

# VU Research Portal

## Herman Hoeksema: A Theological Biography

Baskwell, P.J.

2006

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

Baskwell, P. J. (2006). *Herman Hoeksema: A Theological Biography*. [PhD-Thesis – Research external, graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

### **E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

## Chapter 3

### The Origin and Development of Hoeksema's Theology

In September of 1915, Herman Hoeksema entered the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church armed with of a zeal for the truth of the Reformed faith as he saw it and a self-confidence unabated by anything that had gone before. He would prove his mettle in a controversy over a flag in his first pastorate. This may seem a relatively minor matter from our perspective, but the tensions of those days were so intense that Hoeksema bought a gun to defend himself.

It is not my intention in this chapter to outline a whole theological taxonomy for Hoeksema. I merely wish to investigate those events, including his development of a distinct theological methodology, which occupied Hoeksema's energies at this point in his career. These themes are, to my mind, essential to a proper understanding of the mature Hoeksema to come. In this regard I have drawn heavily on the writing he did for *The Banner*, the denominational organ of the Christian Reformed Church, as it is here that we get a first hand glimpse of Hoeksema as he comes into his own.

#### *3.1 The First Pastorate*

Herman Hoeksema's first pastoral charge at the Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan—the largest Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan—began in a downright stormy manner, but, as I said in a previous

chapter, he insisted he was ‘going to wash his own hogs’ (Hoeksema 1969:67). The congregation, it appears, was of a divided mind and therefore not as ‘Reformed’ as the young pastor would have liked. Hence, Hoeksema’s constant references to ‘predestination’ and ‘election and reprobation’ in his sermons, Sunday after Sunday, grated on some of his hearers (Hoeksema 1969:69). What Gertrude Hoeksema refers to as the ‘liberal element’ (Hoeksema 1969:73) began to agitate against the proclivities of their new pastor; going so far as to seek affiliation with a local Presbyterian church. As unrest began to seize the church, a frightened parishioner came to Hoeksema after having ‘heard that the liberal element were actively conniving with the Presbyterian Church and were working to leave the denomination and to take the property with them’ (Hoeksema 1969:73). Nonplussed, Hoeksema responded to his worried charge, saying: ‘you are like the doctor who gives his patient a dose of castor oil and then gets scared when it begins to work. Now a *good* doctor will give him one more dose. That’s what the congregation will get next Sunday morning’ (Hoeksema 1969:73). The next Sunday, with a preparatory sermon scheduled, Hoeksema chose Galatians 5:7-10 as his text:

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion *cometh* not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. (Bible 1983:1214.)

Believing full well that the trouble was doctrinal and that another dose of spiritual ‘caster oil’ was needed, Hoeksema ended his preparatory sermon with a stinging three-point conclusion:

Three things I have to say, and I hope to be so plain that misunderstanding is impossible. In the first place, to the troublers, and by them I mean those that oppose the official truth of their own church, and those that have gone to the length of working for another congregation, while still belonging to the church, I

have this word. This week you stand before two alternatives: Repent and submit and come to the Supper of the Lord. That is your duty. Even now I maintain that the Supper must remain the standard in the congregation. Or, if this is impossible, there is but one thing left: Leave the church, for your own sake, and for the sake of the congregation, as soon as possible, for the truth of the church stands or falls not with number, but with the truth of the Word of God. In the second place, to the congregation as a whole, this warning: Be not led astray by troublers, whoever they be. The Lord shall judge them. And finally, let the coming Supper be the means to remove all the envy and the hatred from your hearts, so that again we may manifest our unity in Christ Jesus to His glory on the basis of the truth. That truth shall stand; that truth shall conquer. And all else, all personal pride and vain glory the Lord shall judge. Standing on that truth you may be of good cheer, for the everlasting Lord of His church has promised us the victory. Amen. (Hoeksema 1969:77.)

Upon hearing this, the ‘liberal element’ had had enough. Several of them went so far as to voice their intention to leave the church. In the end, it appears the number exiting was comparatively small. This sermon, and its effects, writes Gertrude Hoeksema, were ‘the turning point of Pastor Hoeksema’s ministry in Holland. After that the congregation flourished’ (Hoeksema 1969:77). Hoeksema consistently and steadfastly preached the Reformed faith, as he saw it. He set the parameters of this faith for his sheep very carefully, and any who did not agree with his staunch confessionalism were simply ‘un-Reformed.’ Of this, Hoeksema was sure.

### *3.2 Reformed and Nationalistic*

During Herman Hoeksema’s pastorate at the Fourteenth Street Church, World War I broke out in Europe. ‘Suddenly,’ writes Gertrude Hoeksema, ‘World War I and its propaganda and patriotism was upon them’ (Hoeksema 1969:81). Everyone, with a renewed sense of love of country, was waving the American Flag. It was also on display in most of the churches at the time, but not in Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed

Church. On the morning of 10 February 1918, however, ‘a flag appeared there before the service’ (Hoeksema 1969:81). Seeing the flag, Hoeksema asked the elders to see that it was removed before the evening service, and it was. For Hoeksema, this rather innocuous act proved to be the opening of a proverbial ‘can of worms.’ Three days later, on a Wednesday, the Holland *Daily Sentinel* carried this rather minor occurrence on the front page. The article said in part:

Rev. H. Hoeksema, pastor of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Christian Reformed Church, believes that the American flag has no place in a church and that the national anthem should not be sung there. He told a committee so yesterday afternoon when they called on him to discuss statements he was rumored to have made in a sermon preached last Sunday.... He gave the following statement for publication to one of the members of the committee, explaining his reasons for saying what he did in his sermon: “The church as an institution as the manifestation of Christ’s body on earth is universal in character; hence that church as an institution cannot raise the national flag nor sing the national hymns. As Christian citizens the members of the church, however, are in duty bound to be loyal to their country, to go when their country calls, in obedience to the government. But the flags should be raised from the home, on the streets, and on all public and Christian school buildings. Anyone who is pro-German in our time has no right to the name of Calvinist and is a rebel and a traitor to his government.” (Hoeksema 1969:81-82.)

A certain Reverend Cheff responded to Hoeksema’s contentions on the first page of the *Sentinel*. ‘I do not care to argue the theological contentions advanced (i.e., Hoeksema’s interpretation-PB),’ he wrote, ‘I fail to see the slightest connection’ (Hoeksema 1969:82). Also responding in the *Sentinel*, G. J. Diekema, the President of Hope College, said that ‘if at this crisis we spend our time in theological hair-splitting instead of patriotic devotion we are near to treason’ (Hoeksema 1969:83). Unlike Hoeksema, Diekema ‘cast the war in sacred, apocalyptic terms.’ He believed that ‘in this final conflict between freedom and tyranny, God was using the United States to “give birth to the universal brotherhood of man and ... usher in the promised reign of the Prince of Peace.”’ Additionally, Diekema contended that “the flag stands for all that is pure and noble and

good” [and] that the cause of Christ and country were the same’ (Bratt 1984:88). According to James Bratt, ‘Hoeksema, the resident champion of Antithetical Calvinism, responded by turning to Calvinism, the Constitution, and personal insult. Since Cheff and Diekema appeared to be incapable of sound thinking, he declared, a constructive discussion was impossible; he would have to content himself with showing that “it is very well possible to be fully as loyal and truly patriotic as those that make it their business to advertise their patriotism at every opportunity”’ (Bratt 1984:88).

While Bratt has much that is good to say on the subject, my own opinion is that Hoeksema, as evidenced in the front page article in Holland *Daily Sentinel*, put forward a more thorough theologically based interpretation of the events surrounding the removal of the flag from his church than that of his detractors. For Hoeksema, a Reformed believer may be, and even must be both a good nationalist and a good Calvinist, but that nationalism must not be confused with the eternal Kingdom of God, especially where it concerns the church. These two must stand separately, therefore, if they are to stand at all. For Diekema, this reasoning would be considered mere ‘theological hair-splitting,’ because, for him, both the temporal duties associated with nationalism and the eternal obligations of a Reformed believer seem to run together. Methodologically, while Diekema just proposed a convenient label for those who disagreed with what he considered the proper behavioral response to the ‘crisis’ at hand, Hoeksema sought to discover any theological principles that might apply in the situation and thus dictate a proper behavioral approach. Hoeksema, throughout his career, always seemed to use this same method regardless of the circumstances. In his response to Diekema, Hoeksema stressed that, ‘the church is not a building but the church is the people of God as a whole,

united in Christ as their head as members of His body. And when the people as such do not meet in the church building, there is no church there. ...[Hence] the church as such never raises a flag' (Hoeksema 1969:86-87).

It would seem that Hoeksema also derived some of his ideas on the relationship of the church to the state from his mentor in seminary, Professor F. M. ten Hoor. In the course of refuting the idea that Ten Hoor saw the church and state as antagonists, Cornelius Pronk states:

Ten Hoor ... believed that the church should be completely free from state control or influence, for only then could it be a true New Testament church and be part of an international, spiritual community of believers, governed solely by its King and Head, Jesus Christ. Against those who accused him of dualism, Ten Hoor was careful to point out that this charge was false because he did not say that church and state are antagonists, but rather that they stand independently alongside one another and that each had their own, distinctive terrain which should never be mixed. (Pronk 1987:123-124.)

The way this concept worked out practically, according to Ten Hoor, was that the methods of the world, 'political methods and tactics,' have no place in the Church of Christ (Pronk 1987:122). Conversely, 'the church should never seek to impose its will upon the state in an effort to turn it into a Christian state or society' (Pronk 1987:122). These same themes will be encountered again when Hoeksema begins to write for *The Banner*, but there it will be Kuyper's 'cultural mandate' that will bear the brunt of his scrutiny.

The *Daily Sentinel* continued to satirize and slander Hoeksema over the flag incident (Hoeksema 1969:88). However, during the greater part of this time of satirization and slander Hoeksema was on a trip to Iowa, where he preached for a missionary conference. While there, a minister in a nearby town refused to display the flag during worship for much the same reason as Hoeksema. His church became the

object of clandestine extremism; it was burned to the ground (Hoeksema 1969:89). With the increased emotionalism and extremism of the time, duly illustrated by the burning of the nearby church, Hoeksema thought his life might be in jeopardy. According to James Bratt, ‘Hoeksema reacted with an interesting display of his own Americanization. He took to carrying a pistol and, walking home one dark night in Holland, actually threatened to use it upon some would-be assailants’ (Bratt 1984:88-89). Although Hoeksema never actually had cause to fire on anyone, his son told me that years later he did fire it down a laundry shoot to make noise for a family celebration on the Fourth of July (Hoeksema 2001). The controversy over the flag ended as abruptly as it began. The armistice of 1918 brought the emotionalism and extremism of the war years to an end.

### *3.3 Growth and Development*

During his four and one half years at Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church (Hoeksema 1969:107), Hoeksema’s fame as a preacher began to grow. So much, in fact, had his reputation as a preacher spread that, in the time that he was eligible for a ministerial call while in Holland, he received nineteen such calls (Hoeksema 1969:77). ‘Hoeksema was, throughout his life, a great preacher,’ recalled Cornelius Van Til, late Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Van Til remembers when he was young, as

a Calvin College student [that he] sat spellbound, listening to the young preacher who had just come to Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The preacher had the physique of a blacksmith and the mien of a Napoleon. But his name was Herman Hoeksema. With flaming eyes and resonant voice the preacher said: “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof

is as the flower of the field ... but the Word of our God shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:6-8). (Van Til 1968:83.)

In addition to the mechanics and oratory of his preaching, it was during this period that Hoeksema also began to refine its content. As part of this refinement, he began to reconsider theological positions held by the Christian Reformed Church in what he saw as a more critical, and biblical light.

‘The Christian Reformed Church after 1890 began seriously to reflect upon its place and future in the American world,’ writes Henry Zwaanstra. ‘Not only did the church become more conscious of its surroundings, it also became more self-consciously Reformed and more articulate in expressing the implications of its faith in a new environment’ (Zwaanstra 1973:25). The implications of its faith came to be called its ‘world and life view,’ a concept that could be traced to the Netherlands and Abraham Kuyper (Heslam 1998). Actually, it could more accurately be traced to Princeton Theological Seminary and the Stone Lectures for 1898, which Kuyper delivered there with such distinction (Kuyper 1931). Kuyper’s theological concepts, however, were not new to Hoeksema; he grew up with them (Hoeksema 1969:15-33).

Although in many ways insignificant, the 1918 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church appointed Herman Hoeksema to write an editorial column ‘Our Doctrine’ for the denominational magazine, *The Banner*. In a sense, this was a real coup for one who was only three years out of seminary. In its pages, from 1918-1922, Hoeksema would grapple with a number of subjects both mundane and controversial. More importantly, however, this new found opportunity allowed him to speak to the common people of the denomination; people for whom *The Banner* may very well have been their only source of information, both in and out of the church. These editorials, like the student papers that

preceded them, continually disclose as much about the author, as the subject on which he was writing. His method, however, appears to be of special significance, because of both its apparent simplicity and the external motivations it betrays. It is in these pages that we witness first hand the flowering of Herman Hoeksema's theological thought and, based on what has gone before, a flowering in somewhat unexpected directions.

### 3.4 *Our Doctrine*

Beginning the editorship of his new rubric on 5 September 1918, Hoeksema announced that his first series of articles would touch on the Kingdom of God. That is to say, he starts with a serious but subtle attack on the Kuyparian *Pro Rege* mentality, beginning as he does with issues relating to the kingdom. Hence, instead of sphere sovereignty, the covenant of friendship becomes the theme, where God is the sole source of strength. Flowing naturally from this covenant of friendship is the principle of the antithesis, a principle primary to his *Afscheiding* background. In this endeavor he is successful. He speaks to the hearts of the people in a way others could not. He naïveté, however, was in his assumption that he could spell things out and people would immediately see the logic of his position and follow him. Although, according to Reverend Woudenberg, Calvin College's long time professor of philosophy William Harry Jellema, stated categorically that by 1924 the denomination as a whole agreed with Hoeksema. Still, in 1918, Hoeksema, in his new position as editor, set out to develop his concept of the kingdom from both a positive and an antithetical point of view, but he could not resist a good fight.

Whether Hoeksema had considered the vastness of his theme at the outset is doubtful. Knowing Hoeksema, he would have told his readers if he had. The first glimpse he gives his readers of his own personality, his own motivations if you will, comes like a blinding flash in the course of a charge, a reprimand even, which he gives to his readers in the opening paragraphs. He writes:

When I am preaching I like to have an audience. I hate empty pews. And when the church is well-filled I like to see the audience attentive. I dislike to see people sail off to sleep when I am preaching. Perhaps it's my pride, but I confess, that I am very sensitive in this respect. And the same is true in regard to the articles I must write for *The Banner*. I write, of course, because the Synod thought fit, that since I was successor of Rev. P. A. Hoekstra as pastor of my present charge, I should also follow him in being editor of the department, "Our Doctrine" in *The Banner*. So I accepted the appointment, and I am about to assume the responsibilities connected with this new kind of work. I will write. But I want you to read my articles. I will appreciate it very much, indeed, if you do read them. In fact, if you just omit them, I would feel greatly obliged if you would just drop me a card, informing me of your absolute lack of interest. If all of you should feel that same way about my articles, and if you would inform me about your attitude, it would have the same effect upon me as a church running empty while I was preaching. Just as in that case I would stop preaching, so in this case I would immediately discontinue writing. Hence, please, read or let me know that you don't. (*The Banner* 1918:632.)

Typically Hoeksema, in a tone bordering on arrogance but with a genuine concern for his readers and their habits, he proceeds to accept the appointment, all the while alternating between humbly confessing to a certain inability and proclaiming a sense of superior purpose emboldened by a general spiritual malaise which he sees all around him (*The Banner* 1918:632-633). In short, in the first article he seems to say that: I accept this position because only I can do it justice, and as such, I expect you dear reader to read it.

While Hoeksema's motivation is somewhat obvious, his method is decidedly less so. It is, however, as far as understanding Hoeksema is concerned, of no less importance. During his seminary years, the theological concepts that seemed to captivate Hoeksema's

sensibilities the most were the covenant and the fine distinctions involved in the perennial debate over infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism. I believe it is these same themes that dominate his methodology in his *Banner* articles, at least until such time as he becomes irrevocably entangled in the Janssen affair.

Hoeksema's covenant view, as discussed earlier, was developed primarily in reaction to the view of the covenant espoused by one of his professors at seminary, William Heyns. Hoeksema, in reaction to Heyns, and even at times to Ten Hoor, conceived of the covenant as a relationship with God, controlled, in turn, entirely by God's sovereign decree of election. Additionally, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, Hoeksema did not see the covenant as a means to an end; rather it was an end in itself. In fact, the covenant, God's relationship of friendship and love with those whom He had chosen from before the foundation of the world, i.e. election, was, for Hoeksema, the highest goal of the Christian faith. It is no wonder then that, from the beginning in 1918, he chose to write his offerings in *The Banner* from the perspective of the covenant. However, in Hoeksema's hands, this covenant perspective was to take on a still more refined approach. And, it is in the furtherance of this more refined approach that infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism are taken from their abstract abode and put to use as a working methodology. In order to understand fully Hoeksema's method in his *Banner* articles, a brief look at the finer points of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism and how Hoeksema exploited the tension between these two abstract constructs to form a working methodology, is in order.

### 3.5 Origins of a Methodology

In the Reformed tradition, infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism have been rather technical terms referring specifically to the sequence of the eternal decrees of God, not eternity and history as Hoeksema later worked them out to do. Hence, I think it appropriate to take a look at the traditional understanding before proceeding to how others have ‘developed’ these concepts. Heinrich Heppe, in his classic *Reformed Dogmatics*, has this to say regarding the differences between infra and supralapsarianism:

In this sense the *ordo salutis* is expounded by the prevailing Church doctrine in the infralapsarian sense. The contrast between the supralapsarian and the sublapsarian basis is clearly and skillfully set forth by Riissen VI, 20, 23: “Although in the decrees regarding formally and *a parte Dei* no order can properly be expected, because they are *an actus unicus et simplicissimus*, there is nothing to prevent the institution of some order in them, considered objectively and from our side according to our mode of conceiving. —As to what order they are to be arranged in for the purposes of comparison, there is no unanimous finding. Those who ascend *supra lapsum* (above the Fall) or above creation to constitute the decree of predestination are of the opinion that the decrees must be so arranged, that they place the decree of predestination before the decree of creation and of permission to lapse, and God is conceived as having first thought of manifesting His glory in the exercise of mercy and righteousness in the salvation or damnation of men, before He thought of creating man or permitting his fall; so that creation and permission to fall are of the nature of a means for revealing His mercy and righteousness. Thus the first decree about men concerns the manifestation of God’s glory in the exercise of mercy and righteousness by the salvation and damnation of men; the second concerns creation; the third, permission to lapse; the fourth, the sending of Christ for the salvation of those whom He had decreed to save.” (Heppe 1950:146-147.)

While the words infralapsarian and supralapsarian may be attributable to the Remonstrants (González 1987:279-282, Bangs 1971:67-68), and while it was the controversy between Arminius and Junius over these two concepts that brought the ideas of infra and supralapsarianism into the mainstream of Reformed thought, the ideas themselves and the tension between them as polar opposites was felt long before the Reformation. As historical theologian Richard Muller writes, ‘This problem of the

relation of the eternal decree (whether providence or predestination) to its execution in time is, moreover, one of the problems of medieval theology that was profoundly felt by the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (Muller 1991:250). Without any reference to medieval theology, Carl Bangs, in his monumental study of Arminius, seeks to demonstrate that the conceptual origin of these two constructs lies in the 'high Calvinism' of Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva (Bangs 1971:68). For Bangs, it was Beza's 'extreme' views on predestination and providence, and their primacy with regard to the eternal disposition of humanity, that brought the problem to the fore that both supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism have sought to answer (Bangs 1971:68-69). While Bangs makes some important points, I do not think he does justice to the subtleties of Beza's position. The understanding of the order of God's decrees and their outworking in history was never so cut and dry for Beza as his critics would have us believe. In fact, Beza, while believing firmly in the decree of God's predestination, never loses sight of the historical. On his approach to this matter, He writes:

Likewise, they will discuss this mystery wisely when they use some clear pattern of sound words, as well as the most convenient method for teaching, admonishing, and comforting. In his epistles the Apostle Paul sets down two ways of doing this: the synthetic and the analytic. Here we call "synthetic" the method that is a priori, or that descends from causes to effects, which the Apostle Paul uses in the epistle to the Ephesians. Having explained to us there the ground of the spiritual blessings that we receive from God through Christ, he treats election and its causes before he comes down to its fruits or effects. These effects are the external calling by the Gospel, internal drawing by the Spirit of adoption, and justification, sanctification, and other similar evidences that confirm our election in us. Furthermore, we call "analytic" the method that is a posteriori, or that ascends from effects to causes, which the same apostle uses in the epistle to the Romans. He discourses at length and extensively on justification by faith, on hope, and its fruits, and then ascends finally to predestination itself, which comprehends in itself the supreme principle of our hope and our justification by faith. From all these things it is apparent that the chief end of the former method (the "synthetic") is knowledge; but the chief end of the latter (the "analytic") is

consolation and confirmation in faith, hope, patience, and the rest of the Christian virtues. (Beza 1982:419-420.)

According to Beza, the Scriptures present two viewpoints on the matter and both are found in the ‘Apostle Paul’ who deals with election and predestination from two completely different perspectives. The Epistle to the Ephesians takes an ‘a priori’ perspective, starting with election and proceeding to the fall. Conversely, the Epistle to the Romans starts with the fall, only to arrive at election via an ‘a posteriori’ path in chapter nine. Beza is emphatic that both of these perspectives have value: the ‘a priori’ approach is good for instruction while the ‘a posteriori’ approach is better in such areas as pastoral counseling and personal work.

Herman Bavinck follows closely Beza’s exposition of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism, even appropriating much of the language. Beza’s distinction between ‘a priori’ and ‘a posteriori,’ and his designations of ‘analytic’ and ‘synthetic,’ in regard to method, figure largely in Bavinck’s account of God’s decrees as well. ‘Whether predestination is made part of the doctrine of God (the a priori order),’ Bavinck concludes after careful consideration, ‘or is treated at the beginning or in the middle of the doctrine of salvation (the a posteriori order) does not necessarily imply an essential difference in principle’ (Bavinck 1977:358). Again, following Beza’s lead, Bavinck proceeds to discuss both the similarities and the tensions involved in the understanding of the analytic method versus the synthetic method and the possibilities and difficulties involved in using either as a working methodology. Bavinck writes:

the real reason for [the] difference is the fact that for the Reformed the doctrine of predestination has not merely an anthropological and soteriological but especially a theological significance. God’s glory, not man’s salvation, is considered the chief purpose of predestination. Also the synthetic, a priori order is rooted in a deeply religious motive. Hence, the assertion that this order of treatment

presupposes a nominalistic conception of the Deity and that it offers a dry and lifeless dogma lacks every ground. The doctrine of predestination can be treated in a dry and abstract manner in the middle as well as at the beginning of dogmatics. To be sure, a true and saving faith is the prerequisite for the confession of the doctrine of election, but this is also required with respect to all other doctrines, e.g., the doctrine of God, the trinity, man. If this consideration is allowed to decide the issue, every dogma would have to follow the doctrine of salvation. But in dogmatics we do not discuss the truth as it subjectively enters the consciousness of the believer but as God has objectively revealed it in his Word. The synthetic method alone is able to do justice to the glorification of God, as a religious interest. (Bavinck 1977: 358-359.)

Elsewhere, speaking specifically of those who claim to hold the ‘synthetic’ or supralapsarian position, Bavinck argues that, in reality, both the supra and infra positions are little more than perspectives which alternate depending upon the nature of the inquiry (Bavinck 1977:363). That is to say, for Bavinck, no one holds to either the supralapsarian or the infralapsarian position exclusively. These, in fact, are not positions that any sensitive theologian can hold to be mutually exclusive. For Bavinck, as for Beza before him, these are perspectives, constructs, or models by which to understand God eternal decrees and their outworking in time.

Around the same time as Bavinck, Dr. K. Dijk of the Gereformeerde Kerk in ‘s-Gravenhage, in the Netherlands, also scrutinized the issues surrounding the infralapsarian and supralapsarian positions, with much the same result. In his analysis, Dijk seems to twist Bavinck around. He is markedly clearer than Bavinck in his analysis, but he also drops the language inherited from the Reformation which makes up so much of Bavinck’s case. Writing on the tension inherent in the two positions, and, at the same time, seeing the unity which they seem to demand, Dijk concludes:

All efforts to reconcile these two opinions have given no single final solution, except to see that there is no principal contradiction between Infra and Supralapsarianism. Also, regardless of one’s assumptions, none can eliminate considering the truth of the other; that is, there is no Supralapsarian that does not

make use of Infralapsarian terminology, and there is no Infralapsarian who does not retain some of the Supralapsarian presentation. (Dijk 1912:50.)

Even with the more conciliatory approach to these two constructs issuing from the Netherlands, closer to home, F. M. ten Hoor seems rather to have developed his own position in response to the strong supralapsarianism of Abraham Kuyper. In a sense, simply to give Kuyper a supralapsarian label and leave it at that is misleading. Kuyper really must be considered together with his ‘cultural mandate,’ in which he sought the development of history theoretically. Kuyper wanted to be supralapsarian in his theology, but he also wanted to maintain God’s value within the infralapsarian paradigm. In fact, the irony of Kuyper was that he did not want to give up the value system. In contrast to Kuyper and with an obvious preference for legal terminology, Ten Hoor gives a strong defense of supralapsarianism (Ten Hoor [s.a.]: 118-119), only to conclude that although ‘man appears in the covenant of grace as elect sinner...with the Reformed (Gereformeerden), the conception of the covenant of grace was infralapsarian’ (Ten Hoor [s.a.]: 123). This would appear, on the part of Ten Hoor, to be rather careful anti-Kuyper reasoning, with a tendency towards infralapsarianism, but with a recognition of the place of election more characteristic of supralapsarianism. Giving what appears, on the surface at least, to be a defense of supralapsarianism, but ultimately confirming his preference for the infralapsarian position, Ten Hoor writes:

As to our willing and actions we cannot take God’s secret or hidden counsel or decree as a starting point, likewise we cannot use it as such for our knowing and our thinking either. All knowledge, which in this dispensation is possible for us, God has revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. We know about God’s decree only those things which the Holy Scriptures teach us about it. However, even from this revealed doctrine of election we may not deduce a teaching of the covenant through abstract thinking, and then make the truths, which have been revealed concerning the covenant in the Holy Scriptures, have a cut and dry fit for that teaching. The doctrine of election and the doctrine of the covenant must be

understood as they have been revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, even when the consequences of this is that the relationship between the two cannot be completely understood. (Ten Hoor [s.a.]: 120.)

The significance of all this investigation into these two constructs, infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism, is, to my mind, to preserve two ideas which, if either were held in isolation, would divorce the abstract from the historical. That is to say, infralapsarianism wants to stay close to the historical account as it is laid out in the Bible. Accordingly, it wants to be concerned with the responsibility of mankind, and to deal with God as one who interacts intimately with us. Supralapsarianism, on the other hand, desires to understand the value system of God by understanding the logical order of importance of his decrees. Hoeksema believed that both should be concerned with this order of importance, however, he saw infralapsarianism as not really wanting to get into the decrees of God, but wanting to deal solely with history. The problem with this approach is that once you focus exclusively on the temporal order, the value system becomes very subjective. Hoeksema was determined to find a middle way; to steer between, if you will, the Scylla of supralapsarianism and the Charybdis of infralapsarianism.

In a more recent offering entitled ‘Herman Hoeksema’s Theological Method,’ David McWilliams acknowledges Herman Hoeksema’s quest for a middle way and, at the same time, excoriates him for searching for it. Writing with respect to Hoeksema’s understanding of the Doctrine of Reprobation, McWilliams comments:

It is one thing to acknowledge that God’s work is an organic whole; it is another to think that we can penetrate it. Does not Hoeksema come dangerously close to this when he admits that the Scripture is *infra* in its order of events, but insists, nonetheless, that what is ultimately in history is first in God’s counsel? Moreover, this highly speculative tendency is clearly discernable in Hoeksema’s quest to understand the relationship between God’s counsel and reprobation. (McWilliams 2000:99.)

Several pages later, using a rhetorical question, McWilliams warns: ‘must we not assume that we can penetrate the divine decree and that, furthermore, we can fully understand what God’s ultimate plan is for the universe He has created?’ (McWilliams 2000:117). Much of what McWilliams writes concerning Hoeksema’s understanding of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism reflects not so much on Hoeksema’s conclusions as such, but that he had the audacity to search for conclusions to these matters at all.

In a section of his conclusion subtitled ‘The Place of Mystery,’ after quoting a section from Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics* on the darkened understanding of man in his fallen, sinful state (Hoeksema 1966:283), McWilliams frankly admits:

An analysis of Hoeksema’s thought indicates that he would have done well to develop more fully this concept of mystery. As it is he tips his hat to it, recognizes the truth of it, but rarely will his penchant for grasping the organic nature of things permit him to say that there comes a point beyond which we simply cannot conceptualize since the data is not provided for us. This passing reference to mystery never becomes constitutive in his thinking. (McWilliams 2000:116.)

While McWilliams has written a great deal criticizing Hoeksema and the blatant lack of the mysterious in his method, nowhere does McWilliams demonstrate how the successful integration of the idea of mystery into Hoeksema’s method could be accomplished nor, for that matter, what benefit it would have.

### 3.6 Hoeksema’s Own Thoughts on the Subject

Hoeksema understood supralapsarianism to hinge on the primacy of God’s decree of election, and infralapsarianism to be essentially historical in its perspective (*The Banner* 1920:423-424). It was a synthesis, or the exploitation of the tension these two polar opposites provided, that Hoeksema harnessed as his working method. He expressly

wanted to deal with the covenant, or rather covenantally, only within the confines of history. It was this desire to treat the covenant as it unfolded in history that caused him to begin with the topic ‘The Fallen King and His Kingdom.’ Later, mid-1920 to be exact, he changed to ‘The New King and His Kingdom.’ Concerning these two topics and their covenantal significance Hoeksema writes by way of summary:

Historically we found, the matter is thus, that the first king that was ordained, the head and root of the human race arose in rebellion against His rightful sovereign, and that hence he fell. He became the enemy of God, the friend of the devil, and his kingdom became through his fall and rebellion a veritable kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness, the negative line of reprobation, through the history of the world, and we came to the conclusion that along this line we ultimately arrive at the kingdom of anti-Christ, that will exist for a while but will be consumed by the breath of Christ’s mouth. And if we would follow this historical line in speaking of a new king and kingdom, we would not have to refer to creation again. All that would be necessary is to discuss the fact that this fallen kingdom is saved again in Christ Jesus. The kingdom is created under Adam as king. The king and the kingdom fall through his rebellion and sin. That same and entire kingdom is saved in Christ Jesus. Such is the historical line of development. And here we wish to call your attention to the very obvious fact that history is thoroughly *infra*. (*The Banner* 1920:423.)

However, Hoeksema does not stop with this. Rather, he is intent on discussing the relationship between *supralapsarianism* and *infralapsarianism* in his own thinking and its peculiar covenantal application. He writes that:

It cannot be denied that Scripture is obviously *soteriological* in presentation. The redemptive idea, the message of salvation appears emphatically on the foreground. And we do not even hesitate to state, that just because Scripture follows largely the historical line which is *soteriological*, it is far easier to quote texts that favor the *infra*-conception than to appeal to separate texts for the *supra* representation. ...This, however, does not mean that Scripture does not shed the light of God’s eternal counsel over this historical development of the plan of salvation. It does not mean that we are obliged to rest in this historical development and that we may not struggle till we have caught a glimpse of the glory of God as He realizes His eternal counsel in the history of the world. It does by no means imply that the *supra*-view is to be condemned. On the contrary, very often Scripture affords us a glimpse of this higher conception and allows us to see the whole of history in the glorious light of His counsel. ...It is there above all, that the *supra*-light of God’s counsel is abundantly shed upon the *infra*-historical

development of the kingdom of glory! It is in that higher light that we now wish to follow the historical line of development of the New King and His Kingdom. And if we make a study of history in this higher light we will come to the conclusion that it was, indeed, all adapted to the Christ of God and that the stream of history, irresistibly, without turning back to its source for even once, moves onward toward the realization of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to God's eternal counsel. (*The Banner* 1920:423-424.)

Of major significance, to my mind, is the way in which Hoeksema's insistence that we do not start with election and reprobation per se is worked out in *The Banner* articles. Instead, he insists that we must follow the *Heidelberg Catechism* and speak rather of the 'organism' of the church. Hence, 'the purpose of predestination,' Hoeksema contends, 'is the gathering of the church to live in covenant relation with God. ...He elected there to be a church in order to be to the praise of His glory. And reprobation must serve this election' (Hoeksema 1930b). It is then this 'reprobation serving election' that Hoeksema sees as the unfolding of the covenant in time, which, in turn, is the stuff of which history is made. History is then to be defined as God's way of molding people, the primary purpose of which is the salvation of the elect. While giving an equal ultimacy, of sorts, to both election and reprobation goes back to many of the older writers, Hoeksema wants to distance himself from this conception. God, he believes, does not gain pleasure in simply sending people to hell. Reprobation, therefore, does not have equal ultimacy with election. That is to say, Hoeksema consciously departs from the traditional view of supralapsarianism which simply sees election as a way of showing mercy and reprobation justice. Rather, he sees the goal in God's purpose to bring forth a people, a church, with whom He will dwell eternally in a covenant relationship of love. There is then a very distinct relational purpose in God's mind and a goal which goes well beyond the mere boast of His greatness and goodness. For this reason, Hoeksema's 'modified Supra view,'

as he himself calls it in the sermon on Lord's Day 21, begins with the will of God to glorify Himself by creating a creature to share in the covenant of friendship with Him (see Ephesians 1). In this context reprobation takes on more of a temporal connotation, becoming part of the creation along with the fall. That is, in order to realize this covenant relationship, it is God's will that a world would be created in which humanity, including the elect, would fall and need redemption. Part of the means to this end is reprobation. So, reprobation is secondary in nature. And, when speaking of this historical order, *infralapsarianism* is the language used. In fact, most of the Bible is written from this perspective, but from time to time God reminds man that His purpose is higher (Hoeksema 1930b).

It is just this perspective of the higher purpose, God's covenant of friendship as well as its unfolding in history, which was to become Hoeksema's chosen perspective as well. Whereas Kuyper saw election as the basis of the covenant, Hoeksema bases the covenant on faith. Still, following Kuyper, faith is not the ultimate base for Hoeksema, but election which becomes patent by faith. The purpose of God is with the elect in their lives, and in making all things work together for good. The important thing, however, is faith and it is God who gives it. For Hoeksema, you are not in the covenant unless you believe. Thus, if you come to faith you are elect. The covenant, then, is simply the outworking of the relationship of friendship with God in history, which, in turn, is based on election. This view gives to history an essential reality all its own; it is not just another of Plato's shadows on the wall.

An elemental component of this idea of friendship is communication. In the covenant, then, is the beginning of the possibility of honest communication, which, in

turn, is really the very essence of friendship. Christ came as the fulfillment of the covenant and He was the picture of friendliness and kindness and not just to those who were friendly and kind to Him. It is here, however, that the covenant concept broke in Hoeksema's hands. Other than from the pulpit, it is doubtful that Hoeksema ever really understood the idea of communication. He could preach, he could argue, he could debate with the best, but he could not share himself. Maybe this is why, although he wrote much on the covenant as a covenant of friendship, he never expanded to any degree on just what friendship was.

In the course of his pastorate at Fourteenth Street Church, Hoeksema was really intent on picking up where his mentor at seminary, Professor Ten Hoor, had left off, using these concepts to develop a full-blown dogmatics. He was going to show how to answer all the problems Ten Hoor had and, at the same time, avoid Kuyper's idealism. To do this, his intent was to approach the material from a historical point of view, maintaining neither a polemic nor sectarian stance. It was with this mindset that Hoeksema began his writing career on the staff of *The Banner* on 5 September 1918; his first subject being the 'The Kingdom of God.'

### *3.7 The Banner Articles*

For almost four years, from 1918 to 1922, Herman Hoeksema wrote a weekly column under the byline 'Our Doctrine' for *The Banner*. 'Please,' writes Hoeksema at the outset, believing full well that he, as well as all his readers, live in a hopelessly lazy world, characterized by an unhealthy concern for the practical with little room for

doctrine or theory, ‘don’t be frightened by the heading of this department, so that you pass my article by without reading it at all’ (*The Banner* 1918:632). ‘I am different,’ he says, you need to read what I say (*The Banner* 1918:632). Still, maybe because he is a bit older than when he first determined to ‘wash his own hogs,’ Hoeksema seems at times almost conciliatory. ‘We will try to be as constructive as far as possible,’ he writes, ‘and, therefore, with due respect for the views of others who differ from us in principle or in detail, but at the same time fully convinced of the truth of our own view, we hope to write in a constructive manner conclusively, as much as possible’ (*The Banner* 1918:633).

From the beginning, Hoeksema is intent on engaging himself exclusively with the Kingdom, which he sees as the Kingdom of Heaven in terms of the Covenant of Grace (*The Banner* 1918:672-673). That is to say, he aims to show that the whole concept of the Kingdom can be demonstrated from a spiritual point of view. While his intent may have been to lay all this out in a straight line, it is quite obvious that he is feeling his way as he goes. His stated reasons for proceeding from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God are, first, that a fresh approach will generate interest and therefore stimulate readership; second, the Kingdom of God connects with the principle concept of the Reformed Faith, namely, Divine Sovereignty; thirdly, the Kingdom is all-comprehensive which leaves Hoeksema great latitude [fourthly] to combat false views; and lastly, the Kingdom approach connects with the present state of the mind in the times we now experience (*The Banner* 1918:672-673).

The concept of the Kingdom, its essence and its laws, takes on a whole new meaning in Hoeksema’s hands; even his unique understanding of both its organic nature and development is expounded upon at some length. On this he writes:

Once more, let us remember, that God created the world a kingdom, and that means, too, that He has sovereignly ordained all His ordinances and laws for every creature. When He created the world, He did not make a chaotic mass of objects, thrown together in a haphazard manner, without any relation between them. He did not make sun, moon and stars, seas and rivers and lakes, trees and flowers, man and beast, as separate objects in order to let them determine their own relation to one another and to their God. No, God also created their relations. God did not make chaos but kosmos, harmony, a kingdom. To every one of His creatures God has assigned its place in relation to all the rest. And that relation of every creature to all the rest, and of the whole to Creator, is the law of the creature. The sun cannot wander through space at random, but must travel a certain path, in relation to the earth, and all the planets are controlled likewise, by what we call the law of gravity. The tree must be planted in the soil, the flower must bathe in the light of the sun, the fish must find its life in the water, the bird must fly in the air. The tree cannot walk over the face of the earth, the fish cannot exist on dry land, the bird cannot swim in the water. There is a definite relation, a definite place assigned to every creature, and that definite place is its law. And together these creatures, standing each in its place as assigned by the Almighty, form one beautiful whole, one grand kosmos, the world, the Kingdom of God. But this is also true for man. God assigned him a place. True, there is a difference between man and the rest of the world, for the simple reason that man is conscious of the law of God, is a rational and moral creature that must keep his place freely, from voluntary obedience. But this does not alter the fact, that also to man God has assigned his place, given His own law. And that place of man was that he should be the king-servant. Have dominion over all things and love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his mind and with all his soul and with all his strength. That was God's law for man. In the second place we must also understand that the law which God set for every creature was entirely in harmony with the very nature and being of that creature. It is not so, that God made creatures of a certain type and character, and that He assigned to them a place and gave them a law that was in disharmony with their being; but so that in the case of every creature there is harmony between his being and the law of God. The law of the fish, to live in the water, is in harmony with the being of the fish; the law of the tree is in harmony with the essence of the tree. And so it is with all of creation. So it is also with the law of God with respect to man. The law was adapted to man and man to the law. There was harmony. And this implies at the same time, that the creature can be happy only so long as he remains in harmony with the law, only so long as he retains the place and the relation assigned him by God. As soon as he transgresses, trespasses the boundary of the law, he is doomed to destruction. Pull the fish out of the water, and its death is certain. Uproot a tree and it must wither. Imagine that the sun would leave its path, destruction would be the result. The law of God is the happiness of the creature, transgression of the law is his death. And the same truth holds also for man. God has also assigned to him the sphere in which he could live and prosper. That sphere was the love of God. Transgression of the boundary of that sphere must be his death. (*The Banner* 1918:765-766.)

Having laid the foundation for the Kingdom as he envisioned it, Hoeksema proceeds to look at fallen humanity from the perspective of the unfolding of the covenant and the organic development of sin in its historical context. In discussing the latter, Hoeksema makes a sharp distinction between Kuyper's concept of 'common grace' that entered the world to keep it from destruction after the fall and his own burgeoning view of grace, which he refers to simply as 'special grace.' Hoeksema argues that it is because God must be all in all 'that humanity is not destroyed from the start, that it must have a history, that it is allowed to develop. The principle of special grace, however, injected into the human organism from the start and saving it as such, does not save all the branches of the tree. It saves only the elect' (*The Banner* 1918:789). With one stroke of the pen Kuyper's concept of common grace, one that entered the world after the fall to save humanity and thus make room for the preservation of the 'cultural mandate,' is summarily swept away. But, Hoeksema goes further still. Humanity after the fall, he believes, has no God ordained dominion of any kind, whatsoever. The only one who has dominion over the creation is the devil with fallen man under him as king, a situation which, according to Hoeksema, 'will reach its highest manifestation in the dominion of Antichrist' (*The Banner* 1918:789). 'And it is under the influence of this so-called common grace of the Almighty that the world is allowed to exist,' writes Hoeksema by way of summary, 'that sin only slowly develops itself, that the kingdom of darkness receives a chance to manifest its full strength and reveal all the hatred of rebellion against the Most High' (*The Banner* 1918:789). In contrast to Abraham Kuyper, Hoeksema insists:

Never must we stretch the doctrine of common grace till we speak of two kinds of grace. There is only one kind of grace, and that one kind of grace is special grace, and thru that special grace all the world, with man as king, is to be saved. It saves

humanity, but it also saves the world as kingdom. But there are two kinds of people in Adam, separated thru the injection of special grace into the human organism. They are the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the elect and the reprobate, the children of obedience and the children of disobedience. Outwardly, all the children of the serpent share in the blessings of grace. Also they develop, also they have a history, also they develop their kingdom under Satan. But inwardly, even these outward blessings of grace are a curse to them, for they are totally depraved, and there is no receptivity for the grace of God in their hearts. But the seed of the woman is saved in Jesus Christ. He is their Redeemer and their King, and through His grace they become His willing subjects. (*The Banner* 1918:789.)

From this point on, for almost a year and with few digressions, Hoeksema continued to expound on the genealogical lines of both the elect and the reprobate and their growth and development in history. The lines of the elect always represent the outworking of the covenant of God in time. Whereas, the lines of the reprobate are always referred to in close conjunction with the organic development of sin, always with the latter serving the former. That is, the reprobate are in the world, in space and time, for the benefit of the elect. They serve the unfolding of the covenant in time. And while many times this service meant persecution or tribulation for the elect, it is still service because it is accomplishing ends that are predetermined by a sovereign God for His beloved.

### *3.8 The Bultema Case*

Also known as the “Maranatha Case,” from the name of the book in which the condemned views were propagated’ (Kromminga 1949:72-73), this seemingly minor disturbance occasioned by the dissemination of premillennial eschatological views more commonly held in Fundamentalist circles (Bratt 1984:96), struck many as really more of a tempest in a teapot, than the full-blown crisis others try to make of it. While the book,

written by Reverend Harry Bultema, the relatively obscure pastor of First Church (Christian Reformed) in Muskegon, Michigan, was published in 1917, thus making full eschatological use of the war to end all wars, the ecclesiastical machinery took until the following year to take both the book and its author to task. According to James Bratt:

The CRC Synod of 1918 found time between its patriotic singing and resolutions to declare his [Bultema's-PB] statements on the two contested points ['the unity of the Church in all dispensations and the Kingship of Christ' (Kromminga 1949:73)] to be in conflict with the Confessions and directed his consistory to admonish him properly. But the Synodical committee acted so tactlessly that Bultema, most of his congregation, and scattered sympathizers left the denomination. (Bratt 1984:97-98.)

It seems that Hoeksema entered the fray purely by coincidence, yet his deliberations on a proper disposition of the matter proved to be decisive. The Synod of 1918, the same one that appointed Herman Hoeksema to his weekly rubric in *The Banner*, also appointed him to a special committee to review the details of the Bultema Case and to make the appropriate recommendations (Hoeksema 1969:93). According to Gertrude Hoeksema:

During the committee's discussion sessions, some members found it hard to produce Scriptural and Confessional proof that Rev. Bultema was in error. The committee agreed that the confessions did not, in so many words, denounce Rev. Bultema's premillennarian views. But Hoeksema showed the committee that Rev. Bultema was questioning the Kingship of Christ over His whole church. ...After the committee recognized the nature of Bultema's error to be what Hoeksema had said it was, they refuted it with ample Scriptural and Confessional proof, to the satisfaction of the Synod, which adopted the report. (Hoeksema 1969:93-94.)

Since Hoeksema wrote the report on Bultema's views that Synod later adopted (Hoeksema 1969:93), he was, therefore, a major factor in Bultema's departure from the Christian Reformed Church.

Hoeksema's own opinion was that premillennialism was false doctrine. 'Accept the doctrine of the covenant,' he wrote, 'and Premillennialism becomes an impossibility' (*The Banner* 1918:844). While he recognized Fundamentalism in general and especially

its premillennial eschatological orientation to be ‘one of the most powerful and influential currents in the Christian world of today’ (*The Banner* 1918:844), it was just this influence that he saw as so dangerous. Hoeksema contended that:

Premillennialists have an entirely different view of history than the Reformed people. They cut the thread that runs through all history both of the old and new dispensation. They cannot admit that essentially there is but one people of God, and that one people of God the covenant people, of whom Christ is the Head and King forever. They have no conception of the continuity of the covenant of grace, of the gradual process of its development and revelation, and for that reason they have no eye for the organic unity of Scripture and cannot admit that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. (*The Banner* 1918:844.)

I think Hoeksema’s method is particularly well illustrated in his criticism of those who hold premillennial ideas. While God’s value system, the supralapsarian viewpoint is represented, Hoeksema’s concern is with the outworking of that value, the unfolding of the covenant in time, the infralapsarian perspective. History, therefore, is writ large in his criticism. His concern is not that premillennialists fail to give proper emphasis to election, but that by their hermeneutics they misunderstand history and its natural, organic development. I think this criticism is telling, especially considering Hoeksema’s overarching view of the covenant and its historical continuity and development. In this regard, Hoeksema, while continuing his criticism of premillennialism, continued to develop and present his own insights from a distinctly covenantal perspective. On this he wrote:

Of course, if the truly Reformed covenant idea is grasped at all there is no danger of ever embracing this premillennial view of history. The former stands for the continuity of history, the gradual development of God’s plan and the idea of progress in the Revelation of God to man. There is but one covenant essentially, and that one covenant is the covenant of grace established with the people of God in Christ Jesus, but that one covenant passes through various stages of Revelation till at last in the days of the new dispensation it reaches its highest stage of development and manifestation, because then the head of that covenant and the King of His people has become manifest and actually entered into His heritage

from Jehovah. From this standpoint there is no essential difference between the old and new dispensation, Israel and the Church are essentially one. True, they represent different dispensations but they are dispensations of the same covenant essentially. They have the same God and the same Christ, are members of the same Body and citizens of the same Kingdom, are saved in the same blood and by the same Spirit through the same faith in the same Gospel. They have the same purpose, namely to exist as God's people in the world and show forth the glories of His Name, let their light shine, and ultimately they are all to be gathered under the same Head into the Kingdom of Glory that shall embrace all the works of God. But if a true conception of the truth of the covenant ought to guard us against the strong seductive influence of Pre-millennialism it must also prepare us for battle against a still stronger movement that is in the air today, and which after all is nothing but some form of Post-millennialism.... You ask, how in the world the doctrine of the covenant can draw the lines in this respect? You fail to see what this doctrine has to do with the movement pictured above? Well, then, let me tell you that it is my conviction that at the basis of this entire movement in as far as some of our own people are involved in it, lies an altogether erroneous conception of the relation of "common" and special grace, or if you please, a confusion of ideas with regard to the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace. These must neither be separated or altogether confused, but they must be explained in their true and Scriptural relation to each other. Then and then only can we hope to maintain a clear conception of the kingdom of God and its development in this dispensation. Then and then only will we be in a position to distinguish between the world and the kingdom of God. Then and then only will we be able to appreciate truly the value and the purpose of the different institutions God has ordained on earth in this dispensation. (*The Banner* 1918:844-845.)

It was not until a year or so later, in September 1919, that Hoeksema finally spoke of the Bultema Case by name at all, and this only because 'the act of synod 1918 regarding Maranatha has been called mockingly "an heretic trial"; and has been bitterly denounced as a manifestation of religious intolerance and an act of persecution' (*The Banner* 1919:581). Hoeksema vigorously defended his actions with respect to Bultema, whom he regarded as a purveyor of false doctrine. How this particular label differs from 'heretic' is nowhere addressed. However, he was emphatic that,

one who propagates teachings in disharmony with the Reformed standards is in no wise persecuted or wronged, becomes in no sense of the word a martyr, if he is kindly asked to retract his unreformed teachings or to leave the church. Nor is he in any wise an object of persecution, if refusing to leave the church on his own

account and yet insisting to spread his doctrines he is simply expelled and forced to look for a field of labor elsewhere. (*The Banner* 1919:581.)

The significance of the Bultema Case for Hoeksema was, to my mind, his handling of the affair in print. Both his analysis of the matter for the 1918 Synod and his subsequent writings on premillennialism, including his insightful summary written a year after the fact, scared some people to death. This was a time when, as we have seen, Americanization was beginning to take hold in this once hesitatingly defensive Dutch subculture (Bratt 1984:98). Those who were of a progressive mind could not but bemoan this turn of events. Here was one exhibiting distinctly exclusive tendencies at a time when many, especially those in the vanguard of the Americanization process, were pushing for a more inclusive vision of the church. Hoeksema's handling of Bultema was, to this more inclusive faction, thoroughgoing regression. And, while many who were of this more inclusive mind would never have agreed with Bultema's theological orientation, still there had to be room for this orientation as well. Hoeksema, by his thorough and insightful analysis of the matter and his unflinching desire for doctrinal purity, including the expulsion of any who disagreed, became instantly anathema to those who saw progress elsewhere. In turn, Hoeksema considered these 'progressives' to be pseudo-Calvinists, on whom, according to James Bratt, Hoeksema now 'declared war' (Bratt 1984:102).

One aspect of Hoeksema's 'war' on pseudo-Calvinism was his increasingly critical stand on common grace in print. In the above offering he refers to common grace in quotation marks. To my mind, this is meant, as he does elsewhere in other *Banner* articles of this period, to call this concept and its then current usage into question. While over the next several years these questions would multiply exponentially, nevertheless it

is at this juncture that he openly begins to question the use of the term itself in a specific context. Clearly, it is with this in mind that, on 6 February 1919, Hoeksema takes time from his discussion of ‘Mankind’s Relation to the Fallen King’ to write:

One characteristic of Pseudo-Calvinism is, that although it resembles our genuine faith, it would ultimately lead us right into the midst of the world in the evil sense of that word. Evidently, it does not maintain the sharp distinction, so clearly announced in Scripture between “world” and “world”, and hence it comes to call Anabaptism what is nothing but the only true Christian attitude and must result in amalgamation with the world in its evil sense. (*The Banner* 1919:6.)

It is my belief that by his insistence on the Reformed truth as he saw it at the expense of unity or inclusivism of any sort, Hoeksema made himself a marked man. This would become more evident with the onslaught of the Janssen Affair. Still, it must be emphasized that while Hoeksema may have insisted on Reformed truth for himself and those in his charge, he was never so one-sided in his view of Christianity in general. Even while excoriating pseudo-Calvinism at length, in the same breath he could say:

Not all Christians are Calvinists. Mark, I say: “not all Christians are Calvinists.” They may be Christians all-right. Sure! Dear children of God, with whom I love to shake hands. I don’t believe that there is a Calvinist that denies this. I don’t think that there is a Calvinist who maintains that the Calvinists are the only Christians. And those who love to waste paper (and that in this time when paper is so valuable!) by fighting against Calvinists who maintain that they are the only Christians on earth, are fighting a shadow, a product of their own imagination. No, but I claim that a Calvinist is a Christian of a distinct type, with distinct principles and views, in distinction, namely, from other Christians. (*The Banner* 1919:6-7.)

### *3.9 Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church*

During his last two years at Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church, Herman Hoeksema received many calls to serve other congregations in the denomination (Hoeksema 1969:77). At last, for the congregation, the inevitable happened (Hoeksema

1969:94). After four and a half years at Fourteen Street Church (Hoeksema 1969:107), Hoeksema accepted the call to Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, the largest church in the denomination, in January of 1920 (Hoeksema 1969:114-115). The newly appointed pastor took up his duties in Eastern Avenue in February of 1920. Amidst all the joy of the new charge, Hoeksema could not see the storm clouds that were slowly gathering on the horizon.

### *3.10 Conclusion*

In the course of this chapter, I have tried to give the reader a sense of both Herman Hoeksema the man, and his spiritual/intellectual development. For this reason the chapter has been taken up to a good degree with topical and thematic analysis, in addition to the historical narrative.

I began by outlining Hoeksema's first charge as pastor. It began badly, in part because of a congregation accustomed to one type of minister and partly because of Hoeksema who was definitely not of the expected mold and neither would be. World War I was also beginning at this time with its attendant patriotism and propaganda. It produced many extremes, one of which concerned the display of the American Flag in church. Herman Hoeksema's spiritual/intellectual development influenced and was influenced by all these events. Additionally, beginning in 1918 he began writing in *The Banner*, the denominational magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. It is here that he developed a distinct method. Had things gone differently, maybe he would have completed an entire dogmatics from the perspective of the covenant. As a whole, though,

while much of what is written in *The Banner* under the rubric ‘Our Doctrine’ is of a seminal nature, in the long run Hoeksema becomes too wordy, at times he tends to major on minors, he seems to have trouble getting to the point in many instances, and, as a result, he begins to bore people. It becomes obvious after the first year that he has not thought things through completely and, maybe, he was simply too young to have undertaken such a mature task. Probably, at least in part, because of the Bultema Case, his tone changes noticeably from one of ‘gentle’ persuasion at the outset to one that is distinctly confrontational. It is also in connection with the premillennialism of the Bultema Case that Hoeksema once again, at least in print, takes issue with the whole idea of common grace. The more polemical Hoeksema, however, began to emerge fully with his critique of Neo-Calvinism in the April and May 1919 issues of *The Banner*.

In all this, Hoeksema’s fatal flaw, at least to my mind, was that he allowed himself to get sidetracked, first by the Bultema Case, then finally, and fatally, by the Janssen Affair. His weakness was that he simply could not turn down a good fight. After all, theology developed throughout history through confrontation. Was this not necessary for doctrinal development? All through his childhood on the streets of Groningen, Hoeksema had to fight for everything he got, and he was used to winning. This was just how things were done. He was really a scrapper at heart and he could never resist a good fight. I firmly believe this is what his son meant when he told me that the most telling feature of the mature Hoeksema, in his opinion, was the distinct lack of parental guidance in his earlier years. Anyway, regardless of his motives, this weakness would eventually prove his undoing.