

History of Christian Education

in the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster

“What hath God wrought!” — Numbers 23:23

Having taught for some years in Fivemiletown High School, my wife, Ann, had witnessed first-hand the pro-evolution, anti-God bias of the curriculum content, and had been grieved at the ungodliness of the general environment. Thus when late in 1978 our oldest child, Andrew, was due to enroll in that school we decided that we could not entrust the education of our children to the state system, but must educate them at home. On learning of our intention, other parents in our church in Kilskeery requested us to educate their children also. The plan to form a church school began to take shape.

Presbytery appointed a delegation to meet with the Department of Education to discuss the possibilities open to the Free Presbyterian Church. The Roman Catholic Church received from the state almost 100% (now fully 100%) financial support for its schools without having to give up any control. However, it quickly became evident that Protestant church schools would not enjoy similar privileges, but would have to be independent. The absence of state funding meant that the entire burden of finances fell on us, but our independent status gave us the freedom to choose our own curriculum and teachers.

Kilskeery Independent Christian School opened its doors on September 3, 1979, with thirteen pupils. My wife was the sole teacher. The school provided primary education only. In September 1980, our high school commenced. At present the school has fifty-six primary and secondary pupils. Its record of achievement has always exceeded the national average for schools of its kind and has usually equaled the achievements of grammar schools that enroll only pupils with higher academic ability.

Soon other Free Presbyterian churches opened schools: Newtownabbey (1983), Bangor (1985), Ballymoney and Clogher (1987), and Portadown and Mourne (1988). In 1988, we launched a system of teacher training. Candidates who wish to pursue a career in any of our schools must first achieve university entrance qualifications. Then they must work as assistants in the classroom under the supervision of a qualified teacher while pursuing a degree with one of the universities that provide part-time studies. For a period of four years, they must also attend a one-week summer seminar sponsored by the Presbytery Education Board, at which they study the history, philosophy, and methodology of Christian education.

The success of our Christian schools is due, under God, to the dedication of our teachers, who carry the major burden of the work for a fraction of the salaries they could obtain in the state sector, and to those who have taken upon themselves the

task of ensuring our financial viability. We deeply appreciate those who labour to raise the funds necessary to carry on the work, and we honour the memory of those who have remembered our schools in their wills.

The state education system is plagued with lawlessness among the pupils and a wicked agenda among the policy makers. Thus the need for Christian education is clearer now than when we commenced in 1979. We share Paul's testimony: “Having therefore obtained help of God, [we] continue unto this day” (Acts 26:22). We trust that God will continue to prosper the Christian schools He has raised up and that He will give many more parents the grace to see the need to have their children in educated in them. ■



by **REV. IVAN FOSTER**