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THE CHURCH UNDER THE CROSS
Mission in Asia in Times of Turmoil
A Missionary Memoir: Volume One

Wendell P. Karsen

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
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This book is dedicated
to the memory
of Joyce Hughes Karsen,
my loving and gifted mate
for twenty-nine years,
and to my wife,
Renske Greve Karsen,
who at the darkest hour in my journey
came into my life like a ray of sunshine
and has been my treasured companion
and colleague in life and in mission ever since.
The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America

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All photographs are by or of the author, with the exception of the following:
Missionaries never work in a vacuum. Sometimes, especially among “primitive” tribes, it is the culture itself that constitutes the most powerful force with which the missionary must deal. At other times, commercial interests may find the message of the missionaries “inconvenient,” indeed antithetical to their interests. In the twentieth century it has perhaps been most often that governments, in whatever form, hold the ultimate secular power.

In all of these cases, the missionary faces the choice of compromise, with attendant distortion of the gospel, or confrontation, with the possibility of rejection and ejection. Where the powers that be are tolerant of Christian evangelization, missionaries often see their primary duty to be that of evangelization, preaching the gospel, and letting such needed transformation of societal structures rest in the hands of the converts. Even where injustice and exploitation were rampant, many missionaries saw their essential task as that of conversion. In many cases, meeting the needs of the sick and education also became means of ministry. However, confrontation with societal
structures of injustice and exploitation, whether culturally embedded, commercial, or governmental, were all too infrequent.

An exception to this all too frequent omission was the ministry of Wendell Karsen. His memoirs are an exciting story of confrontation with injustice and oppression, governmental in Taiwan and commercial in Hong Kong.

All of this is not to say that Karsen neglected evangelization. The many who found new life in Christ as the result of his witness are evidence of his faithfulness. However, along with this witness to new life in Christ was also his keen sense of the need for righteousness in the political and moral order. Karsen’s fearlessness and dogged determination in seeking liberation for the oppressed stood him in good stead in his struggle to put gospel precepts into action.

Karsen’s telling, in this volume, of the struggle during his ministry in Taiwan and Hong Kong makes compelling reading.

Donald J. Bruggink
General Editor
Historical Series of the
Reformed Church in America
Preface

This work has been six years in the making. It began with an invitation in September 2003 by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy to participate in a December conference on human rights and to receive an award for my involvement in the democracy and human rights struggle of the Taiwanese people during my missionary days there in the early 1970s. In preparation for this conference, I was asked to write a memoir of my experiences during what had become known as the “White Terror” period in Taiwan’s history. A number of people who read that memoir encouraged me to write about my subsequent experiences in Hong Kong, China, and Indonesia as well. It happened that I was called to minister in those places at critical times in their histories—times of turmoil that proved to be times of testing for the churches there. Thus the common thread that runs throughout the book—the church under the cross. Although this memoir includes my story, it focuses as well on the wider church I served as my colleagues and the Christians for whom they were responsible struggled to come to terms with the sometimes terrible challenges they faced.
My goal in setting down my experiences, observations, and conclusions was to produce an account that was informative, interesting, and inspirational. Even today, I find that many people do not know much about many of the events recorded in this work. My hope is that this account will help fill those gaps. I also hope that readers will not fall asleep while plodding through the abundant pages of these two volumes, but will find them interesting, stimulating, and at times even humorous. My further hope is that readers will be as inspired as I was when I encountered the courageous Christians described in these pages as they faithfully practiced their faith and prophetically challenged "the powers."

No work is ever the result of one person’s efforts. I am indebted to many friends and colleagues, without whom this account would never have seen the light of day. The general editor of the Reformed Church in America’s Historical Series, Donald Bruggink, proved to be a wise counselor and a great source of encouragement. The cheerful and careful copy editor, Laurie Baron, spent many days pouring over the manuscript and making it better. The RCA’s archivist, Russell Gasero, diligently formatted the rough manuscript into a polished printable document. Willem Mineur, at Eerdmans Publishing Company, gave invaluable assistance in cover design and in the oversight of the publication process.

Additional thanks go to overseas colleagues Lim Chhiong-hwa, Tso Man-king, Richard Daulay, and I. Wayan Mastra, who read the parts of the manuscript that pertain to their respective countries and offered invaluable corrections and comments. U.S. colleagues Charles Van Engen, Eugene Heideman, Roger Greenway, George Hunsberger, Charles Weber, Daniel Bays, and Kurt Selles were kind enough to read and comment on the entire manuscript. Long-time friend and supporter, Patrick Chen, provided a generous grant to the RCA Commission on History to make the publication of this work financially feasible. And finally, my wife Renske was a constant source of encouragement and support.

I am also indebted to the Reformed Church in America for giving me the opportunity to serve overseas as a cross-cultural missionary for so many years. Asian secretaries Glenn Bruggers, Elaine Tanis, Ken Zorgdragger, and Bruce Menning were invariably supportive and encouraging during the vicissitudes of missionary life and work. I also thank the forty-two RCA congregations that faithfully prayed for and financially supported our ministry over the years. Ultimate thanks go, of course, to God Almighty, whose grace, patience, challenge,
forgiveness, and strength made possible whatever may have been accomplished.

Wendell P. Karsen
Holland, Michigan
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