

**VI. THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

- A. As the “dust settled,” the conservative churches were few and small.
  - 1. My father stated that in 1900 there were perhaps 12 full-time preachers among conservative churches.
    - a. Most, like my grandfather, supported themselves by farming.
  - 2. Most of the college-educated preachers and churches with nice brick buildings went with the liberal trend.
- B. Despite such encouraging numbers, these years became, in the words of the Lone Ranger, “the thrilling days of yesteryear” for conservative churches.
  - 1. These were the prime years of men whose names were household words—Foy E. Wallace, Jr., N. B. Hardeman, G. C. Brewer, J. D. Tant, Joe Warlick, H. Leo Boles and many others.
  - 2. The years of prosperity of the 20s and the depression years of the 30s were years of strong growth among brethren.
    - a. Some sources place the number of Christians close to 500,000 in 1926.
    - b. The message was spreading not only in the south, but in places like Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and the West Coast.
  - 3. The technologies of radio, automobile and air travel also fueled the spread of the gospel.
    - a. In many areas radio broadcasts by local churches had wide audiences.
    - b. WLAC in Nashville had so many gospel preachers on the air that the station was nicknamed “We Love All Campbellites.”
    - c. KRLD in Dallas featured two young preachers who were also law-school students—W. L. Oliphant and Roy Cogdill.
- C. During this time, various para-church organizations were also growing.
  - 1. Nashville Bible School became David Lipscomb College, and Harding College settled in Searcy, AR after brief stays in KY, MO, OK, and Kansas.
  - 2. With the establishment of Pepperdine in California and other schools, there was now a band stretching from Tennessee to California.
  - 3. Orphan asylums had their beginning with the Tennessee Orphan Home in 1909, and in time others were added—Potter in KY in 1914, Boles Home in TX in 1927 and Tipton in OK in 1928.
- D. A spirit of unity.
  - 1. 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.
  - 2. The issue of Premillennialism caused some unrest in the 1930s, but it was dealt with quickly and effectively with the resulting loss of only about 100 churches located mainly in KY, IN and LA.
    - a. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was very effective in standing against this false doctrine
  - 3. This unity is also seen in the numerous debates with brethren from across the nation cooperating to present these forums for discussion.
    - a. N. B. Hardeman had debates on instrumental music with Ira Boswell from the Christian Church, as well as debates with Ben Bogard, a Baptist.
    - b. Foy Wallace had quite a debate with the notorious Baptist J. Frank Norris in Texas.

- c. J. D. Tant had over 300 debates in his lifetime with all sorts of denominational preachers
  - d. These debates were well attended, and many conversions resulted.
- 4. Gospel meetings were often great events, with great community interest.
  - a. They might run for two weeks, or even longer, with 50, 75 or 100 baptisms.
  - b. The Tabernacle Meetings in Nashville in the 20s drew 8 to 10,000, with many turned away for lack of room
- 5. As historians look at this period, they are agreed that a spirit of unity prevailed.
- 6. One writer characterized this 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)
- 7. Recollections from some older, well-known preachers summarize the era.
  - a. 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.”
  - b. 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.”
- 8. But other factors work also at work, giving a foretaste of the decades to come.
  - a. Although several colleges were quietly accepting contributions from churches for years, a stir was created at the A.C.C. 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.
  - b. 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.
  - c. 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.’”
- E. But there were some who saw the signs of danger on the horizon.
  - 1. 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.”

2. In the 1946 Annual Lesson Commentary, he continue his words of caution. “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.”
3. Brother Woods was later editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, which led the slide into institutionalism, the very thing he opposed.

## VII. WORLD WAR II

- A. The period of time around W.W. II marked a definite change in the church.
  1. For one thing, a generation of respected preachers whose stand for Biblical principles was influential was passing from the earth.
    - a. In one 18-month period of 1940-41 Daniel Sommer, J. D. Tant, Joe Warlick and F. B. Srygley died.
  2. They were replaced by younger men as editors of religious journals and in other spheres of influence.
- B. Attitudes toward the war itself produced some controversy and change.
  1. There had been a strong minority position, mainly through the influence David Lipscomb, that Christians could not participate in civil government, especially in warfare.
  2. In W.W. I Cordell Christian College in OK was closed by the local “defense counsel” and two young Christians were threatened with execution for their beliefs.
  3. But W.W. II produced a different mood and strong patriotism after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.
    - a. B. C. Goodpasture closed the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* to any discussion of the matter, which was a portent of things to come.
    - b. 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.

## VIII. THE POST-WORLD WAR II ERA

- A. With the return of GIs from the war, fervor for evangelism grew.
  1. Churches and brethren seemed to be willing to try whatever sounded good in spreading the gospel.
  2. 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.
  3. With good intentions, churches were inundated with appeals to support cooperative works in Germany, Italy and Japan.
    - a. The work in these countries was “overseen” by churches in TN and TX which assumed centralized control over the work done in these countries.
    - b. This was the beginning of the “sponsoring church” concept, with scores or hundreds of churches sending funds to one eldership, who then had the

oversight of whatever work was in their sight.

- B. In time some brethren began to have second thoughts about such cooperative efforts that involved something larger than the local church.
  - 1. Roy Cogdill, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Luther Blackmon and Yater Tant were forced by conscience to withdraw their support of these schemes and voice their concerns.
    - a. This was reminiscent of what had 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.
  - 2. For some years Wallace had published the *Bible Banner*, but in 1949 closed its pages and revived the *Gospel Guardian*, which he had published in the 30s, and asked Yater Tant to become its editor.
    - a. This paper became a leading influence in the controversies that developed and came to full bloom in the 1950s.
    - b. 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.
    - c. Other papers soon joined the battle—Preceptor, Searching the Scriptures and Truth Magazine.

## IX. WHAT WERE “THE ISSUES”?

- A. The proliferation of human institutions and sponsoring church arrangements, all clamoring for church support, set the scene for conflict.
  - 1. Combining this with the post-war prosperity many Christians were experiencing after the struggles during the Depression, the stage is set for differences, disagreement and division.
  - 2. Soon a national radio and TV program came on the scene.
    - a. 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.
    - b. The 5<sup>th</sup> and Highland church in Abilene, TX was the sponsor, and in time came to have over 1,000 churches sending money to them for the program.
    - c. The problem was that with no denominational hierarchy, how does one program speak with authority for all independent churches of Christ?
  - 3. In the beginning, this program had a different composition.
    - a. The originators of the program, James Walter Nichols and James D. Williford came to my father with the idea of producing professional quality tapes to be sold to churches and aired on local stations.
    - b. My father thought it sounded like a good idea, but the final version was a far cry from what was proposed.
  - 4. Added to the list of organizations clamoring for support were homes for unwed mothers, homes for the aged, orphan asylums, publishing ventures, “Cows for Korea,” and a host of other ventures arising out of the imaginative minds of brethren who wanted to go good.
- B. Opposition began to appear in some of the religious journals.
  - 1. As early as May, 1949, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., wrote an article in *GG* questioning “brotherhood elderships” that were overseeing the work of many churches.

2. Then in Dec., 1953, Glenn L. Wallace, preacher for the College Church in Abilene, had an article in the *GG* raising questions about the Herald of Truth.
3. 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.
4. 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 Reual Lemmons.
  - a. Once again the pages of the *Advocate* were closed to opposing views, thus preventing thousands of from having a clear understanding of the issues.
- C. Eventually there were a number of debates on the issues beginning in 1954.
  1. Holt-Totty debate in Indianapolis, Oct. 1954.
  2. Harper-Tant debates in Lufkin and Abilene, TX in 1955.
  3. Woods-Porter debate in Indianapolis, January, 1956.
  4. Cogdill-Woods in Birmingham, November 1957.
  5. Wallace-Holt in Florence, AL, December 1959.
  6. These debates reflected scores of debates, hundreds of articles and untold numbers of discussions brethren have had through the years.
  7. Brethren who once stood together for the common faith were now on opposite sides of these issues.

#### **X. THE ARGUMENTS ADVANCED BY NON-INSTITUTIONAL BRETHERN**

- A. That God has revealed in Scripture patterns to be followed in the work and worship of the church. Heb. 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 and education 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 Cor. 11:8-9; Phil. 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 world-wide 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 these 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.
    - a. The human race exists, but has no organizational structure.
    - b. The human race lives and functions in nations, which have organizational structure.
    - c. The universal church exists, but has no organizational structure.
    - d. Its members function in local churches, which have organizational structure.

## XI. THE YELLOW TAG OF QUARANTINE

- A. The lines of fellowship were further strained by the policies of the *Gospel Advocate*.
  - 1. 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.”
    - a. 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.
    - b. This is similar to the treatment of lepers in Biblical times.
  - 2. In this environment, the pressure on other institutions to “line up” would be resisted at the risk of losing prestige and financial well-being.
    - a. There were efforts to close down Florida College by discouraging students from going there, and by discouraging individual financial contributions.
    - b. Business ventures such as Bible bookstores were boycotted if its owners were thought to be antis.
  - 3. Churches were pressured to line up and let their position be known.
    - a. I heard urgings to put some human institution in the budget for at least \$5 to let everyone know that they were not “anti” churches.
    - b. Church treasurers were dared to voice a reservation about these schemes were told to either sign the check or resign and go elsewhere.
  - 4. Preachers were threatened, fired and had meetings cancelled.
    - a. They were told “if you espouse such a doctrine you won’t have any place to preach.”
    - b. They were told by elders not to preach on these matters.
    - c. “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.
- B. The ugliness of a partisan spirit was manifested in many ways.
  - 1. Ads for preachers contained such statements as “no anti need apply.”
  - 2. Lawsuits over ownership of church buildings were paraded before the world.
  - 3. I was present in Cordele, GA in 1966 when a group of liberal-minded brethren came to the building with a telephone pole battering ram, intending to break down the door and take over the building.
    - a. They later broke into the building, and one time were confronted with

- brethren inside with cameras, whereupon one of the aggressors shouted to someone outside to “bring the gun.”
4. I heard the tape of a radio sermon preached by Malcolm Hill in Waycross, GA, stating that if a child got run over by a car in front of the Tebeau St. church building there, that the church would not allow the church phone to be used to call an ambulance for the bleeding child.
    - a. This eventually led to my wife and I being involved in working with unwed mothers to find homes for some 80 children who needed to be adopted.
  5. In the Wallace-Holt debate in Florence, AL, I heard G.K. Wallace charge Charles Holt with the crime of taking church money to buy fertilizer for the church lawn, but wouldn't take a dime to feed an orphan child.
    - a. That was a strange charge, as the Holts had adopted four children.
- C. In short, by the 1960s the clear message was sent to the minority “antis”—“go away, you bother me.”
1. What once were defended as expediencies were now defended as something necessary.
  2. One writer claimed that children were raised better in orphanages than in the homes of Christians.
    - a. “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 defender of Central KY Orphan Home).
  3. A study was shown that among institutional churches, the average church member gave 7 cents per week for the care of orphans.
    - a. Thus they were willing to divide the church over 7 cents per week.
    - b. And they accused those who believed in taking orphans into their own homes of being “orphan-haters.”
- D. What is abundantly clear is that the majority of the men and institutions that were centers of influence were with the institutional majority.