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XII. SEPARATION, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Despite the predictions of doom and gloom, “anti-ism” has not perished from the earth.

1. Bill Humble presented a more objective view.

“The most serious issue that churches of Christ have faced in this century is church cooperation and ‘institutionalism.’ Led by Roy Cogdill, Yater Tant, and the *Gospel Guardian*, a substantial number of churches have come to oppose such cooperative programs of evangelism as the Herald of Truth and the homes for orphans and aged, as they are presently organized. During the past 15 years many debates have been held, churches have divided, and fellowship has been broken. This is the most serious division, numbers-wise, that churches of Christ have suffered. Whether that division is final, or whether it can be healed, is yet to be determined.” (*Story of the Restoration*, p. 74, 1968)

B. Counting numbers is something fraught with difficulties.

1. Since we have no central organization to which statistics are reported, any number total can be regarded as less than absolute.

2. However, brother Mac Lynn has done a commendable job for some years in collecting and compiling data on churches of Christ.

a. Of nearly 12,000 churches of Christ in the U.S., the non-institutional churches composed nearly 21% of the total of the combined groups. ('03)

C. Foreign evangelism.

1. Contrary to the charges that we do not believe in foreign evangelism, we have been active in sending Americans into other nations with the gospel, and are supporting countless natives in many nations.

2. While institutional brethren have built schools, hospitals and other such organizations, we have concentrated on building churches.

D. Caring for orphans.

1. Some of the most egregious charges against us was that we were “orphan-haters,” since we did not believe in churches supporting orphan asylums.

a. This was purely an emotion ploy, designed to cause people to not consider the Scriptural basis of our objections.

2. But the figures tell another story.

a. Several years ago, Eugene Britnell surveyed 60 preachers who opposed church support of benevolent institutions, and they accumulated a list of 450 orphans and widows being cared for by individual Christians.

b. Cecil Willis pointed out that 17 children had been adopted or cared for by the faculty of Florida College, which at that time had 25 families.

c. Eight families represented by the editorial staff of the *Gospel Guardian* provided homes for at least ten children not their natural offspring

d. If these figures provide an average, it means that nearly 19,000 orphans and/or widows were cared for by Christians in conservative churches.

3. I had an exchange with one of the officials of the Eastern New Mexico Children’s Home when I lived in Portales, New Mexico.

a. Studying with Naomi Bruce, whose family was struggling in the small town

- b. An institutional church learned of our studies, and then began flooding her with gifts of food and clothes, seeking to undermine our relationship.
- c. One day she asked me when I was going to go get the children at the orphan home, as the director had told her I could have the children if I could find homes for them.
- d. This was my first information about this, so we called the home, and asked when I could come get the children, as I told them I could find homes for them in about two weeks.
- e. The fellow played dumb, until Naomi got on the phone and reminded him of what he had told her.
- f. Of course, the whole thing fell apart when I accepted his offer.

He admitted that there were no true orphans of the 50 in the home, but there had been two there some time earlier.

(2) All the children had living relatives who could have cared for them.

- g. When I later baptized her into Christ, she saw clearly what had been going on—“They tried to buy me with things, but you taught me the gospel.”
4. Referring back to the radio broadcast in Waycross, GA, when I got back to Atlanta, I called the preacher who said that the church there would let a child bleed to death before using the church telephone to call an ambulance.
- a. I challenged him about that statement, and he replied, “Well, David, since you love orphans so much, I’m going to give your name to the probate judge of Juvenile Court here in Clayton County. She’s always trying to find homes for children.”
 - b. Sure enough, in a short time Judge Trudy Boswick called me, and said that her preacher said I could help her find some homes.

I found homes for two 15-year-old girls who were wards of the court; then a 15-year-old boy; then another teenaged girl.

Then a call about 19-year-old Margaret, pregnant and with a 10-month old baby, with no place to go and too old for Juvenile Court to help.

(a) Flora told me to bring her home, which we did, eventually teaching her the gospel.

(5) Another call resulted in our placing a child for adoption with a preacher, and then the word got out that the Tants could help with pregnant girls and with couples seeking adoption.

- c. In the ensuing years, we have had about 50 pregnant girls live with us, and helped arrange adoptions for some 80 children.
 - d. All because an institutional preacher thought he would “call my bluff.”
 - e. I asked the judge why she thought I could find homes for the children when her preacher didn’t seem to have a means of doing so.
 - f. I explained that we taught people to take them in their homes, while the church she was attending told people to put an extra dollar in the collection plate on Sunday, and let an institution take care of them.
5. But we had a reputation to uphold, and it is reported that some women once approached Robert Jackson and chided him for his hatred of orphans.
- a. He then told them if orphan children came to his door wanting help, he would “pinch their little heads off.”

XIII. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Is there any hope for reconciliation?

1. The history of divisions does not present an optimistic picture.
2. Historian Ed Harrell reported after a meeting with institutional brethren in Arlington, TX in 1973.
 - a. “Does anyone seriously believe that...the thousands of unscriptural promotions dreamed up will...suddenly, or slowly, begin to disappear? Of course not. No man could bring it off; not 20 or 50 or 200 men could bring it off. And not only *could* they not, they *will* not bring it about.”
3. Steve Wolfgang remarked: “Such a movement to turn the clock back would require that institutional brethren in thousands of places make a conscious decision to place fellowship with their non-institutional brethren on a higher plane than the support of human institutions—and I think everyone knows that simply isn’t going to happen.”
4. Another preacher expressed such a possibility in these words:

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

“One preacher said, ‘Give us the Scripture authorizing the things you are doing and advocating; that is all we ask.’ A prominent preacher retorted, ‘Give us Scripture! Give us Scripture! You can teach an old green parrot to say “Give us Scripture.” That is all you fellows say.’ I was amazed! Some churches could surely use an old green parrot to cry out, ‘Give us Scripture! Give us Scripture!’ ...Few preachers are saying it.”
6. Paul Williams tells of a discussion of the institutional question in South Africa.
 - a. An American preacher defended the questioned practices by saying, “These practices must be scriptural, for brethren in the U.S. have practiced these things for many years.”
 - b. The African preacher responded: “Brother, if we were practicing the same things we had done for years, we would have cooked you white men and had you for lunch.”

Even among institutional people there has been alarm, as evidenced by an 1986 “Expression of Concern” signed by hundreds of institutional preachers.

1. This document was specifically directed toward the teaching of theistic

evolution and other concerns at Abilene Christian University, but addressed several other issues.

“I. We are deeply disturbed over the liberalism that is so evident in the brotherhood today. By ‘liberalism’ we mean especially the following items, though not excluding other specifics that could be mentioned:

There is a drifting from Bible-centered, definitive, distinctive doctrine that once characterized our preaching. Presently, uncertain sounds and weak messages emanate from many pulpits among us. Brethren are becoming accustomed to diluted and polluted preaching. We are rapidly approaching the point where many of our people, including preachers and elders, no longer know the difference between true Christianity and the corrupted forms of it so prevalent about us.

There is a concerted effort on the part of some of our brethren to restructure the organization, worship and work of the church along sectarian lines, thus tending to denominationalize the New Testament body of Christ.

- C. A spirit of doctrinal compromise and fellowshiping those in blatant religious error has permeated our ranks.
 - D. The world has made alarming inroads into the church. Instead of the church influencing the world for righteousness, as it should, the world has adversely affected many brethren in matters of morality and conduct of life.
 - E. The typical emphasis of the denominational world on recreation, entertainment, and solving the social ills of society has been incorporated into the thinking and programs of many congregations, supplanting the God-given work of meeting the desperate spiritual needs of those born within and without the body of Christ.”
2. No “anti” could have said it better.
 3. We all know the story of the camel that asked to stick his nose in the Arab’s tent one cold night.
 - a. Inch by inch it finally took over the tent.
 - b. And so it is with even small departures from the Biblical pattern, for once started, there is no stopping place.
- C. To reinforce the aforementioned comments, a statement from Abilene Christian University is a real eye-opener.
1. *“Dear Friends: The Abilene Christian University has taken a bold step in their 2004 Lectureship, and has clearly defined the terms for reforming Church of Christ in the 21st Century. These reforms are already being implemented in many congregations. These reforms will fundamentally change the Church of Christ as we know it. A few of the key elements of this reformation movement are as follows:*
 1. *We should cease our elite and sectarian behavior, and ask our brethren in all denominations to forgive our sins, especially that we said they weren’t saved.*
 2. *We must not say that we have the truth, but that we are on a spiritual journey, just as our brethren in the denominations are on their spiritual journey.*
 3. *We should have open fellowship with all who say they believe in Jesus. We should follow the example of brave reformists who ask denominational preachers to share pulpits with their congregations. We should also share*

major social and religious events with our denominational brethren. We should be ecumenical in our thinking and practice, and should openly align ourselves with the current evangelical ecumenical movement.

4. *We should continue to say that baptism is important, but that it is not essential for salvation. We should recognize that there are many non-immersed believers who are saved.*”
2. Some claim this statement is of doubtful origin.
 - a. To authenticate it, I wrote to Royce Money, ACU president, and asked about it, but got no response.
 - b. Those who know ACU state that it accurately reflects ACU’s position.
3. ACU also honored Max Lucado as its Outstanding Alumnus for 2004.
 - a. This popular author preaches for the Oak Hills church in San Antonio, and has had the designation “Church of Christ” removed from its sign.
 - b. I have material from Lucado which shows he no longer believes baptism is necessary for salvation, and has exchanged pulpits with a Baptist preacher.
 - c. They have introduced instrumental music into their worship, and have installed a McDonald’s style playground on their property.
 - d. On a Larry King TV show, he was pressured into saying that he did not believe it was necessary to believe in Jesus Christ!
4. One of the featured speakers at the 2005 Lectureship was Don Jeanes, President of Milligan College, a Christian Church school.
 - a. Concerning this, Money was interviewed by *Christian Chronicle*: “I would fight vigorously if instrumental music were attempted to be introduced into my home congregation. I am firmly within the a cappella tradition, but I have a tolerance for those who make other choices, and I don’t see that it needs to constitute a complete severing of fellowship or alienation. I just don’t see the need for that.” (April 1, 2006).
 - b. Note that Money says a cappella is a “tradition,” not a matter of doctrine!
 - c. I wonder what other denominational preachers ACU might invite?
- D. David Lipscomb University has also joined the bandwagon
 1. The Christian Scholars Conference (CSC) convened at Lipscomb in Nashville June, 2008.
 - a. Participants were Pepperdine, OCU, ACU and Harding—total 90+ orgs.
 - b. Jared Carter, ACU grad., now an Episcopal priesthood, plainly declares he has abandoned the idea of “restorationism.”
 - (1) “I don’t believe in Restorationism or Primitivism. I just don’t. It’s not Biblical, there’s no call to it. I don’t care two bits if today’s church looks like the first century church, and I don’t think God does.”
 - c. His presentation: “One New Humanity: Reconsidering Homosexuality in light of the Ecclesiology of Ephesians.”
 - (1) He studies the place of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Christians in the Episcopal Church.
 - (2) He argues that there is nothing “wrong about a faithful, loving, monogamous same-sex relationship.” “I fail to see what it is about homosexuality that declares it as inherently evil.”
 - d. It is hard to imagine a more egregious affront on the Bible & morality for

these so-called “Christian” schools to engage in.

- e. And this was not a surprise to the schools, for the topic was known beforehand, and indeed this was the topic of Cramer’s Master’s thesis at ACU.
2. Further evidence of Lipscomb’s drift is seen in *Wineskins* mag., Jan-Apr 06
 - a. Gary Holloway, Bible teacher: “My own experience teaching in a university where 70% of the students are from a *cappella* Churches of Christ confirms this cultural shift away from the importance of denominational labels to a deep concern for relational and spiritual union. It is not unusual in a typical week for our students to attend a Monday night instrumental praise worship at a local Church of Christ, a Tuesday night ecumenical teaching session at First Baptist downtown, Wednesday night church at a fairly traditional Church of Christ, and Thursday night Taize worship at a Presbyterian church—all before going home on the weekend to their parents’ Church of Christ where many think we are the only Christians!” Professor Holloway goes on to say that “Many of us cannot deny that there are many devout Christians who are unimmersed.”
 - b. Mike Williams, a teacher of freshman Bible at DLC, delivered a sermon at 4th Ave. CoC. on 3/15/06 titled “Baptism and Christian Unity.” “We need to view baptism in the context of God’s story, God seeks our hearts more than right ritual...” In the sermon, he spoke of three categories—those baptized into a denomination, those sprinkled, and those who have never been “baptized” at all. He warned his listeners to “avoid the proof-text approach,” and to “avoid pattern theology.” “We welcome all believers in Christ.” Well, what about the unimmersed —“perhaps sprinkled...If they choose not to be immersed, we welcome them on the journey as part of the family...What about those who have never been baptized?...And so, for those who have never been baptized, we welcome the opportunity to study with you about the beauty and significance of baptism, yet we will also welcome you...”
- E. “The Great Communion” was held Oct. 4, 2009.
 1. Purpose: to promote unity between Christian Church, Disc. of Christ, and C’s of C.
 2. ACU Moody Coliseum hosted one of these meetings.
 - a. Song before L.S. was a choir using instrumental music, Pres. Money participated.
 3. West End CoC in Nashville hosted another.
 - a. Closing prayer by Rhonda Lowry, wife of DLU pres. Randy Lowry.
 - b. French-speaking Af-Amer Group sang closing song with bongo drums.
 7. Unsuspecting parents send their children to these schools thinking they are safer than public universities.
 - a. Perhaps motto should be: “Send us your children. We will destroy their faith and show you how ignorant your parents are.”
 8. Once digression starts, it is hard to stop, as anyone who raises rabbits knows
- F. I have seen the same trends through the years in the bulletins and journals I get from institutional brethren.
 1. Bar-B-Q dinners and clowns and a charge for admission.
 2. Christmas pageants with instrumental music.

Million dollar gymnasiums and coffee shop facilities.

Fashion shows in church buildings with an admission fee charged.

 5. Pulpit exchanges with denominational preachers.
 6. Women taking leading roles in worship assemblies.
 7. A survey indicating that 90% of young people in institutional churches see nothing wrong with instrumental music in worship.

- a. Thus in the next generation, when the old folks die off, its use will not even be questioned.
9. The White Station church in Memphis has opened a coffee shop, which is to be used for social activities, birthday parties, card games, etc. Some churches are hosting “Christian Rock Bands” and charging for admission. Others build family life centers, with basketball, shuffleboard and yoga facilities. The claim is, “If you don’t provide this, the young people won’t come. So, “If you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em.” A church in has a dance teacher on staff to teach dance to kids and adults.
10. Hillcrest CoC, Decatur, GA, hosted its first annual Golf Tournament, 8/10 for only \$100 participation.
11. “On Sat., Feb. 10, 2007, the Richland Hills church of Christ will begin holding a weekly Saturday evening worship service that will include the use of musical instruments in worship, and an observance of the Lord’s Supper. Jon Jones (the former pulpit minister and one of the elders) said that the elders ‘fully and completely’ endorsed the decision. At an adult Bible study he said, ‘There is unity in our eldership, and we are so thankful for that.’”
This church has 24 “ministers,” and four of them are women.
12. On the TV program, “In Search of the Lord’s Way,” Mack Lyon spoke of the problem of women in leadership roles in churches. Many voiced strong protest to his words.
- a. One woman wrote, “God help us. This message is from Churches of Christ.” She was upset that the TV audience might think this represented the church at large. She went on to say, “I couldn’t disagree more with his message. And yet people in Abilene hear that it’s from Churches of Christ. Pretty soon, they’ll all be dead, including Mack Lyon, and the problem of traditional coC’ers will snuff itself out.”
- b. Mike Cope, a preacher at Highland church of Christ in Abilene, and a teacher at A.C.U. wrote, “Of course, I think this brother (Mack Lyon—jdt) is wrong. Way wrong. I’m becoming more and more convinced that only time will take care of this.” This church is the sponsor of the national Herald of Truth radio and TV program.
- c. The Bible is quite clear about women and leadership roles. I Tim. 2:12
13. But that doesn’t deter those who insist on their own way.
- a. E.g. from N.Y.: “West Islip Church of Christ is led by a group of gifted shepherds known collectively as the Council.” The website then names nine individuals, including five women. The website also mentions “Our ministers, Katie Hays and Lance Pape.” By the way, the last word is that Katie now preaches for the Lawrenceville, GA First Christian Church. Lance Papa had a webpage dedicated to “Gender Justice” in churches of Christ seeking to encourage women’s roles as “deacon, elder, minister, worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc.”
- b. The Cahaba Valley church of Christ in Birmingham as a picture of their elders on their webpage. Their five elders include two women.
- c. How do they deal with I Tim. 2:12?
(1) “From the indications inside the letters themselves, it appears that

these books came from a period around 115 AD and were put together by those people leading the churches that Paul founded in his life-time, attributing the material, as they believed its content to be, from Paul himself. Therefore, most scholars believe that, at times, what is found in I and II Timothy and Titus reflects more about what is going on in the churches of 115 than Paul's own views. This is true of the view of the law found in these letters, along with various other teachings about faith, the church, and even Jesus himself found in these letters.” (Cahaba website)

(2) Evidently they deal with Timothy by dismissing it as “uninspired.”

14. Then there are such promotions as “Coon-huntin’ for Christ” and “Gymnastics to the glory of God.”

15. From there we go on to challenges about the authenticity of Scripture.

a. “It is consistent to believe that the Bible is authoritative in matters of faith and practice, but may be incorrect in geographical or historical details. Once a person abandons the concept of divine dictation, he must abandon the idea of inerrancy.”

(William Abraham, a Christian college professor)

b. The call for a “new hermeneutic” of interpreting Scripture from the leftwing in the church is well known.

G. To look at the future, one needs only to look at the past.

1. To read the debates and arguments of 100 to 150 years ago in the division with the Christian Church, one would think he was reading the debates of 50 years ago, as the same arguments were made then as in more recent times.

2. Consider this example from the *Christian Standard* in 1893, as a writer is defending women having more prominent roles in the church.

“A principle may set aside an apostolic precept. It may brush aside an apostolic decree. We do that constantly. We follow the apostolic example whenever we like it; when we do not, we depart from it.”

3. Such thinking is still around, as I heard a prominent institutional preacher make the claim that “We do many things for which we have no authority.”

4. What we have been experiencing over the past 50-60 years is but a repeat of what has been transpiring since the beginning of time, as new generations arose in Israel that were not content with the ways of their fathers. Jud. 2:9-10

5. In looking to the late 1800s, we see “the case with such men as J.W. McGarvey or Isaac Errett, first generation leaders who serve as a ‘bridge’ for a little

liberalism often discover that succeeding generations are not content to stop where their forebears drew arbitrary lines, and are determined to carry to logical extension the incipient practices of the former generation.” (Steve Wolfgang, *History and Background of the Institutional Controversy*, p. 31)

CONCLUSION

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

1. The conservative group generally took the name “church of Christ.”

2. The more liberal group was usually known as the Christian Church.

3. In time an ultra-liberal group was spawned, known as Disciples of Christ.

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

1. The conservative churches which hold to the inerrancy of the Scriptures and the insistence of having a “thus saith the Lord” for teaching and practice.

2. The institutional churches that insist we do not have to have authority for all that we do, and
3. The ultra-liberal folks who seem determined to have the church take its place among the denominations.
 - C. This emphasizes the need for each generation to be taught the basic principles over and over again.
 1. When Israel came into the promised land, there were certain instructions that were given along these very lines.
 - a. A stone memorial was to be placed at the crossing of the Jordan River as a perpetual reminder. Josh. 4:1-7
 - b. God's ordinances were to be taught to successive generations. Deut. 6:1, 2, 6-8
 - D. Gospel meetings in the 40s and 50s.
 1. I remember gospel meetings as a boy—tent meetings, camp meetings, etc.
 2. I often heard sermons on what was wrong with instrumental music in worship, but never recall hearing a lesson on the Missionary Society, yet these were the two prominent things that were a part of the division in the 19th Century.
 3. When the current division started 100 years later, it was not the instrumental music that was the issue, but Missionary Societies.
 - a. They were not called Missionary Societies, for all knew they were wrong, but they didn't know *why* they were wrong.
 - b. Thus a generation that grew up untaught on a vital principle fell into error.
 4. Let us learn from history, that the cycle not be repeated.

INVITATION

1. The Old Jerusalem gospel is still true, and it is still God's only method for the redemption and hope of all people. John 14:6
 2. If there is one present who has not obeyed the simple commands of Christ to have your sins washed away; his means of doing this is quite clear. Mk 16:16
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