



Robert Coulter, Cecil Menary, Ian Paisley, John Wylie, and George Stears at the opening of Cabra Church in 1953.

On March 17, 1951, when Dr. Paisley conducted the service constituting the first Free Presbyterian church he declared, “We are going back to the old standards, to preach the Old Gospel. . . . We stand today for the infallibility of the Word of God. We believe the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is God’s inspired and infallible Word. When Modernists and Heretics are no more, the Word of God will stand forever.” That first church was Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church and its founding members were five of the seven Lissara elders, all of the Sunday school teachers, and a number of local Presbyterians. These all joined the church in general protest against the apostate modernism

of the Irish Presbyterian Church and in particular protest against the action of the Down Presbytery in closing the Lissara church hall to the gospel. The first congregation was quickly joined by Dr. Paisley’s church, Ravenhill, on April 22, 1951. The next to join was Cabra (now Ballymoney) and then Rasharkin by June 1951.

The power of God the Holy Ghost was evident before and after the formation of the new denomination. In Ravenhill ninety souls were saved in two weeks, in Crossgar ninety-four souls were saved in three weeks, and in Cabra forty-seven souls were saved in three weeks. What an endorsement on the part of the whole Godhead — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Gospel campaigns and meetings continued with Dr. Paisley as the evangelist, and by 1957 more churches had been formed in Mount Merrion (South Belfast), Whiteabbey (now Newtownabbey), Ballyhalbert (now Portavogie), Dunmurry, and Coleraine. Many individuals joined the denomination following the various campaigns.

The Theological Hall of the Free Presbyterian Church was established in 1952 for the training of ministers, and Dr. Paisley was soon joined by the first graduates, Reverends Cecil Menary, John Wylie, Bert Cooke, and John Douglas. Two new congregations were established in Limavady and Sandown Road (East Belfast) by the end of 1964.

The early days were difficult. Every new church faced fierce ecumenical opposition, and as the apostasy of the main Protestant denominations increased, the Free

following a successful tent mission in Saintfield, Dr. Paisley commenced another tent mission in Armagh on the Lord's Day, August 22. Such was the attendance that a second tent was erected. During that six-week campaign one hundred and seven souls were saved. The new Armagh congregation held its first services on October 10. From that point onward the ecumenical fury increased but, praise God, the ecumenists could not stop the powerful spiritual awakening that was to come. Truly the "sound of abundance of rain" was heard in Armagh. To experience personally the overwhelming presence and power of God at Donacloney, Saintfield, and Armagh was to experience at first-hand the power and fulness of the Holy Spirit.

More and more blessings were to follow as Dr. Paisley and the Free Presbyterian Church ministers continued to expose with powerful Bible preaching the ecumenical

"We are going back to the old standards, to preach the Old Gospel.... We stand today for the infallibility of the Word of God. We believe the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is God's inspired and infallible Word. When Modernists and Heretics are no more, the Word of God will stand forever."

— Ian R. K. Paisley

Presbyterian Church responded with protest rallies and pickets against apostasy and ecumenism. The battle lines were clearly drawn and the battle for the Reformed faith became a major public issue.

In the midst of constant public controversy against the "Romeward trend" and the modernism of the main Protestant denominations, whose clergy were ardent advocates of the Ecumenical Movement, the Lord powerfully blessed the preaching of the gospel. Notable examples are two outstanding gospel campaigns held by Dr. Paisley in tents. The first, at Donacloney in September 1963 lasted for five weeks. Seventy-four souls were saved and almost seven hundred attended the final meeting. The second was held in 1964 at Laghey. It lasted for four weeks with one hundred and five souls saved. In 1965

apostasy. The Lord continued to save souls and to strengthen the churches in spite of the rabid opposition mounted by modernistic churchmen and their associates in the media. Certainly the years 1951 to 1965 were a time of the right hand of God manifested in the salvation of souls, the formation of new congregations, and the triumph of the Lord over both ecclesiastic and political opposition. A breath of revival had begun and was to continue. To God be the glory! "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23). ■

Rev. William J. Beattie is the minister of Dunmurry Free Presbyterian Church.

