

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

16 December, 2016

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

John Owen Lecture

2016 marked the 400th anniversary of the birth of John Owen (1616-1683), perhaps the greatest theologian ever produced in the British Isles. His excellent book, “The Death of Death in the Death of Christ,” is the most significant treatise in the history of the Christian church on the particularity of our Lord's atonement. Interestingly, while refuting Arminianism and Amyraldianism on the cross, Owen also superbly confounds their arguments for a desire of God to save the reprobate.



Since we typically choose a historical subject for the annual Reformation Day lecture in the CPRC, I spoke on “John Owen and the Death of Christ” (28 October), summarizing Owen's eventful ministry and setting forth his arguments for Christ's laying down His life for His elect sheep alone. We advertised this meeting through articles placed in *Chatterbox* (October) and the *Ballymena Guardian* (27 October), a trailer after our Sunday morning Reformed Witness Hour broadcast, flyers, etc.

We used similar methods, including a piece in the *Portadown Times*, to get the word out when this speech was given in Portadown (11 November), about an hour south of Ballymena. Though a number of people had told us that they were planning to attend, they and others were put off by a day of very heavy rain. Though they were few, the saints listened attentively and were

encouraged by the truth of Christ's efficacious redemption.

The lecture on “John Owen and the Death of Christ” was given for the third time in South Wales (8 December). Earlier that day, Mary and I made three visits with some of the Lord's people—a young family, an elderly couple, and a young man—making the flight to mainland Britain even more worthwhile.

After the third delivery of the speech, we put it on-line on audio (www.cprc.co.uk/owenlecture2.mp3) and video, along with the slides (www.youtube.com/watch?v=7avtiikh_xw). Already a lot more people have watched or listened to the lecture on the internet than were at all of the three meetings!

Church Meetings

Our Tuesday morning classes this year have been dealing with the Old Testament law. Recently, we treated the ashes of the red heifer (Num. 19) which were used in the Mosaic dispensation to cleanse those who had been in contact with a dead human body—the worst form of ceremonial uncleanness! This is the powerful New Testament argument from the lesser to the greater: “if...*the ashes of an heifer* sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:13-14).

Belgic Confession 29, “The Marks of the True Church, and Wherein She Differs From the False Church,” was the subject of nine Wednesday night classes in the CPRC. We began with the unavoidability of a test for churches and our calling in this regard, before looking at each of the three marks (faithfulness in preaching, sacramental administration, and church discipline) in

turn and collectively. After treating the marks of a true church, we looked at the marks of a true Christian and the marks of a false church. Such teaching is so important in our day! One visitor to our classes went through seminary training for the ministry and he said that he had never even heard of the three marks! Many professing believers have little or no idea as to what they should be looking for in a church and so are confused or easily led astray. These nine CDs on “The Marks of the True Church” are the latest CPRC box set. The recordings of our *Belgic Confession* classes are the most listened to audios on our website (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/belgicconfessionclasses.htm).

We have been enjoying “The Life of Jacob” in the book of Genesis over the last few months (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/OTseries.htm). The patriarch has now fled from Haran, wrestled with Christ at Peniel, embraced his formerly murderous twin, experienced the shame of Shechem, returned to Bethel, and been bereaved of three of his closest friends (Gen. 31-35). Now, with the installation of a hearing loop in our sanctuary, any physical impediment to hearing the Word of God has been lessened!

We have found Facebook to be a free and helpful means to circulate our on-line material, whether written or on audio or video. In the last few weeks, the CPRC Facebook page has increased by some 28% (www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC) and it has been used to gain about 120 new subscribers to the *Covenant Reformed News*.

Others

By God's rich grace, the congregation is enjoying unity and fellowship with God. We are very thankful for the support we receive from all of you in the Protestant Reformed Churches and, indeed, from other saints around the world. Below are just two of many such encouragements:

“We've enjoyed a couple of your live [Sunday evening] services which we watch here at noon [www.cprf.co.uk/live.html]. The a cappella psalm singing is particularly beautiful in worship. The sermons on

Colossians 2 are well received and we are learning much from them. The learning curve for Reformed theology is so large that I think sometimes my brain will melt...”—*Minnesota, USA*

“As an Augustinian Calvinist, but a ‘poor lonesome Calvinist’ in a country dominated by apostasy in the major so-called Protestant churches and, of course, in the ‘Satan synagogue’ (the Roman Church) and atheism in the governing bodies, I am very interested by the CPRC website. I should be glad if I could receive your *Covenant Reformed News*.”—*France*

The *English Churchman* (14 & 21 October) carried a report on this summer's British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) conference (<http://britishreformed.org>). The *Belfast News Letter* published a letter I sent in explaining that the false ecumenism of the Lutheran World Federation with the Church of Rome is due to the awful apostasy of the former and not the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, as a Roman priest had claimed (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/lutheransandrome.html)!

The last two months have been something of a lean period with regard to new translations on the CPRC website with just 12 additions: 6 Hungarian, 3 Marathi (ecumenical creeds in this Indian language), 2 Portuguese, and 1 Spanish. However, this section of our website is still growing and gets a lot of hits (www.cprf.co.uk/languages.htm).

Our thanks to all those who send us cards or letters! Because our work already includes a lot of mailing, I trust that you will all understand that we are unable to send replies and that you will be satisfied with this note of appreciation.

This is the confession of the child of God: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Ps. 23:6). May the Lord be with you all in 2017!

In Christ,
Pastor and Mary Stewart