

75 years:

The Fight for the Reformed Faith

Being a review and appreciation of the book:

**FOR THY TRUTH'S SAKE**

by

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In this Year of Grace 2000, America's Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) celebrated 75 years of their existence as a denomination. It was at once a joyful, vibrant event, with several thousands attending over a glorious week of celebratory meetings on the campus of Calvin College, Grand Rapids. It was no celebration of any men and their achievements. It was a celebration of God's Covenant faithfulness, and a heartfelt thanksgiving to Him by whose Grace alone the PRC stand. And it was a prayerful plea that by Him, the PRC might continue into the future to stand in faithful witness to the Reformed, and Biblical Truth. *God's* Truth, indeed.

As a commemorative volume to mark this happy occasion, Prof. Herman Hanko has via the RFPA provided for us a handsome production that is the fruitage of some 35 years of teaching in the PRC Seminary. For some two years he laboured on this tome, distilling into it the accumulated theological wisdom of his long career. Bearing the title: "For Thy Truth's Sake", the book is therefore extremely important. Important not just because it is a chronicling of the history of the PRC, which has been done by others on other occasions, but important because it primarily focuses on the Theological development of the PRC against the background of gathering apostasy not only in Christianity in general, but specifically within the precincts of the Reformed Faith. It is therefore appropriately sub-titled "A *Doctrinal* History of the Protestant Reformed Churches."

If the 20th century can be characterised by one salient proposition, it is this.....it was a century in which a conscious and virulent rejection of the Son of God overtook the very foundations of a hitherto "christianized" western society. Ablaze with military wars greater than the sum of all previous human wars, the century saw also hot battle on those profound spiritual frontiers that divide Light from darkness.....Truth from error.....True Christianity and the false..... It was a "Fight for

the Reformed Faith". And these battle lines were drawn, not somewhere "out there" amongst the infidels. They were drawn inside Churches. Inside Reformed Churches, at that. For it was inside Reformed Churches, that the full and glorious Revelation of Scriptural Truth, God's Truth, was alone to be found. Into their precincts came the stealthy merchants of darkness, and in *Reformed Churches*, the Glorious Truth of our Sovereign Redeemer was questioned, then villified, and then dismissed.....

For the faithful, these were times of sufferings. They suffered not at the hands of infidels, but at the hands of their own colleagues and brethren in the Reformed traditions. As indeed, the Lord Christ himself was persecuted by the very "church" of His day. Crucified at the instigations of "orthodox" pharisees allied with "modernist-politico-materialist" Sadducees and "materialist-reconstructionist" Herodians and Zealots. Within the churches then, we see the awful spectacle of Christ being crucified again. Within *Reformed Churches*. Great theological minds see Him, revealed in all His glory in the Word, and some of them turn away, appalled, their proud human egos insulted by the Sovereign Resplendence. Others, embarrassed, mitigate their theology, diluting the strong draughts of Heavenly Truth, thinking they can accommodate God to human nature. Still more straddle the divides, and mix their theologies with compromise, believing that the Truth is to be found in some happy medium. A remnant, just a remnant, stay firm with Scripture, their hearts bonded in covenant love with the unadulterated Glory of the Sovereign Christ. For this they pay the price..... "Away with *them*.....Crucify *them*....!"

With such a remnant Prof. Hanks is concerned. In tracking their theological history and development, his book presents a dynamic record of not just the PRC in its struggles through the last 75 years, but it is also, and most importantly, a dynamic record of God's Truth unfolding from His Word against the background of a world-wide apostasy in *Reformed Churches* and in *Reformed Theology*. Herein lies one of the book's most important features, making it relevant not only within the PRC itself, but throughout the whole world of Christianity. It shows us how the Reformed Churches *should* have developed, in contrast to the apostasy that we can see all around. It is indeed like a "meteorological record", so to speak, of the last 75 years of "Theological Weather" through which the PRC has passed, and indeed, through which all other churches have passed too. As such the book touches the very pulse of Christianity. It describes how the PRC coped with the "theological weather", and from this one can gauge how other groups and denominations have fared in passing through the same "weather". Ignore this book, ignore its analysis, its conclusions, at your peril. For its implications concern the whole Church of God militant.

One quickly discovers that this volume is not in the popular stream of "easy" theology. In the Editor's Foreword the reader is told explicitly that he will "have to put his thinking cap on".(p.xiv), but also that such application "in humble faith" means one will "be richly rewarded". To be sure, we have here a profound theological

tome, but it must be said that Prof. Hanko has made the theological profundities unfold most lucidly. It is, I feel, within the bounds of ability of the average layman to understand this book, though here and there he might find a theological dictionary to be of use, when he encounters terms like "ontological" and the term "economical" as applied to the Trinity. (p.407 note). But overall the work really is eminently readable, much more easily read than a volume of "Systematic Theology", though in many ways, equally as profound. Above all, it is most instructive.

In concerning himself with that remnant who struggle to hold fast to God's Truth, the Professor begins in **Part 1** with a theological review of the "roots" of the PRC, tracing them back to two major streams of Dutch Reformed piety, the "Afscheiding" (the "separation") that seceded from the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk in 1834, and the "Doleante" ("aggrieved ones") who, under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper seceded from the same state Kerk in 1886. In 1892 they united to form the Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland (GKN), and amongst Dutch immigrants to the USA we see the two streams uniting under the banner of the Christian Reformed Church.(CRC). However, it was an unhappy union, harbouring a great variation of doctrinal variations on important topics. Afscheiding and Doleante each emphasised their own particular tenets, and in 1905 the Synod of Utrecht was called to arrange a compromise to keep the peace. This peace was uneasy, and contained the roots of the controversy whereby Herman Hoeksema was unjustly deposed from the PRC in the year 1924.

Tracking the development of the PRC Prof. Hanko has done an excellent job in guiding the reader through these rough and complicated seas, providing just enough detail to maintain a connected narrative of events, without losing the reader amongst a forest of facts. In the second chapter of Part 1 we find the developments in the CRC from its origins in amongst the Afscheiding immigrants seceding from the Reformed Church of America, then later taking in the influence of the Kuyperian stream, up to the time when Professor Jansen began to insinuate modernist criticism of the Old Testament into his classes at Calvin Seminary in the teens of the 20th century. At this point we are introduced to the work of Herman Hoeksema and others in exposing what Jansen was doing, and the fateful, and dual outcome. Jansen deposed, but Jansen's supporters still active as ministers in the CRC and pursuing a vendetta with Hoeksema as their target.

**In Part 2** Prof. Hanko outlines the events concerning the beginnings of the PRC. In three chapters he not only adumbrates the series of events that culminated in the deposition of Hoeksema, Danhoff, and Ophoff, but he also takes care to go in to the theological principles at stake underlying this whole controversy. Cleverly, the Jansenites had noted Hoeksema's opposition to the Kuyperian "common grace" dogma that had been sweeping in to the CRC since the early 1900's. Hoeksema had perceptively isolated this dogma as the root evil underlying the influx of such men as Jansen and the evil principles they brought into the churches. But unfortunately, "common grace" as taught by Kuyper was a dogma that evidently partook of the

same "sacro-sanctity" as Kuyper did himself, in those days. A large plethora of the orthodox "Calvinists" in the CRC, and at Calvin College, espoused the doctrine, and soon were to be found in alliance with the Jansenists in opposing Hoeksema, Danhoff, and Ophoff.

A plethora of theological considerations were at issue here. It was the very Biblical theology of Grace that was at issue. It was the work of Christ that was at issue. And there were knock-on effects into practically every area of Christian life. The actual preaching of the Gospel was affected by it...was Grace for all, or only for the elect? The doctrine of God's Providence was affected by these issues, as also were the doctrines of the Covenant, of Election, of Reprobation.

And as a by-product, the Doctrine of Ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the Church was affected by way of how the CRC synodical bodies eventually dealt with Hoeksema and his colleagues. Can a synod, or a Classis, constitute some towering pyramid of perpetual authority directly over the internal affairs of each congregation in the denomination and by-pass, or over-ride, and even pre-empt the authority of each congregation's office-bearers? Prof. Hanko guides us through these "mine-fields" of administration, noting how the Reformed principles of Church government "include the principle of the autonomy of the local Church".(p.104). Thus the Reformed synod or classis is a "federation" which is a "union of autonomous congregations."(p.106). A delicate balance must be maintained between the overall authority of the "synod" and the authority of the local office-bearers. In practice, churches tend to veer too much one way or the other, and maintaining the balance is a "precarious" business, that "needs constant attention."(p.111). Prof. Hanko illustrates the dilemma via commenting on a few historical examples of how the PRC have dealt with such an issue. Fundamentally he sees the local office-bearers as directly responsible to Christ the Lord of the Church, and that synods may only impose their authority into a local congregation *via* such office-bearers.

These are all vital theological questions. In tracing the history of these developments Prof. Hanko has unfolded the theological dimensions intrinsic to each historical issue. We find not only a narrative of events leading up to and including the crisis of 1924-5, but a cogent analysis of the theological issues impelling the whole affair. Common Grace is clearly expounded in Ch. 4, with its ramifications for Gospel preaching, one's view of God's Providence, the restraint of sin, and the good gifts God bestows on humanity in general. Using Psalm 73 as his Scriptural base the Professor elucidates the PRC teaching concerning the good gifts God gives to the non-elect. Such gifts do not imply grace and favour. For "grace is not in things, but purely in the good favour of God" (p.80). Good gifts to the non-elect but confirm God's hatred towards them, as such gifts compound their ingratitude and culpability. For such gifts but enable the wicked to advance in wickedness.

In analysing this problem, Prof. Hanko looks too at the variant shades of the "common grace" dogma, and takes special note of its Kuyperian manifestation, which he subjects to cogent, and convincing criticism. He notes that it "was disas-

trous for the doctrine of the antithesis" (p.96), in that it opened up a bridge between the Church and the world. Across this bridge the likes of Prof. Jansen had come, loaded with their critical modernist ideas about Scripture.

Pursuing the course of events centred around the 1924 crisis, Prof. Hanko gives an analysis of the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the CRC as a form of supplement to the Three Forms of Unity. That such supplementation was required was ample evidence that the Common Grace dogma was a post-Confessional development, and that by the Confessional Standards alone, the CRC could only judge Hoeksema (as they did at the 1924 synod) as being "orthodox".

Having pursued the theological developments as far as the formation of the PRC in 1925, **Part Three** of the book then through 8 chapters looks at "**The Positive Development of the Truth.**" The title should not be interpreted as if to mean some kind of evolution of truth itself, but rather it signifies how the fledgling PRC dug down deeper into the Scriptural revelations and sought to fully elucidate the truths contained therein. Perhaps, outside an American theological context, the word "development" is, for British readers, unfortunate here, in that it gives the impression of a progressive re-modelling, or innovating concerning the truth of the Scripture. The word "elucidate" I think, will convey more accurately to British readers what the Prof. has in mind. The PRC theologians were not innovating. They were elucidating, clarifying, researching and discovering, drawing out the full Scriptural truth on given topics and applying it appropriately in theological reasoning and Christian practice.

This section covers **first the Sovereign Grace of Miracles**, (p.128) in which the Jansenist-modernist view is rightly dismissed as heretical, and miracles are defined as super-natural manifestations of God's power in this material realm for the purpose of saving His church. The theological exposition undergirding this assertion is fascinating, and has damning ramifications against the common grace dogma. **Secondly, the Sovereign Grace & Revelation** (p.141) is analysed, in which it is shown how the idea of "General Revelation" is linked with "common grace". Again the erroneous knock-on effects of "common grace" come to light here, as even leading Reformed theologians took "General revelation" in nature as being preparatory for the "Special revelation" of Scripture. Basic to this error is the notion that God bestows "common grace" on even the heathen, and utilizes "general" revelation as a means of blessing them, enabling them to do a great deal of good. It is interesting to read from here on the Professor's account of how Hoeksema brought out the correct and Scriptural position, showing how the wicked do indeed "hold down the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). Whilst fallen men may possess varying degrees of "natural light", this, being a vestige left over from pre-fall Adam, it is but like the "tattered remains of a fur coat badly eaten by moths in the course of a summer." (p.152) Even such "remnants" of light man uses to facilitate sin, and so they make him all the more culpable. True Grace is sovereign grace, and is that grace which saves, enlightening the sinner and enabling him to receive God's spe-

cial, or rather, full revelation, the Scriptures. And thus Creation still reveals God, but only to the Elect. (p.155). To the non-elect, the witness of God in creation is effectively part of God's wrath, for they squirm away from the implications of nature, and suppress the truth of its witness.

**Thirdly, the Doctrine of Scripture** (p.158) is analysed. Evident in the Bible is the fact that the different writers, being different characters, leave the distinctive imprints of their personalities on the Scriptures they themselves wrote. This "human" element in Scripture has been played up not only by critical modernism, but even in Reformed circles, and damage has been done to the concept of the Bible as inspired and infallible. Despite early on combating Prof. Jansen, Hoeksema and other PRC leaders did not initially go on to fully develop, or elucidate, an adequate Scripture doctrine of inspiration and infallibility, though all their labours evidently presupposed they believed in such truth, as is evinced in the records of their preaching and teaching (p.161). It is from the early sixties on that the PRC began to consciously examine the doctrine of Inspiration. They found that the old creeds (the Belgic and the Westminster) laid down the correct scriptural groundwork, what was now needed in the 20th Cent was to meet the incoming flood of Biblical Criticism with the full "development", that is, full "elucidation" of this fundamental doctrine. Homer Hoeksema, son of the illustrious Herman, undertook this work, the results of which are found in his useful little book, *"The Doctrine of Scripture"* (RFPA 1990). Fundamentally the PRC theologians elucidated the fact that Scripture in its own self-testimony is a miracle in itself, and is intrinsically the work of God. As to the human element, rejecting the Warfieldian suggestion that this is analagous to the Divine/human incarnation as in Christ, they showed that Scripture has its analogy, if at all, with the connection between God's work of Salvation and inspiration. In salvation, all is of God, yet the saved individual acts, moved both to will and to do of God's good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13). This willing, and this doing, originates not in the natural self, but in the Divine Spirit now inhabiting the individual. Likewise, in inspiration, the sacred penman is so moved by the inspiring Spirit, that his thoughts and words are the product of the Spirit, and the product of his pen is indeed the Words of the Spirit of God. As such, the written words will bear the imprint of the writer's human character, but even this has been fore-ordained by God for that particular place, time, and occasion. The end-product, Scripture, is exactly what God determined it should be, and hence it is true to say that it is wholly from God, and none at all from man. This is important. One immediate implication from this is that Scripture is an "organic" unity, not a conglomeration of multi-various authors. The one Divine Spirit speaks through the Scriptures, not Paul, or Peter, etc., but God Himself. Thus 20th Century trends in Reformed Theology to examine and produce learned theses on *"The Theology of St. Paul"* (So: Ridderbos) are fundamentally mistaken, we would say, as also is Geerhardus Vos' work, *"The Pauline Eschatology"*. The root principle of such studies is in error, as it supposes that all of St. Paul's theology, or all of his eschatology, can be culled just from the apostle's

letters in the New Testament. Truth is, Paul would also have held to truths taught by Peter, and John, and James, etc. The fact that he doesn't happen to mention those particular things in his own epistles cannot, under the proper Scriptural doctrine of inspiration, be used to delimit the parameters of what Paul believed. In short, contra. Vos, there is no such thing as "Pauline" eschatology. Espouse that kind of principle, you can also speak of "Petrine" eschatology, which would be evidently different to the "Pauline" breed, seeing that the two apostles focus on different aspects of eschatology. In such an approach the foundation is laid for claiming humanistically, as critical modernist theologians do, that Paul's eschatology contradicts that of Peter. Given the PRC's "organic" approach however, the two apostles are seen as inspired by the same one Spirit to reveal different parts of the one picture, so to speak. What is important here is to see how even within the precincts of the "solid" 20th cent. Reformed traditions of Princeton and Amsterdam, men like Vos and Ridderbos had taken on board humanistic principles. Such institutions had, of course, trimmed their sails to suit the way the wind was blowing.

Steering a faithful Scriptural course through the teeth of all these contrary gales, Prof. Hanko can sum up the PRC's "organic" Scripture-based principles thus:

"The believer is fundamentally not interested in what Paul, or Peter, or Isaiah believed, and Scripture will not help him in that regard, for Scripture is not of any private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). The believer is interested in what "the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:22). (p.174).

**Fourthly**, in Chapt. 10, we are introduced to the PRC "development" or "elucidation" of the Scripture doctrine of **the "Antithesis"**. We are given a succinct and useful explanation of this doctrine, stressing its importance, its role, its nature, and how it is revealed in Election and Reprobation, and executed in time. The practical aspects of the doctrine are also considered vis a vis certain concrete examples, viz. "The Christian and Trade Union membership", and "The Antithesis and Worldly Amusements." Through all this, the writer's concern is to maintain the strict dividing line between the Christian and the world, between the seed of the Woman, and the seed of the Serpent. Interesting is the description of Hoeksema finding that "games of chance" are a use of God's providence for trivial reasons. (p.196).

A well-worn tag that modern "calvinists" stick on the PRC to this day is that they are "Rationalistic" and thereby not Biblical or Confessional. Thus **fifthly**, in **Ch. 11**, under the heading "**Biblical, Confessional, or Rationalistic?**" Prof Hanko looks at this serious charge. This is one of the most profound areas of reasoning in the book. Beginning with Van Baalen's attack against Hoeksema as early as 1922, the Prof. gives us an historical overview of 75 years of running false accusations. In 1922, Van Baalen was already espousing "two-track theology", the idea that the truth is equally present in both of two simultaneously contradictory propositions. This was evidently his way of harmonizing his "common grace" and "free offer" beliefs with Election and Reprobation. In this "paradox" system of theology, one had to believe the contradiction simply because the Bible (allegedly) taught it, and

any attempt to resolve the paradox therein was sinful, in that it was a "rationalistic" attempt to penetrate what only the mind of God could comprehend. 20th century Calvinism, going with the wind, almost to a man, has espoused this theological schizophrenia, and has indicted Hoeksema and the PRC as "rationalists", a charge that is repeated, almost mindlessly by modern Calvinists even today.

Prof. Hanks examines the position of Cornelius Van Til in all this, in that Van Til is the epitome of this whole "paradox" position. We remember how Van Til insisted that "all the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory...." (*Common Grace and the Gospel* p.165). And "faith adores the apparently contradictory: To adore the apparently contradictory is to adore God....." (*Ibid* p. 67), indeed, "we embrace with passion" these contradictions. (*Ibid*. p.9). And thus, to Van Til, "apparently contradictory" was nevertheless absolutely an unresolvable contradiction to the *human* mind.

To Hoeksema and the PRC, such "contradictions" were the products of faulty exegesis, and they set out to make the necessary corrections in this field. Against this, the "Paradox" men hurled the accusation "rationalist". Thus these latter made "contradiction" a sacrosanct and essential component of Scripture. True Christian belief was effectively delineated as a belief in unresolvable contradictions! And this, amongst Calvinists!!!! Here again we see how 20th Cent. Calvinism let the winds of modern culture drive their ships off course. Van Til's own doctrine of Scripture here is loaded with Neo-Kantian concepts, for, like Kant talking of reality, Van Til even talks of Scripture truths as being not truths but "limiting concepts." Rationalism, he said, belongs to the realm of the unbeliever, and the believer's "logic" is different. This allows Van Til to find room for "believing contradictions" as a component of faith. Prof. Hanks lucidly exposes this nonsense, saying "the premises which believers use in their logical reasoning are not fundamentally different from those of unbelievers, for the latter begin with a denial of God as their most fundamental premise, while the believer begins with God. Thus the conclusions a believer comes to are different to the conclusions to which an unbeliever comes. But the difference does not lie in the logic used. That is the same." (p. 212).

This profound area of discussion is an immensely fruitful area of study in this book. One could have wished perhaps, for some comparative study here with the work of Karl Barth, the modernist, for whilst opposing Barth, Van Til's work essentially espouses the same "paradoxical" principle, albeit with the fulcrum of its "logic" (sic) shifted in an evangelical direction. And in espousing the "paradox" principle, modern "Calvinism" has a "soft under-belly" exposed to the vicious jabs of experts in Dialecticism. Not for nothing did droves of erstwhile "Calvinists" slither into a Barthian or quasi-Barthian position during the 20th cent. The whole "Umkehr" at Amsterdam from the 1960's on reflects the breadth of this enormous slide into apostasy. The same can be said of the absolute demise of Calvinism in the French Reformed Church over the last 50 years, where incoming "paradox" principles opened the door wide for Barthianism.

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But then, one has limits to work to in producing a book, even one as good as this!

Over against "paradoxism", Hoeksema asserted that the idea of "apparent contradiction is contrary to the nature of Scripture itself. If we are to know what Scripture teaches and are to understand God's revelation, Scripture can have no contradictions in it."(p.214-215). In elucidating the PRC's whole position on this, Prof. Hanko is able to show that the charge of "rationalism" is unjust, for not only are the PRC's following Scripture faithfully, they are likewise in harmony with the Reformed Confessions on this very matter.

**Sixthly**, in **Ch. 12**, we have an elucidation of PRC teaching concerning the **notion of "organic"**. This very important concept we have already met in Ch.9 with respect to the "organic" unity of the Scriptures. And just as this organic unity is rooted in the one Sacred living author of all Scripture, so this same concept is applicable to the whole of creation. "Organic" refers to a living unity, like a human body, which develops according to the creation principles embedded in it, and in which each individual organ serves its own God-ordained function as part of the whole "organism". Hence the Creation is one massive "organism", as also is "mankind" in Adam, hence the "federal" headship of the first man. Likewise the Church is an "organism" in Christ as her federal head. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-31; 15:45-50). Fascinating is Prof. Hanko's expatiation here on how the "organism" of the redeemed is culled out of the "organism" of the reprobate by the work of Christ. Notable too is the point made concerning how the spiritual world functions organically on similar principles to the material world, a fact borne out in the structure of parables such that things in this natural physical realm can be isolated and used as illustrations of Spiritual verities.

**Ch. 13** continues with the "**Organic Development of Sin**". Danhoff and Hoeksema had applied the term "organic" to sin in order to elucidate the organic growth and development of sin in the unfolding history of the human race. In its root in Adam's sin, one finds what I would call, the "DNA" of sin that has unfolded over human history to the present state of humanity. This is akin to the natural growth of a plant, with small beginnings, and, through the ages, whilst undergoing various prunings ordained by the "gardener", finally bursts forth in all its full strength to blossom and fruit in a way that the original sinful Adam could not have done himself. Today we see this organic development reaching its ultimate conclusions, the great tree of sin with its boughs weighed down with poisonous fruitage, ready for the ultimate harvest of God's Judgement.

In considering this topic, Prof. Hanko has also given us an outline as to the position of the "antithesis" vis a vis the organic development of the sinful human race. Two "organisms" are evident amongst humanity, each with its own "DNA", so to speak. The seed of the Woman, and the seed of the serpent. The history of the world from Genesis to the present is a history of the organic developments of these two seeds as being entirely separate species from one another, though perhaps in human society enmeshed to varying degrees in various social relationships. Nevertheless,

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the line of distinction betwixt the two is ever maintained. Two different, nay, two *opposite* life-forms, the woman is the antithesis of the serpent. And in the unfolding history of humanity, the reprobate life-form under God's sovereign government actually functions as the servant of the elect, much in the way that the roots, stalk, and chaff serve the kernel of wheat. And thus, maintaining the "antithesis" must be high in the calling of the Christian, and difficult, for he will not find that the line of demarcation lies at the Church door, but rather, it will zig-zag hither and thither through the pews, so to speak. Every church is really an "ecclesiola in ecclesia", for "not all they that are in Israel are of Israel".

Seven further chapters, comprising chapters 14-20, comprise **PART 4** under the general heading "**The Doctrine of the Covenant**", filling some 140 pages, an indication of the importance this area of doctrine carries for PRC theologians and churches. The PRC take serious issue with the usual "Westminster" stream of covenant theologians, and deny the notion of a "Covenant of Works" as being a "contract" between Adam and God in Eden. Prof. Hanko enters this deep and important subject by means of recounting the events of the traumatic schism that decimated the PRC in 1953, since that schism was fundamentally entwined with the doctrine of the Covenant. We are given a succinct portrayal of the relationships between the PRC and Klaas Schilder and the Liberated Churches (LC) of Holland, which relationship ran sour when the Dutch LC theologians exported their views of the Covenant over into the PRC via the waves of Dutch immigrants pouring in to the USA and Canada in the immediate post-war years. Effectively a "common-grace" and "free-will" theology was imported into the sphere of the covenant as it bore on the children of believers. What Hoeksema et al. had opposed in 1924 with regard to gospel preaching in general was being applied in the close internal relationships of covenant families. Conditional salvation was clearly implied in the preaching which characterised more and more of the PRC's own ministers. Effectively, they adopted a "Heynsian" view of the covenant, in which God promises salvation to every individual child of every Christian family, *on condition that* they believe. In this controversy the PRC and the LC position differed thus:

To an LC man, it is Scriptural to say: "God promises every one of you that if you believe, you will be saved." So said De Wolf, one of Hoeksema's co-pastors.

To a PRC man, it is Scriptural to say: "God promises every believing soul that He will save them."

The difference between these two statements is fundamentally the difference between Arminianism and Calvinism. And the pro-LC men had imported Arminianism into the arena of the Covenant family.

The controversy split the denomination, and we are given the statistics for the traumatic year, 1953-54. From 6,063 souls in 1953, the PRC was blitzed down to 2,353 souls by 1954, losing 8 churches, and 14 out of 28 ministers. The little denomination was gutted, and it has taken some 47 years to recover the ground and heal the wounds. In that 47 years they really set about elucidating the theology of

the Covenant, and in this they have progressed enormously, throwing down a vital challenge to all the prevalent views found in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. It was found that Hoeksema and his contemporaries had been laying the foundations of a true Scriptural dogma of the Covenant, which could be traced right back through Prof. TenHoor of Calvin Seminary, who had taught Hoeksema back in the teens of the 20th century. TenHoor had developed what he had learned from Bavinck in Holland, and one can see connections that go beyond this to Olevianus and Cocceius at the times of the Reformation.

Fundamental to the PRC's Covenant doctrine is the realization that most Reformed theologians, even such illustrious ones as Witsius and Hodge, had not defined the doctrine Scripturally. For these latter, the Covenant was a "mutual contract" between God and man as equals. But as Hoeksema et al were want to insist, the Scriptures definitely hold out the Covenant as being:

**a) A sovereign imposition** by the Most High, not a "mutual agreement" or "contract". PRC doctrine here is also found in such theologians as Geerhardus Vos, and his son J.G. Vos, both of whom elucidated the Biblical words for "Covenant" as requiring a "sovereign" and actually, "one-sided" work, imposed on man by God in Sovereign election.

**b) A "covenant",** following from the above, is not a "set of rules of contract", but **a bond of fellowship in friendship.** Such a bond may indeed have rules, or laws, but these laws trace the parameters of the relationship, and are not the "covenant" relationship itself.

**c) Arising from a) and b) above,** the "covenant" is not a means to an end, but is **the end in itself.**

**d) This "covenant" is essentially integral with Divine Election and Predestination.** This feature Dr. Klaas Schilder and the LC denied (p.352), as it left them no room for their "free promise to all" dogma, which premise required "covenant" to be interpreted as a "contract".

In defining Biblically the true doctrine of the Covenant, Prof. Hanks begins with the Inter-Trinitarian life in the God-head. (pp.317 ff.) God is a "family of persons", bonded in perfect love. In this we have the "prototype" of the covenant God makes with man.(p.321). Henceforth we are shown how it all affects human family life, the status of covenant children, Infant baptism, and how it establishes the unbreakable sanctity of the human marriage bond on earth. Marriage may never be sun-dered except by death. Divorce and remarriage are proscribed, in that they destroy the earthly type and reflection of Christ's covenant with His church. In Christ, all God's Elect are taken up into a fellowship of love with Him.

**Part 5** is entitled "**Concluding Considerations**". Hitherto Prof. Hanks has concentrated on those doctrines that are distinctly entwined with PRC history and the distinctive development of the denomination.(p.401). But PRC theologians have also been intensely involved in the general theological debate across the whole field of Dogmatics, and hence in this concluding section we have a useful, if unfortu-

nately brief, distillation of PRC thought arranged under the Six Loci of Dogmatics. The subject matter here is, we feel, worthy of far more than the 19 pages allocated to it, but then, it would have needed another whole book probably to do it full justice. Under a brief section entitled "Theology" we are introduced to Herman Hoeksema's view, which, following Bavinck, placed emphasis on "the unity of all God's attributes" (p.403) rather than seeing them as divided into "Communicable" and "Incommunicable" categories. Hoeksema's methodology was to elucidate the Scriptural details concerning God under the significance of His many Scriptural names, rather than under any abstractions. This method facilitated the deduction that all God's attributes formed a unity in His own being. Following from this came ramifications for the Doctrines of Grace, since "if God's attribute of Grace is common to all men, the same must be said of all God's attributes, including His love, mercy....etc..." (p.403). Likewise the unchangeability of God must be unified with His Counsel. If God is unchangeable, and eternal, so also must be His Counsel, and this factor will have ramifications for considering the Decrees of God.

Under "**Anthropology**" we find the PRC holding to the veracity of the Genesis account, a feature from which Presbyterian and Reformed thinking fell away, even in such bastions of the truth as Princeton and Amsterdam. A six-day creation is espoused, and the pressures of scientific theories have not been allowed to mollify PRC theology.

**Christology** is the doctrine of the Person of Christ. We find that the PRC insist on the Eternal Sonship of Christ, and a useful exposition is made here on the relationship between the Eternal Son as one person of the Trinity, and the Incarnate Son as Christ. (p.407). In Christ the Divine and the human natures are found together, as in Him all things are to be gathered into one in the coming Eschatological fulfillment of the Ages, when the spiritual world and the material world are all gathered up into one.

We are given more detail on the matters of **Soteriology**. Here the distinction between Kuyper and Hoeksema is elucidated. Whilst both men insisted on the doctrine of "immediate regeneration" over against those who insisted that such regeneration can only be "mediate" consequent to the preaching of the Gospel, Hoeksema demurred from the particular turn Kuyper gave to this dogma. Kuyper went so far as to separate regeneration from the gospel preaching virtually altogether, whereas Hoeksema was discerning enough to see that the very first work in the heart of an elect sinner was that in which God gave the sinner "the spiritual power to hear the Word of God preached." (p.409). The similarities with Creation, (by the Word of God) are noted, and the fact that regeneration is a "new creation". In this "new creation" faith is part of that which God imparts to the Elect, thus initiating the Covenant bond between God and the believer.

Under "**Ecclesiology**" the Professor is intent on focussing on Preaching, hermeneutics, and missions, and omits any study of Reformed Church Government here having examined this in Chap. 5. In all PRC services, the sermon is the cen-

tral aspect of the congregation's worship, for therein they behold the Risen Christ revealed in some way from His Word. For PRC ministers, this means that they spend "most of their time during the week to the preparation of sermons" (p.415), for they are called to "feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

"**Eschatology**" is the final locus, indeed a hot topic in Reformed circles today, as with the demise of Dispensational Pre-millennialism one finds the incoming tide of "extended politico-material Post-millennialism". What this means of course is that modern Calvinist evangelicals are throwing out one Jesuit heresy (that of Ribera) in order to take on board another Jesuit heresy, (that of Alcazar). In order to meet both of these errors, the PRC propound what theologians call the "a-millennialist" dogma. How this interaction takes place is not detailed in this volume, and we could have wished for more information on the matter.

But all books must necessarily have their limits, and it must be said that some abbreviation notwithstanding, this volume is more than useful, rather, it is *essential* reading. It is a *vade-mecum* of PRC theology, and where it can only present limited amounts of detail, it does most appropriately carry reference Bibliographies, one in general, and one specifically for the works of Herman Hoeksema, that open the way for one to do any "in-depth" further reading one desires, on any of the topics developed in the book. A useful Index of Scriptures is followed by an index of authors and subjects. There are nine appendices, each carrying most useful reference material, e.g., "The Conclusions of the Synod of Utrecht" in 1905 concerning *inter alia*, Eternal Justification. Then one finds the "Three Points of Common Grace" of 1924, and various documents concerning the background to the schism of 1953. Carrying all this data means that the work is not only worth reading, but one will find it a necessary reference source. Material is drawn together here which hitherto has only existed in a multiplicity of disparate sources. Now, for the first time, it is all drawn together into one repository....."how did one ever manage without it....." is an exclamation it will surely provoke in the future amongst many.

We would conclude with one minor caveat. The text is not justified in the right hand margins. Though the overall page design is cleverly drafted so as to maintain a certain attractiveness to the eye, and whilst overall the publishers are to be commended for the excellent quality of the book, we would, respectfully, urge full text justification for future productions. It gives a book a more "weighty" appearance, which we believe, PRC books are most certainly worthy of.

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