

Tom O'Neal's "Human Institutions"

by Gene Frost

Re.: "Gene Frost's and J.T. Smith's Human Institutions" by Tom O'Neal.

Following the title, and obviously related, the subtitle of the first paragraph of the article by Tom O'Neal is: "Which They Deny." The thrust of his article is that I deny that the Gospel Anchor Company, Inc., which published *Gospel Anchor* magazine, was a *human institution* (although he writes in the present tense). He writes to prove that it is. (The same with J.T. and Gospel Truths, Inc. and *Gospel Truths* magazine.) "Yes," he adds, "I know that both of them deny they have a human institution, but I have the proof that they do, thus are inconsistent, besides not handling the truth very carefully." The truth of the matter is, I have never denied that the Gospel Anchor Publishing Company was a human institution. In fact, I insist that it was human; and most certainly not divine.

Tom O'Neal has made a false charge. The reader will note that he does not document his charge, to show *what* was said, or written, *when* and *where*. In the same article, he quotes the following as expressing his sentiment about documenting what is ascribed to others, and he prints it in bold type:

"It is dishonest to ascribe a statement to a man with absolutely no proof that he ever made it."

Tom is the one who has done this! He has absolutely no proof of his charge! It is false! By his own admission, Tom O'Neal is *dishonest* in his treatment of this matter.

He knows better. He tells us that H.E. Phillips "constantly cautioned" him, along with other writers for *Searching the Scriptures*, "to be prepared to completely document anything said or any quotation used." We can certainly understand why Tom has been constantly cautioned. Throwing aside all caution, he enters a controversy with reckless abandon! In this case, he begins with a false premise and holds that course and never veers to the truth!

In the second paragraph of his article, Tom tells us of his effort to get the "proof" that we have a "human institution." He went "to the capitol of Oklahoma to the office of the Secretary of State and obtained a copy of the Certificate of Incorporation for J.T. Smith's Gospel Truths, Inc." From "the Office of the Secretary of State (sic) from the Commonwealth of Kentucky" he obtained Articles of Incorporation "for Gene Frost's Gospel Anchor Publishing Company, Inc." The result, he says, "These two articles **prove** that Gene and J.T. have a **human institution** through which they oppose Guardian of Truth/Truth Magazine Lectureship!" He can prove what needs no proof! And look at the effort. A simple phone call, and I could have told him that "yes," the Gospel Anchor Publishing Company was a human institution. It was a corporation. It was formed by humans according to legal requirements established by humans; it published materials written by humans, which products were purchased by humans—most any way you look at, the Company was a human institution.

The Gospel Anchor Publishing Company (incorporated and unincorporated) was human, and *not* divine. We did *not* use personnel of the company, *nor* funds from its treasury, to mirror local churches. We did *not* propagate the gospel, freely distributing printed materials, *nor* did we conduct religious worship services. We did not plan and

support public meetings with preaching, singing, and prayer. We were a publishing company, through which to print and sell a product (the Gospel Anchor magazine). We were not a dual purpose organization, with commercial interests and an evangelistic program.

(I speak of the Gospel Anchor Publishing Company, Inc. in the past tense, *was*, rather than present tense, *is*, because the *corporation* was dissolved thirty years ago, June 1979. Did Tom not see the Certificate of Dissolution, issued by Secretary of State, when he obtained a copy of the Articles of Incorporation? The business, Gospel Anchor Publishing Company, and the *Gospel Anchor* magazine became the sole property and responsibility of Gene Frost. Tom addressed his article to "Mr. Gene Frost, President," which I am not, and to "Gospel Anchor Publishing Company, Inc.," which is no longer. In his confusion, he even wrote an incorrect address, which prompted the USPS to affix the notice: "Your mail was addressed incorrectly. Glad we found you. Please help us by informing sender of your correct address." The *Gospel Anchor* magazine has not been published since August 1994; the Gospel Anchor company is no more. We now publish and sell books under Anchor Publishing.)

His confusion about the present state of the Gospel Anchor (publisher and magazine) aside, when and where did I ever deny that the Gospel Anchor company *was* or *is*, corporate or non-corporate, a human institution? He is guilty of misrepresentation, not only because of a *failure to find documentation* for his charge, but because the fact is I *actually taught* otherwise, viz. that the Gospel Anchor company was a human institution. Here is what I affirmed:

In May 1975, I wrote: "God has not ordained the collectivity for collective action in the political, economic, domestic, or social areas of the individual's responsibility. (He has in the religious or spiritual!) Individuals may form collectives in these areas, as wisdom may dictate as long as such are in harmony with all principles of right conduct. Individuals may organize themselves in business companies to manufacture and sell a product." (*Old Issues*, 28)

November 1977: "Man's *secular* interests and responsibilities lie in four areas of activity: political, economic, domestic, and social. In this secular realm, God has *not* legislated *specific* collective forms, so limiting man in collective action to specific organizations. ...

"We also have economic responsibilities. ... In fulfilling this responsibility, one may join his effort with others. God has not legislated as to economic collectivities, but has left us free to form partnerships, companies, corporations, etc." (*Brotherhood Societies*, 6)

October 1, 1979: "We have no objection to the Cogdill Foundation in its role of publisher. It is not the existence of the organization per se to which we object. It is not that it publishes religious publications. It is not that it is incorporated. Our objection is to its accepting contributions by which to propagate the gospel. In this role it is not a publishing company (like the Gospel Anchor), but becomes a religious collectivity (optional with the church). This we have clearly set forth." (*Brotherhood Societies*, 51)

"I can and have found authority for the Gospel Anchor Publishing Company, Inc. as a business enterprise, 'to sell and deliver' the religious material it publishes, but I cannot find authority for the Cogdill Foundation when it leaves its role of 'business enterprise' to function in the role of 'teaching society,' soliciting contributions from Christians. Rest assured that if Mike could find Scriptural authority for the dual role of the Cogdill Foundation, he would have presented it. He wouldn't have made the appeal that every sectarian makes: 'my practice is as Scriptural as yours!'" (*Brotherhood Societies*, 52)

Look at the dates. For over thirty years I have defended an individual's right to form human organizations to function in the secular realm, while distinguishing churches of the Lord in the religious realm. How could Tom have made any kind of investigation of what I believe and teach, and have ignored these primary sources? Obviously he is ignorant of what I have consistently taught for decades. Where then did Tom O'Neal get

the idea that I deny that the Gospel Anchor *was* a secular institution? How did he conclude that I am opposed to the Guardian of Truth Foundation because of its organization? Throughout his article Tom follows the arguments presented by Daniel King and Mike Willis in their book, *We Have A Right*. The basic assumption, which King would have the reader believe we deny, is:

"In the following lines I would like to address our right as individuals to conduct a business enterprise offering legitimate services to brethren and non-brethren, separate and apart from any local church, not involving or entangling congregations in any way."

"Gene Frost and J. T. Smith will now take their places as two of the new names forever associated with intemperate attacks upon the right of individuals to work together in legitimate business organization." (*We Have A Right*, 11-12)

This is not, and never has been, an issue. We challenged King and Willis over and again to document their assumption ... they could not. According to O'Neal, "it is dishonest to ascribe a statement to a man with absolutely no proof that he ever made it." As with his mentors, so it is with Tom O'Neal. Their dishonesty is now his dishonesty also!

The Issue

The issue is not, and never has been, whether individuals may form business enterprises, incorporated or not, but whether or not they may form societies or foundations to assume prerogatives of churches of Christ, to solicit and receive funds with which to propagate the gospel and to promote public worship in roles which mirror the churches. We "have specifically stated that we have *no* objection to the GOT Foundation in its business role" (*We Have A Right Answered*, 4).

December 1977: "Our conclusion is, when a publishing company functions strictly as an economic enterprise, produces a product which it sells, it has a legitimate existence. However, when the same personnel receive contributions by which to purchase and disseminate the product, it is not an economic enterprise in this role. As a society propagating the gospel of Christ, its mission is spiritual and depreciates the church, which is God's society commissioned to propagate the gospel. (1 Tim. 3:15). The human society is illegitimate. The issue involved is, simply: may Christians substitute a human society for the church, (not to replace the church, but as a body to exist alongside the church)? Is it optional whether we collectively teach through the church or through the society? May we worship God and edify the saints in the society as well as in the church? The answer should be obvious. What need have we for the society if the church is sufficient to do all that the society does? To contend for the society is to depreciate the church." (Brotherhood Societies, 13)

Tom O'Neal doesn't have a clue! Apparently he wants to be involved in the debate, to support the GOT party, but he doesn't understand the issue. He is content to follow the party line, which from the beginning is to distort and misrepresent the truth—it's a matter of record, easily discerned by anyone who has a sincere desire to know.

Having "proved" that the "Gospel Anchor Publishing Co., Inc." was a *corporation*, Tom raises the question, "What is the difference in these three human institutions"—Gospel Anchor, Inc., Gospel Truths, Inc., and Guardian of Truth, Inc.? He then says that what I contend is "unscriptural": "*all the while he is doing exactly the same thing!*" "Every issue they raise in regard to the Guardian of Truth Foundation can be raised against *their* human organization." We have dealt with this quibble in our response to Mike Willis.

February 9, 1980: "A second observation is that you mislead the reader as to our difference. You write for four columns on the basis that Cogdill Foundation is a business enterprise, as though that was the issue, that I denied it. You know that this is not so—or you should, since I have corrected you on this again and again. It is not its business role to which I object:

"I can and have found authority for Gospel Anchor Publishing Co., Inc., as a business

enterprise, "to sell and deliver" the religious material it publishes, but I cannot find authority for the Cogdill Foundation when it leaves its role of "business enterprise" to function in the role of "teaching society," soliciting contributions from Christians.' (October 1, 1979)." (*Brotherhood Societies*, 72)

We did not *do exactly the same thing* the Foundation did, as Tom claims. We never solicited funds. We never accepted donations. We never financially supported the preaching of the gospel. We never conducted public worship services. We *were* a publishing company, and sold our product—we never presumed a role that belongs to the churches of Christ. The Guardian of Truth cannot say this. And it is *this* that makes us different!

Secular Versus Religious

O'Neal takes his argument a step further. He falsely charges that "Gene has not a secular corporation but a **religious** corporation." This, he says, is because the Articles of Incorporation state that the "corporation is organized and shall be operated exclusively for religious, charitable and educational purposes," which is "to publish and disseminate religious literature and religious periodicals..." Since what the Gospel Anchor produced is religious material for sale, O'Neal reasons that this makes it a religious company, and it is no longer a business company. If what one produces and markets determines the nature of the organization itself, then the Guardian of Truth Foundation is a religious institution. The Articles of Incorporation—from the time of its origin in 1955, as the "Gospel Guardian Company, Inc.," through amendments involving corporate name changes, finally to its merger with Truth Magazine, Inc. and the present name of Guardian of Truth Foundation—have consistently expressed their purpose, with only slight changes in wording, namely "to support a religious, charitable, literary and educational undertaking ..." The religious undertaking has been "to publish and distribute ... religious publications." According to Tom, this makes the Guardian of Truth Foundation a human **religious** institution! This is the Foundation's concept of itself. However, it is not my concept of the Gospel Anchor company, which has never been anything more than a business enterprise.

As with everything else Tom presents, this is a rehash of what King and Willis presented in *We Have A Right*, the fallacy of which I exposed in *We Have A Right Answered*. I had anticipated this quibble earlier, published December 1977:

"The fact that the product of the publishing company is religious in nature—Bibles, books, periodicals, or tracts—does not negate the fact that the company is an economic enterprise and not a religious collectivity. It is a **secular** collectivity and **not a spiritual one!** It does not endeavor to do what God gave the church to do; its **mission** is not to propagate the gospel of Christ. (Let us not confuse mission and motive. One may have a good motive in establishing a business, viz., to print Bibles—he is motivated by a love of truth. Even so, the publishing company is a business and not a church or society). If the religious material that the company publishes is distributed, it is to be distributed by the one purchasing the material. For example, Zondervan Publishing Company publishes Bibles. It sells these Bibles for a profit. Can one say that this company is a religious organization whose mission is teaching the gospel, the same as the church? Hardly! Churches may purchase the Bibles and distribute them. The teaching done thereby is done by the churches and not by the publishing company. Glory is to God in the church, and not in the publishing company. (*Brotherhood Societies*, 11)

However, either they did not read, or did not comprehend, or simply chose to ignore the response. Whichever, I responded, "The one thing that is most conspicuous in their book, *We Have A Right*, is that they completely ignore our writing on the subject in *Brotherhood Societies*, and the distinctions which are clearly made." I offer the explanation further:

"Also, a company may at first be a business, but it may take on a dual role so that, in addition to its legitimate role as a company, it now becomes a religious society in disseminating the gospel and conducting collective worship. This is the case with the GOT Foundation. We have **no objection** to the Foundation functioning as a business, in publishing periodicals and books. However, when it solicits funds by which to disseminate

the Gospel and to conduct worship, it does not now function as a business but as a religious society, an unlawful collectivity that usurps the role of the church. It is this second role that emulates the role of the church. There is no contradiction in accepting a collectivity (organization) as a business, yet rejecting it when it functions as a religious collectivity, usurping the role of the church. (***We Have A Right Answered***, 35)

Still, Tom takes his “talking points” from King and Willis. I really don’t think he has read any of this. If he has, he either lacks comprehension or ignores it. For his sake, I prefer to think the problem is that he has remained ignorant. I will say to Tom: It is unwise to take up the battle of others unless you understand the issue.

Quibbles

Of no particular importance, Tom calls attention to five “False Charges,” for which he demands the identification of who made them, and proof for their accuracy and truthfulness. However, he first calls attention to an apology I made in *They Have No Right*.

Earlier I had identified Bill Cavender as a “board member,” thinking of a member of the **editorial** board of Truth magazine. I did not make the distinction. My mistake; they refer to them as “Staff Writers.” Big deal? Apparently so, since King/Willis refer to this misstatement as a grievous matter, listing it as a **false charge**. A false charge is to falsely “accuse (one) of wrongdoing” (***New World Dictionary***), “to make a claim of wrongdoing against; accuse or blame” (***American Heritage Dictionary***). In calling Cavender a board member, **they say** that I was accusing him of wrongdoing! Being falsely accused is certainly offensive. I know I would be offended if someone accused me of being a Guardian of Truth Board Member. Therefore, I apologized in ***They Have No Right***.

Tom O’Neal acknowledges that I had made the correction—although in the very next paragraph he says, “I pointed out the error Gene makes in this. Yet, he does not correct this in *They Have No Right*.” He even accepts the apology:

“Brother Frost said that Bill Cavender was a ‘Board member’ of the Guardian of Truth Foundation (***We Have A Right Answered***, page 43). However, he was mistaken in this and comes back in ***They Have No Right***, pages 110-11, and (sic) correct this and says, ‘I apologize...and again, I apologize.’ Apology accepted.”

O’Neal accepted my apology. That should have ended the matter; it should be dropped. However, immediately after accepting the apology, Tom draws a box and in it states, using larger bold type: “Frost Wrong,” and covers it again. O’Neal may accept one’s apology, but he will not forget the supposed offense, and will remind you of it.

I find it interesting that it is Tom O’Neal who accepts the apology for Cavender. Or maybe the Board was offended, and he accepts the apology for the Board. Careful, Tom, lest you be accused of taking on “the aura of the Pope of Rome.” (***We Have A Right***, 76)

Tom proceeds in his article to cite 5 “false charges,” which to me are petty, but to him are of grave importance, due serious concern.

Under the title, “Doing the Work of the Church,” Tom O’Neal first quotes J.T. Smith: “There is no authority for any other organization doing the work of the church.” He then avers that among those who oppose the Truth Magazine Lectures, some say there is no authority for a human institution to take over the work of the church. Let the reader take note of the sleight of hand, the subtle change of expression, from “doing the work” to “take over the work.” There is a difference. To “do the work” means to do the same thing the church does, while “take over” means to assume control or possession. Tom then says, “*I do not know of any preacher among us that believes some human institution has the right to take over the work of the church.*” Nor do I; nor can I think of the mind set where one would make that statement. Yet Tom says, in his very next sentence, that I, J.T., and others have “*assumed* without any proof that somebody believes that”—that some human institution has the right to take over the work of the church—“and that the Truth Magazine Lectureship has actually taken over the work of the church.” How

does he know what I *assume*? Yet it is *evident* to him that I *think* that, by repeating it, some will think it is true! *How could a series of meetings take control of a church?* Such irrational thinking is incredible! Now to cap it off, he calls upon me to *prove* that some believe that the GOT lectureship has “actually taken over,” taken control, of the work of the church. This is insane! Of course, I do not believe, without any evidence, that some believe that the GOT lectureship has taken control of the work of the church.

This is one of the issues which O’Neal claims no one deals with, and he thinks he knows the reason why. I will tell him why. What he calls issues are positions that are falsely attributed to us. He makes charges that are nonsensical. How does one rationally answer irrational arguments like the one above?

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The advertisement of my book, *We Have A Right Answered*,—“The Guardian of Truth Foundation claims ‘We Have A Right’ ...to create and maintain a human organization, which usurps the role of churches of Christ, in disseminating the Gospel of Christ and conducting public worship”—was a reference to what I had before, and many times, expressed. I separated what the Foundation claims, i.e. to “have a right” with a break of an ellipsis (...) before inserting what they embrace in this *supposed* right. This *supposed* right would be the import of the book.

Ellipses are used to signify *omission* of original text, or as a *pregnant pause* when the author is unable to speak directly (pause in thought) for some reason, or to present an unfinished thought. An ellipsis is also called a *suspension point*. The ellipsis in the advertisement was *not* an omission of text, in which case there would be a space before and following the three dots. Rather, it serves as a pause between stating that the Foundation claims a right and my stating what this claim includes, viz. to create and maintain a human organization, which usurps the role of churches of Christ, etc. I put the statement in quotations, not as a quote from the Foundation, or a sympathetic follower, but to show that this is the import of the book I authored, rather than an evaluation or endorsement of the bookseller.

I never dreamed that someone would think I was suggesting that the Foundation itself had admitted to usurping the church’s role or that a friend of the Foundation was charging that it did. That would be stupid on their part. I failed to consider the spin that Tom might put on it: “The charge is made that Guardian of Truth **thinks** they have the right to usurp the role of churches of Christ.” Note that Tom added the word “think.” Does he indeed think that anyone would conceive of the Foundation thinking that it was indeed their right to “seize and hold in their possession by force” the functions and prerogatives that God assigned to the local church?

Tom may *think* that the statement of the advertisement is a “false charge.” That is the issue. If it is false, it can easily be shown. If their claim of a “right” is true (and not false), then let them—let Tom O’Neal—give the Scripture authorization!

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Tom quotes Don Martin who relates how a particular family, who attended the GOT lectures, complimented the “Third Annual Guardian of Truth Lectures.” J.T. Smith published it in *Gospel Truth* magazine. Tom demands of both Martin and Smith that they tell him: **Who** said it? **When** was it said? **Where** was it said? He adds, “Until the proof is produced, I personally believe that they have been fabricated! Even if they could produce the proof, nobody associated with Truth Magazine believes them.” Without proof—with the names, and the time and place the statement was made—Tom believes they are lying about it. He does not believe anyone had complimented the Foundation

for “doing a wonderful job in preaching gospel.” This, he declares, is a false charge. He goes even further to say that even if Martin and Smith had verified the report, presented the proof that it was authentic, nobody associated with Truth Magazine would believe them. I can understand how some would find the report hard to believe, but to accuse brethren of making it up is too much! But that’s Tom O’Neal, who says that everyone associated with Truth Magazine is so biased, that, even with proof that Martin and Smith had presented the truth, nobody believes them!

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Again, Don Martin reported that some Foundation promoters had told him that the “foundation can do a better job of preaching the gospel than local churches are doing.” Same argument—*who, when, and where*. He reasons that “with this information, the reader can contact the party that made the statement and verify for (sic) themselves that these statements were actually made.” But, as Tom has already stated, verification would be of no benefit to those associated with Truth Magazine; even with the truth, nobody would believe them!

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Tom next references Mike Hughes. Same complaint. He wants to identify and put on record everyone who has a comment to make about the Foundation. He demands to know what others say and do, whether germane to the issue or not, whether it constitutes an argument against the Foundation that needs to be countered, or whatever. This causes me to wonder if the interest is just curiosity, or is it to identify individuals and their convictions, perhaps in order that they might be persuaded to change their mind, or else censured and marked?

Or, is it because he is determined to see that everyone involved is truthful and accurate in their representation of what others *charge* (accuse of wrongdoing), which would be helpful? He does agree with Tim Haile’s statement: “It is dishonest to ascribe a statement to a man with absolutely no proof that he ever made it.” If he is sincere, then there is a lot of work before him. I have repeatedly appealed to Dan King and Mike Willis to correctly represent what we believe and teach. A good place for corrections to begin is with Dan King’s misrepresentation:

Referring to “family worship,” he writes: “But Gene Frost believes that these people constitute an ‘unlawful collectivity’ that depreciates the local church and threatens its autonomy. He says it is a sin for these people to worship together outside the confines of the local church” (***We Have A Right***, 71).

When and where did I state that I believe the family in worship is an unlawful collectivity, or that “it is a sin for people to worship outside the confines of the local church”? Unless he can show where I said such, it is *dishonest* to ascribe it to me. I will be interested in seeing if Tom is sincere in pursuing honesty in quoting others. I have cited the false statement; who made it, when, and where. It is endorsed and circulated by the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Will he convict dishonesty when it originates with the Foundation?

In Closing

Much more could be exposed in this article, which would be repetitious since every major argument has already been answered in one of four books, namely *Old Issues Do Not Fade Away*; *Brotherhood Societies*; *We Have A Right Answered*; and *They Have No Right*.

I am not going to waste my time dealing with every quibble Tom has made. Quibbles do not establish authority. Let Tom and the *Guardian of Truth* party get serious and attempt to give us scripture(s)—book, chapter, and verse—which authorizes individuals to establish and contribute funds to a human organization (such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation) through which God may be worshipped and His word (the Bible) may be propagated. ☞