

Three Where There Was One

by Paul Williams

Before the 1950s churches of Christ were reasonably united. But some practices of churches became common, and some brethren began questioning them.

The main issues were whether it is right for churches, from the treasury, to send support to orphan homes and colleges. Church support of colleges was the first big issue. Then came the orphan homes. When Herald of Truth Radio Program began, and appealed for support from all congregations, the problem became acute.

There followed two decades of debate and division. Toward the last of the 60's, the process was pretty well complete, and two distinct groups were acknowledged — the non-institutional churches and the institutional churches. The non-institutional churches were very much in the minority.

But the history of apostasy is that departure continues farther and farther. And as time went on, some of the bigger institutional congregations became more worldly. They emphasized recreation and dinners. Then some began to use women in a group to help lead singing, and now they have started using instrumental music in worship. Fellowship with denominations is very much enjoyed, especially with the Christian Church.

The latter group have gone so far out that they have to be considered as a separate group. And the middle group — “the institutional churches” — are wringing their hands in impotent protest.

While I was in the United States last year, an unusual meeting of preachers was held. A leading preacher of the institutional group promoted the meeting. Preachers of the non-institutional churches (that is us) were invited to meet with preachers of the institutional group to discuss our differences and see if there is some basis for fellowship.

The three-day meeting in Alabama was interesting, but the reports I got sounded like there was little hope of fellowship, because there is no repentance. They don't want to change. They just want us to fellowship them. That has always been the case.

But one gospel preacher told me that one of the main leaders in the institutional churches told him that they (the institutional people) have lost 30% of their churches to the ultra liberals. I expect that trend to continue. As the traditionalists get older and die, and their offspring become attracted to the ultra-liberal practices, the middle group is bound to lose numbers. They are not “with it” the way the real liberals are.

Brethren, I went through the original split in the 50's and 60's. It was a very difficult time. But I am thankful for the convictions which came from careful Bible study. The only way to please God is to do what He says — without adding, subtracting, or substitution.

“Do all in the name of the Lord.”

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Editor's Note: Brother Paul Williams has worked in South Africa most of his life. I went to school at Florida College with one of his sons, and have met another son who lives and worships in Bangor, Maine. Last week, while I was attending the Masters golf tournament in Augusta, Georgia, I was privileged to worship with Philip Williams, a grandson of Paul's. Philip has some amazing video sketches which can be viewed on Facebook either by looking up Philip's name, or the name of the church where he preaches: Martinez Church of Christ. Check it out! I highly recommend the work of Paul and Philip. They are sound men.