

*A Spiritual House Preserved*

Reviewed by B.J. Mowery

Hope Protestant Reformed Church's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary was no small occasion. While other churches might hold a special service or print a picture pamphlet, Hope compiled a 752-page autobiography. The book, *A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend*, is split into three sections. I found the historical first section interesting and the second doctrinal section edifying. Part three, which details Hope's congregational life, is somewhat superfluous. I will elaborate on each section.

Hope PRC has an interesting history. Isolated from the rest of West Michigan by the Grand River, the church began as a small CRC mission. Hope's pastors played key roles in the doctrinal battles of 1924 and 1953. The early history of Hope church includes some of the familiar Protestant Reformed family names that I knew as a child: Engelsma, Moelker, and others. I enjoyed reading about the well-known pastors and professors that shepherded the congregation in its early years, the issues that marked the 1920s and 50s, and the universal struggles that the construction of church and school buildings entails. In some ways, the history of Hope PRC is representative of that of many Protestant Reformed churches. In reading Hope's history one begins to appreciate God's preservation throughout the Protestant Reformed denomination.

The middle section of the book focuses on the doctrinal standards of the Protestant Reformed churches. This section could stand alone as a training tool for office bearers. As I read this section, I applied it to my own life and place in the church. It is well-written, includes many details that are pertinent to the proper functioning of a congregation, and does a fine job of describing the purpose of each part of Protestant Reformed worship services.

The final part of the book focuses on the blessings that have been Hope PRC's experience throughout its century-long existence. I mentioned earlier that I found this section somewhat superfluous. I must clarify that statement. This section is likely

intriguing to those who were or are currently members of Hope church. Part one could be of interest to and benefit all in the PR denomination, and part two sets forth doctrinal standards that apply to anyone interested in Biblical church order and governance. But part three is quite specific to the Hope congregation and presents a disconnect to anyone who is unfamiliar with the congregation. That being said, I did appreciate the overall church model that it sets forth.

This is not a book I would have read if the RFPA hadn't requested that of me. Now that I have read it, I'm glad that I did. Even if you are not a member of Hope or are not particularly interested in how many societies Hope church has or the activities of its catering committee, you can benefit from the history and the doctrinal standards presented in this book. Maybe you have a goal of reading a worthwhile 700+ page book – this could be your opportunity!