

Sunday, October 6, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 110 The Formation of Milwaukee Bible Institute (Grace Bible College)

Introduction/Review

- In Lesson 108 we studied the formation of the Grace Gospel Fellowship in 1944/45. One of the things we noted as part of that lesson was that at the first GGF convention in 1945 a need was voiced for a Bible institute training program since many Grace young people had been denied entrance into mainline programs due to their stance on water baptism.
- Ray Reich reports that a Bible Institute committee was organized in May 1945 and charged with the task of starting a Bible Institute program possibly by September of that same year.
- In this lesson we will consider how the school came into existence.

Milwaukee Bible Institute

- “. . . one of the first considerations of the Grace Gospel Fellowship after its inception was the establishment of a school to train its pastors and missionaries. The committee appointed to this task, composed of Charles F. Baker (Chairman), J.C. O’Hair, C.R. Stam, Otis Wasson, and T.R. Huston met at Des Plaines, Illinois in June, 1945 after investigating several locations in the Midwest and decided to locate the new school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.” (Reich, 16)
- “Mr. Baker had organized a local evening Bible Institute which had been in operation since 1939 and it was decided to take over this school, enlarge its faculty and staff, and inaugurate a three year Bible Institute curriculum.” (Reich, 16)
- “In the three short months which remained before the opening of the school, a curriculum was developed, a catalog published, and a faculty was assembled, consisting of Charles F. Baker, President and instructor in Theology; C.R. Stam, Registrar and instructor in Bible and Evangelism; H.B. McIntire, instructor in Greek, English, and History; and Teresa B. Baker, instructor in Christian Education and Music.” (Reich, 16)
- “During the 1945-46 session, fourteen students from eight states were enrolled. Several of these were transfer students, making it possible to graduate two at the first Commencement in 1946 and two at the second Commencement in 1947. The enrollment jumped to over forty during 1947-48 and to seventy during 1948-49.” (Reich, 16)
- “The first semester classes were held in the old Fundamental Bible Church building. . . For the second semester a large three-story house . . . was acquired which served as class rooms and the women’s dormitory. In 1946 another house in the same block was purchased. In 1947 a beautifully landscaped campus was purchased on W. State Street, where were located the Tower House, serving as Library and Administration building, a remodeled building serving as

classrooms, bookstore, kitchen, and dining hall, and another house used as a dormitory.” (Reich, 16)

- Pastor Stam also recounts the events surrounding the founding of Milwaukee Bible Institute in his *Memoirs*. According to Stam, he joined Charles F. Baker in establishing MBI, originally agreeing to stay for two years. In actual fact, Stam stayed for five years before he resigned his position at the Institute in 1950. Many of Stam’s most recognized and influential books were originally written as textbooks for MBI. (Stam, 84-85)
 - “Pastor Baker was president and instructor and I dean and instructor. I had thirteen hours of teaching each week—in addition to at least twice as many hours preparing lessons, grading papers, etc., for we had to blaze some trails. At that time we had no textbooks even recognizing our dispensational belief, and this affected some or most of our courses. Indeed some of my books are really textbooks which I composed for these classes, among them: *Things That Differ or Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*, *True Spirituality*, *Man: His Nature and Destiny*, *Acts Dispensationally Considered*, *Moses and Paul and The Twofold Purpose of God*. There was a second semester on dispensationalism, called *A Dispensational Survey of the Bible* but my busy schedule never allowed me to publish it. Writing takes so much time.” (Stam, 85)
- In the midst of his work at MBI, Stam still needed to find time to write and publish the *Berean Searchlight*. The cumulative effect is that Stam suffered two heart attacks shortly after resigning from the MBI in 1950. (Stam, 85)
- “In 1951, the Fundamental Bible Church built their new edifice adjoining the campus and granted the use of its facilities to the Institute, thus providing needed classrooms.” (Reich, 16)

Milwaukee Bible College

- 1955 saw another physical plant expansion with the completion of a new three story library and dormitories at a cost of \$200,000.
- More importantly, in 1955 the academic focus of the school changed. Mr. Ray Reich states the following regarding this change in his July, 1974 article for *Truth Magazine* “Our Grace Heritage.”
 - “That same year (1955) another advance academically was made. Realizing that the three year Institute program was not able to give adequate training for pastors, an additional year was added to the curriculum and the Institute was reincorporated as Milwaukee Bible College. The Bachelor of Arts degree was granted for completion of this program. A Bachelor of Theology degree was also offered for College graduates who completed two more years of advanced studies.” (Reich, 17)

- Jack T. Dean and Dale S. Dewitt authored a series of articles in *Comment* magazine in the mid-1990s to commemorate the schools 50th anniversary. Dean and Dewitt state the following regarding the schools decision to expand the curriculum and become a Bible College.
 - “The question arose immediately in the development of a curriculum, “How long and how broad of a curriculum do we need?” The founding committee, all of whom became members of the first board, along with Herman Reich, decided upon a three year Bible institute curriculum. Such a limited curriculum was not considered ideal, but was seen initially as a practical necessity.

... As knowledge had deepened and the population became more sophisticated, most Christian educators have recognized the need for a more thorough education for all professionals including those going into the ministry. It was the long-range goal of C.F. Baker (first president) and J.T. Dean (second president) to eventually provide a seminary education for our Grace young people which would be built upon four years of undergraduate work. The board adopted this goal, recognizing it would be a long process. The first step in this process was taken in 1954 when a fourth year was added to the Bible institute curriculum and the name was changed from “Institute” to “College.” This added year allowed the college to offer four different programs.

 - 1) The four year Bible college course specifically designed for pastors, missionaries, and Christian educators.
 - 2) The three year Bible institute program, specifically designed for those who will be doing Christian ministry but perhaps will major in another field such as medicine, education or homemaking.
 - 3) The two year postgraduate course specifically designed for those who already had a college degree in another discipline.
 - 4) The two year Christian worker’s certificate specifically designed for laymen who desire solid training for lay ministries.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 1)
- The impact of this change should not be overlooked. Now, instead of Milwaukee Bible Institute being a three year Bible and pastoral training school, Milwaukee Bible College added liberal arts education to the curriculum. This is indicative of a major shift in the philosophy of the school that not all members of the GGF supported. Within the next fifteen years, this decision would greatly impact the future of the school.
- “In 1960 the school was faced with a crisis. The city building inspection department ruled that the College could no longer use the church facilities as classrooms because they were located in the basement. Only two options were open: either build a new classroom building, or sell the campus to a Lutheran College which was anxious to acquire it. The board decided on the latter course and a search was begun for a new campus.” (Reich, 18)

- “. . . After agreeing to sell the Milwaukee property to Concordia College, the Milwaukee Bible College Board of Directors had eighteen months to secure and prepare a new campus. . . The first question was, “Where should the college be located?” There were plenty of suggestions: Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, and every place between.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- “Investigations were made into many specific sites. One with some appeal was an old YMCA building in Racine, WI, including a gym, swimming pool, and bowling alleys. The asking price was \$185,000. The board visited the site, evaluating all aspects. When the vote to purchase was taken, a tie resulted and Chairperson Robert Johnson broke the tie with a negative vote. A former mental hospital in Waukesha, WI, as well as a hotel resort in Lake Geneva, WI were also considered.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- “Eventually the board narrowed the field and decided to vote on three general locations: Chicago, Milwaukee, and Grand Rapids. On the eighth ballot, Grand Rapids received six of the nine votes and thus the decision was made. Two Grand Rapids locations were under consideration. On June 25, 1960, the board decided to purchase ten acres in Wyoming (a suburb of Grand Rapids) two blocks from the new Berean Bible Church for \$24,000.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- “The four original buildings included two residence halls; one building with four classrooms, a library, and many offices; and the fourth building for student services including a kitchen, student lounge, and a dining hall/chapel auditorium. The total area was 32,000 square feet, and the price of land, landscaping, and construction was \$450,000.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- “Another difficulty was finding a new name for the college. (Milwaukee Bible College did not seem appropriate although it was one of the thirty-six names suggested.) A naming committee was appointed and they recommended the name “Michigan Bible College” (one advantage was that the initials could remain the same). The new board unanimously accepted that recommendation on the first ballot. The new name was announced in *Truth* magazine. However, when the name was submitted to the Michigan Corporation and Securities Commission, its use was denied since there already was a “Michigan Bible College” in Michigan. Eventually the name “Grace Bible College” was selected and properly registered.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- “Another difficulty involved personnel. Would the faculty and students move? . . . most of the Milwaukee faculty and staff moved to Grand Rapids. . . The last difficulty of the move was the relationship with the Michigan State Board of Education. We soon learned that Wisconsin and Michigan viewed things differently. In Wisconsin we conferred the Bachelor of Arts, yet in Michigan were not allowed to do that since we “were a Bible college,” and therefore must confer the Bachelor of Religious Education. When we asked to see written documentation about that, we were told there was none, but that this was the way Bible colleges were regulated in Michigan. The Michigan Board of Education also expected professors to have graduate degrees in the fields in which they were teaching. This meant that some new adjunct faculty had to be hired to teach the general education (liberal arts) courses. This expectation had merit, and we

have appreciated the qualified Christian adjunct faculty. The administration of GBC remained completely in control in selecting adjunct faculty from the other colleges.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)

Grace Bible College

- According to Dean and Dewitt, 72 students from fifteen states enrolled in the first Grand Rapids semester in 1961.
- “On October 31, 1961, the new campus was dedicated to the Lord with a full day of activity, concluding with the dedication address by Dr. S.A. Witmer, executive secretary of the AABC (American Association of Bible Colleges).” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- “The board and administration of GBC have always been interested in college accreditation, for accreditation is to a college what the seal of the Better Business Bureau is to a business. After an exhaustive three year self-evaluation and evaluations by outside educational examiners, Grace Bible College was accredited by AABC on October 27, 1964. Every ten years it has been necessary for the college to submit to another self-evaluation and evaluative campus visit. Accreditation was reaffirmed in 1974, 1984, and 1994.” (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- President Charles F. Baker took a leave of absence during the 1965-66 school year to work on his textbook *A Dispensational Theology*. In his absence the board appointed Jack T. Dean to be acting president. On October 26, 1967, Dr. Dean was inaugurated as the second president of GBC. “Dr. Dean came well qualified for this most responsible position. He had served on the faculty since 1955 and had earned degrees of Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Theology, Master of Arts, and Doctor of Philosophy.” (Reich, 20) The same evening, Mr. Baker was honored with the title President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor of Theology. (Dean and Dewitt, Part 2)
- “As the college grew, more space was needed everywhere. Constructing a new library building would serve two purposes: 1) make the library more dominant on campus as the center of learning; and 2) free former library space for much needed offices and a conference room.
- A major step was taken in 1968 with the erection of the new Bultema Memorial Library. Dr. Bultema, pastor of the Berean Church of Muskegon until his death in 1952, was himself an author of numerous books both in Dutch and English and his extensive library was donated to the college. (Reich, 19) The Berean Church of Muskegon, along with members of the Bultema family, helped initiate the fund raising. (Dean & Dewitt, Part 2)
- The Bultema Memorial Library was dedicated and opened on April 26, 1968 under the planning and direction of librarian Raymond Reich. (Dean & Dewitt, Part 3)
- It was also during this time that the controversial Journal of Grace Theology was first published in 1966. In time this publication would serve as a lightning rod of criticism for GBC.

- Although the '60s were formative, exciting years of growth, they were not without some difficulties. Some of the questions raised about the college were:
 - The identification of the terms “fundamentalist” and “evangelical”
 - The amount of emphasis upon dispensational teaching
 - Education or indoctrination
 - Narrowness or breadth of education
 - The study of the working of the Holy Spirit
 - The code of behavior for students
 - The use of non-GGF faculty
 - The King James or contemporary Biblical translations

- As we will see in future lessons, some of the controversies outlined above would rock the college to its core at the end of the 1960s and ultimately lead to a split within the Grace Gospel Fellowship. Before we can comment further on these issues we need to take some time to develop the greater historical context in which these events occurred so that we might understand them properly. Establishing the historical setting will be the goal of a couple of lessons in this project.

Works Cited

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