

Interview with Rev. C. Hanko (2): The Pastor

Unknown

Question:

Could you give us a little background of what was going on in the Reformed church world at this time? (1920's)

Answer:

At that time there was a strong antipathy, almost hatred, between the people of the Secession of 1834 and the people of the Doleantie of 1886 led by Kuyper. So much so, that when a man came to a women's home in Hull, Iowa, to collect for Calvin College, and stood by her bookcase and said "I don't see a single book of Dr. Kuyper in your library," she said, "Get out! That name is not mentioned in this house. And I don't give you a penny". That's the way they felt.

In that same congregation I visited a man who said, 'I'll talk to you but don't you dare to object to or condemn Kuyper.' He had a whole row of Kuyper's books. So I said to him, "I tell you what. We'll leave Kuyper up there on the bookshelf and we're going to talk Bible." He agreed to that, but every once in a while that hand would want to go up there to get Kuyper to support him. Later he joined our church in Hull, and after a couple of years he came to me and he said, "You know, Kuyper was not always right." Which was quite a concession considering how he felt about Kuyper. That tension was very strong.

When I worked in Randolph, before our church there was organized, a man called me up and said he'd like to talk to me. When I got there he said, "I want you to answer one question with a yes or no - nothing else." I said, "That's hardly fair. You should give a man a chance to explain himself." "No," he said, "Yes or no." "Well," I said, "go ahead, ask your question." He said "Did God will sin?" I said, "That takes an explanation." "No," he insisted, "Yes or no." He was not Kuyperian, I could tell that. So I said, "If you want to know, yes, God wills sin." "Get out!" he said, "Get out of here as fast as you can." He had no time for me. That was common sentiment. They were very much opposed to each other even though two movements had joined in 1892.

Question:

When you graduated from seminary you accepted a call to Hull, Iowa. After having been right in the center of things in the years following 1924 did you find it difficult to head out West?

Answer:

That wasn't too bad because Hull at that time was the doorway to the West. Anyone who went out West stopped in Hull. We always had company. And especially at the time of Classis we had a house full of people. It was sort of an open house. One noon we had 13 men around the dining room table. So we didn't notice so much that we were removed from the center of things.

Question:

You spent the depression years in Hull. Any memories of that period?

Answer:

Yes. I remember one time I had 50 cents in the house. Well, what do you do with 50 cents? You can't get any groceries to speak of. So I had this 50 cents, and collectors came from the school, and the school was hard up too. They asked if I could donate a little bit. I said, "Would you take 50 cents?" They said, "Sure, we'll take anything. We're hard up." So I handed them the 50 cents. We talked a little bit and they got to the door and he said, "Say, was that your last 50 cents?" I said, "What does it matter. You might as well have it. It's not doing me any good." He said, "I'd never take a man's last 50 cents," and he gave it back to me.

Question:

You also served as minister in Oak Lawn, IL and in Manhattan, MT. What is most memorable about those years?

Answer:

The most pleasant years of my ministry were spent in Manhattan, MT. We had almost one hundred percent of the men in the men's society. Show me a church anywhere where you have almost one hundred percent attendance at the men's society. We had almost all of the women in the women's society. We had all of the young people in the young people's society. I really had a wonderful time there.

They didn't have a Christian high school beyond the 10th grade. When Herm got to the point where he was ready for the 11th grade I said to him, "Now if you intend to be a lawyer or a doctor I'll keep you here. But if you intend to go into the ministry or teaching then I'd rather send you to Michigan, to a Christian high school." He said, "Didn't you know I intend to be a minister?" Well, I was surprised because we had really thought that Fred would be the minister, although we had never talked about it. And I said that to Fred too. Fred said, "You thought I was going to be a minister? Not me. It doesn't look good to me!" So we sent Herm to Grand Rapids for two years. By that time Fred was about to go. So I asked him what he had in mind. Well Fred had in mind to be a teacher. So I said he's going to Grand Rapids too.

Then I got the call to First Church. I didn't want to take it. In the back of my mind, of course, I had the problem of my two boys, but I didn't want that to decide. Then I got a letter from Rev. DeWolf: "It's OK if you come, but I hope you don't." Then I got a letter a couple days later from Rev. Hoeksema: "You probably don't know, but we have some serious problems here. I want you to consider this prayerfully. I'm not going to urge you to come, but we need a man badly." Well that decided it. DeWolf doesn't want me. There must be a reason for that. Hoeksema says there is a need. I had the two boys to consider. So I decided to go, much as I hated to leave. I really did, because that was one of the nicest congregations I ever served.

Question:

Before we get into your years at First Church we want to ask about Prof. Schilder. Did Prof. Schilder visit you when he came to America?

Answer:

That's right. He was in Manhattan for a week. Practically every day we talked. We talked in a nice way. We never got hot under the collar or anything like that. But I had made a chart of the covenant: Bavink's view, Kuyper's view, Prof. Heyns' view, Schilder's view, and Hoeksema's view. I showed him that. He didn't like it very well, that I was making those sharp distinctions. But finally he exploded. "To tell you the truth," he said, "I despise your covenant view." Well, that's the only hard time we had.

Question:

Did our churches have contact with the Liberated churches in The Netherlands?

Answer:

Two of our ministers went to The Netherlands. By that time immigrants were coming from the Liberated churches to America. Many here and in The Netherlands were anticipating that there would be thousands, and they asked our men if there would be room in the Protestant Reformed churches. Well, that looked good to them, of course, to have all these immigrants coming to our churches. So they said there surely would be room.

The Liberated asked about our covenant view. Those two men said that we didn't have an official covenant view. That was true in a sense. It was true that we had never officially adopted Rev.

Hoeksema's view of the covenant, but it was really the very heart of our churches. If you would ask what is distinctive to the Protestant Reformed Churches, then it is not the denial of common grace, and it is not the denial of the offer of salvation, although that is involved, but it is our covenant view. We are not a negative church. We do not merely take the position that we're opposed to this and were opposed to that.

We're a very positive church, and our positive stand is that we have a covenant view that we treasure. I would say that's the very heart of the Protestant Reformed Churches. To me it's the most wonderful view. You can't compare it to any other.

Question:

What effects did this immigration of the Liberated have on our churches?

Answer:

In Canada there was a man who had come from The Netherlands, but he said, "We're not Liberated any more. We're Protestant Reformed." He said that in The Netherlands they had lost sight of predestination and that their covenant view did not allow for predestination. "The Protestant Reformed have opened our eyes," he said, "and now we maintain that we are Protestant Reformed."

There was another man in Canada who told me how happy he was that he was Protestant Reformed. So I said to him, "If you went back to The Netherlands what would you do?" "Ya", he said, "I'd have to be Protestant Reformed. We'd have to start a Protestant Reformed Church there." Well, it was more or less on those remarks that we organized a church.

Rev. Veldman was there for a year and then the whole thing blew up. We went up there as church visitors, Rev. Blankenspoor and I. Rev. Veldman took a back seat and let me lead the meeting.

This first man took out a document and started reading it. He was thoroughly Liberated. When he got finished I said to him, "Didn't you say to me 'We aren't Liberated anymore? We're Protestant Reformed. We lost sight of predestination and now we've found it again?'" "Ya", he said. So I said, "Well, when were you lying, then or now?" "Then, of course", he said.

So then the second man pulled out a document, and when he was finished I said, "You told me that if you went back to the Netherlands you would have to start a Protestant Reformed Church. Was that a lie?" "Ya," he said, "it was." "Why did you lie to us?" "Well, we needed a church roof, but now we don't need it anymore. We can be our own now." So they were all done with us.

Plenty of deception. But, you know, they had learned deception during the war. Lying and deception were common in The Netherlands and they thought nothing of it. It was perfectly all right. If your cause was just, it was perfectly all right to lie. ❖

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