

## HERMAN A. HOYT: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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**I**N 1936, Herman Arthur Hoyt penned words which expressed the convictions which have been the hub of his life and ministry for nearly five decades. He affirmed:

There is no greater authority than the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no more ample faith than the whole Bible with every doctrine it contains. There is no more complete life than the life which appropriates the blessings of God, presents itself to God, separates from the world, and is transformed in His presence. There is no more perfect set of ordinances than those of the Word.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Greenfield, Iowa, on March 12, 1909, as the first child of Clarence Lyman and Anna Leola Dorsey Hoyt, he grew up in Dallas Center, Iowa, where he became a member of The Brethren Church. There Hoyt began his excellent academic career, graduating as valedictorian of the Dallas Center High School class of 1927.<sup>2</sup> He played for his high school football team which in 1925 went undefeated and did not even allow another team to score.

After a year of teaching in a country school, Hoyt entered Ashland College in the fall of 1928. He chose to attend Ashland due to the influence of respected pastors.<sup>3</sup> As in high school, Hoyt distinguished himself as a superior student. He graduated as valedictorian of the class of 1932.<sup>4</sup> In 1930, during the course of his college studies, he married Harriet L. Fritz of Dallas Center. To this couple were born two sons, Joseph Paul and Edwin Max.

Next Hoyt entered graduate theological study at Ashland Theological Seminary, which had been established in 1930 as a result of the vision and influence of Alva J. McClain. The relationship established

<sup>1</sup>Herman A. Hoyt, "Distinctive Elements in the Brethren Faith that Impel Us to Reach Out to All America Today," *The Brethren Evangelist* 58:41 (1936) 17.

<sup>2</sup>"Our New President," *Brethren Missionary Herald* 24:21 (1962) 323.

<sup>3</sup>Herman A. Hoyt, "A Personal Testimony and Explanation," *The Brethren Evangelist* 61:14 (1939) 14.

<sup>4</sup>"Our New President," 323.

between McClain and Hoyt would have far-reaching influence in the decades to follow. During his senior year of seminary Hoyt assumed the task of teaching Greek at Ashland College. He graduated with highest honors from the seminary in 1935.<sup>5</sup> He wrote a 210-page thesis titled "The Place and Meaning of Death in the Bible Especially in Its Relation to Sin." J. Allen Miller, a highly respected NT professor at Ashland, "pronounced Professor Hoyt the ablest Greek student he ever had in his classes."<sup>6</sup> Hoyt was Miller's choice as his successor in NT studies and, therefore, upon graduation he was added to the faculty at Ashland Seminary. He enrolled in the graduate program at the University of Michigan prior to beginning his teaching that fall. During his first year of classroom instruction in the seminary, he was given the added responsibility of teaching Hebrew Elements and some OT classes due to the resignation of Kenneth M. Monroe.

His tenure on the seminary faculty was short-lived. Matters which for a number of years had been fomenting division at Ashland between college and seminary personnel came to a head. In June, 1937, both McClain and Hoyt found their ministries at Ashland terminated by action of the Board of Trustees.<sup>7</sup> The two professors had been asked to tender their resignations or be dismissed. They chose the latter course and the letters of dismissal were issued on June 4. This action had serious consequences not only for Ashland College and Seminary and the dismissed professors but also "proved to be the action that brought about a definite division in The Brethren Church."<sup>8</sup>

A group of concerned Brethren men assembled at the home of J. C. Beal, in Ashland, for a time of prayer. Hoyt was one of the participants at this important meeting, the outcome of which was to be instrumental in setting the course of his life for the next fifty years. This gathering gave birth to The Brethren Biblical Seminary Association, which later in the summer of 1937 was renamed Grace Theological Seminary. The new seminary opened that fall, meeting in the facilities of the First Brethren Church of Akron, Ohio. McClain was chosen to be the president and he and Hoyt were the first two full-time professors. Though designated Professor of New Testament and Greek, Hoyt also taught OT, Hebrew, and Homiletics. He also enrolled as a student for the Master of Theology degree. He graduated in 1939, having written a thesis titled "A Semi-Critical Analysis and

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Homer A. Kent, Sr., *Conquering Frontiers* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1972) 152.

<sup>7</sup>No definitive reasons for the dismissals were stated in the letters of dismissal signed by Ashland president, C. L. Anspach, but events leading to this action are chronicled from different perspectives by Kent, *Conquering Frontiers*, 140-52; and Albert T. Ronk, *History of the Brethren Church* (Ashland, OH: Brethren Publishing Co., 1968) 395-426.

<sup>8</sup>Kent, *Conquering Frontiers*, 152.

Exposition of the Epistle of James." In the fall of 1939, Grace Seminary relocated in Winona Lake, Indiana.

The division which occurred at Ashland had implications for the entire Brethren Church. Charges and counter-charges of legalism and antinomianism were registered by members of the rapidly polarizing factions. A denominational division resulted in 1939. The two parties were commonly called the "Ashland group" and the "Grace group." Hoyt was a central figure in the new National Brethren Biblical Conference, being elected its president in 1940. This movement was renamed the National Fellowship of Brethren Churches, of which Hoyt was elected moderator for 1943-44. He was involved also as chairman of the committee on church publications. He assisted in the founding of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company and was named a board member. He served as president of the Herald for its first decade.<sup>9</sup>

Such a load of responsibility could take its toll on a less robust man, but Hoyt has always had a rugged constitution. In this respect he is the antithesis of McClain, who was troubled by various physical disorders for many years. Hoyt maintained a busy schedule and carried great responsibilities as McClain's assistant. In 1942, due to an illness McClain suffered, Hoyt was pressed into emergency service as president. During the years of McClain's presidency, Hoyt developed administrative acumen which was to serve him well in the future. His was the task of doing the legwork for the president, forming new ideas, and helping to develop a solid organization. He was involved in selecting administrative and faculty personnel. While working diligently as a teacher and administrator, he also completed his work for the Doctor of Theology degree which was conferred upon him by Grace Seminary in 1946. His dissertation was titled "An Analytical and Devotional Commentary on the Second Epistle of Peter."

A major step for Grace Seminary was taken with the opening of a collegiate division. This two-year school was born in the minds of leaders in the National Fellowship of Brethren Churches and was suggested in the moderator's address to the conference in 1947. It opened its doors in 1948 with thirty-two students.<sup>10</sup> The school became a four-year college by action of the Board of Trustees in 1953.<sup>11</sup> Hoyt served as academic dean of the combined schools from 1948 until 1962. He was registrar from 1948-51.

After twenty-five years at the helm of Grace Seminary and Grace College, McClain resigned his presidency in 1962. On August 16, 1962,

<sup>9</sup>"Our New President," 323.

<sup>10</sup>Terry White and R. Wayne Snider, *25 Years of God's Grace* (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Schools, 1973) 5.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

Hoyt was inaugurated as the second president at Grace Schools, a position which he held with distinction until his retirement in 1976. Under his leadership the student enrollment in the seminary increased from 160 (fall 1962) to 360 (spring 1976). The number of college students rose from 388 (fall 1962) to 646 (spring 1976).<sup>12</sup> This expanding student body necessitated additional campus facilities. A dining commons/dormitory was erected in 1964, a second new dormitory opened in 1966, and the Morgan Library and Learning Center began service in 1969.<sup>13</sup> A major acquisition was the Winona Lake Christian Assembly facilities in 1968.<sup>14</sup> The Eskimo Inn Restaurant on Park Avenue in Winona Lake was purchased in 1971 and made into a student union building.<sup>15</sup> Various other properties were added to the Grace Schools complex in order to better meet student needs.

The crowning achievement of Hoyt's presidency was the granting of regional accreditation to the college by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in his last year in office. He was particularly pleased because the accreditation had come without compromising the Christian commitment of the college.<sup>16</sup> It has been estimated that in the later years of his presidency, Hoyt was traveling about 50,000 miles a year for the schools.<sup>17</sup> Many of those miles were covered by automobile, pulling a trailer. Hoyt did not fear flying but often enjoyed the companionship of his wife while traveling. They were able to be together in this manner most comfortably due to an allergic condition suffered by Mrs. Hoyt.

Hoyt's contributions to his denomination and the larger body of Christ have not been limited to his achievements at Grace. Many who never came to Winona Lake profited from his expertise in the Scriptures through his broad preaching ministry. Especially noteworthy has been his prophetic conference ministry. Those who have not heard him preach can benefit from his writings. He was part of a three-man committee whose work on a Brethren handbook resulted in the publication of *The Brethren Minister's Handbook* in 1945. In seeking to share with the public the Brethren perspective regarding the ordinances of the church, Hoyt wrote *This Do In Remembrance of*

<sup>12</sup>Statistics from the Office of the Registrar contained in "In the Beginning," a paper presented by Paul E. Dick at the Grace Schools Faculty Workshop, August 18, 1983, 11-13.

<sup>13</sup>White and Snider, *25 Years*, 21-30.

<sup>14</sup>For a brief summary account of this acquisition, see Kent, *Conquering Frontiers*, 208-9.

<sup>15</sup>White and Snider, *25 Years*, 23.

<sup>16</sup>"Dr. Hoyt Serving Grace Schools 1937-1976," *Brethren Missionary Herald* 38:12 (1976) 16.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

*Me*, published in 1947. This book explains the observances of baptism by triune immersion and the threefold communion service. The book was written for the purpose of clarifying the Brethren distinctives in view of the more common forms of observance practiced by other fundamental churches.<sup>18</sup> The need for such a statement has been borne out in discussions held among the Grace Brethren in recent years. A companion volume, *All Things Whatsoever I Have Commanded You*, was published in 1948. This work continues the presentation of the Brethren distinctives with discussions of the holy kiss, the laying on of hands, prayer and anointing for the sick, separation from worldly practice, separation from compromising relationships in business and fellowship, the non-swearing of oaths, and the practice of nonresistance in a violent world. The nonresistance theme became the subject of a book, *Then Would My Servants Fight*, published in 1956. Hoyt's continued commitment to this position resulted in his being chosen as a contributor to the book, *War: Four Christian Views*, published by InterVarsity Press in 1981. He wrote the chapter advocating the cause of nonresistance and critiqued articles by Myron S. Augsburger ("Christian Pacifism"), Arthur F. Holmes ("The Just War"), and Harold O. J. Brown ("The Crusade or Preventive War").

Hoyt's expertise in NT studies is evidenced by a variety of expositional studies intended for the general student of Scripture. Lessons on the Epistle to the Romans written originally for *The Brethren Quarterly* resulted in a booklet titled *The Gospel—God's Way in Saving Man*. Later, *The First Christian Theology: Studies in Romans* was published. Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, also originally published in *The Brethren Quarterly*, became the book *Christ—God's Final Word to Man*. The 1953 series on the Book of Revelation in *The Brethren Teacher* was published as *The Glory—Final Victory of Christ*, and later developed into *The Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ*, republished as *Studies on Revelation*. *Studies on 2 Peter* is a more recent contribution which built upon work done for his doctoral dissertation.

Hoyt has always been very interested in biblical doctrine. His many years of study in the Gospel of John led him to write *The New Birth*, a study of John 3, later republished as *Expository Messages on the New Birth*. A syllabus for his seminary class on eschatology was published by Moody Press in 1969 as *The End Times*. His emphasis on dispensational premillennialism eventuated in his being called upon to contribute an article espousing this position in the work *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (InterVarsity, 1977). In addition to his

<sup>18</sup>Herman A. Hoyt, *This Do In Remembrance of Me* (Winona Lake, IN: Brethren Missionary Herald, 1947) 7.

own presentation, Hoyt also critiqued in this work articles by George Eldon Ladd ("Historic Premillennialism"), Loraine Boettner ("Post-millennialism"), and Anthony A. Hoekema ("Amillennialism").

Hoyt has been remembered by his students as a tough teacher in the classroom. His own disciplined study habits and distinguished academic record caused him to expect achievement from his students. The image of toughness carried over into his years as an administrator. However, his colleagues also speak of a balancing, inner graciousness. His expectations of his students and co-laborers at Grace were high but they were no higher than his concern for each person. As president he listened closely to the opinions of his advisers and normally heeded the counsel of the majority even though he might not be in agreement personally.

Outside his own denomination Hoyt has served with distinction as chairman of the Advisory Council and Executive Board of the American Association for Jewish Evangelism. This relationship goes back to the years when the association was headquartered in Winona Lake. His interest in prophetic themes made him an ideal choice for service within the organization. He has continued a ministry of preaching at prophetic conferences sponsored by AAJE. He has also served as president of the Board of Trustees of the Christian League for the Handicapped.

In 1984 the Hoyts relocated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He still travels many miles each year for various preaching ministries.

The appreciation of Grace Schools for its second president was demonstrated at Commencement in May, 1985. Hoyt was named Grace Seminary Alumnus of the Year. His remarks upon the occasion included words of surprise that he was still remembered at Grace. However, the facts bear witness that Grace Schools would be guilty of gross negligence if it forgot Herman Hoyt. His contributions to the existence, character, development, and achievement of the institution are unsurpassed.