

RELIGION

FUNDAMENTALISTS

Dr. McIntire's Magic Touch

After four decades as archfoe of liberal Protestantism, the Rev. Carl McIntire, 63, has proved that he has a rare gift: everything he touches turns to schism. Contention has dogged him since his seminary days, when he joined a fundamentalist rebellion against liberalizing trends within the Presbyterian Church. Later, he split with fellow rebels to form his own sect, the Bible Presbyterian Church—and then his own church split yet again. Defections have periodically shaken the ranks of his American Council of Christian Churches (A.C.C.C.) and more recently his International Council of Christian Churches (I.C.C.C.), organizations that McIntire formed in 1941 and 1948, respectively, to oppose the National and World Councils of Churches.

The attrition is growing. Late last month, at its annual convention in Columbus, Ohio, the A.C.C.C. went so far as to repudiate its founder. McIntire was pointedly not returned to the council's executive committee, on which he has sat for 28 years. The convention also passed a resolution criticizing him for his cavalier transfer of an A.C.C.C. relief fund to the I.C.C.C.—and then spending some 54% of nearly half a million dollars for "administrative expenses" over eight years.

Imperious Ways. Most A.C.C.C. members still profess a fundamentalism that might best be characterized as responsible extremism. But many who agree with McIntire theologically have become increasingly edgy about his political pronouncements, especially his support of

civil rights opponents like Georgia Governor Lester Maddox. Nor do McIntire's internal political methods endear him to colleagues. A.C.C.C. General Secretary John Millheim notes that his motto seems to be "Let us reason together and do it my way." As for the I.C.C.C., McIntire's political attitudes and imperious ways have proved so embarrassing to missions that an estimated 1,900 of some 2,000 missionary members have withdrawn from the organization. Yet another McIntire enterprise, Shelton College in Cape May, N.J., is undergoing a state challenge to its accreditation.

McIntire is not giving up by any manner of means. More than 600 radio stations carry his weekday "20th century Reformation" broadcasts. He says that he is forming a rival right-wing group to the A.C.C.C. that he will call the American Christian Action Council. And he controls the small (an estimated 8,000 members) Bible Presbyterian Church—at least for the time being. Last month, at the church's synodal convention, 40% of the delegates voted for a rival candidate to replace Founder McIntire as moderator.

MONASTICISM

The Downfall of Dom Besret

In the damp green hills of Brittany stands Abbaye de Boquen, a small 12th century monastery, where cloistered Cistercian monks have prayed and tilled the soil in silent serenity for centuries. In recent years, though, the monastery has welcomed the outside world with a sign at the gate proclaiming: "The brothers would like you to share in their search for spiritual unity and liberty." Since 1964, the abbey has been a center for audacious innovation under its prior, Dom Bernard Besret, now 34.

Last week a new prior arrived in Boquen. Dom Besret (pronounced beret) had been summoned to Rome and dismissed for threatening to destroy the monastic concept. Cistercian superiors were unmoved by his pleas to be permitted to stay on as "president" of a more open community. Explained a Vatican official privately: "If you are going to have a monastery, you must have a monastery. It can't be a country club."

True to Life. More like a hippie commune than a country club, the abbey, under Dom Besret's direction, was open to everyone. Young and old, men and women, even non-Catholics, could freely come and go. When they met, they kissed each other three times on the cheek. Laymen helped prepare meals, tend the vegetable garden and the six cows. Prayers were informal and spontaneous, usually including references to world events and problems of the day. Dom Besret's message was simple: overcome all personal differences and become one people in love.

The word spread. Dozens of visitors

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PREACHING SERMON IN BOQUEN
One people in love.

sometimes attended discussion meetings in the austere study of the abbey known as "The Pit." More and more people started dropping in for a few hours or to stay for a few days. When the news of Dom Besret's dismissal got out, some 12,000 people made their way to the monastery to attend Sunday Mass. Students from Rennes and Brest universities threatened to march on Boquen and occupy it in protest. The local bishop strongly approved of Dom Besret's experiment, which, he said, "was followed with sympathy and hope by many Christians, priests as well as laity."

Dom Besret, a tall, Rome-trained doctor of theology, encouraged his monks to mix with people in the bistros and shops of neighboring villages. At monastery masses, the traditional Host was replaced with crusty Breton bread passed around in baskets. "We have no right to do something simply because it is written in a book," Dom Besret explained. "It must be true to life. Otherwise, it's only theater."

His conflict with his Roman superiors started only recently, when he called for reforms beyond the monastery. All priests, he preached, should take a sabbatical year during which they could decide whether to change their lives and marry or return to their vocations. He refused to accept any new novices as long as service in the church was not "defined with sufficient clarity."

Far from destroying monastic life, Dom Besret claims, he was groping for more efficient forms—"free of all legalism, pharisaism and anachronism"—more suitable to modern man. At Easter, after writing a book and visiting the U.S., he will return to Boquen as a simple monk. He still hopes that, in the end, the Boquen experiment will be permitted to continue and help transform monasteries into living centers and catalysts of Christianity once again.



MCINTIRE AND FOLLOWERS
Everything is schism.