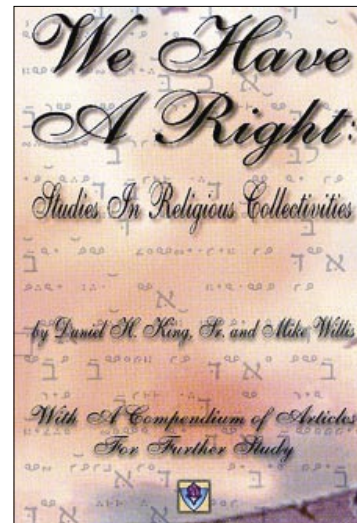


Response To *We Have A Right*

by Mike Willis

Recently Dan King and I jointly authored a study of individuals working together in religious endeavors. The book is entitled *We Have A Right* and is available through our bookstore for \$15.95. Brethren can judge for themselves whether or not the position that Christians can work together only through the local church is right or wrong. However, there can be no doubt that the same arguments that Daniel Sommer, Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett used to oppose colleges which teach the Bible is being used to oppose the Truth Magazine lectureships (see the various debates on this subject, including the Willis-Jenkins Debate; Guardian of Truth Foundation has just recently reprinted the Humble-Garrett Debate which, in my opinion, is the best discussion of the collectivity question).



Already some of those who oppose the Truth Magazine lectureships, in their effort to be consistent in opposing the Truth Magazine lectureship, have concluded that the Florida College lectureship is sinful. In the July 2004 issue of Gospel Truth, brother J.T. Smith wrote, “I have never, however, had what I thought(t) was a good defense of the College Bible Lectureships, although I hasten to say I did attend and support them. In retrospect, it seems to me that these were/are simply gospel meetings set up by the college. . .” (3). He continued, “And we are told that it must be the right thing to do—‘if Florida College (a human institution) can have a lectureship, why can’t we?’ But, what if Florida College is WRONG in having its lectureship — — — —?” I wonder if brother Smith thinks he was saved during those years he attended and supported the Florida College lectures? And, has he ever repented of being involved in them? Brother Smith has followed the logic of the “church is the only collectivity which can teach the Bible” to the same conclusion Daniel Sommer reached—that it is a sin for colleges to teach the Bible. And, he has been just as inconsistent as brother Sommer. Brother Sommer argued that the “church is the only collectivity which can teach the Bible” all the while he was publishing the Octographic Review; brother Smith argues the same position all the while he edits Gospel Truths which is operated by Gospel Truths, Inc. under a board of directors.

Prior to August 2005 brother Smith saw nothing wrong with receiving donations for the publication of his journal. He wrote, “In the beginning I solicited contributions from brethren to get the journal started. That was a mistake. After considering the matter I came to the conclusion that I was wrong in doing that. I sought God’s forgiveness” (Gospel Truths 16:8 [August 2005], 2). I wonder if brother Smith showed the signs of his repentance by returning the monies contributed to his corporation? This should be sufficient evidence to show that those who argue the “church is the only collectivity” position end up in the Sommerite position of opposing colleges which teach the Bible.

One of the old adages which I have heard through the years is this: “If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck!” If these brethren make the argument peculiar to Daniel Sommer in his opposition to colleges that teach the Bible (“the church is the only collectivity which can teach the Bible”) and reach the same conclusions as Daniel Sommer (colleges and other organizations which teach the Bible are guilty of sin), it is proper to identify their position as the Sommerite position, with no malice intended. Indeed, if I have no malice to Daniel Sommer, why should I have malice against those who teach the same thing as he did?

Some folks are claiming it is prejudicial or unfairly stigmatizing to make this point about the course taken by Sommer. No, it is simply a matter of putting the controversy in its true historical context. Rather than running from Sommer, our brethren who are renewing Sommer’s arguments should be quoting him to illustrate in historical context that they are not offering some new or strange doctrine but simply teaching what other “faithful” men have taught in the past.

Here is the cold, hard fact: History has a way of exposing the sad consequences of certain errors, as we can see from the results of men putting communism into practice for a period of years. The history of brethren who followed the Sommerite position left a record which serves as a stark warning to us today. This position bred over a period of years

a spirit of opinionated extremism, personal bitterness, and factionalism, then later swung to the opposite extreme of an ever-widening unity-in-doctrinal-diversity ending in the broadest possible ecumenicism accepting all religions as valid. Sommer tried to pull back somewhat before he died, acknowledging that his views should be held as private and not pressed. A second generation of men such as Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett were avid adherents of Sommer's original view on organizations, and they rode the pendulum as it swung from one wild extreme to the other. That is not a statement of prejudice. It is the record of history.

Someone has said that those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them.

Sommer's arguments were not true when he made them, and they are not true now, as demonstrated in the book *We Have a Right*. Sommer's course was divisive and disastrous then, and will be now. We intend to avoid the extremes of both factionalism and liberalism.

But, back to the point of this article, discussion of the reaction to *We Have A Right*. What is interesting to me is the internet reaction to our publishing this book. Brother Frost took our ad and attached his own advertisement of Brotherhood Societies with the following request: "Please read and pass this on to others. We do not have the means to spread this information as does the foundation. We must rely on friends who are interested in truth and fairness. Thanks. GF" Is brother Frost convinced that only those who agree with him are interested in "truth and fairness"? His statement about not having the ability to more widely advertise his material ignores two crucial facts: (1) he has published and widely circulated a ton of material on this topic in the form of articles, booklets, and books for 25 years, and (2) advertisements of his "brotherhood societies" books have been widely circulated in two well-known journals. Will those two papers be advertising our book as well, in the interest of "truth and fairness"?

Brother Don Martin's "reply" to this advertisement was even more revealing. He wrote a review of the recently published book charging that they "are disseminating the gospel of institutionalism, partyism, and human substitution." He explained what the "modus operandi" of the book would be. He argued the right of a college to have a lectureship while saying that it would be wrong for a publishing company to have one. He charges that the book "mixes apples and oranges," states that the GOTF "now clearly has the mission statement of saving souls," "mix(es) apples and oranges and attempt(s) to extract deductions and then simplistic misstatement of facts," ignores and abuses the difference between collective and distributive action, confuses concurrent action with institutional action, distorts concurrent action, has "flawed thinking," argues that the foundation can receive into its fellowship those the church cannot, uses prejudicial argument, "gradationally substitutes a human organization for the church and encourages political partyism," has "more affinity for human foundations that (sic) the Lord's church," charges that those who participate in foundation activity are looking for more ambitious influence than the local church affords. (Why start a world-wide web site? Is it because one is seeking more ambitious influence than the local church affords?) Having made all of these charges about the book, brother Martin has the audacity to say, "To date, I have not read the book."

Nevertheless he says, "As a dialectician, I offer the preceding predictions." I did not know what a "dialectician" was so I looked it up in Webster's dictionary. A "dialectian" is "a logician; an expert in dialectics." "Dialectics" is "the art of examining opinions or ideas logically." You will have to judge for yourself about how expert brother Martin is; I have my own opinion about that. Frankly, I have never been impressed with people who tell me how expert they are. However, I ask, "What kind of 'dialectian' answers a man's argument before he has even read it?" Is that the way brother Martin wants others to treat him?

Perhaps I need to make note of a group of "individually operated missionary societies" conveniently ignored by those who oppose "individually supported missionary societies," namely "web sites." Look at most any of them. They contain donated material from various individuals (scroll down the list of articles available and start counting the donations that have been made to the web site; I checked the Jeff Belknap web site in preparation for this article and counted well over 20 who had writings posted on the site, whether with or without their permission). The material that is downloaded is free. So, on some of these sites, you have a collectivity of individuals working together to teach that the only collectivity in which individuals can work together is the local church!

If the only collectivity of individuals who can work together for the dissemination of the gospel is the local church, by what rational argument can this group of individuals justify their working together to teach the gospel through their web sites? Let's ask some of those dialecticians around to see if we can get a biblical answer. Whatever argument a brother can make to justify their collective arrangements on web sites which teach the gospel, with the mission to save souls, can be used to justify the Truth Magazine lectures.

The argument, "This is individual activity," appears rather ludicrous when one reads the web pages and sees the number of individuals who are participating in these collective arrangements. Individuals have made contributions sponsoring and perpetuating these web sites in the form of time, efforts, articles, moral support, and money. This hopelessly flawed and self-contradictory approach to assailing group action may convince some but it does not convince me. The web site is under the oversight of a web master who has the authority to determine whether or not something is posted on the page, its layout, etc. Should someone submit something the web master does not want on the page, he rejects it.

Frankly, I would think that those opposed to "individually supported missionary societies" would have learned from the Don Carlos Janes experiment that a "missionary society" overseen by one individual is just as bad as a missionary society under a board! But, of course, the inconsistencies of those opposing individuals working together in spiritual works have little weight on those who selectively choose which individual collectivities to condemn. This leaves many of us brethren with the impression that those brethren opposing "individually supported missionary societies" (as they are wont to call them) are not interested in the consistent application of the truth but with destroying those associated with Truth Magazine. Otherwise, these brethren would apply without respect of persons the principles which they teach. So long as they do not make an effort to consistently apply what they affirm, it is hard to take them seriously.