

A HALF CENTURY OF CHURCH HISTORY HOW WE GOT WHERE WE ARE

By Dub McClish

Introduction

The Lord's church today is not the same body it was fifty years ago. My grandfather (an elder for forty years in central Texas) or even my father (whose more than thirty years of preaching ended in 1966) would not believe their eyes and ears were they to be "beamed down" into some present-day assemblies that still masquerade under the designation, *Church of Christ*. They would surely believe that someone had placed a *Church of Christ* sign on these buildings by mistake or as a prank. They would be struck by the gross contradiction between the sign out front and the preaching and practice going on inside.

Even into the early 1960s, traveling Christians could stop in at almost any building bearing a sign that said "Church of Christ," confident that they would find brethren engaging in Scriptural worship and teaching God's Word faithfully in classroom and pulpit (with notable exceptions in some states in the Midwest and Northwest where the Christian Church still falsely retained the "Church of Christ" designation). Those of us who have been Christians over the past half-century are well aware of the changes—radical changes—the church of the Lord has undergone. There is no corner of the world where the church has escaped them.

I am frequently asked **why** and **how** this metamorphosis has happened to a people whose very reason for existence characteristically has been merely to be the New Testament church. These are significant questions that deserve answers. Many who have lived through these changes are still perplexed by and about them. Some brethren say they feel "uncomfortable" with what they see and hear in their congregations, but they cannot quite "put their fingers" on just what makes them thus feel. Especially do those generations that are too young to "bridge back" fifty years in their experience need to know (1) that a grievous evolution has occurred and (2) at least some of the factors that have produced it.

I will likely omit some factors that others will deem important, either because of ignorance (I claim neither omniscience nor perfect wisdom) or lack of space. In this treatise I will be discussing those persons, places, events, and other assorted things that I judge to be major stepping-stones to the religious (irreligious?) revolution that has occurred among the Lord's people. It will not be my intent to slander or malign any persons, institutions, or organizations,

but it will be necessary to mention names and circumstances as a matter of historical documentation (nameless history is no history).

Some Preliminary Explanations

I will begin by defining some terms in the title above. *We* refers to the Lord's church in the aggregate, including (1) those of the "non-institutional" persuasion (their preferred designation, though more generally called, "antis"), (2) those of the "liberal/progressive/ecumenical" mindset (many of whom, especially the leaders, can scarcely still be considered a part of the church), and (3) those who have remained anchored to New Testament authority, veering neither to the right nor the left. Thus my reference to "How **We** Got Where **We** Are" is not intended to imply that every member of the church or every congregation is implicated in the changes we will survey (many thousands of saints and hundreds of congregations are not), but that drastic and obvious alterations have taken place which have substantially affected a sizable portion of the church and have affected all of the church to some degree.

These changes involve extreme positions that gain ascendancy from time to time. Every extreme position from the days of the apostles to the present revolves around two opposite perspectives, generally designated (as noted above) "anti-ism" and "liberalism." I do not use these terms with any unkind, disrespectful, or malevolent intent, but simply as terms of generally understood identity—a sort of identity "short hand."

Some Definitions

Anti-ism

By *anti-ism* I refer to the inclination to be more strict than the law of God is. Anti-ism, as the term implies, generally occupies a negative position. The problem with this perspective is not that its posture is one of opposition, for to faithful to God one must be opposed to all that is erroneous and evil. The problem with those of the Anti persuasion is that they characteristically oppose certain things which God allows. Those of this mind-frame bind matters of judgment and option as law and obligation. The typical Anti brother forbids what God allows, thereby making laws where God has made none. Thus the private scruples of Anti brethren, rather than the actual dictates of the law of Christ, become the standard of doctrine and behavior to be imposed on others.

Anti-ism has proved itself "progressive" in the sense of a tendency to draw ever narrower boundaries of doctrine and fellowship. For example, some, who at first only opposed church support of orphan homes, next began to forbid any help for a non-Christian from the church

treasury, and finally they argued (even in debate) that a church could not give one penny to provide milk for a starving baby. To their credit, with few exceptions those of the Anti mind-set believe strongly in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and its authority. Their mistake is in making their opinions as authoritative as the Scriptures themselves.

Liberalism

By *liberalism* I refer to a certain attitude and approach to religion that is unwilling to be as strict and definitive as God is in His Word. It is called “liberalism” due to its misplaced “generosity” in “giving away” that which it does not possess. It refuses to bind certain things that God has bound, making it the corresponding opposite extreme of Anti-ism. This approach treats matters of Scriptural obligation as mere matters of option. Those who are liberal in this sense tend to rely on their emotions and subjective opinions to make presumptions on the grace and mercy of God rather than strictly adhering to the law of Christ. For example, A leading liberal over the past several years, Rubel Shelly, declared in 1983 that there are sincere, knowledgeable, devout Christians scattered among all the various denominations. This, in spite of the fact that the New Testament explicitly and implicitly teaches that there is only one church which Christ built, for which He died, to which He adds those who are saved, and which He will save at last when He comes again (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:41, 47; 20:28; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 4:4; 5:23).

Just as the anti advocate is narrower than God is in his approach to the Bible, the liberal is broader than God is in his approach to Divine law and religion. And, just as Anti-ism often draws ever narrower its boundaries of doctrine and those whom it can fellowship, Liberalism is “progressive” in the sense that it is ever widening its doctrinal and fellowship boundaries. [Note: *Modernism* is a step to the left of Liberalism, in its outright denial of fundamental elements upon which Christianity rests (e.g., inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, Biblical miracles, Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Deity, and Resurrection of Christ, et al.).

Some Historical Notes on Anti-ism

Anti-ism is clearly identifiable in the Bible. The scribes and Pharisees are sometimes called “first-century antis” with good reason. They ever sought to bind upon others as law their own traditions and opinions, which God had not bound (Mat. 9:11–13; 12:10–12; 15:2; et al.). Likewise, the Judaizing teachers of the early years of the church were antis in their contentions. They taught: “Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). However, God had not bound circumcision as a religious act or a condition of covenant privilege and salvation under the new covenant (v. 24). Those who were binding it were

troublesome and were attempting to subvert the brethren by binding a law that God had not bound.

Even the apostle Peter was caught up in this spirit in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14). The Gospel was for Gentile and Jew without respect of persons by God (Acts 10:34–35), but Peter refused to eat with Gentile brethren and influenced others to do the same. He was refusing those whom God had accepted, thus binding where God had not bound. Diotrephes was guilty of the same sort of error (3 John 9–10). Paul warned of a coming apostasy in which men would forbid others to marry and to eat meat (1 Tim. 4:3a). Since these were things which God allowed (vv. 3–4, Heb. 13:4), they were making laws which God had not made. Paul labeled those teachers as hypocritical liars and their doctrines as “doctrines of demons” (vv. 1–2). They were antis in the truest sense. We do not have a right to force our private opinions, preferences, and scruples upon others (Rom. 14:1–3), which is the essence of what Anti brethren do.

In more recent times the spirit of Anti-ism has demonstrated itself in varied issues. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century a great amount of opposition among brethren had arisen to “Sunday Schools.” This carried over into the early part of the twentieth century and was an issue of major controversy until about 1930. Gunter College (Gunter, TX), founded in 1903, was doomed from the beginning because its board passed a resolution which labeled “Sunday Schools,” uninspired literature, and women teachers as “unscriptural.” The school died for lack of support in 1928. To a great degree, the same brethren who opposed individual Bible classes, printed Bible literature, and women teaching others at all (even children or other women) in the church building, also attempted to forbid the church to use individual cups for the Lord’s Supper (commonly called “one-cuppers”). They eventually divided among themselves with some of them opposing classes while allowing separate cups and others opposing both classes and cups. The church was largely saved from domination by these anti positions through several public debates, articles in brotherhood journals, and sermons that exposed their fallacies.

In the 1940s and 1950s a similar spirit caused some brethren to oppose “located” preachers (also known as the “mutual ministry” doctrine) and colleges founded by brethren primarily to teach the Bible. Among those prominent in advocating these issues were W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, who, in the late 1950s, radically changed directions and became as liberal as they had formerly been anti.

In the mid-1940s a few brethren began voicing their opposition to congregational cooperation in preaching the Gospel, and soon thereafter to churches supporting orphan homes

out of the church treasury. Two of the earliest principal advocates of these views were Roy E. Cogdill and Fanning Yater Tant, both of whom strongly pushed their views, especially through the pages of *The Gospel Guardian*. Numerous debates were conducted on these issues, especially in the 1950s. Some of the most crucial ones were those between W. L. Totty and Charles Holt (1954), E. R. Harper and Yater Tant (1955, 1956), Guy N. Woods and W. Curtis Porter (1956), Guy N. Woods and Roy E. Cogdill (1957), and G. K. Wallace and Charles Holt (1959).

Roy C. Deaver and Thomas B. Warren also wrote, debated, and spoke extensively against this new Anti movement, helping greatly to stem its tide that threatened to engulf the church. Various ones have pointed out in sermons, articles, and debates that the Anti leaders had once eagerly supported the very arrangements they were adamantly opposing. These two latter Anti movements spawned additional Anti positions, such as opposition to eating a physical meal in church buildings and, as earlier mentioned, giving even a penny from the church treasury to feed a starving baby (commonly referred to as the “saints only” doctrine).

The Anti positions of the early decades of the twentieth century were generally recognized as extreme through the efforts of stalwart men who exposed their fallacies. They therefore captured only a small percentage of congregations and had largely run their course by the 1940s. However, the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan home contentions had a far more powerful effect, in spite of the valiant efforts of several good men. Many preachers aligned themselves with it and at least a few hundred congregations were captured by it. Florida Christian College in Tampa, Florida, came under the influence of this faction and it continues in this alignment as Florida College. While these estranged brethren continue to propagate their doctrine, refusing for the most part to fellowship those who will not bow to their personal scruples, they have made no major gains of which I am aware since the late 1960s.

Regardless of the particular issue, all of the Anti movements make the same basic arguments and the same basic mistakes in Biblical interpretation: (1) They argue that they have found an “exclusive pattern” for their way of doing things when there is none. (2) They elevate optional arrangements to the level of obligatory practices. [Note: For a more extensive history of Anti-ism, see my MS, “The History of Anti-ism from the 19th Century to the Present”: [scripturecache.com/LongMSS.](http://scripturecache.com/LongMSS/)]

Some Historical Notes on Liberalism

As described above, the Anti-cooperation and Anti-orphan home contentions posed a grave danger to the church for a few years. They thus had a significant effect upon the church,

which helps explain “how we got where we are.” While we should not relax our vigilance concerning those errors, the threat with far more disastrous consequences from the 1960s to the present has been and continues to be Liberalism, as previously defined. I now turn attention to the task (unpleasant, but necessary) of setting forth some of the principal developments and influences of liberalism among us.

The word *liberal* is from the Latin word *liber* and means “free,” “generous,” “ample,” “bountiful,” and then “not literal,” “broad-minded,” “tolerant.” One can readily see that this word can have an entirely wholesome and admirable connotation. Paul referred to the commendable liberal spirit that all of God’s people should have in regard to our generosity toward others in need: “Seeing that through the proving of you by this ministration they glorify God for the obedience of your confession unto the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all (2 Cor. 9:13). Such a liberal spirit is constantly enjoined upon God’s people throughout the Bible.

However, *Liberalism* in the context of theology has a decidedly repugnant connotation to those who are concerned with faithfulness to the “blessed and only Potentate.” The dictionary captures this term correctly: “a movement in modern Protestantism emphasizing intellectual liberty...” This is another way of saying that Liberals are broad-minded and tolerant of a wide spectrum of doctrines, beliefs, and practices (except, of course, those held by folk who are “set for the defense of the gospel”). They generally look with disdain on any who dare to emphasize doctrine, law, and Scriptural authority. With an air of superiority they profess to be able to “read between the lines” of the inspired penmen and discern the “spirit” of the law, which to them is far more significant than the “letter” (i.e., what the Bible actually says). In their misplaced generosity they freely give away that which does not belong to them, pronouncing “optional” many things that the Lord has pronounced “obligatory.”

As defined above, Liberalism is evident in many persons described in the Bible. All of those who thought they could substitute what pleased them in place of what God specified were infected with Liberalism. This includes the likes of Cain (Gen. 4), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10), Saul (1 Sam. 15), and even David on at least a few occasions (1 Sam. 21; 1 Chr. 13, 15, 21). The Sadducees were first century Liberals.

Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century

By the mid-nineteenth century the plea to restore Christianity was meeting with resounding success, but Satan never sleeps. At this time some brethren began calling for employment of mechanical instruments of music in worship and for a missionary society in

evangelism. In order to even think in these terms they had to adopt a loose and liberal view toward Scriptural authority. Rather than appealing to Scriptural authority for their innovations (which is totally lacking), they insisted on their right to have these things on the basis that the Scriptures did not explicitly forbid them. Their defense represented a repudiation of the Scriptural principle: "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent."

These men were so determined to have their unauthorized novelties that they would stop at nothing, even a general division in the church, which took a half-century to work its way throughout the church. Those who left the church in the finalized division of 1906 then split into two denominations twenty years later. One of these became the **Disciples of Christ Christian Church**, which now revels in its ultra-liberal denominational status and its radical modernistic theology. It claims Alexander Campbell as its founder and ridicules the very concept of restoring New Testament Christianity. The other is the **Independent Christian Church**, sometimes called the "Conservative Christian Church." However, it is "conservative" only in comparison with the Disciples of Christ Christian Church, not with the church of the Bible. It has generally continued to add numerous innovations to its doctrine and practice in the course of its existence. Both groups are direct offsprings of Liberalism.

When the devastating split occurred, some estimate that eighty-five percent of the church was captured by the liberal element. This meant that faithful brethren in most places had buildings and congregations ruthlessly seized from them and had to start all over. However, now free of having to expend so much energy and expense in fighting the liberals, faithful brethren could turn most of their attention to evangelism. In only fifty years, the church of Christ far outgrew the liberal elements that had departed from them and for some time in the 1950s it was the fastest growing religious body in the USA.

Early Factors of the Current Liberalism

While the church was riding the crest of this wave of growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s, some of the "mainline" denominations (e.g., Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, et al.) were being overwhelmed with Modernism. They were "sitting ducks" for this deadly influence because they had long been enslaved to Liberal theology and hermeneutics, which had produced Liberal doctrine and practice. These religious bodies, captured almost totally by Modernism in their current existence, no longer stand for anything but super tolerance of everything and everybody (except those who insist upon the Bible as their authority in religion, of course). Even the once staid Southern Baptist Church began to feel the same pressures in the 1970s and those in that denomination who still claim to believe in the

inspiration and authority of the Bible are now in a fight-to-the-finish struggle with Liberals and Modernists for control. The Baptists have already experienced some major division due to these influences.

It was predictable that eventually these religious currents would affect the Lord's church. There had been isolated cases of Liberalism among us, even after the devastating division at the turn of the century, but they were just that—isolated and uncommon. Even to the mid-1960s when a Liberal preacher or professor was discovered he was generally “isolated”—dismissed and deprived of a pulpit or classroom lectern unless he repented. Liberalism would soon prove to be not so isolated and unpopular.

A Quick Glance at Major Influences in the 1960s

In the early 1960s I can remember as a young preacher just out of college hearing some brethren who began to accuse Gospel preachers generally of being too plain-spoken, negative, dogmatic, and judgmental. Some advocated that preachers should adopt the Dale Carnegie and Marvin Vincent Peale brands of “positive thinking” in their preaching. (A deacon “subtly” told me in 1963: “You can't catch flies with vinegar.” I pretended not to understand, asked him whatever gave him the idea I was trying to catch flies, and continued to preach my “negative” sermons.)

Some began raising the cry that preachers had over-emphasized the plan of salvation to the neglect of Christ Himself. The “Man or the Plan” issue, as it came to be popularly styled, was thoroughly discussed in brotherhood papers. These were obvious early attempt to shift emphasis away from the fundamentals and sound doctrinal preaching, which doubtless influenced some in that very direction.

In this same era more and more promising young men who attended Christian colleges to prepare to preach were being encouraged by their professors to immediately pursue graduate and post-graduate degrees. The sectarian schools they attended were generally staffed with Liberal, if not infidel, professors. Many of these young men did not have sufficient knowledge and/or conviction to withstand the onslaughts against their faith. When they came back to teach in Christian colleges and/or preach in local pulpits, as time would prove, many of them had embraced Liberal concepts, while some of them had lost their faith altogether. A significant number of them sacrificed their souls on the altar of advanced degrees. This loss of faith in these young preachers and professors could not help but filter down to people in the pews and students in the classrooms.

Many brethren were influenced by, and some swept away with, the Neo-Pentecostal movement that arose in the mid-1960s. Its emphasis was on emotions, feelings, and alleged direct communications from the Holy Spirit apart from and in addition to His Word, with little regard for the authority of that Word. This is the movement in which Pat Boone (the pop singer) and his wife, Shirley, were caught up.

Then, there was all of the spirit of rebellion that swept through the younger generation in society at large at about this same time. It was anti-authoritarian morally, politically, and religiously. It spawned the “sexual revolution,” which has produced widespread barnyard, alley cat morals and has made near nudity “respectable” in public in subsequent generations. President Bill Clinton, with his well-documented immoral excesses, is the “poster child” of these times and influences. We should not be surprised that such amorality has led to fornication in epidemic proportions and Many of the social and moral woes our nation now suffers are directly traceable to this era. Many young people in the church at this time were greatly influenced by the spirit of rebellion in their peers.

Mission, a monthly magazine first appeared in July 1967. Until its demise about twenty years later it would carry the banner of Liberalism (at times evincing tinges of Modernism) for the young liberals among us. It began with an impressive list of names of veteran preachers and professors on its board. As it began to show its true colors, most of these men distanced themselves from it. They could likely have killed it had they publicly announced why they could not support it, but they chose to remain silent. It attacked the concept of a Biblical pattern for the church at least as early as January 1973.

About the time *Mission* was introduced, another group of young liberals began the **Campus Evangelism** program. Its annual seminars, aimed at college students, were heavily stacked with some of the most liberal preachers and professors available. (I will give more detailed attention to the CE program below.) In this same period the late Reuel Lemmons, editor of *The Firm Foundation*, was increasingly defending and endorsing apostates and otherwise indicating a liberal bent.

Also, in the 1960s, the very liberal-minded Ralph Sweet, owner of Sweet Publishing Company, gained control of the all-but-dead, *Christian Chronicle* and appointed a young liberal firebrand, Dudley Lynch, as its editor. Much like its present incarnation, the *Christian Chronicle* immediately became the mouthpiece and promoter of every left of center and unorthodox congregation, school, organization, book, and person. Although Sweet’s publication of the *Chronicle* lasted only a few years, its gave great impetus to the burgeoning tendency in so many

to desert the old paths that had been rediscovered and restored at such great cost, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sweet Publishing Company also published several books, beginning in the mid-1960s, by some of the most liberal men in the church, along with Bible school material, some of which was questionable at best.

By the late 1960s liberal elements in the church were surfacing rapidly. Generally, they were calling for a “restructuring” of the church and had the disposition of mind to challenge every precept, practice, and principle of New Testament Christianity. The groundwork had now been laid that would foment the vast changes in doctrine and practice that men would continue to foist upon the church.

Campus Evangelism, Crossroads, the Boston Church Movement, et al.

The outcry from parents and other sound brethren over its influence became so great that the program folded in 1970. Chuck Lucas picked up the pieces and developed it into the Crossroads cult, which, in turn, spawned the Boston cult, which has now evolved into the “International Churches of Christ” cult (which in 2004 made overtures toward liberals during the ACU Lectures that year).

Although mentioned above, the **Campus Evangelism** program deserves additional attention because of the devastation it would eventually cause. In 1966 a group of young fellows in the Texas Tech University Bible Chair (Lubbock, TX), under the elders of the Broadway Church of Christ, Lubbock, Texas, began the **Campus Evangelism** program. It began conducting annual seminars during Christmas holidays, beginning in 1967, and directed mainly at college students. The aim of encouraging and equipping young people to evangelize their campuses is altogether a noble goal, but by the 1968 seminar (Dallas, Texas, serious doctrinal problems had surfaced. That seminar was heavily weighted with liberal preachers and professors who sent many uncertain sounds home with those who attended.

A storm of concern erupted at the Freed-Hardeman College Lectures in February 1969 as occurrences and statements from the seminar were discussed in the Open Forum. My father-in-law, B.B. James, introduced the subject by handing Guy N. Woods, Forum Moderator for many years, a letter reviewing some of the things that occurred at the seminar (his youngest daughter was there and had reported her experiences when she returned home). Woods read the letter during the Tuesday Forum, and its concerns were roundly discussed.

The discussion at F-HC of the CE Seminar (and the CE program itself) occupied about one-third of the February 17, 1969, issue of the *Christian Chronicle*. The heavily slanted front-

page story carried pictures with captions depicting these discussions as a court trial, with B.B. James as the “plaintiff,” Charles Shelton (a CE staffer) as the “defendant,” and Guy N. Woods as the “Prosecutor.” The *Chronicle* story cast the CE directors as victims and martyrs having to face mean, judgmental watchdogs.

The Broadway elders soon relinquished (apparently, gladly) their sponsorship of the program, and it moved to the Burke Road Congregation, Pasadena, Texas (which was a “church of Christ” in name only because of its rank apostasy even in 1969). The exposure of the leftward direction of CE soon caused so much erosion of its financial support that it folded in 1970 (as earlier noted). Incidentally, Wesley Reagan, preacher at Burke Rd., reportedly became a Methodist “pastor” a few years later. Jim Bevis, one of the three original staff members of CE who traveled to F-HC to defend it, later joined the Pentecostals and a few years ago was “anointed” as an “apostle” by Don Finto, the self-anointed Nashville “apostle” (*apostate* is the accurate term).

Chuck Lucas, “Campus Minister” at the University of Florida, and a field worker in the CE network, picked up the defunct program, moved it to Gainesville, Florida, and developed it into the Crossroads Movement. Under Lucas, Crossroads became a strange combination of liberalism and legalism. By the time the Crossroads momentum could be checked it, had split or corrupted over two hundred congregations.

The Crossroads Church elders dismissed Lucas in the early 1980s due to unspecified “recurring sins.” Kip McKean, a Lucas disciple, picked up the pieces of Lucas’s empire, moved it to Boston, Massachusetts, and turned it into the Boston Movement. McKean eventually chose to disavow any connection with “traditional” churches of Christ, an honest move if he ever made one! In 1990, he moved to Los Angeles, California and renamed it “International Churches of Christ.”

In about 1967 Ralph Sweet (Sweet Pub. Co.) purchased the *Christian Chronicle* and made it a blatant mouthpiece for the liberal element into the 1970s. Under Paul Easley first and then Dudley Lynch, as editors, it finally became so radical that it practically self-destructed and went into somewhat of a state of dormancy for a few years. In this same period Sweet Publishing Company began publishing books from some of the most liberal men among us, along with increasingly questionable and doctrinally soft Bible school material.

Reuel Lemmons, *Firm Foundation* editor, disappointed and confused many brethren by praising and defending such apostates as Pat Boone (the pop singer) and Don Finto (and in the

early 1980s, Chuck Lucas of the Crossroads Movement). In 1969 Gene Fooks, preacher in Hereford, Texas, wrote a little book (*Fellowship of Believers*) in which he advocated fellowship with the denominations, and then began practicing what he wrote. Roy Osborne was in the forefront of liberal preachers who were gaining in popularity on campuses and in pulpits of some large churches.

The Growing Liberal “Snowball”

By the early 1970s the liberal “snowball” had begun to pick up momentum. Congregations controlled by liberal elements were increasingly easy to find. To be liberal was now becoming more and more accepted and those who had for a long time been “closet liberals” began coming out. More than ever (since the years leading up to the great schism of 1906) it became possible for a liberal preacher or professor not only to find a place to preach or teach, but to hold on to his position and even be honored while doing so.

The influential Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, and the Herald of Truth radio and television programs were coming under ever-stronger criticism (by brethren who had defended the type of church cooperation involved in the Herald of Truth program) for toning down the Gospel message and for some outlandish statements from some of their representatives. This criticism culminated in a marathon meeting (about 12 hours) in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1973, attended by over two hundred preachers and numerous representatives of Highland and Herald of Truth. The meeting only intensified the fears of most of the brethren present concerning the direction of Highland and Herald of Truth. These fears have proved to be well-founded as the ever more liberal Highland has become symbolic of the general apostasy in Abilene, and the Herald of Truth has become a separate corporation which is not answerable to any eldership.

Enter the Schools—Stage Left

Institutions of higher learning were a fertile breeding-ground for the liberalism/modernism of the nineteenth century. They are repeating this dubious role in this century. Pepperdine University has even from the 1950s been a bastion of liberalism on the West Coast. The other colleges were generally perceived as conservative, with some more so than others, but with the arrival of the 1970s this began to change.

With the retirement of Don Morris and the installation of John Stevens as president of Abilene Christian College in 1970, a spirit of unprecedented tolerance soon became observable. The drift to the left in Abilene was clearly underway, hand-in-hand with that of the Highland Congregation. The Bible department and the lectureship gradually began to be more and more

staffed with men of “uncertain sounds.” With each succeeding administration the drift has become an open and obvious shift so that it has practically caught up with Pepperdine in this respect.

Expressions of concern in 1986 over the documented teaching in science classes of theistic evolution and that Genesis 1 is a “myth” were met with denial of the facts and defense of the teachers involved. Abilene Christian University (as it was re-named several years ago) has become one of the foremost proponents and encouragers of liberalism through: (1) outrageously heretical statements, both orally and in writing, by various men on the faculty of the Religion Department and the president himself, (2) books published by the ACU Press and authored by ACU professors, (3) the almost exclusive use of liberal speakers on their lectureships, workshops, and seminars in the 1980s and 1990s.

The president defended the appointment in 1992 of a Methodist preacher, an ACU student, as editor of the school paper. The school’s administration and board can no longer credibly claim to believe in the distinctiveness of the church of Christ, as taught in the New Testament, while promoting the people, programs, and principles they do. Lamentably, many other universities supported by the Lord’s people are rapidly following the ecumenical, “unity-in-diversity” lead of ACU. Further, there is almost a “lock-step” mentality among the schools—an apparent unspoken (perhaps spoken?) agreement that they will not break rank with or criticize their sister institutions, but will maintain their endorsement-implying relations with them regardless of how apostate they become.

As the convictions of the administrations and teachers in the schools have become weaker and more liberal, so have those of their graduates. Many of these broadminded graduates are now scattered throughout the congregations as preachers, elders, and deacons. The direction of churches where such men are in places of leadership was predictable to a six year-old.

Another school-related influence is the series of “scholars’ conferences” that began in the late 1980s, hosted by a different one of our universities each year. These have encouraged and produced some of the most radical and anti-Biblical declarations and proposals imaginable. Sadly, but certainly, liberalism has found a mighty ally in the schools, even as it did in the nineteenth-century apostasy.

More influences in the 1960s and 1970s

In this series of essays I am discussing some of what I consider to be significant factors that have contributed to the vast changes that have developed (and are still developing) within the church over the past four decades. These changes have not yet reached their climax. However, they are persistently and rapidly moving toward a universal cleavage that must come between those who are “set for the defence of the gospel” and those who listen more to culture than to the Christ. It took a little more than fifty years for the fellowship fissure to be universally acknowledged in the nineteenth-century apostasy. If that time element is predictive concerning the current apostasy, the forty years of this digression moves us near the consummation. The lamentable division that is now already generally *de facto* will one day be *de jure*. At times it seems that almost every day brings a new report of some unauthorized view or practice some loose-thinking brethren have adopted that would have been unimagined a few years ago among those claiming to be members of the church.

Many very crucial influences came into play in the late 1960s and early 1970s that affected the thinking of “rank and file” brethren, many of whom were ripe for such influences due to their ignorance of the most elementary Bible doctrines. This essay will therefore spend additional time on this important era.

The Impact of Journals

Mission Magazine (mentioned in an earlier installment), begun in 1967, was not the only journal that began to promote theologically eccentric views in the mid-1960s. *Restoration Quarterly* was also begun in this era, apparently to give vent to “scholarly” writers and to appeal to “scholarly” readers. As early as 1965 it was running articles by the likes of Roy Bowen Ward questioning responsible hermeneutical principles. It is now consistently a voice for theological off-beat views borrowed from denominational sources. These were but precursors of other liberal journals to come.

As indicated in a previous article, hand-in-glove with *Mission Magazine*, *The Christian Chronicle* first became a liberal mouthpiece in the mid-1960s. It made the “mistake” (for its own good) of moving leftward too rapidly and openly; its premature radicalism caused it to all but self-destruct in the 1970s. Oklahoma Christian University gained control of it and revived it in the 1980s. Under the direction of OCU, it has become a major “unity-in-diversity” organ. Through its combined advertising, reporting, and editorial policies it has ingloriously reigned as the principal promoter and mouthpiece of all things liberal for many years. Its bias against

conservative brethren, congregations, schools, and other works is so transparent that none can successfully gainsay it.

Two men who started their brotherhood “careers” as “anti” almost everything in the early 1950s, jumped to the opposite extreme in the later that decade. Carl Ketcherside edited/published *Mission Messenger* (not to be confused with *Mission Magazine*) for many years, in which he espoused his views of almost unlimited fellowship. Leroy Garrett advanced practically identical views through *Restoration Review*, which he edited/published for several years. Almost all brethren considered these men radical and extreme in their views for several years, but many of our false brethren have now “caught up” with them (e.g., ACU has invited Leroy Garrett to speak on some of its recent annual lectureships). The fellowship doctrine espoused by Rubel Shelly in the mid-1980s is practically identical to that which Ketcherside began advocating two decades earlier. These two papers never achieved large circulation, but some of the problems now besetting the body of Christ seem to parrot their emphasis.

Previously, I mentioned some of the apostates Reuel Lemmons defended in the pages of *The Firm Foundation* in the late 1960s. By the late 1970s he was showing even stronger signs of compromise in the people and programs he defended and in doctrinal positions he espoused in his editorials (e.g., that elderships have no authority in their local congregations). When William Cline and H. A. Dobbs purchased *The Firm Foundation* from the Showalter family in 1983, they relieved Lemmons as editor and restored the paper to a Scripturally sound emphasis and direction for the next several years.

Within a year Lemmons had found backing for a new journal—*Image Magazine*—in which he was apparently given carte blanche to propagate his ecumenical agenda. Alton Howard, owner of Howard Publishing Company, West Monroe, Louisiana, and long-time elder in the historically doctrinally quirky White’s Ferry Road Congregation, was the publisher.) This was a good match—a left-leaning publisher and a left-leaning editor. *Image* quickly made a reputation as a change agent advocate in such areas as “grace only,” “ignore error,” and “fellowship almost everybody” (except those pesky conservatives, of course). After Lemmons died, Denny Boultinghouse succeeded him, and took the paper even further away (if possible) from the Truth. *Image* was apparently not radical enough to suit Rubel Shelly and his cohorts. In 1992, he launched an even more liberal journal (a difficult feat indeed!), which he named *Wineskins*, published sporadically. *Image* merged with *Wineskins* some three or four years thereafter, perhaps indicating that there were not quite enough latitudinarian folks to support both heretical journals.

The Gospel Advocate, begun in 1855, stood as a symbol of spiritual and Scriptural strength from its beginning, so much so that it was nicknamed “the old reliable,” that is, until about 1985. When Neil Anderson purchased the Gospel Advocate Company he decided to alter the emphasis of the *Advocate*. He signaled this change of direction by removing Guy N. Woods, himself a symbol of spiritual and Scriptural strength, from the editor’s chair, replacing him with a somewhat enigmatic F. Furman Kearley. This move sent a shock wave throughout the brotherhood that reportedly resulted in the cancellation of thousands of subscriptions. While I would not describe *The Gospel Advocate* as a force in the liberal ranks, its storied clarion-clear voice for Truth and exposure of error was seriously muted at a very crucial time in the church’s history.

Books Galore

Numerous books by change advocates and agents, many of them professors in “our” universities, flowed from the press beginning in the mid-1980s, pushing the liberal “envelope” ever further. Principal publishers of these books advocating or sympathizing with digression have been ACU Press, Sweet Publishing Company, and Howard Publishing Company (West Monroe, LA, described above). Prominent among these books and their authors are the following:

- *I Just Want To Be a Christian*, 1984, By Rubel Shelly, 20th Century Christian
- *The Worldly Church*, 1988, by C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, and Michael R. Weed (all ACU professors), ACU Press
- *The Cruciform Church*, 1990, same authors and publisher as above
- *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church*, 1992, by Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris (Harris was a Religion professor at David Lipscomb University when this book was written, but has since moved to ACU), Howard Publishing Company
- *The Core Gospel*, 1992, by Bill Love, ACU Press
- *Distant Voices: Discovering a Forgotten Past for a Changing Church*, 1993, by C. Leonard Allen, ACU Press
- *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1993, Carroll D. Osburn, ACU religion professor, Restoration Perspectives, Abilene, TX
- *Women in the Church*, 1994, same author and publisher as above
- *Navigating the Winds of Change*, 1994, Lynn Anderson, Howard Publishing Company

The dominant theme of these books has been singular: The church must make whatever changes are necessary in worship, fellowship, work, and every other area in order to attract modern society and to grow numerically. In other words, the church must bow to the culture more than to the Christ. At least one of them (*Navigating the Winds of Change*) sets forth a plan

for infiltrating congregations and orchestrating the proposed changes. The attempt to justify these changes on the basis of Scriptural authority has been all but completely abandoned by their advocates. Both periodicals and books (and those who have bankrolled them) have played a decidedly major role in the current digression.

The ironic thing about the cry for “new” things in the church is that the things for which the advocates of change contend are not new at all—they are old things that the denominations have been teaching and practicing for a long time. They are new only to the Lord’s people because we have rightly refused them in the past as unauthorized and “strange” in light of Bible doctrine.

Tracking More Causes of the Changes

None of these changes I have been documenting have occurred “overnight.” Had this been so, all but a handful of folk would have risen as one in their outcry and rejection of them. The devil has always been patient—willing to take short steps to reach his goal. Likewise, those with an agenda of apostasy and liberalism have worked very gradually and have exerted their influence incrementally. They have taken their “short steps” long enough now that, added together, they add up to some huge leaps.

Workshops, Seminars, and Lectureships

A great vehicle for the change implementers since the late 1960s has been various workshops, seminars, and lectureships. Earlier, I described the Campus Evangelism Seminars that were conducted in 1968 and 1969, attended mainly by college students. Many of the Seminar speakers were not exactly doctrinal stalwarts, and at least some of the youth who attended them were detoured from the Truth, never to find the Way again. When brethren saw the liberal direction of Campus Evangelism, its support base dried up and it folded. However, Chuck Lucas (University of Florida in Gainesville) picked up the pieces and built from them his Crossroads Cult. One of his foremost means of indoctrination throughout the 1970s was the annual Florida Evangelism Seminars, generally staffed with his liberal cronies.

Pepperdine University’s (PU) annual lectureships, consistent with the school’s loose doctrinal direction generally, were worse than a bad joke to lovers of sound doctrine all the way back to the 1950s. However, in the 1970s, Abilene Christian University (ACU) began making an effort to catch up with PU. My letters and/or phone conversations with Carl Brecheen (lectureship director) or with John Stevens (ACU President) in those times brought denials that any policies had been relaxed and/or pleas of ignorance concerning the doctrinal aberrations of some of the men and women they were using. Their refusal to admit what they were doing and

the consequences of it (or did they do it with purpose so as to produce those consequences?) have wrought a doctrinal/philosophical evolution that is diametrically opposed to the intent of the school's founders, as reflected in its charter.

Beginning in at least the mid-1970s, it appears that one had to have, with few exceptions, some sort of liberal credentials or track record to be invited to speak on the ACU campus—and generally speaking, the more liberal the better. Since that time, the annual ACU lectureship alone (not counting other workshops and seminars it sponsors throughout the year) has exposed tens of thousands of brethren to and even honored some of the most outspoken heretics of our time. But how can we expect anything different from administrations and faculty members (and an apathetic Board) that have progressively veered leftward the last few decades? Since the 1980s it has been evident that ACU has abandoned any interest in the effort to maintain the restored apostolic church. Note the number of compromising books listed earlier that ACU professors wrote and/or that ACU Press published in the 1980s and 1990s. The listing of subsequent books of the same genre would extend much further.

ACU's doctrinal metamorphosis has greatly influenced many, if not most, of the other universities operated by brethren. Lipscomb University (formerly David Lipscomb University) has long kept pace with ACU in pursuing its own course of doctrinal disaster. Were its board concerned with integrity (not to mention with Scripture), it would change its name out of respect for its founder. LU has for at least a quarter of a century followed an itinerary that has little in common with the sacred principles for which Lipscomb fought so long and hard in the nineteenth century when he founded his school. Lubbock Christian University, Oklahoma Christian University, Harding University, Heritage Christian University, Ohio Valley University, and York College, are not very far behind. Rochester College (founded as North Central Christian College in 1959) began flaunting its ecumenical agenda in the 1990s, obtained the services of Rubel Shelly as a professor in early 2000, and elevated him to its presidency in 2008. As with the course of all apostasy, these institutions only get worse with time as they increasingly break faith with the dedicated souls who sacrificed so much to launch and nurture them.

Even the less liberal universities (e.g., Freed-Hardeman University, Faulkner University [*conservative* no longer seems appropriate for any of them]) seem to have a pre-determined policy to include some men each year on their lecture programs who are at best questionable and in some cases, beyond questionable. Sunset International Bible Institute (formerly Sunset School of Preaching) has a well-earned reputation for retaining unfaithful men on its faculty and

for producing alumni who have left many disasters in their wake, both at home and abroad. The two “stand-alone” graduate schools (Harding Graduate School of Religion and Ambridge University [formerly Regions U., formerly Southern Christian U., formerly Alabama School of Religion] has a several-years record of hiring/retaining one or more professors who have distinguished themselves for their uncertain sounds.

One thing is sure—one can tell much about a school’s emphasis and direction by looking at its lectureship roster. Another sure—and tragic—thing is that those who attend these lecture programs are influenced by them. All lovers of the Truth earnestly wish it were possible to wholeheartedly commend and support all of the institutions mentioned above, as we could do concerning most of them a few decades ago. Many of us took young people from congregations where we preached to special days hosted by various schools in years past. We eagerly encouraged these youngsters to enroll in the schools. We promoted their lectureships and workshops and encouraged brethren to support them financially. Those days have long since past for many thousands of knowledgeable brethren.

In 1978 the Annual Tulsa Soul-Winning Workshop began, largely the brainchild of Marvin Phillips, the preacher at the Garnett Road (now Garnett) Church of Christ. (Who can be opposed to soul winning, right?) What began with the apparent motive of stirring those who attended to do more personal evangelism and to do it more effectively, soon developed into a platform for advocacy of every sort of departure from the Truth. I attended the first two workshops and by the second one, it was apparent that it was degenerating into little more than a Pentecostal-flavored pep rally. Each year it has moved further to the left, including greater numbers of men as speakers/teachers who are best doctrinal compromisers and at worst, who are radical in their theology. What at first was advocacy by some speakers (e.g., Jeff Walling) of fellowship with denominations, has developed to the point of including denominational speakers on its roster. Each year this program draws several thousand brethren to be fed just a little Truth mixed in with heaping portions of error.

In 1989, some of the folk east of the Mississippi apparently decided it was too far to travel to Tulsa each year, so three of the most far0out congregations in Davidson County, Tennessee (Woodmont Hills—Rubel Shelly, Madison—Steve Flatt, later to become President of DLU, Antioch—Walt Leaver) began the “Nashville Jubilee.” This program did not incrementally introduce and reveal its agenda. Rather, from the start it was a hot bed of the rankest advocates of avant-garde doctrines and practices. After rallying several thousand souls (many of them

uninformed, naive, and unsuspecting) for over a decade, it ceased operations in 2001, for which fact Truth-lovers everywhere praised God.

Without controversy, various lectureships have done much to spread the leaven of liberalism, the “gospel of change”—**unauthorized** change.

The “Unity Forums”

The series of “Unity Forums” that began in 1984 with leaders of the Independent Christian Church (ICC) may be part symptom and part cause of the many changes that have harmed the Lord’s body in recent times. The first major meeting in many decades between our brethren and ICC representatives took place in Joplin, Missouri, on the campus of Ozark Christian College in August 1984. The collaborators (Don DeWelt of the ICC and Alan Cloyd [supposedly a convert from the ICC]) first styled it a “Restoration Summit Meeting,” but later renamed it “Unity Forum—I” (after some of us emphasized how presumptuous the name was). The forum was carefully controlled, with fifty of our brethren and fifty from the ICC handpicked and invited. The majority of our brethren who were invited were known, if not for their outright liberalism, at least for their doctrinal softness (e.g., Rubel Shelly, Reuel Lemons, Monroe E. Hawley, Jon Jones, Marvin Philips, Calvin Warpula, and Wayne Kilpatrick).

A guiding factor in issuing invitations was that all of the men must be of an “irenic” (peaceable) spirit. Certain ones were assigned topics upon which to speak before the entire gathering, and others were asked to lead small group discussions. In one of the group discussions, Furman Kearley (who was soon to become editor of the *Gospel Advocate*) heartily endorsed a suggestion from Wayne Kilpatrick in one of the groups that we might gradually introduce pulpit exchanges by first letting ICC men teach in some of our classes, thereafter easing them into our pulpits. Reuel Lemons pointed out ways in which brethren in both groups were already working together (in some benevolence projects and in some mission fields) and suggested that we needed to do more of the same (with no mention of repentance on the part of the ICC). He pronounced unity as **already existent**.

Those in charge of the “Summit” allowed the distribution of packets of material by the long-time advocate of ecumenism, Carl Ketcherside, urging fellowship compromises, but disallowed the same privilege for an appropriate tract by H. Leo Boles. The tract contained Boles’ speech delivered almost fifty years before at a similar conference. In it he correctly emphasized to the Christian Church folk that they knew where they left the Lord’s church and they knew where to find us—right where we were when they left us (and the Truth). At the Forum’s close, Alan Cloyd asked the men to go home and try to arrange “mini-summits” in their

local areas (again, with fellowship issues ignored). He predicted that some (whom he called “knuckleheads”) would not understand and agree with their lofty plans and motives. He was right; many of us strongly disagreed.

Cloyd was right. Wearing my *knucklehead* badge proudly, I listened to tapes of all of the speeches and wrote a review of the “Summit,” which was eventually published in *Contending for the Faith, The Restorer, and Spiritual Sword*. When Andrew Conally’s health prevented him from speaking on the 1985 Spiritual Sword Lectures, brethren Elkins and Warren, lectureship directors, asked me to substitute for him and to deliver essentially the same material orally. The compromising tone of many of our brethren at the “Summit” was both disappointing and alarming. Several of them were willing to ignore grievous and significant issues between us that caused the religious forbears of the ICC members to form the ICC at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The “Unity Forums” have continued through the years, but hardly any brethren of sound convictions have participated (except as self-invited observers in a few cases) in any of them since the first one. Those who continued to take part have been men of the most liberal sort, almost without exception change agents themselves. They do not represent any of us who still love the Truth, but only their own apostate element that still masquerades as part of the Lord’s church. Some of the results of the forums have been the appearance of the late ICC leader, Don DeWelt, on the Tulsa Workshop a few years ago. More recently, the Abilene Christian University Lectures included at least one ICC man on its roster. (Ironically, some of the ICC men may be more conservative than some of those who still claim to be our brethren, but who are featured on such programs!)

Agenda of the Change Agents

The Campaign for a “New Hermeneutic”: *Hermeneutics* refers to the science of interpretation, and Bible hermeneutics has to do with the principles or rules used in interpreting and applying God’s Word. The first call for a “new hermeneutic” (i.e., a new set of rules of Bible interpretation) of which I am aware came from some of our brethren who attended the “Restoration Summit” described above. They sought such so that we could have fellowship with those in the ICC in spite of their apostate condition and with no repentance on their part.

A few years later some of “our” self-proclaimed “scholars” began to holler for a “new hermeneutic” at the “scholars’ conferences” (referenced earlier). Primarily, they have declared war against the idea that we must respect the silence as well as the statement of Scripture, denying the prohibitive nature of the silence of Scripture. Further, they would have us believe

that we are without law under Christ, but that the New Testament is merely a “love letter” from Heaven. They deny that the Bible contains patterns for the church or for our personal behavior, or that it is intended to be strictly followed. Some have already taken positions, the implications of which deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture.

The Campaign to Change Our Worship: Some are suggesting and practicing the observance of the Lord’s supper on other days besides the Lord’s day. Some now say that the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is a non-issue—a mere matter of opinion or personal conscience—and that they have no scruples against them. An increasing number of congregations are regularly using “special” or “presentation” music (i.e., solos, choirs, and other groups separate from the congregation) in their worship assemblies. “Praise teams” have become a fad in several congregations. Bible-quoting preachers were long ago replaced in many congregations by hip promoters, sometimes dressed in cut-offs and t-shirts and giving pop-psychology pep talks laced with funny stories. Drama and theatrical productions are frequently filling the normal sermon time in some congregations.

The practice of those in the congregation lifting their hands up over their heads during songs and prayers and applauding at points of agreement with the preacher, at baptisms, or at certain announcements is on the rise. Some have already done away with a Gospel invitation and they ridicule those who continue to offer one at each assembly. It has become increasingly common for congregations to meet only on Sunday morning and to replace the usual evening worship period with “cells” or “life groups” in homes. Some congregations now have two morning worship assemblies. One is structured along “traditional” lines and is conducted for those who might be offended by “non-traditional” practices. The other is for the liberals who care little or none for Scriptural authorization for what they say or do, but who want to experiment with the old hollow, worn out practices of sectarianism, as if these possessed some magical formula for creating “spiritual worship.”

The Campaign to Change the Church. More and more are indicating in their writing and speaking that they view the church in a completely denominational sense. Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris advocate taking the personal traits of Jesus alone as a “paradigm” (a synonym for “pattern,” but they would not stoop to use such a dirty word!) for the church and disregarding Acts through Revelation for information on the church (*The Second Incarnation*, 1992). Of course, every move to change the elements and/or acts of worship also directly affects the church.

The Campaign to Change the Role of Women in the Church. The secular, social, political, and humanistic “women’s liberation movement” of the 1970s and 1980s has had an obvious influence on some brethren (including sisters) who seem to care more about being “politically correct” than about being doctrinally sound. The liberals are pushing women into leadership roles in the church as rapidly as they can. Their usual beginning point is to use them as ushers and to pass the trays during the Lord’s supper, then they “progress” to having them lead a song or a prayer, then they further move to have them teach mixed adult classes, with the intent eventually to move them into the pulpit. At least one Alabama congregation (Twickenham in Huntsville) has published its agenda for appointing women as deacons, then as elders, and finally, turning the pulpit over to them.

The Campaign to Corrupt the Plan of Salvation. For several years liberals have enjoyed ridiculing as “five-steppers” faithful Gospel preachers who correctly set forth the New Testament plan of salvation. More recently, some have become increasingly bold, brazen, and specific. Carroll D. Osburn, Professor of New Testament at ACU, avers: “There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on...soteriological matters such as whether baptism is ‘for’ or ‘because of’ the remission of sins” (*The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1993, pp. 90–91). Jimmy Allen, long time Bible professor at Harding University, has written an entire book devoted to the proposition that a believer need not know or understand the Scriptural purpose of his/her baptism for it to be Scriptural baptism (*Re-baptism*, 1991). In a December 1996 radio program, aired over KJAK, Lubbock, Texas, Max Lucado welcomed his listeners into the “family of God” upon merely calling God their Father. He further encouraged them to be baptized not “so that you will be saved,” but “because you are saved.” Royce Money, President of ACU, in a speech at the ACU Lectures in February 2000, declared that he knows that God makes exceptions to Jesus’ declaration about the new birth in John 3:5.

The Campaign for Changes Relating to Fellowship. Rubel Shelly has publicly renounced his former Scriptural views in favor of liberal views of Ephesians 4:4–6 and 2 John 9, which views imply the existence of fellowship between all who believe in the atonement of Christ for our sins and in His Deity (*I Just Want To Be a Christian*, 1984, p. 82). Carroll Osburn likewise argues that 2 John 9 refers only to teaching concerning the nature of the Christ and therefore fellowship should not be withheld from those who do not believe the Lord’s supper should be taken every Sunday, those who wish to use instrumental music in worship, premillennialists, or (as noted above) even those who teach that baptism is “because of”

remission of sins (pp. 71, 90–91). The move for unity and fellowship with the ICC (and other denominations as well) is both the effect of this push for a broader fellowship and the cause of additional efforts of this sort. More and more preachers, especially in the large metropolitan churches, are joining denominational ministerial alliances. An ever-increasing number of congregations are engaging in pulpit swaps with denominations, and not to teach them the Truth and expose their errors, but to praise and commend them.

The Campaign for Changes Relating to Moral Issues. The plague of divorce in society became increasingly seen in the church by the 1970s. Perhaps in seeking a means of dealing with this increase, a few brethren, led by James D. Bales of the Harding University Bible faculty, began advancing doctrines that relaxed the Lord’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Matthew 19:9. As a direct result of the “loopholes” these men have professed to find in God’s law for marriage, likely thousands of couples have rationalized their adulterous marriages. Furthermore, numerous congregations now accept as faithful members, people who are involved in such unscriptural marriages on the basis of these supposed “loopholes.” We now have brethren (including preachers and elders) who defend “social drinking” of alcoholic beverages, dancing, wearing immodest apparel in public, public mixed swimming, and gambling. Some have already suggested an attitude of tolerance on the subject of abortion (David Vanderpool, *The Christian Chronicle*, Nov. 1993, pp. 14–15).

There is much more, and word comes almost on a daily basis of additional departures from the faith. Most of these digressions were unimaginable to any of us a few decades ago. Many thousands even now find them so inconceivable that they deny their existence. I have sought to cover enough ground to at least demonstrate the major roots of the widespread apostasy among brethren. I have striven to expose the liberal network (dare I call it a “conspiracy”?) that exists among those who, in conviction and direction, long since exited the kingdom’s gates.

Liberalism to the “Max”

In Search of a Summary Subject

In casting about for the most appropriate way to conclude this historical sketch, I sought some way to summarize the major elements of this material. I believe I have found it (him). One man, more than any other of whom I am aware, is the quintessential liberal among those who are trying to destroy the church. He epitomizes the finished product of the elitist liberal theology that has stolen the hearts of so many. If one would know exactly where the deadly

liberalism of our time leads when consistently followed it to its tragic ultimate, he need look no further than this apostate—Max Lucado.

My quotations and criticisms are aimed at his apostasy, not at him; I have no personal animosity toward Lucado whatsoever. I sincerely desire (and am praying) that he may repent lest he perish. However, I cannot love the Lord and His Truth without absolutely despising (and exposing) Lucado's outrageous doctrine and practice. Verily, he represents all of the worst in matters of doctrine and practice among those still claiming membership in the church.

He has occupied the pulpit of the Oak Hills "Church of Christ" in San Antonio, Texas, since 1988. This church, leaning leftward before he arrived, gave Lucado free rein, which he has used to the fullest. Through his "touchy-feely" books and his interdenominational doctrine and behavior he reigns as the darling of both the change agents in the church and of the denominations.

Fellowship

Liberals constantly seek a wider fellowship, embracing those who have never obeyed the Gospel. Lucado has taken this emphasis to a new level by extending fellowship to all sorts of denominational churches for several years. Any faithful Gospel preacher would welcome the invitation to preach the Truth to a denominational church. Many of us have done so. However, when Lucado visits them he "brothers" them, calls their preachers by their denominational titles (i.e., "Rev.," "Father," et al.), sings with their organs, and generally bids them "Godspeed," in spite of many Scriptural warnings to the contrary (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9–11; et al.). He and Buckner Fanning (Trinity Baptist Church, San Antonio) "traded pulpits" several years ago, which event they proclaimed "Unity Day." Lucado explained: "This is a gesture of unity, a statement of acceptance.... Whenever I see a man call God 'Father,' I see a brother."

In his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, Lucado builds a ship, which he christened *Fellowship*. Its passenger manifest includes Calvinists, charismatics, people who engage in various unauthorized worship practices—apparently anyone who professes belief in Christ. He alleges Christ to be the captain and Heaven the destination of the whole motley crew. They all boarded on "the gangplank of...grace." What is his solution to the problem of divergent doctrines and practices among the passengers? "The answer to arguments? Acceptance. The first step to unity? Acceptance. No agreement? Acceptance."

As his proof-text, he offers Romans 14:1, which deals only with optional matters, recklessly (and inexcusably) ripping it from its context and application. Only two chapters later,

Paul ordered us to “mark” and “turn away from” heretics who beguile others by “smooth and fair speech” (16:17–18). I can see why Lucado would want to forget these verses if he ever read them. They precisely describe him and how faithful saints must treat him!

Had Lucado been making up the passenger list, Noah’s ark would have included many more than the eight souls of the patriarch’s family! Moses summarized the great difference between Lucado and Noah: “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). Liberalism ultimately leads to Lucado’s doctrine of indiscriminate fellowship, little more than thinly veiled universalism.

The Church

Lucado’s fellowship errors reflect his concept of the church. His fellowship/church model is not new, but it is too new to be true. It is the old denominational model of the “universal church,” often depicted by the figure of a circle encompassing all of the denominations. Lucado prefers a ship over a circle to express his anti-Scriptural concept that “the church” is the sum of all of the denominations. He has perhaps voiced his confused view of the church more blatantly than his fellow change agents.

A 1989 newspaper feature story had Lucado referring to “the church of Christ denomination.” He denied saying those words, but to what purpose?. Both his words and his deeds amply testify that he thus perceives the Lord’s church. At the 1997 Washington, D.C., Promise Keepers rally he included the church with the denominations, challenging all to repent of their sectarianism and cease their jealousy and competition with each other.

In the 1999 CSPAN telecast of the National Prayer Breakfast, Lucado stated: “Some think that following Jesus is attending a certain church...” Yes, and one of those Who thus thinks is Jesus Himself! He is the head of His one church, which is His bride (Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22–23; 4:4; 5:23–25, 29, 32). If He has promised to save any who are outside of His church since He built it, I am unaware of it. The saved are added to it as they are saved (Acts 2:47), He will deliver it up to the Father in the end (1 Cor. 15:24) because He is its Savior (Eph. 5:23). If the Bible can be trusted, one must be in the church of Christ to be saved.

The church Jesus built is not a denomination and does not include any denominations. It is not even a fourth step-cousin-in-law once-removed to any of the denominations. The entire denominational concept and structure are the works of men, not of the Son of God. Lucado seems unable to conceive of the church except in sectarian terms. To him every believer must be a member of some denomination. He is not content to hold this doctrine himself, but seems

bent on corrupting as many members and congregations as possible with his heresy. Liberalism ultimately leads to Lucado's denominational view of the church.

Worship

One's view of the church directly effects his concept of worship. When one forfeits Bible doctrine concerning the church's nature, why not concerning its worship also? Lucado is consistent—he rejects the Bible on both subjects. As mentioned earlier, he sings spiritual songs with instruments in the denominational churches he visits. From his Oak Hills Pulpit a few years ago, he revealed his “convictions”:

Many of you know that I have no trouble whatsoever with using instruments in worship.... I love our acappella singing, but I really have trouble saying that if anybody wants to use an instrument in worship it's wrong.

Lucado and Oak Hills recently produced a CD. “Opening Windows” is touted as a “worship experience” with Lucado and the “music ministry of Oak Hills Church,”... “recorded live at Max's home church.” It features a “sixty-member choir, a praise team, and band on [a] personal journey through prayer, praise, and worship.”

Such complete rejection of one element of Scriptural worship is tantamount to rejecting all of them. Liberalism ultimately leads to Lucado's abandonment of Scriptural worship.

The Plan of Salvation

Lucado has not even spared the plan of salvation in his assault on the Truth. He does so **implicitly** every time he extends fellowship and hope to those who have not obeyed the Gospel (2 The. 1:7–9). Faith-only and grace-only advocates are on his “Fellowship,” allegedly bound for Heaven.

He has also **explicitly** cast aside the Gospel Truth on this subject. Never mind what Paul, Peter, or John wrote, or the very Savior Himself stated. Lucado apparently knows more about the plan conceived in eternity than them all (1 Cor. 2:6–10; Eph. 3:9–11; 1 Pet. 1:18–20)! In a 1996 “Upwards” radio program sermon (KJAK, Lubbock, TX) he extended the following invitation:

Just call Him “Father.”... And your Father will respond. Why don't you do that?... [The announcer then offers a “free” booklet to all who send a donation and reintroduces Lucado:] Now, Max Lucado returns with a special word for those who received the gift of salvation just moments ago in prayer. [Lucado:] I'd like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church. I want to encourage you to be baptized.... But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved....

In a recent “Easter” booklet, *He Did This Just for You*, Lucado gives his “plan of salvation” as follows:

Admit your need. **Agree** with His work. **Accept** His gift. Go to God in prayer and tell Him, ‘I am a sinner in need of grace. I believe that Jesus died for me on the cross. I accept your offer of salvation.’ It’s a simple prayer with eternal results.

No Baptist could have stated Baptist doctrine better. In both quotations one sees the old denominational “sinner’s prayer” for which there is not even half a scintilla of Scriptural support! As with all denominationalists, Lucado completely surrenders the Truth about the relationship of baptism to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 22:16; Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Lucado surely knows the clear New Testament connection between baptism, the blood of Christ, and forgiveness of sins? (1) If only the blood of Christ can wash sins away (Rev. 1:5), and (2) if one’s sins are washed away in the act of baptism—not before (Acts 22:16), then (3) the Lord made baptism the act in which His blood washes away one’s sins (Rom. 6:3). No baptism—no blood; no blood—no forgiveness. no forgiveness—no salvation! It is that simple. Liberalism ultimately leads to Lucado’s abandonment of the Lord’s plan of salvation.

Conclusion

We have surveyed many of the factors that have brought the church to its present state of confusion and disarray. We have also seen in Max Lucado what the seeds of liberalism will produce in its ripened fruits. Lovers of Truth must not only have no fellowship with these and their proponents, “but rather even reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

[Note: This MS is for the most part a compilation of a seven-part series of articles I wrote as “Editor’s Extras” in 2000–2001, while I was editor of *The Gospel Journal*. I have since done some updating on it.]