

## **Gospel Gleaner**

Vol. 32 ♦ No. 3

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## **Inside this Issue**

Andy Erwin

As we continue our journey through the Restoration Movement in America, our study critiques some of the conflicts which occurred in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. We ought not to consider religious controversy to be strange. Whenever we find the church growing in the book of Acts, it is not long until some conflict arises which had to be addressed. How we determine to address the conflict will ultimately affect the spiritual growth or decline of our home congregations, families, or ministries.

In this issue we are honored to have writing for us the following men: Todd Brenneman, Associate Professor of Christian History at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama; one of his students and my son, Jackson Erwin, the preacher for the Phenix City congregation in Alabama; Sam Hester, retired Professor of Bible and Christian History at Freed-Hardeman University and owner of Hester Publications; Gary Colley, a teacher in many different schools of preaching and a gospel preacher for many years; Hugh Fulford, a gospel preacher and author for many years, and Mike Kiser, an instructor at the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies and a gospel preacher.

Thank you for your contributions to the paper!

# The Controversy between Alexander Campbell and John Thomas over Re-Baptism

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Jackson Erwin

Throughout the American Restoration Movement, the desire to study the Bible and learn the inspired message has been the center of its purpose. However, in this endeavor, some things have been heavily discussed and debated among the leaders of the movement that have made a significant impact on the church. There are six issues which brought about heated debates and diligent study: instrumental music in worship, the use of missionary societies, eschatology (last things), non-institutionalism, Christians in government, and the re-baptism of those among the sects. It is this last issue that will be discussed in this article.

## John Thomas



One of the first times the question of re-baptism was discussed was in the 1835 issue of the *Millennial Harbinger*. In this volume, Alexander Campbell refuted the teachings of John Thomas, a preacher for the Disciples in Philadelphia. Thomas was a trained surgeon who immigrated to the United States from London in 1832. On his way to New York, his ship encountered a

terrible storm. He prayed that if God spared his life, he would dedicate it to the study of religion. When he survived, Thomas fulfilled his promise.

After landing in New York, he travelled to Cincinnati, Ohio, and encountered the disciples. After being convinced of the Restoration Plea and the essentiality of baptism, he was immersed in 1832. Soon after, he met Alexander Campbell. Campbell encouraged Thomas to “give himself to the study of the Word in order to general usefulness, and gave him some directions as to the proper field he should occupy.”<sup>1</sup> Through Campbell’s instruction, Thomas began preaching in Philadelphia, later encountering Campbell a second time in 1833. Campbell described Thomas’s work in the area when writing:

The brethren in that city in general gave him a good character—said that he improved in the knowledge of the Scriptures; but was too self-opinionated and dogmatical. I apologized for his youth and inexperience, and advised a kind and courteous treatment of him, alleging that this infirmity would wear off in time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell, “Extra, No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger*, ed. Alexander

Campbell (Bethany, VA: Campbell, 1837; reprint Joplin, MO: College Press), 579.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

In 1834, Thomas became the writer and editor of a paper which he entitled the *Apostolic Advocate*. The first issue appeared in May and primarily focused on eschatology. A proposal for the paper was published in the *Millennial Harbinger* and gave six subjects discussed in the publication. They were as follows:

1. The Non-Identity of all Popular Religion with the Religion of Christ.
2. The defence (sic) of the Holy Scriptures against all creeds, ‘Confessions of Faith,’ Commentators and System Makers.
3. The *objects* proposed by the proselyting Spirit of the Age as developed in the so-styled “*benevolent institutions of the day*,” incompatible with and contrary to the predictions of the Ancient Prophets.
4. The modern *dogmas* of physical and spiritual operations, *not* the *doctrines* of the Holy Spirit taught by the Apostles.
5. The Fates and Fortunes of the Kingdoms of the World fore-shown by prophecy.
6. Religious, Moral, and Literary varieties; with Essays on various interesting and important subjects in relation to the kingdom of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Thomas, “Proposals,” in the *Millennial Harbinger*, ed. Alexander

Campbell was optimistic of Thomas and the paper at first. This was demonstrated in his comments on the proposal for the *Apostolic Advocate*. Campbell wrote:

Brother Thomas is already known to many of our readers from his able review of the Catholic controversy, and to myself he is so well known as a talented, devoted, and zealous disciple of the Messiah—as an honorable and independent advocate of the truth, who has, through his veneration and affection for the apostolic institution, sacrificed his temporal and professional interests and honors that I cannot but announce with pleasure his project as above developed.<sup>4</sup>

### **Conflict with Campbell**

The relationship between Campbell and Thomas soured in a matter of years. The roots of their division are found in 1835, but the final break is revealed clearly in the 1837 issue of the *Millennial Harbinger* on the issue of re-baptism. The disagreement between Thomas and Campbell on this subject arose when Thomas refuted the belief held by Campbell and many other disciples that those who were immersed for reasons other than remitting their sins had to be re-baptized for their immersion to be accepted by God. While this is the mainstream view held today among conservatives in the church,

Campbell (Bethany, VA: Campbell, 1834; repr., Joplin, MO: College Press) 189.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

such was not the case in the early-mid 1800s. Of course, there were many others who agreed with Thomas on the issue.

In 1835, Campbell responded to an article written by Thomas in the *Apostolic Advocate*, in which he gave a defense for re-baptizing Baptist converts for the remission of their sins before accepting them as members. Campbell makes his conviction on the subject clear in his reply to Thomas, writing:

We have hitherto thought, and yet think, that when an immersed person presents himself as an applicant for admission into any particular congregation, having either oral or written testimony of his having been an orderly member of a Baptist community, he ought forthwith to be received—his application being evidence of his desire to submit to the institution of the Messiah, as laid down in our Statute Book—the *New Testament*. If himself satisfied with his immersion, the church has no liberty, or is under no precept or obligation to demand re-immersion for its satisfaction.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to note that, while it was the common practice of Campbell to publish the opposing side's arguments and then respond to them, he

gave no such right to Thomas. In the conclusion of the 1835 edition of the *Harbinger*, Campbell wrote:

Closing our volume for 1835, and for other reasons, we have not as yet complied with the request of brother *Thomas*, as to the republishing his pieces on that question. Indeed, I do not desire a discussion of such a matter at this crisis. I should have to accompany those pieces with strictures, which might operate in a direction and to an issue wholly unsuspected by our too sanguine friends. Let it be for the time being attributed to my cowardice, or to any other cause as probable, which the brethren please; but, in my judgment, this is not the time nor the place for such a discussion, nor is *the work* to which we are at present called.<sup>6</sup>

The issue was largely set aside in the following year but reemerged once again in 1837. This time, however, Campbell was much less gracious in his refutation against Thomas. He attributed to his former student a cultic mentality and compared him to others who left the Restoration Movement, specifically Sidney Rigdon and Elias Smith. Having recalled the previous apostates of the Movement, he writes:

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Re-immersion and Brother Thomas," *Millennial Harbinger*, ed. Alexander Campbell (Bethany, VA: Campbell, 1835; repr. Joplin, MO: College Press), 566.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Re-baptism," *Millennial Harbinger*, ed. Alexander Campbell (Bethany, VA: Campbell, 1835; repr. Joplin, MO: College Press), 619.

We have indeed met with some two or three infallible, or rather, indomitable spirits, who, while they admitted the propriety of this course in reference to others, would not be governed by it themselves. Of this class was Sidney Rigdon, of Mormon memory. Exceedingly fond of *new ideas*, and always boasting of originality, he sought distinction by his lubrications on the Prophecies. He became a flaming literalist of the school of *Elias* (Smith.), a Millennarian of the first water... Finally, having discovered the Golden Bible, he and Joseph Smith covenanted for a new religion, and delivered us from a great calamity. And now I fear we are about to find, or rather have found, in the person of Dr. Thomas, another of these infallible dogmatists, so supremely devoted to his own opinions, and his own glory in defending them—so confident in asserting them—so diligent in propagating them, that, to oppose him is, as he avers, to call the doctrine of the conditionality of eternal life, *materialism*.<sup>7</sup>

In this lengthy piece, Campbell provides a background of his experiences with Thomas, from his time meeting him in 1832, to his commendations on Thomas' debate on Romanism in 1834, to the growing hostility between the two largely due to

misunderstandings and personal attacks (primarily on the part of Thomas). More importantly, Campbell provides a reason for his silence on the subject in 1836 and Thomas' retaliation against it. He recalls:

All this was patiently endured in hope that I might save him from his suicidal course, till his reply to my essays on Materialism extinguished the last lingering ray. More barefaced perversion of scripture and reason, more unblushing sophistry, and, when all the circumstances and relations are considered, more insolent treatment has not fallen in my way during my editorial career. I resolved on silence for a time, and so intimated. But this was immediately perverted into "a very convenient way of evading very inconvenient arguments"—"a violation of the Christian spirit...." My silence, then, only emboldened the Doctor to propagate his opinions with more determination, and to treat me with still more disrespect.<sup>8</sup>

### Thomas' Legacy

The time frame in which Campbell wrote his refutation brings more light on the conflict between him and Thomas as well. When reading these pages outside of their historical context, it appears that Campbell is simply attacking an innocent man who disagreed with him about re-baptism.

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 578.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 581.

However, at this time, Thomas was forming his own sect based upon the issue of re-baptism, the millennial reign of Christ, and many other issues surrounding prophecy and the future. In 1847, he was baptized for a third and final time. Over the next few years, his group became known as the Royal Association of Believers but did not have an official name among themselves until the time of the Civil War. In 1864, Thomas identified his fellowship as the *Christadelphians* (or “Brothers in Christ”).

Thomas wrote many works on the subject of prophecy, namely a three-volume commentary on Revelation entitled *Eureka*, one which predicted a future return and restoration of the Jews to Palestine called *Elpis Israel*, and an exposition on the book of Daniel. The prophetic interpretations that began to arise in the mind of Thomas

(later to be published) raised concerns with Campbell. Even though Thomas was correct on the necessity for re-baptism, it was this negative influence in the Restoration Movement that would inevitably cause many to join Campbell in its refutation.

While this was one of the earliest recorded cases on the debate of re-baptism, it would not be the last. In the next issue, we will examine the discussion between David Lipscomb, James Harding, J.D. Tant, and Austin McGary on this historical matter. The debate between the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Firm Foundation* was arguably the most influential event which led many in the churches of Christ to see the need for re-baptism and demonstrates a transition in thought among many in the Lord’s church regarding this subject.

## The Split with the Christian Church

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Sam Hester

The early restorers in America restored the teaching, the worship, and the will of God in the church. They did this by *disregarding* the opinions, inventions, and the devices of man. Then, by putting their faith in God and his Word, they *held to* the authority and judgment of God. But new beliefs and practices were introduced, causing controversy, division(s), and finally a split. What are some lessons we can learn from the split?

1. *Insistence to name the church was uncalled for.* Alexander Campbell liked the name “Disciple” because that term was used in the first two chapters of Acts. Others preferred the name “Christian Church.” All of them had no objection to the designation, “church of Christ,” but they insisted on having a name. Ben Franklin explained, “. . . in nine cases out of ten we will be perfectly understood by saying ‘the church,’ ‘the body,’ or the ‘kingdom.’”

There is no necessity for lugging in such terms as ‘Christian Church,’ ‘Disciples’ Church’ or ‘Disciple Church.’ This is as ridiculous as ‘Disciple Preacher.’ If we have simply *the mind* of the Lord, we can express ourselves in *the words* of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Any of the 96 images of the Lord’s people in the New Testament<sup>2</sup> were scriptural to use, but no one of them to the exclusion of the others. The root word for “name, nomos” is the same root word for “denominate.” Instead of applying a name, all brethren should have been satisfied to “live by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God.”

2. *The innovator became the deformer, challenging the restoration of God’s intended church.* To innovate means to depart from the standard. The Christian Church (Disciples) loved to refer to themselves as the “progressives.” Actually, they became “progressive deformers” and slowly quit even trying to restore the church.

3. *Those who initiated and facilitated the innovations used “expediency” to trump scriptural accuracy.* Expediency became their watchword. But expedients are to be used in a matter only when the matter is scriptural to

begin with!<sup>3</sup> All innovations in church history, including during times of restoration, came in because something was considered an emergency, or an innocent thing, or a convenience.

4. *Several initiators and facilitators were associates of Alexander Campbell.* Younger influential men around Campbell in the last few years of his life, like D.S. Burnett, Isaac Errett, James A. Garfield, and Robert Richardson, were all busy writing in his paper and discussing ideas with him. Naturally, they were very willing to “assist” him in influencing some things in the brotherhood, especially when it was on a large scale. Campbell clearly began a change after 1845 by teaching the absolute necessity of *all the churches* to cooperate in evangelism.<sup>4</sup> Hugo McCord well summarized the absence of a gospel pattern of trying to operate some good work that would involve all congregations in the world. He said, “The church universal did not operate in New Testament times. Only the church local operated, sometimes alone (Phil. 4:15), sometimes in cooperation with other local churches (Acts 11:22), sometimes in helping private

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Franklin, “What Name Shall We Wear?” *American Christian Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 26 (June 26-June 27, 1871) 204.

<sup>2</sup> Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> Hugh F. Fulford, “Expedients of Additions?” *Restoration News and Views: The Pleas, Principles, Perspectives and Personalities* (Henderson, TN: Hester

Publications, 2018) 73-79. See also G. K. Wallace, *Lectures on Denominational Dogmas* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1978. Reissued by Hester Publications with permission, 2006) 155-172.

<sup>4</sup> Everett Ferguson, “The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Alexander Campbell,” *Restoration Quarterly*, Winter 1958, 2:228.

homes (Acts 6:1), but never in a collective sense.”<sup>5</sup>

5. *D.S. Burnett began the first brotherhood missionary society (Cincinnati 1849)*. Many brethren like James Alexander Harding believed that “human organizations as substitutes for the divine arrangement of the church were an arrogant indictment of God’s wisdom.”<sup>6</sup> Campbell was voted in as president of the missionary society. Though he was not present for the vote, he willingly served. Since Ohio was the mother of the society idea, it was natural that Ohio led the way in establishing state societies of mission works.<sup>7</sup>

It was also in an Ohio Missionary Society Convention (1861) that a vote was taken to urge the brethren to “do everything in their power to promote the Union of the United States.” McGarvey recommended they confine themselves to mission work, but his proposal was voted down. The chairman then called a recess, James Garfield appeared in army uniform and spoke to the delegates, and a vote (though an unofficial vote because it was in a recess) was taken.

McGarvey and others were discouraged by this entry of the society into politics. But the society took a stronger stance in an 1863 vote against the

South. At that time McGarvey would no longer support the society at all. Tolbert Fanning in Nashville was insistent that the society repent for their resolutions or their southern brethren could no longer fellowship them. More divisions were being made.

By 1875 some Northern brethren became impatient for even more power for the society. That year they established a more powerful society (AFMS) “whether some brethren liked it or not.” The fear that more overreaching by societies would occur proved to be true! Officials began to make more laws for all the churches to follow. And more separations came.

6. *Isaac Errett and other brethren vigorously supported the Civil War*. Errett made many speeches in support of it. He asked the Governor of Michigan to appoint him to the position of colonel so he could raise a group of soldiers and command them in battle. He was refused because all positions had been taken. J.W. McGarvey begged Errett not to be involved in the war effort, but Errett absolutely refused. History shows that it was here in Michigan that Errett began to exhibit a religious liberalism.

7. *Errett introduced a creed with by-laws in 1863 in a Detroit congregation*. He and some members of the

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<sup>5</sup> Hugo McCord, *Fifty Years of Lectures, Vol. II* (Atwood: TN) 195.

<sup>6</sup> L.C. Sears, *The Eyes of Jehovah* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1970) 75.

<sup>7</sup> James Deforest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard, 1962) 189.

congregation drew up a document called, “A Synopsis of the Faith and Practice of the Church of Christ,” which many in the brotherhood were convinced was a creed. The creed gave power to the by-laws. The by-laws, naturally provided a way to get around the authority of the New Testament Scripture. Moses Lard printed the creed and by-laws in his *Quarterly* in September 1863.<sup>8</sup>

The by-laws did things like create a pastor position in the government of the congregation. Errett himself, of course, became the pastor. The by-laws allowed for “bishops and deacons,” but Errett or anyone holding the position of pastor had more power than the bishops or the deacons. The pastor was in charge of all operations of the congregation and always chaired the business meetings. The pastor was in charge of the worship, did the preaching, and chose whoever assisted him in the services.

Moses Lard wrote a withering refutation of the creed and by-laws.<sup>9</sup> He said that the brethren in Detroit should “repudiate at once this ‘Synopsis,’ and to rescind these laws. That they have erred and wounded their brethren needs no proof.”

8. James A. Garfield led in beginning a new paper in 1866 – *The Christian Standard*. Garfield wanted a paper that would promote Christians getting into politics – something the *Gospel Advocate* (edited by David Lipscomb) and the *American Christian Review* (edited by Benjamin Franklin) did not promote in their pages. Garfield chose Isaac Errett to help him organize a group of influential and wealthy men to establish the paper.

Garfield ensured that Errett was made editor. Through this paper, and with the work of James H. Garrison, Errett led almost all Northern brethren to accept the afore-mentioned innovations, and especially instrumental music, in the last thirty years of the 1800s.

Errett considered the members of the Restoration Movement to be a denomination because they were a “class or collection of individuals called by the same name.” He felt that immersion was unnecessary to be a Christian because denying this principle would damage the plea for Christian unity.<sup>10</sup> As two distinct views of instrumental music became prevalent in the church, Errett championed the idea that instrumental music was a matter of opinion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Moses Lard, “A Synopsis of the Faith and Practice of the Church of Christ,” *Lard’s Quarterly* (Georgetown, KY: 1864. Reissued by Old Paths Book Club: 1949) 95-100.

<sup>9</sup> Lard’s eight pages of comments (100-107) followed the printing of the Synopsis and By-laws.

<sup>10</sup> Monroe Hawley, *Redigging the Wells: Seeking Undenominational Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Quality, 1976) 70, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Earl West, *Search for the Ancient Order, Vol. II* (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1950) 88.

Errett thought the restorers of his day had outgrown the preaching of the earlier frontier times. Franklin declared that he was tired of hearing “progressives continually talking about a ‘higher order of Christianity,’ and ‘keeping up with the times,’ who only seek conformity to the world.”

9. *Robert Richardson began to advocate a Calvinistic view of the Holy Spirit.* After he became motivated about the view by reading some German sources, he advocated it in the *Millennial Harbinger*.<sup>12</sup> He speculated that the restorers’ view of the work of the Holy Spirit was too much influenced by the writing of John Locke. Locke taught that our knowledge came through our five senses. Richardson called this “dirt philosophy,”<sup>13</sup> convinced that the Holy Spirit was more a matter of the heart than of the mind. Both Thomas and Alexander Campbell had read Locke’s works, especially on religious toleration, and referred to Locke as “the Christian philosopher.” Locke’s writings had influenced English Parliament, the king, and religious liberty in England and America.

Alexander Campbell had taught differently on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and he gave strong biblical and historical reasons why. In his debates with Walker, Maccalla, and Rice, Campbell stressed that Presbyterian Calvinism had “tried in vain to justify infant baptism on a faulty alignment of old and new covenants, specifically a faulty typology of circumcision, but it had confounded the whole process of conversion and regeneration by disassociating the operations of the Spirit from the converting Word, and by relegating the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit to the dramatic bestowal of saving faith rather than to the baptism of the conscious believer, the ‘bath of regeneration’ (Tit. 3:5).”<sup>14</sup> In the debate with Nathan L. Rice in 1843, Campbell summarized why he stood so vigorously against the Calvinists’ unproved supposition: “I, therefore, *ex animo*, repudiate their whole theory of mystic influence, and metaphysical regeneration, as a vision of visions, a dream of dreams, at war with philosophy, with the philosophy of mind, with the Bible, with reason, with common

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<sup>12</sup> Richardson assisted Campbell as an associate editor of the *Harbinger* for 30 years.

<sup>13</sup> According to C. Leonard Allen, Richardson called Locke’s popular philosophy “dirt philosophy” because of its insistence that God could influence human beings only through material objects or through revealed words. *Distant Voices: Discovering a Forgotten Past for a Changing*

*Church* by C. Leonard Allen: ACU Press; 1993. See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Richardson\\_\(physician\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Richardson_(physician))

<sup>14</sup> Paul M Blowers and James O. Duke, “Calvinism” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004) 110.

sense, and with all Christian experience.”<sup>15</sup>

Tolbert Fanning objected to Richardson’s views, but Campbell did not do anything about it. Several historians suggested that Campbell was beginning to get feeble at this time and allowed some men around him to take on more of the duties of his work. Richardson was Campbell’s personal physician and an associate editor with Campbell in the *Harbinger* for thirty years, in addition to being a teacher and administrator at Bethany College.

*10. Several good men warned in word and in print about the above innovations:* J. W. McGarvey<sup>16</sup> (preacher, Bible teacher, college president, editor), Benjamin Franklin (preacher, corresponding secretary of a missionary society for 17 years,

editor), Tolbert Fanning (preacher, Bible teacher, college president, editor), Moses Lard<sup>17</sup> (preacher, editor), David Lipscomb (preacher, college Bible teacher, editor of the *Gospel Advocate* for almost fifty years), E.G. Sewell, and others.

## CONCLUSION

Brethren turned away from the Christian Church (Disciples) as the doctrines mentioned above were introduced. When the innovators did not cease, two different bodies of Christians slowly grew apart. Separations in the original fellowship of hearts, minds and bodies began to form in 1845, 1849, 1860-63, 1866, 1875, 1878, and in other years. Finally, the U.S. Census in 1906 reported two different bodies.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Alexander Campbell and Nathan L. Rice, “Proposition Fifth: In Conversion and Sanctification, the Spirit of God operates on Persons only through the Word. Mr. Campbell affirms. Mr. Rice denies,” pages 611-758. Reissued in one volume [print], Henderson, TN: Hester Publications, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Though McGarvey taught against instrumental music in worship, he was not able to convince even his former students to abandon it or to teach against it. When discussing the matter with Jesse P. Sewell, McGarvey commended Sewell’s approach more than his own. What was the difference in approaches? McGarvey and Sewell both taught against it, but McGarvey would fellowship those who used it and Sewell would not. McGarvey was wrong. When McGarvey thought that instrumental music in worship was a fad that would pass away, he again was wrong. When he gave his name and influence to a paper that advocated instruments, again he was wrong.

<sup>17</sup> Lard did not object to missionary societies because he believed they were unscriptural; he objected because they were dangerous for “their extreme liability to usurp power that does not belong to them,” cited by Bill Humble, *The Missionary Society Controversy in the Restoration Movement* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms 1964) 173, 175. Put in print by Hester Publications.

<sup>18</sup> Some Christian Churches separated from the Christian Church (Disciples) in 1927 when un-immersed persons were accepted into membership. These Independents then began to send out missionaries directly from the congregations and established their own convention. T.L. Meithe, “Christian Churches/Church of Christ (Independent),” *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 255.

There were noteworthy reasons these two bodies separated. Things that were only expedients were made into beliefs and practices: instruments of music in worship, instituting pastor rule in a local congregation, writing a creed or by-laws, or otherwise speaking where the Bible did not speak and not remaining silent when the Bible was silent. The result of doing these things in many cases forced some Christians to either worship in ways that had no foundation in New Testament Scripture or to leave the group. One example was when an instrument of music was introduced in the church's worship in Newbern, Tennessee. A lawsuit ensued and after a two-

year trial, the judge awarded the building to the Christian Church (Disciples). Adron Doran's description of the outcome of the trial depicts the starkness of religious division — plus the significance of such division: “. . . John W. McGarvey, the *Christian Standard*, and the College of the Bible were on one side; and David Lipscomb, the *Gospel Advocate*, and Nashville Bible School stood on the other side. The Christian Church won a lawsuit in 1905 and a church building, but the price was the loss of the local church. Churches of Christ were put on immediate notice that the Christian Church valued the organ more than Christian unity.”<sup>19</sup>

## The Conflict over Premillennialism in the Twentieth Century

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Todd M. Brenneman

Belief in the premillennial return of Jesus Christ has a long history in Christianity. There is evidence of it in the earliest centuries, and there have been other times in Christian history where it has made a resurgence. Today, premillennialism is a popular view among many religious people in the United States and elsewhere.

The view that Jesus will return and inaugurate a 1000-year kingdom on

earth, however, is not that common within churches of Christ. There is some evidence that the premillennial view so present in a lot of religious groups is making in-roads into the church, and there are some pockets in various places throughout the United States with premillennial congregations. In most congregations, however, premillennialism is not too prevalent a view. While there was some

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<sup>19</sup> Adron Doran and J. E. Choate, *The Christian Scholar: A Biography of Hall Laurie Calhoun, Protégé of John William*

*McGarvey* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1985) 219.

acceptance of premillennialism in the nineteenth century in the Restoration Movement, by the middle of the twentieth century, the doctrine was largely dismissed and banished from most churches.

### **Nineteenth Century**

Premillennialism became popular in the nineteenth century, even among some in the Restoration Movement. Barton W. Stone appears to have held some premillennial views, but he also had a negative view of whether or not human beings could affect real change in society. While Stone influenced some to hold premillennial views, others adopted premillennialism through the teachings of a Baptist minister named William Miller.

Miller believed that his study of the books of Daniel and Revelation especially had led him to discover that Jesus would return sometime between March 1843 and March 1844. When Miller started to promote his beliefs, he gained a significant following.<sup>1</sup> Walter Scott was one influenced by Miller into believing both premillennialism and the imminent return of Christ (although he was not particularly supportive of determining a date). When

Miller's dates passed without the return of Christ, Scott dropped this view.<sup>2</sup>

### **Russell-White Debate**

There were other examples of premillennialism in the nineteenth century that were not as influential on the Restoration Movement. Charles Taze Russell's Bible Students—the precursor movement to the Jehovah's Witnesses—were also premillennial, and Russell attempted several times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to date the return of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Again, there were not as many in the Restoration Movement who had been influenced by Russell's movement.

In fact, in 1908, brother L.S. White from Texas debated Russell on a variety of propositions, including that “[t]he Scriptures clearly teach that the second coming of Christ will precede the millennium.”<sup>4</sup> This was apparently one of the few times Russell publicly debated his views.<sup>5</sup> It is also interesting that M.C. Kurfees and R.H. Boll were the ones who had suggested White as Russell's opponent.<sup>6</sup>

### **R.H. Boll**

By the twentieth century, many in the churches of Christ had adopted a

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<sup>1</sup>See Paul K. Conkin, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 117-24.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Rollmann, “Eschatology” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 305.

<sup>3</sup> Conkin, *American Originals*, 145-51.

<sup>4</sup> Charles T. Russell and L. S. White, *Russell-White Debate* (Cincinnati: F. L. Rowe, 1912; reprint, Rosemead, CA: The Old Paths Book Club, n.d.), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Russell and White, *Russell-White Debate*, vi.

<sup>6</sup>Russell and White, *Russell-White Debate*, vii.

view that the millennium was not a literal concept. Throughout the history of the Restoration Movement, there had been an emphasis that the kingdom that Christ preached was not a physical kingdom, so Christians need not look for Christ to return to set up his kingdom. Indeed, many noted the connection between the kingdom and the church in the New Testament. There were some, however, who continued to believe in premillennialism as a valid teaching in scripture. One of those was Robert Henry Boll.



Boll came to the United States as a German Catholic but was baptized in Tennessee and became a part of the church of

Christ.<sup>7</sup> He attended Nashville Bible School and preached in various places before arriving in Kentucky in 1904.<sup>8</sup> He also became a frequent author and front page editor for *Gospel Advocate*, where he developed his thoughts on prophecy and the Millennium.

Boll expanded his thoughts on the Millennium beyond just certain passages in Revelation. By 1912 he was seeing “premillennialism in every parable and lesson of the New

Testament.”<sup>9</sup> He was forced out in 1915 because of opposition to his promotion of premillennialism. He moved on to serve as editor of *Word and Work*, a premillennial journal.<sup>10</sup>

Historian Earl West referred to Boll as a “serious and dedicated Bible student who commanded widespread admiration” and “possessed an infectious spirituality that attracted numerous friends.”<sup>11</sup> Several preachers adopted Boll’s views and promoted them in the early part of the twentieth century.

Boll also faced substantial opposition. While still a writer with *Gospel Advocate*, Boll faced opposition from F.B. Srygley, F.W. Smith, M.C. Kurfess, and others. These preachers continued to reject and contest Boll’s views even after he left the *Advocate*.<sup>12</sup>

### Boll-Boles Debate

One of those who publicly confronted Boll on his views was H. Leo Boles, at the time president of David Lipscomb College (formerly Nashville Bible School where Boll had attended). In 1928, Boll and Boles met to debate several propositions related to premillennialism, including the restoration of the nation of Israel, the arrival of the kingdom of God on Pentecost, the earthly reign of Christ, and the question of Christ’s “premillennial and

<sup>7</sup> Hans Rollmann, “Boll, Robert Henry (1875-1956) in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 96-97.

<sup>8</sup> Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, vol. 3, *A History of the Restoration Movement, 1900-1918* (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1979), 394.

<sup>9</sup> West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:296.

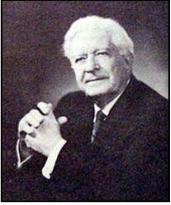
<sup>10</sup> Rollmann, “Boll,” 96.

<sup>11</sup> West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:392.

<sup>12</sup> West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:399-403.

imminent” coming.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the debate, both Boll and Boles had very positive things to say about their opponent as well as the attitude and manner in which the debate had been undertaken.<sup>14</sup>

### Foy E. Wallace, Jr.



The conflict over premillennialism was not always so genteel, however, especially when it came to the efforts of the most significant opponent to premillennialism in the twentieth century, Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Wallace had been successful as a preacher from his youth. He eventually became the editor of *Gospel Advocate* after several years of preaching. By 1933, though, he turned his attention to premillennialism both inside and outside of the church.

Wallace held two debates with Charles Neal, one in Kentucky and one in Tennessee. In the Kentucky debate, Wallace noted that while the debate was between two “members of the same communion,” there was division between them and that it “gives me no

pleasure at all to bring before the world that kind of an open split between brethren.”<sup>15</sup> However, Wallace believed in the need for the debate because premillennialism represented “a distinct menace to the churches of Christ. It involves consequences that are positively vitiating to the gospel of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

As West notes, Wallace’s “admirers universally agreed that he was the greatest man of the age; his enemies, who were often wounded by his relentless assaults, sometimes thought him narrow, ruthless, and bigoted.”<sup>17</sup> There is no denying that Wallace believed that premillennialism was a serious false doctrine that needed withstanding.

Among the problems Wallace had with the view (as West notes) were its apparent denial that Christ was currently reigning, its calling into question the fulfillment of God’s promises, its belittling of the role of the church, and its misunderstanding of the kingdom. Wallace created two journals, *Bible Banner* and *Gospel Guardian*, that “specialized in vigorous rebuttals of premillennial positions,” while other

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<sup>13</sup> H. Leo Boles, and R.H. Boll, *Unfulfilled Prophecy: A Discussion on Prophetic Themes* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1954); See also Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 150-51.

<sup>14</sup> Boles and Boll, *Unfulfilled Prophecy*, 393-94, and 410-12.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Neal and Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *Neal-Wallace Discussion on The Thousand*

*Years Reign of Christ* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1933), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Neal and Wallace, *Neal-Wallace Discussion*, 346.

<sup>17</sup> Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, vol. 4, *A History of the Restoration Movement, 1919-1950* (German-town, TN: Religious Book Service, 1987), 176.

journals, books, debates, and ministers engaged the question as well.<sup>18</sup>

The resistance to premillennialism took a variety of forms, with some holding views like H. Leo Boles that respected and loved those who supported premillennialism but also rigorously opposed it as a false doctrine not found in scripture. Others took the more antagonistic approach that Foy E. Wallace, Jr. did that looked at the doctrine as a pernicious weed that could destroy the church and that those supporting it were seeking to create a separate sect.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Impact of the Conflict**

The controversy over the doctrine was not just limited to the pulpit, debate stage, or pages of various journals. The conflict impacted mission efforts

as churches and members wanted to know what missionaries believed about premillennialism. It also impacted Christian colleges. For example, when most presidents of colleges associated with churches of Christ condemned Boll's position, J. N. Armstrong, president of Harding College, decided not to. Because he did not, many assumed he was sympathetic to Boll's position, if not also a premillennialist.<sup>20</sup>

The efforts of Wallace and others, however, successfully minimized the impact and growth of premillennialism. Shortly after World War II, premillennialism was largely limited to churches of Christ in Kentucky and was not a major theology in most other regions.

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## **The College of the Bible: *What Could Have Been***

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Andy Erwin

The story of the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky, makes for a fascinating case study in Christian education. However, the lessons provided from the College of the Bible have not been learned by many sister institutions over the past century. The present study will provide an overview

of the origin, history, purpose, and demise of the College of the Bible.

### **Bacon College**

The story of the College of the Bible begins in Georgetown, Kentucky. It was here that Thornton F. Johnson decided to open a college sympathetic to the Restoration Movement, separating from the Baptist college where he

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<sup>18</sup> West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, 4:185.

<sup>19</sup> West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, 4:189.

<sup>20</sup> West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, 4:204-207. See also Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 154, and 161-66.

had been teaching, also located in that town.<sup>1</sup> Walter Scott agreed to serve as the first president. After one year, D.S. Burnett (who would go on to establish the American Christian Missionary Society) became the second president.<sup>2</sup> In 1839 the college moved to Harrodsburg, Kentucky. The name was changed to Kentucky University in 1859.<sup>3</sup> The school that would become the College of the Bible originated as the Department of Hebrew Literature at Bacon College. When Bacon College was re-chartered as Kentucky University, the department was expanded and renamed the School of Biblical Literature and Moral Sciences.<sup>4</sup>

### **Kentucky University**

In 1865, Kentucky University combined with Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. Kentucky University had lost its buildings due to fire in 1864.<sup>5</sup> However, the school had an endowment of \$200,000.<sup>6</sup> Transylvania University had unoccupied buildings, but had no money.<sup>7</sup> The Morrill Land Act of 1862 also facilitated the merger as federal funds were made available for the establishment of an Agricultural and Mechanical school.

Kentucky University consisted of the College of the Bible and a College

of Arts and Sciences. The colleges of the Bible and Arts and Sciences were church-related and, to an extent, church-funded. The university also had state-supported departments — the Agricultural and Mechanical College, a College of Law, and later a College of Medicine.

### **The Bowman-McGarvey Controversy**

John B. Bowman was named regent by the state legislature over the Kentucky University and the various colleges which comprised the school. John Bowman was born October 16, 1824, to a rather prestigious family for pioneer days in Kentucky. His father was a lawyer and he too studied law. Bowman was also an alumnus and trustee of Bacon College. He was instrumental in helping the college reboot after it had been closed for a few years in the 1850s.

Each college retained its own president. Robert Milligan was named president over the College of the Bible. Milligan is best remembered for the books he authored, including his *Commentary on Hebrews*, *Scheme of Redemption*, and *Reason and Revelation*. In 1865, Milligan hired John William McGarvey to be a professor at the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard L. Harrison, Jr., "Bacon College," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved 4-7-20 from LTS Website: <https://www.lextheo.edu/history/>

<sup>5</sup> W.C. Morro, *Brother McGarvey* (Charleston, AR: Cobb Publishing, 2016), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

college in courses under the heading of Sacred History.<sup>8</sup>



J.W. McGarvey was born March 1, 1829, in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. He attended Bethany

College from 1847-1850 where he was introduced to Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Robert Richardson, W.K. Pendleton, Robert Graham, and C.L. Loos. McGarvey, Graham, and Loos would be instrumental figures in the College of the Bible. After preaching for twelve years in Missouri, McGarvey accepted the invitation to preach for the Main Street Christian Church in Lexington in 1862.<sup>9</sup>

McGarvey remains a legendary figure in the church. His *Commentary on Acts* remains a textbook for some schools of preaching. He was a prolific writer, editor, preacher, and professor. McGarvey was dedicated to operating a school which functioned for the training and education of ministers and provided a Christian education for other students. He desired the Bible to be the center of the curriculum. He believed by focusing on the Bible and its teachings pertaining to salvation, the College of the Bible could be the greatest seat of biblical learning in the world.<sup>10</sup>

McGarvey also believed that the College of the Bible existed for the betterment of the church. He believed the school should benefit the church which established and supported it. Bowman believed that the entire university was the church's gift to society.<sup>11</sup> He believed that the school could provide education in secular fields and receive support from secular sources in conjunction with its religious education and church-related support. Bowman also chose to ignore boundaries of fellowship with denominations.<sup>12</sup> While this practice was not uncommon among Christian colleges at this time, it was not in keeping with the founding purpose of the College of the Bible, which was to educate and train ministers for service in the church.

Bowman had ambitious plans for what he believed would become a world class institution. McGarvey also had ambitious plans for a world class institution. However, the two were looking at two different sets of plans. In short, a controversy soon ensued which involved accusations made by and against Bowman and McGarvey. Factions were created. Investigations occurred. An Executive Committee was formed. In 1873, McGarvey was fired despite the church's urging that he be absolved of any wrongdoing. Soon, without McGarvey, enrollment

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>9</sup> During the Nineteenth Century many congregations referred to themselves as "Christian Church" and "Church of Christ"

interchangeably. The name on the building had yet to become a line of demarcation.

<sup>10</sup> Morro, 220.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 111

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

in the College of the Bible fell dramatically.<sup>13</sup> His firing would lead to the collapse of this church-supported/state-supported venture in education.

### **An Independent College**

By June 1875, with a declining enrollment, the school sought to make peace with the church and asked that the Kentucky Christian Education Society nominate men for the professorships in the College of the Bible. The Society nominated Robert Graham for the presidency and J.W. McGarvey to fill his former role. However, it soon became apparent that the university would need to be reorganized.

In 1877 the College of the Bible became an independent institution with Graham, McGarvey, and I.B. Grubbs on the faculty. The College of Arts and Sciences became independent as well, although continuing to be church-related. C.L. Loos was recommended by McGarvey and became its president.<sup>14</sup> The Arts and Sciences college kept the name Kentucky University until 1908 when it assumed the former name Transylvania University. The College of Agriculture and Mechanics and the Law school would be renamed and rechartered as the University of Kentucky in 1878. After 1878, Bowman was no longer associated with the school.

In 1895 Robert Graham would retire from the presidency of the College

of the Bible. J.W. McGarvey became president of the College of the Bible and served until his death in 1911. The enrollment and endowment increased under McGarvey's leadership. He kept a close watch on the classes, textbooks, and teachers who were chosen to work in the school. His primary concern was to train gospel preachers and to avoid theological liberalism.

### **The Calhoun-Crossfield Controversy**

Hall Laurie Calhoun was born in Conyersville, Tennessee, December



11, 1863. Upon graduating high school, Calhoun desired to attend the United States Military Academy in West Point, New

York. Having passed his entrance examination, he was intending to enroll in 1888, when his father persuaded him instead to enter the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky.<sup>15</sup>

In 1892, Calhoun graduated as an honor student from Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Arts degree and from the College of the Bible with the Classical Diploma, meaning he had met the language requirements in Greek and Hebrew. According to Calhoun's biography written by Doran and Choate, "No student who had graduated from the College of the Bible surpassed him in ability and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Adron Doran and J.E. Choate, *The Christian Scholar* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1985), 37.

achievement in the estimation of John W. McGarvey.”<sup>16</sup>

With a view to teaching and someday leading the College of the Bible, McGarvey suggested that Calhoun should work toward a greater education. Arrangements were soon made for Calhoun to enter Yale Divinity School. The College of the Bible agreed to support the Calhoun family while he was working on his education with a stipend of \$50.00 per month, with the stipulation that Calhoun would return to Lexington and teach for them after he had completed his education. T.Q. Martin, who was also a classmate of Calhoun at the College of the Bible, remembered how, “J.W. McGarvey once said to me, ‘I have selected Brother Calhoun as the man upon whom my mantle shall fall.’”<sup>17</sup>

At Yale, Calhoun studied elocution at the feet of Samuel Silas Curry, the foremost celebrated speech teacher of his time. McGarvey would later rely on this aspect of Calhoun’s education to provide a new Public Speaking Department at the College of the Bible. In June of 1902, Calhoun graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree, again being awarded with honors. With McGarvey’s permission, in the fall of 1902 Calhoun entered Harvard Divinity School. He remained there for nearly two full years and completed all requirements for the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees respectively. Calhoun again graduated

with honors and was held in high esteem by teachers and classmates alike.

At Yale and Harvard, Hall Calhoun was exposed to the rankest liberals in the field of biblical criticism. McGarvey had hoped that such training would enable Calhoun to keep similar trends out of the College of the Bible after his retirement. Calhoun returned to Lexington in 1904 and worked alongside his mentor until the time of McGarvey’s death in 1911. In the spring of 1911, Calhoun was appointed dean, and upon McGarvey’s death on October 13, 1911, Calhoun was selected by the trustees as the acting president.

R.H. Crossfield was the president of Transylvania University — consisting of the college of Arts and Sciences. However, he resigned from his office to accept a “pastorate” for a large Christian Church in Atlanta. His resignation meant that Transylvania University and the College of the Bible were both in need of hiring a fulltime president. Crossfield suggested that the time was right to appoint a president over both schools. In December of that year, the trustees appointed Crossfield to fulfill the dual presidency he recommended.<sup>18</sup>

In truth, Crossfield had no business overseeing a Bible college. He was a theological liberal and he had no sympathy for the founding purpose of the school. Slowly the “old guard” which presided over the College of the Bible passed, and by 1917 Calhoun found

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 94, 95.

himself standing as the lone semblance of McGarvey's influence. As they passed, they were replaced one-by-one with liberals of the same mind as Crossfield. Calhoun was helpless to do anything about it as the board and president were aligned.

In the spring of 1917, controversy between liberal teachers and conservative students reached a boiling point, and Calhoun found himself squarely in the middle. One of the liberal teachers Crossfield appointed, William Clayton Bower, allegedly taught that Jehovah was nothing more than a tribal God of Israel, and that a missing link had been discovered – the Java Man – which proved the doctrine of evolution. Another of Crossfield's professors, Elmer Snoddy, was accused of being a "hard evolutionist" and considered the first chapter of Genesis to be mere poetry. A third professor, Alonzo Willard Fortune, denied the physical resurrection of Christ, the complete inspiration of the Bible, and that the men who wrote the Bible were inspired.<sup>19</sup>

After a hearing was conducted into these matters by an already biased board of trustees, the faculty was exonerated of all charges.<sup>20</sup> Calhoun was forced out and the College of the Bible (now Lexington Theological Seminary) went on to become one of the

most liberal "theological" institutions in the country.

### **Lexington Theological Seminary**

The College of the Bible changed its name to Lexington Theological Seminary in 1965 at its 100-year anniversary. From the time that Crossfield gained control of the school, it has succumbed to theological liberalism and ecumenicalism. In the 1960s the school joined an ecumenical consortium of denominational seminaries.<sup>21</sup> From 1987-1992 the school cooperated with the Lexington Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church to develop two master's programs to prepare people for service in that church.<sup>22</sup> In the 1990s they established the Moosnick Professorship in Judaism with the support of their local Jewish community.<sup>23</sup> Any semblance of McGarvey's College of the Bible has long since vanished into history.

### **Conclusion**

Are any lessons to be learned from the fall of the College of the Bible by sister institutions supported by churches of Christ today? We can see that the people who are working together in the leadership of the institution must share the same vision for the school. The board of trustees, president, and faculty must be reading from the same set of plans. Moreover, the regard among the leadership for the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 95—121.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Richard L. Harrison, Jr., "Lexington Theological Seminary," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers,

Anthony L. Dunnivant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 470—473.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 473.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 473.

restoration of the Lord's church must be complete, without reservation, without compromise, and consistent.

While the College of the Bible is to be esteemed for many things, it lacked this *one* thing. The college was never consistent in its rejection of missionary societies and maintained fellowship with the Christian Church. Many of the graduates also preached for churches that used the instrument in worship. As the Christian Church digressed into manmade organizations and practices, so too did the school.

If the founding purposes of the school are worthy to be maintained, and for a school to remain true to its founding purposes, the board must be knowledgeable, loyal, and true to them. If the trustees overseeing the school are not dedicated to the founding purposes of the school, it will only be a matter of time until the school that once was ceases to exist, and a new school molded and patterned by the ideals of the present-day board begins to take shape.

We also learn that a school cannot lead the charge against theological liberalism without strong leadership from its board and president. Having a few solid teachers on a faculty is not enough to stem the tide of liberalism. The board and the president must have the stomach, resolve, and backbone to stand for what is right even if it requires personal loss or sacrifice. The colleges associated with the church of that day (much like the colleges of today) had the power and the influence to

stop the spread of theological liberalism dead in its tracks. Yet, not only did they not stop it, they embraced it.

The track record of those to be associated with the school must therefore be considered. Is a person being selected to the board because of money and power, or because years of faithful service to Christ have garnered respect? Is a person being selected as president because of fund-raising characteristics or because of faith-building qualities? Is a person being considered for the faculty because of their academic qualifications or because of their reputation for soundness? Is a person being hired as a teacher for what he/she will say or for what he/she will *not* say? Institutions cannot continue to rob Peter to pay Paul on these questions. Faithfulness to God cannot be sacrificed upon the altar of academia. The leadership must be found *following* the right standard if they are going to be found *setting* the standard for the students trusted to their care.

The College of the Bible was lost one bad decision at a time. So often is apostasy developed gradually and over time. The key to preventing apostasy for individuals, families, churches, or schools is to focus on one decision at a time. Use sound judgment. Honor God. Seek first the kingdom. Do so one decision at a time. Had this been done at the College of the Bible, perhaps its legacy would still be honorable and its influence for good commendable.

# “Look How Progressive We Are!”

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Gary Colley

The word “progressive” is a very interesting word. And those who claim to be described by the word may be even more interesting! Webster's Dictionary (College Edition, Page 1164) defines the word “progressive” as “moving forward or onward; continuing by successive steps; to improve; advance toward perfection or to a higher state.”

Many of the progressive improvements in our world, such as are seen in medicines, merchandising, farming, etc., are improvements very much to be desired, but there must be limits where laws are broken, and individuals may be harmed because of wrong actions.

## **Religious Progressives?**

A few years ago, the “disciples of Christ” denomination broke away from faithful brethren by their introduction of instrumental music into New Testament worship and the missionary society. They called themselves the progressives and caused deep, distressing division in the body of Christ. The unity which Jesus prayed for His disciples to have and guard was trampled on by these (Jn. 17:20-21). Others who opposed them were termed as the moss-backs and non-progressives, among other less flattering names given by the “progressives.” For those whose eyes are now open to the slippery slope of liberalism that these

foolishly followed, they now allow women preachers and women elders, women usurping authority over men in public worship, etc. They ignored and continue to reject 1 Timothy 2:9-13; 1 Corinthians 14:34.

In religion today, some still claim that they are the progressives and suggest that others are in need of “catching up” with the times. Simply because certain things are humanly liked, desired, and practiced, bringing about these departures from the gospel does not make them scriptural practices. Among these “progressives” are the “community churches” who are more interested in pleasing the community than they are desirous of pleasing the Lord. Paul said if he were still pleasing men, he would not be servant of Jesus Christ (Gal.1:10). The apostle John wrote, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 Jn. 3:22).

## **Where is our Authority?**

We must remember that Jesus, after His resurrection, was given “all authority in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18-20; Lk. 6:46). Jesus' authority is established by direct command, approved example, and necessary inference. To this present time, He has not delegated any of His authority to any man, though some seem to so think

(Heb. 13:8-9). The church of Christ (Matt. 16:18; Rom. 16:16) does not belong to any man or group of men, though again some seem to so think!

Diotrephes, spoken of by the apostle John in 3 John 9-10, “prated” against the apostle and refused his command! He also, when some opposed him and evidently attempted to correct him, just “cast them out of the church!” John described him, and others who acted like him, in 2 John 9-11, as going onward or beyond the teaching of Christ, which is the meaning of the word progressive! He stated that he would be dealt with in due time.

Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that not everyone or anyone who just says, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of the Father who is in heaven. James also states that in order to assure our eternal salvation, we must “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22-25).

### Antichrist?

John refers to these “progressives” when he writes, “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 Jn. 2:18-19).

These were the progressives in the first century! Let us be ready unto every good work (Tit. 3:1). Let us trust God's inspired word to furnish us in all things needed to carry out these “good works.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

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# THE RICH MAN'S FAMILY

Luke 16:19-31

## Introduction:

1. There are two men in the story, exact opposites in every way.
2. Our focus is upon the one called “a certain rich man.”
3. While his family is not discussed in detail, we can learn this:

## Discussion:

### I. It Was an Anonymous Family.

- A. His name was not called out! There was no need to do so!
- B. Jesus came to save not condemn. John 3:17; 2 Timothy 4:1, 2

### II. It Was a Large Family.

- A. Children are a divine blessing. Psalms 127:3
- B. Children come with responsibility. Genesis 18:19; Joshua 25:15

### III. It Was an Affluent Family.

- A. No want—but was there happiness? 1 Timothy 6:10
- B. Neither poverty, nor riches are good! Proverbs 30:8

### IV. It Was a Selfish Family.

- A. What was the excuse for neglecting Lazarus? Proverbs 14:20, 21
- B. Greed can destroy a family from within. Luke 12:13; 15:28-30

### V. It Was a Carnally Minded Family.

- A. Their family Bible was unread. Psalms 1:1, 2; John 5:39
- B. Where was their mind? Colossians 3:1-5; I Corinthians 15:19

### VI. It Was a Bereaved Family.

- A. One brother is now dead. Hebrews 9:27; Ecclesiastes 12:5-7
- B. Who would be next to go? Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13, 14

### VII. It Was a Lost Family.

- A. They probably never thought that of themselves. John 3:1-5
- B. The Rich Man had no desire for a family reunion in hell!
- C. We never condemn our loved ones by obeying the gospel!

## Conclusion:

1. What is your family record? Is somebody lost? Is it you?
2. You can straighten the record out. John 8:44 or Galatians 3:26, 27

- Mike Kiser

# The Simplicity of New Testament Christianity

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Hugh Fulford

The church as established by Christ through the divine agency of His Holy Spirit-guided apostles and Christianity as revealed on the pages of the New Testament was simple and uncomplicated. The church consisted of repentant immersed believers who acknowledged Christ as the Son of God and their Savior and who were committed to following His teaching in all things. Their only organization was simple, autonomous congregations overseen by a plurality of spiritually mature men known as bishops/elders/pastors.

They gathered on the first day of every week to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, to eat the Lord's Supper, to pray, to study and be instructed in the word of God, and to give of their financial means for the work of caring for the poor and needy and for providing the funds needed to evangelize others with the gospel. Their objective was to observe all that Christ had commanded (Matthew 28:18-20), to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), to do all in the name of the Lord (by His authority and to His glory) (Colossians 3:17), to walk in the steps of Christ (I Peter 2:21), and to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29; II Corinthians 3:18).

But alas, the original simple way of Christ did not last! Anyone acquainted

with the history of apostasies in Christianity knows that over an extended period of time an elaborate hierarchy developed, culminating in the crowning of the first Pope in A.D. 606. Doctrines and practices strange to the New Testament began to be incorporated into the church: the use of holy water, the doctrine of purgatory, instrumental music, infant baptism, the substitution of sprinkling for immersion, the worship of images, the veneration of Mary, the doctrine that when blessed by the priest (the Bible teaches that all Christians are priests, I Peter 2:9) the elements on the Lord's table become the literal flesh and blood of Christ (the doctrine of transubstantiation), and a host of other doctrines and practices that evolved over the centuries and for which there is not the slightest precedent or authority in the Scriptures.

In time, a protestant (protest) reformation movement (effort to correct) was launched, leading to the formation of multiplied hundreds of denominations, with scores of variations within each of these denominations. Rather than returning to the simplicity of the original church, these denominations retained many of the doctrines and practices of Catholicism and developed distinctive doctrines and practices of their own. Baptists differ from Methodists, Presbyterians differ from

Episcopalians, Lutherans differ from Pentecostals, and the entire system of denominationalism (both Catholic and protestant) is an egregious affront to the unity for which Christ prayed and which He earnestly desires of those who profess to believe in and follow Him (John 17:20-21; cf. I Corinthians 1:10-13). Both Catholicism and Protestantism were born in apostasy and are the fruits of corrupting and departing from the standard of life, doctrine, and practice set forth in the New Testament

Everett Ferguson, in his book *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries*, recounts the simplicity of the church during those early centuries. There were many who held to the unadorned way of original Christianity. While I do not know how many congregations down through the centuries continued to adhere to the simplicity of the New Testament way, it is not hard to believe that there were many who did so. Someone has observed that all the church needs is a Book (the Bible, God's word), a table, a bottle of the fruit of the vine, and a loaf of unleavened bread. If all denominations (both Catholic and protestant) went out of business and closed their doors, simple, New Testament Christianity would not be destroyed or vanish from the face of the earth.

About a dozen years ago, I read an informative book titled *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* by Leonard Verduin, a Calvinist. Two questions he

addressed rather extensively were: "Who was the true Corpus Christi (body of Christ) throughout history?" and "Are the New Testament Scriptures worth dying for?" Those questions were important to several groups during the period of the Protestant Reformation. Regardless of how many did or did not stay true to the apostolic pattern set forth in the New Testament, we know that seed in the natural realm produce after their kind, and that the word of God, the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), produces after its kind—that it will produce in any century what it produced in the first century—plain, undenominational Christians and simple, undenominational congregations (churches) of God/Christ.

Today the churches of Christ are pleading for a return to the simplicity of the New Testament church. They are organized in the same way as were the congregations of which we read in the New Testament. They worship in the same New Testament way and plead for a "thus saith the Lord" in all that they teach, believe, and practice (see Matthew 28:18-20; II Timothy 3:16-17; I Peter 4:11a; Jude 3).

Instead of belittling the restoration plea and questioning the possibility of undenominational Christianity down through the ages, we need to re-commit ourselves and re-double our efforts to proclaiming the New Testament way and to following that way without fear or hesitation and without addition, subtraction, or substitution. On my Facebook page of Wednesday, January

29, 2020, I posted the below illustration that shows both the validity and the reality of simple, original New Testament Christianity in the present age.

If I want to grow watermelons in Tennessee today, I do not have to have an unbroken watermelon vine stretching down through all the millennia from the Garden of Eden to Tennessee. All I have to do is plant watermelon seeds in Tennessee today. They will produce in Tennessee today what they have always produced—watermelons! Similarly, to have the undenominational church of the New

Testament in the 21st century, we do not need an unbroken line of faithful congregations stretching down through all the centuries from the Day of Pentecost to the present. All we have to do is to plant the seed (the word of God, Luke 8:11). It will produce in the 21st century what it produced in the first century—undenominational congregations (churches) of the Lord!

May our world come to see the beauty of Christ and the simplicity of the church for which He gave His life and shed His blood (Acts 20:28)!

## *Remembering James R. McGill*

*1931-2020*

Andy Erwin



On March 16, 2020, James R. McGill was “gathered unto his people” (Gen. 25:8). I met brother McGill when I was a student and he was the director of the Nashville School of

Preaching in the fall of 1999. For the past twenty years, he was a trusted friend, brother, and father in the faith. Many readers and writers of the *Gleaner* will remember brother McGill’s contribution to the paper as the associate editor and a staff writer for several years. Whatever good I may accomplish as this paper’s editor is due to his influence. I would like to spend a short space at this time paying tribute to brother McGill, with plans to pay special tribute to him with greater space in the future.

Brother McGill was born in Nashville on April 27, 1931. While he was

reared in Nashville, he also had family in Bruceton/Hollow Rock, Tennessee, and spent many weeks there during his childhood. His home congregation was the great Chapel Avenue church of Christ. Brother McGill often spoke fondly of this church and her elders. He was baptized by Harris J. Dark in April of 1944. He was also influenced greatly by Carol B. Ellis who preached at Chapel Avenue beginning in 1949.

In 1946, brother McGill began preaching at the Pennington Bend congregation in Davidson County, Tennessee, and at Chapel Avenue by appointment. His earliest preaching appointments found him traveling by bus to rural congregations in Hickman County. He had a monthly appointment with the Rocky Valley congregation near Lyles, Tennessee. Brother McGill spoke of how easy it was to draw a good crowd using an example from his time in Hickman County. On one occasion, an elder at Rocky Valley was checking his mail and it happened that an elder for the Little Rock congregation was a neighbor checking his mail at the same time. The one asked the other if they would like to borrow their preacher the next afternoon. After agreeing to let him preach, the elder made a few calls and brother McGill spoke to a capacity audience the next day. All it took was a brief conversation, an invitation, and a few calls for the young preacher to have a building overflowing with people.

Brother McGill preached the gospel faithfully for 74 years. The last twenty

were spent at the New Hope congregation in Davidson County. He preached mostly in Tennessee, but also in Jackson, Louisiana, and in Germany where he served as a missionary from 1960-62.

Brother McGill was educated at Freed-Hardeman College in 1949-50. He was there during N.B. Hardeman's final months as president of the school. He transferred to David Lipscomb College and received a B.A. He received an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt's Peabody College. His doctoral dissertation was a study of the readability of the King James Version. Brother McGill was a brilliant man and true scholar. I do not use that term lightly. He truly had a magnificent mind and retention for historical facts and scripture. Yet, he was a humble man. He did not flaunt his degree. He did not add it to his signature. He did not expect to be called "doctor." He was simply, "brother McGill."

James McGill used his talent and understanding of the English language for good in the Lord's church. He edited many of the question and answer books written by Leslie G. Thomas. He edited a directory for churches of Christ in Europe. As mentioned, he assisted in editing the *Gospel Gleaner* as well. His editorial work began in 1961 with brother Thomas' book *What the Bible Teaches Vol. 1* and concluded in 2018 with the *Gleaner*. He spent a good portion of nearly 60 years proof-reading and editing biblical studies so that these studies could be presented to

the brotherhood with clarity and soundness.

Brother McGill taught Bible, English, and German, and then chaired the English Department at FHC for several years (1962-1977). He also taught and served as dean of the graduate school at Tennessee Bible College (1979-1999). He was a teacher (1979) and the director (1992-2001) of the Nashville School of Preaching. While serving as the director, the school's enrollment increased from the 20s to the 220s! A new wing was added to the Crieve Hall church building to house the school. Many nights three classes were offered for all three hours. Many of these classes were full. In 2002, a new venture began with the Middle Tennessee School of Preaching. The purpose for this school was to implement the same kind of classes offered at NSOP throughout the rural and outlying areas of middle Tennessee. To this point, classes have been offered in approximately ten congregations. Brother McGill served in various capacities for MTSP. He was also one of the school's primary benefactors. In total, Jim McGill spent almost 60 years in Christian education.

Jim McGill's life and legacy cannot be told without including his family. He came from a Christian home. With Nedra Olbricht, he began a Christian home. He and Nedra married June 23, 1955. She died December 9, 1988. Nedra was the first teacher and head of

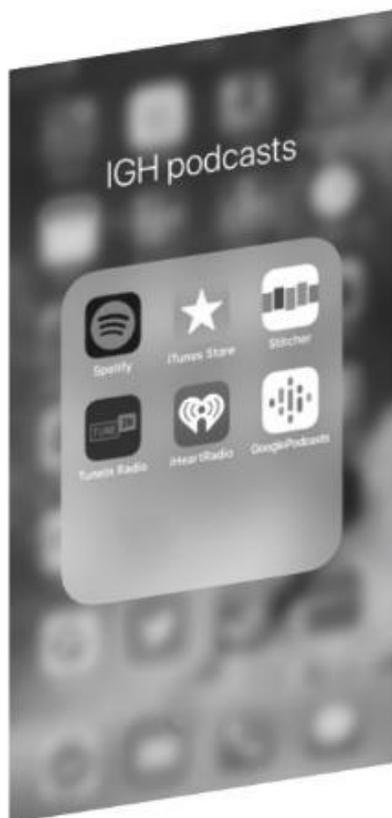
the art department at FHC. She was a tremendous student of the Bible. She could look through a concordance for a few select words and tell if it truly was a complete concordance of the Bible! Their children were Ann (Billy Brimm) and James. James has two daughters—Olivia and Sophie. Brother McGill married Mora Rice on November 28, 1997. She died April 14, 2019.

When thinking of brother McGill, one passage of scripture comes immediately to mind — “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8) Brother McGill was a just and upright man. He was blameless and without guile. He loved mercy. Brother McGill was a forgiving person. He sought as much as was within him to live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18). And brother McGill walked humbly with God. He was a humble, genuine servant of the Lord. He loved the Lord, His word, and His church. He blessed others through his devotion to Christ and we believe he will be blessed forevermore by One who has authored eternal salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).



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