

HALF-DAY CONVENTION IN LEWES ON 15TH MAY 1993

Report by Mark Skoulding

Lewes in Sussex was the venue for a half-day conference on the subject of THE GRACE OF GOD. Ron Hanko of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America, over from N Ireland, was the advertised speaker and the meetings were hosted by Jireh Chapel.

It was regrettable, if not censurable, that not more reformed Christians turned out to hear such a major Reformation truth. Mr Hanko's deliberate and clear preaching manner left no doubts as to the content of his addresses. The systematic style and well-ordered Scripture proofs gave a thorough and complete picture by the time the day was over.

The afternoon session was on SOVEREIGN GRACE. The headings were: (i) Grace is an attribute of God (Exodus 34:6) and therefore always from Him. (ii) Grace is beauty – beauty which is pleasing to someone else, so that they look on you with favour (Genesis 6:8). (iii) Grace is a power not just an affection, a power that saves (Ephesians 2:8). (iv) Grace becomes a synonym for salvation (2 Corinthians 8:1, Acts 14:3, 1 Peter 4:10). God plans it, God works it out and God applies it (Acts 18:27). (v) Grace does not destroy our responsibility, for we are to will and to do (Philippians 2:12–13), but it is all the work of God (Philippians 1:6). The Canons of Dordrecht, 3rd and 4th Heads of Doctrine, Article 16, says: "this grace of regeneration ... quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it [the understanding and will] ... [to] a ready and sincere spiritual obedience." (vi) What is left to us? Thanksgiving? Even that is related to *chara* (grace). All glory, then, to God, who freely bestows the beauty of Christ on us – the beauty of God's own holiness.

The evening session on PARTICULAR GRACE was more direct and humbling and I wondered how many reformed Christians would have said a hearty "Amen" to it. The position was stated at the outset: "Just as the reformed Church has always held to

Particular Atonement, so she has held to Particular Grace." Christ's death is not for everyone; so neither is His grace for everyone.

The Scripture never uses the word *grace* to apply to all without distinction. Grace is therefore not *common* but *particular* (Jeremiah 31:2; Acts 15:11, Romans 11:5-6). God's bounty, goodness and mercy are indeed over all His works and all men have a taste of them, but these are never designed for their salvation but for their destruction. Psalm 73 was expounded in this connection, especially verse 18, "Thou didst set them in slippery places..." Many homely anecdotes were used to show how men use God's bounty as an excuse not to believe in Him, thinking His goodness will somehow never be withdrawn.

I found the evening meeting much more stimulating and challenging and would recommend the cassette to shake some long established views.

[Cassettes of the conference are available, price £4.00, from Alan Ticehurst, c/o 6 Orchard Road, Lewes, E Sussex BN7 2HB. Tel: 0273-472279]

EDGBASTON REFORMED CHURCH *[Cont. from page 35]*

Church of Scotland stalwart back to his native land, the congregation is at the present time somewhat depleted and, for the moment, only one service is being held, in the afternoons at 3 o'clock.

Consideration has been given to closure of the work but the arrival 'out of the blue' of a new, deeply committed, family, has provided fresh impetus. At present the congregation consists of three families, two widows and some adherents. One person attends occasionally travelling in some distance to worship and, although he cannot attend regularly, testifies to the fellowship and spiritual uplift he receives when present. During recent months a Dutch student from the 'Liberated' Reformed Churches of Holland has worshipped with us although, sadly, she will be returning home shortly.

Our future is in God's hands. How much longer we can remain as Birmingham's only salient congregation holding to the Reformed doctrinal standards of Westminster depends on Him alone. His will be done is our prayer and, meanwhile, we maintain our witness and seek that His blessing might continue upon us.