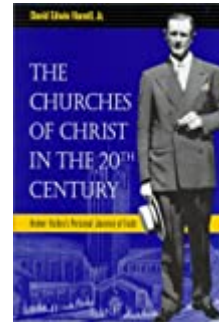


David Edwin Harrell, Jr. *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith.* Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2000. xx + 472 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1008-0.



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Schism and Faithfulness in the Churches of Christ

In the “religious revival” that followed World War II, the churches of Christ were faced with a new dilemma.[1] Growing in members, respectability, and aspiration, this conservative branch of the restoration movement began to confront the issue of “institutionalism.” Institutionalism entailed the support by individual churches of hospitals, orphanages, colleges, and of missions and broadcast ministries sponsored by other individual churches. An earlier controversy had made the rejection of mission societies a distinguishing mark of the churches of Christ. Now the movement divided between those who felt that these new institutions were necessary for the advancement of the churches of Christ in the modern world and those who believed that they were not permitted by the New Testament. Beginning in the early 1950s, B.C. Goodpasture, the powerful editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, enforced a “quarantine” of all those who opposed institutionalism, a group derisively known as “antis.” Preachers, such as Homer Hailey, who could not support institutionalism, found familiar pulpits closed to them and another schism within the Restoration movement was accomplished.

The controversy over institutionalism is central to both halves of this carefully researched book by David Edwin Harrell, Jr. Chapters two through four tell the story of *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century* focusing on the major controversies, enterprises, and leaders of the movement. The remaining five chapters present the parallel story of Homer Hailey (b. 1903) a popular preacher and college professor in the churches of Christ who eventually sided with the opponents of institutionalism. Together these two stories present the intriguing history of the many controversies and changes within this group of Christian primitivists. Harrell, well known for his work on the charismatic movement, is a leader within the noninstitutional churches of Christ.[2] In this volume, he presents a history of the churches of Christ that is both illuminating to insiders and accessible to outsiders. While his own positions in the various controversies are clear (in part because he discusses himself as a historical subject), he has succeeded in crafting a balanced history.

Harrell builds upon his own earlier studies of the movement and the recent work of other historians, par-

ticular Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, to offer the most complete history of these churches in the twentieth century.[3] Harrell draws much of his account from Hughes, but differs with Hughes's interpretation of several issues, particularly the noninstitutional movement. According to Hughes, the institutional schism signaled the end of the dominance of legalism and the "hard, fighting style" within the mainstream churches. The anti-institutional Christians were distinguished by their commitment to a common-sense, Baconian hermeneutic of the Bible that stemmed from nineteenth-century Restoration leader Alexander Campbell.[4] Harrell disputes this. He claims that the common-sense hermeneutic "was a part of the arsenal of disputants on all sides of every argument." Controversies over hermeneutics would divide the movement later in the century, but this process did not begin in earnest until the 1970s. What distinguished the noninstitutional people was their continued fidelity to an "amorphous sense of alienation and world rejection, of cultural dissonance" (p. 174).

Both Hughes and Harrell regard this sense of cultural alienation as an important characteristic of the churches of Christ. They show that it was abandoned amid the increasing denominational mentality and what one minister called the "amazing CRAZE about 'bigness'" of the post-World War II era (p. 170). The mainstream churches of Christ, they argue, became captive to conservative, middle-class American culture and abandoned their "sojourner" mentality (p. 163). Hughes refers to this as an "apocalyptic" worldview. He sees its departure from the churches of Christ as linked to the controversy over premillennialism in the 1930s. In recent decades, Hughes and other "progressives" have sought to revive this perspective.

Harrell views the premillennialist schism differently. He argues that since premillennialists had more contact with the religious world outside of the churches of Christ, they were not necessarily more counter-cultural than their opponents. Furthermore, "many avid foes of premillennialism, such as Homer Hailey, embraced pacifism and other counter-cultural beliefs" (p. 70). The sojourner mentality, he insists, was maintained by Hailey and others who came to support the noninstitutional churches.

Harrell's biography of Hailey helps him to portray the noninstitutional churches as communities of people committed to a New Testament faith and the historic simplicity of the churches of Christ. After entering Abilene Christian College in 1926, Hailey spent his whole life as a preacher and teacher. He was known for his impressive

knowledge of the Bible, his vigorous body building, and his tireless summers spent on the road leading "gospel meetings" across the United States. Raised in Arizona, Hailey was a "Westerner" and never quite comfortable with the more refined branches of the Restoration movement. He decided to attend Abilene instead of Texas Christian University because he found the latter school, "too big" (p. 35).

In the 1940s when he won the job of preacher at Central Church of Christ in Los Angeles, he found the big city too sophisticated and liberal for him and left after only one year. Teaching at Abilene later in the decade, he found that he and his alma mater were headed in different directions. "The emphasis on academic respectability, and the high-pressure fund raising, combined with a relaxation in the disciplining of students," all were at odds with Hailey's simple, strict, Bible-centered ways (p. 271). From 1951 to 1973 he found an amenable environment at Florida Christian College (since 1963, Florida College) and helped to make it the center of the noninstitutional movement.

With his great commitment to evangelism and orphanages, Hailey hesitated to oppose institutionalism. When he was forced to study the issue, however, he recognized that even orphanages were part of a whole complex of institutions not established in the New Testament. "Human organizations through which men seek to do the Lord's work are condemned," he concluded (p. 123). Pained to be on the opposite side of the issue from many friends, Hailey did not seek to close the doors to those who disagreed with him. He did not exclude others, but soon found himself excluded, by church leaders who felt that he and other "antis" stood in the way of the progress of the gospel and of the churches of Christ. Harrell suggests that this experience was typical of most noninstitutional leaders in the 1950s and 1960s. The author clearly objects to the heavy-handed "quarantine" or the "antis" and reminds readers that Hailey belonged to a generation that always saw all members of the churches of Christ as "one people" (p. xiii).

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Hailey again suffered from exclusion because of his convictions. This time from within the noninstitutional fellowship itself. Hailey taught that Jesus's injunction against divorce and remarriage applied only to "Christians" and therefore those who had divorced and remarried prior to being baptized as members of the church of Christ did not have to separate from their spouses. His teaching made it much easier to join the church, but it differed from what most oth-

ers in the movement believed to be the plain meaning of scripture. This generated an extensive dispute between those who felt that the movement could not tolerate this doctrinal diversity and those, such as Hailey and Harrell, who believed a degree of diversity was acceptable among those who “judged one another honorable seekers of truth” (362).

Harrell clearly judges Hailey to be an exemplary figure: “fearless, guileless, selfless, talented, and single-minded” (241). He expects his readers will “like” Hailey and that the members of the churches of Christ will “profit” from knowing about his robust and faithful life (p. xi, xvii). Thus, it is especially disappointing that the book provides little insight into the content and style of Hailey’s preaching. Perhaps members of the churches of Christ can imagine his preaching better than this outside reviewer, but the book is frustratingly silent on what this preacher said. The title promises an account of Hailey’s “journey of faith.” The story that unfolds proves that Hailey remained faithful to his convictions, but it needs more information on the content of his faith. The reader sees this man of action dart tirelessly from pulpit to pulpit, but rarely hears his voice.

One exception to this comes in the story of Hailey’s speedy courtship of his second wife. After less than five days together they were engaged and soon thereafter married. Hailey’s first note to her is the most extensive quotation from him in the book. It speaks volumes about the directness and graciousness that made him such a winsome preacher. Hailey explained that since she had not attended the weekday meetings that preceded the Sunday when they meant he initially assumed she must be “one of those Sunday morning Christians.” He continued in a preacher’s cadence, “Further, the thought flashed through my mind that you were the wife of an oil man Imagine my surprise tonight to learn that you had been out of town with an injured son, and that you are a widow. May I say that I have been charmed by your grace, and may I be so bold as to say, your beauty as well I trust, although there are only three more nights of

the meeting, that we may become better acquainted during those days” (p. 315). If Harrell featured the sustained voice of Hailey more often, readers would have a better sense of his “journey of faith.”

Nonetheless, *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century* is an important contribution to the history of the Restoration tradition. All those interested in the churches of Christ and the development of American Protestantism since World War II will want to consult this book. Thorough documentation and discussions of the historiography in the text as well as in the bibliographic essay will make it a useful starting point for further research.

Notes

[1]. Harrell always refers to the “churches of Christ” with a lower case “c” in order to emphasize that “theoretically” churches of Christ “are an undenominational movement of autonomous local churches” (p. xiv). This convention will also be followed in this review.

[2]. Harrell, *All Things are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975); idem, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975); idem, *Pat Robertson: A Personal, Religious, and Political Portrait* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

[3]. Harrell, *Quest for a Christian America: A Social History of the Disciples of Christ* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966); idem, *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ* (Athens, Georgia: Publishing Systems, 1973); Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[4]. Hughes, p. 228.

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