

BOOK REVIEW

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The Rock Whence We Are Hewn

Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema (ed. David J. Engelsma)

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Who or what are the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC)? Why are they called *Protestant* Reformed? What is the origin of these churches and what are their distinctive doctrinal positions, for surely a denomination of churches owes its distinct existence to significant *doctrinal* differences with other churches? These questions are answered in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*.

Between 1919 and 1924, two Christian Reformed pastors, Revs. Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, began writing against an error called “common grace.” Although Danhof and Hoeksema viewed common grace as an error, and although through their preaching and writing they sought to convince others to reject it, the powers in the Christian Reformed Church did not agree with these two ministers. In fact, the writings of these two pastors sparked a flurry of protests, which came to a Christian Reformed synod. The Synod of 1924 found that Danhof and Hoeksema were orthodox, although with a “tendency to one-sidedness.” At that synod, a study committee formulated the so-called “Three Points of Common Grace.” When the classes or presbyteries of Danhof and Hoeksema required them to subscribe to these three points, they refused, with the result that, with their consistories, they were expelled from the Christian Reformed Church. Those who left with Danhof and Hoeksema formed a new denomination, calling themselves the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches, and later the Protestant Reformed Churches, although eventually Danhof parted company to establish an independent church.

The Rock Whence We Are Hewn traces that history from c. 1919 to 1940 through some of the writings of Danhof and Hoeksema. In these writings, the two pastors set forth clearly their objections to the three points and answer some of their influential critics: the celebrated Louis Berkhof, famous for his

Systematic Theology, Henry J. Kuiper and the less known, but bitter, foe of Danhof and Hoeksema, Rev. Jan Karel van Baalen, among others.

Several of these writings are translated from the Dutch and are available in English for the first time, including “Along Pure Paths” and “The Reunion of the Christian Reformed Churches: Is It Demanded, Possible, Desirable?” The last piece is a presentation written by Hoeksema in 1939, in which he seeks to heal the rift between the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed, as long as the “Three Points of Common Grace” can be thoroughly discussed and examined in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, which plea fell on deaf and disinterested Christian Reformed ears.

Two emotions struggled within me as I read this book—thankfulness for the grace of God, which Danhof and Hoeksema so ably defended and developed, and indignation at the injustice perpetrated against two godly pastors by their ministerial colleagues and friends. Van Baalen in particular seems to have been relentless in his pursuit of Danhof and Hoeksema for the alleged sin of Anabaptism, which charge they refute decisively in “Not Anabaptist but Reformed.” Berkhof, who had been Hoeksema’s seminary professor, friend and even the officiant at his wedding, deeply wounded Hoeksema by his behaviour. Addressing Berkhof in “Calvin, Berkhof, and H.J. Kuiper,” he writes, “For the same teachings contained in *Calvin’s Calvinism* you have persecuted Danhof and myself, and you did not rest until we were expelled from the communion of your church” (293). It is sad to say that sometimes there are more shameful dealings in ecclesiastical assemblies than among worldly politicians!

The value of *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn* is the exegetical skill of Danhof and Hoeksema. The theological truth of God’s particular, sovereign, efficacious grace is developed from the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions, and these two pastors utterly demolish the three points of common grace. In fact, one is left feeling quite embarrassed for the opponents of these men, especially for Van Baalen, whose arguments are extremely weak and easily swept away by the Word of God. God gave outstanding gifts to Danhof and Hoeksema, and, although they are sharp and skilful with the sword of the Spirit, they remain brotherly and charitable throughout.

Friends of the truth of particular grace ought to read this book and critics of the Protestant Reformed Churches, for charity’s sake, also *must* read this book.