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THE POWER OF THE PRESS

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*Studies of the Gospel Advocate, the Christian Standard
and The Christian-Evangelist*

Richard T. Hughes

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The Forrest F. Reed Lectures for 1986

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FOREWORD

From the early 1820's, when the *Christian Baptist* - a little magazine unpretentious in appearance but dynamic in content - began to make its voice heard in the valleys of Ohio, Tennessee, and the Cumberland, it was evident that editor Alexander Campbell conceived of the press as his most potent organ for disseminating the principles of the new American religious reformation initiated by the publication of Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* in 1809. This perception had come about in dramatic fashion. For a decade after his ordination to the ministry in 1812, Alexander Campbell, like his father, had assiduously preached the doctrine of reformation without, in the words of one critic, making "much noise in the world." Then came his first debate - and its publication, which quickly ran through two editions. The reformer had found his medium. Two decades later, as editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*, he could happily report that his periodical was read wherever "our language is spoken" and that, as a result, "A new Spirit of Inquiry is marching forth." A spirit that by mid-century made the Campbell-Stone Movement the fastest growing Protestant body in America.

Future historians, seeking to analyze the movement's rapid rise on the American religious scene, centered attention on the seminal role played by a succession of periodicals and their editors. John T. Brown, in his 1904 history, *Churches of Christ*, observed that, "The disciples have no . . . court . . . but the court of public opinion, and the most efficient means of pleading before that court is the religious journal." In 1909 - the centennial year of the *Declaration and Address* - William T. Moore published *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*. At the beginning of the work he commented, "The Disciples of Christ have no Diocesan Bishops, and consequently their leading religious periodicals have practically occupied that place." Near conclusion of the volume he re-emphasized this conviction that, "from the beginning of the movement until the

present time, the chief authority in regard to all important questions has been the Disciple press." Writing his *Religion Follows the Frontier* in 1931, Winfred E. Garrison stated, "The editor's chair has come nearer to being a throne of power than any other position among the Disciples." Seventeen years later in *The Disciples of Christ, A History* - co-written with Alfred T. DeGroot - Dr. Garrison gave the classic form to the statement: "The Disciples of Christ do not have bishops; they have editors." When, in 1975, William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister wrote their comprehensive history, *Journey in Faith*, they quoted the assessments of Moore and Garrison and, in a section entitled "The Power of the Press," affirmed a like judgment concerning the unique position of the editor's chair as the center of authority in the formative years of the movement which Alexander Campbell himself liked to term "the reformation of the Nineteenth Century."

A further exploration of this subject seemed timely to the Disciples of Christ Historical Society Lecture Committee appointed to make plans for the Forrest F. Reed Lectures of 1986. The subject also appealed on another ground. From its beginning in 1941, the Disciples of Christ Historical Society has provided a forum for discussion and study among the three separate movements which - sadly and ironically but, in the light of history, not surprisingly - have sprung from the original plea for Christian Unity so eloquently voiced in the *Declaration and Address* of 1809.

To this end, the Lecture Committee of 1986 invited speakers to explore "The Power of the Press" as exemplified in the three journals whose editors played major roles in molding and publicizing the divergent views from which have emerged the three separate communions dividing the heirs of the Campbell-Stone Movement. With publication of the three lectures, the Historical Society now makes available a fruitful study of this significant aspect of our common heritage.

Eva Jean Wrather, Chairperson
1986 Reed Lecture Committee

Members of the Lecture Committee

Richard L. Harrison

Edward G. Holley

James H. Samuel

INTRODUCTION

Three lecturers were asked to explore the role of the editor in the history of the Campbell-Stone Movement as exemplified in three journals which had major influence on the development of the three communions issuing from that movement; the *Gospel Advocate* and Churches of Christ; the *Christian Standard* and the Christian Churches; *The Christian-Evangelist* and the Disciples of Christ. The lecturers were:

DR. RICHARD T. HUGHES, Chairman of the Department of History at Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas.

DR. HENRY E. WEBB, Professor of Church History at Milligan College in Milligan College, Tennessee.

DR. HOWARD E. SHORT, Distinguished Editor Emeritus of the Christian Board of Publication, St. Louis, Missouri, and former Church History Professor at Lexington (KY) Theological Seminary.

The Forrest F. Reed Lectures were established in 1964 through endowment of a permanent trust by Nashville businessman and active Disciple layman, Forrest F. Reed. From 1953 until his death in 1975, Mr. Reed was a member of the Society's Board of Trustees, and served for several terms as Chairman of the Board. The lectureship periodically provides a series of lectures designed to maintain and further interest in the religious heritage, backgrounds, origins, and general history of the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ.

James M. Seale
President

THE EDITOR-BISHOP: DAVID LIPSCOMB AND THE GOSPEL ADVOCATE

Richard T. Hughes

W. T. Moore wrote in 1909 that “the Disciples of Christ do not have bishops, they have editors.”¹ He meant by this statement, as he went on to explain, that “from the beginning of the movement to the present time, the chief authority in regard to all important questions has been the Disciples press.” In other words, editors have worn the mantle of “bishop” in the Restoration Movement. Given this understanding of “bishop,” it seems to me that Moore’s argument, at least for the nineteenth century, was beyond dispute.

After all, any organization or association of human beings will develop some locus of power, and Moore’s analysis was simply a way of discerning the centers of power in the Restoration Movement. But beyond this, Moore’s analysis pointed to the informal, almost free-enterprise nature of the movement in its early years. I mean by this that no higher ecclesiastical authority appointed men to seats of power. Rather, the *people* made these appointments by virtue of their responsiveness to a given editor, to his paper, and to the ideas for which that paper stood. James Major, in a perceptive dissertation on the role of editor-bishops in the nineteenth century, caught the genius of this informal, subtle, and elusive sort of power when he observed the competition between the various papers for preeminence in the movement, and then asked,

Which periodical would it be? Campbell had no more official call to publish the *Millennial Harbinger* than John Thomas had to publish the *Advocate for the Testimony of God*, or John O’Kane had for the *Christian Casket*, or Robert Mack had for the *Highway of Holiness*, and so on through the entire list of periodicals.²

But Major then observed, to answer his own question, that “each had just as much authority among the Disciples as the ability of the editor and the size of its circulation list could provide.”³

Examples of various editors functioning as bishops in this way are numerous. What, for example, gave Nashville-based Tolbert Fanning the right to rebuke Memphis-based T. W. Caskey in the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* for Caskey’s appropriation of the term “pastor?” “Is this the language of Canaan or Ashdod?” Fanning asked. “You ought to be an evangelist, like Paul in Rome or in Asia Minor . . . See to it, Brother Caskey.”⁴ Or who gave Alexander Campbell the right to travel from Bethany to Richmond to censure Dr. John Thomas in a congregation hundreds of miles from Campbell’s home? Or why would John Udell walk the eighty miles from his home in Monroe County, Pennsylvania to Bethany in 1840 to secure letters from Campbell to settle an internal dispute in Udell’s home congregation?⁵ Or again, who gave Campbell the right to intervene in the Jesse Ferguson affair in Nashville, and why would Ferguson take Campbell’s intervention so seriously? The answers to all these questions point to the extraordinary extra-congregational power which a few editors like Campbell and Fanning enjoyed.

That David Lipscomb functioned in much the same way seems obvious from the record. Not only was his *Gospel Advocate* the principal brotherhood periodical circulated in Middle Tennessee, but Lipscomb used the *Advocate* to shape perspective and to influence the brothers and sisters toward his understanding of biblical truth. In the *Advocate* he fought numerous battles over issues ranging from missionary societies to settled pastors, and from musical instruments in worship to theological liberalism. His readers looked to him to answer numerous questions regarding the proper interpretation of a given biblical passage, and his influence swelled as the circula-

tion of the *Advocate* spiraled from less than 3,000 in 1868 to well over 6,000 in 1884.⁶

The extent of Lipscomb's influence as an editor can perhaps best be measured by the testimony of his enemies. Thus, when F. D. Srygley sought to stymie what he called "Southern journalism and theology," it was clear to him that his first task was, as he put it, to "neutralize" Lipscomb and Sewell and to change the character of the *Advocate*. "I have an idea," he wrote to Russell Errett of the *Standard*, "that Lipscomb and Sewell could be neutralized in a large paper by smothering them out with a different class of writers and suppressing the six-for-a-nickel jackasses that are now braying in it."⁷ But four years later when Srygley had a change of heart and actually joined the *Advocate* staff under Lipscomb's leadership, Errett expressed his keen disappointment and in the process paid a tribute to Lipscomb's immense power. "Tennessee is to-day one of our richest and most populous states, but its energies are paralyzed by the narrow and acrimonious policy of [David Lipscomb.]"⁸ It is hardly any wonder, then, that when S.N.D. North, Director of the Federal Census, wanted information on the Churches of Christ, he wrote to Lipscomb. And it is significant that it was Lipscomb who pronounced the verdict that

There is a distinct people taking the word of God as their only and sufficient rule of faith, calling their churches "churches of Christ," or "churches of God," distinct and separate in name, work, and rule of faith from all other bodies or peoples.⁹

Thus, the Disciples historian Arthur Murrell does not hesitate to call David Lipscomb "the most powerful figure among the 'conservatives' in the South."¹⁰ And Professor Robert Hooper has argued that

the *Advocate's* editor . . . emerged during the last quarter of the century as the leading spokesman

for the conservative, strictly Biblical interpretation of the Restoration Movement. Although there was a growing number of conservative disciples in states north of the Ohio River, the overwhelming concentration was found in Southern Kentucky, Northern Alabama, Middle and West Tennessee and states westward, especially Texas. The vehicle of a Biblical, conservative position was the *Gospel Advocate*, published at the center of its strength in Nashville.¹¹

It seems to me that Lipscomb's role as an editor-bishop is really too obvious to warrant further elaboration. Thus, I want to turn now to the more intriguing questions of "why" and "how." Why and how was David Lipscomb able to wield such extraordinary power among the churches in Middle Tennessee and beyond?

To raise this question is once again to acknowledge that no ecclesiastical hierarchy imposed Lipscomb on the brotherhood. Rather, Lipscomb was chosen by the people who trusted him and who found in him and in his *Gospel Advocate* perspectives that seemed true and right. What were those perspectives that made David Lipscomb the choice of so many Christians in Middle Tennessee and beyond?

I

The first thing to be said about Lipscomb is that if he functioned as a bishop, he was a strange bishop, indeed, for he rejected the very notions of office and power and sought simply to serve. No one more beautifully captured this dimension of Lipscomb than did Benjamin Franklin who wrote in 1875,

Brother Lipscomb is a plain and unassuming man, with the simplicity of a child. He has a good

native sense, much power and influence and is greatly devoted to the cause. There is not the least danger of his ever turning *clergyman*. He has not an inkling in that way. He lives in utter disregard of the notions of the world, puts on no airs, wears just a coat, hat and pants as suit him... It is refreshing to meet one content to be the *plain man of God*.¹²

These are striking statements indeed, and even paradoxical when applied to a man who did, in fact, exercise tremendous power and authority over the hearts and minds of thousands of Christians in the Mid-South and beyond. But the plain and simple truth lies in the fact that Lipscomb's rejection of trappings of power was the very key to his moral authority and to his power as editor-bishop.

To understand how this could be, we must first recall that Lipscomb lived and moved among a people who were heirs to a stridently anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical tradition. From the early days of Elias Smith, Abner Jones, Barton Stone, and Alexander Campbell, this anti-institutional and anti-clerical posture was close to the very heart of the Restoration Movement. One may recall, for example, Elias Smith's satirical rendition of I Peter.

The reverend clergy who are with me I advise, who am also a clergyman, and a D. D. member of that respectable body, who are numerous, and 'who seek honor one of another;' and a partaker of the benefit of it; feed yourselves upon the church and parish, over which we have settled you for life, and who are obliged to support you, whether they like you or not; taking the command by constraint, for filthy lucre, not of a ready mind, as lords over men's souls, not as ensamples to them, and when commencement day shall

appear, you shall receive some honorary title, which shall make you appear very respectable among the reverend clergy.¹³

Or one may recall Alexander Campbell's "Third Epistle of Peter" in which he satirically instructed the clergy to indulge all their instincts for power and self-interest.¹⁴ This sort of attack on the pretentious power of the clergy was characteristic of the Alexander Campbell of the *Christian Baptist* period. Indeed, he wrote in 1823,

No class of men that ever appeared on earth have obtained so much influence, or acquired so complete an ascendancy over the human mind, as the clergy...Behold the arrogance of their claims! and the peerless haughtiness of their pretensions!¹⁵

It is important to note that it was first Barton W. Stone and then the Alexander Campbell of the *Christian Baptist*, not the Campbell of the *Millennial Harbinger*, who profoundly shaped the perspectives of the Christians in the South. And by the time David Lipscomb began editing the *Gospel Advocate* in 1866, these anti-clerical and anti-institutional perspectives had been plowed into the consciousness of the brothers and sisters in the South for half a century. This was so much the case that anyone seeking power in the movement had no hope of success unless he thoroughly suppressed any evidence of his aspirations, and no one could possibly exert moral leadership unless he appeared to the brotherhood as a simple servant. David Lipscomb clearly passed this test. Indeed, thousands would have agreed with old Ben Franklin that "there is not the least danger of his ever turning *clergyman*."

J. M. Barnes was so convinced of the profoundly anti-clerical dimension of the southern churches that he once drew a fascinating and satirical comparison between Lipscomb and his

colleagues, on the one hand, and a Methodist bishop, on the other. He wrote in 1876, after attending a conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South in Montgomery, that he had never seen a live Methodist Bishop, yet I expected he would be a man, and sure enough he was. He was a little fair complected man with black, stiff hair and whiskers...He wore a black cloth suit, with narrow collar to his coat, and this buttoned at the top gave him a military look — a commanding appearance...The high functionary arose with modest air, made some remarks about foreign and domestic missions...He then exhorted the working bees a little, or rather oiled the little wheels that they might run faster and smoother...This High Priest could take a little snuff and two hundred would sneeze in a few seconds and South Alabama would catch the harmonious snorting in a few days. He speaketh and it is done.

And then, making his point with characteristic wit and sarcasm, he observed, "if it were not for such old fogies as Dave Lipscomb, Ben Franklin and Jacob Creath, our brethren could have just such a one."¹⁶

One may rightly wonder in hearing all this rhetoric, however, if someone is not being badly fooled, and if that someone is not us. Is it possible that by David Lipscomb's time the style of servant leadership had simply become the accepted and even institutionalized way of gaining and exerting power? Is it possible that David Lipscomb was every bit as much the bishop as was the Methodist cleric who could lead his whole flock to "harmonious snorting," differing only in trappings and style? These are eminently fair questions, and there were enemies of Lipscomb who saw things just that way.

But these enemies were badly mistaken and altogether failed to grasp the singular genius of this unusual man. Indeed, the really key phrase in Franklin's description of Lipscomb was not his observation that Lipscomb would never turn clergyman. It rather was his observation that Lipscomb "lives in utter disregard of the notions of the world," and his description of Lipscomb as "*the plain man of God.*" In these observations, Franklin leads us to a whole new level of perception and understanding of the man, David Lipscomb. In truth, the genius of this man was his "utter disregard of the notions of the world" in the interest of serving God.

All of this is to say that David Lipscomb simply was not a man of this world, insofar as his intentions were concerned. When one reads from the vast body of literature which he wrote, one is impressed that his sole ambition was to walk with God, to be faithful to His commands, and to live and move and have his being in the only institution that really mattered, namely, God's church. The world for Lipscomb was simply inconsequential. Indeed, only such a man could, as Franklin observed, put "on no airs" and wear "just a coat, hat and pants as suit him..." Franklin was right, Lipscomb's sole ambition was to be "*the plain man of God.*"

It is this cornerstone in Lipscomb's thinking that provided the unshakeable foundation for all his other positions. His position on civil government is a case in point. For Lipscomb, civil government was but a necessary expression of the sinfulness of this world. But he knew that he had been redeemed and translated out of the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Why, then, should a citizen of the kingdom of God participate in the affairs of the kingdom of this sinful world? To Lipscomb, it simply made no sense.¹⁷

Lipscomb's uncompromising allegiance to the kingdom of God likewise informed his unrelenting resistance to missionary societies. Human organizations in the church were no better

than politics in the world: both fell far beneath the glory of the kingdom of God. Churches which sought to work through auxiliary societies, Lipscomb contended, were “no better than any other denomination...They are all cuts from the same bolt.” Then Lipscomb gave what to him was the only true and biblical solution:

The thing to do is to disintegrate, disband, and abandon them all [denominations] and put Christianity on the New Testament basis of individual effort and personal consecration in the spiritual body over which Christ is the Head and in which every Christian is a member because he is a Christian.¹⁸

From the world's point of view, this sort of advice was ironic if not bizarre. How was it that a man with the powers of a bishop could shun politics, organizations, and human institutions — the machinery through which power normally flowed — and counsel such radical individualism? To advise one's constituents toward “*individual effort*” and “*personal consecration*” was hardly the way to enhance one's own power and authority. If anything, to offer this sort of advice was to risk losing one's standing.

But Lipscomb went even further. While most bishops sought to control the placement of preachers in local congregations, Lipscomb argued that “this kind of work is not in our line of business.” Concerning the church at Murfreesboro, he wrote in 1873 that

. . . we never as we now recollect, advised or suggested to a single member of the church at Murfreesboro a man as a preacher in our life . . . We have never had in our mind a single preacher that we wanted located in Murfreesboro.

And if that was not enough, he went on to contend that “we have always had so great confidence in the piety and Bible

knowledge of the church at Murfreesboro as to believe it capable of living without a weekly preacher.”¹⁹ This, for Lipscomb, was standard advice. He consistently rejected the very clerical machinery through which he might have strengthened his control over the churches. Instead, he urged that each congregation develop within itself its own inner resources of mutual edification, looking to the Bible as its only guide.

Only a man like this could admit in print when describing a gospel meeting: “We spoke three times without interest to anyone so far as we could judge.”²⁰ No wonder his friends and brothers wrote of Lipscomb at his death,

He sought no notoriety and never tried to inflate his undertakings by advertising. He cared not for front-page position; he rather shrank from publicity. . . He preferred the quiet, unassuming walk, and his life was free and far from ostentation in any form. There was no desire for the outward show, no attempt at pomp, no display . . .²¹

Here, then, is a portrait of a strange sort of bishop, a man who regularly undermined his own authority and who challenged the legitimacy of the traditional modes by which most ecclesiastics wielded their power. But Lipscomb belonged to a tradition which prized freedom of thought and discovery and the right of each individual Christian to search and interpret the Bible for himself or herself. Further, his roots, and the roots of the southern Christians, reached deeply into the earliest years of the movement when its leaders viewed the church, and the church alone, as the great engine by which God would revolutionize the world. His allegiance, therefore, was to God as the sovereign of the universe, to the church as the only institution God had annointed to achieve his purposes in the world, and to the spiritual and intellectual integrity of each individual Christian. This was his heritage, and to affirm any less or any

more would have rendered him singularly unacceptable to his brothers and sisters. But to stand squarely in this heritage made him an editor who could function as a bishop, though admittedly in a strange and back-handed sort of way.

II

But we have far from exhausted the extent of Lipscomb's great appeal. Another factor, closely related to the first, was Lipscomb's fundamental, absolute, and unwavering reliance on the scripture. He came by his love for the Bible quite naturally, and recalled when he himself was an old man in 1910, that

my father was a man slow of speech and a stammering tongue. He loved the Bible, and he read it morning, noon, and night. He talked it to all with whom he came in contact, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, black and white. The church in Salem, Franklin County, Tennessee, was built up greatly by preachers he brought to the neighborhood. The greatest number of the earlier members, both white and black, were made ready by his talk with them and his teaching of the word as they worked in the field.²²

Lipscomb inherited from his father this great love for the Bible, a love which remained with him throughout his life. In fact, when Lipscomb, himself, died in 1917, a writer in the *Nashville Tennessean* wrote that

several months ago, for a period, his death was momentarily expected. But he rallied again, and soon again was in his chair reading his Bible from two to five hours a day, which those about him say has been his practice, and perhaps not an over-estimated reading average for him for over half a century.²³

Lipscomb's faith in the Bible, however, was not an idolatrous faith by which one might elevate the Bible to the status of God. To the contrary, Lipscomb loved the Bible because it was to him the word of God. His love for the Bible grew from his love for God and not the other way around.

Be that as it may, firm reliance on the Bible was a central theme in the Restoration Movement from its earliest years. In fact, when Lipscomb attempted in 1907 to explain to S.N.D. North, director of the United States Bureau of the Census, the genius of the Churches of Christ, he argued that Churches of Christ continued in the posture urged a century earlier by Thomas Campbell, a posture of absolute fidelity to scripture. Lipscomb then cited for North such phrases from Thomas Campbell as these: "returning to and holding fast by the original standard, taking the divine word alone for our rule. . . ," or again, "Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church, or made a term of communion among Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament," or again, that Christians should follow "after the example of the primitive church as exhibited in the New Testament, without any additions whatsoever of human opinions or the inventions of men."²⁴ This was precisely the posture southern Christians had learned from Barton Stone in the early years of the nineteenth century and then from Alexander Campbell in those robust days of the *Christian Baptist* from 1823 to 1830. By 1830, the dye was cast: Christians in the South would take their stand on the Bible and the Bible alone, without, as Thomas Campbell had said, "any additions whatsoever of human opinions or the inventions of men."

This was the ground which David Lipscomb consistently sought to occupy, and this posture endeared him greatly to the majority of Christians in Middle Tennessee who took the same stand. Thus, for example, Lipscomb responded in 1892 to another brotherhood paper which compared the church to a

cabin complete without furniture, and which urged that while the owner is free to furnish the cabin as he sees fit, so Christians are free to furnish the church as they see fit. Lipscomb countered that if this premise is true, then,

every man is at liberty to choose his own furniture, and the instruments of service, that suit his taste. I do not see how we can admit things that suit my taste and reject those that suit the Romanist, the Methodist, or the Presbyterian. If human judgment is to supply the furniture, whose judgment — mine, or yours? That of the Mormon, the Catholic, or whose?²⁵

In raising the questions, Lipscomb subtly and implicitly revealed another whole dimension of his appeal to nineteenth century, southern readers, namely the assumptions he employed in interpreting the Bible. Professor Dwight Bozeman in his important book, *Portestants in an Age of Science*, has argued that the dominant mode of biblical interpretation in nineteenth century America was a perspective popularly known as “Baconianism” or Common Sense.²⁶ In a word, Baconianism was an inductive method whereby one begins with the observable facts, arranges the facts, and then draws whatever conclusions the facts permit. We all recognize this as the method of the natural sciences: the scientist simply observes his facts and then draws whatever conclusions the facts permit. He does not speculate on the facts, but simply acknowledges the facts, drawing only those conclusions warranted by the facts. Indeed, his conclusions may simply be limited to the facts that are obvious to every reasonable observer.

Bozeman has summarized this perspective by explaining its three fundamental assumptions: 1) a spirited enthusiasm for natural science, 2) scrupulous empiricism built on confidence in the senses, and 3) a deep suspicion of abstract concepts and speculation, and insistence upon an inductive accumulation of

“facts.” He then observes that this way of viewing reality was “engrafted wholesale into the main structure of nineteenth-century ideas.”²⁷

The important point here is that early restoration leaders, especially Alexander Campbell, adopted the Common Sense, or Baconian perspective, as a central dimension of his agenda for Christian unity. Christians may differ and quarrel over theories, interpretations, and speculations, Campbell thought, but they will not differ over hard, self-evident, indisputable facts in scripture. For this reason, he always emphasized that the gospel is a “system of facts.” Thus, Campbell wrote that “the Bible is a book of facts, not of opinions, theories, abstract generalities...The meaning of the Bible facts is the true biblical doctrine...”²⁸ Or again, in comparing the Christian religion to the natural sciences, Campbell argued that the truths of Christianity “are to be taught...as other sciences are taught—*inductively*,” and that “the inductive style of inquiring and reasoning, is to be as rigidly carried out in reading and teaching the Bible facts and documents, as in the analysis and synthesis of physical nature.”²⁹ James S. Lamar wrote the classic statement of the Common Sense of Baconian method of biblical interpretation for our brotherhood in 1859: *The Organon of Scripture, or, The Inductive Method of Biblical Interpretation*.³⁰ He stated as his objective his intent to make the meaning of scripture “as certain and unmistakable as science.” His book received high praise from Alexander Campbell, from Campbell’s son-in-law, W. K. Pendleton, editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*, and even from Tolbert Fanning, at that time editor of the *Gospel Advocate*.³¹ The extent to which early restoration leaders had appropriated the Baconian, inductive perspective can be seen in the fact that the first of our colleges was aptly named Bacon College, and Walter Scott served as its first president.

In commenting on Lamar’s *Organon of Scripture*, Fanning

emphasized the logical conclusion of the inductive method, namely, that (as he said), "The Scriptures fairly translated need no explanation."³² This conclusion seemed obvious. If the intent was simply to lay out the gospel facts and not to theorize or speculate, then clearly no interpretation was required. This perspective found its way into the *Advocate* again and again, both under Fanning and under Lipscomb. Thus, for example, Fanning declared in 1855 that

the scriptures of truth are themselves, as they stand in the Bible, when fairly translated, heaven's full and last interpretations concerning Himself, man, death and the eternal world, and it is impious beyond expression, for a frail worm of the earth, to attempt an interpretation of what God has made so plain...³³

Lipscomb also employed the Baconian, Common Sense method, though not nearly as self-consciously as had Campbell or Fanning. That is to say that he spent little time discussing either the method as such or Francis Bacon, its founder. But when he did discuss the method, he placed himself squarely in the Campbellian tradition of biblical interpretation. Thus, in an interesting discussion of evolution, he rejected the theories and speculations of science, and insisted that true science confines itself to the facts. "Science is knowledge," he declared, "knowledge reduced to system, classified knowledge. Where there are no well-known facts and truths there can be no science. To call conjectures and speculations science is to misuse words and mislead men." And then he added, "The Bible is science, is knowledge, classified by God..."³⁴

On another occasion, he argued that "the Christian religion...is addressed to the common sense in man," and defined common sense as that "sound, practical judgement...in regard to first principles in which all men in general agree." This means, he continued, that "you must use common sense

to do what he commands in the best way your common sense directs. That in no way interferes with our doing all that God commands — adding nothing thereto, taking nothing therefrom.”³⁵ He might well have added that “adding nothing thereto” and “taking nothing therefrom” was one of the central meanings of Common Sense. Thus, he stated in 1868 that the editors and contributors of the *Gospel Advocate* “are determined to make it *Gospel Advocate* more perfectly the reflex of the Divine Will as revealed in the Bible than any human production now in existence.”³⁶ And he often expressed his confidence that reliance on the Bible alone “clips the wings of imagination and speculation and makes the Bible the only and safest teacher of duty to man.”³⁷

There are several ways in which Lipscomb’s Baconian perspective served his reputation as an editor and enhanced his power and moral authority as an editor-bishop. First, he could have adopted no principle of interpretation that would have served more faithfully his intention to literally interpret the Bible. Indeed, the Common Sense perspective was to Lipscomb such a natural and instinctive way of proceeding that he likely was not conscious of employing any particular principle of interpretation at all. The Common Sense method meant taking Bible facts at face value, and surely no one needed to be aware of Lord Bacon or of the theories behind inductive reasoning to proceed in this way. If one granted the assumption that the Bible was to be read in the same way that a scientist might objectively observe the world of nature, then this seemed the most natural method of all. And few questioned that assumption in America, and especially in the South, in the late nineteenth century.

Obviously, when David Lipscomb sounded this perspective on the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* in various subtle ways, his readers knew they were reading a man of eminently good and common sense. There were no high flown theories here — no bizarre interpretations. Lipscomb was simply making good on

his claim to take the Bible and the Bible alone, with no additions and no subtractions.

But there is yet another way in which the Common Sense or Baconian method enhanced Lipscomb's editorial standing with his readers, for it fostered in Lipscomb's own thinking the clear and unequivocal conviction that he was right. Thus, by 1896, when the liberal wing of the movement was challenging everything Lipscomb held dear, he wrote,

The majorities of professed Christians through eighteen hundred years have been against God, and for the rule of human wisdom. The majority now is against God—likely will be for years to come...[But] he will not leave himself without faithful witnesses, and the final triumph of his cause and the overthrow of all who prefer human to divine wisdom is sure. Lord Jesus, come quickly.³⁸

And in 1907, when division finally came, Lipscomb penned an article under the heading, "Divisions Must Come." There he challenged the progressives,

Can you walk with him [God] while you insist on making laws and changing his order?...Can two walk together when one insists on walking in God's ways and the other insists on going another way? Often those we love most force us to the choice as to whether we will cling to God or go with them. If we love God better than we love them, we will cling to God and his ways. If division must come, let it come along the lines of love and loyalty to God.³⁹

Clearly, David Lipscomb was an editor bishop not only because he was a man of God and a man of the Bible, but also because he was a man of unbounded confidence in the certitude of his positions and capable of inspiring similar confidence in his readers.

But David Lipscomb was also a man of tolerance and great good will—qualities that further endeared him to his readers. Indeed, his implicit faith in Common Sense prompted his deep and abiding conviction that common sense would finally prevail in the brotherhood he loved so well. For this reason, while he was forthright about his beliefs, he was nonetheless short on dogmatism and long on forbearance and moderation until 1897 when he finally called for division. For example, while David Lipscomb opposed the instrument in worship, he regularly preached in congregations where the instrument was used. This confounded and distressed his more sectarian brethren. One preacher, identified only as “a good old brother,” complained to Brother Hansbrough of the *Firm Foundation* in 1894 that he was

pained to hear Brothers Lipscomb and Sewell say they had both suffered the organ to run a few times where they had preached, and that Brother Larimore would do the same; but now comes my good Brother Tant, and says he fully agrees with Brothers Lipscomb, Larimore, and Rowe, and would do the same way. So I despair...I will never have it...What! be partaker with Nadab and Abihu in offering strange fire before the Lord which he has not commanded? No, never, never.

When Lipscomb learned of the “good old brother’s” complaint, he made it clear that he never condoned the instrument even when he preached where it was used. But, he went on, “Lipscomb, Rowe, Sewell, Tant, Larimore, and even Brother Hansbrough and that other ‘good old brother,’ can do more to dissuade them from their purpose by preaching to them than by refusing to preach...”

But this, to Lipscomb, was not the main point of concern. The chief issue in all of this, he thought, was that it would matter to Hansbrough and the “good old brother” what Lipscomb did or taught at all.

It is of little consequence what folks do who are led by Lipscomb, Sewell, Tant, Rowe, Larimore, or any other uninspired man or men in religion. They will not please God, no matter whether they play the organ or sing amazing grace without musical accompaniment and “line the hymn” as they go...It is of far more importance to teach every man to study the Bible for himself, and walk with God by his own faith, than to induce Lipscomb, Tant, Sewell, Rowe, and Larimore to persuade or browbeat those who follow them instead of the Lord to worship without an organ, or with an organ either, for that matter.⁴⁰

It is clear that Lipscomb did everything he could do to convince his adversaries of the truth of his position. But it is also clear that he respected the right of independent judgment, and sought in every way he could to foster discussion and communication, not division, in the movement he loved. Thus, he opened the columns of the *Gospel Advocate* in the 1870s to J. W. Higbee, a man who favored the society, and even added Higbee to the *Advocate* staff in 1881.⁴¹ And as late as 1889, when lines in the movement were rapidly hardening, Lipscomb nonetheless offered F. D. Srygley a position on the *Advocate* staff when Lipscomb and Srygley were poles apart in their perspectives. Three years later, Lipscomb recalled that

when the Gospel Advocate Publishing Company offered Brother Srygley a position on the paper in the fall of 1889,...he had no particular sympathy for the fondness of such men as Brother Lipscomb, Brother Sewell, and Brother Harding for the apostolic way of doing some things, and he stated as much to Brother Lipscomb in a private letter. The points he mentioned to Brother Lipscomb particularly on which he reserved the

right to hold convictions different from Brother Lipscomb were (1) the right of Christians to vote and hold office; (2) the right to use instrumental music in worship; (3) the right to do mission work through missionary societies. Brother Srygley feels under no obligation yet to agree with Brother Lipscomb, Brother Sewell, and Brother Harding or anybody else this side of the New Testament on these or any other questions.⁴²

What made the addition of Srygley to the *Advocate* staff all the more remarkable was the fact that this was the same man who had proposed in 1885 to buy stock in the *Advocate*, neutralize Lipscomb, and suppress "the six-for-a-nickel jackasses that are now braying in it."

One should note that Lipscomb always reserved the right to challenge in print the articles and opinions even of his own writers. His purpose in doing this was not to vanquish his staff. It rather was to carry on in print the dialogue and conversation Lipscomb thought necessary to the discovery of the greater and fuller truth. Likewise, he routinely opposed what he considered error on the pages of other gospel papers. His purpose was not to dogmatize but to elicit conversation. He made this clear when Isaac Errett complained about an article Lipscomb had written which struck Errett as a personal attack.

Now, this sensitiveness to criticism, and this disposition to complain of a reference to a public course of a public man...as a personal attack, is not manly...We wish one point to be understood — that is, we have published none of these things with a view of injuring or exciting any one. But we feel sure that the only certain ground of settlement of differences and difficulties, is not by smothering over matters, but in fully understanding the different stand-points of one

another, and striving to appreciate how the positions of each appear to the other...We are not prepared dogmatically to affirm that our view of the facts we state is infallibly correct. Indeed, we would much prefer to be convinced we were wrong in our view of each case presented.⁴³

Though Lipscomb never hesitated to state his own position and oppose what he considered error, it is nonetheless clear that he practiced what in his day was the venerable restoration tradition of open journalism.

All of this suggests why Arthur Murrell, a historian and a member of the Disciples of Christ, has called Lipscomb "a humble, irenic moderate who was literally pulled apart in unsuccessful efforts to hold together the many splintering factions of the Nineteenth Century Restoration Movement."⁴⁴ Indeed, Lipscomb argued in 1874 that "the integrity, union and harmony of the church of God are dear to the Savior. To destroy these is the greatest of sins before God. We have never seen a circumstance arise in which we were willing to advise division..."⁴⁵ That circumstance finally came in the 1890's when, in Lipscomb's view, his progressive brethren literally forced the society on the state of Tennessee and treated his region as a mission field when Tennessee contained more restoration churches and members per capita than any other state. As Murrell notes, Lipscomb could only interpret this action as "a declaration of war, which it was."⁴⁶ Finally, on August 5, 1897, after years of moderation, of dialogue, and of conversation, Lipscomb advised his readers to separate from those congregations marked by use of the instrument in worship or by support of the missionary society.⁴⁷ The man who had trusted the power of common sense to bring others to see the truth as he saw it finally saw his hopes dashed on the rock of division.

And yet, through all those years Lipscomb must have seemed to his readers a fundamentally *natural* man, and here was the principal source of his power and appeal. For if Lipscomb was a man who employed no apparent method of biblical interpretation, simply taking the Bible in its most natural possible sense, he was also a man seemingly immune to the constraints of culture and history. For here was a man who refused allegiance not only to human methods of scripture interpretation but also to human political organizations, to human organizations in the church, and to all human schemes whatsoever, for that matter. No doubt many readers perceived him precisely as did old Ben Franklin, namely as a man who “lives in utter disregard of the notions of the world...[as] the *plain man of God*.”

III

But here our story takes a strange and unexpected turn. David Lipscomb, the natural man of God who lived in utter disregard of the world, was finally unable to escape the grasp of the world in which he lived. Indeed, at least two dimensions of the world left on him their indelible stamp. These two dimensions were Lipscomb's unfailing allegiance to the American South and his deep devotion to the common man. These dimensions would be irrelevant to our story here were it not for the fact that both worked their way into Lipscomb's religious perspective. This was ironic, to be sure, since Lipscomb sought throughout his years as editor to transcend the world with its claims and demands on the human mind and spirit. His failure to achieve this transcendence was due to at least two things: (1) the fact that he was ultimately and inevitably more a child of this world than he knew and (2) the fact that he viewed both the South and the common man as essentially natural. Neither the South nor the common man, in his view, belonged to the world of artificial human creations. In a profound sense, he felt they

both belonged to God and were natural expressions of his will.

Thus, Lipscomb emerged for his readers not only as a man of God and a man of the book, but also as a man of his region and a man of the people. And in Lipscomb's imagination, all of these — God, book, region, and people — were interconnected in important ways. It remains only to be said that the same was true for his readers. Further, in the aftermath of the Civil War, these ideals were so central to the commitments of the southern people that Lipscomb could hardly have chosen a constellation of themes that could have done more to enhance his moral authority and his spiritual and intellectual power as editor-bishop.

First, when one speaks of Lipscomb and the South, it is very easy to go wrong. Lipscomb was not sectional if sectional means political. To argue otherwise is to refuse to take seriously Lipscomb's consistent refusal to participate in politics of any kind. How, then, should we understand Lipscomb's relation to the South? A recent book by Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause*, gives us some wonderful clues. Wilson argues that in the years between the Civil War and 1900, Southerners transformed the South into an object of religious sentiment. The gist of that sentiment was that the South was a special, chosen people of God and manifested through its virtue and moral superiority what God intended the whole world to become. But God allowed a wicked, more worldly people to destroy the South in order to chasten her and to draw her to an even higher moral and religious calling. This conviction, Wilson argues, was plowed deeply into the hearts and minds of the southern people between the War and 1900.⁴⁸

The point here is that David Lipscomb made it abundantly clear on the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* that he shared this perspective. He told his readers, for example, that God, it seemed to him, had determined to destroy slavery. "But when men oppose the end desired by God and work against it," he

wrote, "God raises up a people mightier than they — overpowers them and accomplishes by violence what they refused to do willingly."⁴⁹ And he argued in 1867 that "God is overruling our wickedness, and from and through our chaos, confusion and strife, He is bringing his order, beauty and harmony."⁵⁰

Further, Lipscomb declared in 1883 that "the southern people have been the conservators of the religious faith in the country..."⁵¹ And in 1896, he sounded the same theme employing far more detail. In that year he reprinted a lengthy article from the *Ladies Home Journal* praising the southern practice of regular Sabbath observance. The author, who also was editor of the *Journal* wrote the following:

The Southern idea in this matter of Sabbath observance, as it is in a great many other directions, is simply the pure, sound American idea. . . . If we would find to-day the American people at their best, where men and women are guided in their actions by wholesome sentiment, where people live righteously, and where the best of our customs are perpetuated and lived every day, where our own language is spoken by all, where hearts beat to the most loyal national sentiments, and where the people can be trusted to uphold what is highest and most lasting in our national life—we must turn to the South...They do not question divine laws in the South; they accept and perpetuate them...And some day when the vast majority of us who live in other portions of this country get through with our camping-out civilization, when we drop our boastful manners, when we get old enough to understand that there is a stronghold of conservatism which stands between tyranny and anarchism, our eyes will turn toward the South. And we will see there a

people who are American in ideas and in living; a people worshipful, progressive, earnest, courageous, and patriotic; a people who have made of their land, against defeat and prejudice, "the heart of America."

Lipscomb's comments on this article were brief, but what he said was important. He said nothing by way of rebuttal, but only by way of praise. "The South had its evils," he wrote. "It was a part of the providence of God to remove the evil. But in doing this he paved the way for the perpetuation of the good. The greatest service that can be rendered the nation by the Southern people is the preservation of a high moral and religious sentiment. To this they are called."⁵²

It is clear that when Lipscomb wrote like this in the 1880s and 1890s, he was in part responding to what he viewed as the threat of northern infidelity. But writings like this also betray his deep love and even reverence for southern values and institutions. And it is in this light—not in a political light—that Lipscomb's many favorable comments regarding his region, from 1866 until his death, should be understood.

If anything, Lipscomb's bias in favor of the common man was even more pronounced, and he played on this theme throughout his editorship of the *Advocate*. One of the first appearances of this motif came shortly after the Civil War in an article on the new American Christian Missionary Society hymn-book. "Almost three times the bulk of the former book," Lipscomb complained,

it may answer well the needs of city congregations, stationed ministers and pastors, and the wealthy who ride to church in carriages and similar equipages...[But] to the great masses who must go to the meeting house on foot, and at best on horseback, to the true, evangelist, who... in apostolic style, goes to the poor of the earth, to

the offcast neglected places of our backwoods,
with his staff in hand, and often times without
purse or change of garments,...it is ill adapted.

Lipscomb asserted that all books, houses, and customs in the church should be adapted "to the necessities of God's elect—the poor of this world, rich in faith toward God,"⁵³ and he finally concluded that the church "is the especial legacy of God to the poor of the earth...it is the rich that are out of their element in Christ's Church."⁵⁴

Lest someone think that this bias on Lipscomb's part was merely a temporary reflex response to the Civil War ordeal, it is worth noting that by 1889, his position remained unchanged. He wrote in that year that

the religion of Jesus Christ was adapted to the common people...despite all theories to the contrary, they are those best fitted to maintain and spread that religion. The rich corrupt it, the rich pervert it to suit their own fashionable ways... Churches are needed among the working people, manned by the working people, suited to the means and conditions of the working people ...The church ordained by Christ Jesus is just that church. Such a church can be supported by the working people, living industriously and economically and will be blessed of God and will be the effective instruments under God of perpetuating and spreading the religion of Christ in its purity."⁵⁵

In this way Lipscomb made it clear to his readers that the true, restored church of Christ was a church by, of, and for the common people — a church especially adapted, as he put it, "to the poor of the earth..."

IV

What then, do we make of all of this? First, if by editor-bishop we mean a bishop in the traditional sense, David Lipscomb does not fit the mold. He shunned power and authority and sought at every turn to exalt only God and his church. And yet, almost in spite of himself, he was a man of tremendous power and influence in Middle Tennessee and beyond. He was appointed by no one other than the people whom he served. They easily could have turned him out by simply refusing to read his paper. But this was not the case. Instead, his circulation lists grew, and his power and influence expanded as well. The real question, as we suggested in the beginning, is, why and how was this true? How can we explain the immense power of a man who really sought no power at all?

The very paradox in this question is the heart of its answer. Lipscomb was powerful because he emerged on the pages of the *Advocate* week after week, in the words of Ben Franklin, as "the *plain man of God*." These words from Franklin convey far more than they suggest on the surface. Lipscomb sought plainness, not artificiality. He sought plainness, not man-made contrivance. He sought plainness, not human invention. And he sought to belong to God—not to time, not to history, not to tradition, but to God. Thus, he lived his life in the church, not in politics or societies or man-con-made organizations. He sought the truth of the word of God unfiltered through man-made systems of meaning and interpretation. And he sought life in a church of the first age, not a church passed down through history as a product of human tradition. In a word, Lipscomb seemed to his readers virtually to transcend the constraints of time, tradition, and perhaps even of finitude. The fact that he belonged to the South and to the common people in no way contradicted this impression, for to him and to his readers, both the South and the common lot of humankind were natural expressions of the way things were meant to be.

But did his readers share these perspectives? The answer is unequivocally, yes! The people for whom Lipscomb wrote, and to whom he most appealed, were first and foremost restorationists. They were people whose allegiance was to God, the Bible, and the primitive church. And to them, David Lipscomb was the most consistent expression of their ideals that one could hope to find. Even when they disagreed with him, they knew that through it all, he embodied in his very person the faith for which they stood. Many, perhaps, could have shared the sentiments which Price Billingsley confided to his diary after attending Lipscomb's funeral in November, 1917. Billingsley wrote that he was "in a state bordering collapse. I did not realize how much I had loved and leaned upon him! And tonight I am broken and sad."⁵⁶ Billingsley and thousands of his contemporaries did not realize how much they had "loved and leaned upon" David Lipscomb partly because they had failed, while he lived, to sense or to grasp the immense extent of his powers as editor-bishop. After all, those powers had been obscured and veiled by the natural dimensions of this "plain man of God." But now in death—now that this "plain man of God" was gone—they knew that the "bishop" was gone as well.

ENDNOTES

1. W. T. Moore, *Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1909), p. 12.

2. James Brooks Major, "The Role of Periodicals in the Development of the Disciples of Christ, 1850-1910" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1966), p. 12.

3. *Ibid*, p. 9.

4. Tolbert Fanning, "Incidents on a Visit to Memphis," *Gospel Advocate* (August 13, 1868), p. 776.

5. John Udell, *Incidents of Travel to California* (1946), p. 190, cited in Major, *Op. cit.*, p. 22-23.

6. Robert Hooper, *Crying in the Wilderness: a biography of David Lipscomb* (Nashville: David Lipscomb College, 1979) p. 268.

7. Letter from F. D. Srygley reprinted in David Lipscomb, "Errett et. al. vs. Southern Journalism and Theology," *Gospel Advocate* (October 20, 1892), p. 657.

8. Letter from Errett to Srygley in *Ibid.*, p. 658-659.

9. David Lipscomb, "The 'Church of Christ' and the 'Disciples of Christ,'" *Gospel Advocate* (July 18, 1907), p. 457.

10. Arthur Murrell, "David Lipscomb: Moderate in the Middle," *Discipliana* (Winter, 1974), p. 43.

11. Hooper, *Op. cit.*, p. 280.

12. Benjamin Franklin, "Visit in Tennessee," *American Christian Review* (July 13, 1875), p. 220.

13. Elias Smith, *The Clergyman's Looking-Glass: Being a History of the Birth, Life, and Death of Anti-Christ* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1803), p. 11.

14. Alexander Campbell, "The Third Epistle of Peter," *The Christian Baptist* (July 4, 1825), p. 243-247.

15. Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Religion," *The Christian Baptist* (October 6, 1823), p. 49.

16. J. M. Barnes, "Great Things," *Gospel Advocate* (March 2, 1876), p. 197-199.

17. It is precisely here that one might most effectively object to the argument that Lipscomb served as an editor-bishop. For while Lipscomb argued that this was one of the most important issues of all and addressed it with great regularity in the columns of the *Gospel Advocate*, few of his readers shared his bias in this regard. It might appear, therefore, that in making this argument, Lipscomb simply was not speaking into the language of his people. But while many of his readers would never agree with his conclusion on civil government, they nonetheless heard a note of fundamental authenticity in this argument—a note that spoke directly to their hearts—namely, that Christians belong to the Kingdom of God, not to the kingdoms of this world. While rejecting his conclusion, they shared his premise, and Lipscomb emerged even here as "the plain man of God," morally and spiritually fit to lead this people.

18. David Lipscomb, "From the Papers," *Gospel Advocate* (August 19, 1897), p. 513.

19. David Lipscomb, "The Cause of Christ in Middle Tennessee," *Gospel Advocate* (March 20, 1873), p. 274.

20. David Lipscomb, "Notes of Travel, no. 9," *Gospel Advocate* (September 26, 1872), p. 924.

21. Wayne Burton, "Historical and Biographical Sketch," *Gospel Advocate* (December 13, 1917), p. 12.

22. David Lipscomb, "Doing Good," *Gospel Advocate* (December 15, 1910), p. 1396.

23. David Lipscomb, "Noted Preacher and Editor Dies," *Nashville Tennessean* (November 12, 1917), p. 1.

24. David Lipscomb, "The 'Church of Christ' and the 'Disciples of Christ,'" *Gospel Advocate* (July 18, 1907), p. 457.

25. David Lipscomb, "Church Furniture Again," *Gospel Advocate* (September 8, 1892), p. 564.

26. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 1-31.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

28. Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (Bethany, Virginia: Campbell, 1839), p. 6. Cf. also Campbell, "The Confirmation of the Testimony," *Millennial Harbinger* (January 4, 1830), p. 8-14; and "Essays on Education," *Millennial Harbinger* (January, 1835), p. 22-23.

29. Alexander Campbell, "Schools and Colleges—no. II," *Millennial Harbinger* (March, 1850), p. 171-172.

30. For a fine analysis of Lamar's *Organon* and of the role of Baconianism in the Restoration Movement, see C. Leonard Allen, "Baconianism and the Bible in the Disciples of Christ: James S. Lamar and 'The Organon of Scripture,'" *Church History* (March 1986), p. 65-80.

31. Cf. Allen, *Op. cit.*, p. 71-72.

32. Tolbert Fanning, "A New Book on 'Interpretation,'" *Gospel Advocate* (January, 1860), p. 30.

33. Tolbert Fanning, "First Principles," *Gospel Advocate* (December, 1855), p. 164.

34. David Lipscomb, "The Bible and Evolution," *Gospel Advocate* (January 26, 1889), p. 56.

35. David Lipscomb, "Common Sense in Religion," *Gospel Advocate* (February 25, 1904), p. 120.

36. David Lipscomb, "Our Subscribers," *Gospel Advocate* (January 23, 1868), p. 73.

37. David Lipscomb, "Tolbert Fanning's Teaching and Influence," in James E. Scobey, ed., *Franklin College and Its Influences* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1954), p. 14.

38. David Lipscomb, "Thirty Years Work," *Gospel Advocate* (January 2, 1896), p. 4-5.

39. David Lipscomb, "Divisions Must Come," *Gospel Advocate* (October 3, 1907), p. 633.

40. David Lipscomb, "From the Papers," *Gospel Advocate* (June 7, 1894), p. 347.

41. David Lipscomb, "More Light Wanted," *Gospel Advocate* (June 16, 1881), p. 372.

42. David Lipscomb, "Erret et. al. vs. 'Southern Journalism and Theology,'" *Gospel Advocate* (October 20, 1892), p. 658.

43. David Lipscomb, "The Standard and Politics," *Gospel Advocate* (August 13, 1868), p. 771.

44. Murrell, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

45. David Lipscomb, "The Sin of the Dividing the Church of God," *Gospel Advocate* (January 26, 1882), p. 46.

46. Murrell, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

47. David Lipscomb, "From the Papers," *Gospel Advocate* (August 19, 1897), p. 513. Cf. also untitled editorial *Gospel Advocate* (August 5, 1897), p. 481.

48. Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980).

49. David Lipscomb, "God Uses the Evil as Well as the Good," *Gospel Advocate* (September 30, 1880), p. 634.

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52. David Lipscomb, "The Heart of America," *Gospel Advocate* (January 16, 1896), p. 46.

53. David Lipscomb, "New Publications," *Gospel Advocate* (January 1, 1866), p. 11-12.

54. David Lipscomb, Untitled article, *Gospel Advocate* (February 27, 1866), p. 141.

55. David Lipscomb, "A Visit to Chattanooga," *Gospel Advocate* (April 3, 1889), p. 214.

56. Price Billingsley diary, 1917-1921, in Center for Restoration Studies, Abilene Christian University.

THE POWER OF THE PRESS: THE EDITOR BISHOP IN A TIME OF TRANSITION, 1900-1930

Henry E. Webb

“Disciples don’t have bishops, they have editors.” This statement, which was made by W. T. Moore, is the focus of inquiry for the 1986 Forrest F. Reed Lectures. It directs attention to the enormous influence of the press on the thinking of the Disciples movement almost from its inception. Indeed, our earliest editor, Alexander Campbell, was often addressed as “bishop,” a term which he accepted as an expression of respect. To my knowledge, it has not been applied to others, editors or otherwise, except perhaps in jest. Nevertheless, those who have served at editorial posts among Disciples have exerted a powerful if declining influence through the years.

When thinking of the editorial giants in the movement, there immediately comes to mind such men of the first generation as Alexander Campbell, Barton Warren Stone, and Walter Scott. But the focus of the lectures this year is on the second, third, and fourth generations of Disciples. In the second generation one deals with Moses E. Lard, Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, Isaac Errett, and Benjamin Franklin to name the most familiar. This was the period when the influence of the press reached its apogee, for reasons that are not difficult to understand. The culmination of the Civil War and the rapid development of the agricultural and industrial potential of the nation brought people face-to-face with many new problems and often forced difficult and unwelcome adjustments. The secular press had not attained the huge proportions that would characterize the present century, and other media were as yet undeveloped. As a people, Disciples hadn’t developed agencies or conventions that would articulate policies or point directions (in fact, we weren’t quite sure that we should bring such agencies into being). Preachers addressed congregations, but

only editors addressed a wider audience. Their opinions and judgments were eagerly read and were scarcely challenged except by other editors.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the editorial giants of the first and second generations (the 19th century) were, almost without exception, owner-publishers. They did not have to conform to company or board policy; they made it as well as articulated it. This gave to them a freedom to express their innermost convictions that would not always be enjoyed by more recent occupants of this "episcopate."

It is my particular responsibility to examine the editors who served the *Christian Standard* in the period 1900-1930 during what might easily be termed the "third generation." Five editors are involved, although a sixth individual is perhaps more important for us to consider than any of the five editors. He is Russell Errett, son of Isaac Errett and owner of Standard Publishing Company. Though never editor, he occasionally wrote articles for the journal and he determined its policies. If the editors may be seen as bishops, there is no question that Russell Errett was archbishop. He managed the company throughout the period 1900-1930 until his death at age 85 in 1931. All of the editors of this period served at his pleasure and reflected his basic convictions; hence it is important to know something about this man.

Russell Errett became sole owner of Standard Publishing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, on the death of his father in 1888. He was 43 years old and already heavily involved in the management of the company due to the declining health of his father over the previous five or six years. Educated at Bethany College, he was deeply committed to the Disciples' movement as he understood it and passionately devoted to the memory of his father. On assuming the management of the company in 1888, he wrote that he regarded the *Christian Standard* as his father's legacy to the brotherhood and he saw himself as

holding it in trust. He determined to carry forth the work of his father, to lift the *Christian Standard* above sectional interests, and to utilize the best talent available in the advancement of the Plea.¹ He never lost this sense of stewardship. He made provision in his will that the company be taken over by a four-man committee on his death and that it be operated as a brotherhood trust once the heirs had been indemnified. The family broke the will.

Russell Errett was not a preacher or public speaker. Tall, lean, and introspective, he was inclined to be shy except in small groups. W. R. Warren called him a great "impersonal editor." He loved nature and the out-of-doors, but otherwise was a hard worker. J. D. Murch called him "the genius who built the Standard Publishing Company"² and acknowledged "that Standard was a benevolent patriarchate ruled by one man. When he said 'yes' things moved; when he said 'no' they stopped."³ So, whatever appraisal may be made of the editors of the *Christian Standard* during the period under examination, it must be seen against the background of this structure and this person.

Russell Errett's intense commitment to the Plea of the Stone-Campbell movement as he understood it, and his determination to use the resources of the *Christian Standard* to advance that Plea, as his father had done, were to make him at once one of the most admired and one of the most despised men in the brotherhood. New developments in the religious world confronted him with problems that his concept of the Stone-Campbell Plea could not easily accommodate and thrust upon him decisions that he was forced to make with reluctance. Such issues as the theology of Modernism, the nature and purpose of federation, and the advocacy of "open membership" in some quarters of the brotherhood became centers of internal controversy simply because he, along with many others, were persuaded that they constituted threats to the

survival of the Plea of the Disciples. All of these issues can be, and were, viewed from differing perspectives, and these differing perspectives involve some fundamentally differing presuppositions which, during the period we are examining, would initiate the second great fracture in the Stone-Campbell tradition. Underlying these considerations and all of the judgments that one can reach is the question of journalistic responsibility in a brotherhood of the kind that was created by this movement. To what extent does such editorial responsibility at this point in the history of the movement resemble that of an episcopate? Historically, the primary function of the bishop is twofold: he is the administrator of the diocese and he is the guardian of the doctrine which the church teaches. But independent congregations and institutions will admit no outside administrative authority and none of the editor-bishops presumed to exercise administrative authority. Similarly, repudiation of creedalism should preclude the need for arbiters of doctrinal orthodoxy since there are no specific dogmas to safeguard. But, therein lies the enigma, for in reality Disciples of Christ have been held together by a common body of concepts and presuppositions that, while never formally articulated, are nonetheless operative as the primary cohesive factor that constitutes these people a brotherhood. When changing conditions in the culture challenge this body of beliefs and, in the minds of some, mandate adjustments that others see as threats, whose is the responsibility to address the tensions that result? In the tradition of the Disciples to this point, it fell to the editor-bishops, Alexander Campbell, Isaac Errett, David Lipscomb, Benjamin Franklin, and a few others. Their judgments were eagerly sought and highly respected so that they profoundly influenced the thinking of their readers. This responsibility was keenly felt by Russell Errett, the influence behind all of the editor-bishops of our period. He was the archbishop whose consistent directive, for good or ill, provided a singular policy for more than four

decades for the journal that became the voice of the emerging conservative body of Christian Churches.

At the turn of the century the *Christian Standard* was the foremost journal among the Disciples. (For all practical purposes the Churches of Christ had become a separate fellowship and any reference to their activities is very difficult to find in the paper.) In 1900, a campaign was announced to increase *Christian Standard* subscriptions to 50,000, a goal that was apparently so easily reached that it prompted a new effort to achieve a level of 100,000 subscribers. An editorial in 1905 boasted that the *Standard* was read in every state in the Union and every province in Canada, plus twenty other foreign countries. The editorial chair was occupied by James A. Lord, who had taken over this post in 1892 and would hold it until 1909. Lord was a native of Prince Edward Island, Canada, the son of hardy Scotch stock of the type that sired Archibald McLean, who also hailed from the same region. He was converted in a meeting led by Benjamin Franklin in 1870, and the next year, at age 21, made his way to Lexington, Kentucky, and the College of the Bible where he came under the influence of J. W. McGarvey, Robert Graham, and others, including Robert Milligan at Kentucky University. Subsequently, he spent two years at Bethany College before settling in a Missouri pastorate, where he became a close friend of Alexander Proctor, the Disciple liberal of that day. While in Missouri, an interesting event occurred at one of the famous Missouri Christian Lectureships. Lord was asked to deliver a paper on "Freedom in Christ" and spoke approvingly of W. T. Moore's "London Plan," a type of "open membership." J. H. Garrison criticized him severely. The situation was repeated a few years later⁴ when Lord critiqued a paper by Isaac Errett and suggested that the pious unimmersed be admitted to membership in the church. Again, Garrison took him to task. Subse-

quently, Garrison became more tolerant toward open membership, and Lord reversed his position and became adamantly opposed.

It was during J. A. Lord's period as editor of the *Christian Standard* that relationships with the *Christian Evangelist* began to change. J. H. Garrison had looked upon Isaac Errett as his mentor and colleague and he was the one chosen to conduct Isaac Errett's funeral. Lord and Garrison were not so congenial. Donald A. Stevenson, who has done the only serious study on J. A. Lord,⁵ saw a difference in editorial policies as the major factor accounting for the friction between the two editors. Lord accommodated opposing views in the *Christian Standard*, holding that discussion enables truth to emerge. Garrison was sensitive to inter-personal problems that such discussion often entails and hence was more reserved and irenic.

Three major controversies marked the period of Lord's editorship of the *Christian Standard*. They were: the Rockefeller Oil controversy, the Federation controversy, and the H. L. Willett issue. Each must be examined briefly.

In November, 1903, J. A. Lord called the *Christian Standard's* readers' attention to the history of the Standard Oil Company by Ida M. Tarbell, which was then being published in *McClure's Magazine*.⁶ There was considerable nationwide public reaction against Rockefeller's business ethics. Lord was opposed to the theology that was emanating from the University of Chicago and he was aware that Rockefeller was the major benefactor of that institution. He noted approvingly in 1904 that the American Baptists refused to accept any further donations from Rockefeller, a fellow Baptist.⁷ The next month he noted that the Nebraska Board of Education had turned down a Rockefeller gift for the state university.⁸ In April of 1905 he noted that a Rockefeller gift to the Congregational Mission Board had evoked a strong protest⁹ and praised the Foreign Christian Missionary Society for not accepting funds from

J. D. Rockefeller. But, Lord subsequently learned that the Foreign Christian Missionary Society had been receiving Rockefeller gifts for three years, that some of these gifts had been solicited by F. M. Rains, and that they had totaled some \$25,000. It was at this point that T. W. Phillips, a Disciple stalwart, entered the picture. A potential victim of the Rockefeller business ethic, he had run for and been elected to Congress from Newcastle, Pennsylvania, for the primary purpose of introducing legislation to curb Rockefeller's business methods. Phillips served only one term in Congress, but his efforts bore fruit in the formation of the Industrial Commission on which he served and which wrote the first anti-trust legislation for the nation.

Phillips was a committed Disciple and a generous benefactor of both missionary and educational enterprises. Imagine his shock when he learned that his church was being used to purchase respectability for one whom he was convinced was an arch-villain. Phillips, in whose home in Newcastle, Pennsylvania, the *Christian Standard* was launched in 1866, responded with a series of six articles sharply critical of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society for accepting Rockefeller's money. Archibald McLean responded with a stinging reply which the *Christian Standard* published. A bitter and unfortunate quarrel then developed which soon involved McLean and Russell Errett. Eventually the Convention in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1907, decided to not accept any more Rockefeller donations. The controversy died, but the fallout from the controversy was tragic and enduring. The most potent editorial personality and the most respected voice for missions had quarreled and parted. Henceforth, neither would entertain much sympathy for the other, and the brotherhood was the loser for it.

Of far greater interest to the mission and purpose of the Stone-Campbell movement was a second issue that had to be confronted, the issue of federation. The unity of the followers of Jesus Christ which is mentioned in *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* and forms the main underlying theme of the *Declaration and Address* seemed more remote at the beginning of the 20th century than it did when the movement began a century earlier. The denominations in the United States had crystalized, and it seemed to many that a different route toward Christian unity would need to be explored. In addition, changes in the nature of American society were producing serious social problems that could scarcely be effectively confronted by individual denominations. As early as 1890, J. H. Garrison suggested the possibility of a federation of evangelical denominations after the model of the federal government.¹⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that he should become the chief proponent of the idea when it was presented to the Omaha convention of 1902. Once again, J. H. Garrison and J. A. Lord were in opposition to each other. The issue of the proposed federation of churches (denominations) involved the matter of identity of the movement and an understanding of its purpose. Does joining in a federation involve acceptance of a denominational posture? Lord said, "Yes," Garrison said "No." Does it constitute a repudiation of the plea for undenominational unity? Lord said "Yes," Garrison said "No." Does this legitimate denominations and hence perpetuate them? Lord said "Yes," Garrison said "No." Or does federation involve nothing more than a method of cooperation in areas of mutual interest and in a manner which presupposes nothing as to the nature of the denominations involved? This was Garrison's view, to which Lord demurred. The issue was thrashed *ad nauseam* in the brotherhood journals with no indication that anybody's mind was changed or any prejudice modified. It was too controversial a subject to allow it to be

placed on the floor of the 1906 General Convention but it was defused in Norfolk, Virginia, at the 1907 Convention when a rump session of the Convention voted in favor of Disciple entry into the Federal Council of Churches, and the Council accepted this decision as satisfactory. Thereafter, that part of the brotherhood that was comfortable with federation was able to enter wholeheartedly into the proceedings of the Federal Council, and the portion that could not embrace the concept simply ignored the Council. This issue contributed its share to the developing polarity in the brotherhood, and J. A. Lord and the *Christian Standard* contributed their share to this development.

A third controversy which must be mentioned is the continuing one centering in the emergence of liberal theology, or, more accurately, Modernism. It was a legacy of the late 19th century. Since 1893, J. W. McGarvey had provided a regular column to the *Christian Standard* titled "Biblical Criticism." Almost every week he lampooned, repudiated, excoriated, and refuted higher criticism. Both Lord and McGarvey were shocked to learn how deeply the new theology was ingrained at the Disciples Divinity House at the University of Chicago. Herbert L. Willett, who previously had written Sunday School lessons for the *Christian Standard*, was the chief villain in the Chicago school. When he was chosen to be one of the main speakers at the 1909 Centennial Convention by a committee consisting of representatives of the agencies and chaired by J. H. Garrison, J. A. Lord's was only one of a number of voices raised in protest. Letters addressed to Standard Publishing Company were published in the *Christian Standard*. These protests questioned whether Willett was representative of the Disciples and raised the additional issue of whether the mission boards, whose representatives had selected Willett, could be indifferent toward or sympathetic to that new theology. J. H. Garrison refused to be intimidated by the protests coming from Cincinnati; Willett was retained, spoke, and the specific issue

dissolved into other expressions of the same controversy.

J. A. Lord had the heart of an evangelist. During the entire period of his editorship he was engaged in efforts toward church planting. Wearied with the conflicts in which he had been engaged, he was happy to gradually turn editorial responsibilities over to S. S. Lappin, who had joined the staff in October, 1908, and who assumed major editorial responsibility at the end of 1909.

The *Christian Standard* reached the peak of its circulation while Lappin was editor. Lappin was a prolific writer with an easy style that had great appeal. However, he seems to have had little stomach for the kind of controversy that marked the tenure of both his predecessor and his successor. His departure after seven years was not altogether pleasant. Among the differences that he had with Russell Errett was a personal matter that involved Errett's wayward son. It is remarkable that Lappin's autobiography makes only slight reference to his editorial career, and only in the vaguest terms. He summarizes:

I was invited to take up editorial work...Seven busy, burdened years followed. A controversy arose among my people at about that time over an issue that was of deep concern to me and seemed a clear call to service in what seemed to me was an uninviting field.¹¹

In 1917 Lappin returned to the pulpit ministry, serving as pastor of First Christian Church in Bedford, Indiana, until retirement.

In 1912 while editor of the *Christian Standard*, Lappin was appointed a delegate to the Second Quadrennial Convention of the Federal Council of Churches. He accepted the appointment as a Disciple of Christ with the understanding that he came from but was not officially a representative of that body because autonomous congregations could not be officially represented by conventions or assemblies. But others had different

concepts of the nature of Disciple involvement. In 1910, the General Convention in Topeka, Kansas, created the Commission on Christian Union with Peter Ainslie as president. Its membership of nine was increased to twenty-five in 1911, and it entered into discussions on Christian union with representatives of Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches. The Atlanta Convention in 1914 gave this Commission the authority to represent Disciples in the Federal Council and to represent the Council to the Disciples. The spectre of involvement in a network of official ecclesiastical bodies violated Lappin's concept of the manner in which the brotherhood ought to participate in the Council and seemed to confirm the fears of ecclesiasticism held by many of the constituency for whom he spoke as editor of *Christian Standard*. He concluded that he had no alternative but to withdraw.¹² Thus ended the brief association that conservative Disciples had with the Federal Council of Churches.

Probably the most controversial issue of Lappin's tenure and the one to which veiled allusion is made in his autobiography involved the question of open membership and the Foreign Christian Missionary Society. It centered around the appointment of Guy W. Sarvis for missionary service in China. Prior to his appointment, Sarvis had served as assistant minister of the Hyde Park Christian Church in Chicago where E. S. Ames was minister. Ames was the vigorous champion of open membership, a practice that had been adopted by the Hyde Park Church. As Sarvis was to be the living link of this congregation, the *Christian Standard* raised the question as to whether or not he would promote the practice in China. The editor of the *Christian Evangelist* saw this as a renewal of the Russell Errett-Archibald McLean feud.¹³ The controversy flared up on the floor of the Louisville, Kentucky, Convention in 1912. A committee appointed to interview Sarvis cleared him and he was sent to China.

Lappin closed his editorial career in October, 1916, and was followed by George P. Rutledge. Rutledge had scarcely settled into his duties when a tumult arose at the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky. J. W. McGarvey had been the dominant influence at the institution, which had become the leading school among Disciples for ministerial education. He had gathered about him a faculty that shared his conservative views about the Bible and the mission of the Disciples. It included Charles Louis Loos, S. M. Jefferson, Isaiah B. Grubbs, among others. McGarvey died in 1911 and the others, all of whom were men of his generation, died or retired shortly thereafter. Within a brief period the faculty had undergone a complete turnover. The younger men had been educated in graduate seminaries where they had been exposed to a different approach to Biblical studies.¹⁴ The single exception was Dean Hall L. Calhoun who, although he had earned the Ph.D in New Testament at Harvard, was devoted to McGarvey's viewpoint. The students sensed the differences, became divided, and several wrote an indictment against the new faculty for teaching "destructive criticism."¹⁵ George P. Rutledge saw this as a threat to the movement and called for an investigation.¹⁶ The new theology, hitherto identified only with the Disciples Divinity House in Chicago evidently had spread to Lexington. An investigation into the charges brought by the students was conducted by the trustees of the college. These men were inexperienced in the conduct of a heresy trial and hardly knew how to proceed. The accused professors were exonerated, but not to everybody's satisfaction. Hall Calhoun resigned and the editorial staff at *Christian Standard* never again would be convinced that the College of the Bible represented the brotherhood in the theological position it took. A Bible College League was organized in Kentucky and activities were launched that brought into being McGarvey Bible Seminary in Louisville, a forerunner of Cincinnati Bible

Seminary. It should be noted that this struggle was duplicated in many other religious communions as part of the great Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy of that day.

The College of the Bible controversy ushered in a decade of intense conflict that culminated in fracturing the International Convention in 1926 at Memphis, Tennessee. The controversy in Lexington over theology was followed by furor over a new constitution that created the International Convention of Disciples of Christ. Even more serious was the issue of a comity agreement entered into by the Christian Women's Board of Missions. The Disciple mission in Monterrey, Mexico, was turned over to the Methodist Church in a tripartite agreement in which the Disciples were given the region of Mexico City previously served by the Presbyterians for development. The *Christian Standard* voiced the objections of some of the Mexican Christians in Monterrey¹⁷ and really opened the door for the whole independent mission enterprise when it offered to receive funds to keep the Monterrey churches functioning as Christian Churches.¹⁸ This became an example of a mission enterprise that would be successfully operated outside of the organized channels.

Simultaneously, plans were in operation to merge six brotherhood agencies into the United Christian Missionary Society. Rutledge spoke for many in expressing fears that such centralization of authority constituted a threat to freedom of the congregations. In 1919, the *Christian Standard* adopted a device which was to prove effective on several subsequent occasions. It called a pre-convention meeting to consider issues and adopt strategy. The 1919 Convention vote to merge the agencies was so close that a second vote was called for before the decision to merge was announced.

The most troublesome controversy was yet to follow. In 1920 R. E. Elmore disclosed through the pages of the *Christian Standard* some correspondence with the secretary of the China

Mission which indicated that the missionaries were willing to adopt the practice of open membership as a necessary step toward the wider unity of Protestant bodies working in China.¹⁹ This revived all of the fears and suspicions of the Sarvis issue. It is not necessary to thread through all of the charges and counter-charges, various resolutions of the Board of Managers and Conventions, special commissions, new publications, and *ad hoc* rallies that this issue produced. Suffice it to say that these were the bitterest years in Disciple history. One may look back upon them with mixed feelings of sadness and disgust. They need to be seen against the broader background of widespread religious controversy in many regions of the nation during that period, bearing in mind also that this was the era otherwise known as the "roaring twenties" when many traditional values were being upset. In the midst of these troubles Rutledge left, whether from burn-out or thrust-out I do not know. He was replaced by Willard H. Mohorter.

Willard H. Mohorter was a son of J. H. Mohorter, long-time Executive Secretary of the National Benevolent Association. He had been in the employ of the Christian Board of Publication until 1917, when a problem within that agency caused him and three other men to transfer to the Standard Publishing Company. W. H. Mohorter became assistant editor of *Christian Standard* in 1917 and editor in 1922. During the early years of his term, the pages of the *Christian Standard* and the editorials that Mohorter provided reflected critical appraisals of the United Christian Missionary Society and also of some of the actions of the International Convention. The China Mission was the eye of the storm, which increased in intensity following the visit of John T. Brown to this field in 1921 and the serial publication of his report and his efforts, largely unsuccessful, to bring about a change of policy by the Society's Board of Managers. These reports, twelve in all, ran from November 17, 1923, through February 2, 1924. In October, 1924, the Convention authorized

the formation of a five-member Peace Commission, later expanded to fifteen members, which submitted the famous "Peace Resolution." This was adopted by the Convention in Oklahoma City in 1925. Once again the *Christian Standard* promoted a pre-convention Congress and conservative forces registered a victory in the convention that followed when the Peace Resolution was overwhelmingly adopted. But it was a short-lived victory. Memphis, in 1926, proved to be such a controversy-laden convention that the conservative element took steps to form a separate body known as the North American Christian Convention. From this point, the segment of the brotherhood that was displeased with what it perceived to be evidences of advancing Modernism in the schools and open membership in the agencies began to abandon the existing agencies and to create new ones. Thus was set afoot the schism that produced a third identifiable body within the American effort to unite the followers of Christ. But in this very process there can be discerned an important modification in the role of the editor. While there is no question that his was a voice that had a measure of influence in the developing events among conservative Disciples, he was no longer the kind of center of authority that would suggest the episcopal analogy. When Willard Mohorter was elevated to company secretary and moved to a managerial role, his editorial chair was filled in 1929 by the scholarly Edwin R. Errett, a nephew of Isaac Errett. No editor before or since had such a commanding grasp of the broader religious issues of his time as did Edwin R. Errett. In the judgment of this observer Errett was a religious statesman who had few peers. The bulk of his editorial career falls outside the parameters of this period. He had a concept of the mission and purpose of the movement which, I believe, would have made a vast difference in subsequent history if he had had the bishop's authority to implement it. But, like his predecessors and his successors, Edwin R. Errett did not wield the power or influence

once held by his uncle, Isaac Errett.

Leadership among conservative Christians had already passed to others; or more accurately, it had to be shared by others. The new leadership consisted primarily of ministers of large and influential congregations. One thinks of P. H. Welshimer, W. R. Walker, Will Sweeney, Mark Collis, and Wallace Tharp, to name a few of the more prominent. It was a collective leadership within which the editor's voice was only one. He was heard and respected but he did not determine direction. The role of the editor was evolving into that of a reporter-commentator who reflected on the direction that the movement was taking, a direction that was less and less one that he greatly influenced. The reasons for this decline of influence are not difficult to discern. Foremost among these reasons is the emergence of many other voices in society that clamored for the attention of those whose fathers read the religious journals almost exclusively. Aside from the growth of what may be called the secular press, there was a proliferation of religious papers serving the Sunday School, the Christian Endeavor or other youth activities, and the several agency causes. The Sunday School movement was in full swing and publishing firms that could provide the burgeoning market for Sunday School literature were prospering. The circulation of such periodicals as *The Lookout* soon far outstripped that of the *Christian Standard* so that the monopoly once enjoyed by the *Christian Standard* had to be shared.

Perhaps even more significant than the multiplication of periodicals in the decline of the influence of the editor was the fact that the editor-bishop of an earlier period operated from a far greater power-base than was the case for any editor during the period 1900-1930. Alexander Campbell was at once the owner-publisher-editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*, president of

the American Christian Missionary Society, and president of Bethany College. Each position enhanced the others. It is inconceivable that he could have been dislodged from any of these posts. Isaac Errett was owner-publisher and editor of the *Christian Standard*, as was J. H. Garrison of the *Christian Evangelist*. Errett was at the same time president of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society from its beginning in 1875. It was quite otherwise, however, with the editors who followed Isaac Errett. They were employees of the company. Inevitably their power was affected not only by the necessity of conforming to company policy but also by the unspecified constraints informally imposed by consideration for the best interests of other publishing components of the company. It would never be necessary to define these constraints; in fact, they were often denied. But, they exist in the very nature of the publishing enterprise whether it be the one located in Cincinnati, or in Nashville, or in St. Louis. When the editor is not "the management," it is doubtful whether he could ever fulfill a role that could appropriately be likened to "the bishop." The later editors simply did not possess the same kind of leverage as the owner-publishers had before them. So, were it not for other factors limiting the influence of the editors, the constricted power-base from which they operated would have greatly reduced their effectiveness.

One additional observation ought to be made which, in my opinion at least, helps to explain the declining influence of the editorial voice in the early decades of the current century. The issues that confronted the Disciples in this century were far less parochial than those of the 19th century. The exception in the 19th century was the slavery issue, which editor-bishop Campbell addressed neither frequently nor effectively. But, issues such as the missionary society, the one-man pastor system, the single cup communion, and the use of the musical

instrument were largely parochial issues. By the turn of the century, however, the luxury of isolation was ending. The Stone-Campbell movement was being affected by issues of Biblical criticism and interdenominational federation, matters of concern to the entire Protestant community. The Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy was an issue that focused primarily on educational institutions, which had also proliferated following the Civil War. This issue was addressed not only by editors but by professors, most of whom were more knowledgeable on the subject than were the editors. New voices were addressing the issues in the journals of the denomination and the role of the editor was inevitably modified thereby.

In summary, the period 1900-1930 may best be understood as a period of transition. In 1909 W. T. Moore was able to look back half a century and noted that the owner-editors of the leading journals of the Disciples carried such influence as suggested episcopal prerogative. Had he been able to look forward half a century he would have seen quite a different picture. The full measure of decline in the power of the editor awaited the arrival of other media developments. The motion picture, followed by the radio and then the television, have all but crowded out the word and counsel of the editor, even in the mind of the church-goer. It is not that the church has been without power-brokers in this century; only that those power-brokers are no longer seated in editorial chairs.

ENDNOTES

1. Russell Errett, Item published following his death, *Christian Standard* (May 16, 1931)

2. Personal interview.

3. James DeForrest Murch, *Adventuring for Christ* (Louisville, Kentucky: Restoration Press, 1973), p. 34.

4. William E. Tucker, *J. H. Garrison and Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1964).

5. Donald W. Stevenson, "James A. Lord: the Man and His Contribution to the Disciples of Christ" (Unpublished BD thesis, Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee, 1974), p. 30.

6. Editorial, "The Story of Standard Oil," *Christian Standard* (November 14, 1903), p. 1636.

7. Editorial, "The Rising Tide," *Christian Standard* (January 16, 1904), p. 87.

8. Editorial, "Licensed Murder," *Christian Standard* (February 6, 1904), p. 186.

9. Editorial, "Subsidizing the Missionary Societies," *Christian Standard* (April 1, 1905), p. 521.

10. Editorial, "The Union Problem," *Christian Evangelist* (May 29, 1890), p. 338.

11. Samuel S. Lappin, *Run, Sammy, Run* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958), pp. 183-184.

12. Samuel S. Lappin, "Time to Withdraw," *Christian Standard* (October 31, 1911), p. 144.

13. Samuel S. Lappin, "The End of the Agitation Against the Foreign Christian Missionary Society," *Christian Standard* (August 5, 1911), p. 1267.

14. Hampton Adams, "Historical Conditions influencing the Trend of Thought in Transylvania, 1780-1922" (Unpublished B.D. thesis, The College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky, 1923), p. 92.

15. Ben F. Battenfield, Letter of March 12, 1917. Copy on file at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

16. "Report of the Board of Trustees," *The College of the Bible Quarterly* (May, 1917), p. 3.

17. E. T. Westrup, "Facts about the Mexican Mission," *Christian Standard* (September 6, 1919), p. 1201.

18. George P. Rutledge, "To the Rescue of the Mexican Mission," *Christian Standard* (June 14, 1919), p. 901.

19. See *Christian Standard* (August 7, 1920), p. 1108.

THE EDITOR-BISHOP THE POWER OF PERSUASION

Howard E. Short

Bishops and editors exert different amounts of influence and authority, depending upon their situation. There are many kinds of bishops in churches with varied histories, separate traditions and church laws. Editors may own the paper they publish or they may be employees of a church. In either case, editors and bishops often exert considerable influence and authority.

Many bishops gain their authority through kindly oversight and modest proposals of doctrinal positions that ought to be accepted and social actions that should be taken. Other bishops have creeds, confessions, conciliar decisions, even papal pronouncements, *ex cathedra*, to defend, promote and cite as ultimate criteria. As recently as last January, the St. Louis prelate, Archbishop John L. May, returned from the extraordinary synod in Rome and told reporters at the airport that a chief result of the synod was the resolve "to tighten up" on the church's teaching. One of the ideas to be attacked is the supposition that has developed since Vatican II that "the church has declared itself a democracy."¹

If editors of church journals have any authority, it is of the personal and persuasive sort. If church members think the editor is interpreting Scripture properly and if the suggestions for action seem reasonable, then the paper can expect to build up a following. In the wide range of church policy which exists, the respective editors know how far they can go without straying beyond the established boundaries of their church and rules.

Other editors, in churches with less authoritative structure, are free to agree with the majority or the minority on given issues. They may even campaign for specific views. Still others

will feel the pressure of unwritten laws of the church and they will spend their time reporting what church leaders are saying without taking strong editorial positions.

The tradition represented by the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is about as loose and informal as could be found in American church history. Congregations were established, often by individual preachers who held meetings and got a following. These preachers passed along whatever doctrines they had heard and accepted at other frontier meetings or had read in a church paper. There was no headquarters and certainly there were no bishops in the governing sense, beyond the local congregation. It was some time before there were even area gatherings for fellowship and singing. Ministers sometimes gained their fame by opposing the views of others; sometimes they aligned themselves with well-known names—the Campbells, Scott, Stone, John Smith, John Rogers. The worshipers came to recognize patterns of thought and in their minds they passed judgment on the preacher's theology. What they read in the church papers had a lot to do with their conclusions.

In this setting, many papers flourished. Most of them were owned by the editor so he could say anything he pleased. It was not until the *Christian Standard* was founded in 1866 that a paper was published by an organized group. Even then, of course, it was not a group of churches but a group of individuals who underwrote the Christian Publishing Association.

McAllister and Tucker have written that by the beginning of the twentieth century "dozens of journals had flourished and collapsed."² They might well have written "scores" instead of "dozens." This rise and fall of individuals and their papers gives us a clue to the real authority of editors. They wrote, espoused their beliefs and promoted their causes and watched the results. Some believed and followed; others opposed or ignored what was being written.

In time, an occasional editor came to hold a position of near absolute power. In a technical or hierarchical sense, he had no authority at all. In the real situation, the readers quoted the editor's interpretation of texts as if it were absolute and final. Anyone who differed from their favorite editor was considered heretical.

Such an authoritative editor was Daniel W. Sommer (1850-1940), of Indianapolis. As a general introduction to our theme we turn now to a short study of Mr. Sommer's work as seen by his writings and as remembered from my own childhood under his leadership.

For more than fifty years, publishing his *Apostolic Review*, Mr. Sommer developed a following that any bishop would be proud to have. He purchased the *American Christian Review* from John F. Rowe in 1887 and renamed it the *Octographic Review*, but it was under the title "The Apostolic Review" that my generation knew it in the early decades of this century.

The title of "Old-Fogysim" was first applied to Benjamin Franklin's teaching in the *Apostolic Review*, but Daniel Sommer inherited the designation. Thirty years after Sommer's death, I was explaining the beliefs and practices of the Church of Christ into which I was born, in southern Indiana, while walking and talking with a prominent minister of the Churches of Christ. It took only a few sentences from me to elicit from him the outburst, "Oh, you belonged to the Old-Fogies."

In their *Journey in Faith*, McAllister and Tucker dismiss the Franklin and Sommer leadership with a sentence: "Apart from a small minority of conservatives, few appeared to notice, and still fewer cared."³ It is precisely those few who afford a prime example of the power of an editor. It was not until after World War II that the cluster of churches in southern Indiana, several score of them, began to desert the absolute dictatorship of Daniel Sommer and his two sons who carried on the paper a few years after their father's death in 1940.

Of course these churches, like most churches, never considered that they were under the spell of a man. We never do. We always jump directly from our belief to the Bible and point out how scriptural we are. It never occurs to us to ask, "How did I know what text to cite for this belief, and how was I able to interpret the Hebrew or the Greek text?" In the case of these Indiana Churches of Christ, what Daniel Sommer said that the Bible said—that was what the Bible said.

The open break in the brotherhood is often pinpointed at the Sand Creek Church in Shelby County, Illinois. At the annual fellowship gathering, August 18, 1889, Daniel Sommer spoke for an hour and forty minutes⁴ and pretty well outlined "the Gospel according to Sommer." He opposed instrumental music in worship, choirs, "man-made" missionary societies, a "one-man, imported preacher-pastor to feed the flock," and "many other objectionable and unauthorized things." (That last phrase is also a quotation.) Forty-two years later, when I wrote Mr. Sommer about his position, the first thing he sent me was his pamphlet on "The Sand Creek Case."

Looking back more than six decades to the Douglas Church of Christ, Howard Township, Washington County, Indiana, it is easy to see that Daniel Sommer was our "bishop," in the most dictatorial sense. The only paper in our home aside from the weekly county paper was "The Apostolic Review." When I read many issues of it, a decade after leaving home, I was surprised to find more of the doctrines of our church in it than I could find in the New Testament.

Of course Mr. Sommer found every one of his doctrines in the New Testament. He seldom took notice of editorials in the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Standard* which opposed him at many points. Since none of us ever saw the other papers, we became absolutists of the first rank.

It would be an unwarranted digression to discuss Sommer's views on many issues such as instrumental music,

missionary societies, printed helps for Bible study and the name of the Church. Our point can be made with a look at the matter of settled pastors. On this question he played a lonely role, even among his contemporaries in the Churches of Christ. Even Benjamin Franklin was settled with the Clinton Street Church in Cincinnati when he wrote that "the Lord did not intend Evangelists to open an office and sit down and wait for sinners to come to them to be converted."⁵

Sommer wrote on the subject, "Therefore, I state that the word 'Pastors' is found but once in the common version of the New Testament, and then it is not a necessary translation. The same Greek word there is found translated elsewhere by the word 'Shepherd.' It means one who tends flocks or herds. The apostle Peter implies that the elders are the 'shepherds' of the flock in this world (I Peter 5:1-4). In verse 4 Christ is referred to as 'the chief shepherd.' This implies that the elders whom he addressed in the first verse are the 'under shepherds.' The modern preacher-pastor, as the chief official in a church, is of Catholic origin, and cannot be traced to the Church of the New Testament...He is more on the order of a Diotrephes, 'who loveth to have the pre-eminence' than he is an evangelist of the New Testament order."⁶

Mr. Sommer did not always provide the answers for specific issues that arose, although he probably would have done so if asked. I recall what happened in our congregation one year. In the county seat Church of Christ there were several men who preached while making their living in a variety of ways. Our elders considered inviting one of them to be our preacher for a year (twelve visits, 36 sermons). The question arose as to whether he might be considered a "settled pastor," since he lived in our county seat and shopping center. To be safe, the elders decided to invite only preachers who got on the train; that is, who came from out of the county. Since my father was one of the elders, I honor them for their struggle to be a New Testa-

ment church. But they never would have thought of this way out without the general teaching of Daniel Sommer.

Our county seat Church of Christ clung to its "no settled pastor" standard, in its own mind, at least, as late as 1950. At Christmas time I attended worship there with my sister and her family. Of course, Christmas was not mentioned in any way whatsoever. I thought of Mr. Sommer's diatribes against "apeing Rome," in such matters. The church was still true to the faith. When I was introduced to the preacher, he did not say "Hello," or anything else. His first words were, "Well, there's one difference between us and your churches; we don't have a hireling ministry. I make my living selling office supplies in Bedford while serving the brethren here as their evangelist." When we got home, I asked my brother-in-law, the church treasurer (incidentally, a questionable office, isn't it?) how much they paid the preacher for coming on Sunday. He quoted a figure more than half what I was making as a seminary professor. That is beside the point; the struggle to be a Sommerite is what interested me.

At last the battle is over; that church now has settled pastors, owns a parsonage and gets college-trained ministers in the opposite direction from Indianapolis. But, as recently as 1985, the minister appointed the elders and included himself as one. My surmise is that we shall not soon see another editor who wields the kind of power that Daniel Sommer had.

II

Permit me a short digression into the editorship of Isaac Errett, in order to cite his leadership in establishing the missionary movement. Isaac Errett was the editor of the *Christian Standard* which announced the death of Alexander Campbell in its very first issue, April 7, 1866. Mr. Campbell had died a month earlier. James Harvey Garrison began to write, January 1, 1869,

and lived on to make his last contribution to *The Christian-Evangelist*, April 11, 1929. Together, these two span a 63-year period in the journalism of the Christian Churches.

Thirty-six years ago I wrote: "Errett and Garrison are illustrative of what has become perfectly clear to us now; the editors of our magazines have been destined to play a chief role in the formulation of both our doctrines and our practices."⁷ (In 1950 I could not have foreseen that I would be speaking now about editors and their influence and that I would be one of the subjects. Neither would I have suspected then that a president, fighting for his political life, would bring my phrase about making things "perfectly clear" into the popular idiom of the day.)

The conclusion reached then still seems to be warranted. Errett and Garrison worked in close harmony during the fifteen years in which their editorships coincided. They took the leadership in espousing cooperative efforts of the churches in missionary work. On his deathbed, Errett wrote to Garrison, saying, "We have been together from the beginning of this missionary work. We have stood shoulder to shoulder...and the two most effective instrumentalities in educating our people and bringing them into active cooperation in spreading the gospel in all lands have been *The Christian-Evangelist* and the *Christian Standard*; and indeed, upon all points of doctrine and practice and expediency you and I have always worked on the same lines in perfect harmony."⁸

While this is a self-assessment at a critical moment in his life, a look at Errett's role in the organization and future leadership of the missionary movement vindicates his own view. In 1876 Benjamin Franklin wrote in his *American Christian Review* regarding a missionary society, that "we do not now go against it merely because it is not a good human scheme, or because it did not succeed, but because it *is* a human scheme."⁹ Alexander Campbell had taken the same position in his

Christian Baptist days, but he was writing in the *Millennial Harbinger* by 1834 that "the church is not one congregation or assembly, but the congregation of Christ, composed of all the individual congregations on earth."

Errett was on the side of the new Campbell. Early in his editorship, he wrote: "The *Standard* is the only weekly paper among us now that advocates missionary societies, and we want the brethren to know this fact. When there is a great end to be accomplished, a scriptural end, and the Word of God does not shut us up to any special routine of operations, we go for the best expedient that the united wisdom of the brethren...may suggest."¹⁰ When the Foreign Christian Missionary Society was organized in Louisville in 1875, Errett was elected president and he retained this position as long as he lived.

It was in relation to women's missionary work that Errett gained his greatest fame. Mrs. Caroline Pearre talked with Errett at Iowa City in June 1874 about the prospects for a women's missionary society. The editorial that Errett wrote in the next issue of the *Christian Standard* was titled, "Help Those Women!" James DeForrest Murch wrote what is the common opinion of many of us when he said, "Without his (Errett's) support, it is doubtful that 'the brethren' would have consented to any such move."¹¹ At the Richmond Street Church in Cincinnati, later that year, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions was organized. There are still windows in some of our churches with the CWBM monogram on them. As Dr. Murch indicated, it was no easy task to overcome the superior feeling men had about their own leadership qualities a century ago. The power of the press and the great spiritual insight of an editor carried the day. It was a classic example of an editor being trusted enough to be followed.

III

In the Spring of 1958 I made several trips to St. Louis for discussions with the editor of *The Christian-Evangelist* prior to assuming that position myself in June. I was welcomed warmly by that most congenial of gentlemen, Lin D. Cartwright. I was eager to receive his advice and his warnings. Almost the first thing he said to me was, "When Dr. Garrison retired, he took his 'Easy Chair' with him."

For those not well-informed, James Harvey Garrison expressed many of his views on church issues and on life in general in a column which he called "The Editor's Easy Chair." This he did during 43 years as an active editor and for 19 years in retirement, a total of 62 years. This column, as well as the editorial pages, should be good places to look for examples of an editor's power, prestige and persuasion.

Of course, Dr. Cartwright was thinking of another meaning of "easy chair" when he spoke, for he was well aware that easiness is not one of the characteristics of an editor's life. Aside from the physical aspects of turning out pages of copy every day, there is the emotional responsibility of dealing with the readers. There are always people who assume that if the editor says it, it must be wrong. But there are others who are likely to accept an editor's views and follow them. We have tried to give examples of this type of reader in discussing Mr. Sommer and Mr. Errett. There is an even greater burden to bear than the accusations. "What if I lead people astray?" is a question no conscientious editor fails to ask.

James Harvey Garrison (1842-1931) came upon the Disciple scene at the right time. As he himself wrote many years later, "At the time of the birth of this journal our Brotherhood had reached the most acute crisis in its history—the parting of the ways with legalistic theology."¹² Looking back, we see that *The American Christian Review* of Benjamin Franklin was in full

swing, promoting its tightly bound teaching of no organs, no choirs, no settled pastors. As my late, beloved colleague at Lexington Theological Seminary, Daniel Troxel, wrote about the *Review*: "The fear of an ecclesiastical system hung like a menacing storm over its editorial mind."¹³

Another journal with a legalistic position was *Lard's Quarterly*, the brainchild of one of my early predecessors in the church history chair at Lexington, Moses E. Lard. It lasted through four volumes, beginning in 1863, "raising a strident voice," as Troxel put it, against "the spirit of innovation in a class of men who can no longer be satisfied with the ancient gospel and the ancient order of things."

Garrison was not worried so much about editorial positions as he was about the state of the church's work. He wrote that "in our religious newspapers, in our colleges, and in our missionary societies—the three great agencies for carrying our propaganda—we were experiencing the difficulties inevitably resulting from an excess of independence which we call liberty ... We pursued the course which created a vast cemetery where lie buried many religious newspapers founded to meet long-felt wants; many educational enterprises built on hopes which were never realized, and many missionary plans, whose only weakness was they wouldn't work."

Garrison believed that another paper with a national scope such as only the *Christian Standard* had at the time, was needed to help harness the freedom of our people and to steer liberal-minded churches and members into more productive and harmonious endeavors. There seems to have been no anticipation of exerting authority over the churches except by the rational arguments he proposed to expound.

Garrison was a great believer in freedom. In the 1870s, when Moses E. Lard busied himself with a particular theological theme, the nature of future punishment for the impenitent, Garrison defended Lard's right to hold any view he pleased

without fearing that the brethren would withdraw fellowship from him. This, of course, brought forth a host of angry readers who accused Garrison of "universalism," the tag that was being applied to Lard. Garrison countered with the information that Errett was already writing a series of articles on the fallacy of Lard's position and that he, Garrison, did not need to repeat them. As Garrison wrote, "I was sure that he (Errett) agreed with me that our liberty in Christ was far more important to the success of our plea than any particular theory of the meaning of *aiônios*."¹⁴ He soon learned that B. W. Johnson, then editor of the *Evangelist* in Oskaloosa, Iowa, took the same position.

Troxel summed up his views of Garrison's position this way: "This spirit was manifested also by his refusal to make his paper a tribunal for the settlement of the organ controversy, holding that it was not within the paper's province to do what each local church must decide for itself. In this way he avoided making his paper speak *ex cathedra* for its constituency, a practice of newspapers which has done much harm to the cause which they espouse. Instead, Mr. Garrison made his paper the vehicle of a personal message giving instruction, inspiration and encouragement to his readers. This was the real strength of his editorship."¹⁵

In order to illustrate the themes with which Garrison dealt, and the way in which he sought to lead the readers in their thinking, we have looked at all the issues of *The Christian-Evangelist* for 1910, 1911, 1912 and 1913, the last years of his editorship. Many of the items are chosen at random, to show the variety of the causes which were promoted. The January 5, 1911, issue carried an editorial, written by W. R. Warren, titled, "The New Year and Its Tasks." Three were listed:

1. More satisfactory and efficient organization of our churches. The eliminating, as far as possible, of all occasion for friction and jealousy between the various societies by the unification of their work and their subjection to the churches in their

representative conventions.

2. Better endowment for our colleges.

3. Our Council on Christian Union should get into good working order this year.

If a journal could bring any, or all, of these hopes to fruition it would be exercising considerable influence.

The following week, January 12, 1911, an editorial titled, "The Evils of Division," proclaimed that "the crying evil of over-churching some towns and communities while others are neglected is a result of our present denominational system. The cure can be effected only by substituting cooperation for denominational competition."

The March 9, 1911, editorial tells of the editor's attendance at a unity meeting in New York with Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The following week he is promoting the idea of a "world conference on unity," to be held "five or six years hence."

The next week the editorial turns to a different issue, delegate conventions. He traces the idea back to Robert Milligan in the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1887, and the Pittsburgh convention in 1909. Thus, the editorial runs, it is not "a scheme of a certain publishing house to get itself officially endorsed."

The churches neglect Holy Week because Rome keeps it, says the April 6, 1911, Easy Chair. "To be logical, we would have to give up prayer, singing, Lord's Day, baptism and communion, all of which Roman Catholics practice," Garrison says.

The April 20 editorial urges churches to join in the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the King James Version of the Holy Bible, "There is no better test of our fellowship as Churches of Christ than the degree of our cooperation in the common work of the kingdom."

On May 18 the editorial points out a "radical defect" in the

Topeka Convention: "Time was not allowed for discussing the reports." Peter Ainslie's motion to allow one session each day for the transaction of business was adopted and Garrison commends the action. Any who wearied of extended business sessions at the General Assembly in Des Moines in 1985 might have to place part of the blame on Garrison, as far back as 1911.

An editorial, November 17, 1910, dealt with the growing issue of an "official" church paper. It quoted the *Christian Century* as follows: "*The Christian-Evangelist* is requesting the Disciples of Christ to allow it to occupy a unique position as representatives of the brotherhood."

Garrison replied, "in the very beginning let us have done forever with the thought of officialdom in journalistic representation...A brotherhood-owned paper can no more assume to be the brotherhood's representative, in an official sense, than the brotherhood-owned college. Take out that thought of officialdom which has never been injected into the discussion by the donor of this publishing plant to the brotherhood...We may state frankly that *The Christian-Evangelist* and its auxiliary publications have always assumed to be representative of the brotherhood. Other papers have made the same assumption...This is the proposal: a brotherhood publishing house, owned by the brotherhood for the good of the brotherhood, with private gain eliminated and personal interest reduced to the lowest minimum." We note here no reference to an editor's desire for power or any conscious feeling that he is the leader of church thought.

The position was outlined rather clearly in the January 10, 1910, announcement of the shift from private ownership to a board of directors. R. A. Long bought all the stock of the Christian Publishing Company, Garrison's company, and chose a board of thirteen directors to control it. "A call to service," by the directors stated that "The Church of Christ is an army of

conquest; the paper is its line of communication."

An editorial in the same issue stated that "(Our paper) must be concerned with everything that concerns human welfare. It must not confuse loyalty to Christ with narrowness of vision, bitter partisanship, or religious bigotry. On the other hand, it must mistake liberty in Christ for license to neglect Christ's teaching and will." As if to illustrate this wide concern for human welfare, there were editorials in the March 3, 1910, issue regarding a free bridge in St. Louis, the Beef Trust, a strike in Philadelphia, forest conservation, men and missions and the liquor traffic.

Garrison also wrote in the January 10, 1910, issue, an editorial titled, "Danger in Power." In it, he said, "A religious journal representing the whole brotherhood...is capable of doing more injury, should it be wrong, than a weak, unsupported journal, which represents its owner and editor....But it must be admitted by all that it is also a far more potential instrumentality for furthering the interests of the kingdom of God." There was a letter from J. W. McGarvey in the same issue saying, "I have not seen a full statement of how *The Christian-Evangelist* is hereafter to be edited and controlled...If it is to be 'our paper,' let us know about it."

There were no articles or letters in the 1910 issues which indicated that churches and members were overjoyed at the new arrangement. By August 25 there was a letter accusing the "brotherhood paper" of "throttling agitation." The editor merely replied that "we invite discussion."

Dr. Garrison proclaimed from his "Easy Chair" in the June 1, 1910, issue that "nature is the text-book of science and the Bible of religion...They are not antagonistic since they come from the same author." Today, in the face of many styles of dealing with this issue, Garrison's lead is still followed by many. Incidentally, in that same issue there was a letter approving Garrison's idea of unity, saying, "It is scriptural..." The letter

was signed, "Cordially, your brother, Hall Laurie Calhoun." Less than seven years later, Mr. Calhoun was to be a leader in the Lexington heresy charges and trial.

Further warnings of the troubles to come to Lexington in 1918 were anticipated in an article by I. J. Spencer in the August 15, 1912, issue. Dr. Spencer was minister of Central Church in Lexington. He wrote: "Think of the inconsistency of a newspaper that would plead for the authority of the local churches to manage their own affairs, and discipline their own members, and yet would try and condemn members of local churches in its own court!... If a free and independent press should mean license to conduct an ecclesiastical inquisition and pronounce sentence and lord it over God's heritage, its freedom and independence should be curtailed, if not be-headed."

Regarding the functions of a religious newspaper, the editor wrote in a March 28, 1912, editorial: "Religious periodicals ought always, everywhere, to be constructive...The belligerent war-like editor of a religious newspaper is a nuisance in the land...The religious newspaper ought always to be a leader. No man has a proper place in the editorial chair who is not endowed by nature as a leader."

The editorial the following week, April 4, 1912, attempts to illustrate this principle by discussing the problems which the foreign missionary enterprise was facing. He writes, "The Christian Board of Publication is conducting a publishing business...We are not running a foreign missionary society, though asking the brethren at large to support it. Nor are we attempting to destroy a missionary society that refuses to be controlled by us...The brethren are finding it more satisfactory to patronize a business house that attends to its own business." These remarks are obviously directed toward another paper which was taking a very negative attitude toward the foreign missionary society. And, one would also have to observe that

the editor was writing about his chief business competitor.

(It is very difficult to keep extraneous items out of this essay. One sees so many "goodies" as he leafs through the pages. For example, in a June 8, 1911, editorial, Garrison condemns the Indy 500, "with machines going at the rate of 80 or 90 miles per hour." Here is one more from the June 22, 1911, issue. It is a letter from Portland, Oregon, regarding the International Convention which is to meet there, July 4-11. "The hotels offer rates for rooms from \$1 up, (with) private families, 50¢. Meals, from 15¢ up.")

The great issue of 1911 was "open membership" on the mission field. We cannot, and need not, develop the issue here, except to look for the part the editors played. On June 22, 1911, there is a plea in *The Christian-Evangelist* to uphold the missionaries and not listen to the denunciations of the *Christian Standard*. At the moment the quarrel was between the *Christian Standard* and the *Christian Century*. The *Evangelist* editor sensed the danger of a major rupture in the fellowship as he wrote: "*The Christian-Evangelist* has given large space to the furtherance of our home and foreign work....In this we have been simply discharging our duty as a public journal. ...Let him that hath ears to hear and eyes to see watch very closely the developments now in progress in our religious journalism." This was a prophetic statement which many did not follow. Within fifteen years, division had come and one has to feel that the two leading papers were doing more than their "duty as public journals." They were the leaders of the separating groups.

There was plenty of in-fighting from the beginning of the Christian Board of Publication. It was in the November 8, 1911, issue of *The Christian-Evangelist* that Alexander Campbell Smithers, on the job as the newly named manager of the newly created firm, first wrote about a "representative publishing house." He said, "I have always been in utmost harmony with

the purposes of the Christian Board of Publication since the movement was endorsed at our general convention in Norfolk. ...The conditions prevailing then, as now, seemed to necessitate a publishing house that would represent the voice of the brethren rather than that of any individual or private publishing company. ...As a brotherhood, we are learning rapidly...the wisdom of patronizing the Christian Board of Publication, which belongs to the brotherhood in exactly the same sense that our colleges and missionary societies belong to us."

Within six weeks of the Smithers statement, a December 21 editorial began: "The *Standard* says this would be a good time for 'our Brotherhood paper' to say something (about the missionary issue)." The *Standard* had put the phrase "our brotherhood paper" in quotes. So, the *Evangelist* editorial continued, "We cheerfully meet (the challenge) without, of course, recognizing its (the *Christian Standard's*) jurisdiction over us or over any organization or individual of the Churches of Christ; but acknowledging that, as the editors of the *Christian Standard* are Disciples of Christ, and this enterprise belongs wholly to the brotherhood, they share with all the other members the right to know the facts." Sarcastic editorials did not end with Alexander Campbell; I think it was Alexander Campbell Smithers who penned this one.

We may now summarize Garrison's position regarding an editor's power and purpose with some quotations from himself and from what others said about him. In his last editorial, February 1, 1912, Garrison wrote regarding his editorship, "It has never recognized any conflict between the utmost loyalty to our plea for Christian unity, and cooperation with other believers in Christ in carrying forward enterprises of common interest for the furtherance of the kingdom. ...This position has caused opposition and misrepresentation, but who today does not recognize the vantage ground it has given us in our

propaganda of the New Testament plan for unity? On the other hand, *The Christian-Evangelist* has never advocated, but has stood four-square against, all proposed short-cuts to Christian union which compromise Christ's authority....Union is not to be hastened by the sacrifice of unity." Unfortunately, Garrison's last editorial did not become authoritative for our movement as a whole, and its unity disappeared.

With the February 1, 1912, issue, W. R. Warren became the sole editor. He wrote of Garrison in this issue: "These forty-three years he has been the seer, the peace-maker, and the soldier of righteousness. Modestly, as a young man, he helped in launching the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and the Foreign Christian Missionary Society. With increasing confidence he has championed in succession, each from its day of projection: Church Extension, Ministerial Relief, NBA, the Brotherhood (a men's organization) and the Christian Board of Publication. He was the prime mover of the Children's Day for Foreign Missions. ...He made the Christian Board of Publication a pioneer in Sunday school publications. Christian Endeavor, the Laymen's Missionary Movement and the Men and Religion Forward Movement found him an immediate friend."

Dr. Garrison continued his "Easy Chair" column after retiring as editor, as we have already indicated. In this first such effort, February 1, 1912, he had some whimsical, but perhaps true, things to say about editors. He wrote, "A few years ago someone wrote a book on 'How to Be Happy Though Married.' There is room for another book, if anyone will write it, on 'How to Be Honest and Fair, Though Editor of a Religious Journal.' Few positions offer more temptations to duplicity, misrepresentation and playing to the gallery. ...There is no class of people who need the prayers of their brethren more than the editors of religious papers. Yet, who prays for them? How few even understand the tax on their wisdom and their patience. They are often criticised for utterances, based on a wide knowledge of

facts, by readers who see only a very limited part of the field. ... (An editor's) motive is often misunderstood. Pray that he may be honest though an editor." This is the kind of comment an editor can make only in retirement.

The January 15, 1931, issue of *The Christian-Evangelist* carried the news: "For the first time in 62 years, the special New Year's number... carries no message from Dr. Garrison." An ad for the paper in the same issue contained the following testimony from R. H. Miller, minister of the Independence Boulevard Church in Kansas City, who would soon become the editor: "The Christian-Evangelist is frankly a Brotherhood newspaper with a wide outlook upon the whole Christian movement. ... It has been loyal to our representative organizations and at the same time given full recognition to the liberty of the individual and the local church."

Two days after this date, Dr. James M. Philputt gave the memorial address for Dr. Garrison in the Wilshire Boulevard Christian Church, Los Angeles, January 17, 1931.¹⁶ In it he said: "Our early leaders were Thomas and Alexander Campbell, then Isaac Errett; after him the mantle of leadership fell on Brother Garrison." Today our church work is divided into units of the church, with many departments and divisions in some of these units, plus boards of directors for each unit, chosen from the men and women who are active throughout the church. So, in the old sense, Dr. Garrison has no successor. But the operative word, from the Campbells to Garrison, was "leadership," not authority or power.

Perhaps George Campbell said it best in the January 22, 1931, issue: "Alexander Campbell, Isaac Errett and James Harvey Garrison are the triumvirate of Disciple editors who have joined the immortals. ..."

Speaking of the last to die, Campbell wrote, "James Harvey Garrison had the ability to keep far enough ahead of the

rank and file to be their leader, and their real leader; but not so far ahead as to break with them.”

IV

With some reluctance, I turn now to an overall estimate of “the power of the press,” as I have observed it and participated in it during the past three decades. Obviously, I cannot evaluate my own editorship in the long scheme of things but the Lectureship Committee has insisted that some personal references should be made by the only lecturer who has had to practice his theories while sitting in the editor’s chair.

The first thing I did was to read the first issue of *The Christian Evangelist* put out under my name, June 30, 1958. I wanted to read again all the nice things so many of my co-workers said about me and also the high promises I made.

The President of the company, Dr. Wilbur H. Cramblet, spoke of the task before me as “interpreting the program and plea of the Disciples of Christ, confident that his will be an effective voice for the unity of the church.” I see no mandate here for establishing a power base from which to “lead the brotherhood”; only the commission to interpret and to be an effective voice for unity.

This reminds me of something Dr. Cramblet said to me shortly after I became the editor, regarding my position. He said one day, “You know the Christian Board of Publication was organized for the purpose of putting out *The Christian-Evangelist*. Everything else we do was added later.” Then he added a stunner: “It has always been assumed that the editor of the *C-E* is completely free, as Dr. Garrison was when he owned the paper, to say whatever he wants to say.”

Nothing more was ever said about this matter. All I can say

now is that in sixteen and a half years, neither Dr. Cramblet nor his successor, Dr. Orville W. Wake, ever said, or even intimated, "Why did you write so and so?" or, "Don't take such and such an attitude again." Personally, I tried very hard to make myself a member of the publishing house team. In the House, I conferred with the heads of all departments related to mine as an equal, not as one around whose department the others were satellites. At the conventions and assemblies, I unpacked and packed as many cartons as anyone else. Whenever I thought of the possible position of power which I occupied, it scared me. Change was somewhat the order of the day during my term of office. We combined *The Christian-Evangelist* with the church school paper, *Front Rank*, after six months. During the year 1969, I carried both names on the masthead, against the better judgment of some of my colleagues, because I didn't want to lose the readers of either paper. As a result, we reached a peak circulation of 137,000. At the end of that year, I was given the privilege of naming the new paper and I chose to call it *The Christian*, picking up an earlier name, one-half of *The Christian-Evangelist* combination. Thus, I am the only editor this last incarnation of *The Christian* had. Its last issue came out at the end of 1973, when I retired. Combined with the monthly magazine which was being sponsored by several units of the church, *World Call*, the new journal is *The Disciple*. Dr. James L. Merrell, the efficient and popular editor, is the first professionally trained journalist to hold the position.

The danger for an editor is that good intentions and general philosophy may get caught up in the daily hustle and bustle. We are not quite like a daily newspaper in the scramble to go to press. But we were a weekly journal in my day, with certain daily deadlines. Some days there was no time to philosophize. "Where's that last head? This screen is an em too short. ...We've got to make a correction on the brownprints (a

procedure that always raised the roof on the composing room—‘You’re supposed to catch those errors on the proofs!’)...Need a two-inch filler here—anything already set?”

In the first issue under my name, I had said, “This is no time for promises, or for outlining a course of action. ...It is a time to reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, my conviction of his Lordship over the church and his ultimate victory over the world, and to pledge my best efforts to use *The Christian-Evangelist* as a vehicle for carrying the Good News and for assisting in the realization of Christ’s hope for the world, in whatever way human effort may prevail.”

In that first issue, the retiring editor, Dr. Cartwright, had written: “We welcome you to the editorship of this influential Disciple journal. How significant is your task and, we had almost said, ‘How impossible.’” If I had read that first, I might not have made such high promises.

The earlier editors gave great emphasis to beliefs, congregational practices, causes to be sponsored. By my time, there were many emphases that might appear to some as secondary which I considered important.

I was greatly concerned with the news. I was told by numerous fellow-editors in the Associated Church Press that a national journal could not print local church news. At the time, we were listing more than 7000 congregations in the Year Book. How could you cover news from one of them? Anyway, who cares if an old, retired pastor returned to Main Street Church for Women’s Day? Well, the answer is, “Several people care.” The congregation is glad to see its name in print; certainly the retired person is glad to be remembered, and any number of people who used to live in that community and now are scattered over the country remember both their home church and the minister who baptized them or married them.

Due to my former experiences and my particular academic interests, I received hundreds of invitations to local churches,

regional and national assemblies. I always wrote "Editorial Correspondence" after such a trip, a trick I remembered from "The Circulation Man Says," as William B. Clemmer called his column. (Incidentally, he put my name in *The Christian-Evangelist* for the very first time, in 1936.) My informal editorial pages received far more attention than the theological discourses did.

There was national and world news to handle, and we used all of it we could. You can always educate the readers through news items on matters they might resent if you stated them in an editorial as something you believed.

There were certain causes that I fostered in the paper because I believed in them. Those who didn't agree wrote lots of letters. One of these programs was the God and Country Award of the Boy Scouts of America and similar programs of the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. I put in 27 years as a Scouter and believe churches should promote Scouting. So, I published every picture of an award ceremony which we received. Often letters came: "Don't you know that those people just wanted to see their picture in the paper?" Editor's comment: "Sure." Some of the pictures had not only the scout and the minister in them, but also the scoutmaster, the parents, grandparents and Uncle Joe. When I was a little boy, the editor of our county weekly paper told my father that he tried to get the name of every subscriber in the paper at least once a year. After all, you have to have subscribers to live.

Another cause I believe in is the military and institutional chaplaincy. I undertook to print the picture of every chaplain, one a week. It took more than two years. This was at the very time that numerous persons and agencies were trying to get rid of the chaplains or, at least, get them out of uniform. The letters I got from these people indicated that their estimate of my religion, my education and my true intentions wasn't very high.

The mail is the best place to find out what kind of job you

are doing. The trick is to interpret correctly what the readers are saying. Some of them are prejudiced! Some have had their feelings hurt. Others are convinced that the editor is Satan incarnate. But still others write to say that their faith has been strengthened and their concerns enlarged. But often it seems as if the only power an editor has is to make people angry.

You print the letters, or excerpts from them. That makes people mad, too. Back comes a second letter: "Why did you cut out the best part of my letter?" Well, we had only one letters page; if we had printed all of yours, we would have had six angry letters from the other persons who were left out altogether. Writing a hundred letters a week to explain, appease, console and thank is just one small aspect of an editor's life.

Perhaps I used my power, if I had any, in the "Editor's Comment" which followed many of the printed letters. Many editors feel that it isn't ethical to have the last word. But I sort of enjoyed it. Often I felt that I could clarify an issue. And if the letter were adversely critical or suspicious of my loyalty, I felt justified in a last word of defense before the hanging.

For 25½ years I wrote an exposition of the International Uniform Sunday School Lesson in this paper, under its four titles. This exposed me as no other editor was ever exposed, for it meant that I had expounded on the whole Bible four times and was well into the fifth round. Some readers imagined they saw things that weren't there, but at other times, I was really caught. The worst situation was occasioned by my use of "immorality" for "immortality" in the discussion of a familiar text of Paul. Even the copy editors missed it. So, one dear lady knew she finally had me. As she wrote, "You deliberately inserted the wrong word into the text so that you could teach some more of your heresy." I never figured out what it was that I was supposed to have done, when it was really just stupidity and carelessness.

My editorship occurred during the Restructure period of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It did not dawn upon me until several years later that I had been a member of the very first committee that took the very first steps which were to lead to Restructure. One day Mr. Cramblet said to me, "Don't you remember the committee that met out on the porch at Pendleton Heights, when I was president of Bethany?" Of course I remembered it; the committee was composed of four college and university presidents, four deans and me, a lonely church history professor, representing the *hoi polloi*. "Well, Dr. Cramblet said, "that was the day Restructure began."

As a member of the Commission on Restructure and editor of the paper, I had to do some serious thinking about my use of editorial freedom. I decided that if I were to be a member of the Commission I had to act like one and not stand on the sidelines, commenting as an outsider. Also, I doubted that anything I wrote would be taken very seriously by a majority of the Commission. I decided to give full account of the procedures and to comment editorially upon matters which I felt needed explanation. I rarely took sides editorially, when there was disagreement in the Commission.

Perhaps I should say now what I did not write in those days: I never expected the Kingdom to arrive when Restructure was completed. I have never been that enamored of organization and structure or that expectant of the rewards inherent in redoing them. I felt that the best thing I could do was to point out, editorially, the best features and possible values in Restructure. I believe many of these have been accomplished.

When stupid charges were made against Restructure, I hit them as hard as I could. We all remember the mimeographed letter that every minister listed in the Year Book received. Assuming that the ministers controlled the churches, an assumption quite un-Disciple-like, the letter said, "Get your church out of the Year Book; they are going to take your

property! The "they" were not identified. The news spread like wildfire. Hundreds of letters arrived in my office. No one could object to a paper or an individual opposing the general principles of Restructure. But with scare tactics like that? Anyone really interested knew that at the very first session of the Commission we voted to discuss the restructuring of the church on the state (regional) and national (general) levels and to do or to say nothing about local churches. Congregations were, and are, "fiercely congregational" in government, as someone has characterized our polity.

In the congregation where I hold membership and in scores of churches across the country, as well as editorially, I tried to calm people and to point out the simple truth which they all knew but had forgotten in panic. The trustees hold the deed to the church property. This is a matter between them and the civil courts. No one could possibly get the deed away from the trustees unless they handed it over, voluntarily. While the Restructure Commission didn't have the slightest interest in accumulating a pocket full of deeds to local churches, how could it have gotten them, even if it did want them? I don't know if the editor did any good in all this; I hope so.

During my years, I was fortunate to be able to travel in 58 countries, to fellowship with church men and women of every persuasion, to chat with a pope and a score of cardinals, to interview a king, three presidents, several ambassadors, a prime minister, three foreign ministers, the mayors of Jerusalem, Nazareth and Jericho, and to write about these experiences. I tried to be as ecumenical as Alexander Campbell and Isaac Errett in the interdenominational organizations I joined and supported. I tried to bring the readers along with me in this fellowship, largely through the "Editorial Correspondence" page.

Perhaps my editorship was what salespersons today call the "soft sell." I sensed no desire for power or to leave a follow-

ing behind. This is what I think of our total theme: the power of the press. Its power ought to be its message. It ought to be built on a positive faith, not on a negative program to destroy the opposition. We can't expect one big, happy family of readers, any more than a local congregation is of one mind. But we can hope for peace, cooperation, good will, Christian principles of living and personal friendships such as I enjoyed with Edwin Hayden of the *Christian Standard*, B. C. Goodpasture of the *Gospel Advocate* and a hundred others in the broader field of religious journalism.

In that framework, we can agree to disagree intellectually, organizationally, and sometimes theologically, but love one another because we were first loved by Jesus Christ. If an editor can generate these positive qualities and get the readers to practice them, that editor has power.

ENDNOTES

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
4. James DeForrest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1962), p. 216.
5. Joseph Franklin, *Life and Times of Elder Benjamin Franklin* (St. Louis: John Burns, 1879), p. 274.
6. Daniel Sommer, *Concerning Church Government* (Indianapolis: Octographic Review, 1910).
7. Howard E. Short, "Some Contributions of Isaac Errett," *The College of the Bible Quarterly* (April, 1950), p. 3.
8. Winfred Ernest Garrison, *An American Religious Movement* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1945), p. 127.
9. Short, *Op. cit.*, p. 9.
10. James Harvey Garrison, *The Reformation of the Nineteenth Century* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1901), p. 293.
11. Murch, *Op. cit.*, p. 187.
12. *The Christian Evangelist* (January 2, 1913).

13. Daniel Troxel, "The Editorship of James Harvey Garrison," *The College of the Bible Quarterly* (April, 1950), p. 14.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 467.

15. Troxel, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

16. James M. Philputt, "An Appreciation of Dr. Garrison," *The Christian Evangelist* (March 12, 1931), p. 353.

