

BOOK REVIEW: LESS THAN THE LEAST

>> Tang Jee Fung

Who is Cornelius Hanko?

Yes. Most of us know him as the father of our dear Professor Herman Hanko.

What do you know about him?

Like me, you probably do not know much about him, until you read this book—which is the fruit of the editing of his prepared memoirs, and tape-recorded interviews with the editor, Karen Van Baren, Professor Hanko's daughter, whom some of us personally know.

Chapters 1-6 of the book help you get acquainted with Reverend Cornelius Hanko, and give the backdrop of the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches as well. You'll find many interesting incidents and anecdotes recorded, often with dry humour. The Dutch culture is clearly manifested in the lives of the pioneers of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

What is the value of reading the story of Reverend Cornelius Hanko?

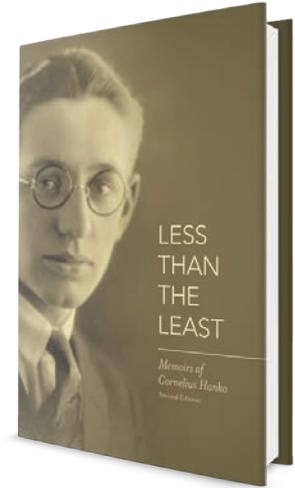
The preface by Professor Herman Hanko puts it this way:

“...his ministry spanned almost all of the sometimes turbulent history of the Protestant Reformed Churches...He was deeply involved in the controversies over common grace, which formed the occasion for the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches. He was also in the troubled controversies of the 1940s and 1950s when the denomination was split over the question of the conditional theology.”

As you read chapters 7-10, you understand better the controversy of 1924, and what it means to our fellow saints in America. Chapters 22 and 23 record the painful schism of 1953, and its aftermath. Having gone through the divorce and remarriage split in our denomination, I can weep with our American brethren who wept. Many of us have gone through at least one split, and still bear the scars from the controversies. But God ordains all things for our good. As a result of such controversies, we grow in a better understanding of the truths of God, and hold dearly these truths, even as we struggle to defend them. We faltered, often, and God taught us, ‘My grace is sufficient for you’. We experienced what it felt like to be forsaken, alone, and in turmoil. Yet, through it all, we experienced a deeper sense of the presence and upholding grace of our sovereign Almighty God.

It strikes me as I read the book that in so many ways, we share many similar life stories and experiences with the saints in the PR churches, and so we can learn much from what they have gone through and learnt.

As Reverend Hanko chronicled the ups and downs in his life, against the backdrop of world events and schisms and troubles in the churches, you will see God's sovereign and particular grace in his life, and in the life of the churches, and be greatly encouraged. At the same time, we are reminded of the fact that this world is not our home, and we are but pilgrims in this valley of tears.



Many of us have heard or read Reverend Herman Hoeksema, but we do not know him as a person. This book gives you a different perspective of one of the founding fathers of the PRCA, and helps you understand why he was so loved and respected.

The other chapters of the book each has its unique value.

In chapter 14, Reverend Hanko wrote of the difficulties, problems and sudden deaths in the congregations. It was during the Great Depression, and the people, including the pastors, suffered financial difficulties. There were also the drought and dust storms in 1934, followed by the grasshoppers, which devoured the entire crop, then torrential rains which caused a great deal of destruction. There are times in our Christian life that trials and difficulties come in waves, one after another, and we wonder when we will see the light at the end of the tunnel...

Reverend Hanko embarked on a

World Tour in 1975, during which he visited Singapore. You can read of his experience in chapter 27.

Chapter 30 is written by Karen Van Baren, in which she completes the

life story of Reverend Hanko, faithful and struggling, as he finished his race. Many photographs are included, which greatly enhance the value of the book, for a picture is worth a thousand words.

I enjoyed the appendices at the end of the book too, especially appendices 2 and 7, and am greatly edified by them.

May our LORD bless and edify you, as you read 'Less than the Least'.

HONOURING GOD IN MUSIC

>> Lim Ruo Xi



Lim Ruo Xi is a member of CERC.

Music is one of the creations of God that brings great pleasure in its engagement. Most people would associate it with entertainment today, but as Christians, we know that the main purpose of music is to glorify God. However, in spite of that knowledge, the way we steward the gift of music is often riddled with sin because of our sinful natures. The consequences of this imperfect stewardship can be far-reaching not just for ourselves, but for others as well. It is thus necessary to look at how we can honour God in music for the sake of our testimonies, our spiritual health, and our neighbour.

It is clear from the Bible that music's main purpose is to bring glory to God. There are many passages that illustrate this, but the idea is most prominent in the book of Psalms — it is a songbook in itself. The fact that God has graciously given us the words which we can use to praise Him says much about

the way we are to worship Him. The church was exhorted to sing psalms (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, James 5:13), and Paul and Silas were noted to have sung to God even in jail (Acts 16:25). Since music exists primarily for His sake and not ours, we really ought to worship God with music in the way He has prescribed. The Reformation restored psalm-singing from biblical days to the church through the Psalter, and we should honour God by continuing in this tradition, never to allow hymns or contemporary Christian songs into the worship service. It will also be beneficial to sing psalters in one's personal devotions as well.

Apart from the singing of psalms, instruments are also featured in the worship of God in the Bible. The harp and psaltery are frequently mentioned, and there is even reference to a ten-stringed instrument (Ps. 33:2). This indicates that the use of instruments in worship is not wrong, and there are practical applications for us in this respect. If one has musical talents, one can play the piano or organ for worship services and also provide the music for a church wedding for the edification of the church.

So far, music for worship in our church is Reformed and informed by the

Bible. However, our personal use of music is not regulated and needs to be discussed. Enjoying music personally is not wrong, even though music in the Bible is mentioned in the context of worship. However, it is susceptible to external influences and is an area in which our testimony can be harmed.

It goes without saying that the bulk of mainstream music with lyrics is dishonouring to God in its content. Just as the Psalms are vehicles of God's Word, mainstream songs are carriers of the world's philosophies. Catchy tunes and beats are used as hooks for the listener, so that even if he is not drawn to the often repetitive lyrics, he becomes agreeable to its message through the music. In fact, it is common for one to hate the lyrics to a song and yet continue to listen to it because the music is too attractive to ignore. Also, many people today listen to songs passively, without thinking deeply about the messages and whether they align with their beliefs. As the redeemed people of Christ, we must not allow such behaviour to affect our testimony.

Some may argue that they listen to such music without actually processing the meaning behind the lyrics, and are just in it for the music. However, while this may not have any direct effect on