

BRF FAMILY HOLIDAY CONFERENCE

Ashburnham Christian Conference Centre

EAST SUSSEX: 27th July-3rd Aug. 1996

Nearly 130 people, comprised of adults, teenagers, and children, from all quarters of the United Kingdom, plus some from abroad, converged on a target just some 4 miles west of the historic town of Battle, in East Sussex, during the course of the last Saturday of July, 1996. The "target" was the beautiful Christian Conference Centre at Ashburnham Place, once the country seat of a landed lord, but now fulfilling a vastly different role.

Hidden from the main highways by a thick belt of trees, and girt around with a swathe of green meadows and a beautiful lake, Ashburnham lay there like a jewel, resplendent in the summer sun. That its situation in the far south eastern corner of England made it difficult for most BRF members and supporters to reach it did not ultimately attenuate the numbers in attendance, which were slightly higher than that of the last Conference in Galashiels two years ago.

Anyone who was present at that last BRF conference in 1994 will know that it would be an enormous task to have a conference more successful than that. Such, however, were the sentiments current after the 1992 Conference in Bangor, Northern Ireland, and after the first BRF Conference in Wales in 1990. But each time, the next Conference seems to be even better than the previous one! Bearing in mind that the two main speakers at every one of these conferences have been the same two Protestant Reformed Theological Professors, Prof. Hanko and Prof. Engelsma, it gives some indication of the dedication, effort, and prayerful study which the two Professors must be putting in to this work. The standard of their lectures, and of their preaching on the Sabbath day, was of the highest order. Both these men preach and teach with the meim of lions, and have intense convictions about intense Word-of-God truths which they deliver intensely, faithfully, with lucidity, and with an orthodoxy riveted to the Word of God detail by detail. The vitally important feature of their ministry was that one tended to forget the preacher, and view the Saviour, as the Lord Christ gloriously shone through the truth of His Word so faithfully expounded. In another age, before the onset of modern "ameliorated Calvinism", these two would have been regarded as being among the premier preachers in the Church world-wide and it would have been next to nothing impossible to secure their services for one conference after another such as we have enjoyed in the BRF since 1990! We give thanks to God for their ministry, we praise Him who gives gifts of grace to His Church, for the up-building of the Saints!

BRF Conference: Ashburnham 1996

At first sight, the theme of the 1996 Conference seemed not so stirring as the theme for 1994. The Doctrine of the Church did not seem so inspiring as the Doctrine of Sovereign Grace! But we were in for a surprise, and your editor was also in for a shock! Amazing what faithful preaching will do! In my case it uncovered an erroneous view of what the Church actually was, a view which I had of course been "brain-washed" into by a lifetime of existing in the situation of modern, and apostate, evangelicalism. It was a view which I had just never thought to review critically, but the first Monday lecture of the Conference brought me up with a severe jolt! The Church of Christ, I learned, did not exist for the benefit of the human race! It existed, like everything else in creation, for the Glory of God! It is Christ's bride, predestinated from all eternity, the very body of Christ, and He is her Head. And she is His elect, she existed in Him from before time. Just like Eve existed in Adam before she was created, and was then formed to be his bride! Now to one such as myself, it was not entirely new to hear this, but it was something new to have it impressed on my soul powerfully such that it threw into sharp relief the other erroneous perspective I had carried in me like a virus for most of my life. After all, our generation had been brought up on Archbishop William Temple's famous dictum, that "the Church of Jesus Christ is the one institution that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members". Uttered by the learned and venerable prelate, I believe, just before the second world war, it conditioned the life and attitude of millions of church-goers within these shores for a generation and more. And millions got the message, and voting with their feet left the churches! And those who were left, were largely the "soft left" who have turned Christian churches either into some kind of amateur and quasi Department of Health and Social Security...or into some kind of "evangelical life-boat" culling the high seas of life searching to "rescue the perishing." Noble enough causes, but when they become the "raison d'etre" of the Church's existence, then it is a sign of apostasy. "God is everything" we were exhorted, time and again at the Conference, and "man is nothing". God's glory is the "raison d'etre" for the Church's existence, all else is subordinate.

The implications of this ecclesiastically and theologically are extensive and important. The ministry of the Word emerges, under this God-centred perspective, as being the God-ordained mode of "gathering and building up His Church". The worship of God engaged in by the Church, we were told, is not some pleasant by-product of the fellowship of the Saints, but is the highest function of that elect body, in that it is Christ's Bride adoring her heavenly Spouse, glorifying Him, reflecting back to Him His own image, now being recreated in Her by the regenerative powers of the Holy Ghost. And such worship must concord with the Divine protocols, must not be the "will-worship" of human devising, as if any Tom, Dick, or Harry can "feel moved of the spirit" so-say to compose and sing any little ditty or import their own ideas into this Holy sanctuary. Only God's Word is satisfactory for the

regulation of God's Worship. The Bride of Christ must reflect His likeness back to Him, even as Adam saw in Eve "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh".

Thus, then, we immediately found the subject of "the Church" come alive for us, right from Professor Engelsma's first address on the Monday morning. Not a few of whom I spoke with after this first address testified to the same "lesson-learning" which had been my own experience.

Right from the start, the tone of the Conference was set for us profoundly by Mr. David Blunt of the Free Church of Scotland, speaking at the welcoming service on the Saturday evening. He conducted worship and preached on Song of Solomon ch. 6 verse 10: "*Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*" His exposition of this text was effectively and efficiently a repudiation of the modern view, found, not only in liberal theological circles, but even amongst evangelical circles as well (indeed, sad to say, I have even met it in modern "calvinist" circles), that the Song of Solomon speaks only of earthly marriage. The marriage figured in this book is that of the King of Israel, who of course was the Lord's anointed, thereby typifying Christ, and his bride, who must therefore typify the Church, the bride of Christ, as all the old-time Puritans and Reformers insisted! A heavenly marriage then, and a heavenly, spiritual bride are in view under the aegis of the Old Testament types and shadows here. Mr. Blunt expounded the text ably and succinctly, drawing attention to each facet therein, namely the "*looking forth as the morning*", the "*fair as the moon,*" the "*clear as the sun*", and finally, as "*terrible as an army with banners.*" Each facet was unfolded explicating its typical signification as applied to the Church. Each point was not only profound, but apposite to the themes of the discourses to be followed by the Professors in the ensuing week.

The worship on the Sabbath day of the Conference was, for me, unforgettable. The Psalm singing, a capella from the Scottish Psalter, was a tremendous experience. The more I use the Scottish Psalter, the more I love it. Thin and banal are the lyrics of the hymn-writers compared to the genius of the Holy Ghost! What a joy it was to unite one's voice with over a hundred others in reflecting God's very words back to Him in praise. And what need for organs or pianos when God provides precentors. Once again we appreciated Desmond Callender's sturdy tones, and also the sedate tones of David Blunt, and the melodic Irish tones of a new precentor, Mr. Alastair Pattison from the new Church at Ballymena. To these native precentors a new friend, Mr. Harry Klomp of Melbourne, added his melodious Australian voice as precentor for several of our meetings.

The two Professors delivered the sermons on the Sabbath. Each exposition was profound and stirring, a foretaste of the delights that were to come in the following days. It is impossible to give here, in this restricted space, a proper appreciation of



HAPPY THROG GATHERS FOR 'OFFICIAL' PHOTOGRAPH on Monday, to catch certain American friends before they make an early departure. Seen amongst the gathering here are Lam and Beth Lubbers, and two of Hudsonville's representatives who fellowshipped with the Conference over Saturday to Tuesday.

The Lord will give strength unto his people; the



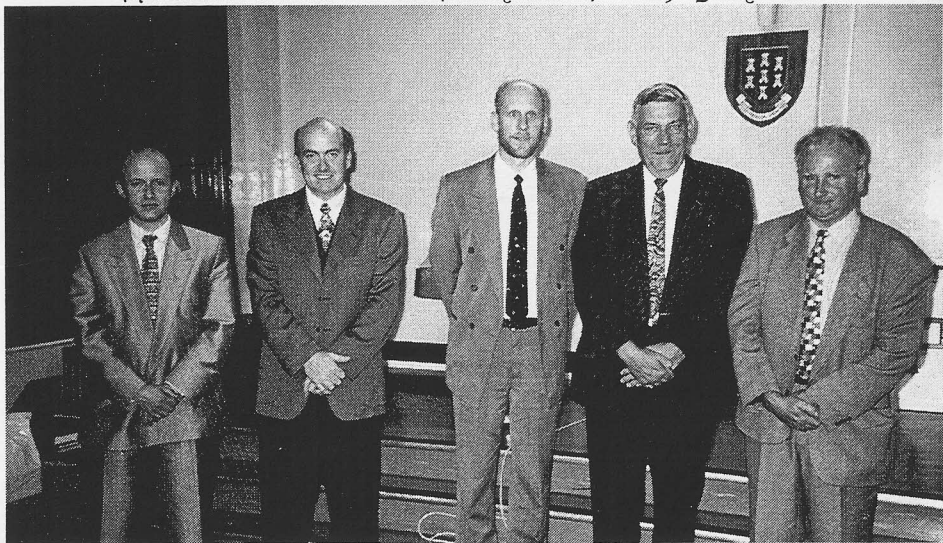
British Reformed Fellowship-Family Ho

Lord will bless His people with peace...(Psalm 29:11)



oliday Conference - July 27th - Aug. 3rd. 1996

Historic Occasion at Ballymena, 24th July 1996



New Consistory shoulders arduous responsibility after ordination. Seen with Rev. Ron Hanko (*Minister*, in centre) are: L. to R., Mr. John Clarke (*Elder*), Mr. Jonathan McAuley (*Deacon*), Mr. Desmond Callender (*Elder*), and Mr. Ivan Reid (*Deacon*).



Solemn occasion marks historic institution as Prof. David J. Engelsma of the PRC Seminary takes charge of well-attended inauguration service filling local town hall.

it all. Mr. John McAuley faithfully taped the whole proceedings, and copies of the tapes are a must for all of us, I should think, and most certainly to be recommended for those not able to attend the Conference.

Monday came, with an air of expectancy. The bookstalls were laid out with an abundance of high quality productions indeed! It was good to see the James Begg Society represented in this respect, and to welcome several of their members amongst us for the Conference. In the ensuing four and a half days during which the bookstalls were open, some £500 worth of books were sold! Sure, there must have been some enthusiastic and avid readers with us!

On the Monday Professor Engelsma's theme was "The Church: Elected in Christ". Professor Hanko followed in the evening with "The Church: Gathered by the Gospel."

The Tuesday following these stirring addresses was most appropriately punctuated by an organised Coach tour, guided by Mr. Mark Kateley, around the Sussex countryside stopping off at the various martyrs memorials that are to be found in that area. Mr. Kateley, a local man, and an expert on the history of the local martyrs of the Reformation period, was able to present an informative commentary on all matters of interest during the proceedings. We noted how some of the monuments had had certain telling inscriptions defaced (now who would have done that, we wonder?)

The coach tour took in Jireh Chapel at Lewes, which lies at the foot of the hill on which a large memorial to the Sussex martyrs overlooks the town lying in the valley below. This 1000 seater, 191 year-old Chapel was open to us, and we were able to walk right through these delightful premises, explore the galleries, the vestry, and even stand in the famous chalice-shaped pulpit, from where the stentorian voices of Jenkin Jenkins and William Huntington had thundered forth the Reformed and Biblical gospel in days of yore. Now resurrected, as it were, from its former decrepitude, under the good offices of Pastor James North, the Trustees, and English Heritage (it is a listed building) it is good to know that the congregation, though small, is worshipping God therein again after a gap of about ten years, and that the same Calvinistic preaching still resounds within those precincts that characterised it from the first. An unusual timber-frame structured building, it cost £1,754..10s..10d (that's 1754 pounds and about 54 pence to you younger generation who can't remember the old fashioned money!) to build in 1805! What it has cost to restore, well Jim North can tell you! What it costs in other terms to maintain the preaching of the truth in that locality is something else Jim can tell you about.

Following the coach tour, in the evening Mr. Kateley delivered an able lecture on the martyrs of Sussex that fitted appositely into the Conference theme of the "Church", and was an indication of how the Saints of a by-gone glorious age valued the Glorification of God as being more important than anything else in

life.....they died in that cause. They refused to compromise on matters of Worship, on matters of belief and behaviour, and they sealed their testimonies with their own life's blood, some 36 of them, ordinary folk with names like Carver, Iveson, Read, Wood, Morris, etc., but whose faith was more than ordinary, as they endured the fires of the Marian persecution without faltering.

Wednesday saw Professor Engelsma looking into the "Nature of the Church", to be followed by Professor Hanko in the evening expounding on the "Institutional Form" of the Church. We were reminded at this juncture how "institutional form" is a vital facet of Ecclesiology. Too many modern evangelicals and even Calvinists today eschew any formal ecclesiastical institution, with the result that the Churches of today are characterised by disorganisation, weakness, and lack of vision. Prof. Hanko left us in no uncertainty that the time has come to remedy this deplorable nonsense.

Thursday was another day of feasting on the manna sent from heaven! Prof. Hanko discussed "The Marks of the Church", and rammmed home the truth that the Church in order to be a true Church has to be much more than an Institution, important as institution may be. The effects of his address on this theme were to make several in the audience initiate serious reconsiderations concerning their present position! The Thursday evening address from Prof. Engelsma was one of the most stirring expositions of the Word I have ever heard. Taking as his theme "The Sacraments of the Church" he showed us how the two sacraments are centred around the preaching of the Word, and that without this preaching of the Word the sacraments are essentially useless.....and thus the error of Romish and Anglican ritualistic liturgies was thrown into sharp relief, and the primacy of preaching put in its proper place. The Professor went on to emphasise Paedobaptism as a matter of strategic importance in the revival of the Reformed Faith, and urged that the BRF initiate an aggressive polemic against the errors of the baptist-immersionist movement, the theology of which was essentially a denial of the continuity of God's one Covenant of Grace through the family.

No conference, I suppose, is ever complete without its 'unofficial' meetings! The time after the lectures was spent by many, especially the younger element, in extended private debates centred in small gatherings. Sometimes the debates went on well beyond midnight.....but amazingly the participants were invariably up in time for breakfast at 8:30 a.m., if not for the well-attended morning worship at 8:15 a.m. !

It was good to meet again friends, many not seen since 1994, and to make the acquaintance of newcomers. Your editor can now call to mind real faces that go with many of the address labels he has to stick on the envelopes that carry this journal, people who prior to meeting them at our Conferences were just names. Now

fellowship in Christ has brought them to life, as it were, and that, not just for the period of the Conference, but it is something which one can carry home and treasure in one's memory.

The Conference drew to a close on the Friday with a day-long coach trip to London, during which Mr. Blunt took a party on a conducted tour of some of London's salient and monumental features, including first the British Museum, with its amazing catena of exhibits from ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Israel, (many of which are relevant to the study of the Bible), and then the famous buildings at Westminster.

Friday evening, with everyone sensing that it was all coming to an end for another two years, nevertheless carried some events that will remain impressed on many a memory. Five young catechumens from the newly inaugurated Covenant Protestant Reformed Church at Ballymena were presented with certificates indicating their proficiency in completing all 107 questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, answering to those questions with "accuracy, understanding, and Christian conviction". We praise God that the new Irish congregation bears fruit already within days of its inauguration. Professor Hanko was able to present one of these certificates to his granddaughter Sarah, who had also memorised over 150 verses of the Scripture proof texts which go with the answers! Grandson Herman Hanko (junior) was also recipient of a certificate, as also were a trio from John and Marlene Clarke's family of Larne, namely Andrew, Joanna, and Sarah. We understand that there are more catechumens following in their footsteps, truly we give thanks that the Lord adds to His Church such that shall be saved.

I saw some tears shed at the end of the Friday evening, as farewells were being said. Many of our friends from America would be up right early on the Saturday morning to make their way to the airports. On Friday night they bade us goodbye. This was a re-run of some farewells said earlier in the week to Lam and Beth Lubbers, and the Elders from Hudsonville, who had to leave on the Tuesday. It was good of them to come over and support us, and more, much more than that, to make friends with us. As we stand here in these islands today, many of us alone, many of us mis-represented, slandered, villified, even persecuted, some of us indeed experiencing poverty, it is a comfort to have their friendship in Christ, their understanding, and their prayers. The British Reformed Fellowship has been enriched abundantly by the kindness and help we have received from our friends in the U.S.A. We give thanks to God for His manifold grace to us in all these things.

This Conference was an eminent success again. One conferee told me that it was like a "foretaste of Heaven" to be there. We appreciate therefore all the hard, behind the scenes, work put in by our Secretary, Mr. Tony Horne, over the last two years in bringing this event to such abundant fruition. To those too who assisted in

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other ways behind the scenes, such as our Treasurer, Mr. Desmond Callender, to all those who contributed in so many ways, to the staff at Ashburnham, we express our thanks and appreciation. To God above all we return our thanks for His prospering of His people, and feeding His flock.

Two years.....to 1998, if it please God, and many of us might meet again, at the fifth BRF Conference. Yes! We are well on the way with the planning stage of the next one. The venue has been decided in the committee stage.....it's Castle Wellan at the foot of the mountains of Mourne in Northern Ireland! With 1200 acres of parkland and woods, a beautiful lake, pony-trekking, canoeing, all at hand! And the sea not far away down the road! The theme? Eschatology! The doctrine of the Last Things! Dynamite! Start saving now, you just cannot miss this one! May God be pleased to be with us, and prosper His Church. May He lead us and restore His Church as an institution amongst us, and prepare us for His Coming! His Name be exalted above all! His glorious person in Christ be magnified above all!

4 One thing I of the Lord desir'd,
and will seek to obtain,
That all days of my life I may
within God's house remain;

That I the beauty of the Lord
behold may and admire,
And that I in his holy place
may rev'rently enquire.

5 For he in his pavilion shall
me hide in evil days;
In secret of his tent me hide,
and on a rock me raise.

Psalm 27 vv. 4-5.

Readers wishing to obtain tapes of the Conference addresses are advised to contact :

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