit Vos, were ordained to serve in Hull and Sioux Center, Iowa. After serving for two years in those congregations they returned to school to finish their education. Some of those who enrolled in the beginning dropped out, and three new ones were added in 1926, so that in 1929 the first class of six graduated. After that, many others followed as the churches grew numerically and, above all, spiritually.

With gratitude we look back and confess: "What marvelous things the Lord hath wrought in protecting His church on earth." 



Growing Up in That Parsonage: A Look at Herman Hoeksema with His Family

This is an intensely personal story. A glimpse behind the walls of the parsonage at 1139 Franklin Street where I grew up, walls which were already made of glass, as any preacher's kid could testify, does not necessarily constitute *Standard Bearer* material.

It was not our family, however, but my father in his relationship to it, no doubt, that sparked the interest in this article and gave rise to the request for it. He was not an ordinary man, although to us he was and to himself, too. When occasionally, as he was out for one of his many walks, someone that he did not know would greet him as "Dr. Hoeksema" or "Prof. Hoeksema," he thought it was a huge joke.

What *was* extraordinary about him was his total commitment to telling the truth about God: it was not simply truth, nor the desire to be right, but the truth about *God*. That drive he balanced with his love for his family, and this is the story of how it all worked out.

I was the youngest of five children, and of the time before I was born I know only from allusions to it. My father used to reminisce fondly about walks downtown to the Karmel Kitchen with my two older sisters. They were happy times, although the storm clouds of 1924 were already on the horizon.

It was also around this time, in 1920, that Etta Kooistra, our dear housekeeper, came to help my mother, whose health was always rather precarious. Etta did the

heavier work, the washing, the cleaning and scrubbing, while my mother cooked and sewed, knitted and crocheted — and disciplined us: she never saved that for my father.

After we lost the court case in December of 1925, our family moved to temporary quarters in a house on Sherman Street until the new parsonage was ready. That new parsonage was big: upstairs were four bedrooms, a study, and a bath and a half. Downstairs were a living room, dining room, kitchen, breakfast room, large pantry, sun room, office, half bath, and a room that at various times was a playroom, sewing room, and den. Besides, there was a large attic and a basement that was divided into washroom, coal bin, fruit cellar, and another large area where Dad in-

stalled his blacksmith shop.

In those early days after 1924 my father was often away from home, lecturing, organizing churches, meeting with interested people. When he could, he took his family with him.

Most of the time Dad traveled by train, but once in a while one of the few people with a car drove him. One of these men was Nick Yonker of Muskegon, who was a faithful friend all his life. Another was Jake VanderWal; he and his wife Dena were always ready to chauffeur my parents in their Hudson Super Six.

I do remember when my father's mother died; my mother set me on the davenport and told me that I had to be very quiet, because "Papa was sad." Later she said it was the only time she had seen him cry. We all



Mrs. Kregel, a member of Grandville PRC, is a daughter of Herman Hoeksema.

Parsonage of original First PRC

loved "Chicago Grandma."

The Depression was upon us in the thirties. Dad had taken his savings out of the bank to buy his first car when the "bank holiday" was declared, but many people lost everything. I lost five dollars, and it was a long time before I had that much money again. The owners of that bank remained on Dad's blacklist for a long time. Years later, if he took our two oldest daughters for a walk and passed a certain house, he would tell them they could pick all the lilacs that hung over the sidewalk, because they were public property. They did not know it, but that house belonged to one of those owners.

The traveling continued into the thirties. When Orange City was organized, Homer and I went along, again, because we were the youngest. I remember meetings, and going to various homes for coffee afterwards; there was always lots of cigar smoke. At one of these coffees there was an old man who shook very badly. They said he had quaking palsy. For many years I thought the man who had been let down through the roof to be healed must have been like that. I remember, too, a wild ride on a horse, Homer and I riding bareback behind one of the local farmers.

My father had to go to California when Redlands was organized. He sent me many picture postcards on that trip, always calling me his "chum." I wish I had saved them. He always brought back presents. From that trip I have a little teakwood box.

He had to go to California yet again in the thirties, when Bellflower was organized, but this time he took the whole family. We all missed school for three or four weeks. Two of us were in Baxter Christian, two were in Christian High, and one in Calvin College. We piled in the car early one February morning, in the middle of a snowstorm. Every few minutes we had to stop to clean the windshield with a little cloth bag of salt; there were no defrosters in those days. We got as far as Moline, and

could go no farther. After waiting in a garage until the roads were semi-clear, we went on. We made Kalamazoo by noon, and after that the roads were better. In California the family spent most of the time in Redlands. Rev. Vos was pastor at that time.

One summer we took a short trip to the Upper Peninsula. We rode the Toonerville Trolley, took a boat to the Tahquamenon Falls – the usual tourist things. In those days, however, they were not "usual." Few of the roads were paved; the cabins were tiny. (Once in a while you can spot some of those cabins today. They look like outhouses.) Our car was equipped with "free wheeling." Dad was going to demonstrate that to us, so at the top of a long hill he put the car in free wheeling, and we coasted to the bottom and stalled. The carburetor was flooded. I was scared and thought we would have to walk out. We had seen a bear at Tahquamenon. After we waited for a while, however, the car started, much to my relief.

When he was home, Dad took occasional breaks from his study. He did a lot of roughhousing with my brothers, while my mother, fearful of damage to the furniture, tried to calm things down. He made rings and a trapeze in his basement blacksmith shop, and competed with us in "chin-ning" ourselves. He made things for my mother: a kitchen cabinet, a sewing cabinet, and a dresser for my room. He also made Homer and me each a pair of stilts, carefully fashioned, sanded, and painted. I still have them. Our children played with them, too.

Sometimes he would desert his desk and his typewriter for a while and take out his oil paints. His palette was encrusted, and one day I surprised him with a new one, made out of a piece of plywood. He thanked me heartily and never used it.

At times he regaled us with stories of his childhood as an urchin in Groningen, while "Ma" would caution disapprovingly, "Not that one,

Harm." (At such times she called him "Harm." To us she called him "papa." That is what we called him also, until we were older. Then it was "Dad." To the members of the congregation my mother referred to him as "Mr. Hoeksema." He called her "Ma," and sometimes "Nellie.")

My mother must have been afraid we would emulate Dad's escapades, but we would "egg" him on. We knew all of his stories, and had our favorites. We could laugh at his pranks, many of which were the result of being "dirt poor" and hungry.

Out of his poverty-stricken childhood arose a lasting sympathy for the poor. He condemned the labor unions in his sermons, but usually had a stern reproof for the selfish employer also. Once a man came to our door asking for money to do mission work among the poor of the city. "The poor?" Dad chided, "Why don't you go to Madison Avenue?" He felt the rich were more in need of mission work.

Our meals were almost always together, and Dad was quick to tell my mother how good everything tasted. The Depression lasted through most of the thirties, and my mother turned every penny over twice before she spent it. Our breakfasts were cooked cereal, made out of wheat that my parents bought by the bushel and ground themselves. We chewed on it a long time. Meat, when we had it, was hamburger. When one of my brothers was sent to Pastoor's Market, he would be greeted with, "Two pounds of hamburger today?" Sometimes we were given part of a cow or pig that had been butchered by a member of the congregation. My mother would can the meat.

Meal times, however, were for more than food. We had our family devotions, Scripture reading, and prayer. My mother ably took over when Dad was not there. At meal times we also talked about school, and the teacher was always right, with one exception: sometimes, when the real culprit could not be

found, a teacher would punish the whole class, perhaps by withholding some privilege. On that Dad would comment, "He/she should read Abraham's prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah; God would have spared the whole city for ten righteous."

Often, as we volunteered our comments, our grammar was gently corrected with "but you *should* say." We learned to distinguish between subjective and objective pronouns, "him" and "her" for example; we learned not to say "that much" for "as much as that," "like" for "as if," and never, never to use a double negative. We all grew up with a keen sense of grammar.

Our schoolwork was totally unsupervised, unless we needed help with a math problem. Good grades were simply expected of us, and the report card told the tale. My parents saw no reason to study for a test, or even an exam, since we had already learned the material.

The same casual attitude toward catechism prevailed. I do not recall ever being taught my catechism questions, from Borstius' Primer on. We could all read, and we were expected to know our questions.

We did a lot of memorizing. Every Sunday afternoon, for a good many years, Homer and I (and I think Herm, too, for a while) were assigned five to eight verses of Scripture. At 4:00 P.M. we had to be ready to recite them. Once we had learned them we were free to read, play Bible cards, sometimes with a neighbor, or take a walk. My older sisters in their childhood learned the whole Heidelberg Catechism.

My father was strict. However, I don't recall ever being spanked. He had "The Look," as we referred to it in later years. That was enough. When we began to date, our curfew was 11:00 P.M. That did not mean 11:01. There were no exceptions. In high school we did not attend basketball games. Dad did not approve of Christian High's membership in the City League; he regarded it as a form of amalgamation with the world. Besides, he did not want our

evening meal interrupted. We did not attend school plays: drama was frowned upon. We went to symphony concerts occasionally, but there were many in the congregation who disapproved, and sometimes let my parents know.

In retrospect, I believe that my father spent more time with his family than most fathers, who went to work in the morning and came home at night. How he could do that and still focus on that all-consuming purpose of his life is not always clear. It is well known, and there is no need to spell it out here, that he accomplished a prodigious amount of work. At the same time, he was almost always ready for a game when he was home. Sometimes it was an invented one, such as throwing a tennis ball at a circular design in the peak of the house. (That was just above my bedroom windows, and there were accidents.)

Neighbors used to remark that his study light was always on at night. I know that if I studied late, or if I awakened at night, I would hear the thump of his Remington typewriter. He composed at his typewriter and never revised: his first draft was his only one.

Preaching was his first love. He would make a broad outline on a single sheet of paper folded in half; he wrote horizontally on it. Then he would pace the floor of his study, or take a walk while he meditated on it. He used to say that he studied "on the hoof." When he preached, he left his outline home. No doubt God blessed him with a keen mind, which was able to retain what he read or thought about. That is probably why he thought it foolish to study for exams.

Behind my father stood a woman of wisdom who protected his time. She screened his callers as well as his mail – not that she ever opened his mail, but if she spotted what she knew to be a "hate letter" it went into "File 13" without his ever seeing it.

My mother did not play games with us. Often in the evening she

sat in her living room chair, knitting and sometimes reading at the same time. She taught all of the girls to sew, knit, crochet, and cook. I had to learn one new skill each summer, as I grew up.

Even Homer learned to embroider. When we were both laid up with scarlet fever for many weeks, my mother traced animal pictures from a book onto muslin squares, and we embroidered them in red for a quilt. In those days we were quarantined; Dad could stay in his study, but could not visit us. My mother sent his meals up the clothes chute on a dumb waiter.

My mother took her place in the congregation, too, leading a large Ladies' Aid Society for many years, Bible discussion and all. She had only an eighth grade education, to her lasting regret. She had a kind of quiet wisdom, and was able to settle minor disputes with her "Now, ladies." She was an avid reader, and I often saw her poring over a well-worn copy of *Barnes Notes on Acts*, in preparation.

The budgeting of the household income was her task also; handling money was not Dad's long suit. He did buy coal in the summer, when it was cheaper, and filled the coal bin. He shoveled a lot of coal to keep that big house warm. In those days we paid our own utilities, except for the telephone, and even personal telephone expenses, few as they were, Dad paid himself.

In the early days of the Depression Dad volunteered to have his salary cut – in half, as I recall. Many were jobless; many lost their homes, and we were not in danger of that. He did not want to live above the level of the people of his congregation. In spite of all this, and I do not know how it was possible, they sent us all to college. My parents firmly believed in a college education, for girls, too. It was not in order to get a better job, or to earn more money, but for the sake of learning itself. We did not always have the greatest food, or attractive wardrobes, but we all went to college.

One Sunday morning after church it was strangely subdued at our house. Dad did not sit down at the old pump organ, as was his wont. That morning, while reading the baptism form, he had had his very first attack of nerves. Thereafter the same thing happened every time he had to read, Sunday after Sunday. The more he tried to fight it, the worse it became. The stress of his life had caught up with him.

Finally, with the blessing of his consistory, he took a six-week vacation and we all headed for the ocean. Dad made a car-top carrier, a trunk (the car did not come with one), and a bench to set between the front and back seats. Homer and I sat on the bench. We carried our first day's dinner in a pot, which my mother wrapped in newspapers and set by her feet. We stayed in cabins; our limit was fifty cents per person.

We had three drivers besides Dad. In those days boys could drive at fourteen, girls at sixteen. (Talk about discrimination!) We sang and scrapped and hinted for treats, and finally came to a little town at the mouth of the Saco River in Maine. There we found a ramshackle house across from a beach of sorts. It was owned by two women who were Christian Scientists; they had many books, and were fans of E. Phillips Oppenheim. We read all of the books, as well as the poetry on the walls of the outhouse.

My parents never worried about water safety. My brothers had access to a small rowboat, and they would go down the river into the ocean at ebb tide and fish for mackerel. There were no life jackets. We could all swim, and it did not matter how far out into the ocean we went. Dad used to swim out to some rocks, and the seals swam along side of him.

To this place we returned for several years. Dad's nerves gradually healed – or he learned to forget them. Many years later I asked him if he still had those thoughts, to which he replied, "I'm too old to be nervous." The consistory lightened the load of

his pastoral work in 1939 by calling a second pastor, Rev. Richard Veldman. Dad went along with that, rather reluctantly, but it was necessary.

By 1936 Jo had graduated from Calvin and was teaching at Baxter Christian School. Although my father had often joked about the time he would shake the nest and the fledgling birds would fly away, when that began to happen he became rather depressed.

My oldest sister, Jo, married Lam Doezema in 1938, and after the wedding Dad sat in his chair in the living room and said, "I think this is a little bit of death."

Soon afterwards, Dr. Schilder visited for the first time. There were many get-togethers at our house. In the morning the cigar smoke would still hang in the room.

Dr. Schilder was scheduled to speak in English at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and my parents took him there. My brother Herm drove them, so that Dad could help Dr. Schilder translate his speech. They went by way of Washington, DC, in order to show him our Capital. Dr. Schilder was enjoying himself, and kept putting off that translation, but finally Dad insisted that they begin. They completed it just as they drove up to Westminster, and Dr. Schilder delivered it in English. The evening was a disappointment to them, and they left for home immediately afterwards; I do not know the reason for this.

Our household changed rapidly in the forties. My oldest brother, Herm, married Annette Doezema and went to the University of Nebraska to pursue studies in chemistry. World War II broke out, and he received a commission in the Navy; he was sent to Panama. Jo and Lam moved to Bellflower, California, where Lam became pastor. Jeanette, who had been teaching at Baxter, met and married Bill Clason, also a teacher. He was in the Navy, too, and they moved away until after the war.

Now only Homer and I were at

home. Homer was in seminary, and I was going to Calvin College.

It was in the forties that Mr. Wm. Eerdmans, Sr., an old college classmate and publisher, became interested in publishing some of Dad's work. He came over one day, intending to look at his Heidelberg Catechism exposition. Dad took him up to the attic, where all his material – radio sermons, theological school notes, catechism notes – lay neatly organized on the floor. Mr. Eerdmans came back downstairs and left, and Dad remarked, "I think he'd like all of it."

In 1944 Rev. DeWolf became our second pastor, replacing Rev. Veldman, who had taken a call to Fourth Protestant Reformed Church. Factions were building up in the congregation. My mother was aware of it; my father did not seem to be. There was an element in the congregation that thought the preaching was too strong, too doctrinal. They talked about it to one another, not to my father. Rev. DeWolf had friends who did not like him to be considered the *second* pastor. Dad was seemingly oblivious.

At home there was not the closeness of the days when we were all there. Homer and I were involved in our own studies. I think my parents were lonely. In 1946 Homer married Gertrude Jonker and they moved to an apartment. I had met my future husband, Charles Kregel, during my first year of college, but we had no plans to marry. In May of 1943 he was drafted into the army and sent overseas a few months later, and he did not return until December of 1945. I graduated from college in 1946, and we were married in May, 1947.

This really concludes the story of growing up in *that* parsonage. There is a sequel, however. A few weeks after our wedding my father suffered a debilitating stroke. It happened as my parents were on their way to California, and followed a long and tense synod. When they were able to return home, Dad needed therapy, Ma needed help, and they both needed

encouragement. Since Homer, Trude, Chuck, and I were the only family members living in Grand Rapids, much of the responsibility fell on our shoulders. We read in unison with Dad, walked with him, took him to therapy. We helped Ma with meals and encouraged her. The ever-faithful Etta stood by, too, ready to do whatever was needed. So it was that the nurturers became the nurtured, and once again we become close.

In 1948 the consistory decided to call another pastor, and Rev. C. Hanko answered that call. He was a great support and comfort for Dad. In 1949 Homer took a call to Doon, Iowa.

By that time Dad was walking fairly well and preaching again, although he disliked his game leg and sometimes stumbled in his speech. He used to drive his car to our apartment and push Mary in her stroller, stopping in for a cup of coffee afterwards.

When the schism came in 1953, Dad was devastated, particularly because so many of the men he had taught as students had forsaken the truth – the truth about God. Once more my mother was his great support and comfort in his discouragement. One thing she refused to do, however, was to attend the many classis and synod meetings of those

days. A group of women often urged her to join them. They would sometimes make a pot of soup to share for dinner, so that they could be away for the day. My mother called it “synod soup” and steadfastly refused to go, with my father’s approval.


That schism divided many families, ours as well. Our home became a sort of haven for my parents. Often the telephone would ring and I would hear, “Are you going to be home? How about a game of *Scrabble*?” There were frequent Sunday dinners, at which Dad sometimes expressed surprise that his youngest daughter had learned to cook. Sometimes Dad would watch a ball game on television with Chuck. That gave rise to the rumor that Dad was always watching TV. When that story reached Chuck’s ears, he said, deadpan, “Didn’t you hear? The consistory bought each of our ministers a set.”

Homer returned in 1959 to teach in the seminary. By this time my mother’s health was beginning to decline. Early one morning the telephone rang: it was Dad asking me to “fix Ma up or something; she just sits there and makes no sense.” She had had a slight stroke, but he thought she had lost her mind. Before long she was bedridden. Trude

and I took care of her until it was clear that she had to be hospitalized. It was Rev. Hanko who helped persuade Dad to let her go. She lingered in the geriatric unit at Pine Rest for half a year, and Dad visited her every day, accompanied by one of us. The morning of September 23, 1963, Homer and I had to go to the parsonage to tell Dad that his beloved “Ma” had gone to glory.

Now Dad’s health began to fail. He still drove, and loved to take one or more of his grandchildren to the beach, or to Schnitzelbank. We were fearful, but hated to deny him company in his loneliness.

Finally the dreaded day came when his consistory had to tell him he could no longer preach: he was too confused. He had to give up driving also. He began to have small strokes, which became gradually worse. Finally he was hospitalized, and on September 2 he went to be with the Lord he had served.

That is my story. There is much, much more, of course, but these are the highlights. The memories are still vivid. I can picture that house and each item in it, in the place where it stood. More important than those images, however, is the legacy that Dad left all of us: his love of the truth about God. May we always hold it dear. 

Book Review

Our Goodly Heritage Preserved, published by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2000. 136 pages, \$15.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Russell J. Dykstra.]

For a homey and personalized presentation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the reader is encouraged to pick up *Our Goodly Heritage Preserved*. It is a commemorative book drawn up in connection with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The soft-covered book is intended to be a companion volume to the work on the doctrinal history of

the PRC, *For Thy Truth’s Sake*.

Our Goodly Heritage Preserved was proposed as a “booklet” which would include at least a brief history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, pictures of the schools, churches, and seminary, and a schedule of the events of the celebration week. It far exceeds the early expectations. The “booklet” has evolved into a 135-page publication of no mean value.

The reader is introduced to the Protestant Reformed Churches with a concise, thumbnail sketch of the churches’ history written by Prof. David Engelsma. He reminds the reader that the only significant con-

cern for the church of Christ is God’s evaluation of her. “Size, the praise of men, reputation among other churches, impact on society—none of these things count with Him. Confession of the truth of the gospel counts with Him. The gospel is the doctrine of inspired Scripture that the salvation of sinners is the work of God alone in Jesus Christ by sovereign grace (Rom. 9:16). And the history of the PRC is the history of churches that proclaim and defend the good news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone” (p. 8).

The history is followed by a brief chapter on the Protestant Reformed

distinctives and church government.

Chapter Two, the longest chapter, is a presentation of the twenty-seven individual congregations which comprise the PRC today. Each congregation was asked to provide a brief history of herself. Pictures abound in this section – pictures old and new of consistories, church buildings, parsonages, children of the congregation, whole congregations, etc. The careful reader can discover much from this section, as for example, which congregation moved the most (at least eleven times!); how many congregations are the result of mission work; and how many are daughter churches. One of the churches has two beginnings – separated by thirty-eight years!


This chapter is not, however, a mere listing of statistics and interesting tidbits of information. It is a record of God's faithfulness, establishing, preserving, and defending His church. Nary a congregation has escaped unscathed from trouble as a consequence of maintaining and defending the Reformed faith. Many of the accounts reveal that fact also.

Chapter Three, entitled "Mission Work of the Protestant Reformed Churches," includes a variety of sections, including a concise history of their mission work, reports on the various current mission stations, the radio program (The Reformed Witness Hour), and current ecumenical relations.

The book includes an informative chapter on the Protestant Reformed Seminary, a lengthy one on the Christian schools large and small, and a description of various publications rising out of the denomination as a whole (although none of these are official publications by the Protestant Reformed Churches). A touching tribute to the early minis-

ters begins aptly, "If the Lord's blessing on a denomination can be measured by His supply of faithful ministers of the gospel, the Protestant Reformed Churches have been richly blessed." Near the end, a list is provided of the known original members still living in October of 1999, although some are already with the Lord at this writing. The reviewer was privileged to know sixty-seven

of these saints. The book concludes with a sober reminder of the calling of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the future, and the very real dangers she faces – to be read and re-read by every member of the PRC.

The publications committee can be credited with a fine work of "snapshots" depicting various aspects of the Protestant Reformed denomination. 

Announcements

REMINDER

The *Standard Bearer* is published only monthly during the months of June, July, and August.



is only a few miles north of the campus.

Monday evening's program will begin at 7:30 p.m. and Cal Kalsbeek will be the speaker. There will be audience singing, special numbers, a short video of the Protestant Reformed Church's History, and the keynote address to kick off the celebration week.

The program on Tuesday evening will start at 7:30 p.m., and Rev. Jason Kortering will speak on "A Beautiful Heritage." Wednesday evening's program will also be at 7:30 p.m., and Professor David Engelsma will speak on "A Present Necessity." Thursday evening's program will start later, at 8:00 p.m. to allow the young people time for their banquet, and Rev. Carl Haak will speak on "A Sure Light for the Future." Following each evening program there will be free time for fellowship with new and old friends.

The atmosphere at the programs will be somewhat relaxed, so please feel free to bring your children, family members, friends, and neighbors. There will be an area outside the sanctuary in which parents with children can go and listen to the program. Transportation will be offered from Calvin College to Sunshine Church for those who are unable to drive. We ask that those who are attending just the evening programs drive directly to the church.

The celebration has over 1,200 individuals registered to attend the weekly event, but we still urge those who are not attending during the day to come at night for the evening programs. We believe that there will be much for the whole family to enjoy, and that you will experience the communion of the saints and how God has blessed us over the past 75 years.