



The Day They Evicted Our Church

(written in 2013)

&

Epilogue

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[Names in this article have been deleted because of the threat of ‘defamation’ charges laid against the author]

Fifty years ago A.W.Tozer stated: *‘Let me go out on a limb a little bit and prophesy. I see the time coming when all the holy men whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit will desert worldly Evangelicalism, one by one. The house will be left desolate and there will not be a man of God, a man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, left among them. As the Church now stands, the man who sees this condition of worldly evangelicalism is written off as somewhat fanatical. But the day is coming when the house will be left desolate and there will not be a man of God among them. I would like to live long enough to watch this develop and see how things turn out. I would like to live to see the time when the men and women of God - holy, separated and spiritually enlightened - walk out of the evangelical church and form a group of their own; when they get off the sinking ship and let her go down in the brackish and worldliness and form a new ark to ride out the storm’.*

The Background

For almost 20 years I have been an elder or a pastoring elder in an evangelical Bible believing autonomous church, but one which was affiliated with the *Churches of Christ Queensland*. We have been largely separate in doctrine and in practice and with little contact with Churches of Christ Queensland. Over the last decade the liberal nature of the Churches of Christ in Queensland from time to time bothered some members. Successive leaderships stood apart from any association, but the ‘affiliation’ increasingly bothered some of us, particularly recently when we discovered the denomination was paying monies to the *World Council of Churches*. Patiently we began to inform the people as to the differences in doctrine and philosophy wherever it was necessary. In 2012 we changed our name to *Hervey Bay Bible Church* and the following year began enquiries to the possibility of having the title deeds returned to us for the property owned and paid for in full decades ago by the church membership.

As I write this article the emotions are still raw. In the last few weeks I have seen the worst injustice inflicted by any denomination upon a group of Bible believing people. Rather than allow my emotions to run, it be best if I transcribe the diary, as the entries below are the historical facts..

The Name Change

1. Late in 2012 at an annual General meeting (August) and then at a special meeting (Nov.25th) Hervey Bay Church of Christ (HBCC) changed its name to *Hervey Bay Bible Church* (HBBC) to ‘*better reflect the beliefs of our church*’ in contrast to the more liberal views, teachings and direction of the Queensland Churches of Christ (CofCQ). Those CofCQ teachings were exemplified in various magazines and articles which included ecumenism with other religions; women in ministry positions; leaders wavering on homosexuality; baptism as part of salvation; and many other liberal or unbiblical teachings.

The name change to *Hervey Bay Bible Church* was carried with a *large majority* of votes in the local church.

The Enquiry

2. Subsequent to this name change, which was *fully endorsed* by CofCQ, the following Sunday a CofCQ executive member attended one of HBBC services. At the end of the service to the surprise of two elders the CofC executive member asked the two elders if they wanted HBBC to ‘disaffiliate’. [The HBBC leadership consisted of 3 elders and 2 deacons]. The two elders answered that they would be interested in discussing what that entailed and also discussing further why we had changed our name to HBBC, as well as the status of the buildings (paid for over many years by the membership of the local church) with respect to the title deeds being held ‘in trust’.

One early meeting

3. Two representatives from the Queensland executive board came and spoke to the two elders on 17th January. When the two elders attempted to discuss doctrinal differences one of the executives said ‘*I am not interested in doctrine*’.

The other CofCQ executive member asked if we thought HBBC were ‘*the only ones in this town*’ (insinuating that we felt we were the only truly ‘Christian’ group). The author strongly rebuked the man, stating he knew very well we were not a ‘cult’ and that we did not think or teach that we were the ‘*only ones*’.

The elders felt that both CofCQ men were not listening to what they were attempting to convey about HBBC and its desire to remain 'conservative' (i.e. 'biblical'). The meeting was at times tense and unfruitful. At the end of the meeting the Queensland CofC men asked '*do you want to disaffiliate?*' We stated we would only do that after we had the support of the full leadership and the membership. However, the immediate answer to that statement was that they [the CofCQ] would report to 'Conference' and that *they would decide* as to what was to happen to HBBC.

Subsequently, HBBC sought solicitors advice as to the legalities of the property and what was the concept of 'deeds' being in 'beneficial trust'.

The Ultimatum

4. To the surprise of all, on 26th August 2013 HBBC received a letter from the 'CEO' of CofCQ stating that HBBC was '*following a different path to CofCQ*' and that this was '*not in the best interests of CofCQ*'. A '*proposal*' was put to HBBC that they '*pay to CofCQ the sum of \$1,000,000*' [one million dollars] to have the title deeds 'returned'; and that HBBC '*resign from membership of CofCQ*'. There was the threat of legal action if an agreement could not be reached to have the land and buildings forfeited to CofCQ.

HBBC was given only *14 days* to reply.

However, this above letter was sent *registered mail* on the 10th September 2013 - *15 days later than the date on the letter*. This made it physically impossible for HBBC to reply within '14 days'. (The letter arrived on the 11th of September and was also not sighted by the entire leadership until the following Sunday).

5. We gave the letter to our solicitors and instructed them to reply with a letter stating we would not pay any monies for something the members already owned (from the 1970's) and that CofCQ held the deeds in 'beneficial trust' only.

Unbeknown to HBBC, the solicitor did not send any reply for a month.

6. We then received another letter (25th Oct) from the same ‘CEO’ of CofCQ stating ‘*I note I have not received the courtesy of a response*’. This letter was quite stern in tone and it stated ‘*HBBC is not entitled to the ownership, use or occupation of the church buildings and land owned by Churches of Christ... If I do not receive a satisfactory response from you by 9am on Friday 1st November 2013 then steps will be taken by CofCQ as they may be advised to seek all available legal remedies against HBBC including recovery of possession of the land from HBBC and disaffiliation of HBBC... Please revert to me as to your position by 9am Friday November, 2013*’.

7. The Hervey Bay Bible church (HBBC) was surprised by this letter and the short deadline set. They replied that it was ‘*impossible to meet these demands in such a short period (6 days)... We hope to have the issue discussed and finalised further some time in November and then we will contact you immediately with further notice of our intentions*’.

8. HBBC then discovered that although the letter by CofCQ was addressed ‘*To the Leadership*’ of HBBC it was also sent by e-mail and blind carbon copied to various local church members, causing concern to many of them. We thus wrote to the ‘CEO’ on the 29/10/2013 and stated our disappointment that members should be receiving a letter addressed ‘*To the Leadership*’... We added: ‘*We humbly and prayerfully ask the board of Churches of Christ to please reconsider resolving this issue in a better manner*’.

9. HBBC then received a letter from the ‘CEO’ and his executive board on Nov.1 stating: ‘*we consider that you have had sufficient time to consider and respond to our proposal... that proposal is now withdrawn... steps will now be taken... regarding its [CofCQ] property and disaffiliation of the Hervey Bay Bible church*’.

The Eviction

10. HBBC received a final letter dated 8th Nov. stating that: ‘*Within 7 days HBBC will no longer be permitted to enter upon and use the land at Hervey Bay... CofCQ will seek an injunction relief to restrain HBBC continuing to use and occupation of the land... and seek recovery of funds...*’

11. Two elders and one deacon then discovered that the Qld Churches of Christ executive had made a private offer to the third pastoring elder...*‘to continue on as a ‘churches of Christ pastor’ and that the other two elders (including the author) must ‘leave the church’*. The pastoring elder was given 24 hours by CofCQ to ‘respond’. Unbeknowns to the leadership the following day the pastoring elder accepted this offer *without the consent or discussion with the leadership or the members*.

12. The two remaining elders met twice with the pastoring elder and pleaded with him to give the leadership and the members (who had employed him) a vote on this decision. The answer was ‘no’ and no reason was given.

Bank Accounts Changed

13. On the Thursday members of the executive CofCQ came to town and held an invitation only meeting with a selective handful of members of the church as well as past members. The two elders and one deacon were not invited and only discovered the meeting took place almost a week later.

On the same day of the meeting the bank accounts were altered. Two members of the CofCQ had driven up from Brisbane and were joined by the treasurer/deacon with the pastoring elder of HBBC and they all attended a meeting at the bank where the two elders, (including this author), *had their names and signatures removed* from the bank cheque authorisation document. This was done without permission and was conducted secretly from the full eldership, the leadership or the members.

The People Vote

14. Consequently, the two elders of HBBC instructed the pastoring elder that he would not be preaching that Sunday and that the members would vote on the action by CofCQ and the private agreement by them with the pastor.

During the week all members were contacted and asked to attend an urgent meeting to be held before the eviction notice came into effect on Friday. (There had been previous members meetings to update fully the church on the situation as it was progressing).

The members voted on the following: *‘Churches of Christ Queensland have decided that from next Friday 15/11/13, Hervey Bay Bible Church will no longer be permitted to enter upon and use the land at Neils St, Hervey Bay. In its place... [the pastoring elder] has informed us that he has made an agreement with Churches of Christ Queensland to pastor a church to be known as Hervey Bay Church of Christ, and...[the treasurer/deacon] is to be part of that leadership. I agree or I disagree with the actions of Churches of Christ Queensland’.*

The vote was attended by 25 members. 2 agreed, 1 abstained and 22 disagreed with the action by CofCQ. The vote was 88% *against the action of CofCQ.* (A few members were away and out of town, and arguably approximately 8 in total could be said to agree to the action of CofCQ, but chose not to attend or vote).

The People Walk

15. For the sake of the members, HBBC decided not to fight the coming eviction threat and to vacate the premises and begin services elsewhere. The Sunday of the vote there was a mass walkout of members and non members. The next Sunday saw 39 people attend a service in a CWA hall. *This was more than two thirds of the entire church.* The people who chose to remain in the property as ‘Church of Christ’ were a small minority.

(Unbeknowns to the leadership, some of the members remaining who had disagreed with the direction of the church and the leadership had been in private contact with the CofCQ over a period of time. These actions were unknown to the leadership at the time).

Assessment

Cof CQ acted hastily, and *not in accordance with the requirements of their own constitution* by not properly disaffiliating HBBC and issuing the threat of eviction.

This was done without the approval of more than 2/3 of the members of the local church. The membership of HBBC viewed this take-over of the land, church buildings, and cash on hand to be a violent and sudden confiscation of their property and assets (over 2 million dollars) by the Churches of Christ Queensland.

The land and building purchase price was repaid to the CofCQ over many years by members and attendees and the deeds held in ‘trust’ for *this congregation*.

No negotiations were held with the leadership before the private offer was made to the pastoring elder and the bank accounts altered.

HBBC *never saw or had a visit from* the CEO of CofCQ who wrote many of the strong letters (all documentation of correspondence is available). *Nor did the Cof CQ executive ever meet with the leadership of HBBC in the entire 10 months prior to the eviction threat.*

At the time of these actions HBBC and its members were fully affiliated with the CofCQ and occupying the building, having church services, etc.

To date, HBBC has never received any confirmation that they are ‘disaffiliated’.

A fight for honesty and truth then began...

Epilogue

The Fight for Truth

Hervey Bay Bible Church (HBBC) was forced to begin services elsewhere. The author, and now pastoring elder of Hervey Bay Bible Church (HBBC), began a tiresome campaign of writing to every Church of Christ in Queensland with information about the eviction. An offer was also extended to view an article on the doctrines of the Churches of Christ '*Restoration Movement*'. (1)

As well, he kept urging the Queensland executive and Conference to agree to the following:

1. A *meeting* with Conference and the Executive to ascertain exactly why the eviction had occurred and what the 'charges' were.

2. That HBBC be *disaffiliated* as required by their own CofCQ Constitution.

The CofCQ executive and Conference consistently refused to meet with or 'disaffiliate' the Bible Church. But the author was convinced that both sides needed to know what the issues really were and what actions had been done behind the scenes. The truth of the eviction had already gone far and wide. Many churches agreed that there was simply no Christian way to evict a church in the manner with which this was done.

After six months of writing articles, exposing the event and some churches offering verbal support, as well as approaches by some church leaders to the CofCQ executives, the author was finally and suddenly approached by one of the Queensland executive. This executive asked what was desired that would help bring 'closure' for us. The author repeated the two requests above. The first request for a meeting was granted; the second request for disaffiliation was denied. A small monetary 'gift' was offered to the HBBC to help with 'closure' and

(1) The author has written a booklet '*The Churches of Christ and the Restoration Movement*'.

setting up of the ‘new’ church (which had already been operating and growing successfully).

I am thankful to this one executive member of Churches of Christ who eventually took it upon himself to bring the two parties together and bring at least a measure of truth and honesty to the issues.

The Meeting

At a subsequent meeting in Brisbane the two HBBC elders met with members of the Churches of Christ Conference executive. *The CEO was not present*. Several matters were resolved. There were misunderstandings, but there were also some outright untruths which had been reportedly told by a few in the local church (now reverted to ‘Hervey Bay Church of Christ’). These were some of the same people who for years had troubled previous pastors and the church. One untruth spread was that both the editor and the second elder intended to ‘*take the monies*’ in the bank accounts. This was partly what spurred the CofCQ on to quick and harsh action. (The discussion and letters by the ‘CEO’ showed this clearly).

When the facts were reviewed, the history of the church shown and the character of the two elders defended, the Conference men present at the meeting apologised to the author and the other elder present - for the ‘misleading information’ received, ‘perceived perceptions’ and for ‘hastiness’ in action.

The author requested a letter be sent to churches and to HBBC expressing this and that the record be set straight. A letter was afterward sent to the author only from the Queensland Conference acknowledging ‘*that we learn from the experiences*’. The Conference ‘*acknowledged that in respect we could have perhaps done things differently from our end in trying to resolve the issues and perceived differences*’. Although this letter was muted and dumbed down (arguably for legal reasons), it did somewhat admit what was said more clearly at the meeting - that CofCQ had acted hastily and without facts.

The author also acknowledges that his writings against the Ecumenism and doctrines of the Churches of Christ were offensive to many CofC

leaders. It was also revealed that selected material and sermons by the author had been privately sent to the denomination by local church members which aggravated the situation.

Assessment

One of the first things that should have been done in this tragic event was simply *a meeting with the entire leadership* of HBBC, which sadly was never done in the 12 months prior (despite Queensland executives falsely stating this was done). We, the leadership of HBBC, have in fact still never met the ‘CEO’ of CofCQ!

There are lessons to be learned in dealing with such serious issues - not by hearsay or from a minority of troublemakers in a local church, but with the *leadership* who also, in this case, represented the *majority* of the members. This should have been done in a Biblical and open fashion.

The leadership of Hervey Bay Bible Church do not shrink from our judgement that this eviction should never have occurred in *the way it did* - particularly using demonstrably false information and *without any meetings with the leaders for over 12 months prior to these events*.

The editor has publicly written to all Queensland Churches of Christ and the Queensland Conference to apologise for any offence caused by things said or written in letters or articles circulated.

However, the leaders of HBBC see the hand of God in separating his people from a denomination that has drifted further and further away from Gospel based moorings and become increasingly Ecumenical. There had been a lack of Biblical teaching and a shift on issues such as same-sex marriage, homosexuality and women in ministry. At the root of much of this is the weakening on the doctrines of ‘Inspiration’ and the all sufficiency of scripture, as shown in many articles in CofCQ magazines in the last few years.

I am somewhat ashamed that this separation did not occur many years ago. But the leadership’s concern was always a *pastoral one* for the people in first teaching and equipping them to understand the *need* for separation. Many will disagree with the length of time it took to separate from what has been a liberal/social organisation for many years. But

the end result has seen not just a destructive split which often occurs in these situations, but rather a *majority* of people who are committed to Bible truths and separation and with a testimony of the stripping of their property, money, and a ruthless eviction to prove it!

The ‘Revival’

It might encourage our readers to know God has turned these unsavory events into a blessing! Following the eviction *HBBC immediately grew and almost doubled in numbers in the first 12 months* (from approximately 35 hurt and confused people). The services have taken on a new zeal and unity.

But more importantly people have come forward to use their giftings as never before. Several men are being trained to take on the ministry of preaching and teaching. An extra home study group has been added and nearly *two thirds of the church are now involved in mid week study or discipleship groups*. A salvation and several baptisms took place in the first 18 months as well as a marriage.

Prayer meetings are well attended and have proven to be the power house of the church and with numerous and obvious answers to many prayers. The people have grown into a deeper, more mature understanding of God’s Word. (The doctrine we teach is not any different to that which was taught a decade or more ago). There has not been a single divisive issue within the assembly in the last 2 years since the eviction. There is a great unity and blessing that we as a leadership have not seen in a decade or more!

We are living in days when true Bible churches will need to be separated from apostate denominations as they go headlong into apostasy. The worldliness and false liberal doctrines of the major denominations are reaching new proportions.

We at HBBC believe the Lord has ‘*severed*’ his people (Lev.20:26). We are commanded to be ‘*separate*’ and ‘*withdraw*’ from those ‘*contrary to the doctrine*’ of ‘*the faith once delivered*’ (2Thess.3:6; Rom.16:17; Jude 3) and to ‘*come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*’ (2Cor.6:17).

We pray this encourages those reading this and that it displays just how *God can bring about such blessing from adversity*.

May the true Gospel go out in increasing measure in days to come.

Terry Arnold (Pastoring elder for Hervey Bay Bible Church)

2018 Addendum:

After five years since the eviction the church HBBC continues to thrive. Several more people have been saved and baptised. More new families have been added and the church is more than double its original numbers. We are now looking to the Lord for an associate pastor for 2019 or if the Lord leads, a replacement pastor for the future.

