
A Difficult 20th Century

Introduction

1. Unfortunately, the split at the beginning of the 1900's only foreshadowed the difficulties to come.
2. While several issues caused limited division (premillennialism, war question, etc.) three issues were at the heart of the controversy:
 - a. Church support of orphan homes
 - b. Sponsoring church arrangements
 - c. The social gospel

The “Issues”

1. Church support of colleges and orphan homes
 - a. By 1945, 21 colleges run by members of the church and 40 orphanages had appeared.
 - b. The question: Does the local church have the authority to send money from its treasury to support a home governed by an institutional board?
 - c. The arguments for:
 - i. The Bible doesn't say how to help orphans, so a home is expediency.
 1. Just as the Bible doesn't tell us how to go and preach—we can use our judgment on the how.
 - ii. The restored home
 1. If the church can help these kids out while their parents were alive, then it can do so when their parents are dead because the orphan home is a restored home.
 - d. What's wrong with this?
 - i. No authority for a board of directors coming between the church and a work it is to do.
 1. Col. 3:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Jn. 9
 2. Scripturally, all benevolence in the NT is limited to needy saints, Acts 2:44; 4:34; 11:29; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:1—the saints; brethren.
2. The Sponsoring Church Arrangement
 - a. Substitute the board of directors of an orphan's home with the elders of a local church overseeing the funds sent to them from several churches and you have this problem.

- b. After WW2, there was a great push to begin missionary work in Germany and Japan.
 - i. The Broadway church in Lubbock, TX was interested in evangelizing Germany
 - ii. The Union Ave. church in Memphis, TN was interested in Japan.
- c. The Highland Ave. church in Abilene, TX, started the “Herald of Truth,” a nationwide radio program on ABC. They solicited funds from other churches across the country, but these funds fell under the oversight of the Highland Ave. church.
- d. Most recently, the Sycamore church in Cookville, TN, started the “One Nation Under God” drive to reach every home in America with the gospel. All of these are works much larger than the local church can support.
- e. One quote from W.L. Swinney seems to capture the motivation of at least some who pushed for these cooperations, “O my brethren, have we not done little things long enough? We have thought little things, and done little things so long that it is with difficulty that we can get away from little things. The doing of big things are for others to do, not for us, so they seem to think.”
 - i. This desire for “bigness” affected many in this period. Burton Coffman, a well-known preacher, desired to start a new, big work in NYC. He urged churches across the country to help this work. Consider these quotes from him and others, “There is no cheap way to win for Christ in the skyscraper canyons of Gotham. To succeed, we must pray and work night and day, weep for the lost multitudes, and buy our way with gold.”
 - ii. Reuel Lemmons commented in *Firm Foundation*, “New York is a mighty city. The people of New York... are hard to reach and hard to impress from the confines of a rented upstairs room, or the side room to a beer parlor! Must the Lord appear to them in rags?”
- f. Arguments for:
 - i. Didn’t the churches in Macedonia and Achaia send funds to the church in Jerusalem?
- g. What’s wrong with this?
 - i. The rule of elders was limited to a local church, 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28. This does not include ruling over other elders and churches.
 - ii. If some of the evangelistic efforts of some churches can be done by one eldership, then why can’t all evangelistic efforts of all churches be done under one eldership?
 - iii. It does not fit the NT pattern:
 - 1. Funds were never sent to a “middle man”—money was sent where there was a need—Phil. 4:15-16; Acts 4:32; Acts 11:27; Romans 15:25 (Acts 21:18-19).

3. Fellowship Halls

- a. While the orphan question and church cooperation have been issues for a long time, the question of fellowship halls is relatively new.

- i. In 1947, Norvell Young was one of the first to urge churches building new buildings to add a large room for fellowships and a place nearby to cook food.
 - b. The issue was not:
 - i. Is it wrong to eat in the building (if that were the case, a mother could never feed a child)?
 - ii. Is the building a sacred place?
 - c. The issue was:
 - i. Is there NT authority for local churches to plan for and provide a place and funds for social activities in its program of work?
 - ii. What was (and is) needed is a NT passage stating that a work of the local church is socially oriented.
 - d. Arguments for:
 - i. A fellowship hall is the same as a water fountain.
 - 1. How would you answer this? _____

 - ii. The “Love Feast”
 - 1. READ 2 Peter 2:13 & Jude 12
 - 2. How would you answer this? _____

 - iii. Fellowship
 - 1. “Aren’t we supposed to fellowship with one another?”
 - 2. How would you answer this? _____

- 4. The results of these problems were very bitter arguments and separations among those who had fellowshiped one another for years.
 - a. By 1960, A.C. Goodpasture, editor of the *Gospel Advocate* (who Roy Cogdill charged with viewing himself as the pope of the church), called for a quarantine of all preachers who objected to the use of institutions—meetings were cancelled and preachers were fired.

Restoration Movement Observations

- 1. They were strongest when they appealed to the word of God
 - a. “Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent
 - b. See 1 Peter 4:11
 - i. Men began to embrace the idea they could for themselves study and draw conclusion based upon that study
 - ii. Just as the Bereans, Acts 17:11; just as the Thessalonians 1 Thess. 2:13
- 2. They were at their weakest when they moved away from the Biblical pattern.
- 3. Men often want to make things bigger and better than God intended.
 - a. Missionary societies were the result of this thinking.

4. While the importance of positive, Biblical authority had been learned from the past, it seems that the lesson of the silence of the scriptures is seen in the latter part of the Restoration movement.
 - a. Toward the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century till today, the real dividing point was and is the issue of authority.
5. The “Restoration Movement” may not be over!
 - a. Easy to think that we have arrived—there is no longer a need for continued vigilance. We must not treat it as if it has—as if our understanding of scripture is perfect and beyond further scrutiny.
 - i. If we do so, we are no different that the religious world.
 - ii. We begin to base our conclusion on the conclusions of brethren over the years. If this had been done before, we’d all be Catholic.
 - b. We must only change course when convinced from God, Acts 9:1-19
 - c. It must always be our goal to present back to God one day the church as Christ established it and intended it.
 - i. This may mean we stand against others close to us.
 - ii. But, we must always stand next to the one closest to us—Jesus.

Questions

1. What three issues caused the most trouble for the church in the 20th century?
2. Read W.L. Swinney’s quote. What seemed to be the motivation for much of this division?
3. What was the “Herald of Truth” and what do you think was right about the idea and wrong about the execution?
4. How does the sponsoring church agreement conflict with biblical teaching?
5. What was the real issue in the fellowship hall question?