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Chapter 8

Point Two: The Restraint of Sin in the Heart of Man

Relative to the second point, which is concerned with *the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in the community*, the synod declares that there is such a restraint of sin according to Scripture and the Confessions. This is evident from the citations from Scripture and the Netherlands Confession. Articles 13, 36 which teach that God, by the general operation of the Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin, by which human life in society remained possible; while it is also evident from the quotations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that from ancient times our Reformed fathers were of the same opinion.

The second and third points of common grace that were adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, exclusive of the well-meant offer of the Gospel delineated in point one, are, as David Engelsma says: ‘the theory of common grace that was taught by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck’ (Engelsma 2003:2). This common grace teaches a non-saving operation, or activity, by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all human beings in order to restrain sin. One result, according to Engelsma, is a partial rather than a total depravity of the human nature (Engelsma 2003:2), even, according to Hoeksema, ‘preparing the entire creation for glory’ (Danhof & Hoeksema [1923] 2003:129). Another result is that all of humanity, Christians and non-Christians alike, are given the ability to perform good works. These works, though not meant to have any bearing upon the spiritual state, or disposition, of the one performing them, are in themselves good, particularly in the civic or social sphere. The point I wish to address in this chapter only concerns the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all humanity. Since there has never been any question regarding the operation of the Holy Spirit in the

lives of Christians, we can dismiss this portion of the argument. The only point of contention, then, is the idea that there is an operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of non-Christians, or the reprobate, if you will.

8.1 The Image of God as a Point of Contact

The non-saving work of the Holy Spirit in the unregenerate, or unbeliever or non-Christian requires a point of contact within the person. Hoeksema terms it ‘a receptivity’ (Hoeksema 1942:50). All the proponents of common grace that posit this work of the Holy Spirit within an individual attempt to identify a point of contact within the person, but many are not really explicit in their identification of such a point. This point of contact, irrespective of the various points of reference alluded to in different writers, Harry Boer concludes, lies in the *imago Dei*. For it is in this *imago Dei*, some of which is purportedly gone and some of which remains, that a cogent point of contact can be sought. As Harry Boer states: ‘As unfallen Man was thus qualified in the direction of ever increasing enrichment of his gifts, so fallen Man retains both a certain goodness and a capacity for the development of his gifts. But these qualities are residual, remnants of the image in which he was created’ (Boer 1990:68). Hoeksema agrees with Boer that traditional Reformed theology has indeed identified such qualities as remaining in fallen man and agrees that traditionally ‘they are called the remnants of the image of God in man’ (Hoeksema 1942:52). Boer, however, goes further. Boer writes that, ‘Reformed theology, while acknowledging Man as continuing to be *imago Dei*, has failed to regard the *imago* aspect of Man’s being as the basis of all restraint of sin in his life’ (Boer

1990:70). Reformed theology has, instead, been too preoccupied with ‘total depravity’ (Boer 1990:70). Using this view of the image as his basis, Boer proceeds to take issue with the concept with the ‘antithesis’ as it is set forth in traditional Reformed thought.

Boer writes;

The Reformed doctrine of predestination did not merely split the numerical mass of individual human beings into two absolutely disparate parts. It bifurcated the human *race*, dividing the *imago Dei* into two eternally irreconcilable segments: the elect and the reprobate. (Boer 1990:161.)

Boer is not the only one to link ‘common grace’ and the ‘image of God’ in the unregenerate. But the image of God remaining in fallen humanity is not one specific thing. It encompasses the remains of those excellent gifts, or qualities, given to humanity by God in the creation prior to the fall. Since no one has lived from before the fall until the present, it is difficult to categorize exactly which gifts were lost and which were retained, historically referred to as in the ‘wider’ and in the ‘narrower’ sense. Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology* mentions, first and foremost, the ‘total depravity’ of the human nature, the loss of communion with God, a change in human consciousness to reflect the now prevailing guilt, physical death, and, finally, a change of residence as our first parents were driven from the garden (Berkhof 1986:225-226). While Berkhof takes the traditional view of the fall and its effects on the image, he does not really specify in what way what is left to humanity differs from what humanity originally had. Although Berkhof, as well as many other Reformed theologians before him, tries to distinguish between ‘total’ and ‘absolute’ depravity (Berkhof 1986:226), Harry Boer sees this as completely the wrong way to go because of the deleterious effect it has on the image.

Boer writes:

Some have tried to take the sharpest sting out of “total depravity” by positing an even lower form of sinfulness called “absolute depravity.” But this is inherently impossible. The state of “absolute” depravity would deprive a person of participation in the image of God, so that the category of humanity would cease to apply. Where the image of God exists, there cannot fail to be some manifestation of goodness, however small. There can be degrees of totality—greater or lesser, broader or narrower pervasiveness of evil. But “absolute” knows no degrees. (Boer 1990:61-62.)

Cornelius van Til, an undeniable exponent of traditional Reformed theology and an ardent supporter of the doctrine of common grace as espoused by the synod of 1924, speaks of the ‘pre-redemptive state,’ in which ‘all men in Adam (elect and reprobate) have a unified understanding and interpretation of the revelation of God and His creation’ (Dennison 1993:241). But Van Til also speaks of a ‘point of contact’ with the unbeliever. Using the measurement of a fish as an example, Van Til believes that ‘in the metaphysical realm, both parties [believer and unbeliever-PB] deal with the same God, who alone exists, and the same universe which is created by God (common point of contact). Moreover, both parties are created in the image of God. For this reason, the believer and the unbeliever can agree that the bass is sixteen inches long and weighs three pounds’ (Dennison 1993:238). ‘For this reason,’ writes Dennison,

Van Til maintained that the antithesis between believer and unbeliever was never metaphysical and psychological, but always epistemological and ethical. Metaphysically and psychologically, mankind can never be anything but the image of God, nor can mankind ever escape the imprint of God upon every inch of the universe and the constitution of his own being. All men, even presently, are responsible for the original pre-redemptive revelation of God to mankind. (Dennison 1993:245.)

It seems Van Til believes that the image of God in humanity is corrupted, but aside from mentioning ‘thinking’ and ‘behavior’ without any concrete examples and one of which he explicitly contradicts in the story of the fish, he is at a loss as to how.

William Masselink speaks of the human heart specifically in referring to the restraining power of the Holy Spirit on sin. He writes: ‘So the restraining power of sin is increased after the deluge, not because of any improvement in man’s heart, but because of God’s sovereign common grace. The beastlike heart of man shall be somewhat more caged by common grace than was the case before the flood’ (Masselink 1953:201). It is interesting that, quoting Isaiah, Harry Boer assigns both the head and the heart to the ‘image’ as component parts (Boer 1990:65).

As long as even part of the image of God remains in fallen humanity, a certain amount of good remains there as well. And, it is but a short step to enhance, or augment, this good by means of a further operation of the Holy Spirit to restrain sin. The point of contact is there. Due to what I perceive to be an important consideration in the doctrine of common grace, I would like to explore the concept of the *imago Dei* a bit further, along with Hoeksema’s reworking of the concept to avoid any point of contact.

Afterwards, in place of a special operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unregenerate to restrain sin, Hoeksema posits his concept of ‘organic development.’ Hoeksema’s idea of organic development covers the outworking, or unfolding, of total depravity in the lives of unbelievers, even giving place to ‘good works.’

8.2 *The Image of God in Man*

Early on in his ministry Hoeksema adopted Abraham Kuyper’s view of the image of God in man. In an early sermon on Lord’s Day III, he said:

Now, what does it imply that man is created in the image of God? Here we must clearly distinguish. Most generally the distinction is made between the image of

God in a wider sense of the word, and in a narrower sense. And then it is said that the image of God in the narrower sense has been lost, but in the wider sense it has been retained by man. And we have no objection to such a distinction, if only we bear clearly in mind that they are not two images, nor two parts of the same image, but the image of God from a twofold point of view. See, friends, we must clearly understand that man, so to speak, was stamped by the impress of God's own image. He could never loose that image again. (Hoeksema 1969:97.)

However, immediately after bringing this to the attention of his listeners, Hoeksema injected a certain amount of confusion into his own argument by saying: 'And since our Heidelberger in this connection only speaks about the image of God from the point of view of its loss through sin, it refers to this image in the narrower sense only' (Hoeksema 1969:97). Hoeksema's more mature thought on the matter, as he set out in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (Hoeksema 1966), presents a decidedly different picture of the present state of fallen humanity. After dismissing any possible distinction between the 'image' and 'likeness' found in Genesis 1:26-27 as 'rather arbitrary' (Hoeksema 1966:204), he goes on to say that this view

led to the Roman Catholic theory of the image of God as *donum superadditum*. Man is *naturally* good; and man with the additional gift of the likeness of God, according to which he is able to seek the higher spiritual things of God, was spiritually perfect. Man, therefore, can loose the image of God and still be naturally good, although he is no longer able to perform spiritual works. That this theory is very closely related to the theory of common grace goes without saying. (Hoeksema 1966:204-205.)

Later Reformed theologians, however, made the distinction between the image of God in a 'wider' and a 'narrower' sense (Hoeksema 1966:206), a concept, as we saw above, Hoeksema inherited most directly from Abraham Kuyper. After demonstrating to his satisfaction that the confessions, specifically article 14 of the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* III, IV, 1, do not admit such a distinction, Hoeksema contended that such a distinction is, in effect, dangerous 'because it prepares room for the further philosophy

that there are remnants of the image of God left in fallen man, and that therefore the natural man cannot be wholly depraved' (Hoeksema 1966:207).

Because the majority of opinion on the image of God in man left the depravity of the natural man an open question, Hoeksema sought an explanation that was satisfactory from a Biblical perspective, consistent with the Confessions of the Reformed churches, and not detrimental to the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man. Taking his cue from Ephesians 4:23-24 in which Paul encourages believers to 'be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteous and holiness' (Bible 1983:1218), and from Colossians 3:10, in which Paul commends the Colossians for having 'put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him' (Bible 1983:1226), Hoeksema tried a different distinction altogether. He wrote at some length:

If a distinction is to be made in the image of God after which man was created, we prefer to make the distinction between the image in a formal sense and in a material sense. By the former is meant the fact that man's nature is adapted to bear the image of God. Not every nature of the creature is capable of bearing God's image, of showing forth the reflection of God's own ethical perfections of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. It is evident that it requires a rational, moral nature to bear that image of God. And by the image of God in a material sense is meant that spiritual, ethical soundness of the human nature according to which man actually shows forth the virtues of knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. If you will, we may distinguish between man as the image *bearer*, that is, as being capable of bearing the image of God, and man as *actually bearing* God's image. By virtue of his creation, God breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, man's whole nature became adapted to be the bearer of God's image. This, however, is not the same as saying that he *is* the image of God. But it means that he is a personal being with a rational, moral nature, capable of standing in a conscious, personal relation to God, capable of knowledge of God, of righteousness, and of holiness. And his capability of being endowed with God's image we would prefer to call God's image in a formal sense. No matter what becomes of man, whether he actually shows forth the beauty and glory of the image of God, or whether he turns into the very opposite and reveals the image of the devil, always you can distinguish him as a creature that ought to show forth God's image, always he remains the living soul that was formed by God's fingers

out of the dust of the ground and into whose nostrils God breathed the breath of life originally. Always he remains a personal, rational, and moral being, who ought to live in covenant fellowship with the living God. However, man was originally created so that he actually possessed the image of God. He was not only formally adapted to bear God's image; but he was also materially endowed with the spiritual, ethical virtues of that image. These virtues are usually distinguished as true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. And all three are often expressed in the one term, *man's original righteousness*. It is that original goodness of man's nature, according to which it was wholly motivated by the love of God and with all its faculties and powers moved in the direction of God, so that the operation of his heart and soul and mind and will and all his strength were in accord with the will of God. And this one virtue of complete integrity is distinguished as true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. (Hoeksema 1966:208-209.)

After the fall, while humanity still retains its humanness, that specific adaptation of the human nature designed to bear the image of God, humanity no longer bears that image itself in any material way. Hoeksema would go even further still. He contended that 'it is not enough to say that man merely lost this image of God' (Hoeksema 1966:213), which he most certainly did. Hoeksema further contended:

The spiritual, ethical operation of his heart and mind and will and strength was put into reverse, so that his knowledge became darkness and love of the lie, his righteousness became rebellion and iniquity, his holiness became aversion to God and impurity in all his affections. The being that was designed to be the image of God changed into the image of the devil. (Hoeksema 1966:213.)

Only through the sacrifice of Christ and by His grace is this image restored, and indeed 'raised to a higher, to a heavenly level and glory that can be lost nevermore' (Hoeksema 1966:213).

This view of Hoeksema concerning the loss of the image of God in man might be considered, in some circles, novel at best. That there are truly a wide range of opinions regarding this image is amply demonstrated by Anthony Hoekema in his book, *Created in God's Image* (Hoekema 1986). The majority of scholars chronicled in Hoekema's book would certainly not agree with Hoeksema. Herman Bavinck, for example, believed

that 'man does not simply bear or have the image of God; he is the image of God' (Hoekema 1986:65), and, thus, it is hardly something he or she could lose. In contrast to Bavinck, Karl Barth argued that 'man and woman together are the image of God' (Hoekema 1986:97). Elsewhere Barth adds:

We might easily discuss which of these and many other similar explanations is the finest and deepest and most serious. What we cannot discuss is which of them is the true explanation of Gen. 1:26. For it is obvious that their authors merely found the concept [of image] in the text and then proceeded to pure invention in accordance with the requirements of contemporary anthropology. (Boer 1990:8.)

Barth's view equally does not admit the possibility of loss of the image. However, Hoeksema does seem to have an ally in the Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger. Bullinger wrote that:

For because all men of their own nature are destitute of the glory of God, that is, since they are without the true image of God, to these the likeness whereof they were created in the beginning: therefore all men verily are unrighteous and sinners: whereupon it followeth, that in them there is no righteousness, and that they have nothing wherin to boast before the righteous God. (Bullinger 1587:551.)

For Bullinger, the image of God in humanity is lost in its totality, and this loss of the image is both a cause and a consequence of the unrighteousness inherent in the present human condition, i.e. depravity. Whether or not Hoeksema would agree with Bullinger as to exactly what constituted the image of God in man is certainly open to debate, but he most surely would agree with Bullinger on the material loss of that image and its consequences.

8.3 *The Restraint of Sin*

The Second Point of Common Grace as espoused by the Synod of 1924 speaks specifically about the restraint of sin in the heart of the unregenerate by the Holy Spirit. We have dealt at some length with the point of contact for this work of the Holy Spirit in fallen humanity. Now, I would have us look briefly at synod's justification for this assertion regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unregenerate and Hoeksema's unique response.

The synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 believed that articles 13 and 36 of the *Belgic Confession* were justification sufficient for their conclusions on the work of restraint of sin by the Holy Spirit. The specific passage from article 13 is: 'without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded that he so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without his will and permission, they cannot hurt us' (Schaff: 1985:397). Likewise, the specific passage from article 36 reads as follows:

We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, hath appointed kings, princes, and magistrates, willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained, and all things carried on among them with good order and decency. For this purpose he has invested the magistracy with the sword, *for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.* (Schaff 1985:432.)

In his book *The Triple Breach*, after commenting briefly that any operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unregenerate keeps the person 'from a total corruption of his nature' so that that person 'is not as ungodly in his outward life as might otherwise be expected' (Hoeksema 1942:21), Hoeksema proceeds to criticize the foundation in the *Belgic Confession* upon which the Christian Reformed Synod rested this point. Speaking specifically with respect to article 13 of the *Belgic Confession* as used by the synod,

Hoeksema contends that article has nothing to do with any operation of common grace by the Holy Spirit. Instead, he writes: ‘It speaks of God’s providence, and in connection with this blessed truth of God’s power and dominion even over the instruments and agents of darkness’ (Hoeksema 1942:21). The fact that this article speaks of ‘devils’ and the ‘ungodly’ ‘in the same breath,’ writes Hoeksema, should have warned the synod that if their ‘so called interpretation’ was correct that this article would also teach ‘that there is a reforming influence of the Holy Spirit upon the devils’ (Hoeksema 1942:21). Hoeksema agrees that this interpretation is absurd, but, he maintains, that if synod does not want an operation of common grace on devils than it cannot maintain that this article speaks of a ‘gracious operation of the Holy Spirit at all, but simply God’s almighty dominion, whereby He rules over and governs all things according to His eternal counsel’ (Hoeksema 1942:22).

Continuing his criticism, Hoeksema now turns his attention to article 36. He writes:

It is well-known, that this article does not speak of a certain restraint of the power and corruption of sin in the heart of the natural man by a certain general operation of the Holy Spirit, but of an external restraint of certain public sins by the power of the law supported by police-power. The plain teaching of this article is even, that without the power of the magistrates men are not restrained at all but are dissolute. If there were such an operation of the Spirit as is taught in the second point, the police, the sword-power of the magistrates would not be necessary. But now it is different. Article 36 does not proceed from the assumption of such an operation of grace upon the heart of natural man at all, and, therefore, professes the need for laws and police. (Hoeksema 1942:22.)

It was regarding article 36 and its use by the Christian Reformed Church, as I quoted in the biography, that Hoeksema, years later, quipped ‘that the CRC Kalamazoo Synod of 1924 could not tell the difference between the Holy Spirit and a policeman’ (Engelsma 2001:294).

8.4 Further Criticism of Point Two

In addition to his disagreement with traditional Reformed theology on the image of God in man, Hoeksema also took exception to Abraham Kuyper's teaching on common grace that was adopted by the synod of 1924 and enshrined in point two. Hoeksema states that he wants to 'call attention to certain fundamental principles that have been adopted in this second point, and that are in direct conflict with the entire presentation of the truth in the Word of God and with the fundamental line of Reformed thinking' (Hoeksema 1942:54-55).

The first of these principles, writes Hoeksema, involves the idea of God's sovereignty 'over the powers of sin and death and corruption' (Hoeksema 1942:55). Common grace as it is stated in point two, Hoeksema observes, offers a dualistic conception of God and the creation, 'more particularly God and the power of darkness' (Hoeksema 1942:55). It gives a representation to sin, death, and corruption that allows them to work outside the sovereign control of God. Hence, this point of common grace teaches God's restraint of these powers, which 'exists and works outside and apart of Him' (Hoeksema 1942:55). 'But this is dualism,' writes Hoeksema,

and contrary to the fundamental conception of the Word of God. ...The corruption of the sinner is death, spiritual death. ...God inflicts the punishment of death upon the guilty sinner in Paradise. Also death and corruption are powers that can work only through God. But if this is maintained, one can no longer speak of a restraining power of the Spirit, for how could God check a power that operates only by His will and through Him? The theory of a restraining grace is fundamentally a denial of God's absolute sovereignty. (Hoeksema 1942:55.)

Secondly, Hoeksema sees this idea of a restraining grace as a denial of God's justice. Those who maintain the view of a restraining grace conceive of the light, the remnants of good that remain humanity since the fall, and the semblance of outward righteousness,

which all the proponents of common grace are seeking to come to terms with (Engelsma 2003:12-17), as ‘unmerited grace of God’ i.e. ‘common grace’ (Hoeksema 1942:55). ‘Very well,’ Hoeksema inquires, ‘but on what basis of God’s unchangeable justice does fallen man receive this light and life and goodness, this common grace?’ (Hoeksema 1942:55). If the threat of God in the garden to Adam and Eve was, if you eat you will die, and God did not carry out the sentence, where is the justice? Hoeksema is quick to distinguish between this scenario and the remission of sins merited by the work of Christ available to the elect. ‘But,’ Hoeksema concludes, ‘to what basis of justice can they point who maintain that natural man, outside of Christ, receives blessings of unmerited grace?’ (Hoeksema 1942:55-56).

Thirdly, Hoeksema maintains that point two is based on what he terms ‘the serious error of resistible grace’ (Hoeksema 1942:56). That is to say that the restraint of sin in the unregenerate, as outlined by the proponents of common grace, is resistible grace. As proof of this assertion Hoeksema states ‘that corruption and sin are not actually checked, they make progress and develop continually. This was evident in the history of the pre-deluvian world. This becomes very evident in all history, also in the new dispensation, for the entire development of the world tends towards the realization of Antichrist’ (Hoeksema 1942:56). On this point Hoeksema quotes Professor Louis Berkhof to the effect that ‘the Spirit strives in vain. He attempts to check the power of sin and lead men to repentance, but He strives in vain, He fails’ (Hoeksema 1942:56). Cornelius Van Till seems to concede this very point when he was guest lecturer at Calvin Seminary at approximately the same time point two was adopted. According to Van Til, writes James Bratt:

Common Grace...was no continuing and renewing work of God but a fund given to mankind in general before the Fall that had been diminishing ever since. "Civic righteousness" was but a weak memory of ancestral blessings. Humanity was divided ever more sharply into two religious camps as the mist of common grace lifted from human consciousness, revealing to the reprobate their true enmity with God and thus triggering ever more thorough, forceful enmity towards the elect. (Bratt 1984:191.)

Even with all he wrote on the subject, Hoeksema considered his chief objection to point two was that it effectively denied total depravity. As I said at the outset of this chapter, points two and three of common grace are related. Point two gives a rationale to point three. While point three repeats some of point two, it would really cease to exist without it. Point two is the foundation and point three builds on that foundation. Hoeksema says that two and three relate as cause and effect. Without the restraint of sin in point two, there would be no 'civic righteousness' as outlined in point three. As Hoeksema writes:

And fact is, that this second point simply teaches that the human nature since the fall is not wholly corrupt and totally depraved; it implies that it would have been totally corrupt if the restraining power of common grace had not intervened. ...Consider it how you will, the second point always presupposes that some of the original righteousness of Paradise is left in man, some moral integrity remained in him, some element of good, which may be preserved, some love of the neighbor, some receptivity for the truth is still discovered in him. If this is not presupposed there is nothing to keep, to preserve, to check. And for that reason the second point, in which the theory of common grace as expounded by Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr., was fully adopted, implies a denial of the total depravity of fallen man. (Hoeksema 1942:56-57.)

8.5 Organic Development

To counter his opponent's view of the restraint of sin in the heart of the unregenerate as a work of the Holy Spirit, Hoeksema posited his own concept of 'organic development' in order to explain the progress and development of sin in the world. This

concept of ‘organic development’ would eventually become one of the dominant themes in Hoeksema’s later theology, especially his view of the covenant. As to how Hoeksema came to adopt this perspective is not at all certain, although a good deal of influence from the great Dutch theologian, Herman Bavinck, can be discerned. The perspective itself, according to Leonard Peikoff, comes from the ‘German historical school’ (Peikoff 1982:259). Following this school of thought, sociologist Henry Pratt Fairchild, writing on modern life in the May 1932 issue of *Harper’s Magazine*, said that it has become ‘so definitely organic, that the very concept of the individual is becoming obsolete’ (Peikoff 1982:268). Herman Hanko, in his recent doctrinal history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, also sets the idea of ‘organic’ over against that of ‘individuality’ (Hanko 2000:232-233). Hanko believes that this was Hoeksema’s opinion also; pitting individualistic Arminianism against a Reformed ‘organic conception of things’ (Hanko 2000:232). Hanko also believes that when Kuyper and Bavinck followed the ‘siren’s song’ of common grace, they also adopted this individualism, leaving behind their original, ‘organic’ outlook (Hanko 2000:232-233). My own studies reveal that this was hardly the case, at least for Herman Bavinck. Herman Bavinck was already a mature, seasoned theologian when he penned his enormously popular *Magnalia Dei* (translated as *Our Reasonable Faith*) in 1909. This volume was to serve as an abridgement, or compendium of his larger four-volume dogmatics, which was issued some ten years earlier. Writing on the covenant of grace in *Our Reasonable Faith*, Bavinck says that

The second peculiarity or remarkable characteristic of the covenant of grace is that in all of its dispensations it has an organic character. ...The elect, accordingly, do not stand loosely alongside each other, but are one in Christ. ...It is one communion or fellowship, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ...Thus election cannot have been an arbitrary or accidental deed. If it was governed by the purpose of constituting Christ as Head of the church His

body, then it has an organic character and already includes the idea of a covenant. (Bavinck 1956:276.)

Bavinck's view of the covenant, as demonstrated above, is most obviously organic in nature. Additionally, Bavinck previously investigated the idea of 'common grace' thoroughly in his rectoral address at Kampen in December 1894. Hence, to say that Bavinck's later studies on common grace altered, or transformed his former 'organic' outlook to one of individualism, does not seem to be the case. In fact, the whole enterprise of pitting 'organic' against 'individual' seems dubious at best. There are some things that are of an individual nature and there are some things that can best be explained from an organic perspective. Adopting the one need not demand precluding the other. I would like to suggest that this was also the case with Hoeksema. While he held to an organic view of the covenant, the elect in Christ, and even of the development of sin in the world, he did not hold to this perspective in areas such as ecclesiology where he lauded Kuyper for again giving respectability once again to the autonomy of the local church (see Englesma 1998:30), or in civil government where rights such as 'to keep and bear arms' is an individual one.

For all this discussion of 'organic' versus 'individual' one might consider a definition to be essential. Unfortunately, Hoeksema really did not give one. Herman Hanko, in his discussion of 'organic' admits just this:

One would be hard pressed to find in all the writings of the ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches a word used more commonly and in a more widely-diversified way than the word "organic." ... (Yet) the rather striking fact is, however, that one can search in vain for a definition of this word. Passages can be found in which some clear things are said about the term, and in which the writer made clear why the term could be applied to a given doctrine; but a definition cannot be found. (Hanko 2000:230-231.)

Earlier, quoting Gertrude Hoeksema, I said that one of Herman Hoeksema's theological mentors was Abraham Kuyper; Professor David Engelsma, current professor of dogmatics at the Protestant Reformed Seminary concurs in this regard (Engelsma 1998:29). However, Reverend Bernard Woudenberg, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches, thinks otherwise. Having studied directly under Herman Hoeksema in the 1950s, Reverend Woudenberg has, what appears to me, to be a deep, abiding understanding and love for Hoeksema's theology. Hence, in contrast to Gertrude Hoeksema and David Engelsma, Reverend Woudenberg sees more of a general Secession influence in Hoeksema's thought on this subject, such as is seen in the theology of both Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Hoeksema's own teacher at Calvin Seminary, Foppe M. ten Hoor (1855-1934) (Woudenberg 2000:97). This would be in direct contrast to one of Hoeksema's other teachers, William Heyns (1856-1933) which I considered at some length in the biography of Hoeksema. Reverend Woudenberg said all this in conjunction with an article he wrote for *The Standard Bearer* analyzing 'The Covenant View of Herman Bavinck,' in the course of which he commented upon an article by Dr. Jelle Faber of the Canadian Reformed Church. He wrote:

In this paper Dr. Faber examines the positions of seven early professors of Calvin Seminary, at least six of whom he proposes formed a consistent line of theological thought—essentially the same as that now held by the Liberated Churches (suggesting, no doubt, that those who would remain loyal to the historical teachings of the Christian Reformed can now best ally themselves with the Canadian Reformed). As I read this, however, something struck me as extremely strange. Faber deals with the last of these men, William Heyns and Foppe M. ten Hoor, as though they were of one theological cut, while I recall distinctly how Herman Hoeksema, who studied under both of them, took strong exception to the teaching of Heyns, while he was quite fond of ten Hoor and in a certain way looked upon him as his own theological mentor. ...Faber points out that he (ten Hoor) had been a classmate of the great Dutch theologian, Dr. Herman Bavinck, and a correspondent with him in later life, leading to the likelihood that their theological positions were essentially similar. This sent me quickly to the shelf for

Bavinck's great book, *Our Reasonable Faith*, and in it to the chapter on *The Covenant*. I was amazed. Here in most concise form are all the essential elements of Herman Hoeksema's covenant view—at almost every point precisely opposite to that of Heyns, Schilder and the Liberated Churches. (Woudenberg 2000:97.)

The specific characteristic that allied Hoeksema's covenant view with that of both Bavinck and Ten Hoor was, according to Reverend Woudenberg, that elusive quality of 'organic development' (Woudenberg 2001). Again we find ourselves pressed into a quest for a definition. Reverend Woudenberg frankly admitted that Herman Hoeksema never defined the term in any abstract or objective sense. Yet, Reverend Woudenberg did say that the key quality of 'organic,' for Hoeksema, was the idea of 'living.' Hence, 'organic' refers to a living relationship; a relationship of like kinds, a sort of symbiosis. This living relationship is between Christ and the Church, His Body, and, by logical extension, a union of the whole church with the individual. A definition, which, at least to my mind, is far different than Hanko's definition in which the individual is pitted against the collective.

It is of particular interest then that James Daane, minister and teacher in the Christian Reformed Church and an ardent exponent of common grace, criticizes Hoeksema's 'individualism,' for focusing exclusively on the individual in his covenant concept to the exclusion of the whole. He writes:

Rev. Hoeksema claims to believe in the Covenant of Grace. Nevertheless, in common with the Fundamentalist and the Liberal, he believes essentially that God deals with mankind as individuals. For, in Hoeksema's thought, God does not *first of all* deal with elect and reprobate together, *in their covenantal historical relatedness*. God has no *common* attitude towards *both* elect and reprobate. Consequently, Hoeksema denies both common grace and common wrath. God *only loves* the elect and *only hates* the reprobate. (Daane 1951:11.)

On the next page of the same article, in the course of expounding his conception of 'man, both one and many,' Daane says that the 'individual is, indeed, superior to the state'

because the state is ‘a thing,’ while at the same time saying that the individual is not superior to the ‘social community’ because it is ‘a community of persons’ (Daane 1951:12). Nowhere does he define ‘social community’ apart from saying it is a community of persons. Is not the state also a community of persons? Daane does not seem to understand clearly, if he does he is unable to communicate it, what an individual is in himself or herself and, in turn, what is the relationship of that individual to the organic whole. For Hoeksema, humanity is indeed organically related, but not in the ‘covenantal historical relatedness’ that Daane imagines. Using Biblical imagery, Hoeksema believed that the relatedness of the different individuals that make up the human race is that of ‘kernel’ to ‘husk’ or of ‘chaff’ to ‘wheat.’ (Hoeksema 1966:214-226). They grow together in the world as they grow together on the plant, and in the end they will be separated. The ‘wheat,’ however, is not the ‘chaff,’ and vice versa. They grow together organically, but they are not related spiritually. The ‘wheat’ and ‘chaff,’ as in the Scriptures, signify the elect and the reprobate and they grow separately from a spiritual perspective along different lines.

Commenting on the covenantal aspect from the perspective of the elect, Reverend Woudenberg says that this living relationship is that in which we receive our life from Christ, and he used the figure of the vine and the branches as detailed in John 15 to illustrate his meaning. This concept of ‘organic,’ i.e. ‘living,’ broadens out into the line of human generations also (Bavinck held to this view also, see Van Genderen 1995:58). As a physical vine produces further new growth so the spiritual branch produces further new branches, which would, in turn, rightly be called spiritual growth. All of which occurs under the rubric of organic development.

Hoeksema, as we have seen in the biography, was a follower of Secession theology as well as that of Abraham Kuyper. Both strains figure strongly in his theological development. Still, it was from Herman Bavinck and F. M. ten Hoor that Hoeksema inherited most of his ideas on the nature of the covenant, with the idea of an organic or living relationship as paramount. Concerning this organic conception of the covenant and its influence on Hoeksema, over against the more judicial categories of Abraham Kuyper, Reverend Woudenberg writes:

This perhaps more basically than anything separates his (Hoeksema's) views from that of Schilder, who, like Abraham Kuyper before him "had a preference for judicial categories and for terms like statute, obligation and legal status, defined by the *speaking God*, the God of the *Word*, both for those who will respond positively, and for those whose response will be negative." Meanwhile, however, the Rev's H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema had followed Bavinck's suggestion and focused on the organic relationship of friendship as the heart of their covenantal thought. To them the idea of the covenant as a living relationship was far more Biblical and far richer in thought than that of a legal right to something that might not even be realized in the end. (Woudenberg 2000:99.)

In speaking of the 'organic' Hoeksema everywhere begins in the book of Genesis with the 'moederbelofte' of Genesis 3:15, and, while we have elements of the 'individual' there are also elements of the 'organism.' Also known as the 'protevangeli,' this is the promise 'that God will put enmity in the heart of man against Satan and his seed' (Hoeksema 1966:261). Hoeksema gives this perspective:

All the rest of the history of God's people in the world is plainly the realization of this prophecy. This prophecy is called the protevangeli (in Dutch: moederbelofte). It is called thus because it is the beginning of the gospel of salvation; and all the rest of the revelation of the gospel in Christ may be conceived as only a further unfolding and expansion of this promise. ...Only, in the course of history it is gradually revealed in all its implications. By the seed of the serpent, although also the serpent brood is meant, is indicating principally the seed of the devil, that is, the children of the devil among men in the line of generations of the reprobate, culminating in the Antichrist, the Man of Sin. On the other hand, by the seed of the woman is meant: The spiritual children of the covenant, the holy seed in the line of the generations of the elect. (Hoeksema 1966:260.)

We have already examined the development of this ‘holy seed’ in the lines of generations of the elect. This is the covenant, both in its individual and corporate (organism) manifestations. In the next chapter, in connection with the third point of common grace, I will look at the darker side of the ‘moederbelofte,’ which, according to Hoeksema, is the organic development of sin, and those associated with it.

8.6 Conclusion

As I said at the outset of this chapter, the second and third points of common function together. The second point speaks specifically of a work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unregenerate to restrain sin so that, point three, they are able to perform good works. This work of the Holy Spirit is termed common grace because it teaches a restraint of sin in the hearts of unbelievers—no one has ever argued against the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of believers, at least as far as common grace is concerned. In conjunction with the second point, we have also looked at Hoeksema’s analysis of the support from the *Belgic Confession* given to this point by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924. Hoeksema effectively showed that the proof adduced by the synod for the second point from the confession, really had nothing to do with the point they were trying to prove. In fact, as Hoeksema retorted, they were confusing the Holy Spirit with a policeman.

For common grace to work there has to be a point of contact in the person in whom it is to work. While most specify various points of contact, the image of God, or various facets thereof, usually seems to be in view. Traditional Reformed theology, with

its description of the image as partially gone and partially remaining, gives support to this view. After all, if part of the image remains, there remains something good in unregenerate and the function of the Holy Spirit expounded in point two simply works in conjunction with what is already in the person. For this reason, Hoeksema repudiated the notion any vestiges of the image of God in fallen humanity. His view was that the image in any material sense was lost in the fall, although human beings still retained the capacity as image bearers; it is simply their humanity.

While Hoeksema may have not believed in any work of the Holy Spirit in the unregenerate from outside the creation, he believed in organic development within the creation. We have discussed this organic, living development in conjunction with the covenant. In the next chapter, we will look at the other side of organic development, the darker side, the development of sin.