



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster marks its Jubilee



An artist's impression of the old mission hall in Crossgar

In the providential mercy of God, on March 17th, 1951, in Crossgar, Co. Down, the Free Presbyterian Church was born. The circumstances of its birth should never be forgotten by Free Presbyterians. Later this month, on March 25th, Free Presbyterians will mark the jubilee of their denomination with a day of thanksgiving and praise in the Odyssey Centre in Belfast. Joining the thousands who with gladness can trace the origins of God's grace in their lives to a meeting in a Free Presbyterian church, will be representatives from our churches from all over the world. It is a day for which every believer should carefully and prayerfully prepare. God purposed that our story began with a young man, Ian Paisley.

Rev. Ian Paisley was the young minister of Ravenhill Evangelical Mission Church in Belfast. The congregation originated from a secession from Ravenhill Presbyterian Church some twenty years earlier, following the exonerated of Professor J E Davey by his denomination. He had been charged with heresy and, despite the clearest evidence of his guilt from his writings and lectures, was found not guilty.

Blasphemy

Professor Davey was a denier of the cardinal truths of the historic Christian faith. His blasphemies were examples of the emboldened, brash attitude of apostates within his denomination. The exonerated and later elevation to the Moderatorship of the General Assembly of the Irish Presbyterian Church of this man, is a dark and indelible stain upon the brow of that denomination, which, I believe, can never be removed by succeeding generations, irrespective of what affirmations of faith and protestations of fidelity to Christ they may engage in. The mark of Cain is upon the denomination. "Ichabod" is written large on its portals. As minister of Ravenhill Evangelical Mission Church since his ordination in 1946, Rev. Ian Paisley had established a name as a bold preacher of the gospel and fearless opponent of the modernism of the three main denominations, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterians and the Methodists, all of whom had been foundation members of the World Council of Churches at its formation in 1948.



Mr. Cecil Harvey and Dr. Ian Paisley from a picture taken just after the constituting of the Crossgar congregation.

Believers in various parts of Northern Ireland invited the young preacher to conduct services and rallies and evangelistic campaigns. Thus he found himself in Crossgar at the beginning of 1951.

Doors shut

Crossgar Mission Hall planned a mission with Ian Paisley and obtained the use of the local



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Presbyterian church hall for its Lord's Day meetings during the mission, the elders in the church being involved with the mission hall and being in full sympathy with the stand of the young evangelist.

The decision by the local elders under the chairmanship of the Interim Moderator of the vacant Crossgar congregation, Rev. Bailey, was overturned by the local Presbytery and Ian Paisley was banned from the church hall and on the first night of the mission, the church hall was shut fast in the face of the elders and people who had gathered to protest at the decision, and the mission began in the mission hall. Three elders, Mr. Hugh J Adams, Mr. George Gibson and Mr. Cecil Harvey were suspended by the Presbytery for their refusal to accept the decision to close out the gospel from their own church hall. They became the founding fathers of our church.



Mr. Hugh J Adams from the same early picture.

Modernistic Control

This decision was a catalyst which made many in Crossgar face up to the fact that their denomination was under the control of modernists and apostates. They had no option but to obey God and resign from the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. The new congregation was constituted as the first Free Presbyterian congregation on March 17th. Rev. Ian Paisley's own congregation in Belfast voted to become a Free Presbyterian congregation shortly after.

Spread

The stand thus taken in Crossgar and Belfast encouraged others, long discontent with the direction their churches were going in, to affiliate with this fledgling secession. Soon, a number of congregations of the Free Presbyterian Church had been formed. They were: Cabra (now Ballymoney), Mount Merrion, Rasharkin, Dunmurry Portavogie, Whiteabbey (now Newtownabbey). Limavady, Coleraine and Sandown followed soon after.

1966 imprisonment

The imprisonment of three ministers of the Free Presbyterian Church in 1966, was the occasion of a further and much more widespread arousing of Ulster to the dangers and directions of Ecumenism. The imprisonment was an unconcealed attempt by the ecumenically-controlled unionist government of the day to curb, by intimidation, the growing protest of Free Presbyterianism against ecclesiastical and political Ecumenism. The former contrived to lead the land under the dominance of ecumenical theology and the latter was determined to accommodate Irish republicanism with its demand, at the point of a terrorist's gun, for a united Ireland.

False charges

The imprisonment arose out of charges against the three ministers, Revs. Ian Paisley, John Wylie and 22-year-old licentiate minister, Ivan Foster, that they had taken part in an unlawful assembly. Their defence was that they had taken part in an annual protest march and picket of the General Assembly of the Irish Presbyterian Church for which police permission was granted, and that march had been stopped by the police at the point where the alleged unlawful assembly had taken place. The assembly was the result of police ac-



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tion. The men, and others that faced similar charges were found guilty and fined and placed under a rule of bail for two years. Upon refusing to sign the rule of bail, since it was contrary to their conscience to forgo the right to protest against the betrayal of the gospel by the ecumenical denominations, they were sentenced to three months in jail.

Plan fails

The court decision had the opposite effect upon the Free Presbyterian Church and Northern Ireland generally to that expected by the Unionist government of Captain Terence O'Neill. Sympathy for the stand of the three men blazed up all over the Province. Free Presbyterian ministers were hard-pressed to meet the demands of Christians in many places, wishing to organise meetings where the facts would be told and where the Word of God for the time would be preached. In consequence of such protest meetings and the series of welcome-home rallies that took place in dozens of churches and town halls and other public buildings, some eighteen new congregations were formed within a very short period of time. Each one of those new congregations has a tale to tell of the enemy's opposition, nights of prayer and crying to God for His intervention and glorious victory over evil men.

Growth

Today, the Free Presbyterian Church has fifty-nine congregations in Northern Ireland with two in the Irish Republic, as well as three extension works attached to congregations. On mainland Britain, there are thirteen congregations and extensions. In Canada and the USA, there are 21 congregations and outreaches while in Australia there are three. There are missionaries in Germany, Spain, Turkey, India, Jamaica and a number in Africa. The Free Presbyterian Church has its own Bible College, seven independent Christian schools with some 50 teachers, about twenty of whom are full-time. It also trains its own teachers for its Christian schools. A world-wide radio ministry is maintained with a full-time radio evangelist and there are a number of congregations in USA, Canada and here in Ulster, which have their local radio witness. The Free Presbyterian Church makes extensive use of the Internet to spread the gospel of the Lord Jesus into many lands.

The Lord alone

Let it be stated plainly that we honour the men whose faith and courage, under God, brought our church into existence. But we join with them in giving the glory to the Lord alone for what has been achieved through the faithfulness of His servants. To Him, we say, be all the praise and the honour forever. May the services on Lord's Day, 25th March, be instilled with a sense of deep gratitude, a solemn sense of the fear of God and a spirit of true rejoicing in His mercy. May the singing of God's praise and the preaching of His Word be accompanied by a glorious sense of His power and presence. Let every child of God pray for just such a day, one of the days of the Son of Man.

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. . . . But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves. . . . Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake, Psalm 44:1-2; 9-10; 26.