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Our Goodly Heritage Preserved

A Pictorial Survey of the Protestant Reformed Churches 1925-2000
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This large size volume ranks as complimentary in a way to the volume produced by Prof. Hanko "For Thy Truth's Sake". It is complimentary in that it too, is a commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), but more especially because it takes a less technical, and more social viewpoint, punctuating its readable text with a goodly array of pertinent photographs. The net result is that it gives the reader a very good insight into the actual ethos, life, and work of the whole denomination in all its aspects. In this volume, one might say, the PRC "comes alive", and those who have never encountered them personally can browse through this book and feel that they are actually meeting the PRC people in their churches, homes, schools, and daily walk. Having spent a few weeks in the USA amongst them myself, I think that the book gives quite a true-to-life impression. As such it is worthy of study by not only BRJ readers, but by any who are concerned with the Reformed Faith.

At the outset, let it be said that the book gives the lie to the slander "hyper-Calvinist" which even today, many who imagine themselves to be "leading" Reformed theologians level against the PRC. Chapter 3 is an eminently significant account of the Missionary activity of the PRC, introduced by Prof. Robert Decker. Herein we are introduced to the hard-working members of (i) The Domestic Mission Committee, which at the moment has two home missionaries active in the USA, with nascent congregations and preaching stations in Carolina, Washington, Pittsburgh, and the New York area, then (ii) the Foreign Mission Committee and their activities in Jamaica, Northern Ireland, Singapore, the Philippines, India, Myanmar (Burma), and now in Ghana. Ghana is the latest missionary placement, where it pleases the Lord to be gathering a new congregation under the labours of the Rev. Richard Moore. Far from any "hyper-calvinism", the whole effort rings with enthusiasm to bring the Gospel to the lost, and to reap where the fields are white unto harvest. We read herein too, about the Bible College in which Rev. Jason Kortering is active in Singapore, assisted betimes by Prof. Hanko. We learn

too of their dangerous forays into the interior of Burma, and of the positive reception amongst the Burmese. Included with all this is an account of the ecumenical relations of the PRC with other denominations concerned for the Reformed Faith, such as the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. And it is to be noted that PRC people are to be found as willing co-workers on the mission field alongside their missionaries, having sacrificed, for a time at least, the comfortable life of modern America to work assisting their ministers under arduous conditions in foreign lands.

Also in this chapter is an account of the PRC Radio outreach. The USA has much more freedom to broadcast Christianity than have most nations, including Britain. Accordingly the PRC have a "Radio Committee", responsible for broadcasting currently on nine different radio stations across the USA. This committee broadcasts sermons by Rev. Carl Haak regularly, together with Psalm-singing devotions, on the "Reformed Witness Hour". For nearly sixty years this effort has been maintained, and we could only wish that this Committee would find it possible to broadcast on the Short-wave as well, beamed to Europe, and beamed in to other needy places as well.

All these matters are but a part, and a most worthy part, of the great and general efforts made by this small denomination. The missionary endeavours outlined above can not be paralleled amongst many a larger denomination, particularly in the British Isles. The denomination's statistics are given on page 15, as of the 1999 yearbook. One is staggered to see that such a small denomination is delivering such a big "clout". Whilst they have more than repaired the losses following upon the 1953 schism, they still only number 27 established congregations with some 6,551 souls in all. Seen in perspective, however, this represents a growth of 278 per cent from the 2,353 souls of 1954, or an overall average annual growth rate of 6 per cent. By comparison, its nearby large "rival", the Christian Reformed Church, with its emphasis on the "Free Offer" and "Common Grace" is presently declining not only with a steady haemorrhaging of numbers, but rampant apostasy of doctrine. One might compare too, the statistics of most UK Calvinist denominations as found in Scotland. Decline is writ large over them, even the best. Listed with 70,000 souls in 1904, the present Free Kirk of Scotland is now down to about 16,000, and the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, listed with some 14,000 souls in the 1890's, is now down to about 4,000. (Cf. Dictionary of Scottish Church Hist. & Theology.)

(It will not do to plead against this that both Free Kirk and Free Presbyterians have had their schisms, because none of them have been hit as hard with schism as was the PRC in the 1953-4 "blitz."

Again, we feel justified in pointing out the incongruity of the charges of "Hyper-Calvinism" brought against the PRC.

Prof. David Engelsma begins the book with an Introduction to the PRC, followed respectively by Rev. Douglas Kuyper's overview of PRC doctrinal principles and Rev. Kenneth Koole's outline on PRC Church Government. The two largest sec-

tions of the book then follow, the first dealing with every congregation in Classis East, the second with Classis West. Photographs and brief histories of each church illustrate the text such that one feels one is looking right in on the whole denomination. Following on this, we are given a look inside the PRC Seminary in Grandville, near Grand Rapids, which, from a first hand visit, I can say is a delightful place of learning replete with a fascinatingly well-stocked library. (I could have spent months, nay years in there!) The text and photographs again convey something of the atmosphere of the place, profound, purposive, intensely hard-working, yet happy.

Chap. 5 I found, as a former school-teacher, immensely interesting. The PRC now have 13 day schools up and running, one of which in Grand Rapids is a High School for grades 9 to 12. (Grade 12 = UK Upper Sixth.). In addition, plans are under way to begin a second High School in the Chicago area. I have visited and toured through 3 of these schools, namely Hope, (Grand Rapids); South Holland, (Chicago area); and Loveland (Colorado). I have also looked around Covenant High School in Grand Rapids, Heritage, and Adams schools, and what struck me immediately was the high quality of the buildings, appurtenances, grounds, equipment, and the excellent maintainance of the same. I saw no evidences of vandalism. Compared with this, the bulk of UK state schools by and large are at a lower standard of provision, and at a somewhat lower standard of maintenance.

The PRC schools are presented ably, I think, in this volume, and I felt that it conveyed to me a lot of what I had felt on my actual visits in 1999. A lot of PRC people must be sacrificing a lot of dollars to make all these provisions for their covenant children, believing seriously as they do that the children of believers should be brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). We in the UK have a lot to catch up in this respect.

A noteworthy adjunct to the PRC educational enterprise is the work of a Centre for Special Education, where a small team of dedicated staff patiently cope with the difficulties involved with children that are handicapped in various different ways. This is a noble calling to deal with such children, one that demands special skills and patience, one that regards all children of covenant believers to be special, whatever their individual talents or handicaps.

Professors Herman Hanko and David Engelsma look respectively at the two main publications of the PRC, the twice yearly Theological Journal, and the semi-monthly Standard Bearer. The circulation figures look surprisingly healthy for such a small denomination, some 1,200 for the Theological Journal, and over 3,000 for the Standard Bearer. With 76 years in publication, the Standard Bearer is one of the oldest still-running Christian papers in the USA.

A lively, interesting volume, it gives an excellent impression of the PRC.

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