

# The History of the Institutional Controversy

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Those who have a general knowledge of churches of Christ today are aware of the fact that a division took place during the last half of the 20th Century. This division took place over doctrinal issues concerning the organization, work, and mission of the Lord's church. In many respects, this division reflected many of the same issues that had caused division during the latter half of the 19th Century which resulted in two distinct groups — the Christian Church and churches of Christ. In the ensuing years, the Christian Church itself has suffered a division, with the more liberal element identified as the Disciples of Christ, and the more conservative part identified as the Independent Christian Church.

In a convention of the Disciples group some years ago, they acknowledged, "We are a denomination, and we might as well admit it, and get on with the business of being a denomination." That is not an exact quote, but expresses what was said, as it was reported to me.

Some may wonder why it takes 50 years for a division to become complete. There are some issues that brethren must take time to study. There are ties of friendship and brotherhood that are slow to be broken. My father, Yater Tant (1908-1997), went to school with many preachers that ended up on the other side, and they often worked together in meetings in their younger years. I knew these men, as they were in my parents' home and I in theirs. But now my own children have no association with these men, thus in the third generation, the lines of division are pretty well drawn.

Sadly, bitterness and wild charges often accompany division. Conservative brethren were oft called "orphan-haters" and "anti-cooperation", and were thus labeled "antis." This is the same appellation that was given to those who were opposed to instrumental music and missionary societies in the 19th Century. "While there are a few places where "anti-ism" is still a real threat to the true faith, it is generally of no consequence. Isolated little groups of 'antis' still meet, but they are withering away and are having no appreciable effect on the brotherhood at large." This speaker went on to say that this "false doctrine" was "antagonistic to clear Bible teaching," and the "typical 'anti' usually cut his own throat by his arrogant and malicious acts and statements" and was "quick to draw the line of fellowship and exclude himself from the larger portion of our brotherhood" [Reubel Shelley, Freed-Hardeman Lectures, 1970].

Nine years later Ira North, editor of the Gospel Advocate (an influential journal among churches of Christ) estimated that the "antis" composed 5% of the churches, and pleaded with them to "come back home ... to the old paths ... and preach again in the great churches," claiming that the "anti doctrine cannot build churches, inspire missionaries, and encourage pure and undefiled religion." One college professor argued that those who believe Christians could "visit

the fatherless and widows by taking them in your home” have “taken the narrow, crooked pig-path of radicalism.” (That sounds like a pretty “radical” statement!)

In this treatise, we want to take a look at the past and see where we are today. I acknowledge the research of Homer Hailey, Steve Wolfgang, Ed Harrell, and others, which has been of great help in preparing this material. In fact, a good bit of the substance of this was taken from a tract Wolfgang wrote several years ago.

## The Bible and Apostasy

The Old Testament was full of apostasy. Prophecies concerning this were made even before Israel entered the Promised Land. *“Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach thou it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, flowing with milk and honey, and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxed fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and despise me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are come upon them, that this song shall testify before them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they frame this day, before I have brought them into the land which I swear”* ([Deuteronomy 31:19-21](#)). The people prospered, grew fat, and fell away. Time and again we have the story repeated — a period of faithful service, apostasy, oppression, repentance, restoration, etc. But finally, God’s patient ran out, and Israel was no more.

The New Testament history presents a similar picture. Once more many warnings were given about departures from the truth. Paul gave charge to the Ephesian elders in [Acts 20:28-30](#): *“Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

Paul gave such a warning to Timothy: *“But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron”* ([1 Timothy 4:1-2](#)). Then we note in [Hebrews 3:12](#): *“Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God.”*

Within the second century, we see the trend beginning of the hierarchal system that culminated in the Catholic system’s pope. This began in the local church with one elder becoming predominant, and the presiding elders in churches in a given area forming a council. Within this area, one elder came to preside, who then joined with presiding elders in other areas, which obviously led to a supreme bishop or pope. This is a clear departure from Biblical directives. *“The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am*

*also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:1-2).* The only flock, or church, which elders are to tend is the one "among them," not somewhere else!

Although there is evidence of small, persecuted groups following the New Testament order through the centuries, they were scattered and isolated. These centuries are called the Dark Ages, with more than one application of meaning.

## The 19th Century -- The Beginning of Restoration

The 16th Century saw the start of efforts to "reform" the Catholic Church. It had grown in power and corruption, and in many respects came to rule much of the civilized world. Augustine, born in 354, is considered the "Father of Roman Catholicism," and formulated a doctrine that greatly contributed to the political power of the church, which gave the pope authority over even kings and emperors. In commenting on this matter, Alexander Allen says:

"The church was here by divine appointment, and if so it was the divine will that all men should come into it; and if they would not come of themselves, they must be forced to do so; and if the church lacked the power of compulsion, it was the sacred duty which the state owed to the church to come to its rescue, and by the might of the sword 'compel them to come in,' that the church might be filled" [V. G. All Alexander, *The Continuity of Christian Thought*, pp. 152, 153].

Luther, Huss, Zwingli, and Calvin rebelled not only against the corruption in the church but also against its political power. These efforts began in earnest in the early 1500s. But their efforts fell short in that they sought merely to reform a corrupt system, rather than to return to the original system. This culminated in the formation of a multitude of denominational bodies, which we have as their legacy today.

Beginning around 1800, we see serious efforts being made at restoring the ancient order of things. Much has been written about the important work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell in this matter, but there were several others who also had much influence in this great movement. Around 1793, James O'Kelly and others left their Methodist conference when their efforts to restrict the power of the clergy were not accepted. They formed what they called "The Republican Methodists" in Virginia. In a formal meeting on August 4th, 1794, Rice Haggard stood up with a New Testament in his hand, and said, "Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply."

Around the same time, Abner Jones and Elias Smith in New Hampshire left the Baptist Church and became pioneers in the search for undenominational Christianity. Meanwhile, in Kentucky, Barton W. Stone was on his own journey. He had been ordained a Presbyterian minister and began preaching at Cane Ridge, KY in 1798. He already had misgivings about the Confession of

Faith and began his break with Presbyterianism at the "Great Revival" at Cane Ridge in 1801. Stone's movement had a great influence on the return to Bible-based Christianity.

The work of Thomas and Alexander deserves special attention. Thomas was born in Ireland in 1763, and was ordained as a minister in the Seceder Presbyterian Church. Thomas came under the influence of the followers of John Glas, a Scot who introduced weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, a plurality of elders in each congregation, and the principle that the Scripture is the only standard of both doctrine and practice. For health reasons, he came to America in 1807.

Shortly after his arrival, he was asked to preach for a Seceder church near Pittsburgh. His views on the Lord's Supper offended some, and the Presbyterian Synod subsequently tried him for heresy. He left the Presbyterian Church but continued to preach to a group of people who, like him, looked for freedom from sectarian narrowness, a closer walk with God, and a union based upon Scriptures.

At one of the meetings of these people, Campbell spoke at length about the desire for unity among all believers based upon the Scriptures and made what has become a well-known statement concerning the rule they would follow: "That rule, my highly respected hearers, is this, that where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." This statement had a tremendous effect on the religious thinking of the nation in the ensuing years.

Realizing the need to make his views of Scripture clear, Thomas delivered his famous "Declaration and Address" on September 7, 1809. The entire document filled 54 pages and was a masterpiece of reasoning from the Scriptures. W. E. Garrison summed up the major points of Campbell's address:

"...first, that the will of Christ included the revelation and imposition of a definite doctrinal and ecclesiastical program. Second, that the Scriptures give an inerrant report of the teaching of Jesus and His apostles and the procedure of the church of the first century, so that any verse in the New Testament could be quoted with perfect assurance of his historical accuracy...Third, that the teaching authority of Jesus had passed over undiminished to the apostles, so that both the injunctions and the examples of the apostles possessed complete authority over the church for all time, that their teachings were as commands of God, and that the practice of the church of the apostolic age constituted a pattern which the church must permanently follow" [Winfred Garrison, *Religion Follows the Frontier*, pp. 95, 96].

Shortly before the "Declaration and Address," in 1809, Alexander and his mother and sisters arrived in the United States. Alexander had already been influenced toward reformation by men in England and Ireland, and happily found similar thinking in his father.

In 1810 a meeting house was built in Brush Run, Pennsylvania, and by the following year, these brethren formally organized themselves into an independent congregation, soon realizing that their attempts to identify themselves with any denominational group was fraught with failure.

Following the principles set forth by his father, Alexander soon realized he had not been baptized scripturally, for Presbyterians did not immerse. Soon the whole family was immersed, and in a short time, nearly the whole congregation was made up of immersed believers. This event was the occasion of the change in leadership from father to son. The father had enunciated the principles, and the son recognized the full implications of the principles and put them into practice.

Alexander began publishing *The Christian Baptist* in 1823, which had a wide influence. He also had several highly regarded debates and was even honored to address the U.S. Congress on one occasion. In his 1843 debate with Presbyterian H. L. Rice in Lexington, Kentucky the noted Henry Clay presided as chairman over the two weeks' debate.

Campbell's famous Sermon on the Law in 1816 had caused much prejudice among the Baptists with whom he had been associated, and this reflected a general ignorance of denominational preachers concerning the Bible and the distinctions between Old and New Testaments. Alexander and Barton W. Stone met for the first time in 1824, and by 1832 the two groups had joined forces, recognizing they were on common ground.

## The Spread of the "Christians Only" Plea — 1830-1849

A new publication appeared — *The Millennial Harbinger*. Campbell wanted to expand the scope of his paper and felt the name "Christian Baptist" could be misconstrued. Though somewhat milder in tone, the new publication did not hesitate to wage war against the denominational departures of his day. It would be hard to overestimate the influence of Alexander Campbell's writing, preaching, and debating through these crucial years.

The spread of the plea was rapid and widespread. The work of the Campbells, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, John Smith, and others resulted in possibly 200,000 who were followers of the ancient gospel by 1839. The causes of this growth were rooted in the zeal of the believers.

"How is such a rapid growth, with no societies, no machinery, no central head or headquarters, to be accounted for? The answer is: They had a message, they believe their message to be the greatest discovery of the age and need of the world; hence, fired with the zeal of discoverers, they became propagandists of the first rank" [Homer Hailey, *Attitudes and Consequences*, p. 93].

Dark clouds were appearing on the horizon. As brethren rejoiced in their newfound faith and love, they began to meet together to edify one another. In 1831 Alexander Campbell published four articles on "Cooperation." He pointed to the obligation resting upon the church to

evangelize the world. Whereas their plea was that any work done by the church should be done through the local congregations, they were discussing how the work should be done. As the movement continued to grow, there was a growing sentiment for a stronger organized force than the cooperation meetings.

Some voices were raised in opposition, not to the meetings per se, but to the consequences of the more organized state meetings that were developing. Aylett Raines, writing in the *Christian Teacher*, strongly opposed these meetings. "He believed there were tendencies, which, unless checked, would lead to state organizations and to a 'United States organization of the congregations' which would be a dangerous consolidation of power" [Alonzo Willard Fortune, *The Disciples in Kentucky*, p. 166]. The subsequent years have proven his fears well-founded.

## 1849 -- The Beginning of the End

In 1849, Campbell published five articles entitled "Church Cooperation." A general meeting was held in Cincinnati October 24-28, which culminated in the forming of The American Christian Missionary Society, with Campbell elected as its first president, although he was hampered by age and feebleness. Accounts of the meeting give the number of those present as 155 delegates representing 110 churches and ten states. This was determined to be a voluntary cooperation of churches that would send funds to the organization, which would in turn select and send out preachers, but in time it came to exercise quite a bit of persuasive power.

From the very first, there were strenuous objections to the society. Among the objections was this: "It was said that the Book of God knows nothing of a confederation of churches in an ecclesiastical system, culminating in an earthly head, for government or for any other purpose...It was a dangerous precedent, a departure from the principles for which we have always contended..." [Archibald McLean, *The Foreign Missionary Society*, p. 20]. Indeed, more than once Alexander Campbell's earlier statements were used against him. His objections to such a structure were very clear. Although there were much discussion and disagreement concerning the Society, it did not result in a break of fellowship at that time.

As 1860 came into view, there was another troubling issue that arose — the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship. As the number of disciples grew, there were more and more who came from the denominations that held not the same convictions as the early reformers did. Thus there were two attitudes that were prevalent:

"There were those who believed the church should move on with the rest of the world and adapt the spirit of the New Testament to conditions that were ever changing. They held that, when not forbidden by the New Testament, they were free to adapt their program to changing needs. On the other hand, there were those who believed the matter of the church was fixed for all time, and the fact that certain things were not sanctioned was sufficient ground for rejecting them.

The men on both sides were equally honest, but they had a different approach to these issues that were raised.” [Fortune, pp. 364, 365].

As early as 1827, resolutions forbidding instrumental music and the title “Reverend” had been stated, and the instruments had no significant backing. But in 1858 or 1859, L. L. Pinkerton introduced a melodeon in the worship at Midway, Kentucky. The storm over this innovation reached full fury by 1864, and the aged Alexander Campbell weighed in against the instruments with strong words in an article he penned in 1851. He charged that the use of instruments was an appeal to the carnal nature of men as practiced in the denominations. “I wonder not, then, that an organ, a fiddle, or a Jews-harp, should be requisite to stir up their carnal hearts, and work into ecstasy their animal souls...and that all persons who have no spiritual discernment, sympathies of renewed hearts, should call for such aids, but is natural.” He further stated, “to all spiritually-minded Christians, such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert” (Millennial Harbinger 1851, pp. 581, 582).

One of the major arguments in favor of the instrument is that the Scriptures do not forbid it. But this argument flies in the face of the very principles upon which Campbell, Stone, and others sought to restore the ancient gospel.

In time, the use of the instrument became more and more widespread, and bitter divisions took place, as those in favor of the instrument and societies forced others out of their buildings and out of fellowship. There were occasions when those opposed to the instruments actually took an ax and chopped up the organ, but this did not stem the tide. By the turn of the century, 1900, the lines were pretty well drawn, and the division was all but complete. In the 1906 U. S. Census, churches of Christ and the Christian Church were recognized as separate entities — no longer one band of disciples.

## The First Half of the 20th Century

As the “dust settled,” the conservative churches were few and small. Yater Tant stated that in 1900 there were perhaps twelve full-time preachers among conservative churches. Most, like my grandfather J. D. Tant, supported themselves by farming. Most of the college-educated preachers with nice brick church buildings went with the liberal trend.

Despite such discouraging numbers, these years became, in the words of the Lone Ranger, “the thrilling days of yesteryear” for conservative churches. These were the prime years of men whose names became household words — Foy E. Wallace, Jr., N. B. Hardeman, G. C. Brewer, J. D. Tant, Joe Warlick, H. Leo Boles, and many others. The years of prosperity in the 20s and the depression years of the 30s were years of strong growth among brethren. Some sources place the number of Christians close to 500,000 in 1926. The message was spreading not only in the South but also in places like Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and the West Coast. The technologies of radio, automobiles, and air travel also fueled the spread of the gospel. In many

places, radio broadcasts had wide audiences. WLAC in Nashville had so many gospel preachers on the air that the station was nicknamed “We Love All Campbellites.” KRLD in Dallas featured two young preachers who were also law-school students—W. L. Oliphant and Roy Cogdill.

During this time, various para-church organizations were also growing. Nashville Bible School became David Lipscomb College, and Harding College settled in Searcy, Arkansas after brief stays in Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas. With the establishment of Pepperdine in California and other schools, there was now a band stretching from Tennessee to California. Orphan asylums had their beginning with Tennessee Orphan Home in 1909, and in time others were added—Potter in Kentucky in 1914, Boles Home in Texas in 1927, and Tipton in Oklahoma in 1928.

Although a few skirmishes came about as the result of egos, in general, the time following the division with the Christian Church up until W. W. II was characterized by doctrinal unity. The issue of Premillennialism caused some upset in the 1930s, but it was dealt with quickly and effectively with the resulting loss of only about 100 churches located mainly in Kentucky, Indiana, and Louisiana. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was very effective in standing against this false doctrine. This unity is also seen in the numerous debates with brethren across the nation cooperating to present these forums for discussion. N. B. Hardeman had debates on instrumental music with Ira Boswell from the Christian Church, as well as debates with Ben Bogard, a Baptist. Foy Wallace had quite a debate with the notorious Baptist J. Frank Norris in Texas. J. D. Tant had over 300 debates in his life with all sorts of denominational preachers. These debates were well attended, and many conversions resulted.

Gospel meetings were often great events, with great community interest. The Tabernacle Meetings in Nashville in the 20s were conducted in the old Ryman Auditorium, the home of the Grand Ol’ Opry. N. B. Hardeman was the preacher, and crowds of 8,000 to 10,000 came to hear the gospel, with many turned away due to a lack of seating space. As historians look at this period, they are agreed that a spirit of unity prevailed. One writer characterized the period in these words:

“There was a time when Churches of Christ were known as a people of the Book. All who knew us knew that we hungered above all for the word of God. They knew that we immersed ourselves in its truths and sacrificed dearly to share the gospel with those who had never heard. These were our most fundamental commitments. We knew it, and others knew it” [Leonard Allen].

Recollections from some older, well-known preachers summarize the era. When comparing the church of the 1980s with that of the 1930s, Willard Collins said:

“I don’t think they see the glory of the church, unencumbered by denominationalism, as I did ... when I was growing up ... I don’t think members of the church think the church is different from



Protestantism. When I started preaching members of the church believed Protestants needed to be saved. We've lost a lot of that. It goes back to an understanding of the distinctiveness of the church. At an earlier time they really felt the gospel was a lot better than Protestantism."

G. K. Wallace described his preaching in the 20s and 30s:

"Most of the baptisms were from the denominations. In those days denominational people would come to our meetings ... Denominational people do not come these days to our meetings and if they did they would not, in most places, hear anything that would lead them out of false doctrine."

But other factors were also at work, giving a foretaste of the decades to come. Although several colleges had been quietly accepting contributions from churches for years, a stir was created at the Abilene Christian College lectures in 1938 by G. C. Brewer when many understood him to say that the church that did not have Abilene Christian College in its budget had the wrong preacher. A decade later, N. B. Hardeman and others revived the controversy as they began a push to get churches to support the colleges from their treasuries. Along with this was more material prosperity, as Bill Humble illustrated:

"...larger and more expensive buildings, the more affluent middle-class membership, the number of full-time ministers, the increasing emphasis on Bible schools and Christian education, and missionary outreach all reflect a gradual but impressive growth ... After W.W. II the church enjoyed a remarkable growth in urban areas. As its members climbed the economic and educational ladder, the church moved 'across the tracks.'"

At the Abilene Christian College Lectures in 1939, Guy N. Woods gave a warning, which turned out to be quite prophetic. "The ship of Zion has floundered more than once on the sandbar of institutionalism. The tendency to organize is a characteristic of the age. On the theory that the end justifies the means, brethren have now scrupled to form organizations in the church to do the work the church itself was designed to do. All such organizations usurp the work of the church, and are unnecessary and sinful."

Brother Woods, later an editor of the Gospel Advocate, continued to sound warnings. In the Annual Lesson Commentary, 1946: "It should be noted that there was no elaborate organization for the discharge of these charitable functions. The contributions were sent directly to the elders by the churches who raised the offering. This is the New Testament method of functioning. We should be highly suspicious of any scheme that requires the setting up of an organization independent of the church in order to accomplish its work." It was the Gospel Advocate that became a leading voice in the slide to institutionalism.

## World War II

The period of time around W.W. II marked a definite change in the church. For one thing, a generation of respected preachers whose stand for Biblical principles was passing from the earth. In one 18-month period of 1940-41, Daniel Sommer, J. D. Tant, Joe Warlick, and F. B. Srygley died. They were replaced by younger men as editors of religious journals and in other spheres of influence.

Attitudes towards the war itself produced some controversy and change. There had been a strong minority position, mainly through the influence of David Lipscomb, that Christians could not participate in civil government, especially in warfare. In W.W. I, Cordell (OK) Christian College was closed by the local "Defense Counsel" and two young Christians were threatened with execution for their beliefs. But W.W. II produced a different mood and strong patriotism after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. B. C. Goodpasture closed the pages of the Gospel Advocate to any discussion of the matter, which was a portent of things to come. By the middle of the next decade, the pages of this influential journal were likewise closed to any discussion of the issues that were dividing brethren.

## The Post-World War II Era

With the return of GIs from the war, fervor for evangelism grew. Churches and brethren seemed to be willing to try whatever sounded good in spreading the gospel. Thousands of GIs were also going to college on the GI Bill, and the "Christian Colleges" didn't want to be left out, thus the growing appeal for funds from churches to sustain their growth.

With good intentions, churches were inundated with appeals to support cooperative works in Germany, Italy, and Japan. The work in these countries was "overseen" by churches in Tennessee and Texas, which assumed centralized control over the work done in these countries. This was the beginning of the "sponsoring church" concept, with scores or hundreds of churches sending funds to one eldership, which then had the oversight of whatever work was in their sight.

In time some brethren began to have second thoughts about such cooperative efforts that involved something larger than the local church. Roy Cogdill, Jr., Luther Blackmon, and Yater Tant were forced by conscience to withdraw their support of these schemes and voice their concerns. This was reminiscent of what happened 100 years before when men like Tolbert Fanning and Benjamin Franklin withdrew their support of the missionary societies and became vocal opponents of such works.

For some years Foy E. Wallace, Jr. had published the Bible Banner, but in 1949 closed its pages and revived the Gospel Guardian, which he had published in the 1930s, and asked Yater Tant to become its editor. This paper became a leading influence in the controversies that developed and which came to full bloom in the 1950s. Tant served as editor for 22 years through some

turbulent times, and thus a position of leadership was passed on from J. D. Tant to his son Yater. Other papers joined the battle — Preceptor, Searching the Scriptures, and Truth Magazine.

## What Were the Issues?

The proliferation of human institutions and sponsoring church arrangements, all clamoring for church support, set the scene for conflict. Combining this with the post-war prosperity many Christians were experiencing after the struggles of the Depression, the stage is set for differences, disagreement, and division. Soon a national radio and TV program came on the scene. The “Herald of Truth” was looked upon as the “voice” of the churches of Christ, much as the “Lutheran Hour” and the “Catholic Hour” were for their respective church bodies. The 5th & Highland church in Abilene, Texas was the sponsor, and in time came to have over 1,000 churches sending money to it for the program. The problem was that with no denominational hierarchy, how does the program speak with authority for all independent churches of Christ? Furthermore, many saw a problem with a large church with a large budget receiving funds from small churches, some of which could not afford to support a preacher. This is contrary to the principle of those with abundance sending to the aid of those who were lacking, as laid out in [II Corinthians 8:13-15](#).

At first, this program had a different composition. The originators of the program, James Walter Nichols and James D. Williford, came to Yater Tant with the idea of producing professional quality tapes to be sold to churches and aired on local radio stations, paid for by the local church. Tant thought it sounded like a good idea, but the final version was a far cry from what was proposed. It became a “brotherhood” project, overseen by the 5th and Highland elders in Abilene, with money sent to them by hundreds and hundreds of churches around the nation. As stated earlier, many reasoned that since the Catholic Church had a national program, and the Lutheran Church had “The Lutheran Hour,” why couldn’t the churches of Christ have what amounted to a “Church of Christ” program that spoke for the Church of Christ? Of course, we have no denominational head as the denominations do, so how could one church be the voice of all churches of Christ?

Added to the list of organizations clamoring for church support were homes for unwed mothers, homes for the aged, orphan asylums, publishing ventures, “Cows for Korea,” Gospel Press, and a host of other ventures arising out of the imaginative minds of brethren who wanted to do good. The “Cows for Korea” project arose out of a shortage of cows in Korea, so the plot was hatched for churches to buy cows and send them to Korea.

Opposition began to appear in some of the religious journals. One of the first articles raising doubts was written by Foy E. Wallace, Jr. in the Gospel Guardian in May 1949. Glenn L. Wallace questioned the Herald of Truth in the Guardian in December 1953. He was preaching for the large College Church in Abilene, Texas. Other papers began to publish articles questioning these practices, but it was the Guardian that was the main voice of the opposition as a growing

number of brethren began to question the increasing number of centralized projects under the control of a few large, prosperous churches.

The two main organs supporting these ventures were the Gospel Advocate under the editorship of B. C. Goodpasture and the Firm Foundation under the editorship of Reuel Lemmons. Once again the pages of the Advocate were closed to opposing views, thus preventing thousands from having a clear understanding of the issues involved.

Eventually, there were a number of debates on the issues beginning in 1954. Some of these debates were the Holt-Totty debate in Indianapolis, October 1954; Harper-Tant debates in Lufkin and Abilene, Texas in 1955; Woods-Porter in Indianapolis, January 1956; Cogdill-Woods in Birmingham, November 1957; Wallace-Holt in Florence, Alabama December 1959. These debates reflected scores of debates, hundreds of articles, and untold numbers of discussions brethren have had through the years. Brethren who once stood together for the common faith were now on opposite sides of these issues.

## The Arguments Advanced by the Non-Institutional Brethren

In his tract on this subject, Steve Wolfgang well defined the major issues.

- A. That God has revealed in Scripture patterns to be followed in the work and worship of the church. [Hebrews 8:5](#)
- B. That authoritative patterns are expressed in terms of —
  1. Generic or specific statements or commands.
  2. Examples for churches to follow.
  3. Necessary conclusions or implications (Acts 15)
- C. That the generic statements or commands allow expedient ways of obeying, while the specific directions are more restrictive and do not allow changes.
- D. That the differences between general and specific instructions can be distinguished by common sense principles of interpretation.
- E. That there is a difference in individual and church responsibilities in carrying out their respective roles in glorifying God.
- F. That the church's treasury is to be used for the purposes of the edification of its members, assisting saints who are in need, and supporting preachers in their proclamation of the gospel.
- G. That there is no authority in Scripture for human organizations or super-church arrangements through which local churches may do their work ([II Corinthians 11:8-9](#); [Philippians 4:15-18](#)).
- H. That the church Jesus died to purchase is a spiritual institution and was not intended to provide for the recreational or social needs of its members, nor to be a worldwide benevolence organization.
- I. That human societies or organizations (hospitals, publishing houses, colleges, etc.) may provide services on a fee-for-service basis, but the Scriptures do not allow for those to become permanent appendages to the church.

- J. That individual churches do not compose the universal church as in a denominational structure, but that it is individuals who are the universal church.
- K. That there is no provision in Scripture for the universal church to function, for it is a relationship of people rather than a structured organization.
  - 1. The human race exists but has no organizational structure.
  - 2. The human race lives and functions in nations, which have an organizational structure.
  - 3. The universal church exists but has no organizational structure.
  - 4. Its members function in local churches, which have an organizational structure.

## The Yellow Tag of Quarantine

The lines of fellowship were further broken by the policies of the Gospel Advocate. Although discussions and divisions would continue for at least another decade, in 1954 the editor of the Advocate agreed to the idea of a “yellow tag of quarantine” to be placed on the “antis.” This harks back to the days before W.W. II and “wonder drugs” when those who had infectious diseases were “quarantined” and a yellow flag posted on their homes to warn others away. This is similar to the treatment of lepers in Biblical times, and even in modern history. Part of the blame for the extreme liberalism today must be placed at the feet of B. C. Goodpasture for closing the pages of the Advocate to further discussions, thus preventing future readers from seeing both sides and weighing the evidence based upon the Scriptures.

In this environment, the pressure on other institutions to “line up” would be resisted at the risk of losing prestige and financial well-being. There were efforts to close Florida College by discouraging students from going there, and by discouraging individual contributions. The administration and Bible faculty were pretty well committed to conservative views on the issues. In addition, business ventures such as Bible bookstores were boycotted if their owners were thought to be antis. Churches were pressured to line up and let their position be known. I heard of urgings to put some human institution in the budget for at least \$5 to let everyone know that they were not “anti” churches. Church treasurers who dared to voice a reservation about these schemes were told to either sign the check or resign and go elsewhere.

Preachers were threatened, fired, and had meetings canceled. I cannot tell how many meetings my father had canceled, but on occasion, he was allowed to go ahead and hold the meeting, and was well received. (The church found out he did not have horns and a tail after all.) They were told, “If you espouse such a doctrine, you won’t have any place to preach.” They were told by elders not to preach on these matters. “Confessions” of preachers who recanted their “anti-ism” were featured in the pages of the Gospel Advocate, including names well known to that generation — Earl West, Pat Hardeman, Hugo McCord, C. M. Pullias.

The ugliness of a partisan spirit was manifested in many ways. Ads for preachers contained such statements as “No anti need apply.” Lawsuits over ownership of church buildings were paraded before the world. I was present in Cordele, Georgia in 1966 when a group of liberal-minded brethren came to the building with a telephone pole made into a battering ram, intending to

break down the door and take over the building. On more than one occasion, they broke into the building, even getting into the preacher's study and smashing his eyeglasses. One night they broke in while brethren were waiting for them with cameras. One of those entering the building then shouted to someone outside to "Get the gun." And all this was done "in the name of the Lord."

I heard a tape of a radio sermon preached by Malcolm Hill in Waycross, Georgia, stating that if a child got run over by a car in front of the Tebeau Street church building there, the church would not allow the church phone to be used to call an ambulance for the bleeding child. Subsequently, I called Hill and chided him for such a statement. He responded by saying he was going to give my name to the judge of Juvenile Court in his county because she was always trying to find homes for children. Sure enough, in a short time, I received a call from Judge Trudy Boswick, a member of the Forest Park church where Hill preached. She had two 15-year-old girls who had been made wards of the court and needed a home. In a few days, I had a home for them. That began a succession of calls from her. Then one day she called needing help for a 19-year-old pregnant girl who already had one baby. After talking to my wife, we took her and the baby in. Soon Margaret became a Christian. This was the beginning of over three decades of taking fifty or more pregnant girls into our home, and some into the homes of others, and helping to place scores of babies for adoption. And all of this because Hill thought he was "calling my bluff." One day I asked Judge Boswick if she understood why I could find homes for these young people when the large congregation of which she was a member could not help. She replied, "Why is that?" I then explained that where she went to church, they were told to drop an extra dollar or so into the collection plate to care for orphans, but we taught people to take them into their homes. This good lady later became an "anti."

In the debate between G. K. Wallace and Charles Holt in Florence, Alabama (1960), Wallace ranted and raved about Holt taking money to buy fertilizer for the church lawn, but wouldn't take a dime out of the church treasury to feed a starving orphan child. Isn't it interesting that Charles and Jewell Holt had, themselves, adopted four children?

Brother Wallace's softening attitude towards Biblical authority was seen in a statement made by Yater Tant in 1956. 'In Tulsa last year G. K. said that the Bible contained no such thing as a "necessary inference," and that he had quit preaching that twenty years ago.'

In short, by the 1960s a clear message was sent to the minority "antis" — go away, you bother me." What once were defended as expedencies were now defended as something necessary. One writer claimed that children were raised better in orphanages than in the home of Christians.

"We contend that the homes perform a service more effective than the average private home in developing habits of work and industry ... We contend that the homes do a more effective work teaching good, moral behavior than the home ... We contend that the homes are more successful than the average private home in making Christians of the young people ... this

statement is no indictment of the private home. It is the best organization in the world" [Said by a defender of Central Kentucky Orphan Home].

It's hard to believe that a sane person would make such a statement. I worked with a church in Portales, New Mexico where the Eastern New Mexico Children's Home was located. A family in the University Drive church there had worked at the home for some time previously. They said they had never known a single child to leave that home and remain faithful as a Christian. It is obvious that this is not universally true, but it does cast some doubt on the above quote. That orphan asylum would send out trucks and busses throughout three states collecting food from churches but would collect more than they could possibly use. They would unload their surplus at a local grocery store and sell the products. That store was owned by a son of one of the elders of the church where I preached. They had one of the finest farms in the state, which was donated to them, and they had all sorts of free labor from their residents, so raised much of their own food.

On one occasion I was having a study with a family in this small town, and evidently, some folks at the church that sponsored the orphanage got wind of this and tried to move in. This family was having some financial difficulties, and the liberal church brought food and clothing in abundance. One day Naomi Bruce asked me if I could take some of the stuff away, as her house was getting too full. (I declined.) Then she said that the assistant superintendent of the home said I could have the children if I could find homes for them. I immediately went to her home and placed a call to the man, asking when I could come and get the children, as I thought I could find homes for them in a couple of weeks. He began to hem and haw, acting as if he didn't know what I was talking about. Then Naomi got on the phone and reminded him of their conversation. I asked him how many orphans they had. He admitted that of the 50 children, none were true orphans, as they all had living family members who could have cared for them. Of course, I didn't get the children. He was just trying to "call my bluff." After Naomi was baptized into Christ, she told me, "They tried to buy me with things, but you taught me the gospel."

A study was conducted some time ago showing that among the institutional churches, the average church member was giving seven cents per member per week. Thus they were willing to cause division over seven cents per week. And they accused those who believed in taking orphans into their homes of being "orphan haters." What is abundantly clear is that the majority of the men and institutions that were centers of influence were with the institutional majority.

### Separation, Growth, and Development

Despite the predictions of "doom and gloom," "anti-ism" has not perished from the earth. Bill Humble presented a more objective view:

"The most serious issues that churches of Christ have faced in this century is church cooperation and 'institutionalism.' Led by Roy Cogdill, Yater Tant and the Gospel Guardian, a substantial

number of churches have come to oppose such cooperative programs of evangelism as the Herald of Truth and the homes for orphans and aged, as they are presently organized. During the past 15 years many debates have been held, churches have divided, and fellowship has broken. This is the most serious division, numbers-wise, that churches of Christ have suffered. Whether that division is final, or whether it can be healed, is yet to be determined" [Story of the Restoration, p. 74, 1968].

Writing now from the perspective of more than four decades later, it is obvious that the wound is so serious that no healing will take place. Counting numbers is something fraught with difficulties. Since we have no central organization to which statistics are reported, any number total can be regarded as less than absolute. However, brother Mac Lynn has done a commendable job for some years in collecting and compiling data on churches of Christ. Of nearly 12,000 churches of Christ in the USA, he has estimated that the non-institutional churches compose nearly 21% of the total of the combined groups.

With respect to foreign evangelism, contrary to charges that we do not believe in foreign evangelism, we have been active in sending Americans to other nations with the gospel, and are supporting countless natives in many nations. We just do not believe there is a scriptural precedent for creating a human organization or a super-eldership in a "sponsoring church" to carry out the Great Commission. And while institutional churches have built schools, hospitals, and other such organizations, we have concentrated on building congregations.

With respect to the emotional issues of caring for orphans, some of the most egregious charges against us were that we were "orphan-haters," since we did not believe in churches building and supporting orphan asylums. These charges were purely an emotional ploy, designed to cause prejudice and cause people not to consider the Scriptural basis of our concerns.

But the figures tell another story. Several years ago Eugene Britnell surveyed 60 preachers who were opposed to the church support of benevolence institutions, and they accumulated a list of 450 orphans and widows being cared for by individual Christians. Cecil Willis pointed out that 17 children had been adopted or cared for by the faculty of Florida College, which at that time had 25 families. Eight families represented by the editorial staff of the Gospel Guardian provided homes for at least ten children, not their natural offspring. If those figures are representative, that means that nearly 19,000 such children are being cared for among families in non-institutional churches. That is far in excess of the institutions built and maintained by the institutional churches.

But we had a "reputation" to uphold. It was reported that some women approached the late Robert Jackson, an "anti" preacher in Nashville, and chided him for his "hatred" of orphans. He then told them if orphan children came to his door wanting help, he would "pinch their little heads off."



## What Does the Future Hold?

Is there any hope for reconciliation? The history of divisions does not present an optimistic picture. Historian Ed Harrell reported after a meeting with institutional brethren in Arlington, Texas in 1973:

“Does anyone seriously believe that ... the thousands of unscriptural promotions dreamed up will ...suddenly, or slowly, begin to disappear? Of course not. No man could bring it off; not 20 or 50 or 200 men could bring it off. And not only could they not, they will not bring it about.”

Steve Wolfgang remarked:

“Such a movement to turn the clock back would require that institutional brethren in thousands of places make a conscious decision to place fellowship with their non-institutional brethren on a higher plane than the support of human institutions — and I think everyone knows that simply isn’t going to happen.”

Another preacher expressed such a possibility in these words:

“It isn’t just supporting an orphanage anymore. The liberal church in town here split this congregation almost eighteen years ago over the orphanage issue — but ironically doesn’t support one to this day! What they have done is to accept people we have withdrawn from, no questions asked; or accept in full fellowship people who have left here after hearing preaching they didn’t like on divorce and remarriage, the role of the Holy Spirit, examination of premillennial claims or of the Masonic Lodge —all of them ‘shaken in’ with the clear understanding that they will not hear any preaching on those of other controversial issues. Don’t let someone tell you it’s just ‘sending a few dollars a month to an orphanage’ — it’s how we look at the Bible, the church, living the Christian life, and much more. The longer it goes on, the more incompatible we will become.”

The division is seen in an exchange between two preachers at a meeting in Leakey, Texas where the two sides seek to come to a meeting of the minds. Joe Fitch was there, and reported this exchange between two preachers:

“One preacher said, ‘Give us the Scripture authorizing the things you are doing and advocating; that is all we ask.’ A prominent preacher retorted, ‘Give us Scripture! Give us Scripture! You can teach an old green parrot to say ‘Give us Scripture.’ That is all you fellows say.’ I was amazed! Some churches could surely use an old green parrot to cry out, ‘Give us Scripture! Give us Scripture!’ ... Few preachers are saying it.”

Paul Williams tells of a discussion on institutionalism in South Africa. An American preacher defended the questioned practices by saying, “These practices must be scriptural, for brethren in the U.S. have practiced these things for many years.” The African preacher responded: “Brother,

if we were practicing the same things we had done for years, we would have cooked you white men and had you for lunch.”

Even among institutional people, there has been alarm, as evidenced by a 1986 “Expression of Concern” signed by hundreds of institutional preachers. This document was specifically directed toward the teaching of theistic evolution and other concerns at Abilene Christian University but addressed several other issues.

- I. We are deeply disturbed by the liberalism that is so evident in the brotherhood today. By ‘liberalism’ we mean especially the following items, though not excluding other specifics that could be mentioned.
  - A. There is drifting from the Bible-centered, definitive, distinctive doctrine that once characterized our preaching. Presently, uncertain sounds and weak messages emanate from many pulpits among us. Brethren are becoming accustomed to diluted and polluted preaching. We are rapidly approaching the point where many of our people, including preachers and elders no longer know the difference between true Christianity and the corrupted forms of it so prevalent among us.
  - B. There is a concerted effort on the part of some of our brethren to restructure the organization, worship, and work of the church along sectarian lines, thus tending to denominationalize the New Testament body of Christ.
  - C. A spirit of doctrinal compromise and fellowshiping those in blatant religious error has permeated our ranks.
  - D. The world has made alarming inroads into the church. Instead of the church influencing the world for righteousness, as it should, the world has adversely affected many brethren in matters of morality and the conduct of life.
  - E. The typical emphasis of the denominational world on recreation, entertainment, and solving the social ills of society has been incorporated into the thinking and programs of many congregations, supplanting the God-given work of meeting the desperate spiritual needs of those born within and without the body of Christ.

No “anti” could have said it better.

We all know the story of the camel that asked to stick its nose into the Arab’s tent one cold night. But it didn’t stop there. The camel came in bit by bit and finally took over the whole tent. And so it is with allowing even small departures from the Biblical pattern. I time they creep in more and more until they become firmly entrenched. To reinforce the above-mentioned comments, a statement purported to be from Abilene Christian University has been circulated that is a real eye-opener.

“Dear Friends: The Abilene Christian University has taken a bold step in their 2004 Lectureship, and has clearly defined the terms for reforming Church of Christ in the 21st Century. These reforms are already being implemented in many congregations. These reforms will fundamentally change the Church of Christ as we know it. A few of the key elements of this reformation movement are as follows:

1. We should cease our elite and sectarian behavior, and ask our brethren in all denominations to forgive our sins, especially that we said they weren't saved.
2. We must not say that we have the truth, but that we are on a spiritual journey, just as our brethren in the denominations are on their spiritual journey.
3. We should have open fellowship with all who say they believe in Jesus. We should follow the example of brave reformists who ask denominational preachers to share pulpits with their congregations. We should also share major social and religious events with our denominational brethren. We should be ecumenical in our thinking and practice, and should openly align ourselves with the current evangelical ecumenical movement.
4. We should continue to say that baptism is important, but that it is not essential for salvation. We should recognize that there are many non-immersed believers who are saved."

Furthermore, A.C.U. recognized Max Lucado as their Outstanding Alumnus last year. This popular author preaches for the Oak Hills church in San Antonio. In recent times, that church has removed "Church of Christ" from its sign, introduced instrumental music in its worship, has exchanged pulpits with a Baptist preacher, and has built a McDonald's style playground on its property. I have material from Lucado that shows he no longer believes baptism is essential for salvation.

The aforementioned statement, reportedly from A.C.U., has been said by some to be of doubtful origin. To authenticate the document, I wrote to Royce Money, the president of A.C.U. asking about the document. He did not reply. But even if this statement was not officially issued by A.C.U., those who are familiar with the school testify that it pretty well represents what is going on there. I called a preacher in Abilene to ask him about this, and he verified that it was representative. I do not delight in mentioning these matters, as A.C.U. is my own alma mater.

Lucado has appeared on Larry King's TV program. When asked point-blank if Lucado believed that faith in Jesus was necessary for salvation, he replied in the negative. It's hard to believe a supposed gospel preacher would make such a statement and on national TV!

One of the featured speakers at the 2005 A.C.U. Lectureship was Don Jeanes, President of Milligan College, a Christian Church school. What other denominational preachers would A.C.U. invite? Royce Money, A.C.U.'s president, was interviewed by the Christian Chronicle about this matter and made this statement: "I would fight vigorously if instrumental music were attempted to be introduced into my home congregation. I am firmly within the a cappella tradition, but I have a tolerance for those who make other choices, and I don't see that it needs to constitute a complete severing of fellowship or alienation. I just don't see the need for that." (April 1, 2006). Notice that he said that a cappella singing was just a "tradition." That says much!

How far have our schools gone? The Christian Scholars Conference (CSC) convened in June 2008 on the campus of David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. With support from several sister schools, e.g., Pepperdine University, Abilene Christian University, Oklahoma Christian

University, and Harding University. The conference represented sixty-eight colleges and universities, along with twenty-four additional institutions.

The CSC platform affirms that it “is dedicated to the virtue of diversity which expands world-views, fosters collegiality, demonstrates the highest quality of scholarship, and provides opportunity for all Christian scholars.” One participant was a former Abilene Christian University student, Jared Cramer. He is now with the Anglican (Episcopal) church preparing for the priesthood. On his blog, the “Reverend Cramer” (as he calls himself) emphatically declares he has abandoned the idea of “restorationism.” “I don’t believe in Restorationism or Primitivism. I just don’t. It’s not Biblical, there’s no call to it. I don’t care two bits if today’s church looks like the first-century church, and I don’t think God does.”

Cramer’s presentation was titled “One New Humanity: Reconsidering Homosexuality in Light of the Ecclesiology of Ephesians.” After examining the ecclesiology of Ephesians, this paper engages in a case study on the place of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) Christians in the Episcopal Church. The main proposition the author attempts to argue is that there is nothing “wrong about a faithful, loving, monogamous same-sex relationship.” He says, “I fail to see what it is about homosexuality that declares it as inherently evil” [“Homosexuality: But Why?”].

It is hard to imagine a more egregious affront to the Bible and morality than for these so-called “Christian” schools to participate in, and thus endorse, an apostate’s attempt to clean up homosexuality and make it acceptable. This is “political correctness” gone amok. This was not a surprise to the participating schools, as Cramer had presented his position as a thesis at ACU in 2006, and his topic was printed in the program for the conference at Lipscomb.

Further evidence of Lipscomb’s drift was seen in the January-April issue of Wineskins. Gary Holloway, a Bible teacher at DLC, wrote: “My own experience teaching in a university where 70% of the students are from a cappella Churches of Christ confirms this cultural shift away from the importance of denominational labels to a deep concern for relational and spiritual union. It is not unusual in a typical week for our students to attend a Monday night instrumental praise worship at a local Church of Christ, a Tuesday night ecumenical teaching session at First Baptist downtown, a Wednesday night church at a fairly traditional Church of Christ, and a Thursday night Taize worship at a Presbyterian church — all before going home on the weekend to their parents’ Church of Christ where many think we are the only Christians!” Professor Holloway goes on to say that “Many of us cannot deny that there are many devout Christians who are unimmersed.”

Mike Williams, a teacher of freshman Bible at DLC, delivered a sermon at Fourth Ave. Church of Christ on March 15, 2006, titled “Baptism and Christian Unity.”

“We need to view baptism in the context of God’s story, God seeks our hearts more than right ritual...” In the sermon, he spoke of three categories — those baptized into a denomination, those sprinkled, and those who have never been “baptized” at all. He warned his listeners to

“avoid the proof-text approach,” and to “avoid pattern theology.” “We welcome all believers in Christ.” Well, what about the unimmersed — “perhaps sprinkled ... If they choose not to be immersed, we welcome them on the journey as part of the family ... What about those who have never been baptized?...And so, for those who have never been baptized, we welcome the opportunity to study with you about the beauty and significance of baptism, yet we will also welcome you...”

“The Great Communion” was held on October 4, 2009, in an effort to promote unity between Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ, and churches of Christ. Moody Coliseum at A.C.U. was the site of one of these meetings. In preparation for the Lord’s Supper, a choir sang with instrumental music. ACU’s president, Royce Money, participated in the service. David Flier of Lipscomb University spoke at a similar service in Nashville. The closing prayer was led by Rhonda Lowry, wife of DLU’s president Randy Lowry. A closing song was sung by a group from the Disciples of Christ. This French-speaking African-American group used bongo drums as accompaniment.

Unsuspecting parents send their children to these schools thinking they are safer than public universities. Perhaps their motto should be: “Give us your children. We will destroy their faith and show them how ignorant their parents are.”

I have seen many liberal trends through the years in the bulletins and journals I get from institutional churches. Bar-B-Q dinners and clowns with a charge for admission. Christmas pageants with instrumental music. Million-dollar gymnasiums and coffee shop facilities. Fashion shows in church buildings with an admission fee charged (Manhattan Church of Christ -- \$15 admission). Pulpit exchanges with denominational preachers. Women take leading roles in worship assemblies. A survey was cited by the Christian Chronicle showing that 90% of the young people in institutional churches see nothing wrong with instrumental music in worship. Thus, in the next generation, when the old folks die off, its use will not even be questioned and the pianos will be moved in without controversy.

The White Station church in Memphis has opened a coffee shop, which is to be used for social activities, birthday parties, card games, etc. Some churches are hosting “Christian Rock Bands” and charging for admission. Others build family life centers, with basketball, shuffleboard, and yoga facilities. The claim is, “If you don’t provide this, the young people won’t come. So, “If you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em.” A church in Birmingham has a dance teacher on staff to teach dance to kids and adults.

Golf, anyone? The Hillcrest Church of Christ in Decatur, Georgia, has hosted its “First Annual Golf Tournament” (8/6/10). Participation was \$100. Perhaps their contributions were too low to fund all the projects of the church, so why not a big fundraiser?

It is happening in more and more churches throughout the land. "On Saturday, Feb. 10, 2007, the Richland Hills Church of Christ will begin holding a weekly Saturday evening worship service that will include the use of musical instruments in worship and an observance of the Lord's Supper. Jon Jones (the former pulpit minister and one of the elders) said that the elders 'fully and completely' endorsed the decision. At an adult Bible study, he said, 'There is unity in our eldership, and we are so thankful for that.'" This church has 24 "ministers," and five of them are women.

On the TV program, "In Search of the Lord's Way," Mack Lyon spoke of the problem of women in leadership roles in churches. Many voiced strong protests to his words. One woman wrote, "God help us. This message is from Churches of Christ." She was upset that the TV audience might think this represented the church at large. She went on to say, "I couldn't disagree more with his message. And yet people in Abilene hear that it's from Churches of Christ. Pretty soon, they'll all be dead, including Mack Lyon, and the problem of traditional CoC'ers will snuff itself out."

Mike Cope, a preacher at Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, and a teacher at A.C.U. wrote, "Of course, I think this brother (Mack Lyon—jdt) is wrong. Way wrong. I'm becoming more and more convinced that only time will take care of this." This church is the sponsor of the national Herald of Truth radio and TV program.

The Bible is quite clear about women in leadership roles. "*But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet*" ([I Timothy 2:12](#)). Paul goes on to say that this was God's order from the beginning. But that doesn't deter those who insist on their own way. For example, from New York: "West Islip Church of Christ is led by a group of gifted shepherds known collectively as the Council." The website then names nine individuals, including five women. The website also mentions "Our ministers, Katie Hays, and Lance Pape." By the way, the last word is that Katie now preaches for the Lawrenceville, GA First Christian Church. Lance Papa had a webpage dedicated to "Gender Justice" in churches of Christ seeking to encourage women's roles as "deacon, elder, minister, worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc."

The Cahaba Valley church of Christ in Birmingham has a picture of its elders on their webpage. Their five elders include two women. How do they deal with [I Timothy 2:12](#)?

"From the indications inside the letters themselves, it appears that these books came from a period around 115 AD and were put together by those people leading the churches that Paul founded in his life-time, attributing the material, as they believed its content to be, from Paul himself.

"Therefore, most scholars believe that, at times, what is found in I and II Timothy and Titus reflects more about what is going on in the churches of 115 than Paul's own views. This is true of the view of the law found in these letters, along with various other teachings about faith, the church, and even Jesus himself found in these letters."

It seems they deal with Timothy by simply dismissing it as “uninspired.”

Then there are such promotions as “Coon-huntin’ for Christ” and “Gymnastics to the Glory of God” sponsored by churches. From there we go on to challenges about the authenticity of Scripture. “It is consistent to believe that the Bible is authoritative in matters of faith and practice, but may be incorrect in geographical or historical details. Once a person abandons the concept of divine dictation, he must abandon the idea of inerrancy” [William Abraham, a Christian College professor].

To look at the future, one needs only to look at the past. To read the debates and arguments of 100 to 150 years ago in the division with the Christian Church, one would think he was reading the debates of 50 years ago, as the same arguments were made then as in more recent times. Consider this example from the Christian Standard in 1893, as a writer is defending women having more prominent roles in the church. “A principle may set aside an apostolic precept. It may brush aside an apostolic decree. We do that constantly. We follow the apostolic example whenever we like it; when we do not, we depart from it.” Such thinking is still around, as I heard a prominent institutional preacher make the claim that “We do many things for which we have no authority.”

What we have been experiencing over the past 50-60 years is but a repeat of what has been transpiring since the beginning of time, as new generations arose in Israel that were not content with the ways of their fathers. *“And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, that knew not Jehovah, nor yet the work which he had wrought for Israel”* ([Judges 2:9-10](#)).

In looking to the late 1800s, we see “the case with such men as J. W. McGarvey or Isaac Errett, first-generation leaders who serve as a ‘bridge’ for a little liberalism often discover that succeeding generations are not content to stop where their forefathers drew arbitrary lines, and are determined to carry to logical extension the incipient practices of the former generation” [Steve Wolfgang, *History and Background of the Institutional Controversy*, p. 31].

## Conclusion

The division in the late 19th Century eventually produced three bodies.

1. The conservative churches generally came to be known as churches of Christ.
2. The more liberal group was usually known as the Christian Church, although in some areas the instrumental groups were known as Churches of Christ.
3. In time an ultra-liberal group was spawned, known as Disciples of Christ.

The division of the late 20th Century looks like it will have the same results.

1. The conservative churches that hold to the inerrancy of the Scriptures and the insistence of having a “thus saith the Lord” for teaching and practice.
2. There are the “main-line” institutional churches that insist we do not have to have authority for all that we do, and then
3. There are the ultra-liberal folks who seem determined to have the church take its place among the denominations.

This emphasizes the need for each generation to be taught the basic principles over and over again. When Israel came into the promised land, there were certain instructions that were given along these very lines. A stone memorial was to be placed at the crossing of the Jordan River as a perpetual reminder.

*“And it came to pass, when all the nation were clean passed over the Jordan, that Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of the Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging-place, where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: and Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of Jehovah your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; that this may be a sign among you, that, when your children ask in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? then ye shall say unto them, Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever” ([Joshua 4:1-7](#)).*

God's ordinances were to be taught to successive generations.

*“Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the ordinances, which Jehovah your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it; that thou mightest fear Jehovah thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged” ([Deuteronomy 6:1-2](#))*

*“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes” ([Deuteronomy 6:6-8](#)).*

I remember gospel meetings as a boy in the 40s and 50s — tent meetings, camp meetings, etc. I often heard sermons on what was wrong with instrumental music in worship, but do not recall hearing a single lesson on the Missionary Society, yet these were the two prominent things that were a part of the division in the 19th Century. When the current division started 100 years later, it was not the instrumental music that was the issue, but Missionary Societies. They were not



called Missionary Societies, for all knew they were wrong, but they didn't know why they were wrong. Thus a generation that grew up untaught on a vital principle fell into error. Through the 50s and 60s, supporters of the liberal trends debated the issues, seeking to establish scriptural authority for their practices. But in time, they ceased to debate, as there was no solid ground on which to stand. Thus teaching on principles of authority became something of the past.

Now we have a generation that has grown up in institutional churches that has not been taught on the vital subject of how to determine Biblical authority, and as the result, we see the increasing introduction of instrumental music and many other departures. In many places, by the time the older members die the instruments will be moved in without any objection. Let us learn from history, that the cycle not be repeated.