

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have tried to give due consideration to Herman Hoeksema as a man, a pastor and a theologian. In a sense these roles cannot be separated from the man because Hoeksema lived and breathed theology, it was in his veins and it was his life's blood. We have looked primarily at Hoeksema's spiritual/intellectual development in the biographical portion, because it is in this spiritual/intellectual development that we gain the insight needed to understand the mature theologian.

In many ways Hoeksema was a product of his early years in the Netherlands. Essentially, he grew up on the streets of Groningen with little to no parental supervision. He learned to fight for what he wanted and he seemed to like it. This liking for a good fight, indeed not being able to resist a good fight, would not suit him well, however, in an ecclesiastical confrontation. This bellicosity was also combined with a confidence bordering on cockiness; Hoeksema just assumed he was right and it was everyone's duty to see this and acquiesce. Unfortunately, when he encountered Professor Janssen, who was well versed in church politics, Hoeksema did not really know what to do. In the end, because of this same church politics, Hoeksema, and others of like mind, found themselves out of their own denomination wondering what happened.

Hoeksema's theology began to take shape in the Netherlands as well. While his parents were divorced while he was still a boy, Hoeksema's mother, Johanna, was a pious *Afscheiding* woman who instilled in her son a religious heritage he never forgot. It was from the *Afscheiding* that Hoeksema took the rudiments of what eventually became his view of the covenant as a bond of friendship and love between God and man.

Additionally, his stress on the ‘organic’ nature of things can also be traced to the church of his youth. Later, because of a childhood friend, Hoeksema migrated to a church with a background in the *Doleantie*. Later in his life, he would read the writings of the leader of the *Doleantie*, Abraham Kuyper, and in the process made many of Kuyper’s ideas his own. While there is debate in certain circles as to whether the *Afscheiding* (Bernard Woudenberg) or the *Doleantie* (David Engelsma) had more influence on Hoeksema’s theology, I have tried to demonstrate that Hoeksema learned from both but copied neither. That is to say, both movements are reflected in Hoeksema’s mature thought, but not in their original form. Hoeksema was original and creative; he took what was available and worked with it until it was unrecognizable. He then put these unrecognizable elements together into a coherent whole; a whole that bore little resemblance to its constituent parts.

In addition to being creative and original, Hoeksema was also dynamic. His capacity for work was breathtaking. His charisma was felt by all who met him. He was the kind of man who initiates movements. And this is what he did; he founded the Protestant Reformed Churches after being expelled from the Christian Reformed Church over the issue of common grace. He taught for many years in the seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, training others to follow in his footsteps. In many ways, however, this was simply not to be. As the Protestant Reformed Churches tried to conserve for posterity the gains Hoeksema had made, a dynamic understanding of the truth gave way to a myriad of rules and regulations, and the leader’s vision was reduced to codes of conduct he never stressed.

The dynamic of Hoeksema's theology, however, was the sovereignty of God. It is God who wills to do His good pleasure and it is given to us, i.e. Christians, to understand what God does. God does not hide Himself from the elect, those whom He has chosen in love from before the foundation of the world. No, God reveals Himself in everything He does. His decrees, according to Hoeksema, are a mirror image of the historical process. It is nothing less than God's counsel being worked out in time; this is the stuff of history. This history, also according to the plan of God, unfolds organically along the lines of election and reprobation. The line of election is the visible unfolding of the covenant in history and the line of reprobation is the organic development of sin. Revelation is, therefore, for those who have been given the capacity to receive it, i.e. the elect. For the rest, the reprobate, God manifests Himself, but because of total depravity this manifestation is never acknowledged, much less understood.

This dynamic reveals, at least from my perspective, the most important aspect of Hoeksema's theology, its thoroughly unconditional nature. The centerpiece of Hoeksema's thought was a covenant which was absolutely unconditional from the perspective of the believer. This covenant was defined as a relationship of friendship and love between God and His elect. And this friendship and love was initiated and maintained by God alone. That is to say, for Hoeksema, the covenant was both established and maintained by God apart from anything the creature would do. Hence, God was seen to be faithful even when the creature was not. Or, as I heard a young lady in church put it: we constantly think we have to hold on to Him when, in reality, it is He who always has hold of us.

In addition to his being dynamic, Hoeksema was also bold. Many of his theological constructs were radical in nature. As I said, he was not a conservative. His views of the covenant, the image of God in humanity, elections and reprobation, general revelation and more were breakthroughs in new directions. He broke new ground. Much of this has gone unnoticed because, even in the church he founded, the implications of many of his original insights have yet to be worked out. In other areas, Hoeksema, with a sentence from a book, or a line in a sermon points the way to a line of thought he himself never investigated. Hoeksema's boldness, however, did not go unchallenged. He has been labeled a 'Hyper-Calvinist,' a 'rationalist,' and a 'theological reactionary.' I have dispelled the cavil of 'Hyper-Calvinist' by showing that Hoeksema never went beyond Calvin in the direction his detractors claim he did. Hoeksema has been labeled a 'rationalist,' a notion which I have also sought to dispel. Rationalism is a philosophy; a philosophy to which Hoeksema did not subscribe. While not subscribing to rationalist philosophy, at the same time Hoeksema was thoroughly rational. He firmly believed that either the logic of revelation is our logic, or there is no revelation. Therefore, I am convinced that those who persist in calling Hoeksema a rationalist simply confuse rationalism with rationality. Additionally, Hoeksema's theology is also not a theology of reaction as some have claimed; either in reaction to common grace or anything else. It is true that some, not all, of Hoeksema's doctrinal formulations were given impetus by doctrines or beliefs he saw as untenable, but this in no way proves his theology is reactionary. If it were true, much of his theology would be characterized by the negative, this is simply not the case and I cite his doctrine of the covenant as the embodiment of friendship and love as an example. In the course of the thesis, even when dealing with

Hoeksema's conflicts, such as the events surrounding 1924, I have tried to present a positive statement of Hoeksema's theology. This is not to say that I agree with all of it, but I firmly believe that a positive statement of Hoeksema's theology is definitely in order.

The theory of Common Grace as adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 became the source of Hoeksema's greatest theological battle. This doctrine with its three points was seen by Hoeksema as a rejection of those theological tenets which he held dear. After his meddling in the Janssen case, where Professor Janssen was dismissed from his post in part because of Hoeksema's efforts, many wanted Hoeksema gone as well and it seems that the doctrine of common grace was well suited to accomplish just that. After the Three Points of Common Grace were adopted in 1924, along with his subsequent refusal to abide by synod's decision in adopting them, Hoeksema was removed from the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church and immediately went about constructing a new church to replace the one that was now lost. His writings on the Three Points of Common Grace show clearly their innovative character. The proof adduced by the Synod of 1924 for their adoption falls to the ground under Hoeksema's pen. Contrariwise, Hoeksema maintained the grace is never common but always particular; it is always for the elect alone. God gives good gifts to the reprobate, but this is to further their condemnation, not to bless them in any way. Equally, there is no free offer of the Gospel in which God sincerely desires the salvation of those whom he has chosen not to save. No, for Hoeksema, the Gospel is always a command which can only be obeyed by those whom God has regenerated. But, just because the Gospel is seen as a command that can only be obeyed by those whom God has

regenerated in no way nullifies the need for the promiscuous preaching of the Gospel, i.e. external call, to all humanity without distinction. Hoeksema also maintained that there is no work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unbeliever to restrain sin. This is what we have the police for. And since there is no work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unbeliever, the unbeliever produces no civic good, or culture or anything else that might be considered good in the sight of God.

Throughout this thesis I have tried to portray the issues as seen through Hoeksema's eyes. I wanted the reader to get to know Herman Hoeksema intimately. This does not mean that I agree with Hoeksema in all he said. As a man, Hoeksema could be aloof, brusque and arrogant. I am not so sure that he was all that likable, and this is what family members have told me. But, Hoeksema is significant nonetheless. Many of his insights were truly inspiring. I consider this study foundational and I hope that others will be motivated by what they read here to develop further the theological legacy Herman Hoeksema has left us. As a historical study, I know I have left many doctrinal questions unanswered. This, however, was unavoidable, as I did not want to go beyond my subject.