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# Scripture Standard

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## Introducing the Format for 2025

MATTHEW SHAFFER – JANUARY 2025

A Christian magazine like the Scripture Standard is, perhaps, designed to serve two purposes: 1) to advocate for a deeper understanding of and respect for the word of God, according to the ability of the editor and contributing writers, and 2) to facilitate a productive exchange of ideas between individuals and congregations who are pursuing the same goal of perfection in Christ.

To my judgment, embracing the second function is essential to the proper execution of the first. As editor, I must confess that my knowledge of the Bible is incomplete, and I do not have sufficient insight to unravel the social and doctrinal issues that divide churches of Christ today. I certainly hope and pray that I have something valuable to contribute through this work, but it would be arrogant to think that I have already reached perfect knowledge and perfect judgment – I cannot claim that I have exceeded the inspired apostle Paul:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

<sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

*Philippians 3:12-16 (NKJV)*

So then, although I strongly believe that there *is* a true and correct answer to every dispute, and that I must hold to and defend everything I have already learned, I must also continue to learn. I must reach forward to the things which are ahead. I must develop ideas and insights that I do not currently possess – which means that they must come from outside my mind. I can and should learn from the word of God directly – I pray that I continue to do so through the rest of my life – but I can and should also learn from the thoughts and experiences of those who share my faith:

As iron sharpens iron,  
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

*Proverbs 27:17 (NKJV)*

For this reason, I hope to develop a more conversational format for the Scripture Standard. I am not only interested in sending my thoughts to you, but I would also like to learn from and, if you are willing, publish your thoughts. It is very likely, in fact, inevitable that you and I will disagree with some of the views expressed in this kind of a format, but if we are to grow through our fellowship together, we must bring our disagreements to light and discuss them openly. You and I have the same choice: we can hide our imperfections – and stunt our growth – or we can expose our hearts and minds to each other so that, with God’s help, we can press together toward the goal.

O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. <sup>12</sup>You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your *own* affections. <sup>13</sup>Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.

*2 Corinthians 6:11-13 (NKJV)*

Now, there is a practical challenge facing the Scripture Standard this year – I am hoping to generate a lively, productive discussion amongst the churches of Christ in the United Kingdom, but there is not a ready-made foundation on which to build. There are several reasons for this: first and foremost, the Scripture Standard has been out of publication for just over two years, owing to personal circumstances on my part and difficulties

surrounding the transfer of the editorship. Second, the Scripture Standard and, to my knowledge, other magazines and circulars published by churches of Christ in the United Kingdom have not had a large or active base of contributors since well before my involvement began. Perhaps we live in an age when written discussion is no longer valued, or perhaps the churches that exist now are either satisfied with the measure of the truth that they have already obtained or frightened of dangerous ideas coming into their ranks if they enter into an open discussion on subjects they consider to be sensitive. It could also be that I am blind to a multitude of Christians who are eager to enter into just the kind of discussion I have described. Whatever the reason, I have needed to look elsewhere for thoughts to fill these pages, so that this year's Scripture Standard does not become a monotonous repetition of *my* perspective and *my* ideas.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I have found an abundant supply of challenging ideas in the past – specifically, in the past pages of the Scripture Standard. Throughout this magazine's history, it has played host to many lively, impassioned, and quite divided discussions about different aspects of Christian doctrine and practical Christianity.

I plan to publish four issues of the Scripture Standard this year – in January, April, July, and October – all based around a single theme: inter-congregational co-operation. Each of the four issues will draw on articles from a different period of the Scripture Standard's history, so that we will be able to see how the discussion has developed over the last 90 years. These periods will be arranged as follows:

January: 1930s-1940s

April: 1950s-1960s

July: 1970s-1980s

October: 1990s-present

Additionally, I will develop my own perspective on the issue through the year as I continue to study along with our past brethren.

In preparing this issue, I have found myself challenged to think more deeply about the subject than ever before, precisely because I do not completely agree with any one of the views we find. Nevertheless, I recognize that

these articles and letters represent sincere, impassioned effort to reach the truth – the same truth that I am pursuing today.

The selected articles and letters will be introduced in their historical context in the next article.

Your submissions on this subject or any other that you consider to be important for Christians today are more than welcome for publication in the next issue. Due to an unfortunate technical difficulty relating to the transfer of editorship, I am temporarily locked out of the Scripture Standard email account. For this reason, please send your submissions to both [scripturestandard@gmail.com](mailto:scripturestandard@gmail.com) and [mshaffer@christianprospect.com](mailto:mshaffer@christianprospect.com) to ensure that I receive your thoughts.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

*Romans 12:2 (NKJV)*

MATTHEW SHAFFER

## Context and Summary of Historical Articles

MATTHEW SHAFFER – JANUARY 2025

The Scripture Standard was established in 1935, in part, to protest an institution called “The Co-operation of Churches of Christ.” This organisation began as a series of conferences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at which representatives from churches of Christ throughout the United Kingdom gathered to share information about their successes and struggles, encourage one another, and think collaboratively about how to preach the gospel in the then-modern world. This collaborative thinking developed quickly into collaborative action, so that the conferences began to solicit funds from the individual congregations that attended in order to fund collaborative evangelistic projects. This centralisation of funding necessitated a central organisation to manage the funds and ensure that they were spent appropriately. This organisation began to grow, to take on

more responsibilities, and, at times, to claim a degree of authority over the congregations that belonged to the Co-operation.

By the time Walter Crosthwaite, the first editor of the Scripture Standard, withdrew from the Co-operation, it maintained a college and an official magazine, both of which had begun to embrace the latest academic scholarship that was critical of the Bible's inspiration and internal consistency – that is, they no longer believed that the Bible was truly and entirely the word of God. Our first historical article, “Why Division,” was penned in 1944 by Walter Crosthwaite as an explanation and defence for his withdrawal and his decision to publish the Scripture Standard as an alternative and competitor to the Co-operation's magazine. In this article, he makes special reference to the way an evangelistic work in Nyasaland, which is modern day Malawi.

The next article, “Conference Well Pleasing to God,” which was written by Walter Crosthwaite in 1946, offers an optimistic view about a new series of conferences between the churches of Christ that had withdrawn from the Co-operation. This view was challenged in a subsequent series of letters from A. E. Winstanley, who feared that embracing such conferences was a step back toward the excesses of the Co-operation. Further, he strongly emphasised that every congregation should operate entirely independently, according to the scriptural pattern. Conversely, Walter Crosthwaite and F. W. Heasman argued that there is only one Church, made up of individual local bodies. While they acknowledged the importance of the local congregation, they believed that it is desirable or even necessary for the universal Church to act as such – that is, their opposition against “The Co-operation” did not translate into an opposition against all co-operation. Instead, they believed it was their responsibility to develop a healthy co-operation where the organisation that preceded them had failed. This correspondence is offered here under the titles: “Correspondence: Conferences,” and “Correspondence: Conferences and Evangelism.”

The discussion in 1946 did not reach any definitive conclusion, but the same theme was picked up again by John M. Wood in 1948. He initially offered “A Warning” regarding Walter Crosthwaite's attitude toward

conferences, fearing, like A. E. Winstanley, that this course would lead to a new Co-operation like the one that had come before. This time, Walter Crosthwaite offered no reply himself, but the discussion was picked up by P. G. Ogden, who, in the short article, “Evangelists, etc.,” did not defend conferences outright, but rather shifted the focus onto the role of evangelists themselves. If there is no clear scriptural pattern for how to support and manage evangelists, he asks, then is not every evangelistic scheme a human invention?

John M. Wood, in his response, also titled “Evangelists, etc.,” made a case for modern day evangelism, although he envisioned a less formalised, more organic and locally-led and funded function for biblical preachers. The following month, P. G. Ogden reiterated his belief that there is no scriptural authority for modern-day evangelists – that their function passed away with the apostles and the prophets – and that evangelism is now a common duty shared by all Christians. At the same time, John Anderson offered a different, more practical challenge to John M. Wood’s position – that the local congregations in his area did not have the resources to fund a dedicated evangelist on their own, so he saw formal co-operation as the only way for evangelistic work to proceed. These letters are presented under the title, “Correspondence: Evangelists.”

Our final instalment appeared in May 1948, when John M. Wood developed his position further. He believed that congregations should know one another and even coordinate in evangelistic efforts and other matters, but that these connections needed to be developed organically, through trust and true brotherhood, rather than through central organisation. Using an organisation to define or enforce any kind of fellowship missed, he believed, the entire point of fellowship in the first place. His letter was joined by one from Geoffrey Lodge, who believed that evangelists should be almost entirely self-directed (though working through and within bonds of trust built with local congregations), and that any attempt to manage their work was a violation of the scriptural pattern. These letters are published under the title, “Correspondence: Evangelists and Co-operation.”

This selection of articles shows that there was little consensus about scriptural co-operation among the churches of Christ during the 1930s and 1940s. Every author showed a desire for genuine fellowship between like-minded congregations, but each held a different view about how the churches should go about building and maintaining this fellowship. Due to the history of “The Co-operation” and the model of evangelistic work it had exemplified, questions of the role and management of evangelists remained central throughout the discussion.

These historical articles are presented with the original spelling and punctuation to the best of my ability. This means that older formatting conventions are used for chapter and verse numbers, so that where I would write “Acts 1:1,” the authors of the historical articles would write “Acts i. 1,” with a small roman numeral representing the chapter and an Arabic numeral representing the verse. In one case, in the article, “Why Division?,” the state of the digital copy available to me made it impossible to determine which word stood in the original paper copy, so I have represented that word as “[UNCLEAR].” I have also changed several references to the “editor” to name Walter Crosthwaite directly, in order to avoid any confusion regarding editorial comments.

MATTHEW SHAFFER

## Why Division?

WALTER CROSTHWAITE – SEPTEMBER 1944

In view of New Testament appeals for unity, and condemnation of division, only strong and scriptural reasons can justify separation. At one time when the question, ‘Is our separate existence justifiable?’ was asked, it had reference to separation from sectarian, denominational bodies. Now it is within the Restoration Movement that we are asked, ‘Why hold separate conferences?’ ‘Why another magazine?’ ‘Why a separate Nyasaland Mission Fund?’

Our short answer is, because the official Co-operation of Churches of Christ has so far departed from the position once held as to become one

of the constituent denominations of the Free Church Federal Council. Our fathers in the faith refused all such associations, and continually emphasised the fact that the Church of Christ is not a denomination.

Our pioneers had no doubt about the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice. They believed the Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God, and the final court of appeal. It seems strange that those who reject, and even sneer at verbal inspiration, should yet appeal to the words of Scripture to settle matters in dispute! Why trouble about correct translation, exposition, or interpretation, if the original words are not reliable?

Those who have departed from the New Testament position and pattern need something more than the Scriptures; true, real Christianity lives and thrives on the Scriptures only. Statements in official publications that Churches of Christ have never stood for the Scriptures only pass unchallenged; and those who make them still retain official positions. Official publications seem keener on [UNCLEAR] Roman and Anglo-Catholics, and sectarians generally, than on pleading for the restoration of the New Testament Church. So we are endeavouring to supply a magazine which makes a definite and uncompromising stand for the faith of our fathers. Many who support the Co-operation do *not* read the official magazine, and are surprised and shocked when statements made therein are brought to their notice.

We gave the main facts concerning the Nyasaland Mission to an obituary of Bro. W. M. Kempster, in our issue of October, 1943. For the benefit of those who still ask questions we repeat what we then said:—

‘When, in 1916, British missionaries were compelled to leave that field, Bro. Frederick Nkhonde, with the help of other native brethren, carried on the work. How well he succeeded official publications bear witness. He “shepherded the three hundred members left in 1916.” “His fine character and fidelity to the gospel which he professed won the respect of the authorities – and the admiration of his fellows”! When, in 1928, the work was resumed by British missionaries, owing to the “fidelity and enterprise



of these brethren... their number had increased to over eight hundred.” (“Christian Advocate,” June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1936)

‘The Foreign Missions report “Year Book,” 1937, contained this intimation: “We have just had a letter from the Colonial Office granting us permission to resume work in Nyasaland subject to certain conditions.” We heard a member of the Foreign Missions Committee tell a large audience that one of the conditions was that they joined a Federation of Missions, which meant sanctioning fellowship with the unimmersed at the Lord’s Table. Frederick and his brethren refused to compromise on this matter and were “excommunicated” by the Foreign Missions Committee (“Year Book,” 1933, p. 67). So if Bro. Kempster had not raised funds these loyal native brethren, who had done such fine work, would have been left to starve. It is a deplorable story, and is sufficient justification for separation from those who can thus treat those who refuse to depart from New Testament teaching and practice. Since then these loyal preachers of the Word have done fine work, and results have amply justified their stand. The last letter from Bro. Ronald tells of thirteen baptisms.’

For the foregoing and more reasons which could be given, we are compelled to maintain a separate stand. It is not easy or pleasant, but, like Luther, ‘We stand where we do because we dare do no other.’

We know there is a very large and growing number in the Churches, who are much disturbed and distressed at the many departures from the old faith. We call upon all such to openly declare on which side they stand. The time for compromise and hesitation has gone. Now is the time to stand and strike for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints.

‘Rise for the day is passing; and you lie dreaming on; –  
The others have buckled their armour, and forth to the fight have gone  
A place in the ranks awaits you, each has some part to play  
The past, and the future are nothing in face of the stern today.’

WALTER CROSTHWAITE

## Conference Well Pleasing to God

WALTER CROSTHWAITE – MAY 1946

At the annual conference of Churches of Christ, held in 1900, Bro. Lancelot Oliver delivered an address with the above title, based on Malachi iii. 16, 17. After expressing the joy of meeting and conferring with those of like mind, he spoke of the times of Malachi as ‘days of restoration,’ and their similarity to our times, thus:

‘Now to most of this our case is remarkably similar. The cause of Christ had its days of purity, and boldness, and progress. In the early days the progress was phenomenal. The primitive Gospel, backed by the pure lives of the Christians, went forth conquering everywhere: the new temple was built that was composed of living stones, built up a spiritual house, upon the foundation of Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. Alas! apostacy ensued here, too. The fine gold became dim, and gradually the new people of God were subjected to a worse, because a spiritual, Babylon. But the day came when the decree went forth to return and re-build the city and temple of God.

‘The time would fail to speak of the Reformers – Wycliffe and Huss and Luther, Calvin and Knox, and of Wesley also. The return was like that of old, one of mingled joy and sorrow – the sorrow due largely to the fact that the people did not fully restore the apostolic truth, order, spirit, and ordinances. The protestant world enjoyed a measure of freedom, but with the monstrous accompaniment, which, sad to say still exists, of disunion. In the midst of the state of things has arisen the plea with which we stand connected, the plea for a COMPLETE return to Christianity as at the first. And the manner in which our pleading has been met is not very encouraging, it must be admitted. It is easy here to give a one-sided view, and I do not doubt there are corresponding hopeful signs, but the actual state of the world in our day is depressing enough. The minds of the people are distracted by war and the military spirit accompanying this; their confidence in the Bible has been for the time shaken by the higher criticism; while Ritualism in the Church is amazing us by its determination to lead the British people back to the thralldom of the Roman priesthood.

Conversions are laboured for, but few are made. The words of the Apostle will apply: "Buy up the opportunity, for the days are evil," for of a truth opportunities of doing good, must be paid for at a high price. It is wrong if we are despondent, but in view of the weakness of human nature, it will be small wonder if the feelings of some who have laboured for the restoration of Primitive Christianity are cooled, and they say something analogous to that old time complaint: "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?" ("Bible Advocate," August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1900.)

The foregoing is an apt description of the times in which we are living, and a summing-up of the situation we are called to face.

It is in such times when conferences of those who fear the Lord meet to talk about the Lord's work are truly helpful.

We are well aware that some regard such conferences as being above and beyond the local assembly, the Church, through which it is claimed everything should be done. But does not the New Testament tell of something bigger than the local assembly? What about the conference reported in Acts xv.? Paul speaks of a brother who 'was appointed by the Churches to travel with us in the matter of this grace'; and also says: 'I robbed other churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you.' (s Corinthians viii. 19, xi. 8, R.V.) Do not these passages suggest something beyond the local assembly?

Some of our American brethren feel strongly that in holding conferences we are going beyond the Divine institution, the Church. But are their colleges run by local assemblies? It is so easy to go to extremes in these matters. There are certainly some things which need the consideration and support of the Churches collectively. SO we do well to meet in conference to discuss the Lord's work, and to encourage each other in the great fight of the faith.

It is when conferences become legislative assemblies, when they attempt to force things upon Churches without their consent, when officialism and routine are fostered, that they are a positive menace not only to the

freedom of individual Churches, but to the very existence of New Testament faith and practice.

So, while enjoying to the full the privilege of meeting with brethren and sisters from many parts of Britain and Ireland, let us be ever on our guard against any unwarrantable encroachments.

We do need in these times, like those in the days of Malachi, to speak often one to another. In our small corners we cannot see very far, the best of us at times are disappointed and discouraged with our feeble and seeming fruitless efforts. But what a spiritual tonic, meeting with hundreds of loyal brethren and sisters supplies. We go back to our respective spheres of labour for the Lord, rejoicing that there are so many who have not bowed to the modern Baals; and more fully confirmed in our belief in the ultimate triumph of the truth.

‘For right is right, since God is God;  
 And right the day must win.  
 To doubt would be disloyalty,  
 To falter would be sin.’

WALTER CROSTHWAITE

## Correspondence: Conferences

A. E. WINSTANLEY & W. CROSTHWAITE – JUNE 1946

Dear Editor., – I would like to comment on your editorial in the May ‘S.S.’, as I fear some may draw from it inferences which you yourself would not support.

Churches of Christ have always insisted upon the absolute autonomy of the local Church. The New Testament teaches that each assembly was a self-governed unit, its life ordered (under its own overseers) according to the laws of Christ. Also clearly indicated in the New Testament is the fact that the local Church is the only divinely-appointed medium for the maintenance of the Lord’s work. It owes neither allegiance nor obedience

to any exterior organization, whether synod, conference, or council. It is answerable only to its Divine Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is it not then a mistake to quote Acts xv. As an example for Conferences today? That conference did legislate. Apostles and elders, with the consent of the Church, gave an authoritative ruling on a disputed question. They said: 'For it seemed good unto the Holy Spirit and unto us...' (v. 28). The Apostles, inspired men, could and did legislate, for it was their work to make known the word of the Lord for the Church. (John xiv. 26.) We have no inspired men, but we do possess the apostolic teaching in the New Testament. According to this inspired volume each assembly must order its own life.

2 Corinthians viii. 19 and xi. 8 do not suggest the existence of an extra-Church organization to which individual assemblies delegated their sovereign authority. Certainly, strong Churches helped the weak ones – whether in granting material aid or providing evangelistic help. But this was done through the local assembly. God ordained no other organization, and none is indicated in the New Testament: (See Acts xi. 27-30, Romans xv. 25, 26)

The only conference in harmony with Scripture, is one where Christians meet for preaching, teaching, and consideration of the Lord's work. But we have no Scriptural warrant to hold conferences where the business of the Church is transacted. Such 'conferences' constitute a positive danger to the divine arrangement. Is not this danger inherent in our present method? It is insisted that these conferences do not legislate. Then why pass resolutions by majority vote? If these resolutions, when passed, bind nobody to nothing, what point in passing them at all? Why pass a proposal by a majority vote if no one is bound to implement it?

The 'Co-operation of Churches of Christ' is in its present unhappy position because it has allowed an organisation bigger than the local Church. This has now become a huge machine, with innumerable committees, to each of which is delegated a part of the Church's work. Dare we make the same mistake by creating 'just another co-operation'? Let us meet together for mutual edification, for preaching and teaching, by all means. But let us

avoid the creation of any organisation bigger than the local Church for the maintenance of the Lord's work.

A. E. WINSTANLEY

Brethren seem to overlook the fact that in the New Testament the word 'Church' is used both for a local assembly and for all local assemblies which form the one Church – the 'one Body.' That one Church is divinely appointed: it is questionable whether some local assemblies are.

Acts xv. does tell of something more than a local assembly, 'the Apostles, and elders with the whole Church.' (Verse 22.) They did not legislate, but enforced legislation given long before. 2 Corinthians viii. 19, xi. 8, do tell of more than one local assembly choosing brethren and supporting Paul. That Paul expected support from the Churches is seen in Philippians iv. 14-18.

Acts xi. 27-30 and Romans xv. 25-27 tell of fellowship in relieving wants of the poor saints, by more than one local assembly.

Bro. W. says: 'The only conference in harmony with Scripture is one where Christians meet for preaching, teaching and consideration of the Lord's work.' That is precisely what our conferences are held for. When has any resolution been passed at any of our conferences that can in any sense be called legislating for the Churches? A conference can recommend Churches to do certain things, but has no power, or right, to compel them. When have we ever tried to?

If it is right for a Church to engage an evangelist, why is it not right for a group of Churches to do so? Where is the New Testament passage which teaches that only a local assembly may do this? If all local assemblies engage an evangelist we shall land where the Co-operation wish the Churches to land, with a paid man in each Church. That is a danger we need to be on our guard against.

WALTER CROSTHWAITE

## Correspondence: Conferences and Evangelism

F. W. HEASMAN, A.E. WINSTANLEY, & W. CROSTHWAITE – AUGUST 1946

Dear Editor, – I have been greatly interested in your editorial, May issue ‘S.S.’, on the subject of conferences and the subsequent correspondence and reply in the June number. The more so as my own thoughts have been recently directed to the teaching of Paul (1 Cor. xii.) in relation to the Church.

Whether or not there be authority for any organization ‘bigger’ than the local assembly, it would seem very clear from the Apostle’s words that at least there is an organism very much bigger.

Is it not evident that in vv. 12-20, Paul is referring to the whole Church: the ‘one body’ (comp. v. 28), and that, so far as his words have reference to any local assembly, it is only to such viewed as a microcosm of the ‘one body’?

If such be indeed the primary application of Paul’s teaching (and the only logical alternative would seem to be the entirely untenable assumption that each local assembly constitutes in itself a separate ‘body’ of Christ), would not a careful reading of vv. 12-27 – specially noting vv. 14-16 and 20-22 and 25-26 – imply that in the mind of the Apostle a right conception of the ‘one body’ the Church requires an even more intimate and closely knit association and intercourse (co-operation) of individual local assemblies, with all other ‘members’ of ‘the one body,’ than possibly we have been ready to acknowledge? Is not this confirmed by our Lord’s own teaching in John xv.?

Should we not be careful, lest in our zeal, we reduce the ‘one body’ of Christ to the condition of a number of more or less isolated fragments?

How, and to what degree, this association and intercourse is to be realised may vary according to circumstances, but if we are fully submitted to His will, God will surely direct us in this respect. To my own mind, the principle at least seems to be clearly set forth in the New Testament. Your own further observations would be welcomed.

In conclusion, if it is right for any one Church to support an evangelist, why not every Church, provided his function is evangelism, and not the entire ministry of the Church to the exclusion of others qualified.

F. W. HEASMAN

Dear Editor, – It is patent to all that the ‘Church’ in the N.T. describes: (a) the local assembly, and (b) the ‘one body’ embracing all the saved. On this there is no disagreement. We agree, too, that some local assemblies may not be divinely appointed. But could anyone deny that an assembly of baptised believers, living consistent lives, and under the authority of a Scriptural oversight, is divinely appointed? That it is undeniably Scriptural for such an assembly to send out evangelists is revealed by Acts xiii. 1-3.

Evidently the N.T. ideal is that the local Church be the vehicle through which evangelistic work be directed. The individual assembly, governed by a Scriptural oversight, is therefore the divinely-appointed channel for evangelism. This divine method assures that the Church’s work is ever under the supervision of her overseers. This is important indeed. Any system which removes evangelism from the supervision of the elders, denies their divinely conferred authority. It has also within itself the potentiality for progressive apostacy. This is the testimony of history, as seen in the rise of the Papacy. The ‘Co-operation of Churches of Christ’ is a more recent example. Each warns of the folly of creating an extra-Church organisation which robs the individual assembly of her rightful work and authority.

The gathering in Acts xv. is unlike present-day ‘conferences’ in the following respects:–1. Inspired Apostles were present. Their pronouncements had the authority of the One who sent them, and were to be accepted as the Word of God. (Luke x. 16, Matt. X. 40.) We have no inspired men to-day. 2. The N.T. record was incomplete. The Apostles were the men through whom the New Covenant Scriptures were being progressively revealed. Until the inspired volume was complete, it was necessary for the Apostles to be present to give authoritative judgment on any disputed question. There is no such need to-day – the N.T. forming our complete and sufficient guide



for faith and practice. 3. The decision reached was backed by Apostolic authority, and was therefore accepted without question by the Churches concerned. (Verses 30, 31.) If it is suggested that this was merely a recommendation, we ask: Have present-day conferences the right to make such ‘recommendations’? Can we, in like manner, ‘enforce legislation given long before’?

2. Cor. viii. 19 and xi. 8 certainly indicate that more than one assembly supported Paul and chose a brother for a particular task. But it is insisted by the present writer that these passages ‘do not suggest the existence of **an extra-Church organisation** to which the individual assemblies **delegated their sovereign authority.**’ If it is suggested that these things were done through any channel other than the local Church, and not under Scriptural oversight, we ask: What was that organisation, when and by whom was it appointed, and who were its officers?

Acts xi. 27-30, Rom. xv. 25-27: Neither passage suggests that this relieving of the poor was through any organisation outside the authority of overseers. Indeed, the former plainly declares that the aid was ‘sent to the elders by the hands of Barnabus and Saul.’ Thus the principle is maintained that the Lord’s work is done by His people through His chosen instrument – the Church.

A. E. WINSTANLEY

We are not contending for an ‘extra-Church organisation,’ but for the right of Churches to combine in sending out and supporting evangelists. This Bro. W. concedes when he says: ‘2 Cor. viii. 19 and xi. 8 certainly indicate that more than one assembly supported Paul and chose a brother for a particular task.’ Then why cannot more than one assembly do it now? In such case would not the work still be done by the Church?

Acts xiii. does not reveal that a local assembly sent out evangelists. Why stop at verse three?

Verse four distinctly says: 'So they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit.' Of course if it is claimed that the Holy Spirit speaks now (apart from the written word) as He did then, there is nothing more to be said.

But our brother now pleads for evangelisation being in the hands of the overseers rather than the local assembly, for he says: 'Any system which removes evangelism from the supervision of the elders denies their divinely-conferred authority.' Elders are appointed by the Church to serve the Church, and are subject to the Church. If they fail to act as the Church desires the Church can remove them.

It was because things were done by the elders that should have been done by the Church that the papacy developed.

When our brother speaks of elders possessing 'divinely-conferred authority,' he says more than the Scriptures warrant. That savours of papacy.

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ possesses 'all authority... in heaven and earth.' (Matt. xxviii. 19.) And we are quite content to submit to Jesus only, and in all things to be guided by His Word.

Bro. W. also concedes that Acts xv. was more than a local assembly.

Yes, present-day conferences of Churches have a right to recommend Churches to abide by 'legislation given long before,' and if Churches will not abide by such legislation (i.e. New Testament teaching), we can and do refuse to have fellowship with such.

We could write much more but space forbids.

WALTER CROSTHWAITE

## A Warning

JOHN M. WOOD – JANUARY 1948

Dear Bro. Editor,— When the Co-operation of Churches of Christ was first formed, there were those who believed that it would become an instrument in the hands of some to seek pre-eminence in the Church: and that the organization was wrong in that it had no Scriptural justification.

The former point has been clearly demonstrated in the history of the Church since then. Because certain brethren introduced false doctrines and practices by means of the organization, it has been condemned as being corrupt.

I feel, however, that if we let the matter rest there, we ignore the more important fact, that corruption largely sprang from, and was wholly fostered by, the Co-operation, an instrument by means of which the whole body became contaminated. Had there been no Co-operation, there would not have been same possibility of dragging every local Church down in the general degradation of an organized whole. It seems to me, then, that it is not enough to condemn the Co-operation because of corruption, but to condemn the organization, as such.

It is my sincere belief, that there is no Scriptural justification for any representative body or assembly with legislative power, and it is in answer to your report on the Tranent Conference that this is penned.

I note, with sorrow, that the matter of the Committee's justification by Scripture is being ignored: and that further discussion is to be had with regard to the election of elders or overseers of the various loyal Churches, to the Committee. Might I point out that if such a measure is adopted, we might well be said to have just another form of super-eldership, on similar lines to that of the Catholic bishopric?

I believe the efforts of the brethren concerned in this matter are sincere and whole hearted – as were those of the brethren who formed the Co-operation, but it is not evident that if we leave the matter as it is at present, we are creating an instrument that may bring the whole body once again

into error, in a disastrous repetition of history? Who will the members of the Committee of the future be? What will be their motives?

JOHN M. WOOD

## **Evangelists, etc.**

P. G. Ogden – FEBRUARY 1948

Dear Bro. Editor,— I have read with interest Bro. Wood's letter in your January issue, but it seems to me that, before the problem can be solved, we must get a little nearer to the root of the matter. The whole question is 'The evangelist, who should appoint, locate, and upkeep him?' For this purpose, years ago, the organization, calling itself the Co-operation of Churches of Christ, was called into being, but having no Scriptural authority for its existence, could naturally find no Scripture to guide it in its work, hence the dire result.

If you could discover in the Scriptures the authority for the evangelist, then, doubtless, you will also find (as with the other officers of the Church) his qualifications, duties, appointment, and maintenance, thus ending all difficulties in the matter. But if not, then the evangelist must first be created, and his appointment, location, and support left to the judgment of man.

If this is the case, what hope have we for any better result than that which we are experiencing to-day? And no one will deny that our brethren did what they sincerely believed to be for the best.

P. G. OGDEN

## Evangelists, etc.

JOHN M. WOOD – MARCH 1948

Dear Bro. Crosthwaite,— No one could doubt there were evangelists in New Testament times. Reference is made to these in Ephes. iv. 11. Specific cases are given in the persons of Philip, a deacon of the Church, in Acts vi. 5, but also an evangelist of Gospel preacher, as the term indicates, preferably a travelling preacher. Samaria (Acts viii. 5), Gaza, to the Eunuch (Acts viii. 26), ‘and in all the cities’ (Acts viii. 40; xxi. 8); and of Timothy, exhorted by Paul to ‘preach the word’; ‘do the work of an evangelist’ (2 Tim. iv. 2-5); ‘Bring one, Mark, for the work of the ministry’ (iv. 11); all of which denote a travelling preacher. There were obviously others, including the Apostles themselves, and we are inclined to use the word too narrowly.

The great commission (Mark xvi. 15) is the Scriptural authority for the evangelist, and if this were true in N.T. times it would be difficult to deny that it is so now. It cannot be demonstrated, however, that any evangelist was ‘appointed’ by the Church, or that his position is to be regarded as a specific ‘office’ of the Church, but rather is he called by the Spirit through the commission. On the other hand, it is true that ‘The labourer is worthy of his hire,’ and that Christians are in honour bound to support the preacher in his ministry, in so far as he has need, and the member is able. Such support, in my personal view, would normally be given through the local gathering.

What cannot be Scripturally upheld is that any organisation, apart from the local assembly, should exist for this purpose. All assistance given either to evangelists or Churches in the New Testament seems to be sent direct from the local Church to those concerned. (2 Cor. xvi. 1-4) We find plenty of co-operation among the Church of the N.T., but never any machinery to retard, limit, or strangle the spirit which prompted this: nor was their co-operation limited to evangelisation. God’s purpose in leaving the support of evangelists to the judgment of men is typical of His work in many things; and I believe is intended to bring home to us the fact that we are entirely responsible for the preaching of the Word – all of us. The ideal organisation and design of the Church appears to me to be the most effective way of

ensuring that the preaching of the Word is unhindered, from the care of the sick and aged, to the teaching of the young. The life of the local Church seems to revolve about this axis.

If the brethren persist in the policy of central organisation, I visualise another disaster for the cause of restoration of primitive Christianity in the British Churches, and feel that our existence as Churches of Christ is at stake.

The position is very clearly defined by Bro. Ogden, when he states in the February issue of 'S.S.', 'For this purpose... dire result.'

JOHN M. WOOD

## Correspondence: Evangelists

P. G. OGDEN & JOHN ANDERSON – APRIL 1948

Dear Bro. Crosthwaite,— I have never doubted that there were evangelists in the apostolic days. Eph. iv. 11 clearly states that God gave them, and the various Scriptures quoted by our Bro. Wood are further evidence of their existence, attended with their power of healing, miracles, gifts of tongues, etc. But the same verse declares that the appointment of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers was only for a period: 'until,' and this period ended with the coming of the 'perfect thing,' the inspired Word of God – our Bible.

There were often special offices and officers in the Church in those days, elders and deacons, but as they were not mentioned in the list of those whose services were to be discontinued, we have them still with us. Their qualification and duties are fully described in the Scriptures, and it is the Elder of whom the Apostles says he is a workman, worthy of his hire.

The great commission lays the duty of preaching the Gospel upon the shoulders of every Christian, and if the meaning of the word 'evangelist' is a 'preacher of the Gospel,' then God has not neglected to provide for this very important office. But the Scriptures are silent with regard to the person

we to-day call the evangelist, or the special office he fills. It, therefore, remains (if the brethren are determined to have him) for them to devise the means to appoint, train, direct, and support him, and whether it be by the Church or by committee, they are both equally without Scriptural authority.

We are taught that the Word of God is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished into every good word and work. Therefore, brethren, why proceed without the Word to guide you? 'Who hath required it at your hand?'

P. G. OGDEN

[Ephesians iv. 11 names 'pastors and teachers,' as well as 'evangelists.' – Walter Crosthwaite]

Dear Bro. Editor,– in the March 'S.S.,' Bro. John M. Wood continues the subject. He states that Philip was a deacon of the Church. Bro. W. here speaks where the Bible is silent. We should not dogmatically assert what we cannot prove to be true. What we cannot prove must be left an open question, where each person can have his own opinion. A 'maybe' is not of much use to any man.

Bro. W. states that the commission (Mark vi. 15) is the Scriptural authority for the evangelist. Here the Lord certainly gave authority to the eleven Apostles, but I see nothing to suggest that evangelists were in view at this time. We generally look later to the inspired apostles for their authority that all Christians, according to their sphere and ability, should preach the Gospel.

Bro. W. is strong in his plea for evangelists, but at the same time, in both this and his January letter, he strongly and abusively condemns Co-operation, which is the only method by which small Churches can, in a decent and orderly way, employ full-time preachers.

What expedient does Bro. W. propose for the extending of the work entrusted by God to the Church? He has no progressive proposal, but he rather advocates restriction. To say each Church must act by itself is

paramount to saying that there can be no full-time evangelists. It is neither just nor orderly for one Church to engage an evangelist and sub-let him out to other Churches; and, like Co-operation, it can only be justified as being an expedient to carry out work approved of God.

Bro. W. risks saying the general Co-operation influenced the Churches to go astray, and that it was not the Churches which influenced the Co-operation. Now the Churches are the Co-operation, and it is difficult to distinguish between them. There are errors which spread through the Churches, and hence the Co-operations. In our district, the Co-operation has kept on right lines for over seventy-three years. The Churches have the same faith and practices as those our fathers had. Whether the Churches or the Co-operation have contributed most to this, it is difficult for a man to say.

Our local Co-operation reckons that God authorizes and desires us to preach the Gospel, and as long as we do not transgress His laws, He has left us to devise the best way of obeying His desire. As an expediency we co-operate.

JOHN ANDERSON

## **Correspondence: Evangelists and Co-operation**

JOHN M. WOOD & GEOFFREY LODGE – MAY 1948

Dear Bro. Crosthwaite,— My reasons for stating that Philip was a deacon are these: (1) I believe that the Philip spoken of in Acts viii. 26 is the same as the one in Acts vi. 5, just as I think that the Stephen of Acts vii. 59 is that of Acts vi. 5, although the Bible does not specifically say so.

(2) This Philip, and others, were appointed to serve tables, Acts vi. 5, which work I regard as that of a deacon. However, lest we presume too much, let us call him a minister of temporal things of the Church, or simply, official server of tables.



But why make a very science of the meaning of a word, if we are to miss the point of the whole matter? The fact is that this man took a regular part in the activities of the local Church, and was yet an evangelist. We err in pinning the word 'evangelist' to the full time preacher alone. Incidentally, the last term is often much abused, too. We have more evangelists amongst us than is generally supposed.

If we trace the natural conclusion of what is contended about the 'Great Commission,' it will be readily seen that very little of the Apostles' works were written directly to us at the present time, but rather to specific Churches. Does this mean that they are really no business of ours?

As far as I am aware, nothing at all was written specifically to me as an individual by name, but I am ready to acknowledge that all things have been recorded for me. I therefore regard the Great Commission as being as personal to me as a call of Christ as it was to the apostles, though, of course, not so direct.

From the third paragraph of my last letter can be read, 'We find plenty of co-operation among the Churches of the N.T.' and from whatever else is written, it cannot be proved that I 'abusively condemn co-operation.' I firmly believe in the co-operation which is the natural result of brotherly affection. Is your brother in any way in need? There is the starting point for co-operation, but not the starting point for central organization in the Churches. Any support given to elders, deacons, teachers or evangelists, should be the direct result of Christian love – not of commercial contract in which there may be no spirit of unity at all. If we thought more of what we could do for others, instead of how much of a certain preacher's services we could buy, or agree to buy, for ourselves, a new spirit would rise in the brotherhood.

Central organization cannot, never has and never will, foster that spirit. We need the breadth of vision which enables us to see that an addition to the Church in Macedonia, is a very real addition to the Church all over the globe. It may well be that the brother we have succoured will one day help in our time of trouble. Central organisation centres our eyes on ourselves,

what can we do for our Church, our district, and our country; what benefits are we to get from so-called co-operation.

The present cry is not for co-operation, but for organisation. Why organisation? Is it because we wish to have some financial agreement for the support of 'full-time evangelists'?

If the spirit of co-operation is existent, why can we not trust the evangelist to direct his own work? Why could we not send the necessary support either directly to him or the Church with which he labours? If we cannot be sure the funds will be correctly utilised, then we demonstrate a lack of faith in the brother or Church concerned. How can we support anyone or anything we cannot trust? No organisation can be an ideal cloak for faithlessness, but never is a satisfactory remedy. If the people of God cannot make the necessary sacrifice in faith, the work of the evangelist as a full-time preacher must stop. In such a case, an evangelist would be obliged to labour with his hands, as many do.

This cry for organisation may be because we wish to concentrate our energies on certain matters pertaining to the work of the Church or in the case of smaller Churches, that decency and order might prevail.

This is the exact argument, no doubt, that denominations would use, and even Catholics would offer to justify the order of their 'Ministry.' Whatever we say of them, their government is certainly orderly and their organisation is first-class. It should be enough to point out that the strength of a nation is not so much held in force of arms or strict government, but rather in the health, prosperity and moral thought and living of its subjects.

In a certain 'District co-operation of Churches' a few years ago, it was decided to employ an evangelist amongst the Churches – to promote unity! It was found that it would be necessary to employ two evangelists, one 'Overdale' and one, so-called, 'Old Paths,' the reason being that each was not acceptable in certain Churches (the objections were not personal). Is this an example of co-operation or is this the expression of spiritual unity? And yet there are many to-day, in the same district, who are unaware that such a 'co-operation' could never possibly be on the right lines.

The Church is the 'Body of Christ,' the 'Co-operation,' an organisation pretending to unite the functions of that body, in which each is a member of all.

Let our action portray what lies within us and with faith, hope and love, these three, there will be no lack of co-operation for all good purposes. Co-operate to unite or spiritual unity for co-operation?

JOHN M. WOOD

We do find the Church completely given in the N.T., but we do not find any instances of a Church instructing evangelists where or how long they were to work, nor do we find a guaranteed stipend. This direction of evangelists labour is still an interference with the local assembly's power, as with the committee system.

We have seen the inadvisable points in both, and the question must be: 'Is there a better method?' Well, back to the Book again. IN reading of the early Gospel preachers, we observe no direction by either Church or committee, but rather a freelance ministry (within the bounds of the love of Christ). (Acts xx. 1-6.) Paul tells the Christians at Rome: 'Oftentimes I purposed to come unto you' (Rom. i. 13), and he makes no apology for being self-determined. Then, too, we find instances of his receiving gifts of money from Churches, particularly the Philippian Church (Phil. iv. 10-19, Weymouth's version). Even a hint of a method in the Scriptures is worth years of wrangling within the bounds of the silence of Scripture. This I suggest is the line to follow, and though I do not pretend to know the way fully, the following seems to have obtained in the early days:

Those who went out to do the work of a full-time Gospel preacher did so of their own free will (always in subjection to the Lord, of course), with the blessing of their brethren. They went where they felt they ought to go, usually to new fields. They seemed to have stayed as long as was profitable for the cause (years sometimes), generally leaving a Church established, which they re-visited occasionally. They were helped on their way by those who knew their worth and loved them for their works' sake. The newly-

formed Church would doubtless minister to the needs of the evangelists whilst they were with them. When poverty or thoughtlessness caused help to cease, they knew how to earn a living and were quite prepared to do so. (1 Cor. iv. 11 and 12, ix. 1-19; 1 Thes. ii. 9; 2 Thes. iii. 7-9.)

Perhaps the simplicity of the method is rather shocking to our organisation-loving minds, but if it is true let us receive it joyfully and cease from attempting to justify accepted ideas when we have no proof for them. The pioneers of the Restoration Movement had to make their progress like that. Why should we imagine the journey to be necessarily complete even yet?

GEOFFREY LODGE

[Considerably abridged. – Walter Crosthwaite]

## The Question of Co-operation Today

MATTHEW SHAFFER – JANUARY 2025

Given the variety of views offered on this subject during the 1940s, it is not yet possible to define a “traditional” position amongst the British churches of Christ. It is possible, even likely that such a view will emerge as we follow the conversation through the subsequent decades, but for now we are only able to highlight the points of contention that need to be addressed before we can come to a well-reasoned conclusion that reflects our faith. Consequently, this article is not meant to provide a conclusive answer to the question of co-operation, but rather to organise our thoughts as we continue to explore the subject throughout the year.

I believe our answer to the question: “When and in what manner should individual congregations co-operate with one another” must be built on our answers to the following questions:

1. *What relationship does the local assembly have with the universal church?*

I believe that the Bible teaches the concept of a universal church – that is, the multitude of all Christians who have lived, are living, and will live by faith in Christ. This is the sense in which Paul uses the term when he says that Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25, NKJV). Even if we do not see it directly, we will share a bond of purpose and redemption when we stand together with all Christians in the judgment.

However, in our practical experience on this earth, we are not well prepared to accurately judge who is and is not in that final, universal church (see Matthew 13:29-30 and Romans 14:10-13), nor can we build an effective connection with every other living Christian. We are being perfected in Christ, but we are not yet perfect. For that reason, we must act and make decisions within our present limitations.

This means that we must decide: when I act, should I act for the benefit of the universal church – and if so, how do I discern what is right and beneficial for that church? Conversely, should I act for the benefit of my local brothers and sisters and allow God to use my efforts in a universal context, if He so chooses? Similarly, if I have been selected as an elder in one congregation, does that give me authority in any other congregation? Or if I have been selected as a deacon for one assembly, can another direct my work?

## *2. How should scriptural evangelistic work be carried out?*

This was, perhaps, the most contentious part of the correspondence in the 1940s. Every writer agreed that the church must be engaged in evangelistic work, but they found little agreement in the method. Some believed that it was appropriate to find and support evangelists, individuals whose lives are solely dedicated to preaching the gospel and building up the church, while others believed that the task of modern evangelism is best shared equally by all members – thus making it an important, but part-time activity of every Christian. Those that supported the idea of evangelists disagreed as to whether an evangelist was best answerable to a local congregation,

to a committee that represented several congregations, or to no one but God. To frame the disagreement in terms of our first question, it was unclear whether evangelism should be considered a local work or a universal work.

3. *How should we understand scriptural fellowship – particularly between congregations?*

The idea of fellowship – sharing something in common – implies a degree of co-operation. If we have fellowship with another Christian, we share a common sense of purpose and a common interest in the health of the church. If we have true fellowship, our actions will be mutually beneficial. Given this understanding, how should genuine fellowship be formed and practiced between congregations?

There are, of course, more factors to consider when it comes to fellowship. If I have missed anything that you find to be important, please write and let me know so that the discussion in the next issues can be better rounded. I will not attempt to provide an answer to any of the three questions I have posed just now, but will leave it for future issues to explore them in more detail. If you have answers that you want to share with me and with other readers of the Scripture Standard, please do not hesitate to submit them at [scripturestandard@gmail.com](mailto:scripturestandard@gmail.com) and [mshaffer@christianprospect.com](mailto:mshaffer@christianprospect.com).

MATTHEW SHAFFER