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**Carl Spain's Waves:
How a Powerful Lecture Ended Segregation in Church of Christ Colleges
By Dyron B. Daugherty**

This article takes a look at the man—Carl Spain—and the lecture that tipped the scales towards African-American integration at Abilene Christian College (ACC), and impacted the Church of Christ fellowship in powerful ways.¹ It was a highly academic, but extremely pointed speech that shook the Church of Christ fellowship, especially its universities, and helped many in the movement to reconsider their relationship with African-Americans.

Like many American denominations, the Churches of Christ were racially segregated from early on. From the time African American members started joining the movement in the nineteenth century, until the present day, there has been a Black network that is quite distinct from White-majority churches. The Black churches have a network that is largely unknown to White members. Richard Hughes writes, “If we wish to understand black Churches of Christ in America, we must realize that two traditions coexisted in that heritage from the earliest years of the twentieth century.” He goes on to point out that in nearly every town where Churches of Christ can be found, there will in all likelihood exist a Black church that is virtually unknown to Whites.²

Today in America, not only are there hundreds of Church of Christ congregations that are almost entirely Black, but there are distinctively Black lectureships, Black fellowships, virtually all Black events, a Black church publication called the *Christian Echo*, and even a Black college—Southwestern Christian College, in Terrell, Texas.³ White Church of Christ members are almost completely oblivious to this vibrant Black network of churches and activities.

We begin by taking a look at the 2018 founding of Abilene Christian University's (ACU) Carl Spain Center on Race Studies and Spiritual Action. It was founded by Dr. Jerry Taylor, an African American professor at ACU. The event was held for two reasons: 1. To honor Carl Spain—a Church of Christ preacher and professor who was clearly ahead of his time; and 2. To inaugurate the Center, articulating what it intended to accomplish.

Dr. Taylor's inauguration speech took a careful look at Carl Spain's famous lecture, which occurred on February 24, 1960, at Abilene Christian's Bible Lectureship. Spain's scorching presentation had a rather innocuous-sounding title: “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals.”⁴

¹ Abilene Christian College (ACC) became Abilene Christian University (ACU) in 1976. See: <https://www.acu.edu/about/history/#:~:text=New%20Name%2C%20Same%20Mission%3A%20ACC,the%20Supreme%20Court%20of%20Texas>.

² Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 285.

³ Southwestern Christian College's website is located at: <http://www.swcc.edu/>.

⁴ Throughout this paper, I am using the typescript of Spain's speech from ACU's website: <https://blogs.acu.edu/specialcollections/files/2013/10/Modern-Challenges-to-Christian-Morals.pdf>. The audio of that speech can be found here: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/sumlec_audio/5199/. The typescript of the lecture can also be found here: Carl Spain, “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals,” in *Christian Faith in the Modern*

But by no means was the lecture innocuous. In it, Dr. Spain publicly excoriated the college for rejecting African American students from enrolling. It is important to note that ACC was Spain's employer at the time, and it was a precarious roll of the dice for him to say the things he did. If any of his superiors missed the lecture, they most certainly would have heard about it shortly after its delivery.

In Dr. Jerry Taylor's 2018 inauguration speech, he made the following remarks about Dr. Carl Spain and the lecture that toppled the walls that had for decades separated Abilene Christian College from potential African American students:

It is an honor today to stand behind this same podium from which Dr. Spain stood as he spoke a timely truth on February 24th, 1960, about the sin of racism that permeated Churches of Christ and their related schools and colleges.

Spain's powerful address is as relevant today as it was over half a century ago ... Standing behind this podium 58 years ago was no easy place to take a stand, and neither is it an easy place to stand today.

While White American Christianity vehemently condemned Soviet Communism for being atheistic and anti-democratic, Spain rightly pointed out that these same Christians were hypocritically excluding, denying, and obstructing African Americans from having full participation in the highly esteemed system of American democracy.

Dr. Taylor went on to catalogue the fallout from Spain's 1960 lecture, which was personally very punishing for Dr. Spain, his career, and his ministry in churches of Christ. In Dr. Taylor's words:

Needless to say that Spain's fearless rebuke attracted to his prophetic back the stinging whip of public punishment in the cruel form of social rejection, religious ostracism, tribal rage, and racial retribution... This act of valor virtually ruined Spain's preaching career. Churches cancelled meetings he was scheduled to preach, anonymous letters and phone calls made threats on Spain's life. His own brothers in Christ made his life a nightmare.⁵

Indeed, Carl Spain's lecture came at a high cost. Surely Dr. Spain understood that he would soon face major headwinds in light of what he had to say. Yet he persisted. And while his speech created waves that reverberated throughout Abilene Christian College, as well as the Churches of Christ, his own life changed markedly as many turned their backs on him. He was punished for condemning racial segregation at the college. However, many others were moved

World: The Abilene Christian College Annual Bible Lectures, 1960 (Abilene: Abilene Christian University College Students Exchange, 1960).

⁵ These quotations are from Dr. Jerry Taylor's lecture, located here: <https://carlspaincenter.org/>.

by what he said, and in just a short time, the waves his speech created had washed over the administration of ACC, leading to change. And as Abilene Christian has always been a nerve center for Church of Christ colleges, Carl Spain's waves rapidly spread to sister colleges in the movement.

Carl Spain was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1917, and died in 1990 at the age of 73.⁶ He was raised in Alabama and in Georgia. He graduated from David Lipscomb Junior College in 1936 and finished up his Bachelor's degree in Bible and history at Abilene Christian College (ACC) in 1938. While at ACC, Spain edited the *Prickly Pear* publication, he played on the tennis team, was part of a drama group called Melpomenean, and was elected "Most Likely to Succeed" by his classmates.

After graduating from ACC, Spain moved to Auburn, Alabama, and preached at a church of Christ congregation while attending Alabama Polytechnic Institute—which changed its name to Auburn University in 1960.

A few years later Spain moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth area and preached at churches in Handley (annexed by Forth Worth in 1946) and Irving. While in the DFW area he studied at Southern Methodist University and received his M.A. and B.D. degrees in 1946.⁷ Spain's M.A. dissertation—from 1946—was entitled "The Pastoral Epistles," and at around 200 pages was rather hefty.⁸

At some point after his graduation from SMU in 1946, Spain began studying for his doctoral degree, specifically the Th.D. degree, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He completed his doctorate there—in the field of Pastoral Ministry—in 1963. His Th.D. thesis was entitled, "A Study of the Evangelistic Ministry in the Churches of Christ," and was 281 pages

⁶ Spain's biographical information is included in the transcript of Spain's speech "Modern Challenges to Christian Morals," located at: <https://blogs.acu.edu/specialcollections/files/2013/10/Modern-Challenges-to-Christian-Morals.pdf>. More detailed information is in ACC's student newspaper, *The Optimist*, volume 41, number 17 (Friday, February 5, 1954), located at:

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph95774/m1/1/?q=%22carl%20spain%22>. Other details come from David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *The Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), especially pp. 253 and 315. Spain's obituary was in the *Gospel Advocate*, February 1991, page 49, located at: <https://www.therestorationmovement.com/ga/gas05.htm>. See also ACU Library's finding aid: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/findingaids/591/>.

⁷ See David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *The Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), p. 253. Harrell mentions that while Carl Spain was at SMU, two other important Church of Christ preachers were also studying there at the same time: Homer Hailey and J.D. Thomas. Mac Ice, librarian at Abilene Christian University, wrote to me saying that the reason SMU does not have Spain's B.C. thesis is probably because the B.D. was the equivalent of today's M.Div., which often requires no thesis or dissertation. Email from Mac Ice to the present author, 13 February 2022.

⁸ See SMU Libraries, Bridwell Library, General Stacks, call number: 227.8 S733p. For fuller information, see: https://smu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991788753403716&context=L&vid=01SMU_INST:01SMU&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,carl%20spain&offset=0.

long.⁹ While I was unable to find the year when Spain began his doctoral studies, what is recorded is that ACC allowed him a leave of absence in 1961 to complete his work at Southwestern Baptist Seminary.¹⁰

Immediately after graduation from SMU, Spain joined the faculty of Harding College in Searcy Arkansas, to teach in the Bible department. During that time he also served as the minister of the College Church of Christ from 1946 to 1947.

In 1947 Spain moved to Lubbock, Texas, to serve as the director of the Church of Christ Bible Chair at Texas Tech. He was also hired as an associate minister of the Broadway Church of Christ.

In January 1952, Spain moved to Houston, Texas, and became the minister of the Central Church of Christ. During the 1953 ACC Bible Lectureships, ACC witnessed him in the role of a main lecturer. He must have impressed at that lectureship because shortly thereafter, Spain was offered a faculty position at ACC. He began his position at ACC in the fall of 1954. ACC hired Spain at the Associate Professor rank in the fields of Bible and Religious Education. He was 36 years old. He was promoted to full professor in 1963—presumably upon the completion of his doctorate degree.¹¹

Spain's years at ACC were illustrious. He was awarded with the Christian Educator of the Year Award by *20th Century Christian* magazine in 1978, where he also served as a staff writer for three decades. He was elected president of the Southwest Regional Chapter of the American Academy of Religion in 1969, and served on the national board of directors for that organization. He traveled to many countries for evangelistic purposes, in both Western and Eastern Europe as well as in several Latin American countries. He became well-known for his work on the campus ministry movement.¹²

At some point in his studies and early ministry, Spain married the former Mildred McClung—a 1941 graduate of ACC—and together they had two daughters, Carla and Claudette. The girls were 13 and 7 years old at the time of his hiring at ACC in 1954.

⁹ The information on Spain's Th.D. thesis comes from ACU librarian and archivist, Mac Ice, in an email to me, dated 13 February 2022. Mac Ice wrote "ACU has a copy of his [Spain's] Th.D. dissertation."

¹⁰ "The Optimist," April 7, 1961, page 4.

¹¹ Spain's promotion to full professor comes from "The Optimist," September 20, 1963, p. 7, located at: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth99322/m1/7/zoom/?q=%22carl%20spain%22%20%22southern%20methodist%22&resolution=6&lat=4676.449771089693&lon=2513.607661202517>. That short article concisely presents Spain's academic background: "Carl Spain moves up from associate professor to professor of Bible and religious education. He holds a B.A. from ACC, and an M.A. and a B.D. from Southern Methodist University, and a Ph.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has been at ACC since 1954." Presumably, the labeling of Spain's doctorate as a Ph.D. was a mistake in "The Optimist," as his dissertation clearly states he earned the Th.D.

¹² See Spain's obituary in the *Gospel Advocate*, February 1991, page 49, located at: <https://www.therestorationmovement.com/ga/gas05.htm>.

While in Abilene, Spain served as minister of the Hillcrest congregation. He also preached at the Graham Street Church of Christ in Abilene for a time.¹³ Records show that he was also a member of the Minter Lane Church of Christ when he died in 1990. He was survived by his wife and both daughters.¹⁴

Spain's famous lecture was delivered in 1960, at a campus where African-Americans were not allowed to enroll. Perhaps ironically, Spain's own daughter, Carla, was a 19-year-old sophomore at ACC when he delivered the speech.¹⁵

Spain's lecture was offensive to some, uncomfortable for all, yet a cause of relief for those who agreed with him. Finally, someone had the courage to say these things. Former Pepperdine president Bill Banowsky called Spain's speech, "the most spectacular speech ever delivered in Abilene." What added to the shock of it was that the topic of race had hardly been addressed at all since the 1955 lectureship five years earlier, when L.M. Graves, Leon Locke, J.W. Treat, and J. Roy Willingham Jr. discussed how integration might impact the church and society. While their panel discussion was sympathetic to equal rights and offered a rejection of slavery, they all argued for "gradual change" rather than "immediate changes" when it came to racial integration in American society. This apparent consensus was in the background when Spain's "shocking keynote address" occurred at the ACU Lectureship in 1960.¹⁶

According to historian Wes Crawford, Spain's speech "... was the most dramatic White challenge to the racial status quo in Churches of Christ up until that time."¹⁷

Amidst the swirling discussions generated by Spain's lecture, a crucial decision was made to allow African-Americans to enroll as full-time graduate students in 1961. The following year, 1962, two brave young preachers—Billy Curl and Larry Bonner—were the first African-Americans admitted to full-time undergraduate study at ACC. They successfully graduated in 1964. These two pioneers deserve to have their story told in greater detail by historians of our movement.

According to Richard Hughes, Spain's speech "... evoked such strong, broad-based support from the board, the administration, the faculty, the students, and the school's constituency ..." that the continuance of segregation was no longer tenable. Harding College integrated the next year, in 1963, and "David Lipscomb College followed suit in 1964."¹⁸

¹³ David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *The Churches of Christ in the 20th Century*, p. 314, mentions that Spain was preaching at Graham Street church in Abilene when he invited Home Hailey to hold a 10-day gospel meeting there in August 1955.

¹⁴ See Spain's obituary in the *Gospel Advocate*, February 1991, page 49, located at: <https://www.therestorationmovement.com/ga/gas05.htm>.

¹⁵ See: <https://blogs.acu.edu/specialcollections/files/2013/10/Modern-Challenges-to-Christian-Morals.pdf>.

¹⁶ Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2013), pp. 114–115.

¹⁷ Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion*, p. 115. See also Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, p. 290.

¹⁸ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, p. 291.

Nearly four decades after Carl Spain's speech, in 1999, ACU president Royce Money "confessed the sin of racism in the school's past segregationist policies."¹⁹ Shortly thereafter, President Money attended the African American lectureship at Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, and asked Black Christians for forgiveness. He also pledged that, moving forward, he would do whatever he could to promote racial reconciliation.

Carl Spain's lecture took place in the midst of a volatile context surrounding racial integration. Looking back, perhaps the initial flashpoint in the Churches of Christ was at Harding University, in Searcy Arkansas, in the year 1957, just two and a half years before Spain's famous speech. In 1957, the students and faculty of Harding circulated a petition to allow Black students to enroll. There were 99 faculty who signed it, along with 946 out of 986 students—a vast majority. Having collected sufficient signatures, they presented the petition to the college president, George Benson, who was a segregationist. The petition was denied; however, changes were on the horizon. Just two years after the failed petition, in 1959, President Benson invited the famed Black evangelist Marshall Keeble to speak at the annual Harding lectures, introducing him as "one of the great preachers of the brotherhood."²⁰

This systemic reluctance to admit African Americans to study was inexcusable for Black Church of Christ leaders such as R.N. Hogan (1902–1997)—a gifted preacher who trained under the great G.P. Bowser. Bowser (1874–1950) is known as the founder of Southwestern Christian College—specifically for Black Church of Christ students—and is widely considered "the father of Christian education among blacks in Churches of Christ."²¹ Bowser raised Hogan from the age of nine after Hogan's father died, and his mother asked Bowser to raise the boy. Hogan and Bowser are probably the most important figures in the Churches of Christ who argued for independence of Black congregations.²²

¹⁹ Don Haymes, Eugene Randall II, and Douglas Foster, "Race Relations," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, p. 622.

²⁰ No doubt Keeble was one of the great preachers in the brotherhood. Keeble baptized more people than any Church of Christ evangelist ever had, Black or White, with the possible exception of Walter Scott—the great evangelist who worked alongside Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone to birth the American Restoration Movement. Both Keeble and Walter Scott are thought to have baptized 30,000 souls into Christ. See Don Haymes, Eugene Randall II, and Douglas Foster, "Race Relations," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, pp. 629–622.

²¹ R. Vernon Boyd, "Bowser, George Philip (1874–1950)," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, p. 97. On G.P. Bowser, see R. Vernon Boyd, *Undying Dedication: The Story of G.P. Bowser* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1985).

²² Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion*, p. 95. Another important Black Church of Christ leader that should be mentioned here is Samuel R. Cassius (1853–1931), who authored the influential book *Third Birth of a Nation* in 1920 that blasted racism in America. He is somewhat of a precursor to the prolific work of Bowser, arguing for racial segregation in the Churches of Christ due to White disinterest in the entire network of Black churches. Cassius's preaching career included a vast number of states and territories including Iowa, Oklahoma, California, Texas, and Colorado. He is known in the Black Churches of Christ for being the first Black preacher in the entire Stone-Campbell movement to preach in the greater Los Angeles area, and where he and his son established the first Black Church of Christ in Southern California. See Ervin C. Jackson, "Cassius, Samuel Robert (1853–1931)," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, pp. 166–167. See also Edward J. Robinson, *To Save My Race From Abuse: The Life of Samuel Robert Cassius* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

Hogan inherited the stances and posture of his mentor, Bowser. He became a prolific preacher and in 1937 moved to Los Angeles to establish the 110th and Wilmington Church of Christ which became the massively important Figueroa Church of Christ—the largest Church of Christ (over 1000 members) west of the Rocky Mountains. More than any of Bowser's protégés, R.N. Hogan carried the torch upon Bowser's death in 1950. In 1951, Hogan became the editor of the *Christian Echo*—the most important African American Church of Christ publication. He vehemently opposed racial segregation, especially in the church, and he worked tirelessly to stabilize the school—Southwestern Christian College—in the aftermath of Bowser's death.²³

Like his mentor G.P. Bowser, Hogan was incensed that Blacks were admitted to both public schools and many other Christian schools—but not to Church of Christ schools. Hogan argued repeatedly that Churches of Christ and Church of Christ schools should stop calling themselves “of Christ” and should stop using the word “Christian” in their names because by segregating themselves from their Black brothers and sisters they were essentially segregating themselves from Christ.²⁴

Hogan once lamented, “My Race can attend the denominational colleges, but not certain so-called Christian Colleges. What a shame!”²⁵

R.N. Hogan found an ally in Dr. Carl Spain, motivating Spain to deliver such a blow in his 1960 lecture that nobody present that day could ignore. In his stinging lecture, he issued this unflinching exhortation:

God forbid that churches of Christ, and schools operated by Christians, shall be the last stronghold of refuge for socially sick people who have Nazi illusions about the Master Race. ... I feel certain that Jesus would say, “Ye hypocrites! You say you are the only true Christians, and make up the only true church, and have the only Christian schools. Yet, you drive one of your own preachers to denominational schools where he can get credit for his work and refuse to let him take Bible for credit in your own school because the color of his skin is dark!”²⁶

Spain continued to hit this issue hard when he asked his audience that day:

Why are we afraid? ... Are we moral cowards on this issue? There are people with money who will back us in our last-ditch stand for white supremacy in a world of pigmented people. God forbid that we shall be the last stronghold among religious

²³ See Ed Robinson, “Hogan, Richard Nathaniel (1902–1997),” pp. 401–402 in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*.

²⁴ Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 288–291.

²⁵ Edward Robinson, *Hard-Fighting Soldiers* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019), p. 89.

²⁶ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, pp. 289–290. Hughes's source for this quotation is: Carl Spain, “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals,” in *Christian Faith in the Modern World: The Abilene Christian College Annual Bible Lectures, 1960* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University College Students Exchange, 1960), p. 217.

schools where the politico-economic philosophy of naturalism determines our moral conduct.

Spain's famous lecture didn't start out so controversially. He began his lecture—titled “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals” by defining the term “moral.” He talked about “pure and undefiled religion.” He quoted from many different New Testament books to make his point that faith and morals are integrally related.

One of his major points in the earlier, milder sections of his lecture was that our morality should be centered, first and foremost, on our desire to please God. And only secondly should we strive to please people. But where our love for God and love for people contradict, we must choose to please God first. The key to Christian happiness, he said, is pleasing God by pleasing other people.

Then Dr. Spain spoke rather philosophically about the Holy Spirit, human nature, and Adam's morality which was written into his nature. He talked about the Golden Rule being a summary of the law and the prophets.

He then became quite perturbed about a famous Jewish historian named Joseph Klausner who had died a couple years before. Klausner wrote a book on the life of Jesus that was very critical. Dr. Spain took exception to that book and critiqued it point by point.

He then delved into Communism and referred to it as an “Anti-Christ rule.” However, he argued, the only way to defeat Communism was to “bear a cross instead of a sword,” since “the sword will only spread the destructive disease of greed and hate,” while “the cross burns in a healing way and destroys the disease without destroying the person.”

Spain then spoke about materialism and atheism, and—in his view—the reprehensible view that humans are not responsible for their actions. He argued that according to materialistic explanations, humans are simply “the result of chemical and physical forces,” and we “cannot do right or wrong because these natural forces determine” our choices in life. In other words, atheism lets humans off the hook, relegating them to almost pre-programmed animals who have no real moral choice or accountability for their actions. In the political sphere, Spain referred to this notion as “political naturalism”—that there is a natural law that is obvious to all.

Then Spain lectured at length about the Nazis and the Soviets, showing his awareness of world events happening around him. He talked about China, Korea, and India. He discussed Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, and Khrushchev. And almost without pause—in the midst of his critique of all these other despots and despotic nations—he said these words:

And in our own beloved America, under the banner of white supremacy, [political naturalism] marches with burning crosses across our nation cursing the doctrine that all men are born free and equal. Robed in the un-American garb of the Ku-

Klux Klan, or in the robes of governors and senators and legislators it intimidates and legislates with utter contempt for Christ who sits as Judge in the Highest Court of Appeals in questions concerning the bill of human rights.

At that point, Spain pivoted to focus directly on race issues in America. He was scathing in his critique:

Marching under the standard of the god of mammon and bluffing his way with ballots and bullets, the white man put his big white foot on the [black man's] neck, quoted the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and piously recited platitudes about all men being born free and equal.

What right have we to talk about the two faces of Khrushchev, when we guard the ballot boxes with guns and pass laws that deny Native Americans the right to vote on the basis of their color and social background. Like Khrushchev, many Americans just don't agree with Jesus about His moral code. The ethics of Jesus are foolish to many church goers.²⁷

Next, Carl Spain told a personal story that gets quoted from time to time in our Church of Christ histories:²⁸

I shall never forget how Christ was crucified by "His own" in a southern community where I grew up. A few law-abiding, humble-hearted [African Americans] wanted to attend a service of the church of Christ. They had listened to me preach on the radio. These souls didn't know anything about an organization for the advancement of colored people. They traded with my beloved step-father, who seemed to be interested in their souls. They loved him like a mongrel dog would love a man who fed him and spoke kindly to him when he was accustomed to being cursed and kicked.

When our colored friends timidly asked if they could attend a service of the white folks and learn more about the church of Christ, I made the mistake of telling them that they would be more than welcome. And they trusted me. They came in timidly and took the seats that were as far back as they could get and still be inside. I shall never forget the agony on their faces when white Christians made it very plain to them that they were out of place and glared at them like a Jew would have looked upon a "Samaritan dog." [These African American friends] left the assembly of the saints. It seemed that the saints couldn't pray or sing just right as long as there were [African Americans] in the church house.

²⁷ I have chosen not to use racial epithets used by Spain in the original lecture. Instead, I typically insert in brackets, "African Americans."

²⁸ See, for example, Edward Robinson, *Show Us How You Do It* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), p. 97.

Spain continued this painful story. He recounted how, shortly after this incident, this same Black community received a Black preacher to preach the gospel to them. It was hugely successful and many of them wanted to get baptized. So, the White preacher invited them to “come over and use the baptistery.”

Some White folks in the town, however, realized what was happening and they “protested violently.” It wasn’t just Church of Christ White folks, rather, Spain says it was a collection of Church of Christ, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterians who protested about blacks using the baptistery in the Church of Christ building.

Spain then recounted the fallout:

Before the baptismal service was over, police came to put a stop to it. Just like the Communists broke up services in Warsaw, Poland, last year. The local paper took up the fight in good old “Democratic” style. Police patrolled the area around the church building. The Lord’s church was branded as a communist front organization where whites and [black folks] socialized as brothers. The community systematically boycotted the business establishments of some of the Christians for months, nearly causing them to go bankrupt.

I grew up in that community! I saw firsthand the kind of social paranoia that caused the Jews to hate Jesus and nail Him to a tree!

There is little to be gained by preaching against the immoral actions of Communists, unless we as Christians are willing to repent of our own idolatry and murder...We have so defined “moral” and “immoral” in our modern times that a covetous idolater and hateful murderer can go to church and be in full fellowship because he doesn’t smoke, chew, drink, or dance. These latter things we ought not to do, but we need to expand the borders of our moral realm and condemn certain areas that have been condoned.

...When people insist on using the Bible to support an un-Christian system of ethics, one can expect that social revolution will follow, with its usual attending evils.

...Our moral attitudes are so mixed up that we use the story of Philemon and Onesimus to justify refusing a [black person] admission to study Bible in our graduate schools ...

A Methodist college will admit our own [black] preacher brethren and give them credit for their work. Baptist colleges in Texas will do as much. Our State universities will admit them. There is no law of our State or nation that will censor

us. The Bible does not rule against it. Why are we afraid? The integrated schools of San Angelo, Texas, ninety miles from Abilene, are rated at the top in our nation.

...We fear the mythical character named Jim Crow more than we reverence Jesus Christ.

...To complacent Jews who boasted that they alone were acceptable to God, Jesus said: "Outwardly you are like whited sepulchers, but inwardly you are full of dead men's bones." Let this be a warning to any people who say they are the only Christians in the world: the surest way to seal the doom of this nation is for the only Christians to be the only ones with un-Christian attitudes."

The Pharisees of Jesus' day had developed a code of morals by which they could safely parade their piety before men...They became blind guides that strained at gnats and swallowed camels.

Then Dr. Spain took another swipe at the policies of the Church of Christ educational institutions:

We reject even our own preachers, and refuse them credit for their work in Bible, on the grounds that we do not have separate facilities for them to sleep and eat.

Brethren, we are not recommending revolutionary legislation. We are merely suggesting that we offer Christian education to all Americans without respect of persons.

Taking another somewhat abrupt turn, Dr. Spain began to speak about the ethics of Immanuel Kant, with commentary on Plato, Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Hume, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Barth. He was trying to make several ethical and theological points, but he seemed most emphatic when he spoke directly about morality. The following is one of his important points near the end of his speech:

No challenge to Christian morals is quite so subtle and so dangerous as that which comes from the unconverted members of the Christian fellowship itself. There are many practical atheists among us who are morally loose because they do not really believe that the earth and the works therein shall be burned up and that they must soon stand before the judgment throne of God to give an account of their moral conduct upon this earth. They secretly nurse in their bosom, or openly profess, that they do not really believe there is a place of outer darkness reserved for rebellious, disobedient men who will exist together in hateful contempt for each other, forever banished from the glorious light and love and spirit of God's presence.

He then upheld the teaching of 2 Peter 3:10:

The day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Peter 3:10).

Next, Dr. Spain condemned both Capitalists and Communists for having “crucified Christ and Christian virtues in their mad race to the moon.” We’ve turned into a people that crave after money. Instead of taking refuge in Moscow, Washington, or even the earthly city of Jerusalem, we need to seek the City of God, the *New Jerusalem*. He then asked: What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul?

Dr. Spain then condemned what he called the “moral tragedy” of the American way of life: the

“...carnal atmosphere of gluttonous dining, lascivious dancing, and lustful conversations over cocktail glasses. All of this dining, dancing, and drinking in smoke-filled lounges and dens of homes and the underworld is the ugly outbreaking of the deadly disease of worldliness. It is a disease that cannot be controlled and destroyed by salving the sores with a few sermons on each ugly manifestation that meets the eye. It must be conquered by creating in men a new heart and a spiritual mind.”

He urged his listeners to withdraw from “carnal-minded” people. We must “put a stop to the evil of baptizing carnal-minded, unregenerate people who join churches rather than becoming children of God by the new birth.” He urged church leaders to “discipline with all the power of truth in love those who are members of the Christian fellowship.” He concluded thus:

We live in an undisciplined age. We must train people in the right way. Lawlessness is on every hand. We must, as an act of love, withdraw fellowship and refuse "to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one do not even eat" (I Corinthians 5:11). But, in harmony with the moral law: "Let all that you do be done in love" (I Corinthians 16:14). And, if withdrawal of fellowship is necessary to save a soul from death, let us have the courage to do it. But God forbid that we do so hatefully. Paul says: "Note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:14–15).

Dr. Spain closed his speech with 2 Corinthians 7:1, urging his hearers to “cleanse ourselves from all defilements of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

To put it mildly, Carl Spain’s speech caused waves. Those waves crashed hard on the evening of February 24, 1960. White-run Church of Christ journals rarely talked about race until Spain’s speech. Wes Crawford writes, “The *Christian Chronicle* was the first White publication to end

its silence by calling for a dialogue on the subject of race.” They even encouraged letters to the editor on the subject of racial prejudice. Years following Spain’s speech, “Letters continued to flow” from the *Christian Chronicle*, “... both praising and ridiculing Spain’s boldness.”²⁹

If Spain’s motive was to create waves, he could hardly have done better. Not even through radio, television, or preaching at a major Church of Christ could he have achieved such results. At that time in history, 1960, the Abilene Christian lectures were the premier place to deliver important ideas. That specific platform provided the best chance for rapid change.³⁰

Crawford writes that “Of all White efforts to challenge White-imposed segregation within Churches of Christ, Spain’s effort had the most dramatic effect...Following the event, Spain’s employer desegregated its graduate school, leading to the desegregation of the entire student body the following year.”³¹

In conclusion, we can point out that Carl Spain was deeply indebted to the African American preacher R. N. Hogan for railing against segregation in the Church of Christ educational institutions throughout the 1950s. The Church of Christ colleges remained segregated nearly a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*’s decision in 1954, which decided that racial segregation was unconstitutional in public schools. Most of the journals and the major players in the Churches of Christ remained silent after that decision was publicly delivered.³²

But then came Carl Spain’s speech. Spain was certainly more the exception than the rule. However, his vocal exception to the rules of his day resulted in a *changing* of the rules for future generations.

Spain’s speech created waves that continue to impact the academy and the church at large.

It is high time that we exchange the ostracism that Spain experienced for a hearty applause of what he accomplished that day when he boldly condemned racism in the church and in the Christian academy. May we commit to carrying the torch for racial justice and deep reconciliation in the Churches of Christ. The deep and lasting damage that was done to the church continues. In the words of R. N. Hogan, “Racial prejudice caused multiplied thousands to lose their souls.”³³

²⁹ Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2013), p. 113.

³⁰ Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion*, p. 115.

³¹ Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion*, p. 116.

³² Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion*, p. 131.

³³ R.N. Hogan, “The Sin of Being a Respector of Persons,” *Christian Echo* 54 (June 1959), p. 2. Quoted in Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion*, p. 96.