

**Anonymous critique of Rev. Bill McAtee after his guest sermon  
at a church to which he'd been invited to come as a minister,  
scrawled by an anonymous parishioner**

In early 1964, the end of Rev. Bill McAtee's first 5-year "call" at the Presbyterian church in Amory MS was nearing, though he wasn't yet actively looking for a new position. A seminary friend of his, who was also a friend of a member of the Columbia Presbyterian Church, gave Bill's name to the church's pastoral search committee. Three members of the committee, including its chairman, Buddy McLean (who in 1965 became the pivotal mayor of Columbia), flew up to Amory on March 1, 1964 to meet him. They met in the airplane at the airport, and three days later invited him to meet the full committee in Columbia, which he did on March 10. While there, he preached a trial sermon, "The 20-20 Vision of the Church," to 45 members of the congregation. A congregational vote was taken on March 15, and a correspondence ensued. These are the first five letters.

Columbia, Miss  
March 16, 1964

Dear Sir:

This is to inform you of the vote cast at the Columbia Pres. church March 15.

There were 59 votes cast by standing vote. (If it had been secret there would have been a vast difference.)

43 for you

16 against.

of those against four were your elders (out of 8 on the session! 50% against you already!!)

Two were deacons!  
one a member of the pulpit committee!!

Before this vote was taken - after hearing you and learning of your views, four different people said that if you did accept this pulpit they would not bother to come. They would listen to television instead.

I guess you know this whole thing has been railroaded - it was decided at a fish camp - (We don't run our Lord's work at that place.)

In other words - if you do take this, just know some want you. They like you as a friend. But there is a big % who don't want you - and if the vote had been secret you would have had at least ten more against you who didn't have g\_\_s to stand up but had already said they did not want you.

Too Bad.

Just a church member - not a fisher

*(Note: that last underlined word is apparently a reference to the "fish camp" mentioned above. Rev. McAtee describes it as "a fine building with a high vaulted ceiling in the main room," which belonged to Buddy McLean's brother-in-law.*

**Rev. Bill McAtee's response  
to the anonymous critique of him and the guest sermon he'd preached  
in the church to which he had been asked to become minister**

Lest something that I have said or done might have been misunderstood, let me make a simple statement of my position with regard to my ministry:

I am a Christian, I am an American, I am a Mississippian, in that order.

My Father, a native of Mississippi, served his entire ministry in Mississippi. I am a child of the manse and know the tensions and fears of our time. I have served a church in Mississippi respectfully and acceptably for five years.

Essentially I am a Christian Pastor who wants to live through this time of stress and growth with my people, serving them to the best of my ability, not adding to the tension or compounding it.

I recognize that many good and devoted Christians have sharp differences of opinion, some segregationists and others integrationists -- adopting these labels by their choice. I prefer the label Christian rather than either, for I feel the Christian Gospel is committed to neither but is greater than both. However, I firmly respect and will defend the right of difference of opinion.

I will love all people and feel no malice in my heart toward anyone regardless of their beliefs or positions in life; and by God's grace I will be a pastor to all, praying with and for them that they may earnestly find God's will for them.

I am devoted to a free pulpit in which God will use me to proclaim his whole Gospel as he leads me through the Holy Spirit in my time. I will preach to please no one save Jesus Christ my Lord. I will never enter the pulpit without having first given my sermon to God, prayerfully seeking his will and standing under his judgement.

I am not a crusader for any certain cause or position other than the cause or position of Jesus Christ as it is revealed to me. I have not program for social change. But where God's word speaks to human need and human relations I will proclaim that word. I am committed to the orderly progress of the Church whereby people are reached for Jesus Christ.

I look to the Session of the Church as elected leaders to promote the peace and purity of the Church. I give myself to encouraging the Session to meet its responsibility of leading the Congregation in seeking and following the will of God for the Church.

"The perfect peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

3/18/64

In Christ's Name.  
William Graeber McAtee

**Pastoral search committee chairman Buddy McLean's  
encouraging note to Rev. Bill McAtee  
about the church being strongly in favor of his coming**

T. C. GRIFFITH AGENCY, Inc.

Insurance

POST OFFICE BOX 168, COLUMBIA, MISSISSIPPI • TELEPHONE RE 6-4537

March 21, 1964

Rev. W. G. Mc Atee  
Presbyterian Church  
Amory, Miss.

Dear Bill,

I enjoyed very much our visit with you last Wednesday and trust that our talk was reassuring to you. Sunday I was really low but every day since I have become more optimistic as members Of the church have asked "is Bill coming." It now appears that this is the best thing that could have happened to the church. Where as we would have gone on knowing that there were those that would hinder the progress of the church most of the membership was not aware of this feeling or at least it was not clearly defined to them but now everyone knows the situation and by far the majority are ready to see that it in no way effects the progress of the church. The Good Lord moves people in strange ways.

I delivered your statement to the session and it was their opinion that it was not necessary to give same to the congregation as they had made their decision and certainly there was no doubt in their mind. I think the whole group was very impressed by the statement and though we all feel that it was unnecessary it does allow them to answer any questions posed by the membership with authority.

I believe that the opportunity for service has been increased many fold by the happenings of the last week.

Please give my best to Millie and if the Good Lord is willing I trust that our paths will cross again in the very near future. If there is anything I can help with do not hesitate to call.



Buddy

*(photo: McLean family archive)*

**Rev. Bill McAtee's note to search committee chairman Buddy McLean  
accepting the pastoral position**

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
AMORY, MISSISSIPPI

WILLIAM G. McATEE  
MINISTER

March 24, 1964

Mr. Earl D. McLean, Jr.  
Columbia  
Mississippi

Dear Buddy,

Having prayed earnestly to find God's will for my life and having honestly tried to understand and know the situation of the Church in Columbia, I do hereby inform you that I am taking steps to accept the call extended me by the congregation on March 15. In doing this I simply ask the congregation to join with me in renewed allegiance to our Lord and Saviour in seeking and following His will for us.

At a Session Meeting, March 25, I am asking the Session of this church to call a congregational meeting to concur with me in asking St. Andrew's Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relation between the Amory Presbyterian Church and me, in order that I may be dismissed to South Mississippi Presbytery to be examined and received so that I may accept the call extended by the Columbia Church.

St. Andrew's Presbytery will meet in a called meeting on April 13. This will clear the way for me to come before South Mississippi Presbytery on April 21. The Congregational Meeting here is to be called for April 12.

Extend my personal regards to the Congregation and ask them on my behalf to enter a season of prayer and preparation for my coming.



Sincerely

William G. McAtee

*Rev. William G. McAtee on the day of his  
installation service at the Columbia  
Presbyterian Church, May 10, 1964.*

*(photo: McAtee photo archive)*

**Pastoral search committee chairman Buddy McLean's  
note to Rev. Bill McAtee,  
very happy that he has accepted the Church's offer**

T. C. GRIFFITH AGENCY, Inc.

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POST OFFICE BOX 168, COLUMBIA, MISSISSIPPI • TELEPHONE RE 6-4537

March 24, 1964

Dear Bill,

I was indeed pleased to receive your call last Sunday and hear the good news. People have been asking all week if you were coming and I have really had to keep on guard not to give away the news. Incidentally, I forgot to mention on the phone that this past Sunday after the vote and unpleasant discussion of last Sunday we had a very good attendance at church which I was pleased to see. My thinking now is to call the nominating committee together Thursday and announce the good news.

As soon as I hear from Dwain Epps I will let you know what his plans are for helping us. I certainly agree on your thinking regarding his approach to the race problems. We certainly will make no commitment without your approval.

Regarding your moving I have a personal friend here who is in that business and if you have no commitments as to who will move you I would like to put a word in for him. Of course the church will pay for the move.

If there is anything you need this way please call.

Please give my best to Millie and we are looking forward to seeing both of you.

Sincerely

Buddy