

Castlewellan 1998

BRF CONFERENCE REPORT

by
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Jodi is a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and is currently studying at University in the USA. With a number of other young folk from the USA she was present at the BRF Conference at Castlewellan this year.

The fifth BRF conference was a remarkable success with approximately 110 Christians from the British Isles, United States, Australia, and Malaysia attending. The setting: Castlewellan Castle Christian Conference Centre with the magnificent Mourne Mountains in sight. This castle is set on 1200 acres of forest, gardens, and lakes. It's been said that each conference is better than the one before and I cannot disagree! We were again greeted with open arms-the great fellowship that accompanies every conference. The speeches were class; the fellowship was brilliant; the singing was loud and from the heart. Overall, it was a great time of spiritual growth.

The two main speakers were again Professor Hanko and Professor Engelsma, both Professors of Theology. They did an excellent job in preparation for this conference from all appearances-when hit with questions, they formulated superb, sound, Reformed answers impromptu. Mr. Tony Horne commented on how marvellous the speakers were with the "faithful exposition of the Scriptures" as well as how devoted they were in revealing to us the truth of God. Finally, Mr. Horne believed that we had heard the "finest preaching" in the British Isles this week.

The theme of the conference was eschatology. The two Professors well-covered the different aspects of this broad topic and broke it into digestible pieces which we ate up completely. After almost every one of the six speeches, there was a question and answer session in which many attendants asked tough and thought-provoking questions and which sparked fantastic Reformed answers by the Professors. Furthermore, we had devotions led by various men from the conference every night. In my mind, the idea of the end times had always been quite daunting and yes, a bit fearful. Throughout the course of the conference, the Professors dispelled any fear

I might have had and replaced it with an unshakable hope for Christ's return - no matter what signs and wonders come before that. All in all, the conference was all about blessed fellowship with like-minded saints as well as sharing of ideas and hoping for the coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven.

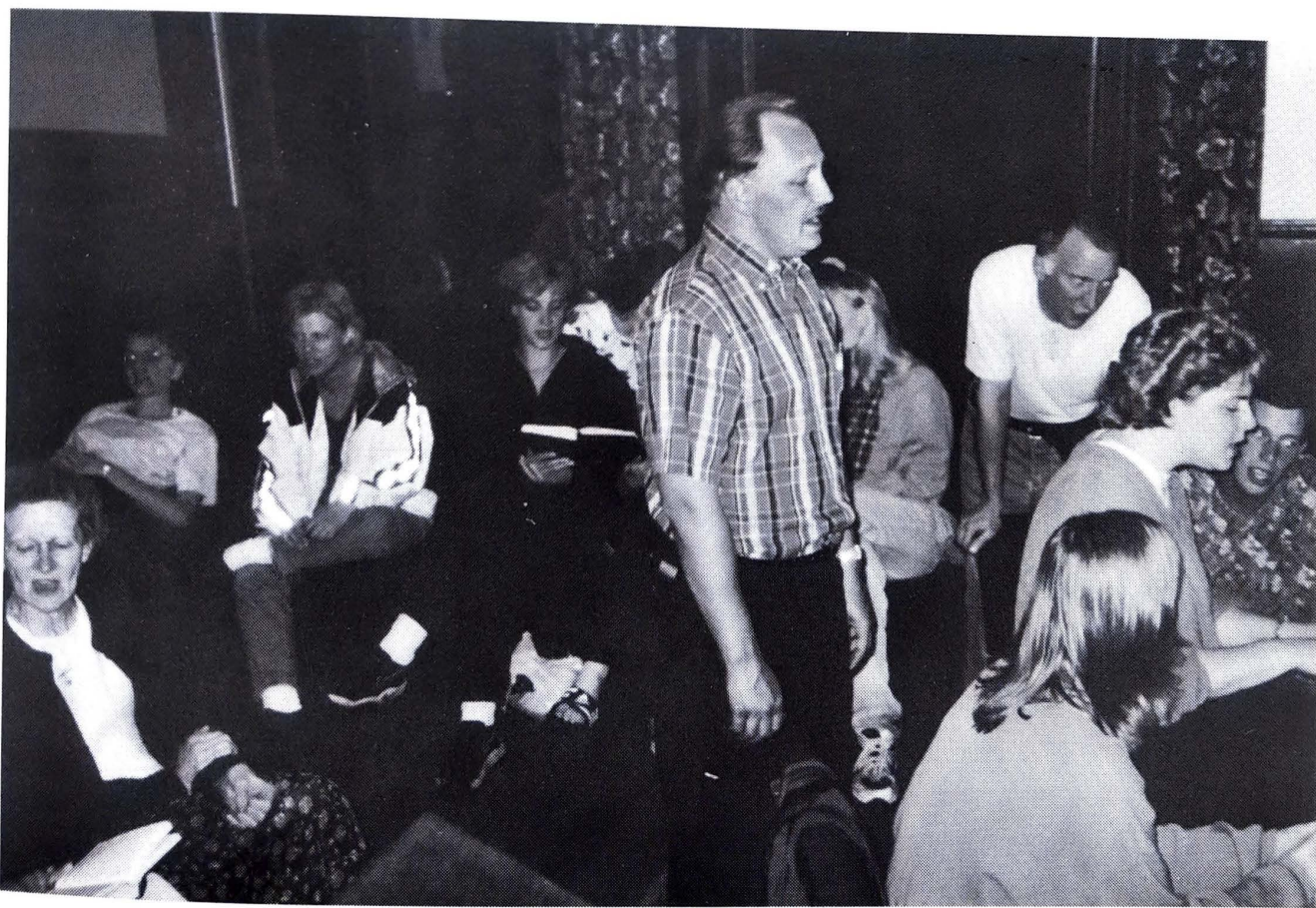
Much instruction took place as questions were raised by many both during and outside of the question and answer sessions. Likewise, the late-night discussions taught all of us to understand each other, as well as the how's and why's of what we believe. As a young person, I thrive on these late-night discussions, even if they do go around in circles sometimes. In the US, the danger is always to take for granted the fellowship we have, the sound preaching readily available to us, and why we believe what we believe. We were always raised with it and so we believe it. We do not have many different Biblical views within our circles that we would use to sharpen our skills in defending our Reformed Heritage. Nevertheless, by way of this conference, we have sharpened our minds in how to preserve and defend the rich Heritage of our forefathers. As Solomon says, in Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

Saturday night, most of the attendants had arrived in time for the welcome speech given by Mr. David Blunt. His text was Matthew 5:13-16. The light is truth and the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The Church then must lift it up and display it, like a city set on a hill or a candle on a candlestick. The light of the individual believer is their walk. We are called to let our light SO shine that the world observes us and our godly walk that they too might glorify God. We were also exhorted to examine ourselves: How is **your** light shining?

Minibuses and cars ferried all the attendants to the Town Hall in Ballymena for worship on the Lord's Day. Professor Hanko led the morning service. He preached on Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul's one last (as it were) admonition or instruction for the church, as institute: endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit. Modern ecumenism destroys the unity by allowing all beliefs inside the church. Additionally, sin disrupts unity. The concern needs to be: Was the Gospel being preached and Was the Church being gathered? My salvation is dependent on the Church's salvation; every elect is saved or none are saved. The keeping of the unity comes by lifting one another up and encouraging like-minded saints. After lunch, Professor Engelsma conducted the afternoon worship service, preaching on Romans 8:19-22. Creation, like we, hopes that glory cannot be compared with present sufferings (vs. 18). It will be freed from corruption. The theme was "Creation's Hope of the Coming Glory." The earthly creation groaneth and travaileth in pain. All of its energies and purposes are futile; the creation is slave. It waits for the great good (hope) that God plans for it. That great good is freedom from corruption and enjoyment of that freedom. The hope of the creation is bound up by the salvation of the elect. A charac-



What a place to go for a holiday! And a Christian Conference holiday at that, too! Like a stately French chateau, Castlewellan Castle was our 'Eine Feste Burg' for a week that was like being, as one put it, "next door to heaven."



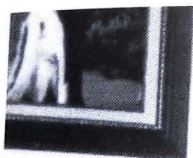
A fine body of Psalm-singers! Mary Hanko is on the piano over on the right for a late evening impromptu singing session. Using the PRC Psalter this group exulted in the praise. They are: (l to r), Mrs. Elaine Bos, Beth DeVries, Kirsten DeVries, Lois Kamps, Ivan Bleyenbergh, Ulster's own Billy Campbell, Mary Hanko and Josh Hoekstra. Three others on there we are unable to identify.



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It was raining outside, and so the 'official' group photograph (see left) this year had to be taken indoors, with the aid of a flash gun, which latter explains the reactions of some of the youngsters in the front of the picture. Quite a few faces were missing the rain. Philip Harbach was, of course, cunningly concealed behind the camera all the time!

Photo: Philip Harbach



TONY AND SANDRA

One sad note at the Conference was the retirement of Mr. Tony Horne from the post of Secretary of the British Reformed Fellowship. He is seen here, with his wife Sandra receiving from Chairman Brian Harris the presentation of some gifts from the Fellowship as tokens of appreciation for the eight years of selfless service which both of them have rendered.

Tony also served as editor of the Journal for the first two years of its existence, and prior to that, he produced 'The Presbyterian' magazine six times a year for about eight or ten years. He used to set it up on his electronic typewriter, print it on his photocopier, collate and staple the pages, 'finish', then post it all out, with Sandra's faithful assistance.

Photo: Jennifer Hanko



Happy late evening fellowship in the quaint 'Coffee-shop' in the Castle's old dungeons! L to r: Mrs Edna Crosset, David Hanna, Brian Crossett, Ed Bos, Prof. Hanko, Mrs. Hanko, with Mrs. Elaine Bos just hidden in the right hand corner.

Photo: Jennifer Hanko



ALL SMILES FOR THE PICTURE! Lining up for the camera here are (l to r): Cindy Adams, Stephanie Adams, Michelle Fischer, Sarah Clarke, Lydia Clarke (right at the front, Oh! . . . and where's Edward?), then Cherith Crossett, Joanna Clarke, David Crossett, Herman Hanko (What? Another one?) and Paul MacAuley.

Photo: Jennifer Hanko

teristic of the redeemed is groaning for present misery. If creation hopes for Judgment Day, how much more should the Church?! Some say: If the Church is heavenly-minded, it is no good on earth, but I say only if the Church is heavenly-minded is it good on earth. After tea, we had a question and answer session on general issues. Specifically, is lying ever OK? (for example-Rahab's lie).

On Monday morning, we had our first conference address by Prof. Hanks on "The Idea of the World's End." In the OT, the day of the Lord referred to the day Christ would be born (fulfillment of promises). The OT prophets did not mean a 24-hour day but one event, starting with the incarnation and ending with the second coming of Christ. In the NT, however, the end is very definite. End, here, means purpose accomplished or goal reached. There are four ways in which the coming of Christ is seen: Christ's life, Pentecost, Death of Believers, and End of History. Christ is working as quickly as He can to come again. So, watch and pray.

With Monday afternoon free, many took opportunity to explore the gardens, go to town, or to fellowship further. That evening, we were again treated to another great lecture by Prof. Engelsma on "The Millennium." Caution: what one believes concerning millennialism affects other doctrines of Scripture. Millennialism is the symbolic description of Christ's ascension unto the end of the world. Christ is always the victor; so, we reign with Christ immediately. However, expect persecution in this earthly life.

Tuesday consisted of touring around to Downpatrick, Saul, Castledward and its gardens for some. Pastor Hanks filled us in with a bit of history surrounding St. Patrick. The rest of the group stayed back and played football and rounders as families. That evening, we heard Prof. Hanks deliver a distinguished discourse on "The Signs of the Times." Signs are earthly events which point to spiritual realities. The preaching is the cause of all the other signs. Zion is redeemed through judgment because God is sovereign.

The BRF had a committee meeting on Wednesday morning. In the afternoon, some shopped in Newcastle while many conquered, just short of severely injuring ourselves, Slieve Donard, Northern Ireland's highest mountain at 2796 feet. That evening, Prof. Engelsma spoke concerning "Christ's Return." Christ comes every day, giving the Church encouragement to fight the battle. Our resurrection is sure and certain because the Head was raised, now the Body also will follow, being resurrected. We err if our main hope is not the coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven.

Throughout the week, topics were discussed into the wee hours of the morning; they ranged from the meaning of Matthew 24-destruction of Jerusalem or the end of

the world, and reconstructionism to the Establishment Principle and the Great Commission. Also, is there sin in hell? Do examples in Scripture have the force of command (especially in the worship service - example, positions of praying?) What does "time, times, and half a time" mean? (Rev. 12:14).

On Thursday morning, some toured Belfast, being briefed by Pastor Hanko as to what to see and where the sights were. That night, Prof. Hanko expounded on "The Great Judgment Day." I learned a new term - theodicy, justification of God in all His ways. God judges every moment. Every man will be judged according to his works. God judges federally, in the context of families, churches, and nations. The wicked will admit that their place is in hell; the righteous will say I'm a sinner saved by grace. No need to fear because God will say: "Well done thou good and faithful servant." We are made bold because we are like Him (I John 4:17-18).

Prof. Engelsma set forth "Our Calling with Respect to Christ's Coming and the End of the World" on Friday morning. The coming must be our lively hope. We must also live in holiness. As churches, we must preach and do mission work to gather the elect and to defend the faith. Additionally, suffer persecution patiently; rejoice in it. Do not be earthly-minded. Be active in a life of good works and remember, death is a calling. On Friday evening, we had an additional question and answer session using written questions that were handed in throughout the week. Such things were discussed as civil government, ceremonial laws, and the differences between pre-mills and post-mills.

The conference was brought to a close on Saturday as we said our farewells. Many attendants had to leave early in the morning to catch flights back home. Again, tears flowed from my eyes to leave this great week behind - relived only in my memories! I would and do recommend such a week of fellowship to everyone!!! Please join us for the next conference in Wales, 2000!!!

