

# Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

---

4 August, 2022

Dear saints in the  
Protestant Reformed Churches,

## **British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference**

After being cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of Covid, the 16<sup>th</sup> BRF family conference on “Union With Christ” finally took place at Castlewellan Castle in Northern Ireland (9-16 July). However, as one attendee put it, “This BRF conference was so good that it made up for not having had one two years ago!”

There were 105 people who stayed at the castle for all or part of the week and another 26 who joined us as visitors once or twice or three times. Saints came from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Northern Ireland, Norway, the Republic of Ireland, Singapore, the United States, and Wales. Apart from a lingering uncertainty regarding the reintroduction of Covid regulations, especially those concerning international travel, more would have joined us. As it was, we were delighted with such an excellent attendance and the wonderful people who contributed to a blessed week.

I delivered the Saturday night opening presentation at the conference on “The Psalm of Union” (Psalm 56). Despite the fact that many delegates only arrived in Northern Ireland that day, and some had travelled a considerable distance and/or gotten little sleep the night before, the saints were remarkably attentive.

Prof. Brian Huizinga’s two excellent Sunday sermons set forth the glory of the Saviour to whom we are united: “Our Changeless Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 13:8) and “The Lamb of God Come” (John 1:29). In the afternoon, I led a Bible study on “The Bond of Faith,” a topic intimately related to the mystical union.



From Monday to Friday, Professors Engelsma and Huizinga ably developed our beautiful theme of “Union With Christ” with six speeches that explained the nature of this mystical union and related it to the covenant, election, Jesus’ death, the forgiveness of sins, sanctification, our death, Christ’s resurrection, regeneration, marriage, the antithesis, abuse, etc. “‘Christ Is Made Ours:’ Calvin on Union” was my lovely subject for the BRF conference’s historical lecture on Wednesday night.

Look for the audios of all the ten speeches and sermons on the BRF website ([www.british-reformed.org](http://www.british-reformed.org)). Lord willing, these will be reworked and published in the eighth BRF book, dealing with our union with Jesus Christ.

Among other things enjoyed by those at the Castlewellan conference were the two day-trips, ice cream in the cellars, shared meals, informal Psalm singing sessions, the arboretum, the hedgerow maze, walking around the lake, kayaking, several football matches, hiking up Northern Ireland’s highest mountain, etc. Friendships were renewed or established for the first time during a relaxing week with lovely weather and beautiful scenery in the Mourne Mountains and by the Irish Sea.



I cannot do justice to the riches of God's truth that was taught to us or the many wonderful aspects of the conference. I simply add here that reports by others will be carried in the *Standard Bearer* and the *Beacon Lights*, as well as in the next issue of the *British Reformed Journal (BRJ)* which will soon be sent to the printers. It has never been easier to subscribe to the *BRJ*. It can now be done on-line and costs just £10 for 4 issues ([www.cprc.co.uk/product/british-reformed-journal-subscription](http://www.cprc.co.uk/product/british-reformed-journal-subscription)).

According to the decisions of the BRF's Biennial General Meeting, the next conference is scheduled for the summer of 2024 in mainland Britain and its subject will be eschatology. After speaking at all of our previous conferences, Prof. Engelsma indicated that his age would rule him out in the future, sadly. Prof. Huizinga and Rev. Ron Hanko were chosen as the two main speakers for 2024.

Rev. Hanko is well-known in the BRF and the British Isles. He laboured in the United Kingdom for 7 or 8 years, speaking in various places in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. He attended several BRF conferences, wrote many articles in the *BRJ* (which are also on the BRF website) and was a member of the BRF Council. He has authored a good number of books and pamphlets (distributed by the CPRC Bookstore), and is writing in the monthly *Covenant Reformed News* again. The CPRC website contains many translations of his various works in several languages. His daughter, Jennifer, is a member of the CPRC, and Rev. Hanko has visited Northern Ireland several times in the last few years.

On the Lord's day during the conference (10 July)—John Calvin's birthday—Rev. Allen Brummel preached at both services in the CPRC in Ballymena for those in our congregation unable to make it to Castlewellan. On Sunday 17 July, the day after the conference's conclusion, and with most of the conferees in attendance, the worship in the CPRC was led by Prof. Huizinga (Romans 2:4-5) and Rev. Brummel, all of whose three sermons dealt with key texts in the book of Job ([www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI](https://www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI)). After this fine preaching of the Word, fellowship was enjoyed after the evening service around tea and sandwiches provided by the ladies of the congregation.

The next day, the majority of those from outside Northern Ireland flew home with accompanying sad farewells. Mary's brother, Dave Hanko, with Joan, his wife, and Will, their son, stayed with us at the manse for a few more days, so we got to show them more of our province in the sunshine.



On the evening of the next Lord's day (24 July), Prof. Engelsma preached a powerful sermon on "The Saviour's Assertions of His Sovereignty in Salvation" (John 13:18-19). Since this may well be the last time that he and Mrs. Engelsma will be in the CPRC, afterwards I gave a brief presentation outlining the immense service the professor has provided to our church (in its various forms) over the last 38 years. The videos of both these addresses are on-line ([www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2Y5Eq5r6y2Fv4JNGXq935PevpTcIv1gH](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2Y5Eq5r6y2Fv4JNGXq935PevpTcIv1gH)).

### Membership

The last three months have probably seen more members added to our church than any other similar period. On 15 May, Joe and Lisa McCaughern with their three children (Jack, Maisie, and Xander) were

received into the congregation. Christ's particular atonement was a key doctrine in Joe's coming to the CPRC.

Billy and Anne Gould, and their two adult daughters, Grace and Kerryann, joined us on 5 June. Some years ago, Kerryann married a man from Egypt and became a Muslim. After she was converted to Jesus Christ, he threatened her and they separated. Kerryann found us on the Internet, when she was seeking a church that teaches God's sovereignty in salvation. Grace left her second husband and former church in order to join us, when she was convinced of the Bible's teaching on marriage and remarriage.

Kerryann's oldest daughter, Aaysha, is in a wheelchair for she has serious health issues (Aicardi Syndrome), making it very difficult for her family to attend the worship services. Aaysha was able to attend on Sunday 12 June, when she was baptized in the name of the Triune God with her little sister, Somaya, and their brother, Yossef.

The next Sunday, Ivan Ortu from the Italian island of Sardinia and Colm Ring from Limerick in the Republic of Ireland made confession of faith together. Ivan came across us through the large Italian section on our website ([www.cprc.co.uk/languages/italian](http://www.cprc.co.uk/languages/italian)). Colm attended the Limerick Reformed Fellowship for several years.

All these additions provide greater opportunities for fellowship in the congregation. We produced a new CPRC listing because of changes to various people's membership status, addresses, telephone numbers, and email numberaddresses (20 June).

My presentation at the CPRC Annual General Meeting (29 June) included some reflections on the Lord's growth of our church. After doctrinal divisions in the old CPRC resulted in its disbanding in 2002, it took as many as fourteen years before the number of our confessing and baptized members reached their pre-split levels! Since 2016, the membership has further grown by over 50% and the Lord is bringing in others too. There are now 4-5 times more people attending our services than 20 years ago.

The BRF conference at Castlewellan, as well as additional contact with like-minded believers from our sister churches in North America and Singapore before and/or after the conference, was a great encouragement to both new and old members of our church.

### **Others**

In March, thanks to a suggestion by a brother in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, we started adding the words of the four Psalms that we sing to our live webcasting. Thus people watching the service on-line on our main website ([www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming](http://www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming)) or on the other CPRC webpages (YouTube, Facebook or Sermon.net) can sing along with us.

Around the start of April, our four Monday night catechism classes ended for the season. In 2002, we had one catechumen (and she was 16 years old); now the Lord has given us 24.

On Easter Monday, we held a congregational picnic in Antrim Park near Lough Neagh (10 April). We had additional occasion for fellowship when we had tea after the Lord's day evening service on 24 April, and Bob and Carolyn Prins (Trinity PRC), who were in Northern Ireland for a few weeks, were able to join us.

Our Wednesday night *Belgic Confession* classes concluded for the season on 27 April. We finished with seven studies dealing with "Ezekiel 40-48 in Eschatology." Both historic premillennialism and dispensationalism claim that these chapters predict a literal Jewish temple in Jerusalem in the future. But is this really true? And, if not, what do the last nine chapters in Ezekiel actually teach? The audios are free on-line ([www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class](http://www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class)) and the CD box set is available for just £8 (inc. P&P in the UK) ([www.cprc.co.uk/product/ezekiel-40-48-in-eschatology](http://www.cprc.co.uk/product/ezekiel-40-48-in-eschatology)).

With both Monday night's catechism and Wednesday night's doctrine class over, Mary and I were able to spend a few days in Scotland (2-6 May) in order to check out Lendrick Muir as a possible BRF conference venue for 2024. We also considered places that would work for two day-trips and had dinner with friends in St Andrews.

Next we engaged in family visitation, which involved 33 visits (10 May - 27 June). This year's Scripture passage was Philippians 4.

Lidi Cecilio from Brazil visited from 17 May to 27 July, which dates included the BRF Conference (9-16 July). She stayed with various families in the congregation and participated vibrantly in the fellowship of the church. Mary and I first met Lidi in 2012, when she and four friends were in Dublin studying English. Since then, she has visited us several times and become dear to the CPRC.

Sunday 29 May marked the end of 37 sermons on "Solomon: Israel's Wisest King" (I Kings 1-11; II Chronicles 1-9), the longest series I have ever preached ([www.cprc.co.uk/old-testament-sermon-series](http://www.cprc.co.uk/old-testament-sermon-series)). Solomon is the last monarch of the united kingdom and he represents the high point in OT Israel. After him comes division, warfare, and temple desecration. Studying Solomon helps us understand Christ's glorious kingship, (aspects of) the OT ceremonial law, and God's one holy church, as well as Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and (some of) the Psalms.

Mary and I were finally able to make it to South Wales for a lecture on "The Irresistible Grace of God" on 9 June. Because of Covid regulations and the press of other labours, it had been over 28 months since we were last there! We visited the homes of Brian and Sian Harris, and Richard and Judy Holt, and took the three Hutchings out for dinner beforehand. It was lovely to see all of them again and the other saints who attended the lecture.

Mary and I hosted the congregation at the manse for a barbecue (24 June). We had good fellowship and the younger ones enjoyed playing football.

## Translations

In the 139 days since my last letter (18 April), we added another 79 translations in 8 different languages ([www.cprc.co.uk/languages](http://www.cprc.co.uk/languages)). Almost half of these new translations are Polish (39), most of which are by Marcin Kozera and Robert Jarosz, both of whom were at the BRF conference—the first time that we had met either of them! These Polish translations include two pamphlets by Herman Hoeksema ("The Antichrist" and "The Mark of the Beast") and the first half of the BRF book, *The*

*Reformed Worldview*, by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma.

This is the breakdown of the remaining 40 new translations: 14 Dutch (including 5 pamphlets by Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof, supplied by Rev. Steve Key in pdfs), 8 Hungarian, 8 Afrikaans, 4 Spanish, 3 Odia (all of the *Three Forms of Unity*), 2 Russian, and 1 Korean.

We now have articles from the *Covenant Reformed News* translated into 22 different languages spoken in various countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America: Afrikaans, Burmese, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Hiligaynon, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Kirundi, Luo, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swahili, and Tagalog. Most articles of the *News* have been translated into at least one language and some up to as many as seven different tongues. Thus there are many more translations of the *News* on-line than there are pieces in English!

May the Lord continue to bless and keep you all by His Word and Spirit in these perilous times.

*Rev. & Mary Stewart*