

An Open Letter to Brown Street in Akron, Ohio

Mike Willis

Dear Brethren,

I extend my warmest greetings to each member of the Brown Street church. Ever since I began preaching, I have known of the Brown Street congregation. My brother Cecil was preaching there in a two preacher arrangement, first with Connie W. Adams and later with Ferrell Jenkins. He was preaching and editing *Truth Magazine* at the same time. When he moved away from Brown Street to preach in Marion, IN, I still received *The Enlightener* and enjoyed keeping up with the activities at Brown Street. Little did I know that some years later my brother Lewis would spend over twenty years in your pulpit. You were kind enough to invite my brother Don for a meeting and, on two separate occasions, to have me with you for a meeting.

My acquaintance with Bob Dickey goes back nearly thirty years. I have known his family in the Indianapolis area ever since I moved to preach at Mooresville in 1969. He and I have not had opportunity to spend a lot of time together but all that we have spent together has been warm and cordial. He followed me in the work at Trader's Point in Indianapolis. He has held meetings where I preached at Danville and, I believe, I was in a meeting at Trader's Point while he was there, but I could be mistaken about that. He was a staff writer for *Truth Magazine* for several years.

I mention these warm relationships in order that you might know how painful it is for me to write this letter. I regret having come to such a disagreement that I feel the need to send a letter to the membership of the Brown Street congregation to respond to a sermon preached in January 29, 2006 by brother Dickey. I contacted brother Dickey to receive a copy of his sermon. Before he responded, brother Dan King wrote an article which was posted on the internet in which he mentioned Bob's sermon and the elders' decision to discontinue financial fellowship with those who were participating in the Truth Magazine lectureship (see [www.truthmagazine.com/articles/collectivities/Response to Gene Frost by Dan King](http://www.truthmagazine.com/articles/collectivities/Response%20to%20Gene%20Frost%20by%20Dan%20King)). Bob wrote me a three page letter about brother King's reference to him and Brown St. I replied to Bob in a phone call asking to meet with him. I believed he sinned against God and me in his sermon. But Bob has refused to meet with me in spite of two separate appeals (although the second appeal conflicted with a meeting he was holding, he left no uncertain impression that he was unwilling to meet with me), leaving me no alternative to address this situation except directly to you in this letter. One cannot respond to a full sermon in two or three pages, so I ask your forbearance in reading through this lengthy reply. Inasmuch as brother Dickey reacted with a three-page letter to his name and the Brown St. congregation being mentioned in one paragraph in an article by brother King, I believe he should understand why it is natural that I would respond to his January 29, 2006 sermon that was preached at Brown Street.

Those of you who have attended Brown Street through the years and have known the Willis family, know that there are few more committed to opposing church support of human institutions than we are. I invite you to look at my writings in particular. You can visit our web site (truthmag.com) and research "institutionalism," the "all-sufficiency of the church," etc. to see what I have written through the years. I invite you to read my workbook *Passing the Torch* for lessons on church support of human institutions. Anyone who would represent me as defending missionary societies or participating in one misrepresents me, either intentionally or unintentionally. You can imagine my disappointment in brother Dickey representing me as among those brethren who believe in missionary societies or by my actions endorsing them!

I can agree with much that brother Dickey said in his sermon. I believe in the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ as man's Savior (Heb. 10:9-10); I believe in the all-sufficiency of Scripture (Jude 3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17); and I believe in the all-sufficiency of the church (Eph. 3:8; 4:7-16).

But brother Dickey's sermon goes well beyond opposition to church supported missionary societies. He uses the word "missionary society" in a new way and then charges that the brethren associated with the Guardian of Truth Foundation endorse missionary societies according to his new definition. The term "missionary society" has historically been used to describe those church supported institutions that in turn provided support for preachers in the field. Brother Dickey knows that he cannot prove that the Guardian of Truth Foundation ever received a donation from any church and knows that he cannot name a single preacher for whom the Foundation provided financial support in its fifty years of existence. So, he changes the meaning of "missionary society" to describe what it was never before used to describe—individuals working together, totally separated from involvement with any local church. Even with this, he cannot provide the name of a single person supported by the foundation to do the work of gospel preacher. Nevertheless, having changed the definition of "missionary society" and without telling his audience that he is using the term in a peculiar and different sense, he publicly accused the Guardian of Truth Foundation with being a missionary society. Bob said,

But in the last two years, it has become evidence that they (the Guardian of Truth Foundation, mw) desire to function as a privately support missionary society, involved in doing what we believe God gave the church to do. . . .

Quoting anonymously Don Martin, Bob said,

with the lectureship it clearly progressed from being an alleged secular foundation run by and comprised of brethren for the purpose of making money. It officially and overtly placed itself into a privately funded entity status that affords and encourages Christians to pool their resources in working through a human organization to teach and preach the gospel, an organization in addition to and separate from the local church, which God has appointed to afford such pooling and organization for Christians to collectively preach the gospel.

In doing this, he takes the position that teaching the Bible is the *exclusive* work of the local church—that no other organization can teach the Bible. In taking this position, brother Dickey has identified himself with the Daniel Sommer position and the statement by the elders has identified the Brown Street church with the position of Daniel Sommer. Here is brother Dickey's argument:

But, I cannot find authority for men who are Christians banding together, pooling their funds, placing themselves under a board of directors, and asking for individual Christians to contribute to something that God gave the church to do.

When God is specific that is our pattern. And my friends, God has been very specific about who is to do this work. Now there is not a statement in the Bible that says that individuals can't form a corporation or an institution or a foundation or a benevolent society to do work that God gave the church to do.

But, the fact that the statement is not there means that it is not authorized. God has been specific. He gave this work to the church.¹

¹ Brother Dickey protests being represented as believing that God gave the church exclusive responsibility to teach the Bible. I draw this conclusion based on the following: (1) His argument that God specifically authorized the organization to teach the Bible and help the Christian just like he specified singing. The nature of specific authority is that it excludes everything else in the same class. (2) His direct statements:

And, individuals also have a responsibility, but let me tell you brethren, there is no authority for Christians forming a benevolent society with a board of directors, a treasury, structure and so on to relieve needy saints. If this is scriptural, I cannot find it anywhere in my Bible. I realize as I say these words tonight that I am saying things that will probably hurt and wound some of my friends who are involved in this endeavor. I will be misunderstood. I will be falsely charged perhaps as being unkind and inconsiderate and not a benevolent person. But, I cannot find authority for men who are Christians banding together, pooling their funds, placing themselves under a board of directors, and asking for individual Christians to contribute to something that God gave the church to do (Sermon p. 5).

I believe it is wrong for brethren to pool their resources together and form human and privately funded missionary societies, edification organizations, and benevolent organizations. God has already assigned the collective or corporate work of teaching the lost and edifying the saints, and, when circumstances demand it, relieving the physical needs of the saints in His organization, the local church.

Bob thinks he has avoided the Sommerism doctrine by admitting that individuals can work together. He said,

No one is opposed to working together. It is not a question of whether Christians can be involved in what they have said is distributive action in an aggregate setting like eating the Lord's Supper. I believe I can do that with you. I believe I am supposed to do that with you. And so, you can talk about distributive action in an aggregate setting and I am not opposed to that, but that is not what this is.

However, I ask what does he mean by "distributive action in an aggregate setting"? Where would one read about "distributive action in an aggregate setting" in his Bible? The language "distributive action in an aggregate setting" comes from Don Martin, not the Bible. These are the hairline distinctions brother Dickey's position forces him to hold. If all brethren under God's blue heaven have to make the same hairline distinctions brother Dickey and brother Martin make in order to go to heaven when they die, we are all in trouble! The word "distributive" is defined as "referring to each member of a group regarded individually." "Aggregate" means "formed into a whole, mass, or sum, united; combined; total." "Distributive action in an aggregate setting" is nothing more than collective action. Brother Dickey gave an example of "distributive action in an aggregate setting" which he approves—the Lord's supper. Here is an action taken together under common oversight presented by an institutional body (whether viewed by the civil authorities as incorporated or unincorporated). To demonstrate that distributive action is not collective action, try to imagine "distributive action in an aggregate setting" for churches. Distributive action is one church doing its work and another church doing its work; but collective action involves oversight and all acting together. I ask you brethren, "Is taking the Lord's supper each Christian acting individually or is it collective action?" Common oversight determines when and where it will be taken, who will preside (note that "preside" implies someone is over others) at the Table, and common funds are used to provide the elements, trays and plate and table, place for

Daniel Sommer opposed Bible colleges on the grounds the church is the exclusive organization which can teach the Bible. To show that this is the teaching of Daniel Sommer, please read the following quotations:

The Rebirth of Sommerism

In Daniel Sommer's debate with J.N. Armstrong entitled, *A Report of Skirmishes Between a Religious Journal and a Religio-Secular College*, Sommer argued:

"Fourth. Then, in the next place we oppose this institution and pronounce it unscriptural because of what the apostle Paul says in his first letter to Timothy, third chapter, 15th verse, where he says to Timothy: 'But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.' So then, my hearers, he says the Church of God is the house of the living God, and adds, which is 'the pillar and ground of the truth.' So, if the Church of God, without any such appendage as this, is the pillar and ground of the truth, we object to this institution, established for the purpose of teaching mankind in religion (13).

D. Austen Sommer, son of Daniel, wrote (and please note the similarity to what brother Dickey preached),

Any human organization with its president, secretary, treasurer, laws, established by Christians to teach the Bible, help the poor or sick or do any other work of the Church is unscriptural, unnecessary and dangerous. The David Lipscomb School and the other "Bible" and "Christian" colleges are human organizations established to do work of the Church for which Christ died, and thus they are unscriptural (13).

These brethren were not discussing whether or not church support of these organizations was scriptural; they were discussing whether or not these human organizations sinned when they taught the Bible. The Sommers believed the work of teaching the Bible was given *exclusively* to the church.

Carl Ketcherside affirmed the same principle in his St. Louis debate (1953) with G.K. Wallace:

partaking, etc. If this is what brother Dickey means by "distributive action in an aggregate setting" then about any collective arrangement can be approved. Guardian of Truth Foundation can call its action "distribute action in an aggregate setting" but brother Dickey can see clearly enough that this is a collective action. I challenge brother Dickey to define "distributive action in an aggregate setting," something which he approves, in such a way as to exclude the Guardian of Truth Foundation.

I challenge brother Dickey to define collective, institutional, and organization in such a way as to include the Guardian of Truth Foundation but to exclude Florida College and the Florida College camps, both of which he participates in, defends, and has never renounced.

Brother Dickey writes, "I think the school has a right to teach the Bible. . . ." What Bible verses authorizes Florida College to teach the Bible and prohibits the Guardian of Truth Foundation from doing the same? Brother Dickey has not and cannot answer this question!

The only thing I am interested in is whether it is a human organization doing the work that God intended for the church to do. I do not care where he puts it or what he calls it. It does not make any difference to me where you place a missionary society. It does not make any difference to me where you put a society like that. All I want to know is what it is doing. You may call it what you please, and put it in any category you wish, but let me tell you that when it does the work God ordained for His one body to do, brother Wallace himself says it is unscriptural and he will give it up (189).

Ketcherside claimed that the school was a “missionary society” (197). Brother G.K. Wallace attacked the taproot of Ketcherside’s argument, the same taproot that brother Dickey is teaching today, when he said,

He (Ketcherside, mw) *assumed a premise* that he never did try to prove. He *assumed* that teaching the Bible is the exclusive work of the church. He never did try to prove that teaching the Bible is the *exclusive* work of the church (240).

In Leroy Garrett’s debate with Bill Humble on the Bible college issue, Humble asked Garrett to prove that teaching the Bible is the exclusive work of the church (112). Leroy Garrett replied,

Is preaching the Bible the exclusive work of the church? Well, he believes it is. Surely preaching is the exclusive work of the church, so how about the missionary society? Oh, but he says, “The church *as the church*, or is it also the work of individual Christians *as individuals*? Now here is the argument: It would be wrong for the church as such to start an organization, such as a Bible college; but it is right for individuals to do so. Well, now let us see if it will work on the missionary society that way. Now, brother Humble, would it be all right for some of us to gather a group of individuals and start a missionary society? (121)

Later, brother Garrett said,

Is not this the church’s work? Is not the church’s obligation to teach the one Lord, the one faith, and to preach Christ? And yet here you have Florida Christian College preaching Christ? Who is featuring this lectureship? Florida Christian College is. Who is sponsoring these twenty-seven lectures? Florida Christian College. What is it? This is a gospel meeting. Conducted by a church? No, it is conducted by a college, under the supervision of that college (127).

I reproduce these quotations for you to put brother Dickey’s argument in its proper context. Brother Dickey is preaching Sommerism. Anyone who reads the above quotations can see that brethren Carl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, Gene Frost, and now Bob Dickey are making the same argument. These brethren protest the description of their doctrine as “Sommerism.” They dislike this description because they are aware of the factional division Sommer’s doctrine caused among Christians several decades ago. They dislike the description because Sommer and his colleagues applied their teaching to Bible colleges whereas the new Sommerites do not want to apply their teaching to Florida College because brethren widely believe that Florida College has a right to exist, many of them have spoken on the lecture programs at Florida College, and many of them attend the lectures participating in the collective singing, praying, and Bible teaching which occur during the lectures. They do not want brethren to know that the very arguments they are using against the Guardian of Truth Foundation were used by earlier Sommerites to prove that Florida

College had no right to teach the Bible. Remember the adage: If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck! These brethren are true Sommerites.

What is especially interesting is that brother Dickey uses the identical argument that the Sommerites use to oppose Bible colleges but does not so much as mention Florida College in his sermon. He is opposed to a human institution sponsoring a lectureship in Bowling Green, KY but he says nothing about a human institution sponsoring a lectureship in Tampa, FL. He condemns the Guardian of Truth Foundation as an individually supported missionary society but has participated in the human institution (Florida College) sponsoring a lectureship at Tampa. Is it right to do in Tampa what it is wrong to do in Bowling Green? If brother Dickey were only interested in pursuing the truth, does it make any sense that he would attack the human institution sponsoring a lectureship that is less than one-fourth the size of the one in Tampa? Why condemn the little lectureship in Bowling Green and say nothing about the big lectureship in Tampa?

Further Extremism

A further example of brother Dickey's extreme position is his conclusion that brethren can only work collectively in benevolence for saints through the local church. Brother Dickey said:

And, individuals also have a responsibility, but let me tell you brethren, there is no authority for Christians forming a benevolent society with a board of directors, a treasury, structure and so on to relieve needy saints. If this is scriptural, I cannot find it anywhere in my Bible.

Brother Dickey has now taken another step that only a few of the Sommerites take. He believes that Christians cannot make contributions to any organization which provides benevolent help to Christians except through the local church. This means, whether or not brother Dickey accepts the logical conclusion to his argument, that one cannot make a contribution to the Heart Fund, American Cancer Society, Diabetes Foundation, etc. if it helps so much as one Christian because that would put it in competition with the local church, even though no church funds are involved.

And interestingly enough, brother Yater Tant suggested that we should put a "box in the vestibule" so that individuals could contribute to orphan homes, old folks homes, unwed mothers homes, and other benevolent works so that these institutions could be supported by individual contributions rather than church contributions and thus avoid brethren dividing over institutionalism. Though I think brother Tant's suggestion was naive, this manifests Tant's and the majority of his brethren's understanding that churches did not have *exclusive* responsibility in benevolence. As a matter of fact, I can't name a single gospel preacher who would agree with brother Dickey on this point, except D. Austen Sommer.

Brother Dickey's Proof

Brother Dickey tried to sustain his position on the basis of the following Scriptures: Eph. 3:8; 4:7-16; 1 Tim. 3:15. There is not one word in any of these verses that says the church has *exclusive* responsibility in the teaching of the Bible.

Brother Dickey and I agree that the Bible does not contradict itself. The Bible shows other groups of brethren singing, offering prayer, and teaching the Bible outside the congregational assemblies of the local church. Acts 12:12 describes many who had gathered together for prayer (this is distinct from what the church was doing in 12:5). Jesus assembled with the Twelve in the upper room for teaching (see John 14-17), prayer (Matt. 26:28), and singing (Matt. 26:30).

Both Jesus before the establishment of the church and Paul (and others) after the establishment of the church taught the Bible in the synagogue (Acts 17:1-3). The synagogue was a human institution, not mentioned in the Old Testament that was begun in the intertestament period. The earliest evidence of a synagogue is from the third century B.C. in Egypt. The synagogue was supported by individual contributions, used some of its resources for benevolence, and had prayer and taught the Bible. It had organization, being overseen by rulers of the synagogue (*archon* and *archisunagogos*). Jesus participated in the synagogues while on earth (Luke 4:16—"as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day") and Paul participated in them after the church was established. If the church is the only collectivity which can have singing, prayer, and teach the Bible, what was Paul doing praying and teaching the Bible in the synagogue? Yet, Acts 17:2 says that his custom or manner was to teach the Bible in the synagogue. This teaching of the Bible by this human institution occurred after the church was established and an inspired apostle participated in it. Did he sin? Can I follow an apostle's example (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9)?

In Luke 8:1-3, women made contributions to Jesus and the Twelve, which contributions were put into a "bag" (treasury) that Judas kept for them (John 12:6), from which were supplied benevolence and the needs of Jesus and the Twelve while they were teaching (Luke 8:1-3; John 13:29). Can we follow the example of Jesus and the Twelve?

By denying that Christians can do what Jesus and the Apostles did, brother Dickey unwittingly undermines the authority of apostolic examples!

This biblical evidence effectively destroys the thesis that the church the only organization which has Bible authority to teach the Bible, the underlying premise on which brother Dickey builds his case to oppose the Guardian of Truth Foundation for sponsoring its lectureships. Any conclusion based on that thesis is wrong.

Inconsistency

Brother Dickey is very inconsistent with the teaching that he delivered in this sermon. Brother Dickey explains that he believes the church is the exclusive institution that can teach the Bible but, in the past Bob Dickey has participated in several human institutions that having singing, prayer, and teach the Bible. In 1996, brother Dickey preached a sermon at the Florida College lectures and in his biographical sketch he indicated that he was a student at Florida College (1962-63, 1965, 1970-72), Butler University (1976), and Luther Rice Seminary (1979-80)—all of these are human institutions that teach the Bible. Wouldn't it be just as wrong to be a student in one of these institutions that teaches the Bible as it is to teach in one of them? (Is it acceptable to attend the Truth Magazine lectures so long as one does not speak?) He said that he was "the first president of the North Central Alabama chapter of the Florida College Booster Club" and "he and Charlotte. . . were the first directors of the Florida College camp in Indiana (1982-83)." I participated in the Indiana chapter of the Florida College camp. When I was there, we studied the Bible, had prayer, and singing, just like we do at the Florida College lectures and at the Truth Magazine lectures. Perhaps brother Dickey can tell us why it is right for him to do what he prohibits others to do. We ask him to tell us plainly: Are the lectures, chapel services, and other worship services conducted at Florida College and Booster Camps sinful organizations—individually supported missionary societies? Did he sin when he spoke at and attended the Florida College lectures?

Let's see if brother Dickey will apply his own reasoning to his participation in Florida College. He writes,

“If you don't think that the Foundation is doing a better job than the church in teaching the Bible, why not discontinue your lectureship? You know that several voices of concern have been raised in objection to what you are now doing. Why not allow a local congregation in Bowling Green to have the annual lectureship, if they desire? Why must the Foundation feel that they have to control what is being preached among brethren?”

To this I reply, “If you don't think Florida College is doing a better job than the church in teaching the Bible, why don't you tell Florida College to discontinue their chapels, camps and lectureships? You know that several voices of concern have been raised in objection to what they are doing. Why not allow a local congregation in Akron or Tampa to have the annual lectureship, if they desire? Why must the college feel that they have to control what is preached among brethren?” If the argument has any validity, it applies with equal force to Florida College which brother Dickey defends.

Brother Don Martin whom brother Dickey quotes to show the Guardian of Truth Foundation has no right to sponsor a lecture program at Bowling Green uses the very same arguments brother Dickey uses to conclude that Florida College does not have a right to conduct a “gospel meeting” (lecture program) in Tampa. In this he is more consistent than brother Dickey.

Consider the following parallels between what brother Dickey opposes and what he has participated in and, defends as righteous:

Guardian of Truth Foundation	Florida College	North Alabama Florida College Booster Club	Indiana Florida College Booster Club
Is incorporated	Is incorporated	Is incorporated	Is incorporated
President–Head	President–Head	President–Head	President–Head
Editor selects writers and board selects speakers	President selects faculty; faculty selects lecture speakers	Director selects counselors	Director selects counselors
Regulates content of magazine/lectures	Regulates content of Bible classes, lectures	Regulates teaching done at camp	Regulates teaching done at camp
Has singing, prayer and teaches Bible	Has singing, prayer and teaches Bible	Has singing, prayer and teaches Bible	Has singing, prayer and teaches Bible
Depends on individuals for support	Depends on individuals for support	Depends on individuals for support	Depends on individuals for support
Not under elders of any church	Not under elders of any church	Not under elders of any church	Not under elders of any church
Does not do work of church	Does not do work of church	Does not do work of church	Does not do work of church

I ask brother Dickey to define “organization” in such a way as to exclude Florida College, the North Alabama Florida College Booster Club, and the Indiana Florida College Booster Club but to include the Guardian of Truth Foundation. If there is no difference, how can brother Dickey defend his involvement in these other organizations while teaching his position that God specified the organization which is to teach the Bible.

If all of these organizations are the same, why didn't brother Dickey plainly tell the brethren at Brown Street that he is just as opposed to Florida College teaching the Bible, having daily chapel services, and conducting a lectureship as he is with Truth Magazine conducting one? If all of these organizations are the same, why didn't he tell the church at Brown Street that those who participate in the Florida College camps are equally as guilty of participating in an "individually supported missionary society" as those who participate in the Truth Magazine lectures? And why don't the elders make an announcement stating that they are going to quit providing financial fellowship or to invite for meetings those who speak at the Florida College lectures or participate in the Florida College Booster Club camps?

But brother Dickey sees nothing wrong with Florida College teaching the Bible and conducting a "gospel meeting."

We are interested in having brother Dickey and the Brown Street elders tell those members at Brown Street who participate in the West Virginia and Northern Ohio Booster Clubs and camps, where the Bible is taught, individuals conduct singing, and have prayer (both institutions do the same thing that are done at the Guardian of Truth Lectures) that they are also guilty of promoting an individually supported missionary society by their participation in these institutions? What will the elders do with these following members at Brown Street who are participating in these camps?

David and Leslie Ferry
Don and Brenda Watts
Shawn and Julie Etheridge
Lance and Diane Cain
Todd and Lori Taylor
Tim and Kim Taylor

Why is it right for these members to do the same thing that brother Dickey and the elders condemn those associated with the Guardian of Truth Foundation for doing? Brother Dickey and the elders may engage in hair splitting to justify the one and condemn the other, but most brethren can see rather plainly the inherent inconsistency.

Brother Dickey struggles with this Brown Street problem charging that my mention of the brethren listed above is designed to smear their names. That is not the case. I believe they are to be commended for what they are doing and have done the same myself. What I am calling attention to is brother Dickey and the elders' inconsistency. Brother Dickey said, "they are not involved in preaching the gospel like the Foundation is now doing"—when they are doing the same thing we are doing in a different human institution—teaching the Bible, having prayer, and singing. There is not a man living who can demonstrate that what Florida College and its camps are doing is right but what the Guardian of Truth Foundation is doing is wrong. And that was the reason I made specific mention of brother Dickey and the elders' at Brown Street's inconsistent application of their new found doctrine.

Paul said, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom. 2:1). Brother Dickey and the elders at Brown Street need to carefully study what Romans 2:1 says.

Hijacking Scholars

Brother Dickey quoted a number of well-known gospel preachers as if they were teaching the same thing as he is now teaching. He quoted David Lipscomb as if he agreed with him that the work of teaching the Bible was the exclusive prerogative of the church. If that were so, why would David Lipscomb have edited *Gospel Advocate* and started David Lipscomb College? He quoted Benjamin Franklin, but if Franklin agreed with him that the right of teaching the Bible was the *exclusive* prerogative of the church why did he start the *American Christian Review*? He quoted Roy E. Cogdill, as if brother Cogdill agreed with him that the church has the *exclusive* right to teach the Bible, yet brother Cogdill started the *Gospel Guardian* which was owned and distributed by the Foundation presently known as Guardian of Truth Foundation, taught at Florida College, spoke at Florida College lectureships, and otherwise promoted donations to both organizations. It simply is not true that these scholars agreed with brother Dickey. Brother Dickey has misrepresented these men when he leaves the impression that they supported Sommerite teaching.

Misrepresenting Brethren

Sometimes in the midst of preaching a lesson, a brother overstates his case. Perhaps that is what happened when brother Dickey misrepresented me and others associated with the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Regardless of why a person misrepresents his brother, he has an obligation to correct it when it happens.

Here are some things brother Dickey charged:

It is not uncommon for these parties to decide what should and should not become an issue among brethren, what men to support or not to support, and what meetings to announce locally. I believe that sometimes these men that are a part of these institutions, these foundations began to think they know better than anyone else in the brotherhood about who should be helped, about what should be done, what the real issues are today, and whether or not we should announce brother So-n-So's gospel meeting because he's either with us or he is against us.

If brother Dickey is going to make that charge, perhaps he can provide the documentation to prove it. Otherwise, it is only his evil surmising. Who has done this? And isn't this exactly what Bob Dickey and the Brown Street elders are doing when they decide to make their Sommerite position a condition of salvation and a test of fellowship?

Brother Dickey also said,

They give a greater allegiance to them. They are more involved with them.

There are people that give more to the institutions than they give to the Lord on the first day of the week, when God has commanded that they give as they have been prospered.

I mentioned these charges to brother Dickey on the phone and he wrote me back in an e-mail, "I looked at my lesson again, particularly the part in the lesson where I say: 'Some give greater allegiance to them and work harder to support and fund them than they do the local church'. In the context of my lesson, I was not specifically talking about the Truth Foundation, but was speaking of 'institutions' in general. I know my thought at the time was particularly mindful of the missionary society, the Herald of Truth, and such like. I did not have you personally in mind." I appreciate brother Dickey clarifying this, for he would have to know the hearts of each member of the Foundation to be able to prove the former and to know how much each of these men gave

to both the local church and to the Foundation to be able to prove the latter. Regardless, brother Dickey needs to make this clarification that he did not mean this to include those associated with the Truth Magazine lectures just as publicly as he made his charges.

Brother Dickey clarifies in a private letter to me that he did not mean the Guardian of Truth Foundation. He said, "You know that my statements toward the end of my lesson, as I informed you earlier, are said about an 'institutional mentality,' and that I was not saying that these were *your* particular attitudes or actions (My notes and lesson CD clearly mention the ACMS and Herald of Truth)." The truth is that brother Dickey could no more prove these things about those associated with the ACMS and the Herald of Truth than he could about those associated with the Guardian of Truth Foundation. He made charges that he cannot and could not prove. He has simply false accused someone other than those associated with the Truth Magazine lectures.

But brother Dickey made many other charges. He charged that we thought the Foundation can do a better job than the church in teaching the Bible. That is not true. Not one of us believes this. Brother Dickey needs to make correction just as publicly as he made his charges.

He charged, "And many times, they defend these institutions more than they defend the Scriptures and the will of God, I am afraid." This allegation is false also. Brother Dickey needs to make correction just as publicly as he made his charges.

He charged, "And I think, many men are glad to find a position and power and the ability to do something in a realm where in the church perhaps they are not able to function." How could brother Dickey know the heart of any of us? Only God himself has the ability to know such things. Brother Dickey needs to make correction just as publicly as he made his charges.

Brother Dickey charged that "they have a way of involving local churches in their campaigns, in their sphere of influence to the detriment of these local churches." What is he talking about? Who is guilty? Let him provide his documentation or withdraw his charge. I deny that I am guilty.

Brother Dickey's description of the Akin Foundation is not accurate either. Ask any of its Board Members. The Akin Foundation is a trust set up by a brother in Texas who was fortunate enough to own several oil wells. He left a portion of his estate to churches. The Akin Foundation never has asked individuals or churches to make contributions to their Foundation in order to support gospel preachers. Brother Dickey made another false charge, this time against the Akin Foundation. Rather, the money was going the other way. This brother left money to give to churches. When an institutional church made an effort to take control of this money, brother Cogdill asked churches and individuals to help cover the legal expenses to keep that from happening. I am rather confident that these monies were not donated to the Akin Foundation because the Akin Foundation was at that time under control of the courts. Whether or not one agrees with individuals and churches helping to pay for these legal bills (*Truth Magazine* carried an article challenging that as well as did one or two other journals), it is inaccurate to describe the Akin Foundation as a missionary society, even if one uses brother Dickey's special and unique definition. And the fact of the matter is that not one church gave a dime to this effort, according to what brother Cogdill said. (I have never received a dime from the Akin Foundation and have never been associated with it in any capacity, lest someone is wondering.)

But, I predict that brother Dickey will not be able go into the pulpit and make these corrections for the same reason that Paul Blake has not been allowed to correct the mistakes he made in his sermon during a gospel meeting in the October 2004. After brother Blake preached his lesson, he discussed with the brethren whom he had indicted (Ron Halbrook, Weldon Warnock, Harry

Osborne, and Tim Haile) what he accused them of and found that he was mistaken. He wanted to return to Brown Street and correct his misrepresentations and the elders have to this day refused to allow him to make correction. Finally 18 months after the event, the Brown Street elders made a statement for brother Blake, which corrected part of what he preached. They continue to this day to forbid brother Blake access to their pulpit to make full correction. In order to present a complete, unedited version of his correction along with enough documentation to demonstrate that he was

eager to make the correction early on in these events, brother Blake posted his statement and his entire correspondence on a web site (<http://www.paulrblake.blogspot.com>). He related to me that he could not in good conscience allow their much edited version of his correction to be represented by implication as my total correction. Based on how the Brown Street elders have handled this brother, I predict that the Brown Street elders will not allow brother Dickey to correct his mistakes either! We will wait and see. What a change in Brown Street which used to advertise that it had an open pulpit and would welcome those who disagreed with their public teaching to come into their pulpit and show them where they were teaching error. Now it is different!

Guilty of What He Charged Others With Doing

Brother Dickey charged that those associated with Guardian of Truth were guilty of causing disruption and a party spirit.

And these collectives and societies have and always will cause disruption and party spirit and eventually, I believe, they will cause division in the body of Christ just as we see its happened before with the Christian Church and our own brethren because of the institutions and societies which they continue to adamantly set before us.

Brother Dickey cannot find the man who can show that he has been treated as if he were unworthy of church support and/or of fellowship should he decide not to subscribe to *Truth Magazine* and/or attend the Truth Magazine lectures. Those of us associated with the Guardian of Truth Foundation do not believe that one has to be associated in any way with the Foundation to go to heaven when he dies, any more than one has to attend Florida College or its lectures to go to heaven when he dies.

But, interestingly, the ones who are guilty of factional and party spirit turn out to be those who are making it a test of fellowship, just as Daniel Sommer, Carl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, and others did in the past. Ron Mayfield, speaking for the elders, made a statement for the Brown Street elders which accused men of “robbing God of His glory” by participating in the Truth Magazine lectures. Then he said,

This teaching was requested by the elders as a preemptive measure to specific action that we as elders must exercise. The elders will be contacting some of the men we currently [supporting?] from this congregation in whom we no longer have confidence. And additionally, some who have caused a great disturbance, and needless to say disruption, among fellow Christians. We have not reached hastily the conclusion in this matter, but after careful and prayerful consideration, much meeting and deliberation, we have found that we should no longer have financial fellowship with men who are taking part in these matters. We simply cannot support preachers who are connected with or are participating in these endeavors.

My dear brethren, the elders at Brown Street decided to drop their support of Daniel Ruegg, Tom Roberts, and Don Willis because they are speaking at the 2006 Truth Magazine lectures. Brother Mayfield said that Brown Street “no longer have confidence” in these men and charged that they “have caused a great disturbance, and needless to say disruption, among fellow Christians.” We have not made participation in the lecture program a test of fellowship, caused disturbance and needless disruption over this issue, but the elders of the Brown Street church and Bob Dickey have made it a test of salvation and fellowship, all the while charging that we are creating the problem. They are walking in the footsteps of the Sommerites.

Brethren at Brown Street, your elders and preachers have led you into a position that would not allow most of the men who have worked with you in the past and held your gospel meetings to return for a meeting at Brown Street, men such as Lewis Willis, Connie W. Adams, Weldon E. Warnock, Tom Roberts, Andy Alexander, Dan King, Ron Halbrook, Harry Osborne, Jason Hardin, Brian Sullivan, and many others like them. Are you aware that your eldership and local preacher have taken this church in a different direction than the Brown Street church has stood for the past forty to fifty years?

A Matter of Indifference or A Matter of The Faith?

When brother Dickey reacted to his and Brown Street’s name being mentioned in the article by brother King, he responded by stating that the Brown Street church was making a judgment decision regarding whom they chose to support. Here is what he wrote me:

The decision to discontinue the support of these men is not a congregational action to mark or withdraw fellowship; neither is it an attempt to dictate to others in the body of Christ what they are to believe. We believe, like you, that local congregations have a right to make sound judgments about who they can conscientiously support.

No doubt, the congregation where you are (and the congregations of other writers for Truth Magazine) have made decisions in the past about who they will and will not send monthly support to, or who they will or will not invite to hold gospel meetings. All of us may differ on those judgments, but we seek to maintain congregational autonomy and do not press our judgments on other brethren or churches. Dan has written that you “have been urging continued fellowship” with brethren who disagree, even though individual preachers, elders, and congregations make these local decisions about who to support and who to invite for meetings. I do not believe you are guilty of dividing the body of Christ just because you make such local choices. Is this not the same for those of us at Brown Street? *No one has marked or withdrawn from any preacher* (my emphasis, mw); the elders just felt they had to be consistent with their personal views on this issue. If you and Dan have helped draw conclusions that have affected who you support and who you have for meetings, why are we guilty of dividing the body of Christ when we have made like decisions?

We have not said that anyone cannot attend your annual Lectureship. We have not told anyone they should not buy from your bookstore or that they should not take and read Truth Magazine. These are personal matters. They should not affect the local congregation. We have members here who may or may not agree with my personal convictions on these questions; I will not press my own beliefs on others. I certainly have no desire to enter into some brotherhood debate about personal scruples.

In this letter, he implores, “Can we agree to disagree?” on these issues. In his March 13, 2006 e-mail he said, “I am not interested in pressing my own views about this matter on others.” But, he did press his views on this matter to the congregation at Brown Street when he preached on January 29th that the Guardian of Truth Foundation was just like the American Christian Missionary Society. And the elders did press their view on this matter on others when they broke financial fellowship with those preachers who disagreed with them, which action brother Dickey defended in public. And Brown Street did make the following charges against these brethren whom they announced their discontinuance of support: They are men in whom Brown Street “no longer have confidence” and “have caused a great disturbance, and needless to say disruption, among fellow Christians.”

In his letter, brother Dickey places his sermon and the elders’ decision to cut the support of Tom Roberts, Daniel Ruegg, and Don Willis in the realm of human judgment. If this is a matter of human judgment, brother Dickey sinned by preaching his human opinions. Romans 14:22 instructs one, not to preach his personal judgments but to hold them to oneself, just as we expect those who believe in the covering, not wearing makeup, not cutting one’s hair, etc. to do. Furthermore, Romans 14 instructs brethren to receive one another in spite of our differences in human judgment (14:1; 15:7), but the elders at Brown Street cut off the support of those who believed differently from them on the matter of the Truth Magazine lecture series.

I cannot believe that anyone who heard or read brother Dickey’s sermon can reach the conclusion that he thought he was preaching about a matter of indifference, a matter of human judgment. I don’t believe the elders at Brown Street thought brother Dickey was preaching his human judgments about matters indifferent. I believe they thought he was charging that those who participated in the Truth Magazine lecture series were guilty of “robbing the church of its glory” by creating an individually supported missionary society to do the work God gave the church to do. To the elders this was not a matter of human judgment; it was a matter of sin and those who were guilty of participating were not worthy of their financial support. That is the conclusion I reached when I heard the sermon. I find it hard to reconcile brother Dickey’s sermon with his letter. He compared the Guardian of Truth Foundation to the American Christian Missionary Society, said that we violated the Scriptures in having the Truth Magazine lecture program in the same way as do those who use instrumental music, and denied the all-sufficiency of the church by our actions in having the lecture program. And, he preached a sermon to convince the members at Brown Street to believe the same as he does about the Guardian of Truth Foundation sponsoring a lecture program. The stated purpose of this sermon was to generate support for the elders’ decision to cease financial fellowship with any associated with the lectureship. Brother Dickey then writes in his letter, “. . . nor have any of us tried to influence any of the congregation about what to personally believe about this issue.” How does one justify such obvious inconsistencies? I ask brother Dickey to tell us plainly: Brother Dickey, do you believe that those who participate in the Truth Magazine lecture series are guilty of sin and unworthy of fellowship? We ask the elders to give us their answer to the same question.

I believe that brother Dickey would never have preached what he labels as his personal judgments in his private letters to me about the Truth Magazine lecture series had he not been prompted to do so by the elders’ decision to cut off the support of those who participate in those lectures. I believe brother Dickey saw that those same elders who cut off the support of Tom Roberts, Daniel Ruegg, and Don Willis for participating in the Truth Magazine lecture series would not continue to support him to preach at Brown Street if he reached a different conclusion than they reached. Even though he had participated in the past in human institutions that were doing the same thing as is being done in the Truth Magazine lecture series, he preached his sermon without

specifically condemning those same activities in which he had participated in the past that are identical in form and principle to what he condemned. He did not mention the Florida College lecture program, he did not mention their chapel assembly, he did not mention their Booster Camp programs—all of which he participated in the past. He did not confess sin for having done so in the past. He did not say he used bad judgment for doing these things in the past. He made no effort to address his inconsistency.

A man may change his mind about a subject. All of us have. If brother Dickey has changed his mind, we ask him to publicly renounce his participation in the Florida College lectures, the Florida College Boosters Clubs, and other human institutions which teach the Bible. If he thinks that he can make a Bible argument defending the Florida College lectureship in Tampa but condemning the Truth Magazine lectureship in Bowling Green, let us see his argument. The truth is that it cannot be done either logically or scripturally!

The Bob Dickey who preached the sermon on “individually supported missionary societies” is not the Bob Dickey I have known and loved for thirty years. The Bob Dickey who refuses to meet and talk with me about his sermon is not the Bob Dickey I have known and loved for thirty years. What is there about moving to Brown Street that has changed Bob Dickey?

Conclusion

Inasmuch as public charges were made against the Guardian of Truth Foundation and I am involved in its work, I felt that a response was appropriate. Since I have no other means of addressing the Brown Street church than through this letter, I have resorted to this. My intention is not to do the church at Brown Street harm. I have known and loved brethren there too many years to feel ill will toward any of its members. However, I tire of having my good name destroyed by false charges on the basis of mistaken concepts about what the Bible teaches, misrepresentations, and unfair judging of motives. Consequently, I felt the need to send this letter to you good brethren. Should you want to contact me about anything I have written feel free to do so. I have sought to press brother Dickey’s teaching to its logical conclusion, but I mean him no personal harm. He is my brother, my friend, and I still consider him to be a good man. But in this matter he is wrong and he and the elders are leading the Brown Street church into taking a factional stance against brethren who disagree with their personal convictions and peculiar scruples. It breaks my heart to see this drastic change in Brown Street.

Brotherly,

Mike Willis
April 2006