

T. T. BRUMBAUGH

by

Charles C. Parlin, Sr.

Immediately after the end of World War II, the Methodist Board of Missions sought to send their Associate General Secretary, Rev. T. T. Brumbaugh, to Okinawa and Japan, still under U.S.A. military control, to contact surviving Christians and to see about reestablishing our Christian mission work there. He had been a missionary in Japan and spoke the language. On the basis of information filed by the McCarthy forces that he was a communist, the Military denied him a visa. Here was a real challenge to the church. I was asked to appeal and, if turned down by the Military Court, to take the case to the Supreme Court as an unconstitutional interference with the working of a church. Preparation of the case developed that T. T. (as he was known) was an out-and-out pacifist and had signed many letters and petitions sponsored, so the claim was, by communist-dominated organizations; and he had been in a race-riot in Detroit which was supposed to have been communist inspired. In college, T. T. had been a champion sprinter, so when he saw two Negro lads being beaten he had been the first to get to their aid. In trying to develop the facts of this particular event, T. T. told me that a Catholic priest had been shoulder-to-shoulder with him in that fight to protect those two lads and had helped drag them into a building where they could be protected until the police came; and certainly the priest was no communist. I sent an investigator out to Detroit but the priest, now a Monsignor, declined to give an affidavit but said he might write directly to the Military Court. As the trial opened in Washington, the Chief of the Military Court asked me to come privately to his office. He said he wanted me to know that he was a Roman Catholic and knew nothing about the organization of the Methodist Church; asked that I take it slowly and bring out in the evidence T. T. Brumbaugh's function in the church; that he realized that this case involved a church-state issue of major importance; that he tried to be a good Catholic and that early this morning he had gone to Mass and asked Divine Guidance in the case. I told him I appreciated his speaking to me in this way and that with Divine Guidance I was certain the case would come out right. In the trial we had a series of witnesses, including T. T. Brumbaugh, and all the McCarthy charges were hurled at him. At an intermission the

Chief Justice of the Military again asked to see me, privately in his office, and he showed me a letter he had received from the Detroit Monsignor. The Chief Justice said he would not take responsibility for putting the letter in evidence or withholding it from evidence—I would have to make the decision. The letter read substantially as follows:

“I understand T. T. Brumbaugh, a Methodist missionary, is applying for visa to Okinawa and Japan. I hope it will not be granted. These Protestant missionaries merely cause confusion in the religious life of those countries.

“But T. T. Brumbaugh is no more communist than I am; he and I shared much when we were both, for a time, stationed in Detroit. Personally, he is a fine fellow.

“This letter is still in my typewriter. I have just reread the first two paragraphs. I have changed my mind. The Government substituting its judgment for the judgment of a church; I don't like the handwriting on the wall. Please issue the visa.”

I told the Judge: “Put the letter in evidence.” Whether it was the testimony of my witnesses or the letter from the Monsignor, I will never know, but the visa was promptly issued and a chance to argue a spectacular case in the Supreme Court of the U.S. I lost! In my library I have a Bible given to me by the Board of Missions in appreciation, and inscribed by many of the Church leaders of the day.