

# Transcript of Address and Question Hour

**YEAR:**

1958

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

34/1958

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema Herman

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 20, 9/1/1958

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Special Article

held under the Auspices of the Committee for Protestant Reformed Action, Hull, Iowa, July, 1954

Speaker: Rev. H. Hoeksema

Beloved Brethren and Sisters:

In many, many ways and for many reasons I am very glad that I may address you tonight. In the first place, because it is my conviction that the history we are making, and especially the history we have made in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, is in many ways similar to the history we made in 1924. I think it was in this same spot, if I'm not mistaken,—at least in the Community Hall of Hull—that in March, 1925 I explained to the people in Hull and in Sioux County, in the afternoon and in the evening, day after day, the difference that separated us from the Christian Reformed Churches. I explained in detail at that time the well-known Three Points that were adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches in Kalamazoo in 1924. I explained and emphasized that in general there is no common grace, and that particularly the preaching of the gospel is not grace to everyone that hears the gospel, but is grace only for the elect. On that basis the church in Hull, and afterwards the other churches in Sioux County were organized; and still later, the church in Edgerton, and the church in Manhattan was established. On that basis, and on no other basis. It is my conviction, as I hope to show tonight, that by this time, 27 or 28 years later, we have again departed from, that basis. I do not enter in tonight into the controversy that has been raging in our churches about the question of conditions. That is not necessary, and it would certainly tempt me from the course which I intend to follow. I want you to know that I am not here to convert anyone. I do not convert people. I'm not here to represent any faction in our churches. There is no such thing as a Hoeksema-faction in our churches. I represent,—and you may controvert me, if you wish,—I represent the cause of the Protestant Reformed truth: the same as I represented in 1924, and no other cause.

In the second place, I want to say a word of introduction as to the purpose of my speech. You must not expect any oratory from me tonight. All I want to do is present to you, the more facts. I'm not even going to try to color the facts. I wish to present to, you the truth of the whole controversy in our Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, and nothing more than that

truth. If, after presenting that truth, you are not quite convinced, you can present your questions; and I'll try to answer them to the best of my ability. I think that is as fair as anybody can possibly expect.

In the third place, I want to say that I'm not here to talk about personalities. I will avoid all personalities, in which I am not interested. If any of you, however, want to ask personal questions that concern me, I am very glad to give account of myself, even though I'm not here for that purpose. This meeting is purely meant to be an informative meeting. I want to give you information. And the information will have to be given in the way of facts, in the way of the plain and clear truth. I have nothing to hide, nothing whatsoever. And I will present the case as it developed.

And then I wish to say, in the first place, that I will enter in, after a brief introduction concerning the situation in my own church, with which you are not acquainted, of course, I want to enter in, in the first place, into the doctrinal issue. After all, that is of chief importance to you and to me. If there is no doctrinal issue, we could not possibly have separated as we did in the First Church. But there is a doctrinal issue. And that doctrinal issue I'm going to make plain to you.

In the second place. I'm going to enter into the fact, the question, of the church political procedure. And I'm going to tell you exactly what happened in that respect.

First of all, then, let me try to acquaint you with my church in Fuller Avenue. You understand, of course, that a thing like this, that causes separation in a congregation, does not come as a thunderclap out of a clear sky. It was not so in Fuller Avenue. Certainly; you can understand that a serious thing as a split in a congregation, which is liable to extend in the churches, is not coming all of a sudden, and did not come of a sudden in the church which I represent. There's a long history even in Fuller Avenue. I believe I read in *Concordia* that it is too bad that what belongs together has been torn asunder. That is not true. What belongs together has remained together. And what does not belong with us has torn itself from us, as it should be. That is the truth. And that is not only a question of one or two statements that were proclaimed from the pulpit. But that is the question of the history of our congregation in the last,—O,—the last 6, 7, 8 years. The thing developed. It gradually became more and more evident that there were in our midst that were not Protestant Reformed at heart and in their confession. It started to manifest itself very plainly and very clearly when we finally determined to establish our own Protestant Reformed Christian School. I always agitated, I always recommended to my people from the very beginning of the history of 1924 that we should have a school of our own. Because if our children were instructed in the schools of the Christian Reformed Churches, we could never expect them to remain Prot. Ref. But for a long time there was no action. But when that action was finally started,—maybe some 10 years ago,—the opposition to that movement became very manifest. There were many that opposed that movement with all that was in them. They hated the very idea of establishing a Protestant Reformed Christian School. And they did not go along. That that is true may be evident to you from the fact that even now, when we have established a school of our own, have established 9 grades of lower education, there are in all Grand Rapids, drawing from the four churches in Grand Rapids,—representing, I think, some 650 families,—only 300 children that attend our school, no more. That, I think, is a bad sign. O, I know, that Protestant Reformed schools cannot easily be established everywhere. But wherever it is established, and wherever it can be established, I think it's a very evil sign that Prot. Ref. people oppose that movement, and refuse to send their children. Now we have separated, most all of our people that meet Sundays in the Christian High School of Grand Rapids are in favor of that school. That is evident from the fact that from our people alone we collected for the Adams Street Chr. School,

our own school, just as much in one collection as otherwise we collected in the whole congregation together. That's one thing. That, of course, filled me not only with grief, but also with apprehension.

The second evidence that things were not as they should be was manifest when the Declaration of Principles was adopted. That Declaration of Principles, which is a thoroughly Protestant Reformed document, and which should have been adopted at the beginning of our history,—that Declaration of Principles was the second offense, the second occasion that many took offense in my own congregation.

There are other signs. Our English Men's Society a year ago was in the habit of asking after-recess speakers from the Christian Reformed Church: Calvin College professors, DeVries, Monsma, Stob, VanTil, and others, were preferred above and to our own Protestant Reformed ministers. And they spoke for them on all kinds of subjects. Some of our ladies attend the Reformed Bible Institute, a Christian Reformed institution of very dubious character. And there they enjoyed themselves very much, and they learned, as they say, to witness for Christ. All these things developed in our congregation.

And then, the sermons of the Rev. De Wolf, to which protests were lodged, was the next objection, and the next item, and the next stage of development in the history. I can tell you now we have separated,—or rather, now they have separated from us,—and we meet in a separate building, all our people are glad. With one accord, with one mind, with one heart and soul, they join in worship as they never did before. That is true of myself. I was very glad when finally we had gone apart. I could not live anymore in that atmosphere, in that atmosphere of corruption that characterized our First Protestant Reformed Church. That was true of the Rev. Hanko, who was very glad and relieved when finally we worshipped in a place by ourselves. That was true of our whole consistory, and that was true of all our people. Brethren and sisters, I assure you we did not belong together anymore. And we will not join together again, unless the Lord works miracles and gives to those people repentance. That is the fact.

Now about the sermons, it has been said more than once that the whole thing in Fuller Avenue, in my church, was a question of a couple of statements. Even if that were the case, I ought to tell you that those statements were serious and implied very serious heresies. And the Consistory, let me say, could not possibly condone and support that heresy and let the Rev. De Wolf continue to preach as he did. I'll make that plain presently. But it is not even true that it was a question of two statements, and nothing else. I have here an official document which I presented to our Consistory, and which later went to the Classis, in which I relate the history of the case. I want to read that to you, and explain as much as is necessary. I have here "A brief history of the case in re the sermons preached by the Rev. H. De Wolf in April, 1951, and in September, 1952. The sermons preached. The sermon of April 15, 1951. On this date the Rev. De Wolf preached a sermon which I did not hear personally." I want to emphasize that: I did not hear that sermon. They say that this is a Hoeksema case. It's not true at all. This was not a Hoeksema case from the very beginning, not at all. I didn't even start the case. It was more than a year afterwards that I entered into the case; not before. You must remember that personally I am often not present at my own consistory meetings. If the Consistory were here, they would know that. My doctor advises me, because of my condition, and because of my sickness 6 years ago, the doctor advises me to avoid excitement as much as possible. And because of that, and also because the consistory meetings always took place on Monday evening, and at 8 o'clock the next morning, or 9 o'clock, I have school, theological school, I avoided the consistory meetings as much as possible. In the second place I say then: I did not hear that sermon. I could have heard it,

because I have a loudspeaker in my own home connected with the-church, and I could easily have checked up on that sermon, but I did not. But immediately after the sermon several people called me up, and said, "What's the trouble with the Rev. De Wolf tonight? He was certainly not Protestant Reformed." They called me up. I told them: "I did not hear the sermon, and you better go and visit the Rev. De Wolf." I don't know what they did. But then, the Consistory received protests on that sermon in April, 1951. And there were several protests. I will not mention the name of the Protestants at that time, but there were several. And these protests,—let me first of all say this: I did not hear, I say, the sermon personally; but at which according to the protests received by the consistory, the Rev. De Wolf spoke us fellows: "God promises everyone of you that, if you believe, you shall be saved." I quote more: "You, have nothing to do with election and reprobation. Your responsibility is to believe. If you will believe, you shall be saved." This, according to one protest. According to another, he said. "Election and reprobation have nothing to do with the gospel." Listen: the Rev. De Wolf denied having made these statements. There is no record of it. We usually have records of sermons, but there was no record of this sermon. Nevertheless, there were two testimonies which agreed at least in this, that the Rev. De Wolf belittled and deprecated the truth of election and reprobation, which is the basis and the heart of the Reformed truth, and especially of the Prot. Ref. truth.

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