

*The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*. Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema. Edited by David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Hardcover. 544 pages. \$43.95. Reviewed by Herman Hanko

This outstanding book is vitally important to members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. I urge everyone to obtain a copy and delve into it with haste and interest.

Using the important admonition of Isaiah 51:1 as its title, the book gives in one volume the most important documents concerning the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Some documents have previously appeared in English, but others have not. Now they are available to those interested in the truth of the everlasting gospel of grace.

The documents are called “foundational,” and truly they are. A careful reading of them will reveal the historical and doctrinal reasons for the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches as a separate denomination, will inspire the members of these churches to maintain their distinctive place in the catholic church of Christ, and will impress upon the members that, if they love the church of Christ, they must maintain these doctrinal foundation strong and sure and not let them be eroded by neglect, heresy, and doctrinal indifference.

The first document, *The Idea of the Covenant of Grace*, is the text of a lecture Henry Danhof delivered to Christian Reformed ministers in in 1919. Danhof was later deposed from the ministry in that church and was one of the founding ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the lecture Danhof set before his colleagues the basic ideas of God’s everlasting covenant of grace. He plowed new ground and clearly maintained that God’s covenant is rooted in and is the revelation of God’s trinitarian life; that the covenant’s essential character is a bond of life, love, and friendship between God and his people in Christ; that the covenant’s development is organic; and that the covenant’s establishment results in an antithetical life in the world for its members. This writing was one of the earliest and is the most fundamental. Especially two words appear in it and throughout all the writings: *organic* and *antithesis*.

The second writing is *On the Theory of Common Grace*, the text of a speech delivered by Hoeksema shortly after he was ordained a minister of the gospel in the Christian Reformed Church. He spoke at a meeting of Christian Reformed ministers. Common grace was a subject

extensively discussed at that time, and the paper is a clear exegetical study of the texts that many used to prove common grace.

Not only in the heat of the battle over common grace, but also through the decades that followed, Rev. Hoeksema carefully and exegetically showed how the scriptural texts used to support common grace were no proof at all and that many other texts clearly militated against the doctrine. In one place in the book, Hoeksema gives no less than eight pages of texts that militate against common grace. The defenders of common grace were guilty of betraying the truth of God's word by their refusal to answer from scripture the biblical texts that Hoeksema explained. Christian Reformed theologians repeatedly quoted texts at random, but never explained them or showed how they supported common grace. Names have been hurled against the Reformed and confessional defenders of the truths of sovereign and particular grace: "Anabaptists" and "Hyper-Calvinists," among the most common then and today; but never much from scripture.

I did not know this paper existed until recently; it is an important addition to the book.

Early in the debate J. K. van Baalen leveled the charge of "Anabaptism" at Hoeksema and Danhof. In a way it was the opening shot in the official battle over common grace. The charge was a blatantly false accusation that anyone who denied common grace was guilty of world-flight. Yet Van Baalen's book, where the charge first appeared, was widely acclaimed by the defenders of common grace. Danhof and Hoeksema answered this heavy charge in their book, *Not Anabaptist but Reformed*, the third chapter in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*.

Their answer makes clear that Van Baalen's charge was rooted in a denial of the antithesis, and that instead of defending his heresy on scriptural grounds he made a clumsy attempt to defeat the deniers of common grace by name-calling. In other words, a defense of the soundly Reformed doctrine of the antithesis, which explains the calling of God's covenantal people in the world and is highly esteemed by Reformed theologians, resulted in the scurrilous name-calling—"Anabaptists"—by the defenders of common grace.

Why? The answer to this is a story woven through the nine works the book. It is the story of Abraham Kuyper's development of common grace and the ongoing defense of Kuyper's heretical doctrine by Dr. Ralph Janssen, who was expelled from Calvin Theological Seminary for

teaching higher criticism of scripture, which he defended on the basis of Kuyperian common grace. The story that emerges is sad, for it tells how defenders of Janssen vowed to get Hoeksema and Danhof out of the Christian Reformed Church, how friends betrayed their friends, and reveals the evil motives that underlay the expulsion of three faithful ministers from their office. But above all, it is the story of how the Christian Reformed Church is today flooded with false doctrine and worldliness. This important writing is a crucial document to understand how important the antithesis is, how the antithesis is rooted in the truth of God's covenant, and how God's people are to live in a wicked world by sharing with the wicked everything in this world except God's grace.

*Along Pure Paths* is translated in *The Rock* for the first time. "Three main issues" are discussed (158). Is God gracious to the reprobate ungodly? Can the natural (unregenerated) human do good works? Does scripture teach a restraint of sin by a working of grace in the hearts of unregenerated humans? The work is important enough for editor, David Engelsma, to say, "Compelling in *Along Pure Paths* is the authors' treatment of scripture. They refute all the alleged biblical evidence for common grace put forward, necessarily weakly, by the advocates of common grace. They advance the overwhelming, and conclusive, testimony of scripture everywhere against the theory of common grace" (159). And then, with sadness, the editor adds, "Haunting is the lament over former friends and coworkers in the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, who once shared the deep concern of Danhof and Hoeksema, but then, under pressure, turned on them, in league with the bitter enemies of the two witnesses to particular grace, total depravity, and the antithesis" (159).

*For The Sake of Justice and Truth*, also translated for the first time from the Dutch, is a plea of Danhof and Hoeksema made between the Christian Reformed synod of 1924 and the classes that ultimately deposed the faithful ministers. They asked for open discussion in the churches on the issue of common grace. In its final decision on common grace, the synod had asked for such a discussion, but the enemies of the truth were so bent on ousting faithful ministers that no one paid any attention to that plea in the hasty determination to rid the church of faithful men.

When the editors of the church papers refused to publish Danhof's and Hoeksema's responses to men who opposed them, Hoeksema and Danhof wrote, "Such occurrences make it unpleasant and impossible to write in our church papers. It is offensive to write for a magazine when the editors have the right to censor what we write! Whatever we write we sign and we are responsible for what we write." Shortly thereafter a group of faithful men formed the Reformed Free Publishing Association with the intent of publishing genuine Reformed material and giving a forum for writers to defend the truth and to answer the men who denied it. The *Standard Bearer* was born out of a desire for a free paper and the determination to defend the truth. The magazine was promoted as one that would follow scripture and be sharply antithetical.

*Calvin, Berkhof, and H. J. Kuiper* answered those who appealed to John Calvin in support of the gracious and well-meant offer of the gospel. The writing deals exclusively with this heresy, which was almost as an afterthought included in the first point of common grace adopted by the synod of Kalamazoo in 1924. It proved to be as destructive of the truth as any of the other errors adopted by the Christian Reformed Church. Perhaps it was really *more* destructive than the other errors. It opened the door for the errors of universal atonement, a universal love of God for to all men, and a denial of reprobation and election and of Paul's insistence that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

The pamphlet is such a powerful defense of Calvin's repudiation of a gracious offer of salvation in the gospel that one wonders how it is possible that the professor of theology in Calvin Theological Seminary (Berkhof) and Kuiper, the editor of the *Banner*, could possibly come up with the almost silly notion that Calvin agreed with them. Anyone reading the pamphlet and having even a passing acquaintance with Calvinism must conclude that the motives of those responsible for the appeals to Calvin were other than an honest pursuit of the truth.

The pamphlet also makes clear what Van Baalen had openly admitted: he supported a "two-track" theology—the track of sovereign and particular grace, rooted in election and reprobation, and the track of God's universal love and desire to save all men as expressed in the gracious offer of salvation to everyone who heard the gospel and its consequent support of

Arminian free-willism. The epithet “apparent contradiction” was invented to explain why Reformed theology can have two opposing tracks.

*A Triple Breach in the Foundation of the Reformed Truth* is a thorough and devastating refutation of all the subdoctrines involved in common grace, an answer to those who tried, without success, to find confessional and scriptural support for the heresies, and a compelling defense of the truth of God’s sovereign and particular grace.

An interesting sidelight is brought up in this work: although Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff were required to sign the three points—which if they refused would lead to their deposition and ouster from the denomination—many members and leaders in the church were also at least suspicious that the three points contained errors. However, they were permitted to remain members and were even elected into offices. At the very least, it gives evidence that the Christian Reformed Church was embarrassed by the three points and would have preferred them to be forgotten and consigned to oblivion. But, as the pamphlet points out, God would not permit that to happen. So even though today most of the members of the Christian Reformed Church have no knowledge of common grace, the church is full of Arminianism and Pelagianism, and worldliness runs rampant in its circles. The gracious and well-meant gospel offer to all and Kuyperian common grace opened the floodgates of error and godlessness. For this reason alone, concerned members of the Christian Reformed Church ought to read this book, for it will demonstrate convincingly why these evils in the church today can be traced back to 1924 (358–73).

*The Reunion of Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches* is unique chiefly because of its historical origin. It is the text of a speech Hoeksema gave at a conference of Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed ministers held in March 1939. The Dutch theologian, Dr. Klaas Schilder, was also in attendance. He had traveled to the United States to bring about the reunion of the two American denominations. Dutch theologians in general thought the controversy over common grace was a squabble between two parties over something not worth fighting about.

Hoeksema came to the meeting thoroughly prepared; no one else had anything ready, much less did anyone show any interest in the proceedings. Leading men were present, but no

one made any effort to defend the three points or even to engage in any discussion of them. Two good things emerged from the meeting: Hoeksema's paper, which clearly and concisely sets forth the basic arguments against the error of common grace, became public; and it was a vivid demonstration of the total unwillingness of the Christian Reformed theologians to discuss the idea of reunion.

The final document is the text of a speech entitled *The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel*. It is a stunning work that shakes one engaged in preaching to the depths of his soul. It reminds me of an incident in my life when I was studying for a Master's degree in Calvin Seminary. In an exegesis class I was assigned to exegete John 12:27–41, which is one of the sharpest scriptural teachings on the doctrine of reprobation. After I had exegeted the passage, there was deathly silence in the class, until one classmate remarked in astonishment, but with genuine concern (I think) for his calling as a preacher, "How are we to preach on this passage?" The professor immediately called for a recess, and the class never returned to the passage. Although the question was *not* answered in that class, it *is* answered in this concluding writing. Hoeksema not only explains how to preach the doctrine of reprobation, but he also maintains that it is the word of God that must be preached, for it is part of the truth of election.

In the debate over the meaning of 1 Timothy 4:10, Hoeksema insists that "especially" in the verse can and does mean "that is." I studied Greek with Dr. Ralph Stob who not like the Protestant Reformed Churches and was fond of needling his Protestant Reformed students. When Stob interpreted 1 Timothy 4:10, he could not resist poking fun of Hoeksema and emphatically repudiating Hoeksema's interpretation. Stob wrote an article entitled "'Especially' Erroneous," in which he delighted in his outwitting of Hoeksema. He never wearied of reminding his students of his coup.

The value of *The Rock* is increased by several additional writings by the editor. Each document is preceded by a short introduction that explains its historical background and summarizes its contents. The value of the introductions is their glimpse into the actual events that took place in the Christian Reformed Church at that time. They are short history lessons on the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Editorial footnotes explain certain sentences

that without the footnotes would be somewhat unintelligible. The afterword is almost worth the price of the book. It is a trumpet call to God's people to test the spirits, especially those afoot when the Protestant Reformed Churches began; an unforgettable reminder of the importance for all Protestant Reformed people to know what the churches believe over against damnable heresies and why they insist on separate denominational existence; and a moving description of what our spiritual fathers endured for the sake of the glory of God. It is, very really, a summons to "the battle of the ages" in the defense of God's glorious truths of sovereign and particular grace.

It is striking that throughout all the writings, the authors never attacked the persons of their adversaries, even though Hoeksema and Danhof were the objects of vicious slander and evil accusations. They dealt with the issues and made it clear that they were interested only in the truth of God's word. This does not mean that they were not deeply hurt, as the editor notes in his introduction to *Calvin, Berkhof and H. J. Kuiper*.

In writing of Berkhof, Hoeksema could not refrain from sounding a personal note. To the end of his life, Hoeksema felt the wound of the turning on him by the Christian Reformed theologian. Berkhof was his respected professor in the seminary. Berkhof officiated at Hoeksema's wedding. Prior to 1924 Berkhof had freely spoken to Hoeksema of the need to address the spread of Arminian theology in the Christian Reformed Church. When the efforts of Berkhof and the other three professors in the seminary to condemn the higher critical views of Ralph Janssen were foundering, it was Hoeksema who came to the rescue, thus making himself the object of hatred on the part of Janssen's many and powerful defenders in the Christian Reformed ministry.

Addressing Berkhof, Hoeksema wrote, "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. At the time you became friends even of your enemies to unite them in expelling those who were your friends and brethren in the faith. You are

responsible before God, before whose judgment seat we will have to appear together.” (293)

Throughout the book one comes across the word *antithesis*, which was almost the lodestar of the 1924 reformation of the church. The word is prominent in Hoeksema’s and Danhof’s writings, especially in connection with the doctrine of the covenant and in their stern prophecy that the adoption of Kuyperian common grace would result in a total loss of the antithesis.

While these men restored this honored word to the vocabulary of the church, it seems to receive less and less emphasis today, even in Protestant Reformed circles. By this word our spiritual fathers expressed what God told Israel, “Israel shall dwell in safety alone” (Deut. 33:28). The emphasis in all their writings was not loneliness that drove them out of God’s creation (as Van Baalen wrongly charged), but spiritual loneliness in the walk of the elect people of God as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The antithesis is also in doctrine, and to be faithful to our covenantal God, it is obligatory of God’s people to stand apart from all heretical teachings, to suffer persecution when they call to repentance those who stray from the truth, and to consider the great glory of their sovereign God the one most important part of their lives and callings.

Buy the book and read it. Give a copy to your children. It will give you the reasons and the courage to be Protestant Reformed and to find safety in dwelling alone—but with God!