

**THE ROCK**  
**WHENCE WE**  
**ARE HEWN**



GOD, GRACE, AND COVENANT

**T H E R O C K**  
**W H E N C E W E**  
**A R E H E W N**

**HENRY DANHOF**  
**HERMAN HOEKSEMA**

EDITED BY DAVID J. ENGELSMA



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Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness,  
ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn,  
and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

—ISAIAH 51:1



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## FOREWORD

The various writings included in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn* are all pamphlets or booklets written very early in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches—between 1919 and 1940. The authors are two men whom God used in forming these churches—Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof. All the writings explain and defend the great doctrines of the Reformed faith that were fundamental to the founding of the Protestant Reformed Churches—covenant, predestination, particular grace, and antithesis. These writings therefore were used to establish these churches in the very beginning of their history. The contents of the book are their foundational writings.

The title of the book is taken from Isaiah 51:1: “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.” In this figurative way the prophet called the people of Israel to look to their origins. This title calls the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, including the ministers and other officebearers, and especially the younger generation, to find in the book the doctrinal truths that are of fundamental importance to the Protestant Reformed Churches still today. By the work of the Spirit these doctrines, confessed, defended, and explained in the writings in this book, are the source of the churches—the rock whence they were hewn.

Many of these writings are polemical. They defend the truths of the Reformed faith against the false doctrine of the Christian Reformed Church’s three points of common grace. The renewing of this old, but continuing, controversy with the Christian Reformed Church by the publication of the book is not unfortunate or unwise. The members of the Protestant Reformed Churches are reminded why they are not, and may not be, members of the Christian Reformed Church or of any church that shares the common grace theology of the Christian

Reformed Church, and why they are and are called by God to be Protestant Reformed.

In addition, although it is now late in the day for this, the Christian Reformed Church ought to be confronted with its doctrinal and church-political sins in the controversy over common grace in the early 1920s and in the ruthless discipline of Herman Hoeksema and many others. Members of the Christian Reformed Church who yet have the (saving) grace to wonder what has happened and is happening to their church, and why, will find the answer in this book. Other Reformed churches and their members who share the Christian Reformed theology of covenant, well-meant offer, common grace, and friendship with the world of the ungodly might profitably reexamine their theology in light of the biblical, creedal, and church-traditional arguments in the book. They too might well look to the rock whence they were hewn: John Calvin, the Canons of Dordt, and Romans 9.

All those in other churches who have any interest in what it means to be Protestant Reformed, and in the reason for the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches, do well to allow this book to answer their questions, rather than to listen to the biased explanations of the enemies of these churches.

A number of the pamphlets in this book were originally written in Dutch. The translators are identified. All footnotes are those of the authors, unless otherwise indicated.

Because of the frequent reference throughout the book to the three points of common grace, adopted as official, binding dogma by the Christian Reformed Church and forced upon Danhof, Hoeksema, George M. Ophoff, and their consistories on pain of deposition from office and exclusion from the Christian Reformed Church, I note that the three points are included in the book in the appendix to *A Triple Breach*.

Many of the ministers, theologians, and other persons who had some significant part in the controversy over common grace in the Christian Reformed Church and who are mentioned in the writings that make up *The Rock* are identified in an appendix.

—David J. Engelsma, editor

# THE IDEA OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE



**HENRY DANHOF**

TRANSLATED BY DAVID J. ENGELSMA

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith,  
Abraham believed God, and it was imputed  
unto him for righteousness:  
and he was called the Friend of God.

—JAMES 2:23

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction to *The Idea of the Covenant of Grace*

This booklet is the translation of the text of a lecture on the covenant of grace by Henry Danhof.<sup>1</sup> At the time a minister in the Christian Reformed Church, he gave the lecture at a conference of Christian Reformed ministers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 4, 1919. Evidently the conference was held in connection with a meeting of a Grand Rapids classis of the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>2</sup>

The lecture was given at the special request of the ministers' conference. The arrangement was that Danhof's address would be followed the next evening by a speech presenting the opposite view. As Danhof urged the antithesis, Johannes Groen<sup>3</sup> was to argue for synthesis, that is, communion and cooperation of church and world. The purpose of the two lectures was that the ministers might come to clearer insights concerning the relation of church and world. Due to the illness of Groen, the second lecture was not given.

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- 1 Henry Danhof, *De Idee van het Genadeverbond* [The idea of the covenant of grace] (Grand Rapids, MI: Van Noord Book and Publishing Company, 1920). The booklet is forty-two pages. The translation of this booklet, which first appeared as several articles in the April 1997 and November 1998 issues of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, is the first translation of the Dutch original into English.
  - 2 Referring to the discussion that followed Danhof's lecture, Jan Karel van Baalen speaks of a statement made by Danhof at "a classical gathering." See Jan Karel van Baalen, *De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Doopersch?* [The denial of common grace: Reformed or Anabaptist?] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1922), 47. (All translations in *The Idea of the Covenant of Van Baalen's* booklet are mine.) James Bratt says that Danhof made the remark to which Van Baalen refers "in the question-and-answer session at the classical meeting after delivering 'De Idee van het Genadeverbond.'" See James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 265.
  - 3 Johannes Groen was the minister in Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church just prior to Herman Hoeksema.

## Controversial Lecture

As the title indicates, Danhof's address was a penetrating study of the fundamental idea of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace. At the same time and as an aspect of the idea of the covenant, the lecture investigated the relationship between the church and the world. This led the speaker to consider and to pass judgment on the apparent good done by the ungodly.

The speech was controversial.

In response to Danhof's rejection of the popular notion that the life of unregenerated mankind is "full of all kinds of virtues," a Christian Reformed minister put the question to Danhof how we then must view the marriage of two unbelievers. Danhof's response is reported to have been that "the marriage between two non-Christians can be nothing other than bestiality and the kind of love which devils have for each other."<sup>4</sup>

This response with its condemnation of all the apparently noble deeds of the pagans infuriated Rev. Jan Karel van Baalen and, undoubtedly, the other Christian Reformed ministers who shared his esteem for the "good" in the unholy world. Three years later, in a polemical work against Danhof and Hoeksema concerning the doctrine of common grace, Van Baalen recalled Danhof's statement with not one but two exclamation marks and called it "nonsense."

At the end of his polemical work, *The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptist?* Van Baalen put several questions to Danhof and Hoeksema. He intended these questions to expose their false doctrine. The first was how Danhof viewed the marriage of Hector and Andromache: "May we ask Rev. Danhof whether he will be so good as to make clear to us what there is in the love between Hector and his wife, as sung by Homer, that is devilish or bestial?"<sup>5</sup>

Danhof's "bestial" and "devilish" was strong language. But Van

4 Van Baalen, *Denial of Common Grace*, 47; see Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 111, 265.

5 Van Baalen, *Denial of Common Grace*, 87. Van Baalen quoted the touching conversation between Hector and Andromache from book 6 of Homer's *The Iliad*. See Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (New York: The New American Library, 1950), 74–83.

Baalen's indignation at that strong language should not obscure the fact that the issue was whether the love between Hector and Andromache was sinful. If it was sinful—*only* sinful—it was devilish, for sin originates in the devil. If it was sinful—*only* sinful—it was worse than bestial, for beasts cannot sin in their mating. That the love of Hector and Andromache was sinful the passage from which Van Baalen took his quotation makes plain. The immediate context of Hector's and Andromache's expressions of love for each other was Hector's advice to the women of Troy to worship the goddess Athena ("Queen Athena, goddess divine, savior of our city!"); Hector's affirmation that his burning desire was his own glory ("to win credit for my father and myself"); and Hector's prayer to all the gods that his son would bring glory to himself and to his father ("O Zeus and all ye heavenly gods!").

Everything that issues from such an idolatrous, self-seeking heart is sin, including marital and family life. The Heidelberg Catechism passes judgment on the love of Hector and Andromache that it was sin: "But what are good works? Those only which are done from true faith, according to the law of God, for his glory."<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:18–23 condemns the life of such pagans as Hector and Andromache: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18).

For all the vigor of his terminology, therefore, Danhof was only pronouncing the biblical, Reformed judgment on Hector and Andromache.

Why was this offensive to Van Baalen? Why could he be fulsome in his praise of Zeus-worshipping Hector and violent in his condemnation of Henry Danhof, who worshiped the true God? How, two years later, could Van Baalen and the entire Christian Reformed synod expel Danhof from their fellowship as a deposed minister, while keeping Hector and Andromache in good repute within the church? Already in the early 1920s there was a diseased love of pagan culture in the Christian Reformed Church. This did not bode well for its future.

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<sup>6</sup> Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 91, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:339–40.



## Historically Significant Address

Danhof's speech, delivered to an influential group of Christian Reformed ministers, was significant in the history of the Christian Reformed Church. Danhof gave the speech in 1919 during the throes of a struggle that would fundamentally determine the future of that Reformed denomination. The issue in that struggle was the relationship between the Christian Reformed Church and the world of the ungodly. Danhof and Hoeksema contended for the spiritual separation of the church from the world. The theological term they used to express this separation and warfare was *antithesis*.

Another group, among whom was Jan Karel van Baalen, fought as vehemently for the church's openness to the world—accommodation, cooperation, and reception—within limits. The deceptive watchword of that party was *Americanization*. The word was deceptive because what that party sought was not conformity to the innocent ways of America—language and clothes—but conformity to the corrupt ways of the world: the higher critical doctrines of European unbelief regarding the holy scriptures as well as other distinctly un-Reformed teachings; the principles and practices of the ungodly labor unions; and fellowship with the works of darkness in worldly amusements.<sup>7</sup>

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7 For a helpful and highly readable analysis of this critically important struggle in the 1920s for the soul and future of the Christian Reformed Church, see Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 93–119. The two chapters on these pages are titled “Forming the Battle Lines, 1919–1920” and “The Resolution, 1921–1928.” Bratt characterizes Danhof and Hoeksema as the “Antitheticals.” The party of friendly relations with the world he describes as “positive Calvinists,” a description that may tip Bratt's hand. Hoeksema called this party “a latitudinarian party in the churches, a group of men...who opposed the antithesis, stood for a ‘broader’ view of the Christian's life and calling in the world, and strove to bridge the gap between the world and the Church” (Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine* [Grand Rapids, MI: n.p., 1936], 15–16). According to Bratt, the positive Calvinists attacked “otherworldliness...and a disregard for God's general grace and revelation” and advocated the church's fulfillment of its “cultural mandate.” Such positive Calvinists as J. G. van Andel supposed, no doubt sincerely, that the Christian Reformed Church was called to solve the world's problems. As though that were a real possibility! But that, he said, cannot be done “if men think only like the Reformed.”

One may disagree with Bratt's conclusion that although the “Antitheticals” went down to defeat in the common grace decision of 1924, the “progressive Calvinists”

The doctrine by which the church would relate positively to the world was Abraham Kuyper's, and especially Herman Bavinck's, doctrine of common grace.

The first ecclesiastical skirmish in this war was in 1922 when the Christian Reformed synod condemned seminary professor Ralph Janssen's views on the Bible as modernism.<sup>8</sup> The apparent triumph of the antithetical position was misleading and short-lived, for a scant two years later the decisive battle was fought at the Christian Reformed synod of Kalamazoo, Michigan. By its adoption of the three points of common grace, the Christian Reformed Church destroyed the antithesis in that church and established openness to the world as its official policy. In this decision, the synod was reacting in part against the well-remembered address by Henry Danhof, "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace."<sup>9</sup>

Danhof's lecture has also been significant for the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. These churches came into existence as a separate denomination as the result of the Christian Reformed

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also "came to grief." The decision of the Christian Reformed Church on common grace spelled the victory of the progressive Calvinists. In time Hoeksema's prophecy that common grace, nothing other than the theory for conformity to the world, would bring a real tidal wave of worldliness over the churches was sure to be fulfilled. The compromising "Confessionalist / Pietist" party (to use Bratt's label), who gave the victory to the progressive Calvinists and who exercised church power for the next twenty-five years, merely delayed the full manifestation of the victory of the progressive Calvinists in 1924. In terms of Hoeksema's figure of the tidal wave, the Louis Berkhofs and H. J. Kuipers spent the next twenty-five years sticking their fingers in various holes that the adoption of common grace had opened in the Christian Reformed dike. In the early 1950s the dike itself began to collapse.

Hoeksema's analysis of the leading figures in Bratt's Confessionalist/Pietist party—L. Berkhof, S. Volbeda, Y. P. de Jong, and H. J. Kuiper—is found in Hoeksema, *Protestant Reformed Churches*, 16–26. About this treatment Bratt remarks that Hoeksema "has especially good insight into the instincts and vacillations of the Confessionalist party" (*Dutch Calvinism*, 266).

- 8 On the history of the Janssen case in the Christian Reformed Church and its relation to the assault on Hoeksema by the advocates of common grace, see Hoeksema, *Protestant Reformed Churches*, 17–26. For an in-depth study of the relationship between the views of Ralph Janssen and the doctrine of common grace, see Herman Hanko, "A Study of the Relation between the Views of Prof. R. Janssen and Common Grace" (master's thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1988).
- 9 For the history of this common grace controversy, see Hoeksema, *Protestant Reformed Churches*, 11–282; on the doctrinal issues of the controversy, see *ibid.*, 285–402.

Church's rejection of the antithesis in 1924 and discipline in 1925 of officebearers who opposed the doctrine of common grace. In his lecture, Danhof developed the reality of the covenant of grace as fellowship that has become central to the theology and practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Some have suggested that Danhof's conception of the covenant was formative of Protestant Reformed covenant theology.

### Profound Statement of the Covenant

Apart from its historical significance, Danhof's treatise on the covenant is important in its own right as a unique, profound, and thorough statement of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. For Danhof the covenant of grace is central in the life of the believer: "The idea of the covenant of grace concerns the deepest and most intimate relation between God and man. The real covenantal relation governs every other relation."

The relationship with God that is the covenant consists of friendship: "The covenant causes God and man to live together as friends. In this the covenant-idea is completely realized."

The ultimate origin of the covenant as a relationship of friendship is the triune life of God.

The covenant rests in the holy Trinity. God is the God of the covenant. He is such not only according to the counsel of his will in his relation to the creature, but first in himself by virtue of his nature. The divine life in itself is a covenant of friendship among Father, Son, and Holy Ghost...The absolute covenantal conception is hidden in the family life of the holy Trinity.

At its core the history of revelation is the development of the covenant of grace. "The beginning of the realization of the covenantal conception was evident already in the earthly paradise. In the state of rectitude, the relation between God and man was friendship." Man's fall did not annul the covenant of God:

God wills the covenant. Therefore, according to God's good pleasure, behind Adam when he fell away stood Christ, God's companion, and in him the Lord's covenant of friendship with

man was firm. Out of grace in Christ, God realizes his covenant of friendship with man...so that man becomes God's covenantal companion and friend eternally.

The history of the world centers in the covenant of God with his people in Christ. "According to God's counsel, all things work together for the realization of this idea of the covenant of grace...The history of all things is the development of the covenant of friendship of our God."

In connection with the development of the covenant in history, Danhof proposes and expands on what he calls the "organic connection of our race." This organic connection of the race is "God's means to realize his covenant. That realization everywhere follows the organic lines...God created man as an organic creature and in organic relation to the world around him."

The conceptions of an "organic connection" of all people and of "organic development" were of great importance to Danhof and Hoeksema in the common grace struggle of the early 1920s. In their book *Van Zonde en Genade* Danhof and Hoeksema explained the development of sin in terms of the organic connection of the human race: "All human individuals, in their organic solidarity, have communion in the root sin of their organic head."<sup>10</sup>

This emphasis on the "organic" so exasperated their antagonist Van Baalen that he angrily charged that all Danhof and Hoeksema did was to chant "organic, ORGANIC, ORGANIC": "Yes indeed. But calling out 'organic, ORGANIC, ORGANIC'!! is not the same as explaining how we must conceive the organic development [of sin]."<sup>11</sup>

10 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *Van Zonde en Genade* [Of sin and grace] (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.), 202. The translation is mine.

11 Jan Karel van Baalen, *Nieuwigheid en Dwaling; De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie* [Novelty and error: the denial of common grace] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1923), 63–64; cf. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, 111. Bratt too has difficulty with the antitheticals' use of "organic": "It is difficult to interpret their obsession with the point because they put it to so many different uses." Perhaps, but one thing is certainly clear from this "obsession": long before it was theologically fashionable to do so, the fathers of the Reformed theology held in the Protestant Reformed Churches insisted on the natural solidarity of the human race, specifically of the elect people of God with the reprobate ungodly. They stressed that the church lives in natural solidarity with the entire created world. At the very

Within the organic, natural solidarity of the elect church and the reprobate world, God's regenerating Spirit creates and maintains the "absolute antithesis" between them. This is an essential element in Danhof's treatise on the covenant. "The idea of the 'absolute antithesis' must be placed emphatically on the foreground in our world view." Antithesis is an aspect of the covenant inasmuch as "also in practice the covenantal idea must always determine our relation to everything about us, especially in relation to the world in a moral sense." As God's friends, elect believers are of the party of the living God. As such, they cannot be friends of God's enemies, the unregenerated, ungodly world.

A few years after giving the lecture, Danhof reflected on it in a brochure he coauthored with Hoeksema, *For the Sake of Justice and Truth*. Danhof viewed the lecture, which by that time had been published, as a development of the basic covenantal conception in its most fundamental idea. He described this conception thus:

Our entire life—inclination, imagination, desire, thought, word, and deed—must arise from the root of regeneration, the principle of true love. One who wills to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God. The believer is a friend of God, and by virtue of this, an enemy of the whole kingdom of darkness. As such he must take his place in this present world, with heartfelt trust in God and looking to his word alone. The promotion of the cause of the Son of God is his life's task. He is of the party of the living God. God's child is God's friend.

According to Danhof, his lecture emphasized the implication of this covenantal conception for the right relation of God's people to the ungodly world.

We have put the idea of the "absolute antithesis" in our world view on the foreground. We did so especially to combat the continual zeal of some for a view of the relation of God's

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foundation of this theology, therefore, is rejection of Anabaptist world flight. The antithesis does not, indeed cannot, mean physical separation from unbelievers or ascetic withdrawal from the creation and its ordinances.

people and the world that is hostile to God that, in our judgment, may not be ours.

The view of the relation of the church and the world that Danhof's lecture opposed was that of common grace: "the fellowship of believers and unbelievers."<sup>12</sup>

Danhof's study includes a knowledgeable survey of the history of the dogma of the covenant. His conclusion is that "in a dogma-historical sense the doctrine of the covenant dates from the time of the Reformation. It is almost exclusively a plant out of Reformed soil." Nevertheless, "the covenantal conception is no Reformed fancy or subtlety, but the most beautiful fruit of the theology of the whole Christian church."

Appropriately, Danhof concludes his masterpiece on the covenant with its eschatological implications. The antithesis will climax in the future in the persecution of the friends of Christ by the antichrist. The greatest of all spiritual conflicts is impending. It will concern the covenant:

The enemy will know how to turn the temporal might of the emperor over the bodies and possessions of men against the friends of Christ...For this we must prepare ourselves beforehand. Also the fainthearted among us have to get ready. The issue will be the covenant of our God. There is no escape from the steel sword of our enemies.

But the covenantal friend of God has hope:

However, because we fight on behalf of the cause of God, we are able to trust in the Lord who is truly Lord. He will accomplish it. His cause will triumph. Strengthened by his grace, we will not lose the crown. Redeemed from all the might of the enemy and more than conquerors, we enter into the joy of our Lord and into the everlasting covenant of the friendship of our God.

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12 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *Om Recht en Waarheid: Een Woord van Toelichting en Leiding* [For the sake of justice and truth: a word of clarification and direction] (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.), 7–8. The translation is mine.

## Stormy Ministry of the Author

The subsequent ministry of Danhof was stormy. He and his consistory, the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, were deposed and thus put out of the Christian Reformed Church by Classis Grand Rapids West of that church in January 1925. In 1926 Danhof and his congregation separated from those who were organizing as the Protestant Reformed Churches. For the rest of his active ministry, Danhof was pastor of the independent Protestant First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo.<sup>13</sup>

By his ecclesiastical independency Danhof very definitely sinned against the covenant of friendship in its important manifestation as a federation of churches.

In 1945 Danhof and his congregation returned to the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>14</sup> Already in 1946 Danhof came again to the attention of synod. With seventeen other members of the Grace Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Danhof protested against a decision of the consistory of the Grace church. The decision of the consistory was that Danhof and the others cease the practice of convening in one of their private homes and entertaining one another socially by asking and answering questions about biblical, religious, and spiritual matters.

Synod upheld the consistory, judging that

the consistory was justified in its decision to condemn this practice in view of the following considerations: 1) The social character of these gatherings was obviously a camouflage for a Bible Study group, comprised of dissident members, many of whom were openly critical of the doctrinal position of the Christian Reformed Church. 2) The leader of the group, the Rev. H. Danhof, had made himself guilty, by means of his

13 This sad history is related in Hoeksema, *Protestant Reformed Churches*, 261–79.

14 Article 88, in *Acts of Synod 1946 of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Publishing House), 63: “A statement of the Stated Clerk of Classis Kalamazoo informing Synod ‘that the union between the Protestant First Christian Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed denomination had been accomplished on November 1, 1945, on the basis approved by Classis at its February 21, 1945, meeting in agreement with the advice of the Synodical examiners of Classes Zeeland, Holland and Grand Rapids South.’”

public utterances, of resisting the adjustment of the Grace Church to the Christian Reformed denomination, and also of undermining the teaching of its pastor.

Synod added that if Danhof and the others would not stop this practice, the consistory should “declare the membership of the protestants in the Grace Christian Reformed Church terminated.”<sup>15</sup>

Evidently, Danhof’s membership was thus “terminated,” for the database of Christian Reformed ministers lists Henry Danhof as a “released” minister of the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>16</sup>

This personal history may be the reason Danhof never fulfilled the promise he showed in *The Idea of the Covenant of Grace*. With the exception of several booklets and one book that he coauthored with Hoeksema during the common grace controversy, Danhof did not publish after his *Idea of the Covenant of Grace*.<sup>17</sup> What writing he did seems to have taken the form of filling the Sunday bulletins of the Protestant First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo with his thoughts on various theological, philosophical, and ecclesiastical subjects.<sup>18</sup>

15 Article 14, in *Acts of Synod 1948 of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Publishing House), 71–74.

16 <http://www.calvin.edu/cgi-bin/lib/crcmd/search.pl>.

17 The three booklets are *Niet Doopersch maar Gereformeerd: Voorloopig Bescheid aan Ds. Jan Karel van Baalen betreffende de Loochening der Gemeene Gratie* [Not Anabaptist but Reformed: provisional response to Rev. J. K. van Baalen concerning the denial of common grace] (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Printing Co., n.d.); *Langs Zuivere Banen: een Wederwoord aan Bezwaarde Broederen* [Along pure paths: a reply to aggrieved brothers] (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.); and *For the Sake of Justice and Truth*. The book is *Sin and Grace*.

18 These must rank as the strangest church bulletins in the history of the Reformed churches, perhaps in the history of Protestantism. There is almost nothing in them of congregational events and church news. Front and back, the four pages of the typical bulletin are crammed with Danhof’s expositions and comments on all kinds of topics. Take the bulletin of Sunday, March 8, 1931, as an example. Page 1 (the front cover of the bulletin) is devoted to “Some Unsolved Problems of Philosophy”; page 2 is full of a treatment of *Het Overblijfsel Behouden* [The remnant preserved]; page 3, from top to bottom, explains *De Proloog van Johannes* [The prologue of John]; and more than two-thirds of page 4, the back of the bulletin, sets forth a “Brief Exposition of Our Doctrine.” Less than one-third of the back cover is permitted to contain all of the church news for the week under the heading “Meetings.” In the midst of the listing of meetings, and under that heading, appears the line, lost in the welter of philosophy, theology, and meetings, “Born to Mr. and Mrs. P. van den Berg, Jr., a son.” Let a pastor try this with the church bulletin today!



Danhof failed to carry out what he proposed in his lecture on the covenant. Having noted the breadth of his subject, he declared, “The Lord willing, I hope to devote my powers to related subjects in the future. We must preserve what we possess by adding to what has been obtained.”

This duty has fallen to the ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

All footnotes in this chapter, as in the introduction to the chapter, are the translator’s.

—David J. Engelsma

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A complete set of these bulletins is held in the library of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. One who would learn something of Danhof’s theological development after 1926 must peruse these bulletins, although occasionally a printed sermon or set of sermons would appear as an “appendix” to certain bulletins. Some of these printed sermons are available.

## PREFACE

It was not my original intention to publish the following address, which was given for a general (Christian Reformed) ministers' conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Repeated and friendly requests from more than one quarter that I would publish it caused me to change my mind. Although rather late, the address is now published without change.

I have hesitated for a long time. I thought that I should wait until someone else would have explained the relation of church and world from another viewpoint than Groen's, who was prevented from making his contribution because of sickness. At the same time, I judged the circumstances unfavorable to a treatment of profound questions of principle. Our age seems to call to us, "Hold fast what you have, so that no one takes your crown; one should not in these times think of any development of doctrine."

Finally, I felt that this contribution calls for thorough study of many related subjects, such as common grace, the incarnation of the Word, the idea of central humanity, and so on. Indeed, the idea of the covenant of grace concerns the deepest and most intimate relation between God and man. The real covenantal relation governs every other relation. For reasons everyone will understand, I did not dare to think even of attempting to demonstrate and develop all this in a short speech. First, the time for this was too limited. But also the logical train of thought demanded that I limit myself to my subject. For this reason, I held back.

Nevertheless, there was also another side to this matter. The ministers' conference insisted on publication. There is in my opinion great need for more doctrinal truth. We must develop the truth. Something is better than nothing. The study of related subjects can, if need be,

wait until later. Besides, about some of the matters that I have just mentioned I have already spoken repeatedly in public. I could not even suggest a hiding of my own conviction. In addition, the gathering of the general ministers' conference of last year was announced in the church papers.

Finally, it ought not be concealed that in the meantime a certain group is always zealously promoting a view of the relation of church and world that in my opinion may not be ours. The idea of the "absolute antithesis" must be placed emphatically on the foreground in our world view. We must be of the party of the living God. Also in practice the covenantal idea must always determine our relation to everything about us, especially in relation to the world in a moral sense.

This covenantal idea I have tried to present in its most fundamental sense. Let the sympathetic reader judge in how far I have succeeded.

The address appears unchanged. After careful deliberation, this seemed to me the most desirable.

The Lord willing, I hope to devote my powers to related subjects in the future. We must preserve what we possess by adding to what has been obtained.

May the Lord confirm the covenant of his friendship with us in the Beloved.

—H. Danhof  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
May 1920

## UNIVERSALITY OF THE IDEA OF COVENANT

*Danhof asserts that the covenantal idea in a formal sense is embedded in the life of men and nations. It structures the entire life of humanity. Although this results in seeming virtues in the behavior of the ungodly, these virtues are merely apparent. The reason is that the ungodly lack the reality and genuine essence of the covenant, which Danhof will later define as fellowship with the triune God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. There is therefore division and struggle between the ungodly and the godly—the antithesis. All footnotes in Danhof's essay are mine, as are the chapter divisions.—Trans.*

**T**he idea of the covenant of grace is not strange to our race. On the contrary, our society is almost entirely permeated with that idea. Regardless of change, man continues formally to arrange his life according to the covenantal conception. Circumstances of minor importance, such as those of war and peace, monarchical and democratic government, revolution and development, do not change this at all. By origin, disposition, and destination, man is a child of the covenant, and he shows this by his way of life.

Precisely at the present time this comes out strongly in international politics. Hardly is the balance of the European great powers broken than many strive for a covenant of the nations. To be sure, that ideal does not enchant all, but the opposition does not concern the idea as such. Besides, the covenantal conception expresses no less strongly the desire for sovereignty in one's own sphere than the longing

of the nations for unity. Indeed, the covenant rests on the physical and juridical unity of our race and the responsibility of the individuals. Therefore, the ideal is the right connection of sovereignty in one's own sphere with a worldwide covenant of the nations.

In the social sphere the idea of the covenant is basic [*schering en inslag*, warp and woof]. The absolute individualist cannot exist there. There the hallmark of everything is organization, combination, alliance, cooperation, and system. Associations and unions of every sort stand in the way of the forceful expression of character. The power of public opinion is enormous. The minority is always wrong and therefore powerless. The slanted and biased press binds together state and society, church and club, religion and morality.<sup>19</sup>

By this means the recent war was the common property of church and state, as well in the lands of the Central Powers as in those of the Allies. Not all were silent, but there was little mention of an independent opinion of the churches. Church and state went arm in arm; Christendom and world were friendly; revelation and reason lay lovingly intermingled and intertwined. Although impotent to fill up the terrible abyss between the warring powers, the covenantal conception still governed human life on both sides of the chasm.

Even the heart joined in. Almost everywhere the intercession of the churches took the form of a prayer for victory. Church and state were of one mind. Even though both allied groups of nations had objections against each other's pretensions of communion with God, each continued to mention such on its own behalf. This was the case also when W. H. Kerr of Great Bend, Kansas, urged America to break with the idea of God, so that she could more effectively stigmatize as hypocrisy the profession of the German kaiser to rule by the grace of God.

Obviously the covenantal conception, as it lives in men's consciousness, also includes faith in God and in a spiritual world—emphatically faith concerning a spiritual world. It is indeed the case that the sorcerers, astrologers, and magicians, as well as the theophanies and appearances of angels of the old world, have disappeared from our

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<sup>19</sup> Today, television must be added to the powerful "*tendentieuze pers*" (biased press) mentioned by Danhof.

society. It is also true that the belief in witches, ghosts, and exorcists is perhaps less strong than in former times.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, superstition still confidently seeks knowledge of and communion with the world of unseen things. Witness our modern theosophists, spiritists, fortune tellers, Christian Scientists, and preachers of heathen religions. Modern man feels the tug of the tie that unites and joins God and man, spirit and matter, the individual and the community.

There is still more. It is a fact that not only men such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, Daniel, Constantine the Great, William the Silent, Gustavus Adolphus, Martin Luther, John Knox, and others knew themselves to be servants of the Lord, but the same is true of people like Balaam, Saul, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Korah, Socrates, Titus, and even Napoleon. All truly great spirits seem to realize somewhat that in their special positions and with their work they stand in service of the God of the covenant. History notes different cases of extraordinary covenantal communion with God.

Besides, human life is otherwise so full of all kinds of virtues, such as receptivity to the good, thankfulness, sympathy, assistance, devotion (to duty), self-denial, tender love, and faithful friendship, that the question involuntarily arises whether man, obviously acting according to the nature of the covenant in a formal sense, does not also live according to the nature of the covenant in the material sense, insofar as he displays these virtues.

Indeed, the husband is faithful to his wife; the mother devotes herself sacrificially to her little child without complaint; the child honors his parents; the young man is ready to sacrifice his life for the fatherland; the merciful nurse bends sympathetically over the sickbed of the pitiable sufferer; and the friend is not disloyal. Do not science and art serve the true and the beautiful? Do not hospitals and sanitariums, asylums and homes, courts, prisons, and judicial system prove that man strives for righteousness and virtue? Even the pet animal shows the goodness of man in its dependency and trust toward its master.

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20 This could be said in 1919. It cannot be said in 2015. The intriguing thing is that Danhof saw this superstition as evidence of the ineradicable reality of the idea of the covenant in man. The reference here and in what immediately follows is to the formal aspect of the idea of the covenant: relationship with God.

What is the ethical quality of these virtues?

The prevailing opinion is that man can choose the good. He commands his own destiny and, as a result, governs the future. Concerning his actual practice of the good, the spirit of the age proclaims the excellency of humanity with increasingly louder voice. However much history may testify against him and certain weaknesses may yet cling to him, man will eventually develop right self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-control. He will banish what is evil and fittingly subject the entire realm of nature to himself.

Expectantly therefore the eye of hope is fixed on him, for regardless of everything that hinders him, he must rule as king. Both evolution and revolution will pave the way to the throne for him. Everything cooperates to this end. The bond of concord must be felt. State and society, capital and labor, religion and morality need to come together on the exalted level of the common brotherhood of humanity. Then the entire, spontaneous development of our race according to the demands of each one's individual virtues and talents will be possible. With this, man's absolute rule over the kingdoms of the world will be confirmed. Criminal behavior, war, sickness, and probably also death will disappear. The prosperity [*zaligheid*, salvation as it lives in the mind of the ungodly world] of man will be great, and there will be no end to the peace of his kingdom. Something like this is man's testimony concerning himself and his future.

Nevertheless, God judges differently. Scripture says that men are by nature haters of God. All have departed. There is no one who does good, who seeks God, not even one [Rom. 3:9–11]. In other words, the entire life of our race, apart from regeneration, in its relation to God is covenant breaking [*bondsbreuk*, breaking or rupturing a union] despite that it is permeated with the covenantal conception and even though it may be made serviceable to the coming of his kingdom by God himself. Only in the renewed kernel is a beginning of God's covenant again found.<sup>21</sup>

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21 To distinguish the elect, regenerated church from the reprobate, ungodly world, Danhof uses a figure that was a favorite of himself and Hoeksema: the kernel of grain as distinguished from the surrounding husk or the wheat and the chaff. The figure is biblical.

According to the testimony of God, humanity is divided into grain and chaff, church and world, bride and whore, children of light and those of darkness. Only in the first does God realize his covenant in a positive sense, out of grace. This takes place, according to the lesson of scripture, history, and experience, in the way of a dreadful struggle in the world and in the life of humanity. Despite their natural solidarity and although their life on earth is in various ways strikingly inter-related, the children of Adam separate on account of their different spiritual relation to God and form an antithesis along the whole line of human activity. In principle this happens always and everywhere. This separation takes place according to the nature of each dispensation and the differing circumstances of time, place, domain, sphere of life, and relationship.

All of this serves to keep our subject constantly and clearly in mind in my treatment of it and must as much as possible be explained. Therefore, I do not restrict myself to a theological exposition of the idea of the covenant *per se*. After the theological exposition, I consider also the realizing of this covenantal conception. Finally, I point out the struggle caused by this.