

The Reception of the Liberation of 1944 in the Christian Reformed Church

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One of the most dramatic episodes in the 150 years of relationship between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands is the affair with Klaas Schilder, a professor in dogmatics at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches in Kampen. When he was invited to the United States in 1939 by CRC-people, several CRC-professors and pastors feared turmoil and begged him to stay home. Schilder was disappointed in this reaction from his colleagues in the sister church. However, he made a successful visit to the USA. The relations with Calvin Seminary were cool, but he was revered among the people of the CRC and the Protestant Reformed Churches and got befriended with the leader of these churches, Herman Hoeksema. Schilder believed the split between both denominations was unnecessary and he and his friend William B. Eerdmans, the publisher, organized a conference in the Pantlind Hotel in Grand Rapids. There for the first time since 1924 pastors and professors of both denominations met. But in the end the CRC-pastors refused to debate the issue on this meeting. That was in 1939. When Schilder made his second trip to the USA, in 1947, the CRC closed its doors for him. Again, CRC-people were sympathetic to him, but it were the leaders that feared his influence. Schilder did preach and lecture in the USA, but this time only in the circles of that other CRC-outcast, Herman Hoeksema.

Schilder's visits of 1939 and 1947 make up the context of our topic of this afternoon, the reaction of the CRC to the split in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, known as the Liberation of 1944. Though it is a bit out of size to ascribe a secession of 80.000 people to the act of one person, Schilder's name is synonymous to that of the Liberation. When Americans heard about the Liberation, their opinion on this secession was determined by their appreciation of Schilder.

Schilder was deposed by the synod of Utrecht on August, 3, 1944. The Liberation started later that month and the exodus of members and churches went on till about 1946. At that time, about 10 % had left the Reformed Churches. One of the striking features of this secession was that it happened during the Second World War, when German terror was reigning in the Netherlands, at the eve of the so called 'hunger winter'. Nearly every church-paper was forbidden or had terminated its circulation because of lack of paper, pastors were shot or

imprisoned, and quite a few Reformed people were hiding for the Germans or were active in the resistance movement. It was not really the time to settle a church dispute. That is why many churches had asked the Synod to postpone the Schilder-case till after the war. But the synod feared the growing influence of Schilder and judged it dangerous not to stop him immediately.

The Synod of course never realized the deposition of Schilder would cause one the largest Dutch church splits since the Reformation of the sixteenth century. When confronted with the immense and sudden exodus, the synodical party got furious. They lost control completely, and started complaining on church struggle in war time, which they themselves had caused. They criticised the Liberated people for being zealous, while they themselves could not be stopped in anyway in their dealing with Schilder. They deposed him, not because of his teachings, but for being publicly unwilling to agree with the synod. The Liberation, seen from the synodical point of view, was a question of authority. From the standpoint of the Liberated people it was a matter of freedom of speech and freedom of opinion, hence the name Liberation.

Initially, hardly anything was known in the United States about this sharp fight in the Dutch church. The Liberation happened two months after D-day. At that time millions of Americans were deeply involved in the war in Europe, and many CRC boys and men fought and died for freedom in France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and in the Netherlands as well. There was no free press in the Netherlands and no open mail exchange between America and Europe. The war situation not only checked the development of the Liberation in the Netherlands, but also prevented any information on this split to reach the USA.

The first news on serious problems in the Reformed Churches reached Michigan in August 1944, when Rev. E. Van Halsema in *De Wachter* referred to some Dutch newspaper-clippings printed in England, mentioning the suspension of Schilder. Van Halsema was not able to confirm the news. Schilder had indeed been suspended by the Synod in March, but that was yet unknown in the USA.

In the September 1944 issue of the *Missionary Monthly* Henry Beets speculated on the word suspension. He wrote: 'If it means that, as a result of his loyalty to his country, the invader has again interfered Schilder as happened in 1940 – we admire his bravery.' But Beets considered it more likely that Schilder was suspended in the ecclesiastical sense of the word and ascribed this 'to a certain leaning of our brother to *disagree* with his fellow believers'. After Van Halsema spread the rumour of Schilder's deposition in October, *The Banner* of November 1944 was more positive in its statements. *Banner*-editor H.J. Kuiper took it as a fact that Schilder had not only been suspended, but had been deposed as well. Why and when

he did not know. But to him the name of Schilder was sufficient as an explanation. Kuiper shared with his readers some of his unpleasant memories of Schilder's visit to the CRC-community in 1939. In those days Kuiper had been the main opposant to Schilder's visit. He had written in *The Banner* that Schilder held opinions on common grace which had been condemned by the CRC in 1924.

The 1924 statement of the CRC-synod at Kalamazoo on common grace - the so called three points - was the shibboleth of the CRC: anyone who did not endorse these points was considered to be deviating from the reformed doctrine. By 1944 the three points had reached a more or less confessional status. For Kuiper and several professors of the Theological School at Grand Rapids, this statement had become so vital to the identity of the CRC, that they turned a cold shoulder to Schilder on his 1939-visit, only because he did not accept this statement unconditionally.

Nearly six years after Schilder's visit Kuiper admitted he had never been more severely criticized than on that occasion. 'But', he now wrote in the November 1944 issue, 'when Dr. Schilder was among us in 1939 and delivered his lectures on common grace and other subjects it soon became apparent that our appraisal had been correct.' Kuiper nor anyone else in the USA did know the reason of Schilders deposition by that time, but – taking in regard his 1939 experiences with Schilder – Kuiper considered it likely that what he called 'Schilders denial of God's common grace' was one of them.

Though he was no member of the CRC, I think it is right to include Hoeksema's reactions to the news on Schilder's supposed deposition in *The Standard Bearer* of October 1944. After all, the history of the CRC since 1924 cannot be written when Hoeksema would be excluded. Hoeksema repudiated Beets' suggestion that Schilder was a disagreeable person and reminded his readers that Schilder left Grand Rapids in 1939 deeply grieved because of the cold-blooded and unbrotherly way in which he had been treated in Christian Reformed Jerusalem. Hoeksema contended, that the CRC's reaction to the news on Schilder was deeply influenced by what he called a 'stubborn obsession with respect to the common grace theory'.

So far the news releases of 1944. Let us halt here for a moment and point to some characteristic elements in these first American reactions to the troubles in the Reformed Churches. First, no one refers in any way to the role of the Synod in the conflict. From scratch on it is the single opponent who is the villain in the story. Secondly, the church papers give two reasons to plead Schilder guilty: one is his character and the other is his opinions. It is clear that from the outset Schilder was in an impossible position to gain even the benefit of the doubt: he was a difficult man, his opinions were deviating from current teachings in the CRC, and, most horrible, his opinions and character looked like Hoeksema's. I remind you

that by this time the worst news was still on its way: there was no knowledge of a secession yet. By Christmas 1944, it was not silent anymore, but all still seemed rather holy around CRC's cradle in the Netherlands.

But let's go forth. It were not shepherds, but soldiers that brought the news of the split. But they did live in the fields, in the liberated southern part of the Netherlands. *De Wachter* played a major role in bringing the news early 1945. It was still a Dutch language church paper and, together with Hoeksema's bilingual *Standard Bearer*, had stronger ties with the Netherlands than *Missionary Monthly*, *The Banner*, or *Calvin Forum*. From January 1945 on, *De Wachter*-editor Van Halsema published several letters from Christian reformed American soldiers or Dutch soldiers who had connections in the USA or Canada. The letter-writers all had arrived in the Netherlands after the Liberation had started and all lived in Dutch provinces that were mainly roman-catholic. There were hardly any Reformed Churches in that area, and liberated people could be counted on one hand.

The soldier-writers all considered the secession a very sad thing, especially because unity was needed so much in the devastated Netherlands. With acknowledgement of the great merits of Schilder, they all wrote that it had nevertheless been impossible to maintain him. His attitude had been too unbecoming and dictatorial. None of the soldiers had this knowledge first hand of course, but thus was told them by Reformed people that favored the synod.

Van Halsema withheld himself from comments until official sources had confirmed this news, but the news of the schism offered Beets and Kuiper the missing pieces to solve the puzzle. In February 1945 they both linked Schilder's doctrinal stance on common grace with the deposition of Schilder and the subsequent secession, and presented Schilder as a Dutch Hoeksema. Especially Kuiper, who was very much opposed to Hoeksema and to Schilder, elaborated on this theme in *The Banner*. Kuiper now even wrote he had known at forehand that a break would happen one day: 'Prof. Schilder kept the Reformed Churches in constant turmoil through his pugnacious attitude toward all who could not agree with his views. Even before the war began it was evident that unless he would change his views or his attitude or both a break would come.'

Hoeksema was the only one who questioned the attitude of the synod and distrusted the impossibility to maintain Schilder. He doubted that the common grace issue had been the reason for the Liberation and the charge that Schilder had been too unbecoming and dictatorial sounded in his ears as a well-known argument of synods that try to justify themselves, he wrote in February 1945. While the CRC-pastors tended to agree with the synod, Hoeksema sided with Schilder, though he refused to make any decisive comment before he knew more.

Hoeksema seemed to be right. A new letter undermined the Hoeksema-Schilder similarity in the spring of 1945. Now a soldier stated in *De Wachter* that a dispute on baptism and presuppositional regeneration had been the reason for the schism. The soldier explained that there was room for a different opinion on these issues within the Reformed Churches, but that the problem was that Schilder and his Kampen colleague Prof. Greijdanus had criticized the synod in rude words and disputed its authority. This could not be tolerated, according to the soldier. Van Halsema concluded that the schism seemed rather complicated: it was not just on doctrine, but on church polity as well.

One soldier seemed to have spoken with some liberated people. The first news from this side was, that these people hoped and expected the CRC would join them.

Beets now started to reevaluate his own judgment. In February *de Wachter* held the news that Prof. Greijdanus had been suspended as well, and had joined the Liberation. The confirmation of the news that 'also our beloved and highly respected Prof. Greijdanus, had been deposed as professor of the Kampen School' led Beets in *Missionary Monthly* of April 1945 to the utterance: 'Strange and sad, that while water, fire and snow is destroying the old Fatherland literally, theological quarrelling persists.' In *The Banner* of June 15, Kuiper had the news that more than 60 churches had joined the secession, and in July *De Wachter* even mentioned the amount of a 100 churches! In July Van Halsema published a message of the synod of August 1944 in *De Wachter*, and pointed to some sharp phrasing in it, like on the 'shameful contents' of a declaration of the liberated people. Van Halsema just reported what he had read, but did not dare to give any judgmental comments.

By July 1945 it had become undeniable that the schism of the 'talented but eccentric' Schilder also had some striking dissimilarities with the Hoeksema-case of 1924, when only about 5 churches left the CRC.

Let us pause here for a while again. We must not forget, that in the first half of 1945 the largest part of the Netherlands was still occupied. When the Netherlands were liberated in May 1945 the Dutch population was exhausted by a severe winter with food shortages and by Germans terrorizing the country for five years. To give one example, Schilder and his family had been forced to leave their house in 1943 and when they returned to it in May 1945 it had been looted by the Germans. As long as the war was going on the Reformed people had no means and not much interest to communicate with the outside world. That is the reason why in the first half of 1945 the principal part in our story is played by the reporting soldiers. The editors were very grateful to them, but their letters also puzzled them. They were one sided at best and contradicting at worse. By July 1945 the editors had lost some of their initial certainty and started to wonder. Did the issue of common grace have anything to do with the

case, and what to think of a synod that just had to depose a disobedient Schilder, as if this was a natural law of cause and effect?

Let us continue our story. To make the situation only more confusing for the Americans, in June 1945 the news was spread that after the Netherlands had been liberated by the allied forces in May a new exodus had started of Reformed people and complete congregations joining the Liberated churches. This had nothing to do anymore with the disobedience of just one professor. But there was help on the way. The Dutch church papers started to appear again and the mail connection between the Netherlands and the United States was restored, though before September 1945 the mail carried no printed matter from the Netherlands. In August 1945 Henry Beets was very pleased to publish one of the first letters from The Netherlands in *Missionary Monthly*. It was written in June by Prof. Aalders, the Free University professor in the Old Testament who had been an adviser to the synod that deposed Schilder. The letter had been taken to England by a British pilot and than was mailed to Beets. This was the first information of someone who had been involved in the conflict. Aalders letter was very clear and certainly helped to brighten up things. He wrote the conflict had been mainly between Schilder and the synod. Schilder had not been content with the synodical decisions of 1942, and, as Aalders wrote, 'was manifestly looking for an opportunity to start a conflict'. Schilder than found out that the synod had not been closed within three years but continued to convene. This was not in accordance with the church order, but the unusual circumstances of the war asked for it, Aalders explained. Schilder considered this to be the introduction of hierarchy and he protested against this continuation. Several churches rejected the synodical decisions of 1942 thereupon. Schilder was rebuked, but, as Aalders wrote, he 'refused to admit that he was wrong. And so the synod at last, having shown a *nearly* incomprehensible amount of patience, found itself in the necessity of suspending him'. This act of synod was followed by a declaration issued by Schilder and his friends. In this declaration the Reformed Churches 'were *accused of deviation from the Holy Word of God*, and of infringing the church order'. Schilder started propaganda tours and founded lots of small churches, especially in Groningen. The liberated people criticised Kuyper's theology and tried to restore the spirit of the Secession of 1834. But Aalders knew 'the fathers of the Separation would turn in their graves' when they heard about Schilder's point of view. The breach in the Reformed Churches is most deplorable, and those, who started the opposition, never can excuse their attitude.

Well, as we say in the Netherlands, there is not a word French in Aalders' letter. It is fully clear that Schilder caused a riot and he and he alone is to blame for the church split. A condensed and outspoken letter like this one could influence the public opinion much stronger than the dozens of Dutch brochures on the conflict, that were received by the

Americans from September 1945 on. The brochures were in Dutch and went into detail on complicated matters. All the more pleasant it was that *The Banner* received first-hand-information as well. In August it published a long letter by the Dutch Rev. Le Cointre, who had been a member of the synod that deposed Schilder. He also explained that there were two aspects in the case: opposition against the synodical decisions of 1942, and opposition against the hierarchy. Prof. Greijdanus had protested 'with unprecedented violence'. But the conflict concentrated on Schilder, who had refused to cooperate in any way. According to Le Cointre synod had done its utmost to bring about a harmonious settlement but at last was compelled to suspend Schilder as a professor at the Theological School and as minister in the Reformed Churches. The decision was inevitable, Le Cointre stressed, 'especially when Dr. Schilder in a revolutionary manner appealed to the churches'. In August 1944 Schilder issued a declaration of liberation or return, containing accusations of tyranny and binding the consciences, and summoned the churches to secede. The 'schismatic faction', as Le Cointre called it, engaged in indefensible propaganda, especially towards the simple folk.

In October 1945 *Calvin Forum* was able to confirm this view from a third Dutch source. This time it was an article by Rev. Prins, the Dutch correspondent of this academic magazine. He had not been a member of synod, but explained in general terms how in the last twenty years a different spirit had crept into the Reformed Churches, a spirit which had set itself to attack pietistic trends and developments which it considered wrong. Propagators of this opinion had constantly stressed the objective side of religion. But in their wish to fight against certain one-sided statements they had drifted too far from the time-honored reformed basis of operation. The synod of 1942 condemned some of their and some of their opponents views and tried to restore the balance. But this caused new debates. Just like Aalders and Le Cointre, Prins stressed that the synod had shown no end of patience towards the opponents, but they had not listened to the admonition. They turned the issue topsy-turvy. Not the condemned opinions were deviations from the confession, but the Synod with its doctrines was held up as a danger for the church. And the liberated people called upon every church member to separate from the false church, as was the duty of the true believer. Prins was deeply convinced that a blinding spirit has seized these men who were tearing the church asunder. 'They call this work reformation, I call it revolution', he wrote in a remarkable comparison, 'No longer owing to Hitler. Now a terrorism of brethren, who think they please God by travelling everywhere to make a proselyte.'

Hoeksema did not publish a Dutch view on the Liberation in *The Standard Bearer*, but in August his first letter to Schilder was a request for information. From October on he offered his readers weekly an extensive report on the synod in 1943 and 1944, based on Dutch letters and brochures. His main impression was that the synodical decisions on doctrine and Schilder's deposition were premature. In his series he made many critical remarks on the

CRC-press in this matter. He did not agree with Schilder's views, but explained that they were in line with CRC-thinking. The CRC however would never admit this, according to Hoeksema. The CRC would just join the majority, and side with the synod, even though the CRC would never state that those who were not in harmony with synodical decisions had no longer a place in their churches.

I think, we 'd better pause a while again. In the second half of 1945, a year after the Liberation started, the CRC finally got substantial information about what had happened in the Reformed Churches. The three Dutch sources confirmed what already had been suggested by Kuiper and Beets: namely that Schilder had caused the trouble. What became much more clear now, was that there was a distinction between the dogmatic and the church-orderly dispute. The doctrinal insights of the liberated people were deviating from the Reformed tradition, but Schilder had not been deposed because of his different views, but because of his disobedience. Remarkable were the sharp words used by the Dutch: Schilder was a revolutionary, looking for conflict, stirring up the churches, there was terrorism of brethren, indefensible propaganda and unprecedented violence. In contrast to this brutality the synod had been like a lamb: it had shown a *nearly* incomprehensible amount of patience and had done its utmost to bring about a harmonious settlement. These stories are constructed in such a way, that the reader got the impression that Schilder forced the synod to depose him, almost against the will of the synod.

The three Dutch informants were friends of the synod and ready to condemn Schilder. It is interesting that Aalders explained he wrote his letter on an early date, because he feared the propaganda of the liberated people that might intoxicate the CRC-people. This propaganda must have been very disturbing to the synodical party, because Prins and Le Cointre also seriously complained on it. The funny thing of course is, that not a word from Liberated people was found in all of the Christian Reformed press. The real propagandists were those who feared the contra-propaganda. They bombed the Americans with synodical propaganda. And there was no need for their worries, because in America the synodical party covered the field.

We continue our story. On September 29, 1945 Van Halsema reported in *De Wachter* that Schilder's weekly *De Reformatie* had reappeared in July. Now *De Wachter* wanted to do justice to the liberated people and informed its readers on what Schilder wrote. *The Banner* saw no need for this. Kuiper was not that much interested in what really had happened in the Netherlands. Now that he had received several brochures, he concentrated on the doctrinal aspects of the issue. It is remarkable he dealt extensively with his pet-doctrine of common grace, though it had nothing to do with the Liberation. Kuiper was afraid the Dutch disputes

would be contagious and stressed the importance and credibility of the synodical decisions of 1942. At the end of a series of articles on the schism he concluded: the blame for the separation must lie with the group that refused to submit to the decisions of the synod, which merely maintained the classic reformed position.

Schilder nor any of the liberated people did try to reach the CRC-press directly, but they did write on the American reaction to the Liberation, and it was done in a rather critical way. Schilder deplored the fact that the CRC still related to the Reformed Churches as a dependent daughter to a mother. The CRC did not make up its own mind by investigating the matter independently, he wrote, but simply connected his deposition to the issues that were at stake during Schilder's visit to the CRC in 1939, or just relied on what the synodical party said. A clear proof of this was in his opinion the uncritical way in which the *Missionary Monthly* had dealt with Aalders' letter. *De Reformatie* contained a long and very critical review of this letter by Rev. Knoop.

Now that in the fall of 1945 some liberated information and reactions penetrated CRC-circles, some Americans started to doubt the wisdom of the synodical decisions of the war years. Beets was disturbed by the liberated criticisms of Aalders' letter and wrote several Dutch friends for advice. How could I have waited for the liberated opinion after all these months of silence, he defended himself, I was simply delighted when Aalders' article was received. Beets had hoped that his old friend, Prof. Greijdanus, would keep him posted on events. He complained that the Dutch just did not understand how less Americans knew of their struggle. Beets now asked Greijdanus to write an article on the Liberation and also offered Knoop space in the *Missionary Monthly*. In the meantime, Beets published amazing lists of more than 100 pastors that had followed Schilder and of more than 150 liberated churches, which meant about 10% of the Reformed Churches. He also reported the favorable attitude of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk towards the Liberated churches.

The large extent of the exodus made the Dutch language periodical *De Volksvriend* in California wonder about the real cause. Never would thousands of Reformed people have followed Schilder, if his deposition had only been a matter of disobedience. The real reason must be something more serious. The paper came to the conclusion, that the main cause of the liberation was that the synod had bound the churches to its decisions of 1942, and had left no room for diverging opinions. It was clear that the synod had been very unwise in doing so. *De Volksvriend* criticised Aalders' letter for avoiding this cause and concentrating on the behaviour of Schilder instead.

The Banner and *De Wachter* had made up their minds on the Liberation definitely by the end of 1945, but by that time Hoeksema became more and more critical on the synod, while Henry Beets struggled with his doubts. In the *Missionary Monthly* of March 1946 he reported on Greijdanus' opinion on the Liberation. Greijdanus was highly respected by Beets. In several

brochures the Kampen professor had explained that the main reason for the schism was, that the synod of 1942 had bound the churches to their opinions. The pulpit was barred to any pastor who did not agree with these opinions. Greijdanius wrote: 'This, and this alone is the reason for the present misery on our church life.' Beets did not comment on this explanation, but he did wonder why the synod had made such a haste in deposing Schilder. The next month he confessed his doubts to his Dutch friend Diemer, editor of the christian newspaper *De Rotterdammer*. He wrote him: 'It appears to me that the liberation is largely a matter of personality, and of misunderstandings as to the phraseology, and personally I fear your General Synod was too much in a hurry in the given circumstances to settle the matter of such great importance. It looks to me that General Synod should at least have waited until the war was over and they could contact the sister churches in America and Africa. *Don't you think so too?*

But these comments and opinions did not change the general opinion in the CRC-press, that there had been no need for a secession. They became all the more convinced of their judgment, when the liberated side failed to communicate their opinion in a clear way into one of CRC's periodicals. In October 1945, on their first synod of the Liberated Churches, a committee was appointed to inform the churches in North America about the events in the Netherlands churches during the war years, when practically no communication with foreign churches was possible. However, at their next synod in 1946, it was reported that this committee had not yet started its work. Thereupon this synod decided to send a delegate to America to inform the CRC on the Liberation, but he never went.

In 1946 it turned out that the opinions in the CRC-press reflected the opinions of the Christian Reformed Church as a whole. The Liberated Churches had invited the CRC to attend their synod, but the synodical committee answered that, inasmuch as the CRC did not at the present time maintain church correspondence with the Liberated Reformed Churches, they were not authorized to send delegates. In the meantime the CRC was organizing the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which took place in August 1946 in Grand Rapids. Ecumenity was a topic many CRC-people were much more interested in than in doctrinal quarrels. They invited the Reformed Church of South Africa and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, who sent Prof. Aalders as one of the delegates. But the Liberated Churches were not invited. At this synod the delegates of the Reformed Churches informed the other members on the Liberation and asked them to agree with her synodical decisions of the last years. Though the CRC-delegates could have known better, they just agreed. Silently and practically the CRC did make a choice, be it only implicitly and not expressly.

But in 1947 the CRC had to come out – and it did. When the news spread that prof. Schilder would visit the United States, the Synodical Committee approved, that an announcement

was published in the CRC church papers that the CRC did not sustain church correspondence with the Liberated Churches and therefore could not invite their ministers to occupy their pulpits. The CRC officially closed its doors to Schilder and the Liberated churches.

This history would all have been without much importance, if nothing had happened since. I'd like to point to four developments. First, the Reformed Churches accusing the Liberated Churches of apostasy, have proved to be wrong. It was they that left the classic reformed position, while the liberated churches kept to it. Seen in this light of history, the Liberation has turned out to be a turning point in Dutch church history, because it initiated the demise of the world Abraham Kuyper had created and seriously weakened the reformed presence in Dutch society. Secondly, prof. Berkouwer, who presided the synod of 1944 that deposed Schilder, in 1987 apologized in public, on the Dutch television, for this decision. It was utterly wrong to depose Schilder, he said. And in reaction to this most personal action of Berkouwer, the synod of the Reformed Churches in 1988 apologized for deposing Schilder and many others. So, we can never talk about 1944 anymore without at least mentioning 1988. The CRC did not accept the synodical decision of 1988 blindly, like it did in 1944. But, thirdly, in America things changed as well. We cannot speak of secession and exodus in CRC-circles today as a purely historical matter, for in the 1990s this has become its sad reality. This reality makes it less easy, but maybe a bit more interesting to reflect on how the CRC judged the Liberation of 1944. And in the fourth and last place, some in the CRC-circles have started to rethink the Hoeksema-case. It is clear from this lecture, that this has implications for the CRC-view on the Liberation as well. Just as the deposition of Hoeksema, the deposition of Schilder was an irregular process, and a 'blitzkrieg' to turn Schilder down, just as the CRC wanted to turn Hoeksema down. And the positions taken in 1944 were highly influenced by the CRC-attitude towards Hoeksema.

The conclusion of this lecture is not that the CRC betted on the wrong horse in 1944. History is not about right or wrong, but it is not for fun either. It is about understanding ourselves by reflecting on the experience of others. It often makes us feel uneasy and especially doing church history is a very critical guide in our Christian life. My conclusion would be, that the history of the Reformed tradition in the twentieth century is in need of a reassessment. We should leave the partisan and doctrinal views that root in church splits and try to understand the reformed world and its splits in a historical way. This calls for a cooperative effort of Dutch and American historians.

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