

# Common Grace...Again?

Ryan Kregel

The title of this column reflects my thoughts early last year upon receiving my copy of *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn* from the Reformed Free Publishing Association.

Boy, was I wrong.

My original (wrong) thoughts on the book were, "Do we really need another book on common grace?" Then I read the book.

We do.

Never judge a book by its cover...or your premature perception of its content.

The book, edited by Prof. David Engelsma, consists primarily of several works surrounding the common grace controversy of 1924 and the events that led up to it in the Christian Reformed Church. Engelsma summed it up well in the afterword:

*The Rock* is the authoritative account of the doctrinal and church historical origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. It is this account, not in the form of a dispassionate, scholarly analysis some years after these churches came into existence. But the account consists of the doctrinal debate, the controversial writings, and the reflections on church political actions that were actually in the process of causing division in the Christian Reformed Church and forming the Protestant Reformed Churches. The book puts the reader into the Christian Reformed Church and, more particularly, into the circumstances of the controversy over common grace in that church, in the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

Most of us have heard and many of us have read about the history of the controversy over the three points of common grace, but here is a description of the battle *from the trenches*. Henry Danhof's and Herman Hoeksema's works in this book, some of them translated from Dutch for the first time, outline many issues and events surrounding the controversy of 1924: how common grace weakens the antithesis, the error of the well-meant offer of the gospel, Danhof's and Hoeksema's struggle to reform the CRC from within, their mistreatment by Classis and Synod,

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn: God, Grace, and Covenant*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 493.

their dismissal from the CRC and the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the formation of the Reformed Free Publishing Association and the magazine, *The Standard Bearer*.

In *The Rock* Danhof and Hoeksema, speak for themselves. They were wrongly cast out of the Christian Reformed Church for their refusal to adhere to the three points of common grace and their rejection of the well-meant offer of the gospel. You can feel Hoeksema's pain while describing the wrong-doing of his former professor and friend, Louis Berkhof. Berkhof, who had earlier officiated at Hoeksema's wedding, was instrumental in misrepresenting him (and Calvin) and casting him out of the CRC. I quote:

For the same teachings contained in *Calvin's Calvinism* you have persecuted Danhof and myself, and you did not rest until we were expelled from the communion of your church. At the time you became friends even of your enemies to unite with them in expelling those who were your friends and brethren in the faith. You are responsible before God, before whose judgment seat we will appear together...If you cannot do this [provide proof that Calvin viewed the preaching as a well-meant offer of salvation], your duty is to acknowledge that you depart from Calvin and that in 1924 you would have thrown him out of your church as you did us.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the common grace controversy, the book includes several other works: "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace" by Danhof, and two more works by Hoeksema: "The Reunion of the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches" and "The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel."

At over 500 pages long, this tome may seem quite formidable, but it is far from that. Apart from being very interesting reading, it is put together in such a way that allows it to be read little bits at a time. Each of the works within this book were originally published as pamphlets, as series of articles in *The Standard Bearer*, or as public lectures, and are therefore short enough to be read in a few sittings or even one. Additionally, there are many helpful footnotes that describe some of the history that Danhof and Hoeksema refer to in passing.

This is truly a must-read for all Protestant Reformed members, especially the young people. Go back to the roots of your Protestant Reformed Church laid out in this book. Your understanding of the common grace controversy will be benefited and your appreciation for the struggle for truth that resulted in the formation of the PRC will only increase.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

Originally Published in:

Vol 76 No 4 April 2017