

The Janssen Case-

Chapter 1: The History of the Case (2)

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(In the last article, we discussed the early history of the Janssen case and ended with the decision of the Theological School Committee to clear Janssen of all blame.)

What is of particular interest to us is the fact that Rev. Hoeksema was a member of the Theological School Committee at the time that Janssen's teaching were being examined. He was sitting in on the meetings.

In later years Rev. Hoeksema reflected on these events in an article you can find in an old **Standard Bearer**. It is Vol. XXX, May 1, 1954, pp. 340-341.

Rev. Hoeksema had studied for one year under Prof. Janssen while he was in the Seminary. He, after he was ordained to the ministry in 14th St. Christian Reformed Church in Holland, had been appointed as a member of the Theological School Committee. After he moved from 14th St. Christian Reformed Church to Eastern Ave. Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Prof. Janssen was a member of his congregation. He became a strong opponent of Prof. Janssen after the Synod of 1920.

In the article in the **Standard Bearer**, to which I referred above, Rev. Hoeksema speaks of the fact that he favored the decisions of the Theological School Committee, but that he also had a long private conversation with Prof. Janssen during the recess time. Among other things about which they talked, Prof. Janssen spoke to Rev. Hoeksema about a lack of harmony among the faculty, and complained that this made his work difficult. In addition to this part of the conversation, Rev. Hoeksema also became a bit suspicious of Janssen's honesty. You will recall that Janssen had originally spoken to the Theological School Committee about some letters of apology he had received from the students. When Rev. Hoeksema quizzed Janssen about these letters, it turned out that Janssen did not have all the letters which he had claimed to have, but that he had only some notes he had taken.

At any rate, the four professors were not satisfied with the decision of the Theological School Committee and they informed the Committee that they were going to appeal this decision to the Synod of 1920. In those days, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church met only every two years, so that, while the committee met in 1919, an appeal would have to wait until the following year.

When the four professors informed the Committee that they planned to appeal, the Committee asked the four professors to delay their appeal until they could submit the whole matter to the Theological School Committee once again. The four professors were also told that this time they had to submit a written document in which all their objections to Prof. Janssen's teaching were listed. This document was to be submitted to the Committee at their next meeting in June of 1920, just prior to the meeting of Synod.

Once again, when this document was submitted, the Committee conducted a lengthy investigation in which Janssen was once again cleared of all charges, although he was also admonished to "strive to evade anything that might give cause to misconception, and that he express himself so clearly in his instruction, that misconception is excluded."

Once again, the four professors notified the Committee that they were going to appeal to the Synod which was due to meet in a few days.

Throughout this whole period, Rev. Hoeksema voted along with the Committee in favor of Janssen. Nevertheless, while he did this, he was uneasy with the whole matter. He was uneasy partly because Janssen did not seem to be completely honest, and partly because the Committee had exonerated Janssen, not on the basis of an investigation of Janssen's teachings in the classroom, but on the basis of Janssen's own personal testimony. He resolved, when he had the time, to conduct his own personal investigation of what Janssen actually was teaching.

The specific charges which the professors brought against their colleague were four in number. They are rather interesting because they indicate some of the wrong teachings of Janssen which were later to be formal charges. The four professors claimed that Jansen taught: 1) that there are exaggerations and inaccuracies in Scripture; 2) that the miracles could be explained in large measure from natural causes; 3) that Moses did not write most of the Pentateuch; 4) that the Song of Solomon was nothing but an Oriental love song.

The Synod of 1920 also conducted a lengthy investigation. The Synod did not investigate Janssen's teachings as the professors had asked, but they did listen to what the professors had to say and they gave Janssen an opportunity to defend himself against all the charges brought against him.

The Synod, after considering the whole matter, also decided in favor of Dr. Janssen. They cleared him of all charges brought against him and only urged him to be careful to express himself in such a way that he could not possibly be misunderstood.

One would think that this would have been the end of the matter. Three different times Janssen had been exonerated – twice by the Theological School Committee and once by the Synod itself. In fact, even the president of the Synod thought that this would be the end of the matter and that harmony would once again be restored to the church. In his concluding remarks, and referring to the Janssen controversy, the president spoke of the Synod as a "unity synod."

But this was not to be.

Very soon after Synod adjourned it became obvious that the decisions of the Synod had accomplished nothing.

The uproar in the churches was great and widespread.

There were three events which brought about this uproar.

The first was some writings of Rev. Hoeksema.

Rev. Hoeksema had been appointed as an editor of **The Banner** by the Synod of 1918. He was responsible for a column which was entitled, "Our Doctrine." Shortly after the Synod of 1920 finished its meetings, Rev. Hoeksema began his own private investigation of Janssen's teachings. He succeeded in obtaining a set of Student Notes, which he studied privately and which formed the basis for a series of articles in his column in which he began to criticize Janssen's teachings. He had personally become persuaded that, after all, Janssen was teaching false doctrine. Rev. Hoeksema offered Janssen room in his column to answer any charges which Hoeksema made, and Janssen took up the offer and wrote a series of replies.

The second cause of the uproar was articles that began to appear in other papers of the Christian Reformed Church in which some men defended Janssen and others attacked him.

The third cause of the uproar was a pamphlet which was published by the four professors who had brought the original charge. This pamphlet, written in Dutch, had the title: **Further Light On The Janssen Case**. In it the professors did three things. 1) They defended themselves against the charge that they were motivated by jealousy in their attacks against Janssen. 2) They reviewed the history of the case from the beginning. 3) They explained their objections against

Janssen's teachings and attempted to show why these teachings were contrary to God's Word and the Confessions.

The uproar was so great in the churches that at the meeting of the Theological School Committee in June of 1921, they faced overtures from eight of the thirteen classes, all of which asked for an investigation of Janssen's teachings.

The Theological School Committee decided that they had better conduct such an investigation; and so they appointed a committee of six ministers and one professor to conduct the investigation. The committee was: J. Manni, Chairman, Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, Henry J. Kuiper, Gerrit Hoeksema, Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, and Prof. D. H. Kromminga. The last three were supporters of Janssen; Revs. Hoeksema, Danhof and Kuiper were opponents; and no one know what Rev. Manni's position was.

The Theological School Committee also asked that all discussion of the case would be stopped until the committee had done its work. And they gave Janssen a year off from teaching with pay, although Janssen did not want this forced vacation because he considered it an indication that he was already under a cloud of suspicion, if not condemned.

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