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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S BANNER ARTICLES

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MEDITATION

And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins...

Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.

—Exodus 22:16–17, 21–27

Love Thy Helpless Neighbor

The people of Israel had many helpless neighbors in their midst. The helpless of Israel were entirely at the mercy of the strong of Israel. With a single word or a single action, the strong could destroy the helpless and utterly ruin them. And who would defend the helpless? They were not strong. Their families were not strong. No one was looking out for them. The strong in Israel could get away with almost anything against their helpless neighbors.

Over there was the single young woman in the bloom of her womanhood, susceptible in her innocence to the flattery and deceit of men. A smooth-talking man without any regard for her well-being or her family's honor might entice her, thus damaging her prospects to be married. Over there was the foreigner sojourning in Israel, without family or friends to defend him against oppression in the land of his sojourn. Over there were the widow and the orphan, who had no husband or father to defend them from being afflicted and taken advantage of. Over there were the poor, who had nothing but the clothes on their backs and who had no choice but to borrow

from those with means. Who would pay any attention if the lender took the borrower's raiment as surety, even though it would mean that the borrower shivered naked through the night?

So many helpless people in the midst of Israel! So much opportunity for the strong to take advantage of the weak!

But God is the God of his helpless people. God is the God of the widow and the fatherless, the God of the poor, the God of the stranger, the God of the innocent. "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble...For the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever" (Ps. 9:9, 18).

In his judgments God told the people of Israel that they must not take advantage of their helpless neighbors. The man who enticed the young woman must marry her or pay the dowry that her father set. The Israelite must not oppress the stranger, remembering that the people of Israel had been strangers in Egypt. The man who oppressed the widow or the orphan would be slain by God so that the oppressor's

wife would be a widow and his children orphans. God would hear the cry of the shivering borrower who was being taken advantage of by the lender's greed and cruelty. Thou shalt not take advantage of thy helpless neighbor! Rather, thou shalt love thy helpless neighbor!

And would you see the unfathomable grace of God to his helpless people? He has sent his only begotten Son to be one of us. Born into our

poverty, our sojourn, our lowliness, our weakness, our helplessness—our Lord was made like us in all things, except sin! And even that—our sin, including our sin of oppressing our helpless neighbors—he took upon himself in our place! What mercy! What grace! We are the helpless, but God loved us and saved us.

Now in gratitude, by the Spirit of the lowly but exalted Christ, love thy helpless neighbor.

—AL

EDITORIAL

Union

Introduction

When we last looked in on our Reformed forebears, they were singing Psalm 133 as they finished the first meeting of their new classis in April 1848.¹ In a simple log cabin in the heavily forested lands of Zeeland, Michigan, God had brought four transplanted Dutch churches together as Classis Holland.

It was the first of three great April milestones among the seceded immigrants, as God established his Reformed church on the wild American frontier.

Although that first meeting of Classis Holland must have appeared foolish and backward to every civilized eye, it was nevertheless a miracle of God's grace to his helpless people. Having carried his people across the seas, away from their persecuting kinsmen in the Netherlands, the Lord established Classis Holland on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ as he is made known in the scriptures, according to the sound interpretation of those scriptures in the Reformed confessions. Well did the delegates to Classis Holland begin their first classis meeting with the cry, "Bless the LORD, O my soul" (Ps. 103:1). And well did they conclude, "For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (133:3).

But it would not be long before the gravest of dangers threatened the newly formed denomination. In fact, even before Classis Holland met for the first time, the foe was already stalking her and laying the foundation for her destruction. Though the little churches had weathered brutal winters and a diseased summer and injury and sickness and death; though they had come through winter's ice and summer's swarms of mosquitoes and the trackless depths of the Michigan forests; though their little colony already had a central city and surrounding villages; though they had all these gifts from their God, Classis Holland was poised to put her foot on the path of spiritual apostasy. Her real foes in those years were not disease and death of the body, though those foes stalked her too. Her real foe was spiritual compromise with an apostate American church. Centuries before the little band of *Afscheiding* immigrants was transplanted in Michigan, Dutchmen had already settled in the east of America. Those Dutchmen had already established a Reformed church in America, hundreds of years before Classis Holland ever came into being. But that old Reformed church and those Dutch Americans had left the old paths of doctrine and worship. And now that Rev. Albertus Van Raalte

¹ See Andrew Lanning, "Classis Holland," *Reformed Pavilion* 3, no. 1 (April 12, 2025): 6–11.

and his fellow immigrants were organized as Classis Holland in Michigan, they faced the question of whether they would have an ecclesiastical relationship with that old Reformed church back East. It was a time of great danger for Classis Holland. And the tale is a sad one, for Reverend Van Raalte and the fledgling denomination of Classis Holland found it irresistible to compromise with that apostate Reformed church.

In this April of 2025, then, let us revisit April 1850—exactly 175 years ago—to see the second great April milestone of Classis Holland: union with the Reformed Church in America.

The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of New York and New Jersey

When Reverend Van Raalte and his little flock of *Afscheiding* seceders first arrived in America in 1846, Michigan was a wild frontier; but the states of New York and New Jersey on America's eastern seaboard had been settled for centuries. Among the early settlers in New York and New Jersey were Reformed men and women who had emigrated from the Netherlands in the 1600s. In order to set the scene in America as Van Raalte found it in 1846, we must go all the way back to the Netherlands in the days of the great Synod of Dordt in 1618–19.

At the time of the Synod of Dordt, the Netherlands was in the midst of a flourishing Golden Age. The economy of the entire world ran through Amsterdam, with its busy port and powerful trading companies. Dutch ships sailed the world and brought all its exotic wonders and considerable riches back to be enjoyed by the genteel populations of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and other powerful Dutch cities. The Netherlands was about to revolutionize the art world, with masters like Rembrandt and Vermeer waiting in the wings. The Netherlands was hungry for new ideas in science and would soon become an enthusiastic student of Isaac Newton and his physics. The seventeenth-century Netherlands was the center of the world.

As this Golden Age in the Netherlands unfolded, the Reformed church in the Netherlands was in the midst of a life-and-death doctrinal struggle to maintain the Reformation. The Reformed church had been built on the doctrine of God's sovereign grace that saves sinners, as that doctrine had been taught by John Calvin and the other reformers. But James Arminius had introduced the idea that God's grace is resistible by the free will of the sinner. The Reformed church in the Netherlands was heading for a showdown as to whether she would stand for the sovereign grace of Calvinism or the resistible grace of Arminianism. At the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19, God gave the Reformed church in the Netherlands a resounding victory over the Arminian error. The synod wrote and adopted the Canons of Dordt, in which the Reformed church confessed the truth of God's sovereign grace and condemned the error of man's free will.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands was establishing Dutch colonies all over the world. From Cape Colony (South Africa) to the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) to Dutch Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to the Dutch West Indies (Caribbean), Dutchmen streamed forth from the Netherlands to establish themselves everywhere that their ships could sail. One of the earliest of these Dutch colonies was on Manhattan Island in New Amsterdam (later to become New York).

It would not be long before a Dutch Reformed church would be established on Manhattan Island. In 1628, still relatively fresh from the resounding victory of the Synod of Dordt back in the Netherlands, a few Dutch people in Manhattan founded a Dutch Reformed church under the leadership of Dominie Jonas Michielius. The church that they founded in America would become the denomination known as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of New York and New Jersey, which today is known as the Reformed Church in America (RCA). "In the small colonial town of New Amsterdam, on a Sunday in 1628, about fifty people gathered around a crude table in a mill loft. Their celebration of the

Lord's Supper marks the birthdate of the Reformed Church in America."²

For the next two hundred years, the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church remained established along the eastern seaboard of America. But as the generations went by, the church began to depart from the old paths of doctrine and worship. She left the psalms and introduced hymns—eight hundred of them. She stopped preaching the Heidelberg Catechism. She administered the Lord's supper to visitors from every denomination. She allowed her members to join lodges and other secret societies. She promoted the books of Richard Baxter, who compromised the heart of the gospel—justification by faith alone. And the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of New York and New Jersey maintained a sister-church relationship with the apostate state church back in the Netherlands. By the time Van Raalte and his fellow *Afscheiding* seceders arrived in America in 1846, the old Reformed Protestant Dutch Church was already far down the road of apostasy.

A Strange Friendship

But when Van Raalte and his fellow *Afscheiding* seceders arrived in America in 1846, it was the old Reformed Protestant Dutch Church that helped Van Raalte and the Dutch immigrants immensely. Before Van Raalte arrived, the old Dutch Church gathered gifts and supplies to distribute to the immigrants. When Van Raalte and his band disembarked on Manhattan Island, representatives of the old Dutch Church met them and welcomed them to their new land. And shortly after Van Raalte and the churches of Classis Holland had organized as a classis in 1848, the old Dutch Church sent a representative to meet with the people of Classis Holland.

Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church of Albany, New York, a great friend of the Michigan colonists, was sent by the Board of Domestic Missions to visit the Holland Colony.

Wyckoff came to the Colony in the early days of June, 1849, two years after the Holland settlement was made. Van Raalte, who owned the only horse in the Colony at that time, set Wyckoff on it and they traveled around the entire colony, with Van Raalte on foot and Wyckoff on horseback. Van Raalte and the colonists were overjoyed to see this emissary from the eastern Dutch Reformed Church. Several of the colonists must have gotten to know Wyckoff when they passed through Albany on their way west and many of those who did not know him personally had heard of him. His visit showed the colonists that the eastern Dutch Reformed churches were concerned about this settlement in western Michigan. For his part, Wyckoff had already sensed the importance of these colonists to the future of the Dutch Reformed Church and now, through his visit, he came to understand their needs first hand and he assured them of the love the old eastern denomination had for them.

On his return to the east, Wyckoff published an extensive and enthusiastic report on the Holland Colony and the progress it had made in just two years.³

It was a strange friendship that sprang up between Classis Holland and the old Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. The two churches certainly had things in common. They shared a common Dutch heritage. Each also saw in the other an opportunity to expand. The old Dutch Church in the East had not been successful in establishing itself in the West, but here was a Reformed frontier colony ready-made for them. And Classis Holland could use a strong contact back East to receive the waves of incoming Dutch immigrants and to speed them on their way to Michigan. Each also saw in the other

² Reformed Church in America, "History of the RCA," <https://www.rca.org/about/history/>.

³ Elton J. Bruins, *Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader of the Emigration, 1844–1867*, <https://docslib.org/doc/10483252/albertus-c-van-raalte-leader-of-the-emigration-1844-1867>, 20.

churches full of friendly people who were willing and eager to lend a helping hand.

But for all the external things that they had in common, Classis Holland and the old Dutch Church were divided spiritually. Classis Holland sang the 150 psalms in worship, had suffered intense persecution for doing so, and ultimately had had to secede from the state church to keep her psalmody; but the old Dutch Church sang eight hundred hymns in worship and had long since given up the psalms. The people of Classis Holland had been deposed and mocked and outlawed and fined and imprisoned by the state church in the Netherlands; but the old Dutch Church had a sister-church relationship with the state church. Classis Holland walked in the old paths of Heidelberg Catechism preaching and of administering the sacraments to those who were united in faith; but the old Dutch Church did not preach the Catechism and administered the Lord's supper to everyone who walked through the door, except Roman Catholics.

Classis Holland and the old Dutch Church were divided. There could be no ecclesiastical relationship between them without compromising both doctrine and worship. But Classis Holland began contemplating exactly such a compromising ecclesiastical relationship. After all, the people of Classis Holland were filled with neighborly affection for their brethren in the East. They had benefited greatly from the Christian charity of Reverend Wyckoff and others in New York. What should prevent them from joining their churches together in ecclesiastical union?

But Classis Holland erred. It was a common error that many still make today, but it was a devastating error for all that. Classis Holland judged the soundness of the old Dutch Church by the quality of its people. Instead of looking for the marks of the *true church institute*—the pure preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline—Classis Holland looked for the marks of *true Christian people*—Christian charity, neighborly affection, and other fruits of faith. Apparently there were many true

Christians in the old Dutch Church. But *people* are not the marks of the *church*. Just as hypocrites in the true church of Christ do not mark that church as false, so Christians in the false church do not mark that church as true. The fact that Classis Holland found Christian brethren in the old Dutch Church did not mean that Classis Holland and the old Dutch Church may unite ecclesiastically. Classis Holland's call to her Christian brethren in the old Dutch Church should not have been, "Let us join churches!" Her call to her Christian brethren should have been, "Come out from among them!"

Classis Holland's confusion was inexcusable. Oh, we can very well understand the classis' confusion. And well might we blush at how easily we too can become confused. Over there someone is saying, "There are good, Christian people in that church, so it must be a true church." And over there someone else is saying, "That is a false church, so there can be no good, Christian people in it." We scratch our heads and furrow our brows and become confused.

Nevertheless, a Reformed church ought not be confused about the difference between evaluating church *people* and church *institutes*. God made the difference clear in the case of Israel and Judah in the days of King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat. Israel was the false church under King Ahab, and Judah was the true church under King Jehoshaphat. Israel was known as the false church in the marks of her doctrine (Baal is god) and her worship (golden calves in Dan and Bethel). Judah was known as the true church in the marks of her doctrine (Jehovah is God) and her worship (the temple in Jerusalem). Yet God had his elect people in the false church of Israel: seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (I Kings 19:18). And what did the presence of God's elect people in apostate Israel mean for Judah? It did not mean that Judah might join herself to Israel, for God rebuked Jehoshaphat for joining Judah's army to Israel's (II Chron. 19:2).

The Belgic Confession, in article 29, is at pains to distinguish between the church institute, on

the one hand, and the people who are members of the church, on the other hand. When the confession identifies the true church institute, it explicitly states that it is not speaking about people: “But we speak here not of hypocrites, who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it.” And the confession explicitly differentiates between “marks by which the true church is known,” on the one hand, and knowing the “members of the church...by the marks of Christians,” on the other hand.

Classis Holland may well have found Christian brethren in the old Dutch Church. But Classis Holland should have rebuked the old Dutch Church for her apostasy and called her Christian brethren to depart. “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

Union

But Classis Holland, disregarding the marks of the false church that characterized the old Dutch Church, sought ecclesiastical union with her. At its classis meeting in April 1850, Classis Holland voted to send Reverend Van Raalte to New York to facilitate the union of the two denominations. It is the second of the three great April milestones in Classis Holland. The minutes of the April 1850 classis meeting have been entirely lost. After the meeting the clerk suddenly became sick and died, and the minutes that he took could never be found. But the letter that classis adopted in April 1850 has been preserved.⁴

The overseers of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Classis of Holland, in Ottawa [Co.], Michigan, wish the brethren, the overseers of the church of our Lord known as Dutch Reformed Church, and assembled in one of the sections of New York State, in order to promote the welfare of that portion of the flock of Christ.

Grace and peace from God the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

In consideration of the precious and blessed unity of the church of God, and the clearly declared will of our Saviour that they all should be one; as well as the need which the particular parts of the whole have of one another—especially we, who feel our weakness and insignificance—our hearts thirst for fellowship with the beloved Zion of God.

Since the day that we stepped ashore in this new world, our hearts have been strengthened and encouraged by meeting the people of God. The children of God are all dear to us, living in their various branches, but in guiding and caring for the interests of our congregations we find ourselves best at home where we are privileged to find our own confessional standards and the fundamental principles of our church government. Thus it was gratifying to us to experience from the other side no narrow exclusiveness, but open, hearty, brotherly love. This awakens in us a definite desire to make manifest our fellowship, and to ask for the hand of brotherly fellowship in return.

For these reasons we have resolved to send as our representative to your church assembly, which in the first days of May is to be held in the neighborhood of Albany, one of our brethren, namely, A. C. van Raalte, pastor and teacher in the church of God, instructing him in our name to give and to ask for all necessary information which may facilitate the desired union.

For him and for your meeting we pray that there may be granted you in abundant measure, from our glorified Head and Mediator, who is seated in the throne of God, provided with rich gifts obtained through his blood, that Holy

⁴ Earl Wm. Kennedy, *A Commentary on the Minutes of the Classis of Holland, 1848–1876*, vol. 1 (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2018), 96–102.

Spirit whom He left behind as the Comforter, in order that there may be granted to the flock, from the fulness of the Ever-living One, what is necessary that she shall be enabled to glorify the Triune God.

In the name of the Classical Assembly of the Classis of Holland, held in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ 1850 in the month April.

Holland, Ottawa [County], Michigan

Truly signed,
S. Bolks, president

Classis Holland's request was received favorably by the old Dutch Church. At the June meeting of the old Dutch Church's synod, the union between Classis Holland and the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of New York

and New Jersey was completed. From that time until today, Classis Holland has been part of what is known today as the Reformed Church in America.

The story of Classis Holland's compromise is sad. How quickly men are willing to compromise with false doctrine and corrupt worship! Yet the story of Classis Holland's compromise is not the story of the church's defeat. For God would use the events of April 1850 to bring reformation to his church. Not everyone in Classis Holland was satisfied with the union with the RCA. In April 1857—the third April milestone of Classis Holland—God would reform his church by calling out of the RCA what would become the Christian Reformed Church.

To be continued...

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

February 17, 1921

(pp. 101–103)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article CVI: On “Common Grace” Once More

The following communication we received through our esteemed editor-in-chief, Dr. H. Beets:

Editor of *The Banner*:

Would you kindly allow me as a member of our Christian Reformed Church a little space in *The Banner*?

I have read with deep regret the continued assaults by Rev. H. Hoeksema upon the doctrine of Common Grace in *The Banner* as our official organ of the Christian Reformed Church. Rev. Hoeksema is willing to admit that the late Dr. Abraham Kuyper and Dr. H. Bavinck, both of the Netherlands, are not only upholding this doctrine, but that the first named professor has

written very extensively on the matter. I would like to know in all sincerity and with due respect for the pastor of the Eastern Avenue church what authority Rev. Hoeksema has to set aside one of the fundamental doctrines of our Reformed faith.

God's common grace was revealed right at the gates of the lost paradise when God placed a mark on Cain in order that he should not be killed and that his days on earth might be prolonged. From paradise through the whole sacred history of the Bible runs the doctrine of Common Grace as a golden thread that cannot be separated from the truth as it is revealed unto us.

As a member of the Christian Reformed Church I wish to enter a word of protest against

the writings of Rev. Hoeksema in which he denies the doctrine of Common Grace, which is clearly taught in Scripture and is being upheld by the very best and most learned of our Reformed

theologians, the names of two thereof being mentioned above.

—A. Dykstra
Grand Rapids, January 31, 1921

Reply

Dear brother Dykstra:

In the first place I wish to state for the good of the cause that I think it a strange coincidence that this regret felt at an “assault upon the doctrine of Common Grace” is felt at a time when I made an attack of an altogether different nature. It is a year and a half ago, brother Dykstra, that I made my assault upon this doctrine. Then I received no criticism. When my former, recent critic on this point informed me that he intended to attack my view on Common Grace, he was not even aware of the fact that I had written on the subject in *The Banner*, and I kindly selected the *Banner* numbers for him where recently I made an attack on an entirely different subject. Now regret is felt. And the regret is felt not at the most recent attack I made, but at the attack that I made a year and a half ago! I want to state this, because I would regret if the issue on Common Grace would serve to paralyze my most recent attack. You understand this latter attack concerned some of the teachings at our school.

In the second place, brother Dykstra, I do not deny any of the fundamental doctrines of our Reformed faith. I have no authority whatsoever to do so. I am appointed by Synod to write Reformed doctrine. By this I understand doctrine on the basis of and within the limits of the standards of our Church. The standards of the Reformed churches I accept heartily and fully. And I do not deny them in my view of what is called “common grace.” Believe me, brother Dykstra, I am not at all inclined to undermine our Reformed doctrine and at the same time remain with the church under a pretext of being Reformed. But if you mean by fundamentally Reformed all that Dr. Kuyper has said and written, I differ with you. I esteem

that Dutch theologian very highly. But not to the extent that I would slavishly follow him. And the moment I would be placed under obligation as department editor of *The Banner* to adhere strictly to all the teachings of Kuyper and Bavinck I would lay down my pen. Dr. Kuyper made mistakes. His interpretation of Melchisedec is an illustration of it. And I think his exposition of “common grace” is another.

In the third place, dear brother, I want to reassure you that I would greatly enjoy a friendly controversy on this subject. I believe in healthy controversy. I believe in controversy in public. Not for the purpose of biting and envying one another, but for the sake of developing the truth and to come to a clear understanding of one another. In the Netherlands they are not half so afraid of debates and controversies as we are here. They discuss most anything in the papers. They believe in rubbing elbows. And if you read our Netherlands publications, or some of them, you will know that the controversies in the old country and our Church here in America run somewhat along parallel lines. I welcome your criticism most heartily. And I do wish our people would all understand that it is wholly possible to exchange thoughts on certain subjects without running into personalities and bitterness. Hence, once more, I welcome your communication.

But we must be clear and specific. It is of greatest importance in any controversy, and especially in regard to that concerning Common Grace, that we be definite, clear, logical, specific. We must clearly define the issue we are discussing. Otherwise we are in danger that we will talk about matters that are irrelevant. You may probably be discussing one thing and I another.

Now, it is a well known fact that there are many different opinions concerning the matter of Common Grace. Kuyper differs from Bavinck, and that rather essentially. Kuyper holds that there are two kinds of grace, the one from Christ as mediator of redemption (“special grace”); the other from the Mediator of creation or the eternal Word. In this case Common Grace is not based on atonement. But Bavinck holds that there is but one grace essentially that flows from Christ Jesus. And among us there are various conceptions about this matter. Some of our men that hold to Common Grace refute Kuyper’s conception of it. Some, moreover, hold that Common Grace is something that concerns only the world outside of Christ; others maintain that it is a grace believers and unbelievers have in common. You see, we do not define the issue by saying that we are talking about Common Grace. If I judge from the illustration you selected of Cain’s sign, you have a conception of your own. Surely, you do not mean to say that all men receive such a sign or even the thing implied? Not even all murderers receive such a sign of “grace” as you would call it. It is, therefore, essential if you wish to enter into controversy with me in a brotherly way that you define your own view of this doctrine. May I ask you a few questions:

1. You speak of a fundamentally Reformed doctrine of Common Grace. Which view do you mean?

2. Do you believe that essentially there is but one grace flowing through Jesus Christ? Or do you hold that there are two kinds of grace, the one of which flows directly from the Mediator of creation? This is essential, as you will see. Both views are held by great Reformed theologians. Which is yours?
3. Do you believe with Dr. Kuyper that under the influence of Common Grace the sinner performs something positively good? Or do you not accept this part of it?
4. Do you hold with Dr. Kuyper that believers live from a double grace, Common and Special, while the world lives from Common Grace alone? Or do you hold that Common Grace operates only in the world outside of Christ, while Special Grace operates in God’s people only?
5. After having expressed definitely what is your personal view of this matter, will you state on what basis you call it a fundamentally Reformed view, thereby excluding the others as un-Reformed?

In conclusion, brother, I want to inform you that I am preparing a full exposition of this doctrine which in some form I expect to publish. I would have done so before, but I am extremely busy, as you may surmise. And in the second place I expect to deliver a speech on this same subject in the Broadway church sometime in April. You are kindly invited to debate.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Erroneous Views and Unwarranted Criticisms of Rev. H. Hoeksema

Before proceeding to take up further weighty material it is well that we get clearly before us some of the outstanding facts that have thus far come to light in regard to the views of Rev. H. Hoeksema. They are as follows:

Firstly, Rev. Hoeksema in his Banner articles denies in language strong and explicit the doctrine of Common Grace.

Secondly, Rev. Hoeksema in denying Common Grace has broken with Calvin, our spiritual father. A lengthy passage I quoted from Calvin in which, as in numerous other passages, the Reformer sets forth his doctrine of Common Grace, his “*generalis dei gratia*,”¹ to use Calvin’s own term for it.

¹ English translation: “general grace of God.”

Thirdly, Rev. Hoeksema has broken with Reformed theology. Not only Kuyper and Bavinck, but the Reformed theologians of both the past and present hold with Calvin to the doctrine of Common Grace. Reformed theology, furthermore, regards Calvin as the discoverer of the doctrine. “De algemeene genade door Calvijn ontdekt”² and similar utterances occur in the works of the Reformed authorities. (Parenthetically I wish to remark here that one of the greatest dangers that beset Calvin in his work as a Reformer was Anabaptism. To meet and counteract the doctrinal errors of the Anabaptists Calvin developed on the basis of Scripture his doctrine of Common Grace. The Anabaptists deny Common Grace and, as Bavinck puts it, “weten van niets dan genade,”³ i.e., grace as it is in Christ Jesus.) Rev. Hoeksema, accordingly in denying Common Grace, has not only broken with Reformed theology, but has in so far actually joined the ranks of the Anabaptists.

Fourthly, Rev. Hoeksema has used the doctrine of predestination as a lever to force out and discard the doctrine of Common Grace. Our confession imposes very specific restrictions in the use we are allowed to make of the doctrine. Compare Canons of Dordt, I, Art. XIV.

Fifthly, Rev. Hoeksema in order to eliminate the doctrine of Common Grace makes a strong appeal to reason. Starting from his idea of God, Rev. Hoeksema reasons that it is inconceivable that God can assume an attitude of favor, of general grace, to those who are not in Christ. Starting from his idea of man, of natural man, Rev. Hoeksema reasons that there can be no receptivity in natural man for God’s Common Grace. So by a process of reasoning Rev. Hoeksema is led to eliminate Common Grace. Now, this method of reason, Rev. Hoeksema tells us, is the method the rationalistic higher critics use so effectively. They summon all truth, every doctrine, before the bar of reason. Whatever cannot bear the light of reason cannot retain a place in faith. We see, therefore, that what our

critic, Rev. Hoeksema, does is something more than merely denying Common Grace. He appeals to the method of reason, subjects to this method of reason the objectionable doctrine of Common Grace, and by means of reason actually succeeds, as he thinks, to get rid of Common Grace.

Sixthly, Rev. Hoeksema takes an even more advanced stand than this. He says that from the Arminian or Semi-pelagian point of view it is **conceivable** that God assume an attitude of general grace to all men. In other words, we who hold with Calvin to the view that God manifests his general grace to all men—we take the Arminian or Semi-pelagian standpoint.

Seventhly, Rev. Hoeksema makes this appalling statement, viz., that to maintain that God, say for 6000 years, can assume an attitude of favor or general grace to those that are not in Christ is to make an attack on God. Calvin and all who hold the Reformed, Calvinistic view, this is the conclusion we are forced to draw, are by this verdict of Rev. Hoeksema guilty of attacking God.

Eighthly, Rev. Hoeksema in his denial of Common Grace does not allow the benevolence, mercy, or goodness of God to have a voice in the consideration. He has regard only for the righteousness and holiness of God in deciding the question of the possibility of Common Grace. This is in flagrant contradiction with Scripture, e.g., with what Paul says to the pagans at Lystra that God has not left himself without a witness to them, but is **doing good** to them * * * * filling their hearts with food and gladness. Compare Acts 14:17.

Ninthly, Rev. Hoeksema rejects, more specifically, such views as the following of Calvin and the Reformed authorities, views of far-reaching importance: 1. That God immediately after the fall interposed in order by his Common Grace to curb sin and uphold in being this world of ours, and 2. that the institutions of marriage, of the home, of society, of the state and so much more continue to exist or are permitted to develop by virtue of the working of God’s Common Grace.

² English translation: “common grace discovered by Calvin.”

³ English translation: “know nothing but grace.”

Rev. Hoeksema takes a diametrically opposed view and declares that there is operating here throughout only the grace which is in Christ Jesus (i.e. “Special Grace,” as we call it. This name, however, Rev. Hoeksema also discards, there being only one grace and no need for the name “Special Grace”).

In the tenth place, Rev. Hoeksema virtually denies the Calvinistic or Reformed doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. God **cannot** assume an attitude of favor, of Common Grace to all men in general, Rev. Hoeksema holds. Calvin and the Reformed theologians teach that God **can**. Reformed theology, furthermore, teaches that Common Grace is “rechtstreeks afgeleid uit de souvereiniteit des Heeren, die voor alle Gereformeerde denken de wortelovertuiging is en blijft.”⁴

In the eleventh place we ask in all seriousness if, as Rev. Hoeksema claims, there is operating solely and alone the grace which is in Christ Jesus and if this grace explains and accounts for everything that Rev. Hoeksema makes it account for, is then the grace which is in Christ Jesus any longer always regenerating, saving and sanctifying in character? Can then the conclusion any longer be avoided that the grace which is in Christ Jesus is not always “zaligmakend, wederbarend”?⁵ Think this out and you will see what would result if, that is to say, the grace which is in Christ Jesus is not always sanctifying, saving.

(To be continued)

—R. Janssen

Editor’s Note:

1. We were glad to hear that Prof. Janssen took up the pen again. When we read the article, however, we were sorry, and that for his sake and for the good of the cause. The professor has nothing new. Still the same method is pursued: to place his critic in a bad light in

order to weaken his criticism. Professor, I deem it below the dignity of a theological professor to come with unproved, unfounded accusations as the above. And I deem it below my own dignity to answer them at length. Once for all then: the above is from beginning to end a misrepresentation of my views. Those that have at all followed my articles in The Banner for two years and a half know that I am writing the truth.

2. Answer my charges, professor. I quoted them practically without comment in my last article on this matter from the notes of your students.
3. I am glad to notice that Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen agrees that these teachings are dangerous. “If they are but half true,” the esteemed brother writes, “Dr. Janssen must leave.” Well, brother Van Lonkhuyzen, they are not half true, but entirely. I do not agree with the same brother, however, when he leaves the impression that I deserve a sound scolding for the fact that I commenced to write. Neither, dear brother, will I ever take it. The Church owes the brethren that wrote and spoke against these teachings her gratitude. Nothing else will they accept. Just so determined they are.
4. Yes, Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen, you write the truth when you say that it is a question of either or. I am fully aware of it. I do not for a moment hesitate to express it. The Church will change its attitude toward these teachings, and that through synodical decision, or I stand condemned by that same Church. And I am willing that it should be so.

There is no bitterness or jealousy in my heart to any of the brethren. It is the love of our Church and of the truth; it is the glory of my God and his Word that prompts me.

—H.H.

⁴ English translation: “directly derived from the sovereignty of the Lord, which is and remains the root conviction for all Reformed thinking.”

⁵ English translation: “know nothing but grace.”