

An Evaluation to the Polemical Idea of the RCN¹ in 1940s on the Covenant of Grace as Governed by Election: Its Impact to the Mission in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Makalah ini mengkaji pandangan bahwa kovenan anugerah diatur oleh pemilihan Allah yang implikasinya adalah bahwa anak-anak harus dibaptis, dengan asumsi bahwa mereka telah dipilih dan dilahirbarukan. Di dalam RCN, gagasan ini diajukan oleh Abraham Kuyper, yang pada beberapa dekade selanjutnya menimbulkan konflik serius yang menyebabkan perpecahan di tubuh RCN pada tahun 1944. Kajian ini disusun dari perspektif teologi sistematika yang juga berusaha melihat relevansinya dengan baptisan Roh; sebuah tema yang tidak termasuk di dalam kuliah teologis selama konflik di dalam tubuh RCN. Setelah membahas hal ini, dampak dari hal tersebut terhadap misi Reformed Belanda di Indonesia, khususnya di Sumba, penting untuk dibahas guna mengetahui secara tepat bahwa permasalahan dan perpecahan di gereja-gereja Belanda tersebut telah menciptakan citra yang buruk pada sejarah kekristenan di Indonesia.

Kata-Kata Kunci: kovenan anugerah, doktrin pemilihan, konflik RCN, misi Reformed Belanda

Abstract

This article evaluates the view that the covenant of grace is governed by election which its implication that the children must be baptized by assuming that they are elected and regenerated. Within the RCN, this idea was promoted by Abraham Kuyper, in which, some decades later, this concept inflicted a serious conflict that lead to a separation in the body of the RCN in 1944. This evaluation is made from the perspective of systematic theology which also tries to see its relevance to the Spirit baptism; a subject which was not included in the theological discourse during the conflict within RCN. Afterwards, its impact to the Dutch Reformed mission in Indonesia, particularly in Sumba, is substantial to be discussed in order to know properly that the polemic and the division in the Netherlands had created a bad image in the history of Christianity in Indonesia.

Keywords: the covenant of grace, election, conflict within RCN, Dutch Reformed mission

¹ RCN is an abbreviation of "the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands" (Dutch = Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland [GKN]).

Introduction

A controversy on the doctrine of the covenant emerged among theologians in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the early 1940s. The main issue was whether the covenant of grace particularly regarding the baptized children of believers is governed by election and therefore unconditional or not.¹ The synod of the church made a decision that election governs the covenant which leads to its implication that the elect children are in the covenant as members of the covenant and the reprobates are only under administration of the covenant.² Some theologians such as Schilder, Holwerda, and Veenhof reacted against this decision and formed a new denomination.³ Schilder group argues that God makes his covenant promise to all baptized children and the covenant is conditional. Its condition is faith which is performed by the child.⁴ By stating this, they were accused teaching Arminian doctrine on conditional covenant which was condemned by the Synod of Dort. Schilder group responds that God's grace enables some to perform the condition.⁵

Taking this controversy as a background, the aim of this essay is to make a critical evaluation on the view that covenant of grace is governed by election by analyzing some weak points in it. Some notes need to be stated: (1) Describing the whole points of this position is a complex task and will be unrealistic for a short paper. Therefore, taking a few points to evaluate is reasonable. (2) In order to make an objective evaluation, I avoid repeating the arguments of the group which opposed to this view during the controversy (e.g., Schilder group). (3) Regarding the infant baptism, the

discussion will also deal with its relevance to the Holy Spirit baptism; a subject which did not exist in the time of the controversy yet today such subject is popular. (4) As the last part, the impact of this controversy to the Dutch Reformed mission in Indonesia, particularly in Sumba, will be presented.

Some questions will guide the discussion: (1) What is the description of the idea that the covenant of grace is governed by election? (2) What are the problems of this idea? (3) Why is the impact of this controversy to the Dutch Reformed mission in Sumba, Indonesia, needs to be discussed? Based on these questions, first, we will briefly discuss the statement of the idea, second, explaining its weakness, and third, describing its impact to the mission in Sumba, Indonesia.

Plausability

General Points

A decade before the time of the controversy, The Reformed Congregation (other church denomination in the Netherlands) declared in 1931 that the covenant of grace is governed by the decree of election.⁶ The implication is that there is no substantial distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace.⁷ Indeed, the RCN had the same view, for the origin of this thought in the RCN came from Kuyper who sees election as the starting point of the covenant.⁸ Kuyper argues that the covenant is from the eternity and having been established with Christ as mediator and head of the elect which means that they will be regenerated.⁹

Moreover, based on regeneration, Kuyper maintains the concept of antithesis.¹⁰ This antithesis stresses on the distinction between the regenerated and the un-regenerated. The

¹ David J. Engelsma, *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011), 15.

² Engelsma, *Covenant and Election*, 16.

³ The new denomination is the Reformed Churches (Liberated); Dutch: Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt).

⁴ Engelsma, *Covenant and Election*, 17.

⁵ Engelsma, *Covenant and Election*, 17.

⁶ J. Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election* (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1995), 10.

⁷ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 10.

⁸ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 25.

⁹ J. Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant* (Launceston: Free Reformed Church of Australia, 1985), 24.

¹⁰ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 24.

first can perceive the eternal reality such as justification through faith, the church, and the covenant etc., while the second cannot realize them.¹¹ Consequently, this teaching could speak strictly about the distinction between the true partakers (the elect and regenerated) and the false partakers (the non-elect and un-regenerated) in the covenant.¹² Their difference is that the regenerated have an awareness to the eternal reality while the un-regenerated have no awareness.

Indeed, this view has a great impact on how Kuyper sees the sacrament of baptism. According to him, baptism as a divine mark has to be understood from the doctrine of regeneration in which the Holy Spirit gives the germ of life without the word of God as an instrument. This germ of life in regeneration is confirmed by baptism and consequently the elect/regenerated become conscious of their connection with Christ. Therefore, according to this teaching, baptism presupposes regeneration.¹³

Based on such view, experiencing the eternal reality for the elect/regenerated is a fundamental point. However, it becomes a contradictory element in Kuyper's thought because on one hand he shows strongly opposition to Schleiermacher's subjectivism¹⁴ in his era, yet on the other hand he maintains that believers have to experience the eternal reality as a result of the regeneration. Kamphuis argues that although Kuyper confronted Schleiermacher's subjectivism but at the same time the enemy is in the stronghold.¹⁵

¹¹ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 24.

¹² Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 24.

¹³ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 24.

¹⁴ The subjectivism of Schleiermacher could be seen through his concern to change religion (theology) from a matter of knowing to feeling. Bavinck argues, "Schleiermacher himself had taught [his students] that the religion was not a matter of knowing or doing but of a certain state of feeling and, in keeping with this, that dogmatics is a description of pious states of mind." And therefore, Bavinck views Schleiermacher's method as "the religious-empirical method." See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 524.

¹⁵ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 23.

Particular Points to Evaluate

(1) The concept that the covenant of grace is governed by election. This view sees the doctrine of election as a starting point for the doctrine of the covenant. It means that the covenant of grace is particularly for the elect. Moreover, the partners in the covenant of grace are only those who have received grace or those who are predestined to receive it.¹⁶

(2) Baptizing children on the assumption that they are elected and regenerated. According to this idea, the true covenant children are those who have had a part in Christ and those who will become partakers of salvation, while those who are not elected only appear to be covenant children.¹⁷ Regarding the children of believers, Kuyper argues that they must be regarded as being in God's covenant of grace. It is not just in appearance but in reality. Consequently, when the children are baptized, they must be baptized on the assumption that they are elected and regenerated.¹⁸

To put Kuyper's view clearer, Douma's comparison between Kuyper and David Kingdon (a Reformed Baptist theologian) could be helpful. According to Douma, Kuyper states that believers should consider their children as reborn and therefore can be baptized. On the contrary, Kingdon says that believers should consider their children as unconverted because they are children of wrath and therefore should not be baptized. Moreover, Kuyper believes that the covenant is only for the elect/regenerated, and since believers do not know at the baptismal font which child is elected and which is not, they have to assume the baptized child will be reborn. Kingdon states the same thesis, yet he moves on to contrary direction. He says that in the case of infants, there is uncertainty whether they are elected or not, therefore infant baptism is not permitted. Douma describes that their views

¹⁶ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 23.

¹⁷ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 23.

¹⁸ Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 26.

are totally different as well as has similarity.¹⁹ The similarity is that they start at the same point, namely, the covenant is established only for the elect. Afterwards, because believers have no certainty whether infants are elected or not, then they move on to opposite directions. Kuyper believes that the children must be baptized on the assumption that they are elected and regenerated, while Kingdon argues that the children must not be baptized because believers have to consider them as unconverted. Douma says that in this sense Kuyper is more optimistic and Kingdon is more pessimistic.²⁰

Evaluation

Covenant as Governed by Election

Before evaluating this view, the concept of covenant must be stated. Reformed theologians speak about three covenants: (1) covenant of works;²¹ a covenant between God and Adam as the head and representative of human kind in Eden. (2) Covenant of redemption; a covenant between God the Father on behalf of God and Christ as the head of the elect. (3) Based on the covenant of redemption God made a covenant of grace between God himself and human kind. However, some theologians like Beuker, Ten Hoor, and Heyns make a strict distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. For instance, Beuker states that the two covenants differ in covenanting parties, covenant demands, and covenant promises.²² While other Reformed theologians, such as Berkhof, sees the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace as one covenant with two aspects. For him, the cove-

nant of redemption is the eternal foundation of the covenant of grace.²³

Speaking about the covenant of grace as governed by election could be true for a single reason: that God himself cannot make a covenant with sinful human beings unless they have been chosen in Christ as a righteous head and representative. Accordingly, election in Christ must be prior and become the base to make a covenant. Galatians 3:29 describes, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."²⁴ Therefore, concluding that election in Christ governs the covenant of grace is reasonable. Yet, it is just a half truth and a half truth could become danger. In the following it will be explained.

(1) The term "govern" itself has a significant problem because election and covenant are a set of God's plan with its possibility to speak prior about election before the covenant of grace in a logically order. In this term, the word "govern" must be misleading for the word itself indicates that election is supreme above the covenant of grace. In my opinion, it is incorrect because the existence of the first needs and depends on the existence of the second and vice versa. To put it another way, since God wants to make a covenant of grace, thus he elects some of them in Christ. In this sense, election depends on the covenant of grace. Yet, the covenant of grace cannot be actual unless God elects some people in Christ. In this case, the covenant of grace depends on election. Consequently, election and the covenant of grace are interdependent. Bavinck describes that election and covenant are closely related to each other in which election becomes the essence of the covenant of grace.²⁵

(2) Another problem, even a greater problem, this view declines the biblical fact which asserts that the context of the covenant of grace is human fall (or human sin) and not

¹⁹ J. Douma, *Infant Baptism and Regeneration* (Kampen, 1997), 32-33.

²⁰ Douma, *Infant Baptism and Regeneration*, 33.

²¹ For further study on the covenant of works, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 211-218.

²² Jelle Faber and Klaas Schilder, *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism and Extra-Scriptural Binding: A New Danger* (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1924), 30.

²³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 270.

²⁴ All Bible quotations in this article are from NIV.

²⁵ Cf. Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 27.

election. Genesis 3:15 says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” This is the seed of the gospel—the germ of the covenant of grace—which appeared after the fall.²⁶ Although the word offspring in this verse refers to the woman’s offspring in general yet it eventually designates Christ as the offspring who bruised the head of the serpent on the cross.²⁷ Moreover, in the Bible, God’s salvation grace is always spoken in its relationship with sin, for instance, Roman 5:17 says, “For if by the trespass of the one man, death reign through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (cf. Ro. 3:23-24; 6:23). Also, New Testament clearly states that Jesus came to this world in order to redeem fallen humanity from eternal condemnation. For instance, John 3:16 describes, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Mark 10:45 states, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” We could also mention the opinion of the theologians concerning the relationship of the incarnation—a part of God’s covenant of grace—and sin, for instance, while speaking on the necessity of the incarnation, Thomas Aquinas and also the Reformed theologians believe that its reason is the entrance of sin into the world.²⁸ And indeed, to say that sin is the reason Christ came into the world is not the same when one says that election is the reason of his incarnation. As a conclusion, human fall (or sin) and not election is the real context of the existence of the covenant of grace.

²⁶ Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), II.x.20, 446.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.x.20, 478.

²⁸ Cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 333.

Baptizing Children on the Assumption that They are Elected and Regenerated

Before making a critical evaluation on this view, explaining the relationship of infant baptism, regeneration, and the Holy Spirit baptism is necessary in order to put this discussion in understandable manner in today’s context. Although, at the time of the controversy in the Netherlands in 1940s, the issue regarding the Holy Spirit Baptism had no place, yet today it become a common subject in theological discourse.²⁹ Therefore, the evaluation on the view that children have to be baptized by assuming that they are elected and regenerated could be put in a proper perspective. To put it another way, one could not speak on children baptism and its relationship to regeneration unless seeing its correspondence with the Holy Spirit baptism, for in our theological discourse today we understand that regeneration has a close relationship with the baptism of Holy Spirit.³⁰

Some churches which do not administer infant baptism criticize Reformed churches and other churches that practicing it by using a most common reason that a child is unable to have faith whereas the biblical base to baptize is faith. They quote Mark 16:16 as a scriptural base. However, Reformed theologians believe that there is continuity between the covenant of God with Abraham and his descendants in the Old Testament which was

²⁹ In Indonesian context, for instance, Stephen Tong had made a seminar regarding the baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit which had been published. See Stephen Tong, *Baptisan dan Karunia Roh Kudus* (Jakarta: LRIL, 1996).

³⁰ Cf. Greg Haslam, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: Westminster Chapel, 2014), 4. According to Haslam, the regeneration is prior to the Holy Spirit baptism. He describes, “‘Baptism’ or ‘Filling’ with the Spirit, is actually a subsequent, actively sought, voluntary reception of the Spirit’s power for everything else that new converts are now qualified to receive. The first experience, ‘regeneration’, is our ‘vivification’ making us spiritually alive and enabled to believe.” However, I myself have a different view, which sees the Holy Spirit Baptism as prior to regeneration. The reason is that the Holy Spirit as a gift of Christ in our life will create a new life (regeneration) in us. To put it another way, one is born of the Spirit because Christ have given His Holy Spirit, through the Spirit Baptism, to him/her before. This view is more consistent with John 3:5-8.

marked by circumcision and God's covenant with believers and their children in the New Testament which is sealed by baptism. This continuity makes infant baptism has its biblical base. Indeed, the New Testament has never instructed either to baptize children or not to baptize. Frame builds his argument to defend infant baptism by making a comparison between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament. He argues that circumcision was the rite of entrance into Israel, as baptism is now the rite of entrance into the visible church. Circumcision becomes a seal of the promises of God to the people as baptism seals those promises to Christian believers. As the children who were circumcised without the requirement of faith in the Old Testament—because children are unable to have faith—it is also true for the children who are baptized in the New Testament.³¹ Frame's argument above summarizes the whole point of Reformed theology on infant baptism.

Circumcision in the Old Testament was a seal of God's promises which was started from Abraham to the New Testament era where the seal has been changed to baptism. The term "seal" in this sense is a clue to determine the meaning and the value of either circumcision or baptism. Indeed, both circumcision and baptism are visible seals for entering either Israel or the New Testament church which symbolizes a spiritual seal, namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, Reformed theologians in the past had not seen the relationship between water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism. Yet, by the emergence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements which maintain the Holy Spirit baptism in an excessive manner, many theologians started to deal with the issue and view water baptism as a visible symbol of the inner Holy Spirit baptism. For example, Unger describes that baptism of the Spirit is symbolized by water

³¹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Philipsburg: P&R, 2013), 1065.

baptism.³² According to him, water baptism is intended to be a symbol of unity between believers and Christ and among believers, and this unity is influenced by the baptizing work of the Spirit.³³ A biblical passage which deserves our attention is Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." This verse implicitly asserts that water baptism by John the Baptist is a visible sign of repentance whereas its spiritual sign will come from Jesus who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire.³⁴ Consequently, through the Spirit baptism, the Holy Spirit becomes a spiritual seal for believers as 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 explicitly states, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." Similarly, 2 Corinthians 5:5 states, "Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

Additionally, a question will need to be addressed: What is prior in believers' life, water baptism or Spirit baptism or both of them happen together? Before answering this question, a brief elucidation on baptism of the Spirit is necessary.

Stephen Tong distinguishes between Spirit baptism in the term of state and in the term of condition. According to him, Spirit baptism as a state had been given by Christ to all believers in all ages and places in the day of Pentecost, whereas Spirit baptism as a condition will happen in believers' life.³⁵ How do Christians know whether they have been baptized with the Spirit or not? Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians believe that

³² Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 106.

³³ Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, 107.

³⁴ The word "fire" in this verse has a certain meaning, yet it is out of the scope of this paper to explain its meaning.

³⁵ Tong, *Baptisan dan Karunia Roh Kudus*, 38-39.

speaking in tongue is the true sign of the Spirit baptism. However, this view is misleading for a few reasons: (1) It is not all believers could speak in tongue because this is a Spirit's gift to equip some (and not all) Christians to build the church. 1 Corinthians 12:7 states, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." In the subsequent verses, Paul describes the various gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongue, which God gives to each believers (vv. 8-10). (2) For observing that some Christians did not perform the sign of the Spirit baptism—speaking in tongue—Pentecostal and Charismatic people then divide Christians into two groups, first, those who believed in Christ but are not baptized with the Spirit, and second, those who have been baptized by the Spirit and therefore performed the sign (speaking in tongue). Such division is not known in the Scripture³⁶ and indeed it is unbiblical. It seems that having faith in Christ becomes the only true sign to know whether someone has been baptized with the Holy Spirit or not.

Based on Tong's view above, we could say that Spirit baptism as a state had been given by Christ in the day of Pentecost and for that reason it is prior to water baptism. Yet, Spirit baptism as a condition has some possibilities. In some cases it can be prior to water baptism and in other cases it will happen later, yet they also have a possibility to come together. The first possibility could happen in adult baptism in which water baptism for the adult is administered after they have faith in Christ, where "having faith in Christ" is the sign of the Spirit Baptism. The second and the third possibilities occur to those who experiencing infant baptism. However, there are no biblical verses which deal with this issue and it remains as a mystery. It is only Jesus Christ as the Baptizer of the Spirit who knows exactly how and when he gives the Holy Spirit in

order to regenerate and to make someone be united with him and his body; the church.

Now, based on the preceding discussion, we will make a brief evaluation to the view that infant baptism must be administered by assuming the children as elected and regenerated. Its problem is underestimating the difference between the water baptism and the Spirit baptism. The first is a visible sign of God's covenant that has no direct relationship to the regeneration while the second is its spiritual sign; a seal for all true believers, and therefore has a direct relationship with regeneration. It means that whoever experienced Spirit baptism must be regenerated and those who are regenerated must experience baptism of the Spirit. Consequently, they must have been elected by God.

The distinction of the water baptism and the Spirit baptism is striking. The water baptism could not only be a sign for those who are true believers which means that they are elected and regenerated but also can be a sign for those who are included in the covenant yet they are not true believers which means that they are not elected and regenerated. For instance, in the Old Testament, Ishmael was included in the covenant by circumcision yet he did not belong to the true Israel who inherited the faith of Abraham. In the New Testament, Acts 8:13 speaks about Simon (a witch) who was baptized by Philip for he also believed, yet reading verses 18-24 one could come to the conclusion that Simon was not a true believer. In this sense, Douma is correct when he argues that just as there are two kinds of Abraham's offspring in the Old Testament, the same thing also happen in the New Testament.³⁷

As a conclusion: (a) It is a futile theological discourse to speak about infant baptism which assuming the children as elected and regenerated, because water baptism is intended to be a visible sign that seals both the elect/regenerated and the non-elect/unregenerated who

³⁶ Cf. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 926.

³⁷ Douma, *Infant Baptism and Regeneration*, 29.

are included in the covenant of grace. It is only the Holy Spirit baptism which has a direct relationship with regeneration and become a spiritual seal for the elect/regenerated. (b) It declines the biblical fact that the members of the covenant of grace in both the Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are always two kinds. Therefore, the scope of the covenant cannot be interpreted as consists only the elect/regenerated which leads to its false consequence, namely, to baptize children by assuming that they are elected/regenerated.

The Impact of the Controversy to the Dutch Reformed Mission in Indonesia

Regarding the Protestant Christian mission in Indonesia in the past, most of the missionary workers came from the Netherlands. That is why many Protestant churches in Indonesia hold Reformed faith³⁸ which most of them today are very open to the liberal theology.³⁹ The oldest and largest among the Dutch mission bodies is the *Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap* (NZG).⁴⁰ Yet, a mission foundation from Germany, *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*, also had a great significance especially in founding churches in South Kalimantan (from 1835) and North Sumatra (Batakland, from 1862).⁴¹ There were some Reformed mission foundations worked in Indonesia in the past and one of them was from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

(*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*); the church which had experienced the controversy we have mentioned above. A conservative Calvinist mission started to work in Central Java which later was over taken by this church. Its evangelism work also started a new mission in Sumba.⁴² Sad to say that when the separation within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands happened in 1944, the church in Sumba—as its result in mission field—was also separated. The first half followed the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, which later known as Sumba Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Sumba*), and the rest which followed the group of Schilder named itself as Free Churches in Sumba (*Gereja-Gereja Bebas di Sumba*).⁴³

Before the separation in the Netherlands which followed by the church in Sumba, some conflicts regarding the mission work in East Sumba had happened. S. J. P. Goossens⁴⁴ was a figure who played an important role in that conflicts. Contrary to his predecessor, J. F. Colenbrander, who was patient toward the Sumbanese and Savunese,⁴⁵ Goossens showed a strict attitude to those people and their customs, and indeed, this could be a source of conflicts.⁴⁶ His difference in approach with Colenbrander, lead to the result that two mission approaches appeared and divided the Christian pastors into two parties, namely, those who have mildly approach and those who have strictly approach. This division made a certain impact to the congregations.⁴⁷ Finally, the conflicts caused the sender Church in the Netherlands fired Goossens in 1939. However, some congregations in East

³⁸ Cf. Jan S. Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran di Dalam dan di Sekitar Gereja* (Jakarta: BPK, 2001), 52-53.

³⁹ Riemer argues that the theology of the PGI (Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia; English: The Alliance of the Churches in Indonesia) tends to be Liberal and Modern, see Gerrit Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia: Asal, Sejarah, dan Identitasnya* (Jakarta: BPK, 2009), 127. Indeed, most of the churches in the PGI are a result of the Dutch Reformed missions in the past.

⁴⁰ See Th. van den End and Jan S. Aritonang, "1800-2005: A National Overview," in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, eds. Jan S. Aritonang et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 141.

⁴¹ Van den End and Aritonang, "1800-2005: A National Overview," 141.

⁴² Van den End and Aritonang, "1800-2005: A National Overview," 167. Sumba is an island in the southeast part of Indonesia.

⁴³ Cf. Th. van den End, *Ragi Carita 2: Sejarah Gereja di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK, 2008), 267.

⁴⁴ He was a RCN (GKN) missionary who worked in East Sumba.

⁴⁵ In the past, Savunese came from the island of Savu and settled in the coast of East Sumba.

⁴⁶ See Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 36.

⁴⁷ Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 30.

Sumba, especially in Melolo, defended him and sent K. Tanahomba and S.J. Piri to the Netherlands to explain the conflicts and to defend Goossens as well as to explain the position of the congregations in East Sumba.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, in the Netherlands there was a hard debate regarding the view that the covenant of grace is governed by election as we have discussed. It was a very serious polemic, as Van puts it, “the debate even led to a serious conflict within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) in 1944.”⁴⁹ The position of the synod of the GKN (RCN) supported this view that stands as a striking opposition to Schilders’s. We could say that the synod at that time was a Kuyper’s follower. Van Genderen describes, “Without the theology of Kuyper there would never have been any Conclusions of Utrecht (1905).”⁵⁰ This Conclusions was a doctrinal pronouncement to defend the view that the election governs the covenant.

Indeed, as we have mentioned above, Kuyper taught that the doctrine of election is the starting point for the doctrine of the covenant. Moreover, according to him, the covenant of grace is intended exclusively for the elect.⁵¹ On the contrary, although Schilder allows the doctrine of election functions fully in the doctrine of the covenant, yet he does it in a very different way from the theologians who view the covenant as made with the elect only.⁵² Van Genderen describes that for Schilder, “human responsibility, which is given along with the covenant, always weighs very heavily. In the covenant God does not just say something *about* man; He *addresses* man the responsible party and deals with him

as such.”⁵³ Therefore, man can keep the covenant and can break it as well.⁵⁴

Consequently, the synod of the RCN condemned Schilder. According to the church papers, there were two reasons to plead him guilty, first, his character, and second, his opinions.⁵⁵ And the result, as Harinck describes, “Schilder was deposed by the synod of Utrecht on August, 3, 1944.”⁵⁶ Then, “Schilder issued a declaration of liberation or return, containing accusations of tyranny and binding the consciences, and summoned the churches to secede.”⁵⁷ The Liberation took place and the exodus of members and churches continued to occur till 1946. It was about 10% had left the RCN during the exodus.⁵⁸

According to my opinion, division is not a good choice in this context because this polemic did not happen between Reformed and Arminian theologians, but a dispute regarding an issue about the covenant and election among brothers in Reformed wing. A *via media* is probably better as a solution, for instance, while the synod of the RCN held that the election governs the covenant, yet whoever held different view like Schilder group is not necessary to be condemned. The similar thing had happened regarding the issue of supralapsarian and infralapsarian. According to the Conclusions of Utrecht, while the formal position of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands was infralapsarian yet whoever holds supralapsarian as a personal conviction was not condemned.⁵⁹

⁴⁸ Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 41.

⁴⁹ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 95.

⁵⁰ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 25. There was a series of the RCN’s doctrinal pronouncements, it was 1905, 1942, 1946, 1959, see Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 25.

⁵¹ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 25.

⁵² Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 97.

⁵³ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 97.

⁵⁴ Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, 97.

⁵⁵ George Harinck, “The Reception of the Liberation of 1944 in the Christian Reformed Church,” *The Canadian Reformed Magazine*, LII (2), 17 Jan 2003: 32-34; LII (3), 31 Jan 2003: 53-56.

⁵⁶ Harinck, “The Reception of the Liberation of 1944 in the Christian Reformed Church.”

⁵⁷ Harinck, “The Reception of the Liberation of 1944 in the Christian Reformed Church.”

⁵⁸ Harinck, “The Reception of the Liberation of 1944 in the Christian Reformed Church.”

⁵⁹ Cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 125.

Back to Tanahomba and Piri, both of them could not go back to Indonesia for World War II happened and had to stay in the Netherlands. However, Piri was no longer stand for Goossens. During those years, Tanahomba stayed in Goossens's house and Piri moved to other house.⁶⁰ And, when the liberation from the synod of the RCN occurred in 1944, Goossens and Tanahomba made a decision to join with the new liberated church (Reformed Churches-Liberated), while Piri joined with the synod of the RCN.⁶¹ As result, the churches (congregations) in Sumba, particularly in East Sumba, experienced a division between those who followed Goossens and Tanahomba and therefore became a part of the liberation and those who did not join with the liberation.⁶² Later, the congregations that still stayed with the synod of the RCN named themselves as Sumba Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Sumba*) and those who followed Schilder's liberation known as the Free Churches in Sumba (*Gereja-Gereja Bebas di Sumba*).⁶³ From this brief mission history, it clearly describes that the conflict in the Netherlands on the view that the covenant of grace is governed by election leaved its impact to the mission field in Indonesia. It seems more as a contra-productive result rather than productive.

Additionally, it is important to note that later Goossens made another polemic within the Free Churches in Sumba. The conflict occurred between Goossens and other missionary, Henk van Egmond, for Goossens wanted to have an absolute power in all mission activities and to all workers. This conflict leads to the result that the church sender in the Netherlands called them back

and banned Goossens to continue his mission in Indonesia, while Van Egmond could go back to continue his service. However, Goossens went back to Indonesia by his own initiative and with the assistant of Tanahomba made their own service and congregations. Thus, another separation happened.⁶⁴ The first half named itself Free Churches in East Sumba (*Gereja-Gereja Bebas di Sumba Timur*) or also known as Free Churches Goossens because it was under the leadership of Goossens. The other half named itself as Reformed Churches in East Sumba (*Gereja-Gereja Gereformeerd di Sumba Timur*) or also known as Free Churches Zwolle (*Gereja-Gereja Bebas Zwolle*) because the church was supported by a congregation in Zwolle, the Netherlands, which is a member of the Reformed Churches (Liberated). Later, this church changed its name with Reformed Churches in Indonesia (*Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia*)⁶⁵ which faithfully preserves its relationship with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) until today.

Conclusion

A brief conclusion could be made: (1) The idea that the covenant of grace is governed by election have some difficulties. For instance, it will make the election supreme above the covenant, whereas the two are interdependent. Also, the context that makes the covenant of grace substantial according to the Scripture is the existence of sin and not the doctrine of election. Moreover, the related view that the children must be baptized by presupposing that they are elected and regenerated has some problems. For instance, it obscures the difference between water baptism and Spirit baptism. The first, as a visible sign, seals both the elect/regenerated and the non-elect/un-

⁶⁰ Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 41.

⁶¹ Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 41.

⁶² Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 42-43.

⁶³ However, According to Riemer, as has been mentioned, the root of this division had already appeared in 1930s because the conflict regarding the Sumbanese custom where Goossens played an important role had happened, see Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 43.

⁶⁴ Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*, 44-45.

⁶⁵ In order to understand the origin, development, and how this church experienced separation by following the separation within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the past, see Gerrit Riemer, *Gereja-Gereja Reformasi*.

regenerated who are included in the covenant, while the second, as a spiritual sign, seals only the elect/regenerated. And therefore, it has a direct relationship with the election and regeneration. Also, this view disregards the biblical facts that the member of either Israel in the Old Testament or the church in the New Testament are always two kinds, the true and false members.

2) The separation as a result of the conflict around this idea within the RCN in 1944 which also divided the churches (congregations) in East Sumba, Indonesia, had become a bad image of the Dutch Reformed mission in the history of the Christian church in Indonesia.

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