

MY RECOLLECTIONS OF THE BEGINNING OF THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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In the year 1928 my father, a graduate of the Moody Bible Correspondence Institute, began looking for a gospel preaching church that we as a family could attend. In his search he “happened” to drive by the Collingswood Presbyterian Church and noted the sermon topic listed on the outside bulletin board for the next Sunday. It was entitled, “The Blood of the Lamb.”

We started to attend the church. The pastor was the Rev. Harold S. Laird, under whose ministry I came to the full assurance of my salvation. In 1931 the Rev. Carl McIntire, after his ordination and two-year pastorate at the Chelsea Presbyterian Church of Atlantic City, New Jersey, was called as pastor by the Collingswood Church. Several years later a group of six ladies separated from the U.S.A. church (Chelsea Presbyterian) and began to hold services in Atlantic City. This small group later developed into the bible Presbyterian Church of Vetrnor, Jew Jersey. I pastored that church from 1940 to 1949, after my graduation from Faith Theological Seminary in 1941. But that’s another story.

In 1933, after the Independent Board for Presbyterian Missions was formed, I remember attending one of their meetings, which was held either in the North Broad Street Presbyterian Church pastored by the Rev. Merrill T. McPherson, or in the Tenth Street Presbyterian Church pastored by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse. I’ve heard Dr. J. Gresham Machen, the first president of the IBPFM, speak in both of these churches. It probably was in the North Broad Street church, not far from Temple University, where I was a freshman student. I was a little late to the meeting, coming from class. I took a vacant seat next to my pastor. After a few moments I saw Dr. Machen hand a note to someone on the platform, who then came down and gave the note to Mr. McIntire. He immediately went to the pulpit. Dr. Machen introduced the Rev. Carl McIntire as the latest member of the IBPFM. Then the fireworks began!

I attended a number of the meetings of the West Jersey Presbytery, in which attempt after attempt was made to silence Mr. McIntire. But he answered one charge after another with fearless logic from the Scriptures. It was a thrill to me, as a teenager, to see my pastor calmly and coolly answer every charge with Scripture. At one point in a meeting, he had taken a bite out of an apple someone had handed to him when he was called to the platform. Apple in hand, he went to the platform and answered their charges. (It’s strange what a young person will remember!)

In the course of a few years, Mr. McIntire and a few other pastors were excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. because they refused to resign from the IBPFM. The pulpit of the Collingswood Presbyterian Church was declared vacant. The very next Sunday the West Jersey Presbytery sent a member to occupy the “vacated” pulpit. He met with a surprise! The twelve elders of the church sat in a semicircle in front of the stairs to the pulpit area. The Presbytery representative arrived that Sunday morning to occupy the pulpit. He was met by an

elder and led to the Session room, adjacent to the pulpit. The result was that he came out and sat in the congregation and heard the message by our excommunicated pastor! This went on for several Sun days before packed congregations.

In the meantime we had heard that at that same Sunday, the members of the North Broad Street Presbyterian Church found themselves locked out of their sanctuary. This same congregation then moved further north and organized the Church of the Open Door. For years the church kept its doors unlocked 24 hours a day for worship and prayer, never forgetting how they were once locked out of their place of worship.

We, especially the young people, were determined that the Presbytery would not lock us out of our own church. So we, with the permission of the Session, mounted a guard over the church property. The caretaker and church staff were there during the day. But what if members of Presbytery tried to change the locks during the wee hours of the morning? So Bill Bonner, Early White, Bill Irving, a few others, and I stood watch. Our plan was to ring the church bells in the tower if an intruder from Presbytery showed up. We took turns trying to sleep on the hard pews. And they were hard! This was well before the days of cushioned pews. Needless to say, we did not sleep very much, and Presbytery never showed up, much to our chagrin!

Shortly thereafter civil action was begun by the West Jersey Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. to take possession of the Collingswood Church property. The ruling came down finally that the property belonged to the mother church, and a date was set for us to leave. On that last night, the entire congregation walked out of the church. It was thrilling and heart breaking at the same time. We were leaving things that perish because we believed it was better to obey God than man. But now, where to meet? But the Lord provided. A large lot was found and purchased at the corner of Cuthbert Boulevard and Haddon Avenue. It was overgrown with weeds, mixed with much rubbish. We young people joined in the task of cleaning it up. That I will not forget; I came up with a bad case from poison ivy.

A super-big tent was erected on the lot and furbished with folding chairs and a wooden pulpit area. And, as I remember, the very opening Sunday was communion Sunday. We left behind a beautiful communion service of silver plates and tiny silver goblets, given as a memorial by a member. The court had ordered that we could remove nothing from the property. I left behind a pair of overshoes in the church gym. That was my donation to the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.! Everybody present at that first tent meeting was thrilled to be free from the unequal yoke with an apostate denomination. In that communion service we were served with paper plates for the bread and paper cups for the blood. It was a joyous occasion.

Some of the townspeople ridiculed us and our tent. They labeled it “McIntire’s Circus.” And the rest is history.

I thank God that I was privileged to live in those days when people and pastors were ready to pay the price required in order to obey the whole counsel of God, that is, to preach and defend the Word of God. It cost many men in the 1930s—their pastorates, their pensions, and their homes—to come out and be separate in obedience to God’s Word. Eventually, in a few years, the Bible Presbyterian Church was born. This is our heritage as Bible Presbyterians. This

is my recollection of some of the events of those early days. We are not just Presbyterians; we are Bible Presbyterians, “contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints”!