

Silence in the Face of Racism: Exploring the Inaction of White Christian Churches/Churches of Christ During the Civil Rights Movement

The 1960's were crucial years for the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, as Black demonstrators fought for equal rights under United States law. It impacted every aspect and institution of American society, including churches of all different denominations and movements. The three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement (Churches of Christ, Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ) were certainly not exempt, and each one reacted uniquely. Disciples of Christ joined other mainstream Protestant denominations to openly advocate for the Civil Rights Movement, while the Churches of Christ began the process of publicly confronting racism and segregation in their own congregations due in large part to the work of Black members.¹

However, during this pivotal decade, white members of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (who made up the vast majority of the movement) took almost no action to support the Civil Rights Movement, despite several prominent adherents advocating for an end to racial prejudice. This silence was due in large part to these writers and speakers simultaneously arguing that new legislation, civil disobedience, or systemic concepts of racism were unhelpful. Instead, they argued that problems of racism in the United States could only be solved through the work of God in individuals, each one solely responsible for their heart. This individualist theology tragically kept almost all members of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ from any notable participation in the Civil Rights Movement, despite vocal calls for an end to racism and prejudice, and this silence continues today.

¹ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 204-208.

Background

During the early and mid-twentieth century, the fellowship of churches that would eventually identify themselves as Christian Churches/Churches of Christ was slowly coming into existence.² The Stone-Campbell Movement, of which Christian Churches/Churches of Christ are a part, began in the nineteenth century with a focus on unifying Christianity by returning it to its first-century condition, utilizing only Biblical instructions to guide both individual Christians and the church as a whole.³ By the turn of the twentieth century, a forty-year split into two groups was finally demonstrated in a census of religious groups in the United States, with the new, more conservative Churches of Christ (no connection to the aforementioned group) leaving the original Disciples of Christ.⁴

Shortly thereafter, the Disciples began an equally gradual process of fracturing into two groups. A large number of Disciples began to embrace a more liberal theology that focused on social, systemic service to unbelievers and those in need, not dissimilar to that of the Protestant denominations taking part in the early twentieth century ecumenical movements, and began to organize in order to make their ministry more effective. Meanwhile, conservative members were strictly against these shifts, believing that the early church consisted of independent congregations. As early as the 1920's, as the Disciples began to organize their various mission societies into a single, more efficient organization; conservative congregations refused to take part and even started their own preaching conference in 1927, the North American Christian

² For further reading on this topic, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, edited by Williams, Foster, and Blowers, gives a detailed retelling, while *Renewal For Mission: A Concise History of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ*, by Helsabeck, Holloway, and Foster is a briefer read that focuses especially on the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.

³ W. Dennis Helsabeck, Jr., Gary Holloway, and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewal For Mission: A Concise History of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ* (Abilene: Abilene University Press, 2009), 76-78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-100.

Convention (NACC). Slowly, the Disciples continued to become more organized, which culminated in 1968 when they formed their own denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). By this time, conservative congregations, which would become the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, had been effectively separated for years as they refused to join in the increasing organization, but this final step led to thousands of churches formally leaving the movement to remain independent. Their theology also remained more conservative during the decades of separation; they had much more in common with the newly emerging neo-evangelical movement, which focused specifically on converting and changing individual souls, and began to work more closely with these evangelical denominations and organizations.⁵

During the 1950's and 1960's, as focused as the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ were on their internal debates, neither they nor the Churches of Christ could ignore the effects of the Civil Rights Movement. The Disciples of Christ, which were mainly located in the Midwest, had traditionally acted in racist and paternalistic ways toward their Black members, but they began to join the other Protestant churches formally agitating for change.⁶ Churches of Christ existed primarily in the South and had been more segregated while also having a larger number of Black members. While these churches as a whole did not join protests or advocate for civil change, their Black members advocated for integrated congregations, which did begin to happen; this also led to a vocal, far-reaching discussion on race and racism.⁷ Christian Churches/Churches of Christ were also concentrated in the Midwest but, unlike the Disciples, did not have many churches in urban areas, leading to primarily white

⁵ Summary drawn from D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 193-208.

⁶ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 204-206.

⁷ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 206-208.

congregations; Black members often worshipped in separate congregations and those interested in ministry even attended separate Bible colleges. However, during the Civil Rights Movement, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ as a whole did not contribute any substantial effort towards the Civil Rights Movement, due primarily to the inaction of their mostly white members.⁸

Primary Sources Utilized

Two primary sources are vital to understand why white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members did so little in support of the Civil Rights Movement. The first is archived materials from the North American Christian Conventions that took place during the years of the Civil Rights Movement. The convention, which ran from 1927-2018 and yearly after 1950, began as a place for conservative Disciples ministers to meet and discuss preaching and practical ministry, as opposed to social or organizational concerns.⁹ As the decades continued, it became the primary convention for the budding Christian Churches/Churches of Christ movement. In 1963, it changed somewhat when Standard Publishing (a Christian Churches/Churches of Christ publishing company) permanently merged its conventions with the NACC for one major event.¹⁰ While it still focused on preaching and Christian ministry, the NACC began to feature more classes for laypeople, including children's programming, that occasionally featured presentations on social issues. (In addition, during the 1960's, most social issues were saved for separate discussion-based groups, as noted in programs from these conventions; no record of these

⁸ While the Disciples and the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ kept directories of their churches with membership statistics at this time in the Directory of the Ministry, these did not include racial demographics. However, anecdotal evidence does suggest that churches that would soon become part of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ were mostly white.

⁹ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 180.

¹⁰ Leonard G. Wymore, interview by Lee Schroerlucke, May 5, 1996. Transcript, 8. Milligan College Archives, Johnson City, Tennessee.

conversations is available.) At this time, it was the most important convention for Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members, so the events and speeches at these events give voice to the various opinions of church members and authorities on a variety of topics, including racism.¹¹

However, for a variety of reasons, the NACC records are incomplete. Transcripts of every address given were only consistently saved starting at the end of the 1960's, and convention materials that noted event speeches and topics were often not preserved before the start of the decade. Therefore, while the convention programs and transcripts that remain are invaluable, they are utilized as supplemental material.

Conversely, issues of the *Christian Standard* from this era are fully preserved in digital form.¹² Founded in 1866, this magazine became a voice for conservative Disciples in the early twentieth century and followed them as they became the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.¹³ At the time of the Civil Rights Movement, this weekly magazine was one of the most accurate representations of the concerns of those in this movement. (However, since Christian Churches/Churches of Christ defined themselves by their congregational independence at this time, no magazine or conference can truly be said to represent the theology of the movement at large). During the course of the Civil Rights Movement, the magazine featured nearly forty articles and editorials on the issues of race and racism, providing a general snapshot of how members of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ responded to these issues. (One editor,

¹¹ For more information on the history of the North American Christian Convention, see Leonard G. Wymore, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone Campbell Movement*, s.v. "North American Christian Convention" (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 570-572.

¹² For this project, they were accessed on a computer at the The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement at Milligan University.

¹³ Henry E. Webb, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, s.v. "Christian Standard" (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 197-199.

Edwin Hayden, remained in charge throughout this entire period.) Therefore, this magazine is a much more reliable indicator of the opinions of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members about racism and why these opinions led to inaction, as compared to the North American Christian Convention.

Belated First Voices (1960-1962)

Despite the fact that the Civil Rights Movement began to coalesce in 1954 with the landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education* and quickly gained national attention,¹⁴ there were only a handful of brief references to racism, usually discussed using the terminology of “race relations” in the *Christian Standard* and at the North American Christian Convention events. This silence demonstrates that white thinkers and leaders, who represented the vast majority of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members, did not think that the Civil Rights Movement was even important or relevant enough for them to discuss at this time.

Between 1960 and 1962, the issue slowly began to take up more space in the pages of the *Christian Standard*, especially in Edwin Hayden’s editorial section.¹⁵ (At the 1960-1962 North American Christian Conventions, race was not explicitly mentioned in any of the presentation or sermon titles.) There was one editorial on the subject of race in both in 1960 and 1961. The 1960 editorial simply pointed out with glee the racism the Russian government showed towards Black competitors at the Olympics after previously denouncing the United States for its racial discrimination. However, the 1961 editorial sounded much like the two editorials about racism published during 1962. While all three appeared at different times and discussed different

¹⁴ Wallenstein, Peter. *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, vol. 1, s.v. “Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Movement” (New York: Grolier Educational, 2001), 345.

¹⁵ No names were directly attached to any of the editorials over the course of the decade.

anecdotes, they all had the same essential argument: that the solution to the difficulties of institutionalized racism in the United States was much more complicated than those arguing for integration laws would suggest. One argued that laws would in fact be unhelpful, as they would be separating Black people out to receive special treatment, and that forcing integration onto a white person might actually make them dislike Black people more.¹⁶ Another argued that it would be much more useful to love all people as God commanded, which cannot be enforced by a governmental law.¹⁷ These editorials set the tone for the *Christian Standard's* editorials on race for the rest of the decade; compared to the authors of articles within the magazine, the editorial section often had the most blatant opposition to the Civil Rights Movement or discussing it.

In 1962, the *Christian Standard* also featured four articles about race and its impact on the church. Two of these articles were the two parts of James D. Strauss's "Race, Redemption, and Responsibility," published in the February 10 and February 17 editions of the magazine. In them, Strauss argues that humanity's fall into sin was the cause of the racism harming the relationships between humans that God had established, but that Jesus had restored this broken situation and Christians must live out his restoration. However, Strauss states that simply getting "hearts right with God" to solve this issue is denial, while solutions such as those proposed by the "social gospel" place too much responsibility on the humans and their environment while leaving God out of the equation.¹⁸ Instead, Strauss examines scientific and biblical works to try and craft a new solution. He notes that ethnic groups are not equivalent to race and that no group is

¹⁶ "Not That Simple," *Christian Standard*, February 10, 1962, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

¹⁷ "No Simple Solution," *Christian Standard*, July 28, 1962, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

¹⁸ James D. Strauss, "Race, Redemption, and Responsibility." *Christian Standard*, February 10, 1962, 3. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

genetically more “pure” or superior to another.¹⁹ Instead, prejudice is to blame for racism; sinners see themselves as the superior beings they desire to be, instead of viewing themselves through the lens of Jesus’s “revelation.”²⁰ He concludes by noting that the (white) Christian response should not be to try to scientifically prove their superiority through anthropology, as this has also proved ineffective.²¹

The second part of Strauss’s work focuses on what the Bible says about race. He argues that the only distinction between people that God makes is that of members and non-members in His covenants; Strauss also notes the errors in the racist interpretations in the curse of Noah on Ham and the scattering at the Tower of Babel in Genesis. Christians who live in an environment where the Bible is used to justify a racist status quo should remember that that all of humanity also shared the same common ancestors (Adam and Eve), and God erased all divisions from humanity through Jesus and His love. Strauss notes that the gospel is not “neutral or silent” on this issue; those who disobey are stopping its spread through their prejudiced actions.²² Strauss’s solutions to these issues are to increase the training of Black missionaries to send to Black communities and bridge the racial divide with “love;”²³ he views this challenge as a test to see if Christians can behave any better than non-Christians in this area.²⁴ It is notable that civil rights legislation is not a solution Strauss proposes, despite him essentially arguing for non-codified

¹⁹ James D. Strauss, “Race, Redemption, and Responsibility.” *Christian Standard*, February 10, 1962, 3. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ This summary is drawn from James D. Strauss, “Race, Redemption, and Responsibility.” *Christian Standard*, February 10, 1962, 3-4. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

²² James D. Strauss, “Race, Redemption, and Responsibility [part 2].” *Christian Standard*, February 17, 1962, 9-10. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ This summary is drawn from James D. Strauss, “Race, Redemption, and Responsibility [part 2].” *Christian Standard*, February 17, 1962, 9-10. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

equal rights, especially within the church. Instead, Strauss emphasizes God's role in ending racism within people's hearts, dismissing the role that a person's surroundings might play in their racism.

The other two articles, published next to each other in the July 28 issue reveal that one pressing concern brought on by the Civil Rights Movement for white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members was white flight. "We Are Moving" by Charles Richards details the mistakes his church made that led to its end as white people left the neighborhood and those who remained opposed ministering to their new Black neighbors. He offers seven tips to churches in a similar situation that will help prolong their survival, which include accepting that white flight will happen, to work with the congregation on what to do next, and to act in a "Christian" manner no matter the tensions.²⁵ He closes with a warning that as a church decides whether to remain white or to integrate, that the congregation should know that families will move in order to avoid the possibility of their children becoming romantically involved with Black peers.²⁶ However, his opinion is that churches should stay and integrate; if white Christians are willing to send missionaries to Africa, why can they not minister to the Black people in their neighborhoods?²⁷

The companion article is a reprint of an editorial from a newsletter, written by Park H. Netting and titled, "'Mixed'" Congregations at First." By using the example of a local integrated congregation that was quite successful, as well as the unity around the Communion table

²⁵ Charles Richards, "We Are Moving." *Christian Standard*, July 28, 1962, 5-6. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6

²⁷ Summary drawn from Charles Richards, "We Are Moving." *Christian Standard*, July 28, 1962, 5-6. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

ordained by scripture, Netting argued that churches should integrate. In these articles, both Richards and Netting argue that the racism is sinful, but none of the proposed solutions involve legally enforced desegregation, the primary emphasis of the Civil Rights Movement. These writings also show the racism within the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ that partially contributed to the movement's silence on the Civil Rights Movement; large numbers of white members clearly did not want to associate with Black people and chose to move instead if the issue was deemed relevant enough to include in the *Christian Standard*.

Focus on Civil Rights (1963-1965)

The next year, the tone of discussion among white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ changed as the Civil Rights Movement began to build in scope. Specifically, all but one article and editorial on race in *Christian Standard* in 1963 came after or in response to the March on Washington, which took place on August 28 of that year. (The North American Christian Convention, held before the march, featured no presentations with race or racism explicitly mentioned in their titles.) The two race-focused editorials Edwin Hayden included in 1963 focused on demonstrations, and while the author(s) praised the March on Washington for remaining peaceful in a potentially explosive situation, they bemoaned the platforms the demonstrators at the March on Washington and at other protests supporters. Integration would give minority groups special "privileges", while the civil disobedience protestors were using would encourage people to break any laws they wanted.²⁸ This continued the trend of negative attitudes toward civil rights within the *Christian Standard's* editorial pages.

²⁸ "Where is Justice," *Christian Standard*, August 10, 1963, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

Two *Christian Standard* articles responded to the protest. James DeForest Murch's "Today in Christendom: Christianity and the Racial Crisis" describes the Civil Rights Movement as an emergency for the United States and for Christianity. Murch notes that left-leaning Christians have joined in protests, while evangelicals issued statements. However, both white supremacists and Black Muslims are damaging the fight for integration; Black churches have also not shown any desire to integrate. While Murch was impressed by the peaceful March on Washington, he was afraid that it would encourage further violence and mob action.²⁹ In order to solve the crisis, he put forth ten biblically-inspired principles, which forbade racism, including civil discrimination, because all people are the children of God.

The second article was a reprinted sermon that N. Gene Carlson gave on September 1 and was published in the November 2 issue of the *Christian Standard* with the title "Two Marches... Washington and Jerusalem." After positive comments about the peaceful nature of the march, Carlson discussed how the "upheaval" it represented should be dealt with by Christians.³⁰ To present his solution, Carlson referred to Jesus's own procession: his triumphal entry into Jerusalem; Jesus used it as a springboard for rapid change, and Christians should do the same now to further the end of racism. After rejecting both the liberal Christian social gospel and the conservative Christian tendency to ignore social issues, Carlson argued that the impact of the gospel of Jesus on people's hearts was the answer to ending racism, not legislative action. He finished his sermon with criticism of the church, which had not taken Jesus's Palm Sunday

²⁹ Summary drawn from James D. Murch, "Christianity and the Racial Crisis." *Christian Standard*, October 19, 1963, 5. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³⁰ N. Gene Carlson, "Two Marches... Washington and Jerusalem." Sermon given at Southport Heights Christian Church, Indiana, September 1, 1963, in the *Christian Standard*, November 2, 1963, 3. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

lessons to heart and were doing less to further integration than even professional baseball.³¹

These articles demonstrate the importance of Christian individualism for how white members of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ understood racism and the Civil Rights Movement; both Murch and Carlson opposed actions that focused on any aspect larger than a single person's heart.

In 1964 and 1965, civil rights protests continued and the United States government began to pass civil rights legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; these would be some of the most sizeable impacts of the Civil Rights Movement.³²

However, there was no significant increase in discussion of racism in the pages of the *Christian Standard*: the magazine featured just two editorials and articles on racism during all of 1964 and only one editorial and article during 1965. This relative lack of discussion, as well as the previous dearth of race-related articles, was partially explained in an editor's note in the February 15, 1964 issue: "Between obdurate white supremacists and obsessive partisans of 'civil rights,' we... had no wish to add fuel to an emotional fire."³³ This note demonstrates that instead of discussing the issue of racism in a more in-depth manner, *Christian Standard* creators, led by Edwin Hayden, decided to simply avoid discussing it in order to prevent any tension among its readers.

The first mention of racism in a 1964 *Christian Standard* editorial came in the September 5 edition, in which the author argued against reparations for Black Americans. In a patronizing

³¹ Summary drawn from N. Gene Carlson, "Two Marches... Washington and Jerusalem." Sermon given at Southport Heights Christian Church, Indiana, September 1, 1963, in the *Christian Standard*, November 2, 1963, 3-4. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³² Wallenstein, Peter. *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, vol. 1, s.v. "Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Movement" (New York: Grolier Educational, 2001), 348.

³³ "This Week and Next," *Christian Standard*, February 15, 1964, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

tone, they argued that the Black Americans alive now were not the slaves who built up the United States, so why should they receive what was due to others?³⁴ The next editorial, titled “A Time to Laugh” and published in the October 10 issue, commented on an article in that issue: “Curtailing Comedy,” which was an editorial, originally written for *The Christian* (a Disciples of Christ magazine) by its editor, Howard E. Short. In it, he criticized the backlash that the television comedy *Amos ‘n’ Andy* had gathered for its portrayal of the main characters, who were Black. Short argued that the show was not detrimental to the image of Black people because its characters were not designed to be representative of an entire people group.³⁵ The author of “A Time to Laugh” wholeheartedly agreed with Short’s perspective and supplemented it with the argument that taking a comedy show so seriously prevents one from enjoying its humor, which shows a lack of understanding of comedy and an unhealthy focus on one’s sensitivity, which is unchristian due to its self-centeredness.³⁶

The other article on racism, published on February 15, 1964, had the title “For Such a Time” and was a reprinting of a speech that Tibbs Maxey gave the year before at a missions rally in Indiana. Maxey was at that time the white president of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ-affiliated Bible college in Louisville, Kentucky, known as College of the Scriptures, an integrated school specifically created to train Black pastors.³⁷ Maxey opened his address by noting that his (presumably majority-white) audience and the movement are finally beginning to

³⁴ “Worthy of His Hire,” *Christian Standard*, September 5, 1964, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³⁵ Summary drawn from Howard E. Short, “Curtailing Comedy.” *The Christian*, August 9, 1964, in *The Christian Standard*, October 10, 1964, 5. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³⁶ “A Time to Laugh.” *Christian Standard*, October 10, 1964, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³⁷ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 195.

show interest in hearing about how to stop racism, and he then presented his ideas on how to do this. He argued that Christians had the message, as Esther had during her life, “for such a time as this.”³⁸ After explaining why people were protesting and correcting the stereotype of Black protestors, he listed ways that Christianity had fought racism in the past and could continue to do so now. Maxey argued that the religion helped to encourage nonviolence in potentially explosive situations, as well as the selflessness needed to fight racism directed towards others, a trait which both white and Black extremists did not have. He finished by stating that Jesus’s love would be the tool that could achieve integration, as only God could remove racism from a person’s heart.³⁹ Maxey’s role as a white person leading a predominantly Black college and working within the Civil Rights Movement, while demonstrating that he was more focused on ending racism than the majority of his white peers, also showed that he was benefitting from paternalistic attitudes through even holding his position. In addition, he also advocated against legislative action to grant the civil rights of Black Americans, showing the entrenchment of individualism within white Christian Churches/ Churches of Christ members as a whole.

In 1965, the editorial “Rupert and Crystal” appeared in the May 29 issue. The writer detailed how the titular couple, who were Black, served as missionaries in their home country of Barbados and were visiting the American church they had attended when Rupert went to seminary. The editorial lamented the situation that had occurred as the couple visited their former church; white people who did not know them were happy to find out that they were not

³⁸ Tibbs Maxey, “For Such a Time.” Lecture given at Missions Rally, First Christian Church, Washington, Indiana, November 11, 1963, in the *Christian Standard*, February 15, 1964, 9. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³⁹ Summary drawn from Tibbs Maxey, “For Such a Time.” Lecture given at Missions Rally, First Christian Church, Washington, Indiana, November 11, 1963, in the *Christian Standard*, February 15, 1964, 9-10.

“just Negroes.”⁴⁰ The editor concludes that when white congregants learn that other potential Black members of their churches, even those who just came to test if they might be thrown out, were humans that could be known and befriended, just like Rupert and Crystal had been.⁴¹ While acknowledging the humanity of Black Americans was a step in the right direction, “Rupert and Crystal” still paints them as foreign provocateurs, which encourages racism even as the editorial deplors it.

The sole article on racism from 1965, published in the same issue as the above editorial, took a decidedly different tone. Ray A. Giles was a North Carolina pastor, and the *Christian Standard* specifically included his article to feature a white, southern perspective on the Civil Rights Movement. Giles’s work, “Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs,” started by listing what he believed what both the Civil Rights Movement and its opposition had gotten wrong. He believed it was wrong for civil rights protestors to break the law, that Christians who said the movement was biblical were incorrect, and that the only equality that truly mattered was that of equality before God. However, he also disagreed with the brutality of white supremacy, especially when they were supported by faulty interpretations of the Bible. He then listed that he thought it was correct for all individuals to be equal, especially among Christians. His solutions were that integrating churches was currently unnecessary but that racism should not stop white Christians from evangelizing their Black neighbors.⁴² Giles’s address may claim to oppose racism, yet it advocates for no actual steps towards integration.

⁴⁰ “Rupert and Crystal,” *Christian Standard*, May 29, 1965, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁴¹ Summary drawn from “Rupert and Crystal,” *Christian Standard*, May 29, 1965, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁴² Summary drawn from Ray A. Giles, “Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs,” *Christian Standard*, May 29, 1965, 7-8. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

Between 1964-1965, the North American Christian Convention featured very little material about race and racism. (While several speech titles from these years suggested that these topics were mentioned, none were explicitly about race or racism, and transcripts of these presentations were not in the NACC archives.) One speech, however, titled “The Christian Man’s Answer to Delinquency and Crime,” presented by attorney Charles C. Chestnut at the 1965 NACC on June 24, made arguments much more racist than anything featured in the *Christian Standard* that year. In his address, delivered in a somewhat alarmist tone, he deplored the rising rates of crimes committed by young adults, which he blamed on too-lenient responses, the growth of illegal businesses as well as on the supposed influence of Communists, who planned to join forces with Black youth and those fighting for civil rights.⁴³ This utilizing of negative stereotypes of Black people (and Communists) as dangerous encouraged listeners to see them as enemies, not fellow human beings.

Throughout these three pivotal years of the Civil Rights Movement, vocal white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members demonstrated their opposition to legal integration and formally taking part in the movement. This came about for multiple reasons, including not wanting to stir up emotions, disagreeing with civil disobedience, or simply being racist. However, multiple articles also defended this position through arguing that theological equality was sufficient and solely focusing on individuals’ actions.

Increased Discussion and Disagreement (1966-1969)

⁴³ Summary drawn from Charles Chestnut, “The Christian Man’s Answer to Delinquency and Crime.” Speech, North American Christian Convention, Tulsa, OK, June 24, 1965. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

Even as more civil rights became law, through acts such as the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the years from 1966-1969 marked the end of the Civil Rights Movement. Civil rights organizers turned their attention from civil freedoms to economic and cultural equity, and large numbers of race-related riots occurred across the country, especially after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968.⁴⁴ These movements and actions met with much greater opposition from white members of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the articles and speeches they produced very much reflected this; because of the number of incidents in these years, the amount of media coverage of racism also increased.

The first major reference to violence associated with struggles against racism in the *Christian Standard* in the March 26, 1966 issue, the only article during the entire year that focused on race or racism. (There were no editorials.) The article, titled "For Such a Time as This," was written by Dan Smith, a pastor to a white congregation in the area of Compton in southern California mostly occupied by Black people. However, even though Compton was right next door to Watts, which experienced rioting, the riots did not spread because Black people were allowed to express their discontentment in more constructive ways. The rest of the article detailed Smith's efforts to save his dying congregation, which was being drained by white flight. As the church began to shrink, Smith worked to save it by persuading his congregation to integrate, though at the time of publishing, the venture had not yet been successful.⁴⁵ This article shows the wary attention that white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members were beginning to pay to these riots,

⁴⁴ Tom M. Lansford, *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, vol. 1, s.v. "The Aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement" (New York: Grolier Educational, 2001), 350-351.

⁴⁵ Summary drawn from Don Smith, "For Such a Time as This." *Christian Standard*, March 26, 1966, 7. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

especially given that there was no discussion of the Civil Rights Movement at all in the magazine that year, leaving only a portrayal of Black people being primarily violent.

At the 1966 North American Christian Convention, several speech titles implicitly suggested a discussion of race, and one discussion panel was titled “Working in Inter-Racial Evangelism,” but no transcripts were available. However, Donald H. Sharp’s presentation, “The Conquering Faith and Men in Need,” presented on July 1, was preserved in the NACC archives; it discussed psychological needs humans have and how Christian faith can answer them. One of these needs that Sharp mentioned was the “need to rebel.”⁴⁶ While he mentioned that he and others were tired of protests (including but not limited to those protesting for racial justice), he also noted that everyone has the desire to fight back against rules they find unjust; Jesus, who was God also did this.⁴⁷ Therefore, Sharp encouraged people to rebel, as long as they were doing so against “hypocrisy, social justice, and religious bigotry,” including that within Christianity, and they will follow the example Jesus set.⁴⁸ While this is an encouragement of participation in the Civil Rights Movement; it is very much tempered by Sharp’s notable lack enthusiasm for these protests.

In 1967, the association between race, protests, and violence continued to be encouraged by the *Christian Standard* and the NACC, though not all the material they featured did so. While the *Christian Standard* contained no editorials about race that year, it included three articles on the topic. One, authored by Jessie Wells Clark, who the magazine described as “a teacher among

⁴⁶ Donald H. Sharp, “The Conquering Faith and Men in Need.” Sermon, North American Christian Convention, Louisville, KY, July 1, 1966, 3. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴⁸ Donald H. Sharp, “The Conquering Faith and Men in Need.” Sermon, North American Christian Convention, Louisville, KY, July 1, 1966, 4. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

Negroes in Newark,”⁴⁹ was published on September 9 and had the alarmist title “A Time of Fear.” It contained Clark’s reflections of living through violent riots in Newark that summer, and it dwelled on how Black people were the primary victims; a small group of extremists were destroying their neighborhoods and reputations. Clark proposed that these extremists had the goal of gaining support by stoking people’s fears, and that the power of spreading God’s love would heal shattered cities, calm fears, and change the hearts of the agitators.⁵⁰ Even as the article emphasized that only a small number of Black people were responsible, the article discusses their ideology and actions more prominently than that of any other group of Black people, drawing disproportionate attention to the violence.

The *Christian Standard*’s coverage of race overlapped with that of the North American Christian Convention when the magazine published, in two parts, the transcript of Robert O. Fife’s NACC presentation entitled simply “Racism.” Fife gave the speech on June 30, though it is noticeable that the NACC planners bookended it with discourses on communism and crime.⁵¹ The *Christian Standard* published it in the September 2 and September 9 issues, meaning that the magazine’s editors juxtaposed the second part of Fife’s speech with Clark’s depictions of riots. However, Fife’s presentation was far from alarmist. Instead, seeing racism as a phenomenon Christians needed to end, he examined it from three different angles to discover the best ways to do so. Fife first examined how different factors that played a role in the creation of the concept of race, noting that genetics provided differences in skin tone, but that history has shaped people of different skin tones and cultures into various races, and that the major barrier between

⁴⁹ “A Time of Fear.” *Christian Standard*, September 9, 1967, 7. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵⁰ Jessie Wells Clark, “A Time of Fear.” *Christian Standard*, September 9, 1967, 7-8. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵¹ 1967 North American Christian Convention program, “1967 Convention Materials” file. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

different races is actually cultural, not genetic.⁵² In the *Christian Standard's* second part, Fife continued his first angle by noting how social identities can unify members of different races and the six areas in American society in which racism has led to difficulty (education, economics, the law, family, psychological effects, and religion). Fife's other two sections then diagnose the cause of racist difficulties and provided a solution. First, he notes that racism stems from humanity's fall into sin, when humans' relationships with other humans became broken; racism is an unhealthy focus on a natural genetic phenomenon that shatters peoples' connections to each other. Fife then concludes by reminding listeners and readers that Jesus's death bridges these barriers and that the church must combat racism through the "ministry of reconciliation," though he does not think that the church should lose itself by simply being a "pressure group" to force its view on one particular issue, instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to work through believers to change the hearts of others.^{53 54 55} Fife too, primarily focuses on individual actions, not seeing Christianity's place as advocating for any sort of laws that would impact a large group of people.

The rest of the North American Christian Convention in 1967 featured multiple unrecorded speeches that implicitly suggested a presentation on race in their titles and one missing presentation by William M. Ellis, a Black missionary serving in a Black community in Florida,

⁵² Summary drawn from Robert O. Fife, "Racism." Lecture presented at the North American Christian Convention, Tampa, Florida, June 30, 1967, in the *Christian Standard*, September 2, 1967, 9-10. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵³ Robert O. Fife, "Racism [part 2]." Lecture presented at the North American Christian Convention, Tampa, Florida, June 30, 1967, in the *Christian Standard*, September 9, 1967, 10. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵⁴ Summary drawn from Robert O. Fife, "Racism [part 2]." Lecture presented at the North American Christian Convention, Tampa, Florida, June 30, 1967, in the *Christian Standard*, September 9, 1967, 9-10. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵⁵ Unlike the majority of his peers discussed here, Fife did indeed do more than simply give a presentation; his dissertation and its popular form, titled *Teeth On Edge*, loudly called for integration within white Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 209.).

titled “Negro Evangelism.”⁵⁶ However Richard D. Hogan’s June 30 workshop on “The Downtown Church,” while primarily focused on explaining how and why to start urban ministries (Christian Churches/Churches of Christ were in primarily rural areas), spent time in a discussion of race and racism. In his description of modern American cities, Hogan described how inner cities were quickly becoming undesirable places due to the presence of Black people and Puerto Ricans, as well as how racism in America led violent groups to join with less violent ones to cause riots in cities Hogan’s solution to the problems of the city were the opposite of his description of mainstream Protestant churches conforming to urban environments. Instead, he urged people to preach the gospel just as it was, even in the inner city, without prejudice.⁵⁷

In 1968, the slowly rising number of articles on race increased dramatically in the *Christian Standard*; while presentations on the subject decreased at the North American Christian Convention, they certainly did not go away. This was quite significant, given that 1968 also featured the final rift between Christian Churches/Churches of Christ and the new denomination of the Disciples of Christ. This happened in large part due to the tumult that erupted after Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination on April 4, but it also had to do with the social demands for racial justice that Black protestors began to make more and more frequently. This trend is especially noticeable in the *Christian Standard*’s editorials; Edwin Hayden published an editorial that warned that Christian ministry was needed to stop potential riots (it featured in the March 30 issue, five days before King’s assassination). A later editorial argued against the concept Stokely Carmichael proclaimed, that all white people helped kill King, which the editorial described as

⁵⁶ 1968 North American Christian Convention program, “1968 Convention Materials” file. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵⁷ Summary drawn from Richard D. Hogan, “The Downtown Church.” Workshop, North American Christian Convention, Tampa, FL, June 30, 1967. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

depriving the assassin of his humanity by taking away his responsibility.⁵⁸ Hayden also used one editorial space to feature a “Call to Action,” signed by several prominent Christian Church/Church of Christ members who were both Black and white (including several previously mentioned authors and speakers). The signatories wanted to form a movement-wide group to discuss how to end racism while not falling into violence.⁵⁹ Through their focus on violence and condemning systemic understandings of the racism that took King’s life, they encouraged their readers to do the same.

The first *Christian Standard* issue in 1968 to feature articles on race was published on February 10; it featured multiple discussions of the issue in order to honor Abraham Lincoln’s upcoming birthday. One simply listed alternatives to violence, showing how associated the two issues had become for white Christian Church/Church of Christ members, while the other, condescendingly titled “You’re Just Like the Rest of Us!” featured Martha B. Ziegler’s anecdotes from a New York City trip that helped her understand that Black people have just as human personalities and experiences as white people do. This led her to also note that Black people therefore also need to hear the gospel just as much as anyone else.⁶⁰ However, Ziegler’s examples to prove her point, which were her interactions with different Black and African people across the city, were all somewhat derogatory and continued to paint these people as an unusual “other” (as opposed to her primarily white readers).

⁵⁸ “Destroying Humanity, *Christian Standard*, May 4, 1968, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁵⁹ “Call to Action,” *Christian Standard*, May 4, 1968, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶⁰ Summary drawn from Martha B. Ziegler, “You’re Just Like the Rest of Us!” *Christian Standard*, February 10, 1968, 5-6. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

The May 11 issue presented a sermon given by Sam E. Stone the Sunday after King's assassination, "Transformation or Tragedy?" Stone noted that, with the violence following King's assassination, the United States could choose to transform into an equal society or it could descend into racism and violence that would tear the nation apart. The only way that the nation could become better, Stone argued, was through God's transformative power, not through legislation or riots. It must rid itself of all hate and violence; through Jesus, Christians can solve the problems of racism through "light," "life," and "love."⁶¹ ⁶² Stone's analysis is yet another example of white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ rejection of systemic action in favor of the work of Christians giving God's love to one person at a time.

In the July 6 issue, Rolland A. Steever discussed racism within the context of ministering to cities in "Christ in the Ghettos?" As the title suggests, Steever discusses the plight of inner cities, which had changed substantially as Black people moved into them. He then proposes that ministering to these areas, which Jesus would not have shied away from, should take place through a strong, permanent presence in the area, integrated churches, and support from suburban churches.⁶³ On August 10, the *Christian Standard* included James M. Swiney's "Comments on Racism," which featured several different arguments for the end of racism and segregation specifically in churches. He quickly noted that Jesus died for all people, so all are equal, before moving on to his first argument, that God demands it, and his followers must obey. He also argues that fears of interracial marriages should not stop churches from integrating, since

⁶¹ Sam E. Stone, "Transformation or Tragedy?" Sermon given at Western Hills Church of Christ, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 7, 1968, in the *Christian Standard*, May 11, 1968, 7-8. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶² Summary drawn from Sam E. Stone, "Transformation or Tragedy?" Sermon given at Western Hills Church of Christ, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 7, 1968, in the *Christian Standard*, May 11, 1968, 7-8. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶³ Summary drawn from Rolland A. Steever, "Christ in the Ghettos?" *Christian Standard*, July 6, 1968, 9. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

all people are descended from Adam anyways. In addition, racism is a lie that comes directly from Satan; instead, Christians should follow Jesus's inclusive example. While Swiney does note the seriousness of the devastation caused by racism-fueled riots, he counters this concern with a reminder that humans should care more about the lives of other humans than the condition of their property.⁶⁴ After the end of the summer, as violence decreased, the articles and editorials on racism abruptly stopped.

The 1968 North American Christian Convention featured only one recorded address that explicitly mentioned racism: William Ellis's "Continue in My Word," a meditation on John 8:32,⁶⁵ the theme of the convention that year. Ellis noted that living out Jesus's truth, which is that freedom is found in Him, is a vital part of the Christian faith. After giving several examples of ways to carry on in God's truth of Jesus's freedom, Ellis turned to applying Biblical concepts of freedom to the societal freedom Black protesters were calling for. He argued that the Bible supports civil rights, but that attempted solutions had often failed; instead, he argued that the church should leave its racist ways and simply show love to all people.⁶⁶ It is notable that Ellis's address was one of the only recorded defenses of the Civil Rights Movement in the NACC or the *Christian Standard* during this decade.

In 1969, the Civil Rights Movement was effectively over, as King had died and civil rights workers continued to call more and more for economic and social justice for Black Americans. This justice, protestors believed, needed to be a systemic answer to a systemic problem, but, as

⁶⁴ Summary drawn from James M. Swinney, "Comments on Racism." *Christian Standard*, August 10, 1968, 5-6. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶⁵ "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (New International Version)

⁶⁶ Summary drawn from William M. Ellis, "Continue in My Word." Sermon, North American Christian Convention, Cincinnati, OH, July 9-12, 1968, 6-8. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

before, the white writers and speakers of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ disagreed with the idea of institutional phenomena, as they believed that these problems were on an individual level. This led the *Christian Standard* to feature three separate editorials, still often the most vocal opponents of the Civil Rights Movement and its successors in the magazine, throughout the course of the year that angrily denounced the Black Manifesto, a document written by activists asking for monetary reparations from white churches to Black communities. The author repeatedly declared that this demand was just as helpful for the vast majority of Black people that it did not represent and their fight for equality as the Ku Klux Klan.⁶⁷ Similarly, a May 3 editorial criticized Martin Luther King Jr.'s widow, Coretta Scott King, for blaming her husband's death on the racist "system" that produced his assassin. The author argued that she was relieving James Earl Ray of his responsibility for murder, which they considered a way of ignoring the Bible's words about individual sin and salvation and transferring it onto a nebulous group of people.⁶⁸ These editorials both emphasize individualism as the only possible solution to racism in the United States and give a disproportionate voice to movements that the magazine's white audience would find most offensive.

Despite the fact that the North American Christian Convention was held in Detroit in 1969, a city that had experienced a lot of racism-related violence, there was only one presentation at least somewhat related to racism: a panel designed for college students with two speakers, one arguing for the use of civil disobedience and the other against.⁶⁹ John Mills's presentation titled "Evangelism in the Urban Areas," the transcript for which was available in the NACC records,

⁶⁷ "Whitemail, Perhaps?" *Christian Standard*, May 31, 1969, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶⁸ Summary drawn from "What System?" *Christian Standard*, May 3, 1969, 2. The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶⁹ 1969 North American Christian Convention program, "1969 Convention Materials" file. NACC Records, Collection HSC0002, The Helsabeck Archives of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Johnson City, Tennessee.

only mentioned racism to discuss race and ethnic-based violence in urban areas. Mills then went on to state that the church would only be able to serve urban areas by uniting under sound biblical theology before he offered a variety of mission strategies, none of which mentioned race.

The final article about race in the *Christian Standard* in this decade was also the only article about race in 1969. Leland Tyrrell, the author of “Who Will Work This Field?” was the white president of the Christian Institute (now known as Winston-Salem Bible College), an integrated Christian Churches/Churches of Christ college that emphasized training Black ministers.⁷⁰ In it, he called attention to the fact that more white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members were concerned about evangelism to Black Americans than ever before but that there were not enough people sufficiently interested to do the actual work, generally suggesting that, after the shortage of Black preachers had ended, that they should do most of the ministry.

During these four years, white members of the Christian Church/Church of Christ movement generally increased their opposition for formal equality for Black people by adding to their disagreement over civil rights a disapproval of economic or social rights. In addition, they increased their coverage of racism-fueled violence, arguing that it could be solved in the same way as the lack of equal rights for Black people, through individuals’ salvation without the need for a theology that acknowledges systemic racism or offered solutions.

Conclusion

During the 1960’s, as the Civil Rights Movement fought racism in the United States, the white members of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, who were very much the majority of the movement, made no action to support them. This took place despite calls from within its

⁷⁰ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 195.

media by prominent members for an end to racism in the church. This took place for a variety of reasons, including not wanting to stir up emotions and the individual racism of several of the contributors (almost all of the speeches and articles, despite whatever tone they took, presented issues of racism from a white perspective and for white people to solve by reaching out to Black neighbors, ignoring the fact that there were indeed Black people and institutions within the movement, which marginalized them.) However, it was primarily due to the independence and individualist theology of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Members advocated for an end to racism through God's work in people's hearts and did not believe that systemic problems or solutions, such as racism or civil rights legislations, were effective, keeping almost all white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ participants from taking part in the Civil Rights Movement.

However, this apathy did not end at the end of the 1960's, or even after white Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members began to recognize the importance of the Civil Rights Movement in retrospect and note the struggles with racism within their religious movement.⁷¹ This is because, in large part, the theological, conservative individualism that hampered action during the Civil Rights Movement has remained an integral part of the beliefs of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ members. This absence of change has resulted a similar continued lack of action or advocacy to support the current fight of Black Americans for equality. There is no need to act against systemic racism or institutionalized police violence against minorities, if such systems and institutions do not exist and individuals simply need to have their hearts changed with no additional action. White members of the Christian Churches and Churches of

⁷¹ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 209.

Christ must allow for the existence of systemic explanations of the prevalence of racism in the United States within their systems of belief, if they want to productively aid Black Americans (and their own Black brothers and sisters within the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ) as they advocate for their equality. Otherwise, this deafening silence will continue unhindered.

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