

A Significant Historical Event—Is History Repeating Itself? # 1

by James P. Needham

I have been trying to preach the gospel since 1948. When I started the churches were at peace so far as I could tell. I was invited to preach in many of the churches in the area where I grew up. (They wouldn't let me make announcements now, much less preach!) In a summer during the 1950's I held 7 meetings in West Tennessee in all of which I preached the truth on the relationship of the church to human institutions. I have not been invited back since!!! (From the reaction I received, I didn't really expect to be). I entered Freed-Hardeman College in the fall of 1948, and studied under N. B. Hardeman, L. L. Briggance, Jim Cope, Clinton Hamilton, and others. The peace and harmony that I enjoyed was to be short lived. While I was a student at FHC the Gospel Guardian was begun by Roy E. Cogdill, Yater Tant and Luther Blackmon, et. al. A bundle of them was put on the table in the library for all who cared to take one. It was begun for the purpose of examining the sponsoring church and orphan home issues. As I studied the Bible and read the Guardian, I began to see that things were turning in the wrong direction. Intensive efforts were made by the Gospel Advocate and others to defend these things for which there was no scriptural authority. In time the Advocate spearheaded a movement to "quarantine" those who stood against the sponsoring church concept and church grants to orphan homes. Division was now in the wind. Churches began to divide all across the nation.

N. B. Hardeman was a straight shooter. He had a firm conviction that the Bible is God's word and must be our rule and guide and everything contrary to it must be opposed. He had no time for a soft approach to religious issues. He taught the truth on missionary societies, Premillennialism, and other pressing issues. He constantly disparaged other colleges for their softness on religious denominationalism and their errors. One of his famous expressions was, "If you want to know what I believe on any Bible subject, write and ask me, and I can answer you on a post card and have enough room left to ask you about your wife and kids." Before he died, however, he joined forces with those he had opposed, and spoke publically in favor of the issues. Brother B. G. Hope had been a student of brother Hardeman's and had become a dear and close friend to him. He said he asked brother Hardeman, "Should I preach it like you taught me, or like you preach it now?" He said brother Hardeman replied, "Preach it like I taught you." Brother Hope asked him, "Why don't you?" He said Hardeman replied, "I can't afford to." At the end brother Hardeman joined forces with those he had opposed and was invited to hold a gospel meeting at David Lipscomb College.

During this time I also became acquainted with the writings of Foy E. Wallace, Jr. His writings were pungent and to the point. I read just about everything he wrote with great profit..

I. The College-In-The-Budget Issue:

The controversy over church contributions to colleges took place while I was in the military in Europe, so I knew little of it except a few references that were made to it among the students that were in school while that issue raged between N. B. Hardeman and Foy E. Wallace, Jr. In time I became friends with Yater Tant who loaned me bound volumes of the old Bible Banner which I read with enthusiasm and much profit. In these bound volumes was the Hardeman-Wallace discussion of the college in the church budget issue. They discussed this issue at length.

Brother Hardeman finally compared church contributions to colleges to church contributions to orphan homes. He pointed out the inconsistencies of those who beat the drums for church contributions to orphan homes, but denied the scripturalness of church grants to colleges. This was a strategic move, because it turned the discussion from the college-in-the-budget issue to church grants to orphan homes which a large part of the brotherhood approved and practiced. This was the beginning of an extended discussion in the Gospel Guardian and the Gospel Advocate on this issue. The orphan home issue was well suited to break down brethren's

opposition to church grants to colleges and other human organizations because of its emotional appeal and because Hardeman had it right, church contributions to colleges and orphan homes do, indeed, stand or fall together, and the truth is, *they fall together scripturally*. In time opposition to church support of colleges melted away, because, as brother Hardeman said, "*They stand or fall together*." So, many brethren, rather than give up the practice of church grants to orphan homes, accepted church grants to colleges. They obviously were more interested in consistency than in the truth. Thus, many of the liberal churches of Christ began to put the colleges in their budgets for regular contributions. To give up church grants to orphan homes was too much to ask, so since they and church grants to colleges "stand or fall together," they chose to accept both. It would be a mistake to overlook the party spirit that plagued this issue. Well-known anti-institutional brethren began to make their confessions of change in articles to the Gospel Advocate, and B. C. Goodpasture, editor of the Gospel Advocate, virtually became the "father confessor." The liberals gloated!

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was a leader in the struggle against the sponsoring church concept and church grants to any kind of human institution. His writings were often sharp, to the point, and clear. (This can be clearly seen in the first and only volume of TORCH he edited, and in others of his writings. I can supply you with a bound volume one of TORCH for \$6.00 post paid). He was the first preacher I ever heard preach against the sponsoring church idea. A group of us students traveled from Henderson, TN to Mayfield, KY to hear him in a gospel meeting. The night we attended he opposed the Broadway church in Lubbock, TX for their sponsoring church setup for the work in Germany following WWII. He spoke of their trying to be a brotherhood eldership, and a brotherhood treasury.

This aggressive style of preaching was quite prominent in those days by men like Roy E. Cogdill, N. B. Hardeman, Luther Blackmon, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., his brother Cled, and many others. While it was popular with many brethren, it was too harsh for some.

II. A Movement Toward Blunting The Arrow Of Truth

All who lived through the period sensed a change in attitude particularly by the Nashville, TN contingent. That attitude was one of softness and leaning heavily toward the Protestant attitude of live and let live, or unity in diversity. There was a loud outcry against preachers who called the names of the denominations and exposed their errors. (Brethren often don't realize that false doctrine doesn't lead to heaven). A large contingent in the church didn't know the difference between the Lord's church and the churches of men. They often spoke of "other denominations." I often heard brethren say, "I don't like that preacher, he is a fighter."

Maybe others knew that this softening was a planned and promoted movement by some Nashville preachers, but I certainly did not. (It was a religious conspiracy to change the general attitude and practice of the brethren). Now I know its source. I recently read a book entitled "REVIVING THE ANCIENT FAITH, The Story of Churches of Christ in America," by Richard T. Hughes. (If you have not read this book, I highly recommend that you do so, it is an eye opener). I shall here quote a few lines from this revealing book on the subject at hand.

"Resisting the Fighting Style

"Four graduate students at Nashville's Peabody College - M. Norvel Young, James D. Bales, George DeHoff, and Woodrow Whitten - conceived the idea for this journal (20th Century Christian, jpn) in 1938. Disillusioned with the fighting style that increasingly characterized journalism in Churches of Christ and concerned that Churches of Christ had failed to communicate effectively with the younger generation, these students determined to bring the message of Churches of Christ more into line with contemporary concerns - a goal strikingly similar to that of the new *Christian Leader*. Further, like those who pioneered the new *Christian Leader*, these young men also were committed to positive, constructive journalism.

"But when Young took this idea to E.H. Ijmes, at that time President of David Lipscomb College in Nashville, he received little or no encouragement. Ijams informed Young that a group of older men was about to launch a significant journal, backed by substantial funding, that would accomplish precisely what these younger men had in mind. Ijams therefore advised Young and his colleagues to stand aside and entrust their common vision to the older generation.

"Despite this advice, the graduate students determined to press ahead. With their own funds and their own resources, they issued the first number of the *20th Century Christian* from the basement of Nashville's Hillsboro Church of Christ in October 1938 - only three months before the new *Christian Leader* appeared. Knowing that none of them carried sufficient weight among Churches of Christ to serve as editor, they secured for that position J. P. Sanders, at that time the preacher of the Hillsboro Church of Christ. They also signed on Hugh Tiner (dean of Pepperdine College in Los Angeles) and Athens Clay Pullias (vice president of David Lipscomb College) to serve along with Sanders and themselves on an editorial council.

"Far from being disillusioned with the core message of Churches of Christ, these students were deeply committed to the traditions of their heritage and to the ideal of primitive, nondenominational Christianity. They sought, however, to make that traditional message relevant to their own time. The cover of this periodical, for example, bore the motto, "New Testament Christianity in the Present Age." Further, Young and his cohorts found inspiration for the title of their journal- *20th Century Christian* - in two sources. First, it played on the theme of first-century Christianity and implicitly pointed backward, in good primitivist fashion, to the first Christian age. Second, it celebrated the present and the modern. The Hollywood film studio Twentieth Century Fox, for example, helped to inspire the title *20th Century Christian*. When the magazine changed its name to *21st Century Christian* in January 1990, it dropped from its cover the motto 'New Testament Christianity in the Present Age.'

"In spite of their preoccupation with the modern world, though, these students maintained significant links to the Stone-Lipscomb tradition. James D. Bales, George DeHoff, and Woodrow Whitten, on the one hand, all graduated from Harding College, where they had been influenced by J. N. Armstrong. Norvel Young had been immersed in this tradition from his earliest years growing up in Middle Tennessee. His mother's father and uncle both owned farms adjoining David Lipscomb's, and his mother, Ruby Morrow Young, studied not only under Lipscomb but also under James A. Harding and T. B. Larimore. Young himself graduated from David Lipscomb College, the successor to the old Nashville Bible School. In later years, Young claimed no memory of either a legalistic or exclusivist outlook in the churches of his youth in Middle Tennessee. Rather, he recalled a pietistic perspective, centered on prayer, love and one's relation to God through Christ. Further, in the 1930s all four of these students had embraced the pacifist tradition that for years had been central to the apocalyptic worldview. (Pages 210, 11).

"It is not surprising then, that they sought to reconcile Churches of Christ to the spirit of the modern age. But the old apocalyptic perspective of the nineteenth century constitutes an obstacle to such a reconciliation" (page 212).

"Further, they positioned their new journal as inspirational rather than polemical, thereby withdrawing from the battlefield that Foy Wallace claimed as leader and watchdog..." (page 212).

"Second, they steered clear of all discussion of premillennialism, focusing instead on positive, constructive values that many, if not most, among Churches of Christ could accept." (p.215).

"Foy Wallace and others of his stripe never sensed the threat to sectarian values implicit in the 20th Century Christian. But that threat became increasingly easy to detect in the period during and following World War II. Many of the people, in the 1930's prized a kind of gentle spirit, who refused to attack R. H. Boll, and who sought to undermine the fighting style of Foy Wallace,

worked to develop the institutional machinery of Church of Christ in the 1940's. Their efforts set the stage for the next major battle in this communion and the next major transitional move from sectarian status among Church of Christ toward full-fledged denominational standing ." (Page 216).

"The new journalism and associated theology would move Churches of Christ further and further away from the sectarian mentality of the nineteenth century and would increasingly celebrate the values of conservative Protestant culture in the United States.

"In this way, the *Christian Leader* initiated a transition fundamentally similar to the one Alexander Campbell had made in 1837 (see Chapter 2), when he elected to defend American Protestantism. The difference was that while Campbell acknowledged that transition, those directing the *Leader* apparently possessed little or no awareness of this dimension of their work. Their naivete in this regard was closely connected to their continued commitment to the primitive Christian faith.

"The truth was that since the days of Campbell and Stone, the notion of primitive Christianity had become so central to the thinking of Churches of Christ - and so foundational to orthodoxy in every aspect of this tradition that no one who cared about his or her standing in the church could afford to waffle on the theme, much less abandon it outright. Put another way, primitive Christianity had become the defining, foundational myth for this tradition. In this context, few progressives sensed any disjunction between the celebration of modern values and commitment to the primitive Christian faith. On the other side of the fence, however, Foy Wallace and his people were fully convinced that the progressives had abandoned their historic, sectarian posture.

"Of all the literature of Churches of Christ through this period, the *20th Century Christian* perhaps most graphically depicts the fusion of conservative twentieth century Protestant values with a commitment to primitive Christianity. And once again, the individuals who led this project had all enjoyed opportunities in higher education. (page 210).

I will now make some observations on the above quotations and let that suffice for this first article.

1. This was a "landmark" development that would have long range effects on the church in the future. We can see the fruits of this softness movement in the liberal churches today. We see church contributions to human institutions, church furnished recreation, family life centers, church operated schools, church grants to colleges, milktoast preaching, and even merges with the Christian Church, etc.

(*Genesis 11:6*) "...now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do."

Closing the door to open discussion of current issues, opens the door for just about anything.

"...they positioned their new journal as inspirational rather than polemical, thereby withdrawing from the battlefield that Foy Wallace claimed as leader and watchdog..." (page .212)...they steered clear of all discussion of premillennialism, focusing instead on positive, constructive values that many, if not most, among Churches of Christ could accept." (page 215).

2. We can't help but notice the connection between the **20th Century Christian** and the Colleges. Note,

" They also signed on Hugh Tiner (dean of Pepperdine College in Los Angeles) and Athens Clay Pullias (vice president of David Lipscomb College) to serve along with Sanders and themselves on an editorial council," (Page 212).

All these men were leaders in the softness movement. This brings to mind the fact that periodicals and colleges have played a major role in every departure in the church since it's beginning in the United States. While these entities have potential for great good they have an equal if not more than equal potential for evil. To deny this is to deny the undeniable.

4. Throughout his book, Hughes denigrates the "fighting style" of Foy Wallace. I counted 95 times that Wallace's name appears in the book (there are, no doubt more). Hughes attaches such descriptives to Wallace's name as "the Wallace crowd," "Wallace followers," "Wallace program," "Wallace people," "Wallace faction," "Wallace camp," "Wallace crowd," "Wallace and his people" "leader and watchdog." While Hughes, throughout his book of 448 pages, opposes the "fighting style" of Foy E. Wallace and his "crowd," he engages in that same "fighting style" against Wallace with a vengeance! If he intended to portray his so-called "gentle style of journalism" he really missed the boat. He loses his argument that it is wrong to argue because he argues that it is wrong to argue. His contempt for Wallace and those like him shows on almost every page. While he sets himself forth as a professional historian, his personal agenda and religious posture are obvious throughout the book. In fact he calls the idea of practicing New Testament Christianity a "myth

. " *Put another way, primitive Christianity had become the defining, foundational myth for this tradition,*" page 210.

He who can see through a ladder can see where he is coming from.

Hughes has not one good word for Foy E. Wallace, Jr. He has no appreciation for the good influence he had in those early days when he was battling Premillennialism, institutionalism and the sponsoring church concept. If Hughes' policies had been followed, where would the church be today? Brother Wallace was a very complex personality, capable, it was said, "of making close friends and bitter enemies." He had no equal as a preacher, writer, and defender of the faith (Though I'm not a judge in such matters, he probably was a genius). Regardless of everything else, he deserves credit for the great good he did. He practically stopped the spread of Premillennialism in churches of Christ its tracks, and was likely first to raise opposition to the issues of sponsoring churches and church grants to human institutions.

Because of some personal problems, Foy allowed his influence to be used by the very people he had spent his life opposing. For reasons I won't discuss here, he saw the liberal camp as his only refuge in his latter days. But be it remembered, he didn't fit well there! Some of the big liberal churches tried to use him, but he couldn't stomach their liberalism, and when he spoke out against it, they ditched him, though they rejoiced to count him as a convert from "antiism," which he really wasn't, deep down. The liberals claimed him in order to take advantage of his wide influence among conservatives, and tried to make it appear that he had renounced the hated "antis," but they didn't really care for him. Brother Wallace tried to save face by trying to spin his well-known anti-institutional, sponsoring church stance, but his spinings fell short of refuting the truths he had defended in earlier days. There is no way that he could convince reasonable people who had read his past writings that he had not changed.

5. Throughout Hughes' book, he exalts elitism ("one of whom he thinks he is which") and extols higher education which has never been a friend of the Lord's church. For instance he says, "*And once again, the individuals who led this project (20th Century Christian, jpn) had all enjoyed opportunities in higher education,*" (page 210). Is that supposed to be significant? Well, it is, but not the same significance Hughes gives it. The Lord's church has probably suffered more from brethren who have "enjoyed the opportunities in higher education" than from any other source. My good belated, beloved, and witty friend, Luther Blackmon, used to say, "*The problem with higher education is that one has to learn so many things that 'ain't' so.*" Throughout Hughes' book, he extols higher education, and looks down his elitist nose at men like Ben Franklin, Tolbert Fanning, et al, who likely did more good for the cause of Christ than Hughes ever will, (see chapter 4, and other places in his book). Tolbert Fanning said, "*...we think the schools generally are well calculated to make infidels,*" (*Gospel Advocate*, Nov. 1856, page 326,27).

6. Those who lived through the drastic change that came over the church in and around Nashville, TN in the 40's and forward, saw it happening and observed who was involved, but I never knew it was so well planned by its perpetrators. As Hughes shows, there were meetings and plans laid to change the direction of the churches of Christ toward a protestant denominational posture, and deliberately avoid the discussion of pressing issues of the time like Premillennialism.

(...they positioned their new journal as inspirational rather than polemical, thereby withdrawing from the battlefield that Foy Wallace claimed as leader and watchdog..." (page 212). "...they steered clear of all discussion of premillennialism, focusing instead on positive, constructive values that many, if not most, among Churches of Christ could accept." (page 215).

One sage observed in the 1950's that "Nashville would become a mission field." He was pretty close to correct, for liberalism swept over at least 90% of the Nashville churches.

7. This movement within the church of Christ followed the pattern of the instrumental music/missionary society apostasy. The leaders of both movements continued to mouth the old line mantras "the restoration movement," "where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent," "We call Bible things by Bible names, and do Bible things in Bible ways." This softened the impact of the drastic changes they were making, because it deceived the people into believing that nothing had changed. It's one thing to mouth a motto, and quite another to practice what it projects.

We see that the softening movement of the 40's and forward followed the same historical pattern of previous apostasies. On the masthead of the "20th Century Christian they carried the "New Testament Christianity in the present age." It is significant, however, that later they dropped that from the masthead. Hughes says,

"When the magazine changed its name to 21st Century Christian in January 1990, it dropped from its cover the motto 'New Testament Christianity in the present age.'" (page 211).

Did they realize that they had ceased to practice "First Century Christianity in the 21st Century"? Or had such a thought lost its meaning to them and they had adopted Hughes' idea that the idea of practicing first century religion in the 21st century is a "myth"? This was a subtle, but significant change, the impact of which is vividly seen in the liberal churches of Christ today.

This calls to mind Hughes' statement about Norvel Young,

"In later years, Young claimed no memory of either a legalistic or exclusivist outlook in the churches of his youth in Middle Tennessee. This is difficult to believe in view of Hughes' statement that "Norvel Young had been immersed in this tradition (the restoration movement philosophy jpn) through the years growing up in Middle Tennessee. His mother's father and uncle both owned farms adjoining David Lipscomb's, and his mother, Ruby Morrow Young, studied not only under Lipscomb, but also under James A. Harding and T. B. Larimore. Young himself graduated from David Lipscomb College, the successor to the old Nashville Bible School. Rather, he recalled a pietistic perspective, centered on prayer, love and one's relation to God through Christ. Further, in the 1930s all four of these students had embraced the pacifist tradition that for years had been central to the apocalyptic worldview." (Pages 210, 11). Either Norvil Young has a short memory, or he is ignorant of the history of "the restoration movement" (which I seriously doubt) in which hundreds of public debates were conducted with the denominations and thousands and thousands of people left the denominations and came into the churches of Christ. Hughes engaged in some wishful thinking here, and the re-writing of history. To say that Lipscomb and Harding and Fanning and others of their contemporaries were passivists with only a "pietistic perspective, centered on prayer, love and one's relation to God through Christ," and were not exclusivistic of human denominations and religious error is to call in question Young's integrity or Hughes' credentials as the true-blue historian he tries to project himself to be. Historical revisionism is a mixture of dishonesty and wishful thinking.

III. The Admission Of An Historical Truth:

It is commendable that Hughes' is honest enough to admit an historical truth, namely that those who opposed centralized control and the sponsoring church concept were not the ones who changed, but rather those who promoted these matters. Not these lines from Hughes' book:

"...the anti-institutional movement among Churches of Christ was not a product solely of the Campbell tradition nor solely of the Stone-Lipscomb tradition but was rather a product of both mixed together, blended, and amalgamated. Second, it means that those who opposed the development of institutions stood squarely in the democratic, anti-institutional mainstream of their nineteenth-century heritage, contrary to the assertions of mainstream Churches of Christ that they were deviants, radicals, and schismatics.

"Not only did these people stand squarely in the historic mainstream of Churches of Christ by virtue of their democratic biases and their opposition to anything smacking of institutions and centralized control but they also stood squarely in the legal tradition of Churches of Christ. In this regard, they simply carried to a higher key the outlook popularized by Arthur Criehtfield, John R. Howard, Moses Lard, Benjamin Franklin, and others who had radicalized Alexander Campbell's *Christian Baptist*," (see Chapters. 3-4).(page 226).

It is the common practice of those who trim their sails to the prevailing winds of liberalism to deny that they have changed. Campbell did it, Guy Woods and Foy E. Wallace, Jr. did it. This is one of the worst no brainers of all time. Anybody who can read can see in the previous articles the anti-institutional posture of nearly all the leaders of the pro-institutional and sponsoring church movement among churches of Christ since the 1930's. I can express my anti-institutional/centralized control position in the writings of these leaders in the 1930's and forward. In fact, they can often express my views better than I can!

If the general stance of the churches of Christ had been anti-institutional and centralized control, how could "*pacifism*" have "*been central to the apocalyptic worldview*" of churches of Christ, as Hughes avers? If the position of the conservative brethren today is identical to what brethren believed before the change came, then the pacifist position had not been "*central to the apocalyptic worldview.*" There was a battle royal between the conservatives and the liberals over the instrumental music and the missionary society, and constant conflict with the denominations. That's hardly pacifism. Hughes can't have It both ways.

That the so-called antis are not "deviants, radicals, and schismatics" will come as a surprise to the thousands of brethren who have been brainwashed with the liberal propaganda to the contrary: Note what Highes says:

"..it means that those who opposed the development of institutions stood squarely in the democratic, anti-institutional mainstream of their nineteenth-century heritage, contrary to the assertions of mainstream Churches of Christ that they were deviants, radicals, and schismatics,"(page 226).

How could an honest historian make this admission, and yet call the liberals the "mainstream Churches of Christ." How can they be the "mainstream" when they are the ones who separated from the mainstream? Hughes often meets himself coming back. In the above quotation he called both the conservatives and the liberals the "mainstream." How can both be the "mainstream"?

Conclusion:

In the next article I will show that certain brethren among the conservatives are following the pattern of apostasy in the past. It happened with Alexander Campbell, it happened in the institutional/sponsoring church controversy in the last half of the 20th century, and it is now happening among the conservatives. As Thomas Paine said, "These are times that try men's souls." Remember, crises don't make the man, they just declare him.

In the next article I will show that similar changes are being made today designed to change the attitude and outlook of the conservative churches. It is important that we realize what is happening lest our lack of perception cause us to sleep the sleep of death.