

Portraits of Faithful Saints

A Review and Appreciation
of the book by Prof. Herman Hanko

by
Mr. Raymond Kemp.

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When originally asked to review this book for the *British Reformed Journal*, this request met with an immediate decline. Your reviewer had a general knowledge of the book's interesting content; known, liked, and appreciated, the author, because as a student of literature, he has long admired the prose which profuses from the Hanko pen. Why refuse the review? Whilst the reasons for the original articles in *The Standard Bearer* were clear, initially it was neither immediately or abundantly obvious what the actual purpose was in the publication of eclectic anthology. But there was something else. We were aware that in existence were a number of Revd Herman Hoeksema's (unpublished) *Sermons on Romans*, and we considered this venture more worthy. However, this arbitrary and unwarrantable creation of a hierarchy with the canons of Reformed literature was soon jettisoned. The reason lay in the excellent content and underlying message of *Portraits*.

It is a volume which sets forth the plight of God's people in the face of suffering. From the very first Portrait of Polycarp in the early church to George Ophoff in the 1950's, Prof. Hanko's saints suffered under the whip of persecution and the melting sun of marginalisation and opposition. Thus, in a sense, bare history recedes to reveal human hardship, human trial, and, ultimately, human impotence in the face of a Holy, Sovereign, and Graciously loving God.

The book's fifty-two chapters are organised into a septuplicate division of church history, each section introduced by a time chart detailing the names, dates, and church events of the period.

Part One, *The Ancient Period* (100-750 A.D.), deals with such men as Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Anthony, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, Patrick, Columba, and Boniface. Therefore, the concentration is widespread, covering God's dealings with His people in North Africa, Europe and Asia. As an Irishman, your reviewer warmly recommends the chapter on Patrick, whilst we were not aware that, mythically, Patrick banished frogs (which we can refute as well as snakes), we gladly welcome the debunking of the myth that Patrick worked under Papal authority, hence our disappointment that some of the accompanying pictures (including Patrick) have a Romanist tinge. They may have been better omitted altogether. Initially, the inclusion of the hermit Anthony, Ascetic among Ascetics, was surpris-

ing because of his self-imposed exile and self-inflicted, physical punishment in an attempt to conquer the flesh and the world. But as Prof. Hanks argues, some men in God's church belong to the roster of the heroes of faith only because their witness, though in some respects wrong, is important (p.22). We agree. Anthony played an important part in the Arian controversy, declaring it no better than heathenism. We agree with Anthony. This was a period of rampant heresy and corruption. Even the great Tertullian ended his last days in the Montanist sect, but, as Prof. Hanks correctly notes, Tertullian was a Theologian of the Trinity. This, of course, was a time when Arians corrupted the text of Scripture, which has serious ramifications for us today. The two main Greek manuscripts (א and B, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) underpinning most modern Bible translations (such as the NIV) undermine the deity of Christ. For example, I Tim. 3:16, "**God** was manifest in the flesh" has been changed in the Westcott-Hort text to, "**He** who was manifest in the flesh" (RV). The implication is: He was one, albeit the highest, aspect of godliness, a pivotal argument in unitarian philosophy. Interestingly, the Watchtower Society (JW's) have used for their own Greek text the printing plates of the W-H text! If Prof. Hanks ever decides to publish a book of heretics, we may perhaps learn something of the root cause of textual corruption.

Part Two unfolds the *Medieval Period* (750-1517) including Alcuin, Godeschalk, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Wycliffe and Hus, and a treatment on The Waldensian movement. We may wonder why Catherine of Siena, a Mystic, is included, and although Francis of Assisi, founder of the famous order, did much to challenge church abuses, nevertheless his order was later a major counter-reformation force. We are treated to an excellent review of the reforming pivots of the period, Wycliffe and Hus, and the author rightly gives these great figures a place in the period's roll of honour. However, this section brought home to this reviewer the fact that God has providentially preserved the faith. Long before Calvin and Beza there was Godeschalk (806-868), also an ardent defender of the doctrines of grace, and Martyr for Predestination. How many of us knew this? Thanks to *Portraits* we now do.

Parts Three and Four cover *The Reformation Period* on the Continent and Britain (1517-1600). The Continent receives excellent coverage, and it is especially refreshing in these days of ecumenism and apologetic Protestantism that Zwingli, Luther and Calvin are rightly praised and not forgotten, and that other notables are also included. We have Bucer, the Protestant facilitator; Peter Martyr; Bullinger; Beza; Ursinus and Olevianus (authors of the Heidelberg Catechism); de Bres (author of the Belgic Confession); William the Silent, Peter Datheen; the Two Fredricks. The portraits of the lesser known reformers are what makes this book a worthwhile companion to Wylie's *History of Protestantism* and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. All these tomes have one thing in common, they reveal the horror and antichristianity of the Church of Rome. For the Protestants, "The Inquisition ordered that their tongues be screwed with metal screws to their jaw bones and the whole cauterised

with a hot iron so that the swelling would make it impossible for them to speak.” (p.226).

The British section contains such figures as Tyndale, Knox, Latimer (but not Ridley), Cranmer, and Andrew Melville, (Father of Presbyterianism). These are the prominent figures of the British Reformation, though, of course, many could be added to the list.

Parts Five and Six cover the *British and Dutch Post-Reformation Era* (1600-1920). Biographies of the covenanter, Alexander Henderson, Rutherford, the martyrdom of the two Margarets (MacLoughlin and Wilson), and Bunyan, is arguably a weak representation of Britain's post-reform movement. We could well have had a chapter on one of the greatest theological influences on the Westminster Assembly (1643), James Usher, Archbishop of Armagh, whose Irish Articles are almost quoted verbatim in the Confession of Faith. Whilst many consider the British delegation at the Synod of Dordt (1618) to have been weak, yet a mention of Joseph Hall (1574-1656), Bishop of Exeter, author of *Roma Irreconibilis* or *No Peace with Rome* and proud wearer of the Dordt Medal (which appears in all his portraits) would have been beneficial. Surprisingly absent is one who just makes the period. William Perkins (1558-1602) is immensely important in establishing a link between Beza and the Westminster Confession of Faith, although not as R.T. Kendall *et al* believe in introducing hyper-calvinism to confessional Presbyterianism. A convinced paedobaptist, this reviewer would nevertheless have made place for Dr. John Gill (1697-1771), Bible commentator, scholar, and ardent defender of the doctrines of grace. If our criticism is that this section needs strengthening by additional material to supplement already excellent and eye-opening portraits, then **Part Six** dealing with the *Dutch post-Reformation* is worth the price of the entire book. What do we really know about Gomarus, Ames (the English Puritan), Maccovius, Voetius, Cocceius, William III, Prince of Orange, Hendrik DeCock or Abraham Kuyper? The generally favourable account of William III is confusing in its assertion that in Ireland, James II had successfully defended Londonderry and Enniskillen. He did not. Enniskillen was defended by the heroic Western Protestant Army which swept North-eastwards gathering protestants from Irish counties, Sligo, Roscommon and Leitrim. James's army did not even successfully besiege Enniskillen, whilst the Protestant inhabitants of Londonderry withstood James's blockade and siege of the city for 105 days. Their staple diet at the end was the sewer rat. The account of the Englishman, William Ames, sub-headed as *A Puritan in the Netherlands*, is excellent. Not only did Ames study under that doughty Calvinist, William Perkins, at Cambridge, but later would serve as assistant to Bogerman, President of the Synod of Dordt, and Professor of Divinity in Friesland. His *Marrow of Theology* (1620) was at one stage quoted more prolifically than either Calvin or Luther. Whilst your reviewer found interesting the biography of De Cock, leader of the Afscheiding (1834), or Secession in the Dutch church, most people will be more interested in

Abraham Kuyper, leader of the later secession, *The Doleantie, or Aggrieved Ones* (1886). As far as we know only two biographies of Kuyper exist in English, one of those only recently published; therefore, this treatment of the not uncontroversial Preacher, Reformer, Politician, Educator and Theologian, is significant. In his university days Kuyper was influenced by modernism, but as Prof. Hanko notes, "God governed events. Kuyper's surrender to modernism was not complete" (p.360). Here is revealed the thrust of Hanko's book: God's providential dealings with His people, his church. In many respects Kuyper is a pivotal figure in the body reformed. He more than any other popularised the theory of common grace. An interesting but incredulous assertion is Kuyper's belief in the antithesis, the separation of the church from the world (p.372), yet Kuyper would resign his ministerial charge, enter politics, and his anti-revolutionary party, under his premier-ship, would unite with Roman Catholics in the governance of Holland (1901-05). What happened to antithesis? Prof. Hanko sees the culprit as the doctrine of common grace which paved the way for co-operation between believers and unbelievers in many areas of life (p.372). Suffice to note, the nemesis of common grace.

Part Seven deals with *20th Century Reformers in America* (1920-1965), and includes one Presbyterian and two from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America: J. Gresham Machen, Herman Hoeksema and George Ophoff. There is a good balance here, those from a PRC background will doubtlessly find some profit in reading about Presbyterianism through Machen's biography, and those of a Presbyterian persuasion (or non-Americans) will learn much about Dutch Reformed theology and the doctrinal instigation of the Protestant Reformed Churches through the portraits of Hoeksema and Ophoff. In all the profiles, one lesson pervades, that is, God's Providential care of His church. The sufferings and trials faced by all three men for the sake of orthodoxy was borne in the knowledge that God was working all things for the good of His people (Rom.8:28). When old school Presbyterianism united with new school Presbyterianism, and gave the accepting nod to Finneyism, it was God's plan. Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was that plan. Modernism is, as Prof. Hanko notes, born of Arminianism. Modernism, very closely, is born from a teaching of common grace, or the belief that man is not depraved. Dr Ralph Janssen denied the inspiration of Scripture, and used common grace to introduce higher critical methods to Calvin Seminary, against which Hoeksema fought with fervour. Though we have read the full biography of Hoeksema, *Therefore, Have I Spoken*, nevertheless Prof. Hanko's account made points which were absent in the fuller account. For example, Hoeksema's theological pedigree was twofold. For he was an heir to the piety of De Afscheiding and to the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace in the Kuyper followers (p.397). He was steeped in church reformation, an apposite pedigree for perhaps the greatest American theologian of the Twentieth Century, as is demonstrated by his groundbreaking reformed contribution to a unilateral understanding of the covenant. It was refreshing, too, to see Hoeksema's co-professor at the

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Seminary, George Ophoff, given considerable recognition. He has been almost forgotten. His writings should be collected and published, and my reading of this account has made your reviewer more determined in this belief. Ophoff, and not Hoeksema, recognised that the PR Churches of the 1950's were lapsing into the error of a conditional covenant as espoused by Dr Klaas Schilder. Prof. Hanko's insights are worth their weight in gold, because through all the sufferings and human weaknesses God in His sovereignty used these men for the glorification of His church. Thus, this book is an excellent accompaniment to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Wylie's *History of Protestantism*.

Stylistically, Mr Jeff Steenholdt shows no inconsiderable skill in designing a professional and modern image to embellish Hanko's work, which is greatly aided by an excellent index. However, the typographical layout of the book with its unjustified right margin brought us back to the bad old days of manually typed, untidy scripts. This does not look good. (The Publishers have adopted this procedure with Engelsma's, *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church*, 1998, but not with Hanko's, *Ready to Give an Answer*, 1997). Perhaps presumptuously, we issue a warning. Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Sermons on Romans* are shortly to be republished and published respectively, and the format used recently shall be wholly inappropriate for such important and academic works. The serious acceptance of a theological position may be dependent on presentation. We suggest an appearance not far removed from the RFPA's best presented tomes, *The Voice of Our Fathers* and *When I Survey*.
