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Baskwell, P.J.

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Chapter 4

The Janssen Affair

Herman Hoeksema took up his duties as pastor of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in February of 1920. Over the course of the next four years, his world would be turned up side down. In the end, he would no longer be affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in any way. What happened to bring about this change of fortunes? It is to this question that I would like to direct my efforts in this chapter. The question is, however, not as simple and straightforward as one might imagine. The history of the period is one marked by ecclesiastical conflict, based, in turn, upon detailed doctrinal wrangling, and the things that happened to Hoeksema in 1924 were in many ways the result of these earlier controversies and the part Hoeksema played in them. Paramount among these earlier events was the appointment and subsequent dismissal of Ralph Janssen from his position as Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Seminary in 1922. In this rather sordid affair Hoeksema played a truly pivotal role. Moreover, the issues at stake in the ‘Janssen Affair’ actually set the stage for the events of 1924.

Since it is really impossible to appreciate the events of 1924 without first understanding the events leading up to and including 1922, in this chapter I intend to investigate the latter. As in previous chapters, I intend to deal with both the historical and the doctrinal, as together they determine the intellectual/spiritual development of Herman Hoeksema, and, in turn, lay the necessary foundation for our later discussion of common grace.

4.1 Professor Janssen

Harry Boer, in an early article written on the Janssen Case, concluded that ‘in the entire history of the Christian Reformed Church no significant event has been so silenced by the ecclesiastical structure nor has any event cast so long and oppressive a shadow over its life as the disposition of the Janssen case by the Synod of 1922’ (Boer 1973:21). While biographical material on Professor Janssen is ‘extremely meager’ (Boer 1972:17), George Stob, in his thesis on the history of the Christian Reformed Church, was able to supply some necessary details.

Roelof (Ralph) Janssen was born on a farm between Holland and Zeeland, Michigan in 1874 (Stob 1955:301, Bratt 1984:105). According to Herman Hanco, he studied at Hope College, received his baccalaureate from the University of Chicago in 1898, and went on to study at several major European universities finally receiving his doctorate from Halle, in Germany, in 1902 (Hanco 1988:9, Heerema 1986:62). The one person, who exerted the most influence on this developing scholar, writes George Stob, was Dr. Martin Kahler at Halle, under whose supervision Janssen submitted his doctoral thesis on textual criticism and the Gospel of John (Stob 1955:301).

Janssen was initially appointed, through the efforts of his pastor Rev. Johannes Groen, to teach exegetical theology at the Seminary Division of Calvin College in 1902. From the start there were differences between Janssen and Professor F. M. ten Hoor, as Stob relates, ‘on the question of the relations of theological science’ (Stob 1955:301). Ten Hoor believed theology to be the queen of the sciences, but nonetheless under the governance of the church (Stob 1955:301), whereas Janssen did not look kindly on this

idea of ecclesiastical oversight. Following Kuyper's lead, and borrowing a great deal from him as well, Janssen believed that theological science should not be subject to the church, but rather exercised 'sovereignty in its own sphere' (Stob 1955:302). These opinions, in addition to using the 'university method' in his teaching, did not serve to increase his popularity with his colleagues in the theological faculty. 'Since he also was not an ordained minister of the gospel,' writes David Holwerda of Calvin Seminary, 'several insisted that he had no right to be a professor of theology, and they feared that his appointment meant that greater significance would now be given to the demands of scholarship and objective research than to the confessions of the church' (Holwerda 1989:11). Since this type of reasoning was widespread, Janssen was generally suspect and his commitment to the Reformed faith was openly questioned, so much so that in 1906 he was not re-appointed to his position on the faculty.

Upon failing re-appointment, Janssen traveled to the Netherlands to study in the Faculty of Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam. G. D. de Jong, in an essay on the early history of Calvin Seminary, wrote that 'Janssen had spent two years (1906-1908) in Europe and the Free University of Amsterdam conferred on him the degree of Doctorandus of Theology. Some of the delegates knew (Janssen's earlier trials), but statements like these: "Dr. Janssen longs to serve the church in which he was born"; "Dr. Janssen has learned a great deal since 1906² were conducive to lessen the apprehension' (DeJong 1926:41). With this new found support, Janssen was re-appointed to Calvin Theological Seminary as Professor of Old Testament in 1914, a position he held until his dismissal in 1922. Edward Heerema, in his biography of R. B. Kuiper, Janssen's brother-in-law, concludes 'that Janssen was appointed this time in the confidence that his study

under Bavinck and Kuyper in Amsterdam had cleared up whatever questions that had emerged in his previous tenure' (Heerema 1986:63). Even though Janssen's second appointment in 1914 coincided with Herman Hoeksema's last year in Calvin Seminary—he graduated in 1915—Hoeksema never mentions him in connection with his study for the ministry. It is probable that Hoeksema did not have any first hand experience with the teachings of Professor Janssen and only became acquainted with them later.

By 1919 Janssen had again become the object of suspicion among his colleagues at the seminary. This was due primarily, as David Holwerda explains, because of certain 'student complaints voiced to certain professors during annual home visitations' (Holwerda 1989:11). He writes:

One student revealed that he had often thought about leaving the seminary to take up some other occupation because Janssen's instruction had shaken his faith in the reliability and infallibility of the Scriptures. Another felt that Janssen's view of miracle negated any immediate intervention by God. A third confirmed that Janssen taught that the Song of Songs was an eastern love song and that the Pentateuch was not in its entirety from the pen of Moses. And a fourth student rendered the opinion that Janssen did not present a high view of the Bible. (Holwerda 1989:11.)

As a result of this testimony, in the spring of 1919, Professors L. Berkhof, W. Heyns, F. M. ten Hoor, and S. Volbeda, 'niet om to twisten, maar uit gewetensdrang' (not in order to quarrel, but out of moral constraint) (F. M. ten Hoor, W. Heyns, L. Berkhof, & S. Volbeda [s.a.]:3) as they themselves insist, presented a pamphlet entitled *Nadere Toelichting omtrent de Zaak Janssen* (Further elucidation about the Janssen case) to the Curatorium of the Seminary essentially demanding a full inquiry into the matter. Expanding further on the student's statements from home visitations with the aid of student notes from Professor Janssen's classes, the four professors charged Janssen with: a dubious view of the inspiration of Scripture, a downplaying of the miraculous elements in

the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and a questioning the Mosaic authorship of portions of the Pentateuch (Boer 1972:18). Janssen, appealing to both Kuyper and Bavinck, explained his own views on inspiration without hesitation.

I hold to that view of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures which in present Reformed Theology (e.g. Kuyper and Bavinck) is called organic inspiration. This to me implies: 1. that the writers of the Scriptures were infallibly moved and guided by the Holy Spirit, and 2. that the Holy Scriptures are *verbally* inspired, theopneusta, and are credible, infallible and of Divine authority for faith and practice. Strictly speaking, it is only autographa that are infallible. Organic inspiration does full justice to the Divine and human factor...But Theol. thought goes on. Continued study of the Scriptures, Exegesis, Biblical Theology, etc. will bring to light new facts. That is, I take it, in accordance with the promise of Christ, that the Holy Spirit will lead into all truth. Of that new light account will have to be given in the further study of the Locus on Inspiration. How to bring the truths, which Theological study may bring to light, within the definition of Inspiration as Reformed Faith formulates it—that is our task in the future, and that task will be there as long as there shall be a militant church. (quoted by Boer 1972:18.)

According to Herman Hanko, the response of the Curatorium to the four professors' demand for an investigation into the teachings of Professor Janssen was to appoint a committee to consult both with the four professors and with Professor Janssen (Hanko 1988:12). These meetings having been accomplished, the Curatorium proceeded to give Professor Janssen a vote of complete confidence. Specifically, they insisted that the four professors should have gone to Professor Janssen privately before bringing this matter into the public forum, and 'that Professor Janssen has given full assurance that he believed completely and wholeheartedly in the authority, credibility and infallibility of Scripture' (quoted in Hanko 1988:15).

Hoeksema agreed with the decision of the Curatorium in so far as it reprimanded the four professors for not going to Professor Janssen in private. However, he was uneasy with the fact that the Curatorium, while giving Professor Janssen a vote of confidence, failed to investigate the matter beyond the personal assurances given by Professor

Janssen as to his own orthodoxy (Hanko 1988:16). So much was Hoeksema's uneasiness over the disposition of the allegations of the four professors against Janssen that he admits he became 'a strong opponent of Prof. Janssen after the Synod of 1920' (Hanko 1988:16).

If Hoeksema was uneasy, the four professors were even more so. They summarily ignored the Curatorium's admonition to privately discuss the matter with Professor Janssen. Instead, as Hanko relates, 'they notified the Curatorium that they were appealing to the Synod of 1920 (Hanko 1988:17). In the interim the Curatorium once again scrutinized the matter, reaffirming their original decision regarding the soundness of Professor Janssen's instruction (Hanko 1988:18).

It seems as if the events of 1920 were pivotal for everyone concerned, the four professors and Hoeksema, as well as Janssen. The four professors renewed their charges against their colleague in Old Testament before the Synod of 1920, which was held in June of that year. Hoeksema, who had been writing under the rubric 'Our Doctrine' for *The Banner*, began the year with a series on 'The Kingdom and the King,' only to interrupt his series to examine the charges against Janssen more closely. After due deliberation, the Synod of 1920 exonerated Professor Janssen of all charges pending against him.

4.2 Contextually Speaking

Before detailing the specific events of 1920, and beyond, I think it pertinent to put things in a bit larger context to gain a better perspective on the events that are about to take place. Recounting the history for this period, George Harinck writes:

The Neo-Calvinists in the Christian Reformed Church tried to reinforce their position by enabling theologians to study under the supervision of Bavinck and others at the Vrije Universiteit. Their plan worked and several of the theologians who made use of this opportunity, such as R. Janssen, Y.P. de Jong, H.H. Meeter, and S. Volbeda, were appointed at Calvin Theological Seminary of the Christian Reformed Church or at Calvin College. Among ministers who had done graduate work in the Netherlands the idea arose that closer relations with the Neo-Calvinists and a better knowledge of their view of culture might help the Christian Reformed to integrate as Reformed people in modern America. But the counter forces were strong, and tensions grew when Dr. Janssen..of Calvin Seminary was rejected by his colleagues around 1920. Instead of promoting Neo-Calvinism successfully, his appearance resulted in a serious blow. Following Neo-Calvinists, especially Bavinck, he further developed Reformed theology by presenting fresh reflections on the Bible and culture to his students. He confronted the Christian Reformed Church with the uneasy but unavoidable question: is our Reformed theology fit for modern times? (Harinck 1996:120.)

Others of the Neo-Calvinist spirit within the Christian Reformed Church at the time were, Dr. Henry Beets, Prof. H.J.G. van Andel, and Rev. Gerrit Hoeksema (Harinck 1996:136).

These men were of one mind with Professor Janssen on the need for the 'Americanization' of the 'Dutch' Reformed church in America (Harinck 1996:119). Americanization was understood to mean the development of a more positive attitude towards culture; more specifically overcoming an inherent 'antithetical cultural attitude' by means of the concept of common grace as developed by Kuyper and Bavinck (Harinck 1996:119). This antithetical cultural attitude to Americanization was seen by the Neo-Calvinist followers of Abraham Kuyper in the Christian Reformed Church as no more than a certain hesitancy among members in the churches to adopt American culture and thereby loose their Holland roots. By contrast, Herman Hoeksema believed the use of this common grace concept by the Neo-Calvinists to construct a bridge between Christianity and

culture was in fact bridging the gap or ‘Antithesis’ between the church and the world (Bratt 1984:100). According to Bratt, Hoeksema branded Neo-Calvinism as ‘Pseudo-Calvinism, which would really have us mingle with the world.. adopt the principles and methods of the world and deny our own’ (quoted by Bratt 1984:102). Elsewhere, Hoeksema called the proponents of Neo-Calvinism ‘jongeren,’ restless young men who adopted the theory common grace because it ‘offered them a philosophy that would support their latitudinarian views in the name of Calvinism’ (Hoeksema 1947:16). For their insistent opposition in this matter, Hoeksema, and others of like mind, were labeled ‘Separatists’ and ‘Antitheticals’ (Bratt 1984:100). H. J. van Andel of Calvin College ridiculed the ‘Antithesis’ which Hoeksema preached, saying that it was ‘neither biblical nor historical. It is simply a product of erring fantasy. (And) the Antithetical’s problem involved their mental habits. They were cold and humorless, sterile in their eighteenth-century logic, oppressive with their party line, and arrogant for assuming that their principles described all reality for all time’ (quoted by Bratt 1984:100).

I would suggest that the year 1920 was a watershed. The stage was set for a battle to determine nothing less than the future course of the Christian Reformed Church. I also believe that the main issue at stake in this battle was the doctrine of common grace. In this, Christian Reformed historian James Bratt concurs. Bratt perceives that ‘by the end of 1920 the stage was set for its discordant enactment..the definitive lines for the struggle had emerged as the defensive parties joined across the pietist/Kuyperian divide for the decisive battle’ (Bratt 1984:104). Bratt also sees the doctrine of common grace as the main issue in both the Janssen affair and in Hoeksema’s deposition two years later. He writes: ‘at issue in each case was the doctrine of common grace, which, positively or

negatively, defined the various streams of the Dutch Reformed tradition and, as the theory relating “the people of God” to “the world,” constituted the prime theological metaphor for the question of acculturation’ (Bratt 1984:105). Common grace was not, however, immediately perceived by everyone as the main issue, and this includes Hoeksema himself.

While the Synod of 1920 exonerated Professor Janssen of any charges of heresy, it did maintain ‘that Dr. Janssen should endeavor to avoid all that has given or might give occasion to misunderstanding’ (Stob 1955:312). Synod also decided ‘that Dr. Janssen, in the interpretation of Holy Scripture, sometimes has placed too much emphasis on the human factor and on the natural means, so that on that account the special divine factor did not come to its right in the mind of some students’ (Stob 1955:312). After being vindicated by both the Curatorium and Synod, any question concerning Professor Janssen’s orthodoxy would seem to have been settled. And, if not for the pen of Herman Hoeksema, this probably would have been the case. This is not to say that Hoeksema was solely responsible for the eventual deposition of Professor Janssen. The four professors, Janssen’s colleagues, were already pursuing an independent course of action that would have resulted in Janssen’s demise regardless of what Hoeksema did. But Hoeksema, by his decision to delve into the matter publicly in his column, did himself a disservice and, at the same time, seriously bungled a matter that would have eventually resolved itself.

4.3 In the Pages of the Banner

Shortly after the Synod of 1920 adjourned, Hoeksema succeeded in getting copies of the student notes that first cast aspersion on the teachings of Professor Janssen. The fact that he had been appointed to the Curatorium of the seminary in July of 1920 undoubtedly aided him in this acquisition (Hoeksema 1969:132, Woudenberg 2001). His editorial column, 'Our Doctrine,' in *The Banner*, underwent a subtle but definite change after Synod adjourned in June of 1920. He spent the whole summer studying the student notes relating to Professor Janssen's classes and preparing his arguments. During these summer months, even though Hoeksema was still writing under the theme 'The New King and His Kingdom,' he now seemed more intent on discussing the historicity of the Old Testament. Finally, on 23 September, he was ready to discuss his findings. Under a revised heading entitled 'Objective Revelation or Subjective Development,' Hoeksema now wants to make clear the relationship of what has gone before to his more recent investigations into Higher Criticism. 'Before I proceed to discuss the question of higher criticism in regard to the Old Testament,' he writes, 'I wish to point out that this apparent digression on my part is closely related to the main subject of our discussion: the development of the Kingdom as presented in the Word of God' (*The Banner* 1920:584).

After this seemingly innocuous token, Hoeksema launches into his discussion, all but forgetting his main subject: the Kingdom. 'The question of higher criticism in regard to the Old Testament,' he argues from the start, 'concerns first of all our conception of supernatural revelation. And in the second place the problem of the historicity of Scripture' (*The Banner* 1920:584). At the outset Hoeksema assures his readers that his purpose in writing on these things is not personal, but then he turns just as quickly to discussing the blunders of the last Synod. While he does not as yet mention Janssen by

name, he does accuse the Synod of 1920 of majoring on minors. He forcefully says to the delegates of that Synod that the question is ‘inspiration,’ pure and simple. In the course of this stinging rebuke to the Synod of 1920, Hoeksema lays out three presuppositions by which he judges higher criticism:

1. The Reformed faith always was and still is, that in the Old Testament we have a record of supernatural revelation. God supernaturally revealed himself in paradise, to the patriarchs, in Israel’s laws and sacrifices and ceremonies and to the prophets. A supernatural revelation which finds at once its center and climax in Christ, the Word become flesh. And Scripture is the written record of this revelation. 2. This certainly leaves room for development in revelation. God did not, and because of the human and natural factor could not, reveal himself and the plan of redemption as fully and clearly to Adam as He did to Isaiah. There is, therefore, development in the fullness and clearness of revelation. And accordingly, there is also development in the fullness and clearness of the conception of God and his covenant in the minds of his people. 3. But this leaves no room for development from a wrong to a correct conception of God. The idea of supernatural revelation rules out all possibility of development from polytheism to monotheism, of belief in many gods to the faith in One God, of belief in an immoral to faith in a moral God. Adam, and Noah, and Abraham no more believed in many gods than did Isaiah. I wish to emphasize that the Reformed conception of supernatural revelation absolutely rules out the possibility of such development. (*The Banner* 1920:584-585.)

It is not until his next installment, in the 30 September 1920 issue of *The Banner*, that Hoeksema finally mentions Janssen by name (*The Banner* 1920:600). And even then it is not really what one would have expected from Hoeksema at this point. In point of fact, he is objective, even conciliatory, no doubt expecting the same from his would-be opponent, Professor Janssen. Beginning with his dissatisfaction regarding the actions of the previous Synod, Hoeksema writes:

It is in this connection that I wish to state my first reason for being concerned and uncertain in regard to the action of the last Synod. And I want to state it objectively. In the first place, in justice to Dr. Janssen, whose teachings were called in question before the Synod last June, it must be stated very strongly, that he is no disciple of the Wellhousen school of criticism. Of this he has been frequently accused in private conversation. And lest I leave the impression that this is also my opinion, I want to express myself very positively to the contrary.

Proof abundant I would be able to furnish that the professor is always combating on scientific grounds the Grafian theory of the Old Testament. Time and again in the professor's dictations one meets with a presentation of the critical view of a certain matter in order then to be followed by a refusal of this view by Dr. Janssen. Neither, let it be plainly understood, do I underrate the doctor's scholarship. I rather wish to pay my highest regard to his scientific ability and attainment. I do not believe that in regard to knowledge of Semitic languages there is another man that could take Professor Janssen's place. And I would not rejoice, but rather think it a pity if we would have to lose him from our circles. And yet...I feel uncertain. To my mind the professor in his teaching yields too much to the critical school, so much that it is difficult to harmonize it with the idea of revelation. And I consider it a pity that Synod did not enter into this matter. (*The Banner* 1920:599-600.)

Some feel that what followed, in succeeding issues of *The Banner*, can be construed as nothing less than a calculated attack by Hoeksema on Janssen. Herman Hanko, professor emeritus at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, is of this opinion (Hanko 1988:23). While it is true that Hoeksema's rhetoric continued to build in successive issues, Janssen's comments were no less caustic. Hoeksema was looking for answers and, for him, he was going about it in a rather objective manner. Janssen, however, was looking to deflect blame and, as successive issues prove, in this he was very successful. Additionally, whether Hoeksema actually had the right to pursue this matter in the pages of *The Banner*, independent of Classis or Synod or their appointed representatives, is yet another matter.

4.4 *The Rhetoric Escalates*

In the 7 October 1920 issue of *The Banner* Hoeksema inquires into certain of Professor Janssen's 'higher critical' teachings saying that 'all these can, to my mind, scarcely be reconciled to the Reformed conception of objective, supernatural Revelation'

(*The Banner* 1920:615). At the same time Hoeksema ponders whether Synod's failure to take any disciplinary action against Professor Janssen at this time implies that 'the above views are henceforth to be considered as officially approved by Synod' (*The Banner* 1920:615). Becoming even bolder, in the next paragraph Hoeksema goes so far as to hint at Synod's complicity in the whole matter by conspiring to hide what was taught at the seminary (*The Banner* 1920:615). He ends this rather stinging editorial by pointing to the utter seriousness of the matter, which, in turn, continues to fuel his concern with the decisions taken by Synod in regard to Professor Janssen the previous June. He writes that, 'The seriousness of the matter seemed to me sufficient justification for my lengthy digression from my subject proper. I feel satisfied that I have written without malice, without personal hostility against anyone. I know no such hostility in my heart. But I feel that the Word of God is at stake and nothing less' (*The Banner* 1920:615).

In the last installment for October of 1920, Hoeksema busies himself with discussing the covenant as it relates to Noah. While briefly mentioning common grace, he says nothing about the ongoing debate with Professor Janssen. The 4 November 1920 issue of *The Banner*, however, is of singular interest because in it for the first time we have a reply from Professor Janssen concerning what Hoeksema had written to date. By way of an introduction to Janssen's reply, Hoeksema wrote:

We are glad to give space to the reply of Dr. Janssen to our criticism of his views. And we just as sincerely hope that the professor may be able to justify himself before our church, which he serves at our school. To personal insinuations we shall give no reply. We would ask the professor to avoid them in the future. They do no earthly good in his case. I do not regard this a personal controversy between Dr. Janssen and myself, but a serious matter concerning nothing less than the very basis of our faith. Let us simply bar them from discussion. In the second place let no one be deceived by the above attack on our view regarding the doctrine of common grace. Of course, we are glad to discuss that doctrine with the professor. But then we must have more than mere statement. However this may be, it is my

deepest conviction that there is no relation between our views on common grace and our criticism of Dr. Janssen's views. However, we are anxious to learn what connection the professor has discovered. (*The Banner* 1920:667.)

Janssen's reply turns out to be essentially that which Hoeksema has already deemed a 'personal insinuation,' and to which he promised no further reply. Janssen begins by claiming that Hoeksema's digression into higher criticism in his column over the preceding three months was nothing less than 'an attack on the chair of Old Testament at our theological seminary,' namely, himself (*The Banner* 1920:667). Janssen then reprimands Hoeksema for his use of student notes, or 'dictations,' as the ground on which to base his investigations. The Old Testament Professor states categorically that he has not as yet prepared or issued for his classes "dictations" (*The Banner* 1920:667). In what Hoeksema will undoubtedly construe as only more personal insinuations, Janssen outlines both his complaint and his intent:

What there is extant is simply student-materials, notes which they have put together. It is, therefore, in the first place, an injustice to represent the material that is subjected to criticism as "the professor's dictations," or to make the public believe that this material is accurate and has the authority of the "professor" back of it. It is, in the second place, an injustice to rush into print with this kind of material, an injustice to both students and professor...In the third place the Christian Reformed churches have their curators for the Theological School and Calvin College. If Rev. Hoeksema has some "professor's dictations" that he feels like criticizing, he should lodge his complaint with that body. His present method of procedure ignores the curators and our church polity. He is taking the law into his own hands. And fourthly, it is nothing short of astounding that Rev. Hoeksema, the pastor of Eastern Avenue church, the church of which the professor is a member, should never have spoken one word to me about these "professor's dictations," nor have declared to me his intention to write a series of articles attacking me. However, be the methods of the pastor as deplorable as they may be, be furthermore the attempt he makes in his articles to assure his readers that there is no malice on his part and that he is not actuated by animosity, as vigorous as possible, I don't really see as yet why he should come with such assurances to his readers at all, why he should repeat the assurance; I don't understand that psychology. I say, be the methods what they may, the fact remains that the attack of Rev. Hoeksema is there, and I purpose to devote a few articles to it and also after that to some other theological questions which, to my mind,

deserve to be looked into, questions which it is timely to discuss for general enlightenment. (*The Banner* 1920:667.)

Despite much of what would be said about him over the next two years, Janssen was both intelligent and refined, and he could write. He was also politically astute, and he was not finished with Hoeksema. Whether through honest disagreement or subterfuge, Janssen was unwilling to reply to Hoeksema's accusations forthrightly, instead, he turns the spotlight on Hoeksema's 'denial' of common grace. In his response, Hoeksema was utterly flabbergasted that anyone could make so much of such a minor point. Referring back to many of Hoeksema's previous articles in *The Banner*, Janssen seemed intent on putting an entirely different spin on what Hoeksema had written regarding common grace. Hoeksema, even at this early date, did not like terming any grace 'common.' Grace was grace, and, while it may be multi-faceted, to him it was still grace nonetheless. Trying to distinguish different kinds of grace from God was, for Hoeksema at least, both futile and silly. Not so for the Professor. Janssen, who, with stinging elegance, culls from Hoeksema's articles, both from actual statements and from silence, what he interprets as a pattern of denial of what he considers one of the Reformed Church's most precious doctrines. Janssen argues:

We are not Roman Catholics, not Lutherans, nor Anabaptists, not Arminians. Calvin is our spiritual father, to his doctrines we subscribe, doctrines that distinguish him from Luther, from Arminius, from the Anabaptists, etc. Now, one of the main doctrines which distinguish Calvin from the Roman Catholics, the Anabaptists, etc., is the doctrine of common grace. In fact, that doctrine was Calvin's discovery. He found it taught in Holy Scripture. That doctrine, from Calvin on, has been an essential part of the Reformed faith. It was a great discovery, this doctrine of Calvin. In the early history of the Reformed church, it is true, the doctrine was not much further developed. The early Reformed theologians did little more than repeat what Calvin had said about it in the institutes. But the doctrine is here. All the Reformed dogmaticians of the time agree that it is there. The doctrine is there also at the Synod of Dort. Our confession presupposes it. The Canons of Dort point out that the Arminians

interpret common grace wrongly, identifying it with the light of nature and making also a wrong use of it. When much later the reawakening comes of the Reformed churches, the doctrine of common grace is in evidence more than ever before. That it is essential and fundamental stands “al seen paal boven water.” It is to this doctrine and its further exposition that the Reformed theologians devote themselves. The names of the two great leaders of present day Reformed thought, Kuyper and Bavinck, need only be mentioned to enable one to see what importance is attached to this doctrine of the Reformed faith. But how about Rev. Hoeksema and common grace? You say, he stands foursquare on the doctrines of the Reformed faith and, therefore, undoubtedly holds to this important Reformed doctrine. Let us see what precisely the views of our critic are and find out where he stands. (*The Banner* 1920:668.)

After scrutinizing four more of Hoeksema’s editorials from the previous year, Janssen, with more the acumen of a trial lawyer than an Old Testament professor, presents his closing argument:

Quotations similar to the above, from Rev. Hoeksema’s articles, can be multiplied. They all in a variety of ways give expressions to his standpoint that there is no common grace. We can now sum up. Our discovery brings us face to face with a very discouraging fact. The unexpected has happened. In Rev. Hoeksema we are after all not dealing with a critic that is a sound Calvinist. In denying common grace he has broken with true Calvinism and joined ranks with the Anabaptists. He has been found to deny one of the most important doctrines of our Reformed faith. How this unreformed standpoint of Rev. Hoeksema affects his criticism of the “professor’s dictations” we shall see later. (*The Banner* 1920:668.)

Despite the response put forth by Professor Janssen, Hoeksema felt sure that where there was smoke there was fire; that the notes from the students must contain a fairly accurate representation of what was being taught in Professor Janssen’s classes, and thus, he continued to probe into the matter. Janssen, for his part, published nothing, hence, the difficulty in judging objectively exactly what was being taught in the seminary. Additionally, while his case against Hoeksema might seem substantive, Janssen actually proved nothing. Janssen assumed both the validity and importance of common grace without ever proving his point. That is to say, he assumed that which needed to be proven, which, in philosophical circles, is known as begging the question.

4.5 *The Exchange Continues*

Hoeksema's rubric in the 11 November 1920 issue of *The Banner*, in addition to a rather substantive response to Professor Janssen, also contains an interesting insight that would prove significant for the future of both combatants. Continuing his exposition of 'The Covenant with Noah' which he began on 28 October, prior to any mention of Janssen, Hoeksema sets about criticizing Kuyper's view of common grace and its effect on the covenant of grace (*The Banner* 1920:683). In the course of his analysis, Hoeksema refers to Kuyper's view as a 'covenant of so-called common grace' (*The Banner* 1920:666). I believe that even at this early date Hoeksema repudiated the idea common grace espoused by Abraham Kuyper in its entirety. While it is true that a few paragraphs later (*The Banner* 1920:667) he says that he would be happy to discuss Janssen's idea of common grace and its relation to his teachings, I do not think this is sufficient reason to conclude that he subscribes to the concept. In fact, in response to Janssen use of the 'doctrine of common grace' to defend of his teachings, Hoeksema writes:

It is a rather strange coincidence that we are writing on the covenant established with Noah, concerning which we believe that it is the covenant of grace, at the same time that one of our seminary professors makes that attempt to raise the doctrine of common grace to one of the main doctrines of the Reformed faith. One cannot but stand aghast at the boldness of the statement that the doctrine of common grace constitutes one of the main doctrines which distinguish Calvin from others! Over against it we make the statement that there is room for debate on the question whether Calvin did teach anything at all that did resemble the so-called doctrine of common grace, a debate in which I would be willing to take the negative side. But the matter becomes mockery when the professor knows to say nothing more in regard to one of the essential doctrines of the Reformed faith than that it is 'presupposed' in the confession! In the first place I would deny even this. But in the second place does the professor seriously think that one of the most essential doctrines of the Reformed faith would be merely presupposed in the

confession? But we will answer these statements in detail when the professor is through with his reply to us. If he wishes to prove nothing but that his views of Scripture as revealed by the dictations I mentioned are rooted in a certain view of common grace, all the worse for that conception of common grace. In the meantime we will continue our discussion of the covenant with Noah. (*The Banner* 1920:683.)

If Hoeksema had stuck with his contention that Janssen's higher critical views were rooted in his concept of common grace, or rather, that Janssen's higher critical views were a direct result of his doctrine of common grace, he might have won the day, but he never mentions it again. He does, however, respond to Janssen's charge of Anabaptism. Hoeksema states categorically: 'Characteristic of Anabaptism is that it separates nature and grace. But we establish a connection between nature and grace, more intimate than any doctrine of common grace can ever do. We believe that not only the souls of a few elect, but the elect organism of the human race as a whole shall be saved by grace' (*The Banner* 1920:684).

From the outset Janssen realizes that, given the intellectual climate in the Christian Reformed Church at the time, there is no way he can defend his views on the Bible in the public forum, so he simply sidesteps the issue. And, Hoeksema, by getting involved at all, is simply the one who provides the forum for Janssen to defend himself. Janssen develops his position by means of public debate and he uses the opportunity to scourge Hoeksema on common grace. Effectually, Janssen makes Hoeksema the 'whipping boy' in place of the professors who were after him. It is doubtful whether Hoeksema could see any of this at the time as, according to all who knew him, he was particularly inept in understanding church politics. This fact becomes painfully obvious in that Hoeksema allows Janssen to keep writing and then urges him back when he later quits, instead of branding all Janssen had written as simply irrelevant and refusing to

print it. Additionally, Hoeksema simply could not sit down and just speak with Janssen either. Regardless of what Janssen says or does Hoeksema adamantly refuses to get sidetracked, but he gets tarred as a result. Meanwhile, Janssen is not finished.

Janssen's second 'Reply' to Hoeksema is broken up into installments, the first is in the 18 November 1920 issue of *The Banner* and the second is found in the 25 November issue. While the 18 November issue also contains another installment from Hoeksema on 'The Covenant with Noah,' the 25 November issue contains the Janssen response alone. In his first installment, on 18 November, Janssen begins with a recapitulation of both the arguments and conclusions from his previous 'Reply' on 4 November. 'In this weeks article,' he writes, 'I want particularly to examine Rev. Hoeksema's denial of common grace more in detail... [After all,] disturb any part of the Reformed system of thought and you disturb the whole system' (*The Banner* 1920:701). From this suggestive beginning brimming with expectations, Janssen, for the remainder of the 18 November installment, merely laments Hoeksema's denial of God's favor to the reprobate. The second half of Janssen's 'Reply,' contained in the 25 November issue of *The Banner*, looks more substantive, at least on the surface. Janssen begins boldly, saying that it is now time to take the testimony of the 'Reformed authorities' (*The Banner* 1920:716). He begins with Herman Bavinck, a well-known exponent of a 'form' of common grace (see Bavinck's 'rectoral address at Kampen in December 1894, entitled "De Gemeene Genade"' (Van Leeuwen 1989:35)). Janssen follows Bavinck with 'quotes' from John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, H. H. Kuyper, and A. G. Honig, all of whom seem to substantiate Janssen's contention that universal blessings are indeed bestowed by God upon the world at large. These things are said to be 'most excellent gifts,' yet no mention is made of specifically

what they are. And, while he quotes freely from these illustrious authorities, actual, verifiable, references to specific works is sorely lacking. Additionally, one thing becomes abundantly clear; the doctrine of common grace is hindered by a strong view of reprobation. In fact, Janssen almost wants to redefine Calvin's view of reprobation. On this he writes:

And there are other features of Calvin's doctrine of reprobation to which attention should be called. There is, in the first place, the fact that he says so little about the working of reprobation. The *Institutio* is a work characterized by great sobriety, wholly free from scholastic abstruseness; it everywhere treats the doctrine of faith in the closest connection with the practice of religion. But of even greater significance is that with Calvin reprobation does not mean the withholding of all grace. Although man through sin has been rendered blind to all the spiritual realities of the Kingdom of God, so that a special revelation of God's fatherly love in Christ and a "specialis illuminatio" by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of sinners here becomes necessary, nevertheless there exists alongside of these a "Generalis Gratiā" which dispenses to all men various gifts. If God had not spared man, his fall would have involved the whole of nature in ruin. As it was, God immediately after the fall interposed, in order by his Common Grace to curb sin and to uphold in being the "universitas rerum." (*The Banner* 1920:716.)

While Janssen pays Calvin great tribute in this portion of his 'Reply,' his understanding of Calvin seems to be tempered more by his understanding of Abraham Kuyper than of Calvin himself, the language clearly bears this out. Abraham Kuyper was a great and well-known exponent of common grace, but I am convinced that Kuyper's views on the matter were decidedly not those of the Genevan Reformer (see Ridderbos 1947; Douma 1966 and Hylkema 1911 for a balanced discussion on the matter). (We will consider in greater detail later the specifics of Kuyper's concept of common grace and Hoeksema's response.) Towards the end of his response, Janssen attempts by way of summary to put Hoeksema's denials of common grace into stark relief, which he then contrasts with Kuyper's teachings on common grace. This is rather telling as to where Janssen got his concepts, but beyond that it proves nothing.

4.6 *The Rationalist and the Irrationalist*

In the 16 December 1920 issue of *The Banner* we have the third 'Reply' of Professor Janssen to Hoeksema. Hoeksema, so it would seem, is either oblivious to or simply does not care about what is happening in his column. I say this because there was absolutely no response on his part to Janssen's second 'Reply,' either the first or second installment. Hoeksema simply continued, on both 2 December and 9 December, with his discussion of the covenant with Noah, seemingly oblivious to Janssen's remarks.

Janssen's third 'Reply' also appears in two installments; the first of which is in the 16 December 1920 issue of *The Banner* and the second in the 30 December 1920 issue. In the 16 December portion Janssen, in a rather offhanded manner, accuses Hoeksema of being an Anabaptist, again (*The Banner* 1920:764). This time, though, in addition to being an Anabaptist, Hoeksema is now a 'fanatic,' and an 'intolerant' one at that (*The Banner* 1920:764). Janssen then succeeds mightily; he labels Hoeksema in a way that would be remembered even to the present day. Janssen, focusing primarily on Hoeksema's method which he compares favorably with the higher critical method he himself stands accused of, now accuses Hoeksema of being a 'rationalist.' He writes:

This whole procedure of Rev. Hoeksema shows plainly that reason virtually decides that matter for him. The Reformed doctrine of Common Grace is called before the bar of reason. If it cannot stand the test that reason may impose, well that ends it. What here cannot commend itself to reason cannot retain a place in our faith. And as to Rev. Hoeksema's observation...I would remark that our Reformed theologians knew better than to give the doctrine of Common Grace a rationalistic basis. (*The Banner* 1920:763).

The debate, or rather monologue, especially the sweeping, unsubstantiated accusations that flowed so effortlessly from the pen of the esteemed Professor of Old Testament, became an increasing point of contention among the readership of *The Banner*. Appended to the 30 December offering is a letter from several subscribers to the General Editor, Henry Beets, insisting that the writings of Professor Janssen be, in no uncertain terms, ended. The subscribers go on to say that the ‘debate,’ with its attendant name-calling on the part of the Professor, is an absolute disgrace (*The Banner* 1920:802). Beets avers to Hoeksema as the editor of that specific rubric, only commenting that it is good that both sides are being heard. Hoeksema, however, remained silent.

Under the heading, ‘The New King and His Kingdom,’ commencing on 6 January 1921, Hoeksema begins a series of several articles on Melchisedec in which he interacts thoroughly with the views of Abraham Kuyper. In the 13 January 1921 installment, Hoeksema refers to Kuyper’s explanation of Melchisedec’s priesthood as one of ‘so-called common grace’ (*The Banner* 1921:22). Janssen’s fourth ‘Reply,’ however, which is contained in the same issue, seems to overshadow anything Hoeksema has to say about Melchisedec. Janssen crafts a huge edifice of results, causes and second causes, all of which supposedly flow from Hoeksema’s denial of common grace. Janssen’s edifice lacks any sort of evidence or proof, but it is replete with all sorts of assumptions. As it really has to be read to be appreciated, I include a rather interesting portion as illustrative.

Janssen begins:

It has been seen that by denying common grace one is committed to much more. The implications of the denial are many and manifold. They affect every article of the Christian faith. They extend to every locus of Reformed dogmatics. If common grace has to go, much more has to go. This has already in a measure been demonstrated and will be demonstrated still more as we go on. Then too, more specifically, there are other consequences resulting from the denial. Force

the doctrine of common grace out of the Christian faith and the necessary distinction between creation and redemption (‘schepping en herschepping’), the work of God the Father and the work of God the Son, cannot be maintained. And if the proper distinction cannot be maintained, the relation of the one to the other becomes the wrong relation. Then, likewise, the correct relation between the covenant of grace and the covenant of works, between Israel and the non-Israelitish nations, between Christianity and paganism, between religion and culture cannot be maintained. Take the doctrine of common grace out of the Reformed system and what is left ceases to be Reformed. The doctrine is essential to the system. It is the case here as with the essential attributes of God. Deprive, in your theology, God of one of his essential attributes and your whole theology becomes impossible. If common grace has to go, it is difficult to see what part of our theology will remain unchanged. (*The Banner* 1921:23.)

But, Janssen says that he would be remiss if he were to stop here. Hence, he proceeds in the same manner to develop a positive side to his argument, which, in his estimation, encompasses all of Reformed Theology in its implications. Contrary to his previous, copious references to Calvin, the theology of Abraham Kuyper again looms large in his presentation. Promising to present the ‘barest outline’ of the ‘Reformed’ doctrine of common grace, he writes:

Very briefly stated the Reformed position is as follows, immediately after the fall, when the “foedus operum,” i.e., the covenant of works, had been broken, God intervened with his grace, his common grace and his special grace. By his common grace God curbs sin and upholds in being this world of ours. Had God not interposed with his common grace, man’s fall would have involved this world in ruin. That grace, therefore, was in character a “bewarende genade.” It preserved and perpetuated the ordinances of creation. The presence in man of the remnants of the divine image, the seed of religion, man’s god-consciousness—this is to be ascribed to God’s common grace. By virtue of this same grace the institutions of marriage, of the home, of society, of the state either continue to exist or are permitted to develop. As we follow the history of the descendants of the first human couple the working of common grace becomes very manifest. Through a fratricide, Cain’s life is spared. In his favor God gives Cain a sign which shall be instrumental in protecting him against the avenger of blood. This murderer becomes, furthermore, the recipient of numerous other gifts of God’s common grace. He is permitted to become the father of a race. His race through God’s common grace is privileged among other things to build a city and lay the foundations of civilization. In addition to this it is privileged to originate and develop the ‘fine arts.’ The race of Seth, on the other hand, is permitted through the working of common grace to preserve the knowledge of the true God. After the

flood this common grace receives its fixed form in God's covenant that henceforth remains effective in the life of the world. The descendants of Noah, through God's common grace, develop into powerful nations. These nations at different periods in the history of the world become the founders of great civilizations. Babylonia, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, all are centers which at one time or another witness the rise of great empires. In these empires arts and sciences, philosophy and literature, law and medicine, architecture and sculpture, flourish. God does not leave himself in this pagan world without a witness, "doing good to them, giving them rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." These pagan peoples, too, are, to use Paul's own words, "the offspring of God." In Him they live and move and have their being. God is not far from each and every one of them. He giveth them "life and breath and all things." Among them are found men of genius, of high morality, of proverbial virtue, men with a lofty conception of God. Socrates and Plato in all subsequent periods of history have aroused the admiration of the believer. And what holds true of Greece can be said of pagan peoples elsewhere. All of which, goes to show that there is an abundant working of God's common grace in the pagan world. (*The Banner* 1921:23-24.)

From Janssen's perspective, it is difficult to see what if anything does not depend upon common grace. On 20 January, 1921 Professor Janssen abruptly curtailed any further reply to Rev. Hoeksema (*The Banner* 1921:40).

4.7 Hoeksema's Response

Amazed and bewildered, coupled with a measure of sadness, Hoeksema regrets that Professor Janssen has decided to discontinue his articles. Hoeksema is also sorry that the esteemed Professor has seen fit to take any and all criticism as personal attack (*The Banner* 1921:55). Now, under the heading 'Not Satisfied,' Hoeksema finally responds to some of what Janssen has been saying. Hoeksema tries to explain, and in a rather laborious manner at that, that his contention with the Professor's teaching is not a personal matter. In fact, writes Hoeksema, 'synod did not advise the brethren professors to settle the matter between them, but openly discuss the matter and come to a conclusion. Synod

did not consider the matter a personal one, but one of general significance for the whole church' (*The Banner* 1921:55). Quoting from the alleged 'dictations,' Hoeksema shows repeated instances where Professor Janssen by his teaching has undermined the historicity of the Word of God. Referring again to these dictations, Hoeksema concludes: 'And it is these that cause my concern. What conception do our future ministers obtain of the Word of God? I assure you that on the basis of such a conception I could be no preacher of the Word of God. And I fail to see how anyone can be. I write this without personal antagonism, but with grave concern about our future' (*The Banner* 1921:56).

Next, Hoeksema seeks to address Janssen's 'absurd' accusations regarding common grace. Aside from viewing any discussion of common grace as a ruse, Hoeksema still, to a certain degree, gets drawn in. Obviously annoyed and responding to what he considers purely an ad hominem argument, Hoeksema comments at some length:

In regard to the matter of common grace, I wish to state that this is not the matter at issue for the present, and I refuse to be thrown off at a tangent in regard to the main question between us. If the professor had shown the connection between this question and common grace and higher criticism, the matter would have been different. He failed to do so, however. A few things of a formal nature I wish to say, nevertheless. First of all, the professor made very serious charges. He called me unreformed. In regard to one of the main doctrines of our confession. Hinging his statement on a single phrase he even intimated that I was a rationalist. I kindly ask the professor to retract these statements or to follow them up. The matter cannot rest here. The professor made mere accusations. He promised to substantiate them by passages from our Reformed Standards. This he never did. Not for once. I publicly ask the professor for proof that the theory of common grace is a confessionally Reformed doctrine. I here deny that it is. All that the professor has shown is that I differ on this subject with Kuyper and Bavinck. As to Calvin's views, we shall again (sic). But remember, I refuse to be called unreformed only because I differ with these great men. Not they, but our standards are the criterion in this case. And that the professor must know as well as any man that a person can hold to my view of common grace and be thoroughly Reformed. In the second place, I would welcome a serious and friendly discussion on this subject at any time. I think it is very unfortunate that Prof. Janssen broached this subject as he did. It was plainly evident that the whole discussion on common grace was marred by the single purpose the professor had

in view: to destroy the critic in order that he might destroy the criticism with regard to his teachings. That is deplorable. It accounts for the fact that the whole discussion, even from a purely scholarly point of view was a lamentable failure. (*The Banner* 1921:56.)

4.8 Abraham and the Covenant of Grace

Almost a month passes without any serious discussion of common grace in the pages of *The Banner*, meanwhile; Hoeksema busies himself with his investigation of various Old Testament personages. After a rather long look at Melchisedec, Hoeksema begins a significant series of articles on ‘Abraham, the Friend of God’ in his column for 10 February 1921. The significance of these articles lies in their treatment of the covenant. The first of these, for 10 February, outlines the pertinent history regarding Abraham, his calling by God and his place in covenant history. The only attention common grace receives in this entire discussion is in a passing reference. ‘Thus the representation of this part of sacred history is often given,’ contends Hoeksema, that ‘before the appearance of Abraham on the stage of history all that is narrated has reference to common grace. Special grace commences with Abraham. This conception is, of course, entirely beside the representation of Scripture. The line of God’s covenant of grace commences immediately after the fall’ (*The Banner* 1921:79).

Hoeksema’s exposition of Abraham and the covenant of grace extends well into the summer of 1921, giving full vent to his contention that the heart of the covenant is friendship between God and man, and not simply a contract governed by mutual obligation. This growing certainty that friendship is the defining characteristic of the

covenant is aptly illustrated in a paragraph from the 5 May 1921 column. In it Hoeksema writes:

First of all it appears that God is Abraham's friend. He will bless Abraham and take his side over against the enemy in the world in which he lives. This is always first in God's eternal covenant of grace. Surely, as also our baptism form has it, in all covenants there are contained two parts. In the covenant of grace the parties are Almighty God and his elect people in Christ. But never should we forget that in this covenant God is always first. His people become a possible party in the covenant only through the powerful operation of his grace in their hearts. God chose his people. God redeemed his people. God delivers his people through his grace. God calls and prepares his people to be received in his covenant and to be his party in the world. The action always proceeds from God. Thus it is with Abraham. It is God who calls and prepares Abram in order that he may be his covenant friend. God is first of all Abraham's friend, and by making him the object of his grace also prepares Abraham to assume his own part in the covenant of God. (*The Banner* 1921:276.)

In later years Hoeksema would dispense with the language of 'parties' in the covenant stating categorically that 'the relation between God and man can never really be that of an agreement between contracting parties, with mutual stipulations, conditions, and promises' (Hoeksema 1981:4). But even at this early date (1921) I think it is important to understand that, for Hoeksema, the covenant was both established and maintained by God alone; man was merely a recipient of God's goodness. In his understanding of these things Hoeksema betrays a debt to Herman Bavinck, probably going back to his days in seminary.

4.9 The Letter from A. Dykstra

During the course of his discussion of Abraham and the covenant and about a month after the last 'Reply' from Professor Janssen, Hoeksema receives a letter from an A. Dykstra, forwarded to him by *The Banner's* editor-in-chief, Henry Beets. The letter, printed on 17 February 1921, protests strongly the disservice Hoeksema is doing to the church by his repeated denial of common grace. Dykstra believes that 'God's common grace was revealed right at the gates of the lost paradise' (*The Banner* 1921:101), and that it, not redemption, runs as a 'golden thread' throughout the whole of sacred history. Dykstra's position betrays an obvious Kuyperian provenance in his belief that God has a purpose with the development of civilization and culture quite apart from redemption, a purpose which only common grace can assure. Dykstra is particularly adamant that the doctrine of common grace 'is clearly taught in Scripture and is being upheld by the very best and most learned of our Reformed theologians' (*The Banner* 1921:101), and Reverend Hoeksema should be censured for teaching otherwise.

Hoeksema's response to Dykstra gives evidence a genuine pastoral concern for a fellow brother, as well as a willingness to help a brother develop and clarify his own views regardless of how much they may ultimately differ from one another. Hoeksema begins by informing Dykstra that not all opinions concerning common grace are the same. In fact, writes Hoeksema,

Kuyper differs from Bavinck, and that rather essentially. Kuyper holds that there are two kinds of grace, the one from Christ as mediator of redemption ('special grace'); another from the Mediator of creation or the eternal Word. In this case Common Grace is not based on atonement. But Bavinck holds that there is but one grace essentially that flows from Christ Jesus. And among us there are various conceptions about this matter. Some of our men that hold to Common Grace refute Kuyper's conception of it. Some, moreover, hold that Common Grace is something that concerns only the world outside of Christ; others maintain that it is a grace believers and unbelievers have in common. You see, we do not define

the issue by saying that we are talking about Common Grace. (*The Banner* 1921:102.)

Hoeksema also informs Dykstra that his articles 'attacking' common grace were published a year and a half ago, and that when my 'recent critic on this point (Professor Janssen) informed me that he intended to attack my view on Common Grace, he was not even aware of the fact that I had written on the subject in *The Banner*, and I kindly selected *The Banner* numbers for him' (*The Banner* 1921:101). Hence, the current controversy raging in the pages of *The Banner* is not about common grace, in spite of what the Professor may say, it concerns certain teachings propagated at our school by the Professor (*The Banner* 1921:101). Helping Dykstra to gain clarity regarding his own views of common grace in order to make a better case, in addition to giving his most vociferous critic, Professor Janssen, the very articles in which he previously denied common grace demonstrate that, for Hoeksema, common grace was not a doctrine but an opinion open to vigorous debate, something which he relished. In fact, he openly states as much. To Dykstra, he writes:

I want to reassure you that I would greatly enjoy a friendly controversy on this subject. I believe in healthy controversy. I believe in controversy in public. Not for the purpose of biting and envying one another, but for the sake of developing the truth and to come to a clear understanding of one another. In the Netherlands they are not half so afraid of debates and controversies as we are here. They discuss most anything in the papers. They believe in rubbing elbows. And if you had our Netherlands publications, or some of them, you will know that the controversies in the old country and our Church here in America run somewhat along parallel lines. I welcome your criticism most heartily. And I do wish our people would understand that it is wholly possible to exchange thoughts on certain subjects without running into personalities and bitterness. Hence, once more, I welcome your communication. (*The Banner* 1921:102.)

Hoeksema's frustration remained, as no one wanted to enter the debate.

4.10 Janssen Reenters the Fray

Beginning with the 17 February 1921 issue of *The Banner*, Professor Janssen abruptly takes up his pen again—Janssen's self-imposed silence did not last very long. The editorials that followed, which Hoeksema continued to publish, were little more than a rehash of what had previously been said. Janssen continued to draw all sorts of radical, even bizarre, conclusions from Hoeksema's denial of common grace. Trying to remain gracious, Hoeksema wrote:

We are glad to hear that Prof. Janssen took up his pen again. When we read the article, however, we were sorry, and that for his sake and for the good of his cause. The professor has nothing new. Still the same method is pursued: to place his critic in a bad light in order to weaken his criticism. Professor, I deem it below the dignity of a theological professor to come with unproved, unfounded accusations as the above. And I deem it below my own dignity to answer them at length. (*The Banner* 1921:103.)

A week later, after another editorial from the Professor's pen filled with absurd conclusions, vitriol and personal abuse—he calls Hoeksema a liar (*The Banner* 1921:117)—Hoeksema seems as if he is beginning to lose his temper. Still, with more composure than his opponent, Hoeksema responds:

I really do not care to answer all sorts of personal insinuations. But sometimes it is necessary. I am not dodging anything. I am only refusing to assume responsibility for views that are not my own at all. You distill them out of my writings and try to present them as mine. They are not. And this is the only answer I will ever give to these supposedly erroneously views that are not mine at all. I refuse to be sidetracked. Now, please, professor, write about the subject rather than about me. I did not attack you personally. It is your notes I am attacking. You have not come to the point yet, although you wrote several articles. If I presented your teachings in a wrong light, you shall have a public apology in *The Banner*. But if I presented them fairly, I maintain that there is no room for them at our school. My person is in no way involved. I am neither excited nor bitter. But I am very serious about this matter. (*The Banner* 1921:119.)

In a sense, this type of reasoning was Hoeksema's fatal mistake. This is why he was effectually blind-sided by Janssen. From the start Hoeksema wanted to discuss Janssen's notes and the higher critical leanings that they betrayed. Janssen, however, was not about to sit still and be questioned about his teachings, rather, his approach was to go on the offensive. While from every angle Janssen was a master politician, Hoeksema, as I have endeavored to show, could not fathom church politics. His attitude was simple: let's discuss it openly. Granted that, for Hoeksema, discussion really meant a knock down, drag out fight, just like when he was a child on the streets of Groningen, except now in print. Add to this Hoeksema's renowned debating prowess and it is understandable that the last thing Janssen wanted was to confront Hoeksema over the issues; hence he decided to take a different tack. So, while Hoeksema is essentially dumbfounded and continues to reply only that 'the professor has not come to the point yet' (*The Banner* 1921:150), Janssen's editorials are being widely read and taken seriously.

Beginning on 24 March 1921, Hoeksema appears to be through waiting, but his first offering actually allows Janssen to determine the terms of the debate. Entitled 'Common Grace,' the 24 March editorial merely laments Janssen's changing the ground of the debate from his own views to common grace. Hoeksema, in what amounts to a rather feeble effort, summarizes his own views on common grace and concludes that: 'In the meantime, let us not forget what I wrote on the notes of Dr. Janssen still stands. That part of our controversy remains separate' (*The Banner* 1921:182).

For the next month Janssen's editorials continued, interspersed with Hoeksema's very technical analysis of Janssen's notes. It is not hard to imagine which editorials were more widely read in the pews. Hoeksema's analysis of Janssen's teaching is highly

technical and is written in highly technical language, while Janssen's editorials are designed to have popular appeal. As Hoeksema deals at length with scientific method, Janssen successfully portrays him as an arch heretic. In the final analysis, both men managed to annihilate each other. While Hoeksema managed to bring to light the aberrant instruction that was occurring at the denominational seminary, Janssen, by means of innuendo, wild assertion, and outright falsehood, dealt Hoeksema fatal blow. Hoeksema, however, by his unwillingness to answer Janssen, regardless of the absurdity of the accusation, also did himself a great disservice. He effectually allowed himself to be caricatured. Finally, in April 1921, for the good of the church at large, 'The Publication Committee has decided to discontinue the debate of Prof. Ralph Janssen and Rev. Herman Hoeksema after April 21' (*The Banner* 1921:214).

4.11 The Controversy Widens

In addition to the ongoing debate being conducted in *The Banner*, other denominational periodicals began to follow suit (Hanko 1988:24). The four colleagues of Professor Janssen, who originally sought inquiry by the Curatorium into his teaching, co-authored another pamphlet, again outlining their objections to Janssen's teachings and how these teachings were contrary to both the confessions of the church and the Word of God (Hanko 1988:25). With attention from ever widening circles within the Christian Reformed Church being focused on Janssen, it is no wonder, as Harry Boer laments, that 'the fears of the four professors swept through the church' (Boer 1972:19). Boer goes on to say that 'when the (Curatorium) met again in 1921 there were before it requests from no

less than eight (out of thirteen) classes that the views of Janssen be investigated. No one made any charges. There were only “questions” and “unrest” in the church’ (Boer 1972:19). Meeting in June 1921, the Curatorium took the following decision: ‘Although the Curatorium has never received any definite charges against Dr. R. Janssen, nevertheless, because of the present prevailing unrest the Board decides to make a most thorough investigation of the teaching of Dr. R. Janssen and consider its findings at its next meeting’ (Boer 1972:19). Curatorium also decided that, while the investigation was ongoing, all discussion on the matter in church papers or periodicals would effectively cease (Hanko 1988:26, Stob 1955:323). Pending the completion of the investigation, Professor Janssen would be required to take a year’s leave with salary (Stob 1955:322). At this point, according to Stob, ‘Dr. Janssen protested that this would amount to “accommodation to the unjustifiable propaganda that had been waged against me,” and also declared his conviction that “in my teaching I have been advocating the cause of truth,” and that in consenting to a leave of absence he would become disloyal to that cause’ (Stob 1955:323).

The June 1921 meeting of the Curatorium also saw the appointment of an investigating committee to look into the views of Professor Janssen. Herman Hoeksema was appointed to this committee. One of the first acts of the investigating committee was to secure much needed information. To accomplish this objective, the committee first made a ‘formal and public request for both “student notes” and “individual notes.”’ (Hanko 1988:27, Stob 1955:325). Next, the committee formally requested Professor Janssen to submit the notes from which he conducted his lectures. ‘Dr. Janssen did not answer the first letter of the committee,’ writes George Stob, ‘and to the second replied: “Permit me to

say that I do not care to be responsible in any way for what may involve the violation of our Reformed Church polity' (Stob 1955:325). For the duration of the investigation, Stob reports, 'Janssen refused to cooperate in the process of investigation, and withheld himself from the opportunity to witness to the truth to which he was committed' (Stob 1955:326). Janssen remained adamant, throughout 1921 and into 1922, in his judgment that the proceedings against him were contrary to proper Reformed Church order. Prior to the opening of the Synod of 1922, which met in June of that year in Orange City, Iowa, Janssen was requested to explain his opinions to an advisory committee. R. B. Kuiper, Janssen's brother-in-law, relates what was asked of him:

Dr. Janssen was requested to appear before the advisory committee to correct and complete students' notes of his lectures, before Synod had determined whether the Janssen case came before Synod in the proper way. Synod never asked Dr. Janssen in so many words to explain his views regarding certain specific articles of our confessional standards. He was requested to correct and explain certain students' notes, which of course contain much material on which the confessions say nothing. Dr. Janssen did not refuse under any and all circumstances to give an account of his teaching. He promised to answer all possible objection. He even asserted that he was anxious for an opportunity to speak. So, while he did refuse to defend himself under the given circumstances, he did not refuse a defense as such. Dr. Janssen's second communication, in which he restated his objections to a trial under the circumstances, was received by Synod as a communication and never considered. (Kuiper 1922:35-36.)

While the war of words, both pro and con, continued, Janssen published a pamphlet in his own defense in February 1922. In it, while addressing himself to the issues in a rather cursory manner, he expends himself in charging his colleagues, the four professors, and that portion of the investigating committee antagonistic to him with being Anabaptists because of their denial of common grace (Stob 1955:327).

The investigating committee produced both majority and minority reports. The majority report, in which Hoeksema had more than a little influence, was adopted by

Synod. Janssen, however, was given the opportunity to defend himself on the floor of the Synod of 1922. Edward Heerema, R. B. Kuiper's son-in-law, writes of this crucial moment:

R. B. Kuiper strongly advised his brother-in-law to speak in his own defense. "If you don't do so," R. B. told him, "you may as well take the next train out of here." Janssen persisted in his refusal to speak. He maintained that there were those at synod who were prosecutors as well as judges, people who had made up their minds about him, people who had spoken or written publicly about him. He said he would be glad to discuss all the points in dispute, but only if his objections to the stacked makeup of synod and the violations of good order were acknowledged. Dr. Janssen was deposed. (Heerema 1986:67-68.)

Three months after Janssen's deposition, R. B. Kuiper wrote in *Religion and Culture* that the whole affair was nothing more than a sham and reeked of politics (Kuiper 1922).

David Holwerda writes regarding the proceedings in which Janssen refused so adamantly to take part:

Even the opponents of Dr. Janssen admitted that the requirements of the Church Order had been violated by the procedures leading to the decisions of 1922, but they defended such violations by asserting that in Reformed theology the Church Order is not a law but a set of prescriptions to be followed in ordinary circumstances. Moreover, the highest law is the welfare of the church, and when the church is threatened, "extraordinary circumstances demand extraordinary measures." (Holwerda 1989:13.)

Hoeksema would find later, much to his dismay, that this same 'end justifies the means' attitude would prevail in his own struggles with the Christian Reformed Church. He went after Janssen, and Janssen's supporters would do the same to him (see Bolt 2000a). Within two years it would be Hoeksema complaining of procedural abnormalities, and finding those complaints falling on deaf ears just as Janssen's did in 1922.

It is impossible in retrospect to judge whether Janssen was guilty of what he was charged. He wrote almost nothing. What he did write were pamphlets critiquing and condemning the proceedings against him from a procedural perspective (Holwerda

1989:13). The student notes on which his teaching was judged are no longer extant, and any access to their content is now limited to quotations found in the report of the investigating committee (Holwerda 1989:13). Notwithstanding, it seems that, apart from family members such as R. B. Kuiper, all are agreed that Janssen's teaching was to a greater or lesser degree tainted with higher criticism (see Holwerda 1989, Bolt 2000a). But were Janssen's purported higher critical views really the issue in the 'Janssen Case'? Of course he was deposed for his higher critical leanings, still, I do not see this as the main issue for everyone concerned. George Harinck concluded that Janssen was deposed for his Neo-Calvinist perspective, which manifested itself most particularly in his desire to see the Reformed faith made relevant to the modern world (Harinck 1996:120). Janssen himself consistently appealed to both Kuyper and Bavinck (see especially Janssen 1922), and their teachings on common grace, as a precedent for his instruction. According to Holwerda:

The doctrine of common grace provided Janssen's main line of defense. He rejected out of hand the suggestion that his theology was an exercise based on an unbelieving empiricism; the real fault, he insisted, lay with his opponents' failure to appreciate the rightful place of the sciences God had given us through his common grace. Did not common grace justify an appreciation of the sciences? .Did not common grace justify the search for parallels, continuities, and relationships between the history and religion of Israel and the surrounding peoples?..And did not common grace constitute the broad basis of special grace? Janssen held fast to the belief that common grace warranted an emphasis upon the human agents used by God who brought with them much from their background and environment. (Holwerda 1989:27.)

At what point Hoeksema finally realized that common grace was the main issue in the Janssen case is really open to debate. In *The Banner* editorial for 4 November 1920 Hoeksema did make known both his own disagreement with Kuyper's doctrine of common grace and Janssen's appeal to it in his defense (*The Banner* 1920:666-667). By

the later half of 1922, though, the connection was definitely made in Hoeksema's mind (see Danhof and Hoeksema 1922). Hanko writes of this period:

He [Hoeksema with Danhof-PB] admitted that common grace was always the issue. And, while insisting that the issue could be decided on other grounds, he nevertheless prophesied that if common grace was not repudiated, Janssen's views would rise in the church and prevail. It was his considered opinion that if the Christian Reformed Church did not repudiate common grace as taught by Kuyper, and if the church took the position that common grace was basically Reformed and in agreement with the Confessions, Janssen would emerge after all as victorious. (Hanko 1988:189.)

In addition to his editorials in *The Banner*, one of the two other times Janssen accused his detractors of denying the doctrine of common grace was in a pamphlet written in 1922 entitled, *De Crisis in de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Amerika*. He accused the members of the Curatorium, especially Hoeksema (Janssen 1922:17), of the 'false doctrine of the Anabaptists, (specifically), in their denial of Common Grace' (Janssen 1922:53). 'And why should one object to a view of special revelation rooted in general revelation, or of special grace based upon common grace, or of miracles based upon created nature,' comments David Holwerda on Janssen's accusation, 'unless one has failed to catch the essential unity and compatibility of nature and grace, which is the hallmark of the doctrine of common grace but lacking in the Anabaptist tradition' (Holwerda 1989:27)?

Janssen's legacy to the Christian Reformed Church was that anyone who denied the 'Reformed' doctrine of common grace, was, quite simply un-Reformed, and, as such, would be more properly identified as an Anabaptist: a heretic who was guilty of despising the creation and seeking to flee from it. Reminiscing about the Janssen case, Hoeksema believed that it had been a fundamental mistake for him to have cooperated with the four professors in their opposition to Janssen (Hoeksema 1947:24). In the two years following

Janssen's deposition Hoeksema saw an alignment, or compromise, begin to form between the neo-Calvinist supporters of Professor Janssen and the four professors. This confederation would now turn against Hoeksema precisely because of his repudiation of the 'Reformed' doctrine of common grace (Hoeksema 1947:23). In fact, it is very probable that Hoeksema's prolonged exchange with Professor Janssen in the pages of *The Banner* was instrumental in bringing about this confederation. Hoeksema himself was persuaded that:

The fact that the four professors and others of the opponents of Doctor Janssen could unite with the pro-Janssen faction in their action against the three ministers (Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff) that were deposed in 1924-1925, plainly reveals that, apart from superficial differences, there was a fundamental agreement in principle. There was in the Janssen controversy an underlying principle which, had it not been violently and intentionally forced to the background, would have paralyzed every effort of the four professors to combat Doctor Janssen's views and would have aligned them from the beginning with the pro-Janssen faction against the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema. This underlying principle is the theory of common grace! (Hoeksema 1947:23.)

In retrospect, Hoeksema changed his mind about the importance of common grace and its relation to the Janssen case. In the beginning, around 1920, he believed that the issues revolved around the Professor's use of higher critical methods and that common grace was merely 'smoke screen' used deliberately by Janssen in order to obscure the real issues. After witnessing the materialization of an alignment between the former opponents of Professor Janssen and his ardent supporters over against the deniers of common grace, Hoeksema finally understood that the real issue was always common grace. It seems that when Hoeksema allowed himself to get drawn into the dispute with Janssen, he did not realize what he was getting himself into. Granted, Hoeksema started the dispute in the pages of *The Banner*. He should have left it alone. Janssen, because of his views, was

doomed anyway. Hoeksema does not seem to have understood this at the time and by the time he did it was too late.

Janssen's charge of Anabaptism, with its concomitant accusation that denying common grace was un-Reformed, did not fall on deaf ears. I firmly believe that the Christian Reformed Church could not integrate into her ranks one such as Hoeksema who dared deny the Kuyperian basis of Christianity and culture that the neo-Calvinists in her midst were so insistent upon. This ultimately proved to be the case.

4.12 Conclusion

The events of 1924, in which Hoeksema's ouster from the Christian Reformed Church is central, were founded firmly upon the events leading up to and including the Synod of 1922. While Professor Ralph Janssen's expulsion in 1922 from his teaching post at Calvin Seminary was not based primarily on the investigations of Herman Hoeksema, Hoeksema did succeed in bringing this sordid affair before the eyes of the church at large. Additionally, while Hoeksema may not have initiated the furor over Janssen, he surely took advantage of it. Janssen tried to cloud the issue with repeated references to common grace. He tried to weave a huge tapestry of causes and results that would inexorably follow from any denial of this common grace. And while much of what Janssen wrote may have been extreme, nevertheless, he had a substantial following. Common grace, because of Janssen, would eventually become the cause célèbre in the Christian Reformed Church.

I have tried to demonstrate that because of the events surrounding the ‘Janssen Affair’ Hoeksema himself would eventually be deposed from the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church by Janssen’s supporters and fellow Neo-Calvinists. Hoeksema went after Janssen in the pages of *The Banner* in such a way that it instilled a profound fear in many of his contemporaries. His debating prowess, his mental acuity, his logical rigor, and his constant need to be right were sufficient reason that none wanted to face him in open debate over the issues. At the same time, a sizeable contingent in the Christian Reformed Church began to realize that if they did not rid themselves of Hoeksema, he would eventually get rid of them.