

# Ulster Presbyterianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## I. Background

### A. Distinctive Nature of Ulster Fundamentalism

1. Only place outside of USA where a Fundamentalist movement has had a discernible impact on society
2. Political Context
  - a. Ongoing “Irish Question”: Ireland’s desire for independence
  - b. Partition of 1922
    - 1) South formed Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland)
    - 2) Northern Ireland remained a province of UK
    - 3) Resulting Catholic-Protestant tensions

### B. Forces Shaping Ulster Fundamentalism

1. Revivalism
  - a. Emphasis on “methodistic” piety (what Wesley and Whitefield had in common)
    - 1) Experience of a vital relationship w/ Christ as the central Christian experience
    - 2) Spirit-anointed worship and preaching, *not* “Charismatic” but not an assumption of the Spirit’s work through the Word and the sacraments
    - 3) A stress on both conversion and holy living
  - b. Heritage of the ’59 Revival
    - 1) Precursor: cleansing from Unitarianism (Henry Cooke)
    - 2) Major revival that followed—God’s reward?
  - c. Seen in opinions of ministry of W. P. Nicholson
2. Confessional concern
  - a. Example of controversies & splits in Scotland
  - b. Influence of Princeton theology in Ulster
3. Example of C. H. Spurgeon & Downgrade Controversy
  - a. Spurgeon fought growth of liberalism in the Baptist Union
  - b. Eventually, he withdrew
    - 1) Dramatic act because associations have been a central part of Baptist life
    - 2) Not a large impact on the Baptist Union
  - c. Precedent for evangelicals
    - 1) Inspired evangelicals in Britain and America
    - 2) James Kyle Paisley left the Baptist Union in Ulster

## II. J. E. Davey Heresy Trial

### A. Summary

1. J. E. Davey, modernist professor in the Presbyterian theological college in Ulster
2. James Hunter brought charges against him.
3. Ulster equivalent of the Scopes trial

### B. Trial

1. Hunter brought five charges with the help of student W. J. Grier [hampered when some students admitted they supplemented class notes later]
  - a. Denying imputation (of Adam and Christ)
  - b. Origin of sin
  - c. Nature of Jesus
  - d. Nature of the Trinity

- e. Inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture
- 2. Davey claimed liberty within the bounds of interpretation of the Westminster Confession
- 3. General Assembly acquitted him
- C. Aftermath
  - 1. A few left to form the Evangelical Presbyterian Church
  - 2. Davey eventually became moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)
- III. W. P. Nicholson Campaigns
  - A. Character of Nicholson
    - 1. Born in Ulster in a godly family (1876), but not converted until adulthood
    - 2. Preparation for ministry
      - a. Worked w/ campaigns of J. Wilbur Chapman
        - 1) Worked in Chapman's "simultaneous" campaigns
        - 2) Adopted many methods of American evangelists
      - b. Later a staff evangelist for Biola
    - 3. Boisterous style & manner
  - B. Ulster Campaigns
    - 1. Two series of campaigns in Ulster (1920-23; 1924-26)
    - 2. Moved Ulster more than anything since the '59 Revival
    - 3. Thousands of conversions were reported
    - 4. Revival amidst the Irish Partition
  - C. Influence
    - 1. Although Presbyterian, not particularly Reformed in emphasis
    - 2. Firmly resisted liberalism
    - 3. Some charge his Fundamentalism an "import," yet it took root among the Ulster populace
- IV. The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
  - A. Background of Ian Paisley
    - 1. Father's example of separatism
    - 2. Became pastor of an independent congregation
    - 3. Received blessing of W. P. Nicholson
    - 4. Preacher of evangelistic "missions" in 1940s and 1950s
  - B. Free Presbyterian Church
    - 1. Founded in 1951
      - a. Presbyterian Church in Ireland tried to stop one of its congregations from holding an evangelistic campaign w/ Paisley
      - b. Majority of the church withdrew, and asked to join with Paisley's church
      - c. Birth of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
    - 2. "Free" of liberalism and ecumenical movement
    - 3. Fundamentalist/Separatist in origin
      - a. Protested PCI actions
      - b. Protested acquittal of Davey—who was PCI moderator at the time
      - c. Protested PCI membership in WCC
      - d. Significance of original "Articles" of FPC
        - 1) Represents special concerns beyond Westminster Confession
        - 2) States distinctives: open policy on baptism & eschatology

4. Paisley's motivation
  - a. *Not* simply traditional Ulster anti-Catholicism
  - b. Initial protest against Protestant liberalism as well as Catholic apostasy
- C. Later History
  1. Small growth at first
  2. Grew w/ rise of Paisley's political activism
    - a. Began w/ "Troubles" in Ulster (1960s)
    - b. Paisley founded Democratic Unionist Party
    - c. Eventually rose to First Minister of Ulster (2007)
    - d. Balancing politics a challenge to FPC
  3. Today: 60+ Ulster congregations & 20+ outside Ulster

#### Articles of FPC

1. The Absolute Authority and Divine Verbal Inspiration of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God.
2. There is but one living and true God, and in the Godhead, there are three Persons, equal in power and glory, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.
3. The Eternal Sonship, Virgin Birth, and Deity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
4. The personality of God the Holy Spirit, and the absolute necessity of His work in Regeneration and Sanctification, and His Infilling of the Indwelt Believer for power to live and witness for Christ.
5. The Substitutionary Death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Resurrection as the only way of Salvation through Faith.
6. God has appointed besides the Word and Prayer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
  - a. Baptism—The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, under Christ the Great King and Head of the Church, Realizing that bitter controversy raging around the mode and proper subjects of the ordinance of Christian baptism has divided the Body of Christ when that Body should have been united in Christian love and Holy Ghost power to stem the onslaughts and hell-inspired assaults of modernism, hereby affirms that each member of the Free Presbyterian Church shall have liberty to decide for himself which course to adopt on these controverted issues, each member giving due honour in love to the views held by differing brethren, but none espousing the error of baptismal regeneration.
  - b. The Lord's Supper—The Lord's Supper has been appointed by our Lord for Remembrance of Him in His work as Saviour. Its purpose to the child of God is for strengthening, and putting a visible difference between the redeemed and the unregenerate. This Sacrament will be observed once each month in every Free Presbyterian Congregation, or more frequently as each local congregation shall decide.
7. The visible and personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ.
8. These Articles, together with the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, and The Westminster Confession of Faith, form the Subordinate Standards of the Free Presbyterian Church.