

BRF CONFERENCE 2016 REPORT

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The 2016 British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference was held from Saturday 16th July to Saturday 23rd July. The venue was Castlewellan Castle in County Down, Northern Ireland. Some of its main attractions are its beautiful grounds, a lake providing aquatic activities (such as kayaking), a path around the lake, a maze, gardens featuring exotic plants and trees, and trails around the forest park for hikes with some very beautiful views. It is, therefore, quite safe to say that there was plenty to occupy the attendees between addresses within, and close to, the castle grounds alone.

The theme of the 2016 conference was “Behold I Come Quickly’: The Reformed, Biblical Truth of the End,” a topic which is of great interest to the Christian as he lives in the last days and is surrounded by many tell-tale signs in creation that Jesus Christ is coming again, and as he looks for comfort in the midst of such terrible events as wars, famines, pestilences, abounding apostasy in the church world and a growing manifestation of the hatred of the gospel by the ungodly world. The believer must look to Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, for his comfort, and to the Word of God for teaching, in order to make sense of these things and to understand the purpose of God in them.

This conference saw a significant change in speakers. Some would say that it marked the end of an era as Professor Herman Hanko, sadly, can no longer attend and lecture at the BRF conferences. In his stead, we joyfully welcomed Rev. Andy Lanning from the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, accompanied by his wife, Stephanie, and their five children: Jessica, Eric, Emily, Megan and Jason. We were also pleased to welcome back Professor David Engelsma with his wife, Ruth.

With this year being the biggest BRF conference to date, including a total of one hundred and twenty-five attendees and almost fifty day visitors, it was encouraging to me, yet again, to see many different nations and continents represented. Said nations included Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Wales, Hungary, a large contingent from the USA, Canada and even attendees from as far afield as Australia, the Philippines and, indeed, Singapore.

During the week, we enjoyed excellent addresses, which I will briefly summarize. The opening speech was given by Rev. Martyn McGeown entitled “Disorderliness and the Second Coming of Christ.” Basing his lecture on II Thessalonians 3, Rev. McGeown warned the attendees against the sins of idleness and being busybodies, which sins flow from a mistaken notion of the imminent return of Christ and a foolish speculation concerning eschatological matters without the prayerful watching required by Christ: “Watch, pray and work!”

On the Lord’s day, Professor Engelsma preached on “The Hope of Creation for Christ’s Coming” (Rom. 8:19-22) and Rev. Lanning preached on “Methuselah” from Genesis 5:25-27. Methuselah’s name, meaning “when he dies it shall be sent,” corresponds with the year in which the flood was sent and is a harbinger of judgment, both for his generation and at the Lord’s return. In the afternoon, Pete Adams gave a fine lecture on “The Renaissance and the Reformation.”

The first main conference address by Professor Engelsma was “The Second and Quick Coming of Jesus Christ (as Indicated by the Signs).” In this speech, Prof. Engelsma explained the key terms: Premillennialism, Premillennial Dispensationalism, Postmillennialism and the good, Reformed position of Amillennialism. The bulk of his speech focused on the truth that there are signs, including apostasy and the rise of the kingdom of Antichrist. Nevertheless, we must be encouraged by the truth of Matthew 24:14 that “what not only shows the nearness of the end but determines the nearness of the end is the preaching of the gospel throughout all the world ... the church determines the history of the world, the church determines the time of the end ... not the Antichrist, not the false church, [but] the church!”

The second address was entitled “The Reformed Belief Concerning the Rapture and Antichrist,” in which speech Rev. Lanning refuted the unbiblical and absurd view of a secret rapture. Our hope, instead of a secret rapture to escape persecution, is in the public return of the Lord on the clouds of glory after which we shall dwell with Him for all eternity.

The next address by Professor Engelsma was “The Coming World-Conquest of the Beast From the Sea,” in which lecture the professor identified this beast described in Revelation 13, not by wild and unbiblical speculation but from the Scriptures. This beast is indeed Antichrist and he shall have a global kingdom,

for all the world shall worship him (vv. 7-8). Nevertheless, the beast's victory is temporary because Christ shall cut the reign of Antichrist short, which is signified by the half a time in the time, times and half a time mentioned in the book of Daniel (7:25; 12:7). The real victory is Christ's, whose kingdom is established in truth and shall never be cut off nor destroyed but shall endure forever.

Rev. Lanning delivered the fourth conference address on "Jesus' Coming as a Thief in View of Abounding Lawlessness and Great Apostasy." Christ is spoken of using the figure of a "thief," not because he is a lawbreaker but to describe the sleepy, careless, unprepared people to whom He comes. The earthly-minded, false church shall not even be looking for the coming of Christ, which is clear from the comparison with the generation of Noah. Sudden, but not unheralded, destruction falls upon the people. Rev. Lanning also showed from I Thessalonians 5 that our duty is to watch and be alert (v. 6), to be sober (v. 8) and to comfort one another (v. 11), so that we are not overcome as by a thief at Christ's return.

Rev. Angus Stewart delivered a special lecture entitled, "Dispensationalism, J. N. Darby and Powerscourt." The address covered J. N. Darby (1800-1882), his error of Dispensationalism and a mansion in Ireland associated with him. Darby has been dubbed the father of Dispensationalism, a false system of eschatology held by many denominations in many lands.

"The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11" was the title of the penultimate speech, delivered by Professor Engelsma, in which the professor explained that the two witnesses are not two individuals, such as Enoch and Elijah, but, drawing upon Zechariah 4, the true instituted church that proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord. Their witness is long-standing and victorious (Rev. 11:5-6). Although Antichrist shall have the witnesses killed, he cannot do so until they "finish their testimony" (v. 7). Furthermore, after they are killed, it is only a short time (three and a half days [v. 11]) before Christ returns to honour the two witnesses before the whole world.

The final judgment was the topic of Rev. Lanning's last speech, entitled "Called to Live in the Expectation of a Final Judgment and in the Hope of Life Eternal." Christ shall return visibly in great power and glory, and sit on His throne to judge every rational and moral creature. God's elect people will also come before His throne to be judged but, because our judge is also our

Saviour and Advocate, we have nothing to fear. “Whatever part we have in the final judgment, it is a part that serves the glory and honour of the Lord Jesus Christ which is more dear to us than anything else. Importantly, God will be justified on that day, for all His dealings will be seen to be perfectly righteous.” No wonder we can look forward to that day with eager anticipation!

Besides the great speeches, there were also two enjoyable day trips during the conference, the first of which was to the village of Hillsborough and its castle, one of the royal residences of Queen Elizabeth II and the site of major political discussions. The castle features various ornately decorated rooms with many interesting paintings, photographs and ornaments. The second day trip was in the Republic of Ireland, where we visited the site of the Battle of the Boyne and Trim Castle. The site of the Battle of the Boyne, located in Drogheda, Co. Meath, was where the army of William of Orange fought the forces of James II, aided by King Louis XIV of France, in 1690. This battle is still celebrated today on the 12th July and is a public holiday in Northern Ireland. Trim Castle was the next stop, a castle developed by the “wonderful” Hugh de Lacey in 1172.

At the BRF biennial general meeting, the topic, speakers and venue of the next conference were chosen: the family, Professor Engelsma and Rev. Lanning, and Hebron Hall near Cardiff in Wales (21–28 July, 2018).

In conclusion, I wish to say that this has been my most enjoyable conference for several reasons. I met and had fellowship with many godly saints of my age group from different countries. I appreciated the castle’s good accommodation with its interesting attractions throughout the week. And, of course, the speeches were, as always, fascinating.

Looking forward to 2018, I can say, as a resident of Cardiff during the academic year, that Hebron Hall promises to be an excellent venue for the next conference, for Wales offers places of historical interest and natural beauty to visit on day trips. Furthermore, Cardiff is only a short journey from the conference centre, and is a vibrant and homely city to visit. I look forward to the conference itself and meeting some of the readers of this report there in under two years’ time, DV.