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Subject: John Davis articles on HEF

Posted by [jisamazed](#) on Mon, 08 Dec 2008 04:59:27 GMT

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The following was the first installment in the series of 4 articles about FA and HEF written by John Davis in 1983. I was told that people were advised not to read them. However, I'm wondering what everyone thinks of them now with 25 years hindsight. I can include the other 3 articles in subsequent posts, or simply give the links for the website and let everyone read them that way.

Hobart Freeman: Mystic, Monk or Minister

Permission given by John J. Davis to offer this on YesterYear In Print (6/12/2007)

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Part 1 of Four Parts

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Writing About Faith Assembly

John J. Davis, a professor of Old Testament at Grace Theological Seminary, has utilized two recent private conversations with Faith Assembly leader Hobart Freeman and other research to compile a four part series --the first of which appears in today's Times-Union.

Freeman has refused to grant all media interviews and told Davis their meetings were "private conversations."

However, Davis, a student of Freeman's before the latter was fired from Grace Theological Seminary in 1963, told his former professor during their initial meeting he was planning to write a series of articles on the group. The two spoke for approximately 45 minutes following a Faith Assembly service and one and one-half hours on a later occasion at Freeman's home.

Because Freeman was adamant about not being interviewed, Davis said he did not pepper him with controversial questions, for fear the conversation would end abruptly. "I basically let him do the talking," Davis said. "If he felt confident moving into sensitive or delicate areas, I let him ... He knew I was writing about it, so if he wanted to stop, he could have."

Davis also spoke with approximately eight former and 15 current members of the Faith Assembly. Unlike Freeman, he did not tell the current members of his intentions, and for that reason, felt it would be unethical to name them in the articles.

In addition, he read all of Freeman's books, listened to 61 Freeman tapes and 10 tapes of other ministers at the Assembly. He also attended 10 services at the headquarters near Wilmot.

Along with reporting on the background of the group and Freeman, Davis offers analytic insight in

each of the four articles. With a doctorate in Old Testament and Hebrew (ironically, the same degree held by Freeman) from Grace Theological Seminary and the author of 13 books and numerous articles of 13 books and numerous articles, he is well versed to do so.

Davis said he wrote the series because "a good many articles were not in balance. They were based primarily on statements from former members, but were not trying to get into why this was happening."

Davis has been associated with The Times-Union since 1972 as a part-time correspondent, and since 1979, has written the weekly "Outdoor Scene" column.

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"There's no doubt about it," the elderly lady announced with authority. "If Hobart Freeman is not a self-proclaimed mystic or messiah, he certainly is a religious monk with incredible power. No minister would encourage mothers to allow little babies to died without medical help."

But that is only one opinion. Views on Dr. Hobart Freeman, founder and pastor of Faith Assembly in Wilmot, are as varied as current opinions on political matters.

"I have known Brother Freeman for 13 years and have been blessed by his love for the Lord and his skillful preaching from the Word of God," explains a current member of the assembly. "If it were not for his ministry, I would have been the victim of moral, physical and spiritual disasters from which I would have never recovered."

How can opinions vary so dramatically over the ministry of the same man" What happened to this scholar who, in 1961, appeared to be well on his way to a brilliant teaching career in graduate theological education?

The story of Hobart Freeman does not begin in Indiana, however, but in the little hamlet of Ewing, Ky., where he was born on June 17, 1920.

#### Early Education

After attending Isaac Shelby Elementary School in Louisville, Ky., for eight years, he enrolled in duPont Manual High School, also in Louisville, where he completed three and one-half years before dropping out, to work.

Several years later he attended Bryant and Stratton Business College in Louisville, where he received a diploma after only one and one-half years of study. He graduated in 1942 and in June of that year was married.

His undergraduate studies at this point in his life also included one semester of work at the University of Louisville.

Freeman and his wife, June, were not Christians at this time and life interests were more in the area of business. They moved to Tampa, Fla., where he began a freelance photography business. After a short time, they moved to St. Petersburg where he opened up a retail grocery business in addition to his photographic work.

Apparently his early years in business were quite successful. "I was making money hand over foot ... and everything I touched turned to money," he explains in his recorded testimony.

Dark clouds began to move across what was a bright horizon in 1950 and both businesses ran into trouble. He attempted to sell the retail food market but had no success. It was in January, 1952, after two years of financial struggle, that he became a Christian. His conversion to Christ took place while returning home from a night club in Tampa.

Feeling he had been called into the gospel ministry, he decided to enroll in Georgetown College in the fall of 1952, where he came in contact with the Baptist denomination and its beliefs. After a year of study at Georgetown, he was ordained as a minister by the Great Crossing Baptist Church.

It was also at Georgetown that his academic potential was first realized when he completed the four-year baccalaureate degree in Bible and history in just three years with an "A" average.

In the fall of 1955 he enrolled in Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and completed the standard Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1958 and the Master of Theology degree a year later.

While in the Master's program at Southern, he taught Hebrew and pastored the New Testament Baptist Church in Sellersburg, Ind.

During this short involvement in the Baptist ministry, Freeman felt uncomfortable with the denomination and openly criticized its programs and policies. He claimed the celebration of Christmas, along with Easter, was regarded as pagan and was rejected.

The "life of faith" concept along with "positive confession" had already become features of his life and ministry. "We claimed everything by faith ... I didn't work five minutes all the way through college or seminary," he says.

For much of the time at Southern, he and his wife served as houseparents at a home for delinquent children which provided not only food and a place to live, but unlimited study time.

The fall of 1959 brought another move for the Freeman family which now numbered five with the addition of three daughters -- Kathy, Pamela and Becky. The decision was made to pursue a Doctor's Degree in Old Testament and Hebrew at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake.

He completed the program in 1961 and was hired by the institution that Fall to teach in the Old Testament department. This was made possible, in part, by the fact that he and his wife had been rebaptized and had joined the Grace Brethren Church in Winona Lake one year earlier.

His disciplined study habits and scholarship in the classroom impressed students and faculty alike. "I often sat across from him in the library," recalled Rev. Ivan French, now pastor at Pleasant View Community Church. "He was one who could sit for hours without moving."

Freeman has written 10 books, including a major volume on the Old Testament prophets published by Moody Press in Chicago.

A deepening commitment to separatist ideas regarding Christmas, Easter and other holidays, along with open criticism of virtually all churches, failure to attend the church and meetings with students in his home, became a matter of concern to the Grace administration. Growing doctrinal differences, coupled with a lack of compatibility with his colleagues, came to a head in the fall of 1962 ending with his dismissal as a professor in January, 1963. The seminar bought up his contract for the remainder of the year and has not had contact with him since that time.

"I was fired because I refused to promote Santa Claus and my wife did not attend a Christmas party," Freeman maintained in a private conversation. School officials, however, argue that the issues were far more substantial than that.

It is noteworthy that among the controversial doctrinal and practical issues in his dismissal, divine healing was not involved. That ministry was to come much later.

By action of the board of the Winona Lake Brethren Church, he was excommunicated from membership on Feb. 24, 1963. While his official membership with the Brethren Church was severed, his doctrinal commitments remained virtually unchanged. This is evidenced in a document published by Freeman in 1964 entitled, "The Faith and Practice of the Church at Winona Lake, Indiana."

Shortly after his dismissal from Grace Seminary, the informal gatherings in his home took the form of an organized church complete with a doctrinal statement.

Of special interest to observers is the fact that between 1964 and 1966 his theological positions remained within the Baptist-Brethren tradition, but views regarding practical living and church policy shifted substantially.

The home church moved to Claypool until his 1972 alliance with Mel Greider at the Glory Barn in North Webster.

#### A Turning Point

One of the most significant turning points in his spiritual and theological experience occurred on March 19, 1966 at McCormick Seminary in Illinois when he received the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit," an experience defined by charismatic teachers as a special empowering of the Holy Spirit subsequent to personal salvation and evidenced by speaking in "new tongues."

"Dr. John Rea was responsible for my introduction to the baptism experience," Freeman noted. "That revolutionized my approach to Scripture." Rea, also a former professor at Grace Seminary, is presently teaching at a West coast charismatic seminary and at the time, was an editor at Moody Press.

It was at this point that Freeman's theological interests shifted to charismatic theology including speaking in new tongues, divine healing and the experience of special visions and revelations.

Deeply influenced by healing evangelists like Kenneth Hagin, John Osteen, Kenneth Copeland and T. L. Osborn, along with the writings of E. W. Kenyon, his ministry emphasis drifted quickly to expanded faith and healing concepts.

Freeman's association with converted gang member and alcoholic Mel Greider at the Glory Barn was an interesting one. On one hand, it provided a unique setting for his charismatic ministry to grow, but on the other, it resulted in bitter differences between the two in matters of doctrine and practice. According to observers, Freeman's position on many matters became more rigid and his contacts with outside groups began to decline.

Finally, in 1978 the two separated and Freeman held his meetings in a tent first located in Warsaw, then Goshen. By this time, however, he had established himself in the field of charismatic theology and his books and tapes were being circulated across the country.

When his ministry was moved to its present location near Wilmot, observers agree that his perspectives narrowed even more and church discipline became extremely rigid.

#### Freeman Today

What is Hobart Freeman like? Very few really know this man, including people in his congregation, simply because he is a very private individual. He is only available for counseling for a short time after the Sunday and Wednesday evening services. Otherwise assembly members have little or no contact with him.

He refuses all interviews with the media and his public appearances are largely limited to

preaching at the Faith Assembly near Wilmot. Most of his time is spent at his home on the west side of Shoe Lake where he prepares radio programs (which are aired over more than 10 stations around the country) and sermons for the Assembly.

Critical of the media which has resorted to "shabby sensationalism" in his estimation, he recently described reporters as "blind men looking for a black cat in a dark basement at midnight who is not there ... and finding him!"

I did have the privilege of two recent private meetings with Dr. Freeman at the church and later in his home and found him to be personable and intensely dedicated to his ministry. Aside from aging since his teaching days at Grace, he still exhibits a deep interest in the highly disciplined study of Scripture.

His current hobbies include photography (16mm movies) and ham radio. He has renovated a small room for his ham equipment, most of which he has built himself. He possesses an "extra class" radio operator's license which is the most advanced license the government issues for amateur ham operators. Recently he also earned a first class radio operator's license.

He has won awards for ham radio contacts from around the world, including parts of Russia. In his spare time he also enjoys building antique radio models and old telegraph keys. For a short time in the middle 1970's, he attended meetings of the Fort Wayne Radio Club.

"I have not been on the (amateur radio) air in the past two months," Freeman said in one of our conversations, "mostly due to a busy schedule of correspondence, research and the Assembly ministry."

Reports of his great personal wealth have sometimes been exaggerated or founded on faulty information. His home, consisting of a little more than 2,000 square feet, is very comfortably furnished, but is by no means in the class of a "luxurious mansion" described by some. He owns a motor home, Lincoln Continental and a small Jeep station wagon.

His personal income is largely derived from donations given at the Assembly and some of the profits from his books and tapes. "Most of the profits from the tapes go to subsidize the radio programs," he explained. "I do not ask for money on any of those programs."

Estimates on the amount given at the Faith Assembly vary from \$500 to \$2,500 a service. Donations are given to Freeman by placing money in specially marked boxes at the rear of the church. Some boxes are marked for others ministering at the assembly as well.

He has had his share of health problems over the years, beginning with polio as a child. He still limps with a withered lower right leg and wears a special lift for that short leg. He has had kidney surgery and has suffered several heart attacks.

Since his kidney surgery prior to his charismatic experience, he claims he has never been to a hospital for treatment. Rumors of emergency trips to Kosciusko Community Hospital are not verified by the records and the same is true for an alleged trip to the Mayo Clinic.

He would not comment on those specific allegations, but maintained, "I have not spent a dime on medicine or medical care since the baptism of the Holy Spirit and new insights into God's promise of healing."

#### Pulpit Mastery or Mind Control?

His grip on and influence over the minds of those who attend Faith Assembly is very strong and there are several reasons for this.

First, he has a mastery of the Scriptures which includes facility in the original languages. His presentations are characterized by careful organization and profuse Scripture quotation. Those wanting to know the Scriptures better find his teaching challenging and interesting.

Second, there is the constant claim to supernatural visions and special revelations. Since these are said to have come from God, no one in the congregation is about to challenge them, for to do so is to question God Himself.

Third, his is a ministry frequently supported by fear. Members are often reminded of the curses and punishments that follow a falling away from the faith as taught at the assembly. Illustrations of this fact are regularly paraded before the congregation, not only by Freeman, but by other ministers in the assembly.

The use of this technique came home with full force when I was leaving his house and he called my attention to the fact that virtually all the reporters who had recently spoke critically of his ministry had since suffered illness, injury or death. I assumed that bit of information was for my benefit.

Finally, the seclusion and discipline of his Faith Assembly ministry which forbids reading newspapers, watching television and having fellowship with members of other churches, virtually guarantees an uncritical commitment to his ideas. (Members utilize only materials (tapes and books) produced by him.)

#### Hobart Freeman: a Charles Manson or Jim Jones?

I doubt it. He has many positive accomplishments to his credit and most of his theology falls within the framework of evangelical through generally and charismatic ideas specifically. This area will be examined in a later article.

His insistence on absolute obedience to all his ideas and the reinforcement of those ideas by fear and seclusion is dangerous and has been tragic for many young families.

Hobart Freeman is a scholar, capable author, effective teacher and friend to many who have had significant needs. On the other hand, his has been a ministry of turmoil, suspicion, fear and despair to others.

According to some, he is a religious tyrant and cultist, but to others, a man of God who exhibits great faith and meet the critical spiritual, physical and emotional needs of thousands. Clearly, his ministry presents a paradox.

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