

Collected here are four editorials concerning the North American Christian Convention.

**From March 2000**

## **NACC and Sassafras Trees**

It is a great understatement to say that my wife likes to grow things. I cannot take the time or the space to tell you about her gardening, but I do want to tell you about one thing that she planted a few years ago.

She decided that she wanted to plant a sassafras tree. She started a small tree that grew quickly and provided her with roots for tea and beautiful leaves in the fall. One problem: the tree was too close to the house. We decided that it needed to come down. Down it came and the roots were harvested. But then a strange thing happened. If you look where the original tree once stood, there are now about a dozen sassafras trees nearby that came up unplanned. Apparently there were forces at work down below the surface that we hadn't contemplated.

I think that the same thing can be said about the changes that have been, and are being, made with the North American Christian Convention. Let's take a closer look at some of these changes.

**1. From "event" to "ministry."** At the last meeting of the continuation committee in October in Louisville, KY, we were given a working draft of a mission statement. Feedback was asked for, but before the discussion time (10-15 minutes) we were told that the NACC had already changed from an "event" to a "ministry."

The "draft" statement is as follows. "The North American Christian Convention is a ministry that nurtures a community of New Testament church leaders by serving their personal, professional, and spiritual needs, as they pursue the Great Commission."

There is much about this "draft" that causes questions, but the main thing, in our way of thinking, is this idea of "event" to "ministry." It is apparent that we have a generation that "knows not Joseph." The first NACC came into being simply to be an event. Nothing more. It was a call from a meeting in Memphis, November 12, 1926, that "voiced a widespread and growing sentiment in favor of a general yearly *meeting* of members of the churches of Christ...for the purpose of defending, reviving and furthering our plea for the restoration and extension of New Testament Christianity." (Christian Standard, October 22, 1927)

Edwin Hayden, in his book *North American Gold*, tells how in those early conventions, the only business "would be the bare necessities of providing for the next meeting." "Each convention was to be complete in itself, planned and conducted by its own personnel, and concluding with the final benediction. 'The Indianapolis Convention will soon adjourn *sine die*, and **cease to be**,' said a resolution adopted at that meeting in 1927.' It added, 'That is well. There should be no continuing Convention officary or

machinery whatsoever. But it is only the part of wisdom that each yearly meeting should make provision for its successor.'"

Please notice that it was not considered a "ministry" but an "event." Who gave those in charge of the convention the right to change the convention into a ministry? It is like the person who takes care of your yard suddenly telling you that he also wants to home-school your kids. What do they mean when they call it a "ministry"? They are talking about a year-round organization that will "nurture" us. Although the "draft" is not complete and is being worked on, it does tell us the direction that some would like to take us. They want to "nurture" our leaders. My thesaurus says that means to "nurture, foster, cultivate, nourish." In short, they want to mother us.

Hayden points out that those in the NACC office are "not convention officary," but they "are employees serving the Convention Committee each year."

This change in "event" to "ministry" is a volunteer sassafras tree that the original founders of the event never intended to be. It seems that the tail wants to wag the dog.

The "tail wagging the dog" was one of the reasons that the NACC came into existence. The International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) would no longer listen to the "will of its faithful membership." A generation arose that knew not Joseph then as well as today.

**2. Ministry Partners.** A little over a year ago we received information which said that the NACC had entered into an "exclusivity contract" with the Church Development Fund of California at the cost of \$150,000. This contract would allow the CDF to say what part similar agencies/groups would be allowed to play in the convention. Upon hearing this we called the NACC Executive Director and asked if this was so. His first comment was, "How did you hear about that?" When told that wasn't important and asked again if it was true, his reply was, "The figure is about right." A discussion ensued about why that would not be a correct thing and we were told that the NACC was still working on the idea and it might not be that way at all. The mere fact that they discussed the first form shows intent.

What developed from that first idea is now called "corporate sponsorships" where certain groups sponsor certain items involved with the convention. It is a nice idea to have sponsors provide finances for certain areas of the convention, but there is a great danger here in that "money talks." Will sponsorship be silent or will sponsors want to have a say in what goes on? They would be foolish not to want to follow their dollars with direction, but what direction will they want to go? This is one area that the NACC has tried to keep away from in the past.

The NACC adopted a document in 1969 called the *NACC History and Purpose*. It was published in 1973. Part of that document says, "It (NACC) shall have no affiliation with parties, factions, agencies, institutions, or special interests; neither shall it seek to

imprison the fellowship of Christian brethren within the frontiers of any single form of human organization."

Before that, in 1963, a report to the Convention Committee said, "There is no wish to avoid mention or description of works or agencies in the sessions of the convention, but its character as being not an agency convention precludes specific promotion of any such enterprise."

Sponsorship is promotion. Would those "sponsoring" groups be willing to simply give the money and not have their names attached prominently? I doubt it. The reason for sponsorships was to get more money for the NACC. Apparently those who are now sponsors had not been giving the same amount of money before. Sponsors are getting their names displayed prominently by the convention. Is this not "specific promotion"?

Corporate sponsorships is an "affiliation with...agencies" that could bring disastrous results. It is a volunteer sassafras tree that the original founders of the event never intended to be.

**3. Board of Stewards.** Many of the changes that have come about began in 1997. The convention president that year appointed two "permanent" committees. It is somewhat difficult to understand how "permanent" committees can be appointed by a president who is in office just one year, but nevertheless they were. From these committees the changes began. One change that evolved was the appearance of the Board of Stewards.

The purpose of this board, according to the *Christian Standard* (March 4, 1999), was to have a group that would "deal with the business aspects of a 501 c3 organization. It could handle long-range issues (such as future sites selection, financial concerns, and personnel issues), things that overlap from one convention to another."

In 1987, the NACC incorporated for the first time. We were told that those incorporation papers from 1987 "actually called for such a board, but that one had never been activated." We were also told that having such a board "fulfills the legal requirements for a nonprofit organization and assures sound business management practices for this growing convention."

Looking at the incorporation papers tells a different story. Two times the incorporation papers refer to a "Board of Directors" in paragraph five of Attachment A. Neither time does it talk about setting up of such a board. To the contrary it assumes that such a board does indeed exist. The Convention Committee (120) was the *de facto* board seeking the incorporation. The incorporation papers made the Convention Committee the *de jure* (in accordance with the law) board.

When presented to the Convention Committee (120) in St. Louis in June, 1998, the idea was that this Board of Stewards was legally necessary and would help the convention to plan ahead. Later, when a new document was sent to those of us asked to serve on the Convention Committee beginning in 1999, it told us in the part marked "Organizational

Structure" that part of the Board of Stewards reason for existing is to "Set and review corporate policies." The document in which this exists was adopted February 11, 1999, by the Board of Stewards itself. They have written their own job description and many of the same people on the Board of Stewards were on those first two "permanent committees" that started this ball rolling. The same document says that the Continuation Committee exists to "serve as an advisory group to the Board of Stewards and Executive Committee." Shouldn't the Board of Stewards advise the Continuation Committee rather than vice versa? Shouldn't the Continuation Committee be the ultimate authority for the NACC?

Again, this is another volunteer sassafras tree that the original founders of the event never intended to be.

**4. Blueprints.** The Blueprints is a series of seminars that are taking place around the country. They are being co-sponsored by Standard Publishing Co., The Church Development Fund of California and The North American Christian Convention. We have no problem with Standard Publishing Co. or CDF sponsoring these events around the country. They are institutions who can stand on their own. One is a for-profit corporation, and the other, a non-profit. We applaud any effort to help our churches. The problem we have is that the NACC is also sponsoring these events. In short, this is the very thing that the founders tried to stay away from. Each sponsoring group is giving its approval of the others. What does that say to our churches about other publishing companies or other lending institutions? Is this not in fact an NACC seal of approval?

The report to the Convention Committee of 1963 answers the question, "What is to prevent the NACC from becoming an ecclesiastical force controlling the people it is designed to serve?" in part by saying, "Avoid affiliation with parties, factions, agencies, institutions, or special interests."

We used to sing in church, "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds," but the ties that are binding these three organizations together are becoming a Gordian knot. The chairman of the Board of Stewards is from Standard Publishing and one of the newest members of the Board of Stewards; in fact, he was appointed by the Board of Stewards and is the Executive Director of the Church Development Fund. Nothing against these men. No one is calling into question the integrity of the people involved in these decisions, but the judgment of those who have tied this knot must be questioned. Yes, there may be no problem with this particular arrangement, but what about the generations to come? This one has gone farther than the founders desired. How far then shall following generations continue to go? Slippery slope? Yes, indeed!

Again, this is another volunteer sassafras tree that the original founders of the event never intended to be.

**5. Continuation Committee.** The document previously referred to that was adopted by the Board of Stewards, February 11, 1999, gives the following "primary rolls" of the Continuation Committee: "(1) Assist the Executive Committee in planning the

Convention by advising and giving counsel on program decisions during the fall meeting; (2) Selecting Executive Committee and Board of Stewards members, as well as approving Executive Committee Officer selections; (3) Supporting the NACC enthusiastically and faithfully through promoting registration and attendance, making a three-year personal financial commitment, and asking churches and other individuals for financial support; (4) Sharing a pulse of the brotherhood by helping the NACC to keep in touch with how God is working in the church and what the church needs."

Selection: In past years, Committee (120) members were sent a list of committees and asked to pick the ones on which they would most be willing to work in the October meeting. This year, a list of eight committees was named from which we could make our selections. Interestingly enough, the "Nominating Committee" which selects those to serve on the 120 Committee was not on the list. The "Nominating Committee" was chosen by the Chair of that committee. Does anyone else see a problem with this?

Support: Each person serving on the 120 Committee was asked to sign the covenant that was "adopted by the Board of Stewards, February 11, 1999." As you can see from the above, each member is to make a "three-year personal financial commitment." In the document itself it goes on to say, "Our annual needs range from \$500 per year per member to \$2,000 per year per member. Some can do more, others cannot reach these levels. But everyone is expected to do something significant." When asked about this, it was pointed out that no one is being told what to give; they were just telling of the needs. When those figures came up originally, they were suggested to those on the committee because of the great financial indebtedness that the convention had. We were all asked to try to raise that much. Now that figure is given as what they would like to have from each member of the committee each year. Interesting how things evolve!

Would the Board of Stewards be interested in adding a statement of faith to the Covenant? Immediately someone will respond by saying that it would be a creed. Not at all! The Covenant already has listed under "Criteria for Selecting Potential Candidates" that, "Potential candidates will have a strong Christian commitment to serving others in keeping with the teaching of Jesus Christ and the historic position of our fellowship of churches that we are 'not the only Christians, but Christians only'."

What is wrong with writing out in more detail what some more of that "historic position" is? The purpose of this would be for leadership and not fellowship, which is apparently the purpose of the Covenant. No one has to sign the covenant to attend the NACC. If one has to sign the Covenant to serve in a position of leadership, then nothing could be wrong with a statement that tells what the leadership believes. Certainly money is not more important than what a person believes. In a time when we are seeing more and more of a solifidian position being taken in some of our churches, this would be of great benefit to make sure that our leaders were not taking us down the wrong path.

**6. Program.** Each year we face the spectacle of people on the program from outside our fellowship playing prominent roles in the program and advertising. Each year some of us ask "Why?" Their appearance offends many, yet they are still invited. No one seems to

care if some of the brethren are offended (a far cry from what 1 Corinthians 10:32, 33 has to say). The absence of denominationalists should not offend anyone, but their appearance does. Yet, every year there is something else to offend the brethren, not the least of which is this year's appearance of a lady "teaching pastor."

If we are drifting, rowing, or going full bore into solifidianism, the leaders of the NACC who have consented to the travesty of making celebrities out of these "invited guests" will have to bear the responsibility for the inevitable wreckage.

More sassafras trees!

In 1963, when many of our current leaders were still in grade school, there was great discussion concerning the hiring of a full-time Director of the NACC. Church papers and college papers warned about where this might lead. Under Leonard Wymore and Rod Huron we did not go from Movement to Denomination. Both knew and signed statements that they were not to speak officially for the convention, they were but employees of the convention. This came about because of the observation of what happened to the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ when they selected their full-time secretary in 1946. He became heralded as the "voice of the brotherhood."

Let me close with one quote: "But observation as well as reason tells us that conventions are and can be a source of potential harm to the cause of Christ if they are not guided and governed by certain well-defined principles consistent with the freedom and autonomy of the local church. From the time when Alexander Campbell and others issued a call for a 'general convention' through the confusing days of the short-lived 'Louisville Plan,' down to the present monstrosity of a full-time secretary of a permanent 'International' convention, these principles have been violated to the confusion and embarrassment of Christians only."

The warning continued, "The minister and elders of every local congregation should see to it that their people are guarded against the false pretensions of ambitious convention leaders. To yield at this point is to exchange the beauty and glory of the New Testament church for the tinsel trappings of denominational ecclesiasticism."

Those words from a *Christian Standard* editorial from 1947 were reprinted in the *Sentinel* of Central Christian College of the Bible in Moberly, MO., in 1963. They were originally words of warning aimed at the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ, but also carried important warnings for 1963 and now again in 2000.

The *Sentinel* goes on to say, "The historian sees such things happen; and he knows that if the course of events proceeds as it usually does, that the end will be another full-fledged denomination. It will take time, but it will come. When it finally does happen, there will be some who will react to it and separate from the denomination so as to have a separate 'fellowship.' The whole process will then begin again."

I greatly enjoy the NACC. I go to see Christian friends and hear great preaching. I want the NACC to be all that it can be, but nothing more than it should be. It is not our brotherhood convention, it is simply "a" convention of Christians. I pray that all of our various gatherings may prosper as they remain faithful to Christ.

Warning: Those volunteer sassafras trees just keep growing! We need to be very careful. After all, some say that sassafras is a carcinogenic.

**From June 2000**

## **More on the NACC**

The March issue of the *Restoration Herald* contained an editorial about the North American Christian Convention. As one would suspect, we received more than the usual amount of mail and phone calls concerning what was said. We were heartened to find that all, with the exception of one, appreciated the stand that was taken. Here are two of those we heard from.

The first from a former president of the NACC:

"Thank you for your fine article on the restructuring of the North American Christian Convention. It was right on the mark.

"I have served on the Convention Committee off and on for more than thirty years. In recent years the power of the larger committee has eroded to the place where the 120 can do little more than give advice and raise money."

Here is a quote from one who has served as a Vice-President of the NACC: "...all that you wrote about I had already thought...You will not be surprised to know that I agreed with you 100%.

"Several months prior to your editorial I had stopped giving because I cannot conscientiously give any more. I do not agree with the policies. The present administration will not listen to anyone. They will not listen to warnings. They are going to do what they are going to do. I can no longer go along....I feel so strongly about it that I do not plan to attend in July."

Another brother wrote and asked a very good question, "What do you suggest be done?" Here is part of my answer to him:

"What can be done about the NACC? Basically, I think that several things ought to happen:

1. It needs to return to being a once a year event and not a year long ministry.
2. The Board of Stewards needs to be limited (if it is to continue) in what it can do. Its job should be two fold: (a.) review financial status and report to the Continuation Committee for discussion and action; (B.) make recommendations for future convention sites to the Continuation Committee for discussion and action.
3. No one from any of the Ministry Partnerships should be allowed to be on the board of Stewards.

4. Ministry Partnerships should be changed to sponsors, with everyone given the same right to sponsor part of the convention.
5. The NACC should sponsor nothing during the year in concert with any other organization.
6. The Nominating Committee should be chosen in the same way that other committees are chosen (which, I believe, was the procedure in the past).
7. The "covenant" adopted by the Board of Stewards should be made null and void and should disappear.
8. A signed statement of faith should be a part of the agreement to serve on the Convention Committee.
9. The NACC should revert to the former practice of using denominational speakers "sparingly" and with great discretion.
10. The fee for family registration should be dropped to \$50.

Those are just a few suggestions. I am sure that others have suggestions also. Why not send your suggestions to the NACC at P.O. Box 11326, 4210 Bridgetown Road, Cincinnati, OH 45211 or e-mail to: [nacc@one.net](mailto:nacc@one.net). Remember that the NACC is not THE brotherhood convention, it is just a large convention of Christian people. Whether a preacher or not, on the continuation committee or not, your suggestions are valuable.

**JUST IN:** Since the above was written, I received an e-mail from a member of the NACC Continuation Committee who missed the October meeting and was wondering what was going on. He noticed that the theme of this year's convention and the logo for this year are exactly the same as a group called "Mission America." (I don't recall that being mentioned in the October Continuation Committee meeting). When one goes to the Mission America web address ([www.missionamerica.org](http://www.missionamerica.org)) one will find that "Mission America," largely sponsored by the Southern Baptists, says that they are: *"a coalition of over 300 national Christian leaders who represent some 185,000 churches, denominations, para-church ministries and ministry networks. Mission America's national evangelism initiative Celebrate Jesus 2000 seeks to mobilize the church to pray for and share Christ with every person in America by year-end 2000.*

*"Mission America is an outgrowth of the Lausanne Movement, and is a cooperative effort with The AD2000 & Beyond Movement, plus scores of denominations, ministry networks, servant ministries and local churches. The requirements for membership in Mission America are simple, but very important:*

1. *Each member must be committed to Jesus Christ as Lord, and the fulfillment of His Great Commission.*

*2. Each member must be willing to sign the Lausanne Covenant without reservation.*

*3. Each member must be committed to give high priority to participating in a two-day Committee meeting each year between now and the year 2001."*

Then in the list of participating denominations what do we find listed but the North American Christian Convention. Why? Who listed the NACC as a denomination? Who gave someone the authority to do this? If the leadership of the NACC did this, why didn't they inform the Continuation Committee? Why the compulsion to use a denominational group's theme and logo? Have we entered the days of which Moses spoke when the people would want to be "like the nations around" them?

I'm sorry, but I don't want to go back to Egypt!

**From July 2000**

## **The Soul of the Brotherhood**

Since March we have had much to say in this column concerning the North American Christian Convention. It is a great meeting (because of its size) and we enjoy attending and being with the brethren. But we have chosen to speak about many of the changes that are being made to the convention because much of what the NACC does affect us all.

In our first editorial we asked the following question: "Who gave those in charge of the convention the right to change the convention into a ministry?" In speaking with an employee of the convention about that particular question, he answered with this question: "Who has the authority to say that we can't change the convention?" That answer as a question, although a bit cavalier, demands an answer, and the answer is: "Those who started the North American Christian Convention have the right to say that you can't change the convention."

Everything that went into starting the NACC was to make sure that it never developed into anything more than just a preaching and teaching convention for Christian people.

Recently, I came across a book entitled: *Adventuring For Christian Unity*. It is a collection of the writings of Dean Walker. Some of the most interesting paragraphs are in the section entitled: *Annual Report of the Commission on Restudy*. The division with the Disciples was becoming more pronounced. The infidelity of their leadership had been, and was being, documented almost every day. Dean Walker thought he could work from the inside of the Disciples to help bring about change that was needed. He served on the Disciples Commission on Restudy. Some of those who served with him were P.H. Welshimer, first president of the NACC; W. E. Sweeney; and Robert Tuck. I give those three names because they were on the first committee that began the North American Christian Convention. In the book of Walker's writings, the paragraphs of the *Restudy* that he authored are in bold print and thus represent his thoughts (and probably those of Welshimer, Tuck and Sweeney) on the matter. This was written almost 20 years after the NACC began. It was written at time when it was very apparent to many which direction the International Convention was going. Read the following carefully and then our comments.

### **Report of 1946**

#### I. Denomination or Movement?

"Some of us hold that we must therefore refuse to accept any denominational status, and rather seek to occupy non-partisan and ultimate ground in all points of faith and order.

#### II. Local Church Autonomy

"Some among us hold that there is a tendency on the part of agencies and conventions to assume and to exercise authority over the local churches.

### III. The New Testament Church.

"Some among us find in the New Testament the divinely authoritative pattern for the form and organization of the local church, and affirm that, historically, we set out to restore this New Testament pattern and that our local churches essentially represent its restoration.....

"Some believe that our churches would therefore deviate from the New Testament norm should they (1) recognize such a relationship (organization of local churches in a general or connexional relationship), or (2) consent to create a recognized agency as their exclusive instrument for the united administration of their missionary or benevolent enterprises, or (3) create a single representative convention or council for the formation and expression of their united convictions on (a) matters which concern the churches and their agencies, or (b) our witness to Christian unity, or (c) our witness to the gospel in relation to the moral and human problems of our time. But they would leave to the brethren freedom to create any number of agencies for the expression of any or all of these above ends, as may seem to them expedient.

### IV. Conventions

"We are agreed that our conventions have a highly important place in the life of our churches. As occasions for fellowship and witness-bearing, they have served to enlarge the vision of the local churches by exchange of views and experiences and by keeping the churches conscious of belonging to one another. We are also agreed that our people have not yet found a type of convention which fully satisfies their tradition, their convictions and their sense of obligation to give united expression to the interests of Christ's kingdom. The dissatisfaction which we all share has, however, in recent years, found expression in the holding of other conventions sponsored by those who desire to protest against certain features of the existing International Convention, as well as to exemplify, by contrast, a convention of a different type.

"This development is an expression of the dissatisfaction and is also a cause of tension and of possible peril to the unity of our brotherhood. We believe that the sponsors of the North American Convention deplore what seemed to them, in good conscience, the necessity of holding another type of assemblage. In view of the dissatisfaction, not only on the part of the dissenters, but of the supporters also, it seems evident that the brotherhood has a clear call to provide itself with a convention that will unite our people wholeheartedly, instead of tending to divide them."

Please note that Walker, in addressing changes that were taking place among the Disciples says that: 1. we refuse to accept any denominational status; 2. that agencies and conventions have a tendency to assume and exercise authority over local congregations; 3. that churches that enter into a denominational status or other like arrangement with

other congregations deviate from the New Testament norm; 4. a convention should unite our people wholeheartedly, instead of tending to divide them.

The International Convention was moving toward establishing denominational status by their actions and thus dividing our brotherhood. Some didn't believe that something like that could and would happen, but from 2000 it is much easier to understand what eventually happened in the 40's, 50's, and 60's.

But there is an even better way than this to see what those who started the North American Christian Convention say that no one has the right to change it. Their words come in official NACC documents. Before we reproduce their words, listen to Ed Hayden's introduction to these words in North American Gold.

"The architects of that first North American Christian Convention planned well for the future. Almost half a century into that future the Convention Committee of the North American Christian Convention *laid down the law to itself*, (emphasis mine) imposing upon itself a series of firm restrictions, spelling out the principles set forth in 1927. Here it is, from the NACC History and Purpose adopted in 1969 and published in 1973:

### **Limitations Self-imposed by the Convention**

"Realizing the dangers of any extra-Scriptural or human form of organization and/or cooperation, due to habit, instinct, place, learning, and the physical senses, the North American Christian Convention commits itself now and henceforth to the following safeguards of individual, group, and congregational freedom in the body of Christ.

"The Convention shall assume no official or exclusive character.

"It shall at all times respect the freedom and autonomy of the local church.

"It shall not assume the character or function of the church of Christ.

"It shall not assume the character of a church council or synod, nor in its relation to the churches enact regulations; make rulings or recommendations; pass resolutions; propose, sanction, or legalize procedures; invest with authority, ordain to special ministries; endorse, forbid, exclude, or excommunicate persons, groups, or agencies; or exercise controls of any nature.

"It considers Christian fellowship to be personal, vital, and spiritual, rather than structural or organizational; moral, not legal; voluntary, not coerced; natural, not artificial; and predicated upon faith in and wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

"It shall have no affiliation with parties, factions, agencies, institutions, or special interests; neither shall it seek to imprison the fellowship of Christian brethren within the frontiers of any single form of human organization."

The organizers of the NACC have spoken. We need to listen.

Is it too much to say that what is happening in our midst right now is part of the struggle for the very soul of our brotherhood? It is time for men of good will to study and reason together lest the mistakes of the past century are repeated.

**From July 2001**

## **An Open Letter to the Board of Stewards of the NACC**

**(Board of Stewards includes: Chairman Steve Reeves, Brownsburg, IN; Tom Ellsworth, Bloomington, IN; Barry McMurtrie, Corona, CA; Wally Rendel, Lexington, KY; Dustin Rubeck, Clearwater, FL; Rick Rusaw, Longmont, CO; Bob Russell, Louisville, KY; Paul Williams, East Islip, NY; Don Wilson, Glendale, AZ; Larry Winger, Anaheim, CA.)**

Dear Fellow Servants of Christ:

Greetings in the name of the One who emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant, Jesus Christ!

I appreciate your individual ministries and the added time that you are giving to serve on the Board of Stewards of the North American Christian Convention. I do not wish to add to the burden of your stewardship, but am greatly concerned about the future of our movement and the recent changes with the NACC that will have lasting effects (and at this time may be hidden) for the future of our people.

The pages of the *Restoration Herald* this last year (March, June, July) have carried editorials concerning the direction of the North American Christian Convention in light of the history of our people. When I penned the first editorial, I sent a copy (by e-mail) to the Executive Director of the NACC and received in a phone conversation a few corrections that I was able to make, even though the copy had already been sent to the printer.

Later, I received a letter from the Chairman of the Board of Stewards addressing two items in the first editorial that concerned him personally which were 1.) Comments concerning "permanent committees appointed in 1997," and 2.) "Alleged improper organizational ties." He and I both have copies of that correspondence.

Those were the only two answers that I have received to date from anyone "official" concerning the issues raised in those editorials. I have received an abundance of comments in support of what was written, many from members of the 120 Committee, and some from past officers of the convention.

Last September 7, I drove to Bloomington, IL, to meet with the president of this year's convention and share my concerns with him. At that time I asked if there could be a spot on the agenda of the October meeting of the 120 in Tampa to discuss these issues. I am under the impression that many on that committee also wanted to have such a discussion. I was told that he did not know if he could add something like this to the agenda. There was, at the Tampa meeting in October, something of an "open mike" time, but under the circumstances of the first person being asked to share the heart-wrenching story of his son's passing, it was totally inappropriate to the spirit of the moment to begin a discussion of these matters.

At that meeting, I discussed these things with the new chairman and a former member of the Board of Stewards. I was asked if anyone had ever gotten back to me about these concerns. My answer was what I have already related. I was assured that these concerns would be discussed in your February meeting and that the chairman would indeed get back to me. After your meeting I was told by the chairman that the Board of Stewards had decided that they would get back to me only if I wrote a letter directly to them expressing these concerns.

Here is the letter that you requested. **It is an Open Letter because the NACC is an open meeting of Christians.** The NACC is not a private meeting, but a public meeting. The NACC has never been a para-church organization. It has always been just a meeting of Christian people. It was brought into existence in part because of brethren being tired of closed meetings where decisions were made in a backroom somewhere without counsel. It was never meant to be an organization that operated outside the will of those who attended the convention. The NACC was meant to be a once a year meeting of brethren of like precious faith. If the decisions made by the NACC board cannot stand in the light of day, then I think you will agree, they do not need to stand at all. The concerns that I have shared publicly and privately are concerns of others also. Just as I deserve an answer, so to does every person concerned about the NACC deserve an answer to their questions about the NACC.

When the Board of Stewards was set up in 1998, it was voted on under what I hope was an inadvertent false premise. The premise was that the articles of incorporation (1987) called for such a body to be brought into existence. Such was not the case. Simply ask the signatories of the articles of incorporation if they were signing to set up a board similar to the Board of Stewards or were their signatures on the document simply at the request of the 120 to bring about incorporation? (Signatories were: Dale McCann, Sam E. Stone, Lanis Kineman.)

I would quote from the March editorial concerning this. "It was not that the three were to be **the** board, but were acting for the board. The Board of Directors already existed. The Convention Committee (120) was the *de facto* board seeking the incorporation. The incorporation papers made the Convention Committee the *de jure* (in accordance with the law) board."

If the 120 would have meant for the three signatories to be **the** Board, then wouldn't they have selected someone to succeed those gentlemen? Wouldn't there be a paper trail somewhere that would have told what this board was to do?

When the Board of Stewards was set up in 1998, it was mentioned that the purpose of the board would be to "make arrangements for future conventions and observe the financial dealings of the convention." In just a short time much more than that has happened and none of it with the approval of the 120. In fact, one former president of the convention has stated: "...the power of the larger committee has eroded to the place where the 120 can do little more than give advice and raise money."

So much has been done since the Board of Stewards has been set up, but where are the checks and balances? If the 120 cannot be given time on the agenda to discuss these things in an open meeting then what has happened to our freedom in Christ?

In discussing this issue with another (other than the one quoted above) former president of the NACC, his comment was, "This generation does not study history, they study sociology." That is indeed the problem. The history of the NACC has been ignored in making the changes that have been made. Why the history was ignored may or may not be significant. But the problem with ignoring history is that it fails to ask the questions as to **why** things were set up the way they were. The writer of Proverbs quotes Moses when he says, "*Do not move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set*" (Proverbs 22:28).

The NACC is not sacred in the sense that God ordained it within His Word as to its being and function, but there are reasons why the founders of the NACC set it up in the way in which they did. How foolish we are to ignore their reasoning and make changes (move the ancient boundary) that are certain to cause greater problems in time to come.

Previous editorials have contained my objections and proposed solutions. I would add that perhaps a "Blue Ribbon Committee," composed of past presidents, recognized scholars, and other interested individuals be appointed to study this problem and bring back a report to the 120 for full and open discussion as soon as possible.

I do not believe that the things that have been done have been done with malice toward the Restoration Movement and its people. I hold each of the men who serve on this board as men of integrity who are honestly seeking to do what he thinks is best for the Kingdom of God. I believe that each one wants to take his stewardship with the NACC as just that, a responsibility to care for something that he does not own, for someone else, for a limited amount of time. You gentlemen have the opportunity to correct some mistakes that may have been made simply because of the time requirements and situations in which others were working. With this in mind, I would close with the words of Paul, "*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful*" (1 Cor 4:2).

I will pray for your deliberations and await to hear from you.

In His Service and yours,

Lee Mason

P.S. Some names I would recommend for this "Blue Ribbon Committee": Ed Hayden, E. Ray Jones, Marshall Leggett, Lloyd Pelfrey, Bob Shannon, Floyd Strater, and Leonard Wymore.

**Letter from Steve Reeves, Chairman of the Board of Stewards in reply to  
the Open Letter**

April 9, 2001

The Christian Restoration Association

5664 Cheviot Road

Cincinnati, OH 46247-7071

Attn: CRA Board; Lee Mason

Dear Lee,

Thank you for the letter addressed to the Board of Stewards. We appreciate the opportunity to respond.

We wholeheartedly agree that the Board of Stewards serves the people who attend the convention, in addition to our primary service to Christ and His church. Because we do, it would be entirely fitting to conduct a review of the Board by the Continuation Committee. We will move forward to launch such a review of the Board's first three years of service at the fall meeting of the Continuation Committee.

Lee, as I shared with you at Tampa in October, the Board has had overwhelming support with very few concerns expressed to us. Evidently, those with the greatest concern have been in communication with you.

The Board has initiated monthly financial reviews, annual staff reviews, and budget control reviews. The financial picture of the NACC is encouraging and the vision for the future looks bright.

I do know that you've had personal discussions with Sam Stone, Dusty Rubeck, and Tom Ellsworth and that they feel they've been misrepresented in your comments concerning your meetings with them.

Frankly, the Board is concerned about your ongoing pattern of addressing these issues on the editorial page instead of direct communication with the Board of Stewards. The concern is that this has the potential of eroding the credibility of the C.R.A.

That's a discussion we'll leave up to you and your board but do request your ongoing prayers for us as we seek to encourage New Testament Christianity in the churches and invite the Continuation Committee to evaluate the first three years of service by the Board of Stewards in October.

Have a wonderful spring as you seek to serve Him!

A partner in God's grace,

Steven T. Reeves (For the Board of Stewards)

**From April 2002**

## **Report on the NACC Continuation Committee**

### **Meeting of October 1-2, 2001**

The talk-radio program was discussing the secret service employee who had been refused flight on a plane because of some mix-up in his paperwork. The lady who called in was also a government employee who had to carry a gun. She, too, had an airline story.

The paperwork that she filed for the trip told about her gun. The person at the inspection station asked that the gun be given to him. She told him that she had been trained and was under orders that at no time was she ever to turn her handgun over to an unauthorized person. The inspector then looked back to his question sheet and decided to continue the pre-boarding questions. His next question was: "Are you carrying any fingernail clippers?"

There are times when one wonders if people fully understand the impact of their own words and actions. Thus was the experience at the last North American Christian Convention Continuation Committee meeting in Columbus, OH, October 1-2, 2001.

Before we get into that meeting there is another matter that must be handled first. We have written extensively concerning the NACC. Why? Because this is the largest gathering of our people. Those who are supposed to be in charge used to come from the broadest spectrum of our brotherhood. Also, because the NACC seems to have the largest impact in our churches.

In the March, 2000, issue of this periodical, we wrote in part about the selection of the Nominating Committee. The NACC Committee had met in St. Louis for its Fall meeting in 1999. The Nominating Committee that particular year was selected in a different way from years before and we were critical of that. We are happy to report that for the next year, the President of the 2001 Convention changed the modus operandi of the previous year and the Nominating Committee was selected in the same way that all other committees were selected which included the opportunity for Continuation Committee members to volunteer to serve on that committee. That was good! We appreciated his hearing and action.

What was not so good was that two people, the Executive Director of the Convention and a member of the Board of Stewards, neither one of whom had been elected to the Continuation Committee, sat with the committee and made nominations with the other members of the Nominating Committee. This type of activity does nothing to help the stature of the Board of Stewards. By the way, that same member of the Board of Stewards was re-selected for another three year term on the Board of Stewards this year by the Board of Stewards (affirmed by the 120 without discussion) under the guise of wanting continuity. Interesting that the 120 *must take* two years off before serving again on the CC.

Now to October 2001!

In April, 2001, I met with the then Chairman of the Board of Stewards to discuss the matters that have appeared in this column. I was heartened by the chairman's promise that at the October, 2001, meeting of the Continuation Committee (CC) there would be a review and evaluation of the Board of Stewards by the entire CC. At that time he promised that the items that had appeared in this journal would be fully aired and discussed by all. That was all I wanted.

I prepared for that meeting. I went with a list of six things that I felt needed to be discussed.

1. The change from a once-a-year event to a year-round ministry. This was an action taken by the Board of Stewards without the consent of the 120 CC, and without discussion. It is a change of major proportions and was written about in the March, 2000, *Restoration Herald* editorial.

2. The alliances with ministry partners. Once again, a change never discussed or voted on by the 120 CC, but simply put in place by the Board of Stewards. (Again check March 2000 editorial.)

3. Hiring of a permanent director. In the past, this had always been with the approval of the 120 CC. The hiring of the present director was done without advice or consent of the CC. It was simply announced that the action had been taken.

I find it interesting that Leonard Wymore, first director of the NACC, (he refused to be called the Executive Director) is quoted in *North American Gold*, by Edwin Hayden as saying, "I would not speak for the Convention or in anyway officially represent it to any religious body." The new Executive Director is quoted in *Christian Standard* (Sept. 16, 2001) "As the executive director of the North American Christian Convention, I will seek to give voice to our brotherhood internally and externally." How the times have changed!

4. Raising of registration fees. This, again in the past, had always been done with the advice and consent of the 120 CC (although a \$4.00 increase was made between 1999 and 2000). For Columbus, it has simply been announced that the fees have again increased from \$99.00 for a family to \$125.00, which represents an increase of about 20%. At a time when attendance at the NACC is going down and the country is in a recession we wonder at the wisdom that would raise taxes (fees).

5. Separation of the Bible Bowl from the NACC. This apparently has been done, I am told, at the request, of the Bible Bowl people. It is interesting that a discussion took place four years ago in which an NACC executive said that he wanted to "ditch" the Bible bowl because it was a "logistic headache" and "a financial drain." Whoever had the idea is not the point. The point is that there was no discussion with the 120 CC; it was again simply announced that this is the way that things would be.

6. Review of the work of the Nominating Committee by both the Executive Committee(s) and the Board of Stewards before nominees being contacted by the NACC office. This idea first appeared in print this year in a questionnaire sent to the CC by the new Executive Director. When questioned about it, the answer was that it was to make sure that there was no one nominated by the Nominating Committee that for moral reasons should not be asked to serve. I agree with the sentiment entirely, but review by the Executive Committee(s) and Board of Stewards puts too much power with too few. A better way might be to post the original list of names proposed by the Nominating Committee and allow the entire 120 to look at the list and report reasons for non-acceptance to the chairman of the Nominating Committee at the meeting of the 120. Having served on this committee several years, I have observed that it is usually the first committee to complete its task.

7. Establishment of the Covenant. This document was approved by the Board of Stewards on February 11, 1999, and has never been presented to the 120 CC for approval.

Those are the items that I had hoped to hear discussed in the "review and evaluation" that was promised for the Columbus meeting.

When I arrived in Columbus and received my CC packet, I quickly checked to see if there was a spot on the agenda for the "review and evaluation" and was happy to see that it was scheduled for an hour and a half on the first day. But when that time came around the new chairman of the Board of Stewards simply got up and said, "The Board of Stewards wants to know in what direction you think the Convention ought to go, so break up into small groups and discuss it."

The "review and evaluation" promised never materialized.

People did discuss the aforementioned items, but not in a plenary session. Discussions were held in hallways and hotel rooms, but never publicly.

I was approached by both the new Executive Director and the president of this year's convention, separately, who wished to discuss the objections of which I have written.

One comment that was made was, "You know, Lee, you are probably in the minority of the of the people in this room holding these views." My answer to him was, "You know, you are probably in the minority in the views that you preach in your town."

Important issues are not about minority or majority, but right and wrong, good and bad, maybe better or best. The minority can be wrong and so can the majority.

The real answer to him should have been: "How will we ever know without a full and open discussion of these matters?"

Why is it that we can't have a full and open discussion concerning these important matters? I have nothing against the men in charge. I have considered, and still consider,

them my friends (I'm not sure how they feel), but these matters are greater than friendships. These are matters that concern thousands of churches that consider themselves part of our brotherhood whether they attend the NACC or not. Decisions that are made today can have long-term consequences. (It seems that a decision that Abraham and Sarah made 4000 years ago with Hagar is still causing us problems today in the Israeli-Arab fighting.)

Some have questioned the use of this forum to discuss these issues. I have had private conversations with "officials" from the NACC and not only did little happen, but the idea was expressed that probably nothing would happen. But the NACC does not belong to just one group of people, and just because some are elected does not necessarily mean that they have free rein to do as they wish. The NACC belongs to the people. Great scrutiny, thought, and prayer was given to the setting up of this great meeting because of what our people had gone through with the Disciples of Christ. Now, just because a generation comes along that knows not Joseph or Downey Avenue in Indianapolis, does not mean that any and all changes are acceptable. To the contrary, more thought than ever before must be given to every change lest we find that each change is simply greasing the already slippery slope on which the NACC has been poised since its inception.

I love the NACC. I have been attending for about 40 years. I have learned at the NACC. I have laughed at the NACC. I have hugged and been hugged by Christian brothers whom I do not get to see that often. I have been encouraged by the NACC.

The things that have been written in this column have been out of love, not hate, for the NACC. If I didn't care about the church of our Lord, about the Restoration Movement, about the NACC, then none of this would have been written. None of the private correspondence, phone calls, and conversations with the NACC leaders would have taken place. The NACC is a great tool of the church and deserves to continue as an important place of learning and fellowship as long as it does not depart from its original task.

Changes that have taken place have moved the great ship from its moorings and it looks like it will soon be tied to a different dock. I want to again set sail with the NACC, but I'd like to be sure of the direction that the crew is going.

I drove home from Columbus after the meeting thinking of one passage of scripture. It's 1 Samuel 8:22. The children of Israel wanted a king like all the nations around them. Samuel argued with them trying to warn them of what life would be like with a king. But the Bible says that they refused to listen to Samuel and declared that they would have a king. When Samuel reported back to God the verse says: "*So the LORD said to Samuel, 'Heed their voice, and make them a king.' And Samuel said to the men of Israel, 'Every man go to his city'.*"

On October 2, 2001, the members of the 120 CC went every one to his own city.