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The Truth About Restructure: A Second Open Letter to Christian Churches and Churches of Christ

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Don't Miss "A Deadly Parallel" on Pages 20, 21, 22 and 23.

The Truth About Restructure

A SECOND OPEN LETTER TO
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND CHURCHES OF CHRIST

To our brethren in Christ, Greetings:

In response to many requests from readers of our first Open Letter, *Freedom or Restructure?*, and inasmuch as our so-called official Brotherhood journals are biased in favor of Restructure and closed to full and free discussion of the issues involved, and because the platforms of many of our area and national conventions reflect a similar commitment and policy, we send forth this new brochure.

Our first Open Letter has met with remarkable acceptance throughout the churches of the nation and continues to have a wide circulation. The probity and dependability of its statements have been amply justified and they need no defense. Indeed, they have proven so effective that an official of one Brotherhood agency said, "Not in 50 years has any document made such powerful impact on the life of the Brotherhood." A retired state secretary said recently, "So great has been the influence of this brochure in our state that, as of today, I would say that less than 25 per cent of our churches will vote to go into Restructure." If the reader of this Letter has not read *Freedom or Restructure?* it is advisable to do so, as it contains much basic, vital and essential information not included in this document. There is now

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need for additional information,* because of new steps taken in the process of Restructure.

It is increasingly evident that the official "establishment" is unequivocally committed to Restructure regardless of the consequences. They seem not to care about the disunity of our people and the damage done to our image in the Christian world as a direct result of their determination to achieve their goals. Restructure is actually proceeding *now* unofficially, semi-officially and officially at every level of Brotherhood life, *according to plan*, despite its unpopularity among the majority of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in America. It is proceeding unofficially in confidential dialogue with key leaders in which personal commitments are made; semi-officially in invitational gatherings where personnel and organizational problems are being ironed out; and officially in area and national conventions and conferences where resolutions are passed and structural changes are approved.

THE BASIC DOCUMENT OF RESTRUCTURE

At the 1964 Assembly of the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) at Detroit, Michigan, the basic document of Brotherhood Restructure, "The Nature of the Structure Our Brotherhood Seeks" (Report 33-B) was unveiled. Dr. Granville T. Walker, chairman of the Convention's Commission on Brotherhood Restructure, writing in the February 2, 1965 issue of *The Christian*, page 13, said that this document is (1) a call for "the wholeness of the church" on the one hand, and (2) for "responsible congregational involvement"

*This brochure is issued anonymously because the Committee for the Preservation of the Brotherhood wishes to have the facts, principles and issues of Restructure presented and considered on their own merits. It has been our observation that in similar situations in the history of the Brotherhood sober and meaningful discussion has been made impossible by the introduction of personalities and organizational prejudices. Let us keep to the basic issues involved in Restructure. Let us solve this problem in the spirit of Christ, by an appeal to the authority of the New Testament, to the historic position and practice of our Movement, to prayer and common sense.

on the other. Declaring it to be "the basic document" of Restructure, he stated further that its passage by the Detroit Assembly marks "a turning point in the life of the Disciples of Christ." It behooves us, therefore, to examine it carefully (See the 1964 *Year Book*, pages 36-38).

"The Nature of the Structure Our Brotherhood Seeks" calls "the whole brotherhood in all its parts . . . to renewal and reformation." In pious phrases it sets up a smoke-screen which can well mislead uninformed and trusting brethren into believing that some great spiritual revival will come as the result of Restructure. The document, as its framers must know, has only one distinctive purpose and that is to change the organizational structure of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (Disciples of Christ), from that of a free church, congregational polity to that of a "controlled congregational" or "modified presbyterian" polity and to create a so-called "responsible"* denomination with strong centralized authority. Report 33-B is a political document, pure and simple. As Dr. Ronald E. Osborne, dean of Christian Theological Seminary and a foremost advocate of Restructure, has written, "The actual function of denominational structure . . . is not theological but political in the pure meaning of the term (in "The Structure of Cooperation," *Mid-Stream*, December, 1962).

In our examination of the basic document, therefore, we shall analyze its seven articles in search of the practical, political, structural changes they propose and without particular regard to the pious theological verbiage involved. We have emphasized the significant passages in each article with bold type as an aid to the reader.

I. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS STRUCTURES ROOTED IN CHRIST'S MINISTRY MADE KNOWN THROUGH SCRIPTURE.

The ministry to which Christ calls us is the continuation in the world of the ministry of reconciliation wrought by God through Jesus

*"Responsible" is defined in Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary as "accountable, as to a judge, master, creditor, ruler, or rightful superior."

Christ. Christ's call to this ministry of loving God and loving one's neighbor as oneself is to each of his followers, to the whole Church and not just to the "ordained" or "special" ministry. **The whole life of the brotherhood must** proclaim and embody the reconciling ministry of Christ to the world.

According to the scriptures, through the covenant of faith in Christ, his followers are joined to him and to each other. In the church, by baptism and at the Lord's Table, they receive gifts of the Holy Spirit which are means of grace for the fulfilling of their ministries to the world.

To assist Christ's followers in their individual and corporate ministries of reconciliation to the world, **the church develops such specialized functions as preaching and worship, religious education and pastoral care, and identifies such offices as elders, deacons, deaconesses, teachers, pastors, etc.** These church functions, programs, and "ministries" find Christian meaning as they equip the members of Christian congregations to fulfill their ministries wherever they live and work in the world.

We accept the structure of the church as "rooted in Christ's ministry made known through Scripture."

But it may be appropriate at this point to further consider the teaching of the New Testament regarding church structure and the Scriptural polity to which Disciples of Christ have been committed for over one hundred and fifty years.

In the beginning of the church's history local congregations were constituted by the spontaneous association of believers in Christ. Individuals and families were drawn toward each other by their common trust in Jesus Christ and their common interest in the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. They became united, not by external bonds, but by the vital force of distinctive ideas and principles. New affections became the bond of a distinctive brotherhood and the new brotherhood, with its mutual duties and united responsibilities, became an organized society. A new and unique commonwealth of believers came into being and each local church became a little autonomous republic under Christ. The churches planted by the Apostles were distinctly local institutions.

Nothing like a national church or an area church having jurisdiction over many congregations within geographical boundaries, national or political, appears in the New Testament. Each local church was complete in itself and was held responsible to Christ for its own character and the character of those whom it retained in its fellowship. Particular churches were related to each other as constituent portions of the greater spiritual body, the universal Church. Their unity was in the one faith, one Lord, one baptism, and the one hope of life eternal. It was a unity of distinctly Christian ideas, principles, and conduct, distinguishing them from the world — a unity of common interests and common efforts, of common trials and perils, and of mutual affection. The kind of structure and unity being currently proposed by the advocates of Restructure originated later in church history (A.D. 100 to 400) and was without benefit of Apostolic teaching or example. It had a humanly devised centralized episcopal structure, supplanting local self-governing churches and eventuated finally in the ecclesiastical organization known as the Roman Catholic Church.

To put it briefly and succinctly, the church polity revealed in the New Testament follows this pattern:

1. **The universal spiritual body of Christ** (I Corinthians 12: 13-26; Ephesians 2:14-22; 4:4-6). When Christ said "upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), he was talking not about local churches, but about this universal spiritual body. This body also is referred to as "the church of God, which he hath purchased by his own blood" (Acts 20:28), and as "the foundation of God" which "standeth sure having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (II Timothy 2:19). This is the church that will ultimately triumph (Hebrews 12: 22-23; Revelation 3:12). There is no indication in the New Testament that this manifestation of "the wholeness of the church" had any man-made structure or owed allegiance to any human authority.

2. The New Testament also speaks of **local churches**, such as the churches of Galatia, or the saints at Philippi "with elders and deacons," or "the seven churches of Asia," or "the holy and faithful brethren at Colosse." Epistles are addressed to churches at Corinth, Thessalonica, and to the seemingly unorganized fraternity in Rome. These were self-governing bodies with congregationally appointed or elected elders, deacons, ministers, teachers and other functionaries (Acts 15:2-29; Ephesians 4:11-17; I Timothy 3:1-13; 4:1-6; I Peter 5:1-11) who were warned not to be "self-willed" nor "lords over God's heritage," always respecting the rights of the congregation; the whole body "submitting themselves to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). There were no extra-congregational bishops or other officials to whom these local churches were advised to report or to whose edicts they were obliged to submit. They were absolutely free in Christ.

3. However, there is implicit in the New Testament record the idea of **voluntary fellowship of equal churches**. They aided one another in times of trouble (II Corinthians 8:9), they conferred with one another in matters of common concern and cooperated with one another whenever by so doing they could advance evangelistic, educational and benevolent objects for which the church was established on earth (Acts 5). The doctrine of inter-dependence is clearly taught, because of the common union of the churches with their acknowledged Head, Jesus Christ.

Disciples of Christ have historically encouraged such cooperative effort, but have never considered extra-congregational organizations or their officials, or representatives, to be Scripturally authorized or to have the right to exercise any direction or authority over local congregations. Never has there been any general disposition to consider such agencies as "the church," parts of "the church," or as having any status essential to the valid expression of "the wholeness of the church." Restructure

calls for a repudiation of our historical doctrines and practice with respect to extra-congregational cooperative agencies, thus threatening the freedom and autonomy of local churches and endangering the unity of the body of Christ.

What is it the Commission seeks to change? They would destroy the autonomy and the freedom of the local congregation and the autonomy and freedom of our voluntary cooperative agencies by the creation of an ecclesiastical system of organizational "wholeness." In and through this new denominational structure the functional life of the local churches (their preaching, worship, religious education, pastoral care; elders, deacons, deaconesses, teachers, pastors; their program and ministries) will become "responsibly involved" with denominational headquarters. The framers of this document have overlooked nothing — every function, every functionary and functional program of every local church and of every extra-congregational cooperative agency must be brought into subjection to their humanly-structured Super-Church. Indeed, the authors of this significant document go on to imply that all these God-given ministers and ministries (Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 12:6-8) can have true "Christian meaning" only through the official status granted them by the new ecclesiastical overlords at denominational headquarters. Thus we have a picture of "the wholeness of the church" the advocates of Restructure seek.

II. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS STRUCTURES THAT ARE COMPREHENSIVE IN MINISTRY AND IN MISSION

Christ's ministry is to the whole world, to all men, and to the whole man. **The brotherhood seeks to reorganize itself so that in every place there may be a more effective ministry for Christ on the part of local congregations, metropolitan, district, state and area boards, and national and international agencies and institutions. The ministry of the whole brotherhood in all its parts must be related to the whole mission of the church and to man in all his needs and relationships in community, in the nation, and in the world.**

In each generation and place, Christians must discover the forms of service and witness relevant to their contemporary world. **All church organization, program and "special ministries" must constantly be re-formed in terms of assisting** the followers of Christ to carry out their ministries in the world. **The need for radical rethinking in all these areas is obvious in this day of rapid social and technological change.**

This article spells out in unmistakable political terms the extent of the ministry and mission of the new denomination. It states that the Brotherhood *must be restructured or reorganized in every place*—in local congregations, metropolitan, district, state, and area boards and in national and international agencies, evangelistic, missionary, benevolent and educational institutions and, as if this statement might not seem to be comprehensive enough, the document goes on to say that *"the whole brotherhood in all its parts" must be reorganized* in order that it may be properly related to "the whole mission of the church." There is definite intimation here that the Restoration plea and the New Testament pattern of the Church are *passee* and inadequate in a modern world. Then, to give the architects of the Super-Church *carte blanche* for future changes, it is made clear that it will be necessary periodically to reform and remodel as changing conditions may warrant. Indeed, it is intimated that these changes will probably be the result of some "radical rethinking" inspired, not by appeal to the Word of God, but by rapid sociological changes. This suggestion cannot help but arouse fears that liberal socio-political elements in the leadership of the new denomination may have great influence in further restructure, even beyond the pattern indicated in this basic document.

III. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS STRUCTURES BY WHICH CONGREGATIONS MAY FULFILL THEIR MINISTRIES

In order that individual Christians and local congregations may freely exercise their ministries both in and beyond the local congregation, **it is necessary to provide organizational channels within which responsibilities and opportunities have been clarified.** The

dynamics of individual and congregational initiative should be preserved. **Such terms as "freedom," "authority," "responsibility," "rights," "autonomy" and "power" derive Christian meaning only in relation to the ministry which Christ lays upon his whole Church.**

This article recognizes the fact that the great majority of our local congregations are jealous of their historic freedoms, their authority, their responsibility, their rights, their autonomy and their power. They believe that these endowments are from Christ, the Head of the Church, and are implicit in the pattern of the Church as revealed in the New Testament. They have operated for over 150 years with a fair understanding of the meaning of these terms and may resent being told that they can only have meaning as leaders in Restructure interpret them. The advocates of Restructure are so fearful for the success of their proposals, that they know they must destroy the old Scriptural concepts. Therefore, this article asserts that new interpretations and definitions are necessary in terms of Restructure. Our churches may well expect that these new and "more meaningful" elucidations will be so phrased as to deceive the very elect. They will undoubtedly give the impression that all the rights and freedoms of the individual Christian and of the local church will be preserved and perpetuated under Restructure, while at the same time providing loopholes for Super-Church relationships and authorities in courts of law. If the old words and definitions are to retain the meanings they have had for over 150 years, why is there need for new definitions? Changes are going to be made not only in definitions, but in the rights and freedoms of the individual Christians and of the local church.

IV. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS STRUCTURES THAT ARE RESPONSIBLY INTER-RELATED

In Christ his followers are **members one of another through their covenant** to continue his ministry to the world. They are **a single body, one Church ministering comprehensively** through many organs. The brotherhood seeks to **equip and embody** this

ministry through many agencies and institutions organized on a geographical basis, together with local congregations, all of which are responsibly inter-related under the lordship of Christ who is the head of the body. To that end, arrangements must be mutually sought out and adopted which clearly identify for each unit of the church its appropriate functions and freedoms, its rightful responsibilities and representatives, the autonomies each must claim and the limitations which, under God, each must acknowledge.

First, note the reference to a covenant. There is now being drawn a covenant, or loyalty oath, which every agency and institution, including the local church (and even individual Christians?) must eventually sign or affirm which involves absolute commitment to an official, exclusive, central, authoritative denominational body. Within this framework each unit will be permitted a certain amount of freedom, initiative and diversity but all functions and limitations must be definitely marked out and mutually agreed upon. Note well the ominous word "limitations." This is all supposed to be done "under God" but it is rather certain that the Restructure "establishment" will determine what God thinks about it. No unit in this denominational body (and this includes the local church) shall have the right to *independently* assume any rights, responsibilities, representations or undertakings whatsoever. Every "freedom" (if the word can rightly be used in this connection) enjoyed by any unit is permissive and permission must emanate from denominational headquarters.

V. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS STRUCTURES THAT MANIFEST BOTH UNITY AND DIVERSITY

The brotherhood will continue to be open and inviting to **congregations and agencies willing** to embody, at one and the same time, the diversity and unity that characterize Christian fellowship. Where diversity is embodied, unity does not lead to conformity; where unity is embodied, diversity does not lead to divisiveness. **The simultaneous expression of unity and diversity results in inter-relatedness with responsibility but without the tyranny of either the minority or the majority.** The brotherhood should continue to seek

structures which make provision for differences of opinion, always attempting within the bonds of love to discover amid differences the unifying will of God.

This article hastens to soften the blow just delivered to our historic freedoms in Article IV. It asserts, though without supporting proofs, that the new corporate body will guarantee unity and *diversity in matters of opinion*, regardless of minorities or majorities. It will assure inter-relatedness with responsibility. This is a giant-sized order. We can only await the events and judgments of history as to the validity of this promise. Consider, however, the absence in this article of any guarantee for *diversity of action*. Diversity of action, apparently, is to be subject to the "limitations" provided in Article IV.

VI. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS TO BE ECUMENICAL

The brotherhood should continue its wholehearted participation in the ecumenical movement. Membership in and the contribution of personal leadership to local, state or area, national and world councils of churches should be encouraged. Disciples of Christ should continue to explore with other Christians the faith they share within the one Church of Christ on earth, each body bearing witness to its distinctive heritage and being enriched by the faith, heritage and witness of other Christian bodies. The Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) should continue with other bodies vital conversations and negotiations looking toward larger unions which may more fully manifest the unity given us in Christ and be more fruitful for the ministry of Christ's church in the world.

There has been much reticence on the part of advocates of Restructure, especially at the local church level, regarding the involvement of Restructure in the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement in general. In some quarters there has been overt denial that it is the ultimate purpose of Restructure to deliver our churches into mergers with certain denominations. This article makes it clear that Restructure will include membership in local, state or area, national and world councils of churches and active

leadership-participation in their programs and in their decision-making groups. Participation will become more meaningful, under Restructure, in local church situations and in inter-church responsibilities. Local church mergers and closings can be effected with acknowledged extra-congregational authority. Plans for denominational mergers can be expedited with greater assurance and speed. The Article tacitly approves participation of the Disciples in the Blake-Pike consultations (involving the Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical United Brethren Church); and also the separate consultations and negotiations with the American (Northern) Baptist Convention and the United Church of Christ. This is all we need to put us well along the road to becoming a "disappearing brotherhood."

VII. THE BROTHERHOOD SEEKS STRUCTURES FAITHFUL IN STEWARDSHIP

Faithful Christian stewardship demands the committed use of monies, resources, energies and abilities, by individuals, congregations and agencies. Faithful Christian stewardship requires a continuing reformation of administrative procedures in all areas in order that full potential may be released. However, achievements of administrative efficiency are not to be taken for the whole work of renewal of spirit and reform called for in restructure. Renewal and reform must be continuing characteristics of our Christian life and work.

This article proposes to give new powers to the headquarters establishment for money-raising and money-spending purposes. Through these new powers congregations and agencies can be compelled to give their material resources to definitely administration-approved programs. It closes the door to individual and independent initiative in either raising or expending funds on projects which have not been approved by headquarters. *Carte blanche* is given for any future changes that may be deemed necessary to draw the "stewardship" noose still tighter around the sources of funds and to give greater authority to central

headquarters. The term "faithful stewardship" is already being defined so as to include only giving to headquarters-approved and -controlled objectives and concerns.

We are glad for the "however" in this article. It comes like an afterthought, but it expressly concedes that renewal of spirit and reform cannot be achieved through structural perfection and administrative efficiency. Despite this concession, it seems to us that the *major thrust* of Report 33-B is that true religion and the purpose and mission of the church can be advanced most effectively by means of organizational restructure. This has been the fatal error of church leaders through every century of the Christian era. True Christianity, as revealed in the New Testament, is not organization, it is organism. It does not consist in a system of rules, regulations, rituals or ecclesiastical structures. Christ had great difficulty in getting his disciples, most of whom came out of Hebrew backgrounds, to understand that true religion was not limited by the four walls of a Temple and did not depend upon outward forms — laws, dogmas, rituals, ceremonial sacrifices, sanhedrins or priestcraft. He taught that true religion is basically the fruit of the Spirit and expresses itself in Christian character and resulting action.

The current emphasis upon ecclesiastical structure is fraught with grave dangers. It will cause our people to get a distorted and unscriptural concept of the relative value of spiritual and/or material considerations in the life of the church. It will cause us to put our trust in efficient organizations and in highly-sophisticated clerical leaders, rather than in Christ and his Word. It will result in the introduction of tests of fellowship that are completely extraneous to the fellowship that is in Christ Jesus, and cause rifts in our Movement which is already beset by divisive influences of a very serious nature.

CURRENT PROGRESS IN RESTRUCTURE

Actual Restructure is taking place now according to some generally accepted pattern which its authors have clearly in mind. It is common practice for advocates of Restructure to say that there is no "blue-print" for it; that our leaders are waiting for "the guidance of the Holy Spirit" and "to discover the will of Christ." They say no action can be taken until "our brethren make known their wishes in convention assembled." They intimate that Restructure is something for the future. We are, therefore, listing eleven steps that have been taken or are being taken, each of which is related to Restructure.

1. **Delegate Conventions.** The International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) is being reorganized. At the Detroit Assembly, Report 34 proposed changes in the By-laws providing for a delegate convention. Many assumed that this meant only that the local churches would henceforth send duly-authorized delegates; that the old mass-meeting would be discontinued and be replaced by a more representative and "responsible" gathering. But the proposal was really for a four-level controlled delegate system: (1) local congregations would henceforth be represented by three votes each for *approved* memberships up to 1,000, and one additional delegate for each 500 additional *approved* members; (2) the *principal* members of the Committee of Recommendations; (3) the *voting* members of the Council of Agencies; and (4) the officers and staff members of the Convention itself. Resolution 30, which provides for a Convention Credentials Committee, makes it clear that only those brethren can vote in the Assembly who have been approved by "the powers that be" in the Convention. (See also "7. Local Church Membership"). It will be necessary for the delegates chosen by local churches to have their credentials cleared by the state secretary's office, as an extra precaution. Furthermore, annual meetings of the Convention will be discontinued. The Assembly will meet only every other year. In the interim between assemblies, the Officers and

the Board of Directors of the Convention will exercise increased powers to direct the affairs of the Brotherhood. State and area associations of churches are moving to make their conventions delegate gatherings, following a similar pattern. Many of these bodies have already completed this phase of Restructure.

2. **A New Name.** The term now used to designate the International Convention is "International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)." In 1954 the Miami Beach Assembly changed the name from the "International Convention of Disciples of Christ" to the present form. This was a significant move in that it changed the character of the Convention from that of a voluntary mass-meeting of individual Christians (Disciples) to that of a quasi-representative convention of churches. Now in order to make it clear that this body is really a Church or denomination (such as the Methodist Church), it is proposed that the name be changed to "International Convention of the Christian Church." Advocates of Restructure hold that the term "Christian churches" denotes only a loose-knit aggregation of free congregations and inadequately expresses "the wholeness of the church."

3. **Christian Stewardship.** Moving to implement Article VII of Report 33-B, authority for dealing with all matters involving faithful Christian stewardship is being given to one "Finance Commission" of the Convention (Resolution 31).

4. **The Ministry.** Resolution No. 51 at Detroit was a Restructure measure. It provides for the transfer of final authority for the ordination of ministers from the local congregation to "the whole church." This intimates that the sum total of congregations organized into approved state and area associations now has the final ordaining authority. It further intimates that men must have graduated from "the right schools" and hold "the right views" on Brotherhood affairs. Local congregations will be "involved" in the new system, but will have no final control.

5. **General Ministries.** A "General Minister" of "the whole church," Dr. A. Dale Fiers, was ordained in a very significant liturgical service at Detroit. He was "consecrated" by the laying-on of hands of purported representatives of "laymen, pastors, state ministers, educators, ecumenical ministers and national ministers" of "the whole church." A whole new level of extra-congregational ministers is being created, "super-ministers" in a "Super-Church," in certain respects similar to superintendents, bishops, archbishops and cardinals of the older denominations. This is a part of Restructure.

6. **Associations of Churches.** For over 150 years the cooperative agencies of the Brotherhood at area, state and regional levels were voluntary associations of brethren. They did not claim to have official connections with or authority over the churches. Under Restructure all such extra-congregational organizations are being replaced by official associations of churches which, in turn, are officially related with the International Convention. Except for certain refinements that may be made later, this phase of Restructure has almost reached the saturation point of accomplishment.

7. **Local Church Membership.** In Detroit, Resolution 47 provided a new definition of "active member" for local congregations. This makes it possible to eliminate all brethren who are not wholeheartedly in favor of local, state or national church policies from consideration for appointment as official delegates to state, area or national conventions. The standards set up affect reports to the *Year Book* and could be utilized by local church leaders to control elections.

8. **Dividing the Brotherhood.** The International Convention's Commission of Cooperative Policy and Practice (beginning with the 1963 *Year Book*) has arbitrarily divided the churches of the Brotherhood into two separate lists — "Cooperative" and "Non-Cooperative." This drastic and unprecedented action followed the issuance of an anonymous

pamphlet (sponsored by the Commission) entitled, *What Brotherhood Cooperation Means*. The pamphlet defines and specifies some of the differences which caused Convention officials to divide the Brotherhood. Here we already have the pattern for ultimate overt schism laid down by the advocates of Restructure. The current *Year Book* continues this divided listing of our churches.

9. Church Planning. The Christian Church Planning Council is already at work implementing Report 33-B. Restructure will scrap our free church or congregational polity and substitute in its place a "modified presbyterian" or "controlled congregational" polity. Every agency in the Brotherhood is already involved in preliminary negotiations with the Planning Council. Its representatives are meeting with boards, examining their constitutions and by-laws, legal involvements, deeds to properties, bank balances, investments, methods of operation, etc. The agencies have been advised that they cannot keep their independent fiscal status. Their service goals must no longer be ends in themselves. New "responsible" boards must be chosen to assure "responsible" church structure. All agencies must yield their separate "sovereignty and pride" as "God reveals the way under the guidance of the Holy Spirit," said "way" being clearly designated by the Council, the Commission on Restructure or by the Convention.

Furthermore, the Christian Church Planning Council is re-examining the present sources of support of all agencies with view to setting up new zones equal in population and church constituencies. When this work is completed there will be drastic changes in the organizational life of the Brotherhood affecting the present educational, benevolent, missionary, and other functional institutions. Take, for instance, our colleges and seminaries. Council leaders say there will be no more "illegitimate" institutions, i.e., no new schools expecting support from the Brotherhood can be established without official approval from de-

nominal headquarters. The Council and a new "responsible" Commission on Higher Education will take the place of the present loosely-formed "Board of Higher Education" and will be given authority to determine whether our present schools should continue to operate, be merged with other schools, or restructured to meet new needs. The benevolent, missionary and other institutions of the Brotherhood will likewise have to come under review and their futures determined in the light of modern social and technological change.

This Christian Church Planning Council is not overlooking any unit in the "whole church." It has provided a blueprint for "responsible" local church organization, policy and program. Our congregations are being fed this material through national, regional, state and area agencies. New constitutions and by-laws, deeds to church property, etc., are being recommended which clearly specify relationships with extra-congregational agencies and with denominational headquarters.

10. **Moves toward Mergers.** The International Convention (as has been previously mentioned) has officially authorized its Council on Christian Unity and certain special committees to proceed with consultations and negotiations looking toward the eventual merger of the Disciples of Christ with the United Church of Christ, and the American (Northern) Baptist Convention, the Methodist Church, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church (1964 *Year Book*, pages 53, 54, 55, 56, 146). Union and community churches are already being established by joint action with some of the above denominations. There is already joint administration of student work at various colleges and universities, and of general youth work in the churches at local, area, state and national levels; also joint undertakings in missions and in theological training (1964 *Year Book*, pages 245, 265-274). Every consultation and negotiation is marked by some kind of compromise or surrender of the distinctive position of the Restoration Movement.

11. Local Church Constitutions. In various ways beyond the efforts of the Christian Church Planning Council local churches are being advised to adopt new constitutions and by-laws. While this is undoubtedly for the purpose of expediting and assuring Restructure, Restructure as such is never mentioned. Churches are advised that there may have been many changes in laws and in legal procedures which make new documents advisable. Brethren throughout the country have sent us copies of recently revised constitutions and by-laws which show unmistakably the hand of Restructure agents. As an example we cite the constitution adopted not long ago by the First Christian Church, Reseda, California. It clearly states that the congregation is affiliated with the State Convention of Christian Churches of Southern California and that it operates its affairs according to "The Church Program Planning Guides of the Disciples of Christ." In the selection of its minister, the Pulpit Committee is required to submit the names of the candidates to "the State Secretary of the Christian Churches of Southern California for his endorsement or further recommendation." In Idaho when the new state constitution and the suggested form for local church constitutions were unveiled, there was an exodus from the state convention of some of the strongest churches in the state that refused to surrender their local church autonomy. The reason for this strong drive for the adoption of new constitutions and by-laws is that a clear legal relationship between the local church and the denomination must be established that will be sustained in the courts if central denominational controls are to be imposed or if denominational mergers are to be legally effected.

By the time this Open Letter is published, other steps in Restructure will have been taken. The process of re-forming the Brotherhood is being advanced with "all deliberate speed". Only the immediate action of local churches to preserve their freedom and to reject Restructure can save us from utter demoralization.

A DEADLY PARALLEL

Having presented this array of facts about the present state of Restructure in the Brotherhood, we would summarize the situation by drawing a contrast between the present historic position and practice of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ and the changes which will obtain under Restructure.

OUR PRESENT AND HISTORIC PRACTICE

The Brotherhood—a free, voluntary fellowship of individual Christians and local churches accepting the supreme authority of Jesus Christ and seeking responsibly to serve him according to the teachings of the New Testament.

Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and obedience to him in all things according to his will as revealed in the New Testament . . . the sole test of Christian fellowship.

All churches accept the Bible and the Bible alone as the rule of faith and practice.

Scriptural baptism essential to church membership.

THE PROPOSED PRACTICE UNDER RESTRUCTURE

The Brotherhood — an official and exclusive denomination composed of officially - related churches and agencies acknowledging a central Super-Church authority, through which the teachings of the New Testament are to be interpreted.

Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and loyal support of official denominational agencies and conventions . . . as tests of fellowship.

The sole authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice is denied and rejected.

Open membership permitted. Sprinkling, pouring and infant baptism condoned.

A DEADLY PARALLEL (Continued)

OUR PRESENT AND HISTORIC PRACTICE

Church polity is congregational, according to the New Testament pattern, thus guaranteeing the freedom and autonomy of the local church.

Local churches are free to buy, sell, hold and manage their own property without regard to extra-congregational controls of any kind.

All money-raising and money-spending powers are reserved by the local church. It may support any extra-congregational agency or undertaking it pleases.

Christian ministers are free in Christ. Ordination is by local churches. All churches are free to choose, retain or release their ministers under immediate responsibility to Christ.

THE PROPOSED PRACTICE UNDER RESTRUCTURE

Church polity "modified presbyterian" or "controlled congregational" with ultimate authority in a denominational Super-Church.

Local churches hold property as denominationally-related corporations with all the implications of that legal relationship.

All money-raising and money-spending powers of the local church are subject to review and/or approval by extra-congregational denominational authority.

Christian ministers are subject to denominational authority. Local churches must have denominational approval for ordination, choice and release of ministers.

A DEADLY PARALLEL (Continued)

OUR PRESENT AND HISTORIC PRACTICE

Local churches recognize their elders as "overseers of the flock" and their ministers as responsible servants in Word and work. They consider extra-congregational overlords unscriptural.

Extra-congregational agencies, fellowships, societies and conventions considered to be voluntary in character and without any authority over local churches. These bodies are not "the church" but servants of the churches and individuals that support them.

Extra-congregational agencies fellowships, societies, and conventions are free to elect their own officers, adopt their own administrative policies, promote their own programs, and maintain their own financial integrity.

Colleges and seminaries are free to elect their own boards, hold their own property, and administer their own educational programs.

THE PROPOSED PRACTICE UNDER RESTRUCTURE

A whole new category of general ministers, national, state and area (similar to bishops) is being created. These men and women will outrank local ministers and exercise a species of authority over local churches.

Extra-congregational agencies and conventions approved and authorized by Super-Church headquarters are, with approved local churches, parts of the "whole church."

All extra-congregational agencies must be subject to the denominational headquarters in all matters of personnel, policy, program and property.

Colleges and seminaries must be denominationally related. Boards of trustees and administrative policies must have Super-Church approval.

A DEADLY PARALLEL (Continued)

OUR PRESENT AND HISTORIC PRACTICE

The unity of all Christians is sought through the restoration of the New Testament Church in faith, doctrine, ordinances, and life, with the Bible and the Bible alone as the definitive guide.

The relation of local churches to church mergers and unity proposals is a matter to be decided by their congregations.

THE PROPOSED PRACTICE UNDER RESTRUCTURE

Christian unity is sought through ecumenical discussion, negotiation and compromise, denominational mergers, and the creation of an Ecumenical World Church.

Local churches can be compelled to enter mergers, to close their doors or to change their policies or practices by the action of overhead authorities in the interest of ecumenical progress.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT!

Local churches that wish to avoid Restructure and that are determined to maintain their congregational integrity, freedom and authority should act without delay.

1. Form study and discussion groups to give your members the truth about Restructure, using this brochure as a guide.
2. Elders, deacons, trustees and leaders of various local church organizations should be alerted to the dangers of Restructure.
3. Consult the best attorneys available. Examine and, if necessary, strengthen your local church charter, constitution and by-laws, and property deeds to make sure that the freedom and autonomy of

the local church and your legal rights to your church properties are fully protected.

4. If necessary, submit a petition to the church board calling a legally-constituted congregational meeting to consider the relations of the local church to Restructure. At such meeting the following suggested form of resolution might be appropriately proposed (framed by your own attorney):

The congregation of the (name of church) in meeting duly assembled in order to preserve and perpetuate its historic free congregational polity and practice, does herein and hereby reiterate the fact that it has no relationship legal or denominational with any extra-congregational religious organization or ecclesiastical official, but is responsible only to Christ and the teachings of the New Testament, and its own duly constituted officers as set forth in its Constitution and By-laws (herewith appended).

5. Study and evaluate the relationships your church now has with all state, national and world church or religious bodies and determine legally whether they endanger the present and future freedom of your local congregation. If convinced that any such relationship is dangerous, terminate it with appropriate legal congregational action while you still have the legal right to do so.

6. In the interest of the preservation of the Brotherhood see that this brochure is distributed widely in your own church and among brethren of neighboring churches.

Additional copies of this brochure, *The Truth About Restructure*, may be obtained from the address below at 5 cents per single copy; 50 cents per dozen; \$4 per 100.

Copies of *Freedom or Restructure?*, previously published, may be obtained from the same address at the same prices indicated above.

**COMMITTEE FOR
THE PRESERVATION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**

P. O. Box 1471

Indianapolis, Indiana