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THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND SOCIAL FORCE
IN TENNESSEE, 1865-1900*

By DAVID EDWIN HARRELL, JR.

From 1865 to 1900 Tennessee society was shaped by such potent forces as the conflict between urban and rural interests, the clash of industrial and agricultural philosophies, and a heritage of sectional bitterness. In fact, these social realities had a good deal more to do with the course of religion in Tennessee during these years than did theology. No major denomination escaped their impact; every national Protestant group divided at least once under the pressures. The Disciples of Christ movement, long considered immune from such influences by the church's historians, is perhaps the most striking example in nineteenth-century Tennessee of the molding of the Christian message to fit the needs of society.

Under the dynamic leadership of Alexander Campbell, the Disciples of Christ emerged as an independent denomination around 1830. Disciples preached a message of "Christian unity," which they believed would be accomplished if Christians would "restore the ancient order of things" as spelled out in the New Testament. Their plea was simple; the preachers were fervent; and their success was impressive. By 1860 the church had around 200,000 members, and by the first decade of the twentieth century there were well over 1,000,000 Disciples.¹

The growth of the movement was accompanied by the development of serious internal tensions. In the decades following the Civil War there was an extended doctrinal debate within the church over the use of instrumental music in worship services and the propriety of such church-wide organizations as a missionary society. In the religious

*Adapted from an address delivered at a meeting of the Society in Knoxville, March 5, 1965.

¹Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis, 1948), 327-29; U. S. Bureau of Census, . . . *Religious Bodies: 1916 . . .*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1919), II, 209, 249. The other most useful general studies of Disciples history are: Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2 vols. (Nashville, 1953); Winfred Ernest Garrison, *Religion Follows the Frontier* (New York, 1931); Oliver Read Whitley, *Trumpet Call of Reformation* (St. Louis, 1959). A good new biography which shows considerable insight into the critical years from 1865 to 1915 is William E. Tucker, *J. H. Garrison and Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis, 1964).

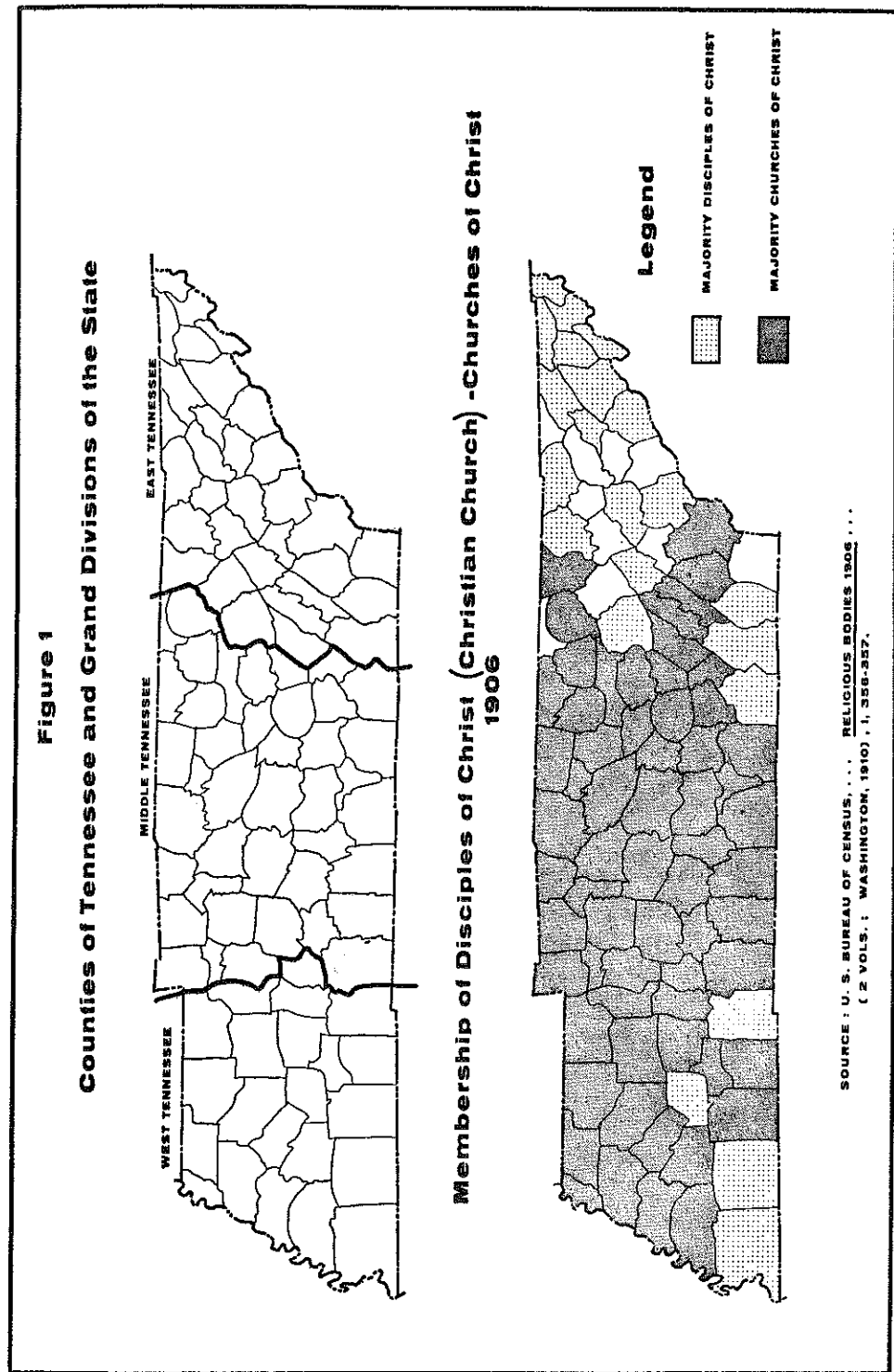
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census of 1906 (see note 3) this separation was recognized by listing independently the Disciples of Christ (Christian church) and the Churches of Christ. Of course, the schism did not happen in 1906; it had been happening for over half-a-century. There simply never had been an organization in the movement with authority to announce the division.

The problem of names when dealing with the Disciples is a confusing one. From the beginning of the churches three names were used: Disciples of Christ, Christian church, and Churches of Christ. After the movement divided into two groups, congregations on each side continued to use a variety of names. More and more, however, the name Churches of Christ became quasi-official for the anti-instrumental-music conservatives. The name Christian church was almost universally rejected by those conservatives but was widely used by the more liberal element in the movement. It will be used in this study to designate the pro-organ element in the divided church. The name Disciples of Christ continued to be used by all factions; until mid-twentieth century, however, it was the official title of the liberal church. When so used in this study it is followed by Christian church within parentheses or brackets. The term Disciples of Christ is most useful, however, as a term to describe the entire movement.

In the twentieth century both wings of the movement have continued to grow. According to the 1964 *Yearbook of American Churches*, the Christian church has a membership of 1,779,046 and the Churches of Christ an estimated 2,250,000.² The two churches together form the largest and most important native American religious movement.

Students of the Disciples have long explained the causes of the partition in the church simply in theological terms. The impact of slavery, the Civil War, and the economic pressures in postwar society have been ignored. And yet, the sectional nature of the Disciples division is obvious. According to the 1906 religious census 131,940 out of 159,658 of the members of the Churches of Christ lived in former slave territory. On the other hand, over three-fourths of the Christian church's membership of around a million was located outside of the former states of the Confederacy.³

² Benson Y. Landis (ed.), *Yearbook of American Churches* (New York, 1964), 255.

³ U. S. Bureau of Census, . . . *Religious Bodies: 1906* . . . , 2 vols. (Washington, 1910), II, 240, 243. A broad view of the influence of social forces on the division within

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Tennessee is a key state in a study of the impact of the social forces of the nineteenth century on the severing of the Disciples. The church grew rapidly in the state. By 1860 there were about 15,000 Disciples in Tennessee and according to the religious census of 1916 there were over 85,000, a slightly greater increase than of the population as a whole. By 1916 the Churches of Christ reported a membership of over 63,000 and were the third largest white denomination in the state. The Christian church listed nearly 22,000 members at the same date.⁴

The sectional distribution of the membership of the divided movement within the state of Tennessee fits neatly into the national pattern of the church. East Tennessee generally went to the Christian church, while Middle and West Tennessee were swept overwhelmingly by the Churches of Christ. Of the 22,000 liberal Disciples in Tennessee in 1916, about half of them lived in East Tennessee. On the other hand, less than six per cent of the Churches of Christ membership lived in the same area. The pro-organ party swept all of the churches in ten counties, all of them in East Tennessee. The Churches of Christ claimed all of the members of the movement in thirty-two Tennessee counties, only three of which were in East Tennessee.⁵

Of course, there are exceptions to this pattern. The most notable is the behavior of the major urban counties of the state. This problem

the Disciples movement may be found in David Edwin Harrell, Jr., "The Sectional Origins of the Churches of Christ," *Journal of Southern History*, XXX (August, 1964), 261-77.

⁴ See Garrison and DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ*, 327-29; *Religious Bodies: 1916*, I, 309-10. The four religious censuses published from 1906 to 1936 are not highly accurate. A discussion of their reliability is contained in Wilbur Zelinsky, "An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1942," *Association of American Geographers, Annals*, LI (June, 1961), 142-44. The figures are especially questionable when dealing with a group such as the Disciples where a grass roots division was in progress and where there was considerable confusion about church titles. The patterns of behavior within the Disciples movement are so clear, however, that these statistics are quite adequate. In the case of the Disciples, the 1916 figures have some advantages over the other censuses. The schism in the church was more open in 1916 than it had been in 1906; in fact, not until after the census of 1906, which for the first time listed the churches separately, had a clear method of defining the break been established. Obviously, many churches were more careful in reporting their affiliation in the census of 1916 than they had been ten years previously. On the other hand, the 1926 and 1936 censuses, while generally revealing the same membership distribution patterns, clearly show the effects of post-division evangelization and continuing social evolution.

⁵ *Religious Bodies: 1916*, I, 309-10. See, also, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, I, 356-57; U. S. Bureau of Census, . . . *Religious Bodies: 1936* . . . , 2 vols. (Washington, 1941), I, 820-21. Figures 1 and 2 show county distribution of the membership of the Disciples movement between the Churches of Christ and the Christian church. The pattern remains essentially unchanged through the years. Some of the more significant variations are discussed later in this study.

will be considered later. Fayette and Hardin counties in West Tennessee violate the sectional pattern. The behavior of Fayette County may be accounted for by its proximity to the strong Christian churches in Memphis. Hardin County is not so easy to explain. In addition, Hardin County's Middle Tennessee neighbor, Wayne County, was divided almost exactly evenly between the two churches in the census of 1916. By 1936 Hardin County had become overwhelmingly Churches of Christ and Wayne County was 100 per cent Churches of Christ. These figures suggest a number of interesting possibilities. In the first place, these counties fit rather well into a Republican-Democratic pattern which is developed later in this study. (See figures 3 and 4). They were Republican counties along the border between West and Middle Tennessee, both of whom had opposed secession in June, 1861. It may well be that they establish rather than violate the sectional pattern in the state.

A number of other explanations for the behavior of these counties are possible. According to the census of 1906, there was a combined Disciples membership of 264 in Hardin County and 209 in Wayne County. In 1936 Hardin County reported 148 members for both churches and Wayne County 98. Both counties showed a marked net loss for the Disciples movement. The swing of the counties to the Churches of Christ was not the result of evangelization, but was a belated switch of pro-organ churches to the Churches of Christ position. In these cases, the 1936 census figures may better represent the true sociological level of the churches than the 1916 statistics.

An additional problem in these counties, as in most of those in East Tennessee which were controlled by the Churches of Christ, is that the number of members was so small that there is little basis for generalization. For instance, according to the census of 1936 there were only 11 Disciples in Monroe County and only 14 in Sevier County.

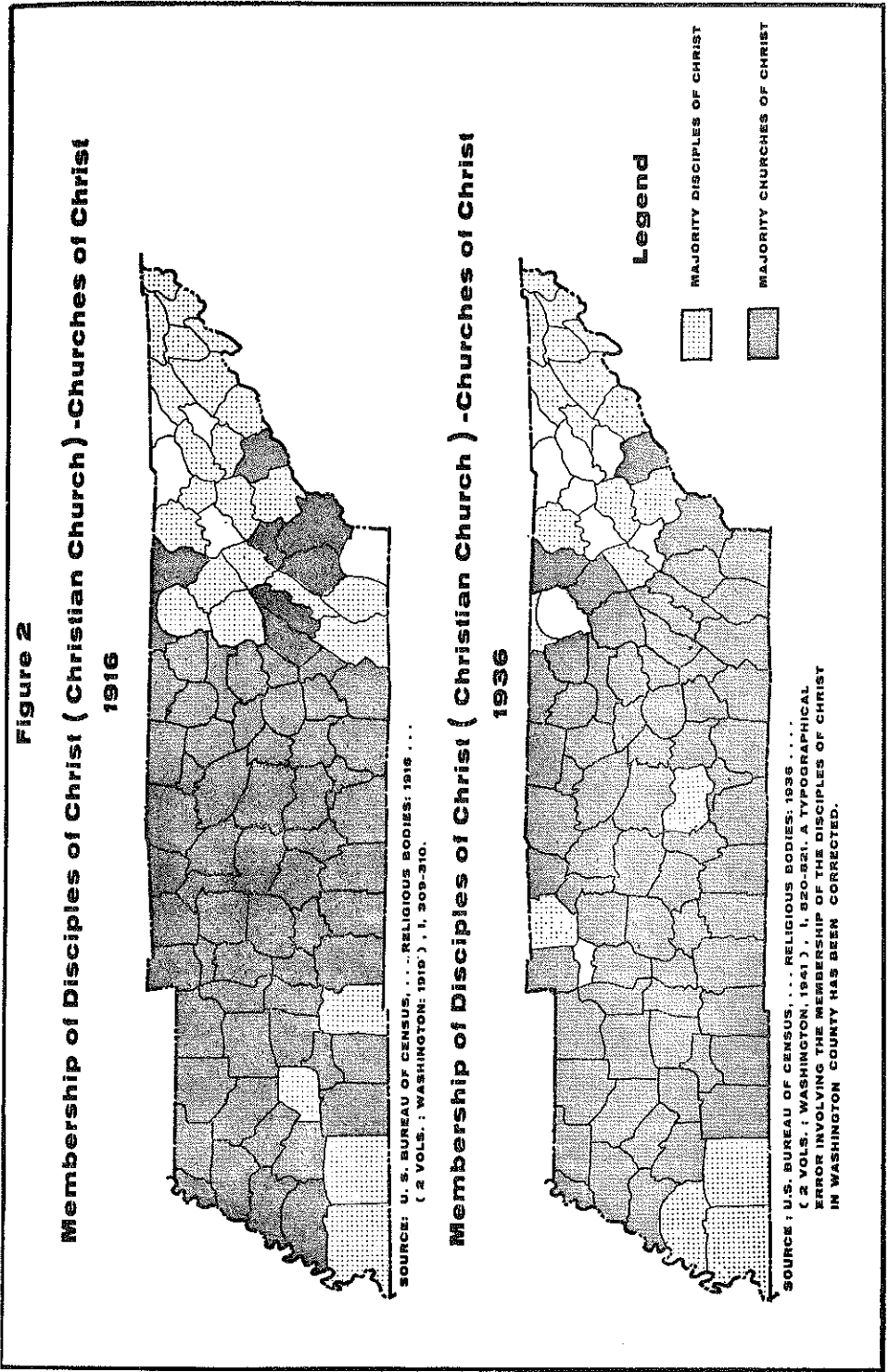
But in spite of these untidy details, the evidence is overpowering. The Disciples of Christ schism in Tennessee was a sectional affair. Most East Tennessee Disciples believed it proper to play organs in church services and most Middle and West Tennessee Disciples believed it wrong. This was hardly a remarkable coincidence. The question is why?

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Of course, the answer to the problem of religious motivation is not simple.⁶ But it is clear that the national trauma which climaxed in the Civil War and reconstruction deeply influenced the life of the Disciples of Christ—as it did every intersectional American church. In the years following the Civil War the conservative theological view of the Churches of Christ became deeply entangled with the lost cause and southern sectional prejudices, while loyalty to the Union was often linked to the acceptance of such “innovations” as the organ.

Almost immediately after the end of the war the sectional hatred generated by the long struggle erupted into an intrachurch struggle.⁷ The center of the southern viewpoint in the church was the *Gospel Advocate*, a weekly published in Nashville and edited by two influential preachers, Tolbert Fanning and David Lipscomb.

Early in 1866 the Nashville paper attacked the American Christian Missionary Society, which was the only national agency in the church. In 1863, during the heat of the war, the northern-dominated society had passed resolutions of loyalty to the Union. The editors of the *Advocate* were highly critical of these wartime activities: “Those brethren who believe that political resolutions are the Gospel can do so; and those who desire to contribute to such an object can do so; we cannot do it.”⁸ The Tennessee editors sternly denounced those northern Disciples preachers who had been “full of the bitterness of the war” and had “hardly thought of religion for years, save as they could use it to promote the war feeling.”⁹ Southern Disciples never forgave Isaac Errett, the editor of the leading northern Disciples journal, the *Christian Standard*, for accompanying William G. Brownlow on a speaking tour on which the caustic Tennessee unionist delivered “fierce philippics on the only two rights of the rebels—to be hanged and to be damned.”¹⁰

⁶ This paper does not deal with the complex problem of individual religious motivations. Many forces influence religious actions. The personal attractions of a dynamic leader, the intellectual appeal of a message, the religious psychology of each individual, and a great many other factors affect religious behavior. Of course, each of these forces is closely related to the social setting. But this study is designed only to demonstrate the obvious way in which social forces influenced the Disciples movement.

⁷ Of course, the troubles within the Disciples movement did not begin with the Civil War. Information concerning the prewar roots of the struggle may be found in David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Quest for a Christian America* (Nashville, 1966), pp. 91-174. The Civil War brought the resentments within the church into the open. It is quite logical to begin a study of the impact of sectional influences on the church in Tennessee in 1866.

⁸ “A Reply to the Call of W. C. Rogers, Corresponding Secretary of the A. C. M. Society for All to Disseminate the Gospel,” *Gospel Advocate*, VIII (March 27, 1866), 206. Hereafter the *Gospel Advocate* will be cited as *G. A.*

⁹ “Correction,” *G. A.*, XXXIV (July 21, 1892), 453.

¹⁰ “D[avid] L[ipscomb], “The Truth in History,” *G. A.*, XXXIV (July 14, 1892), 436.

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Northern Disciples were deeply concerned about the sectional bitterness expressed by the Middle Tennessee preachers. The editor of the *Christian Standard* charged that the *Gospel Advocate* "commenced its new issue with an appeal to men of southern blood, and proposed cooperation among them only. It has constantly denounced the brethren of the North who shared in the military defense of the government."¹¹ Northern churchmen were unimpressed by the upsurge of southern pacifism in the wake of the war and bluntly retorted that it was "a new-born faith, unknown before the recent civil war and chiefly prevailing among those who were in sympathy with the lost cause."¹² According to his critics, David Lipscomb was playing politics and his politics was that of the "secessionist," "fireeaters," and "Ku-Klux."¹³

The diverging political orientations of these major papers furnished a blueprint for schism during the next half century. Soon open charges were made that a "Mason and Dixon's line" was being drawn "through the Bible and the Church of Christ."¹⁴ Generally the relationship between theological conservatism and southern sectionalism was not so frankly expressed, but sectional theology erupted frequently enough clearly to mark its presence.

The immorality of the North in general, and northern Disciples in particular, became a rather persistent theme among Middle Tennessee preachers after 1865. Justus M. Barnes, a pioneer Tennessee evangelist, wrote: "Yankee Doodledom fermented and some of the scum ran over, and came south in the form of novels and magazines. . . . The war cloud had just passed when Harper, Godey, Peterson, Madame Demorest and many unknown to me, flooded our land with their loathsome literature."¹⁵ Another writer in the *Gospel Advocate* warned: "Mormonism, adventism, sanctificationism, spiritualism, women's rights, free love, and all such, started north of Mason and Dixon's line."¹⁶

¹¹ "The Gospel Advocate," *Christian Standard*, II (February 16, 1867), 52. Hereafter the *Christian Standard* will be cited as *C. S.*

¹² "Religion and Politics," *C. S.*, I (October 20, 1866), 228. A study of the relationship of pacifism to the sectional division in the church may be found in David Edwin Harrell, Jr., "Disciples of Christ Pacifism in Nineteenth Century Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXI (September, 1962), 263-74.

¹³ J. S. L[amar], "Curtain Lecture for the Georgia Brethren," *C. S.*, VI (December 9, 1871), 388.

¹⁴ See "From the Papers," *G. A.*, XXXIII (March 25, 1891), 177; "No North or South in Christ," *Missionary Weekly*, XII (February 26, 1891), 4.

¹⁵ "Away Up in Tennessee," *G. A.*, XVII (February 4, 1875), 125.

¹⁶ James L. Thornberry, "The North East Iowa Christian Association," *G. A.*, XXV (February 8, 1883), 89.

Tennessee conservatives were troubled by the inroads of northern immorality in the South. "The Southern people can be caught with putrid lure," warned Justus Barnes, "and the Northerners know it."¹⁷ David Lipscomb wrote, "Our Southern people while not zealous and earnest in their religious service as they should be, kept themselves free from the infidel influences that so largely prevail in the North. Respect for religion, and at least, a passive recognition of the truth of the Bible . . . are much more common among all classes in the South than in the North. But with the influx of the northern and foreign element infidel theories, associations and influences will come and spread among the working people of our Southern country."¹⁸

The powerful group of Middle Tennessee conservatives who formed the leadership of the Churches of Christ clearly viewed the growing division in the Disciples movement as a part of this national moral dichotomy. Edwin A. Elam, an influential Middle Tennessee preacher, insisted that instrumental music, missionary societies, and all other "progressive foolishness" had been brought into the South by "carpetbagger pastors."¹⁹ David Lipscomb clearly recognized the sectional implications of the broad conservative-liberal religious rift in the nation during the last quarter of the nineteenth century: "The southern Methodists are protesting against the tendency to reject the word of God by the Northern Methodists. Southern Presbyterians are objecting to the loose teachings of their Northern brethren. Baptists South are protesting against the setting aside the word of God by their Northern brethren, and loose rationalistic and semi-infidel teachings are prevailing in some churches of Disciples in the Northern states."²⁰

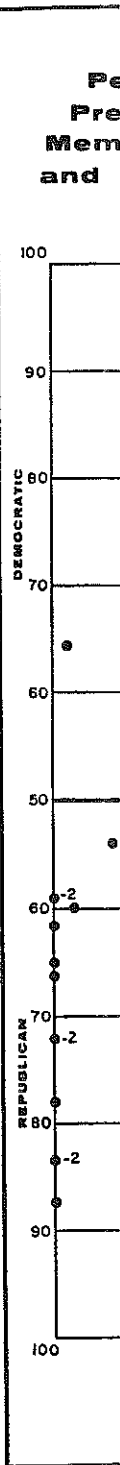
The Middle Tennessee conservatives, through the *Nashville Gospel Advocate*, were vocal and positive in their sectional and theological views. It is more difficult to establish the sectional basis of the church in East Tennessee. The Disciples were less powerful there. Until the founding of Milligan College around 1875, there was no center of institutional influence and never in the nineteenth century was there a church periodical in that area.

¹⁷ "Away Up in Tennessee," *G. A.*, XVII (February 4, 1875), 125.

¹⁸ "A Visit to Chattanooga," *G. A.*, XXXI (April 3, 1889), 214.

¹⁹ T. R. Burnett, "Burnett's Budget," *G. A.*, XXXVIII (November 26, 1896), 755.

²⁰ "Should Women Preach Publicly," *G. A.*, XXXIII (August 5, 1891), 486. Lipscomb's observation is quite accurate. Precisely the same sociological evolution was taking place in every major American denomination—in the same sectional pattern. Kenneth K. Bailey notes a number of statements by southern Protestants which are

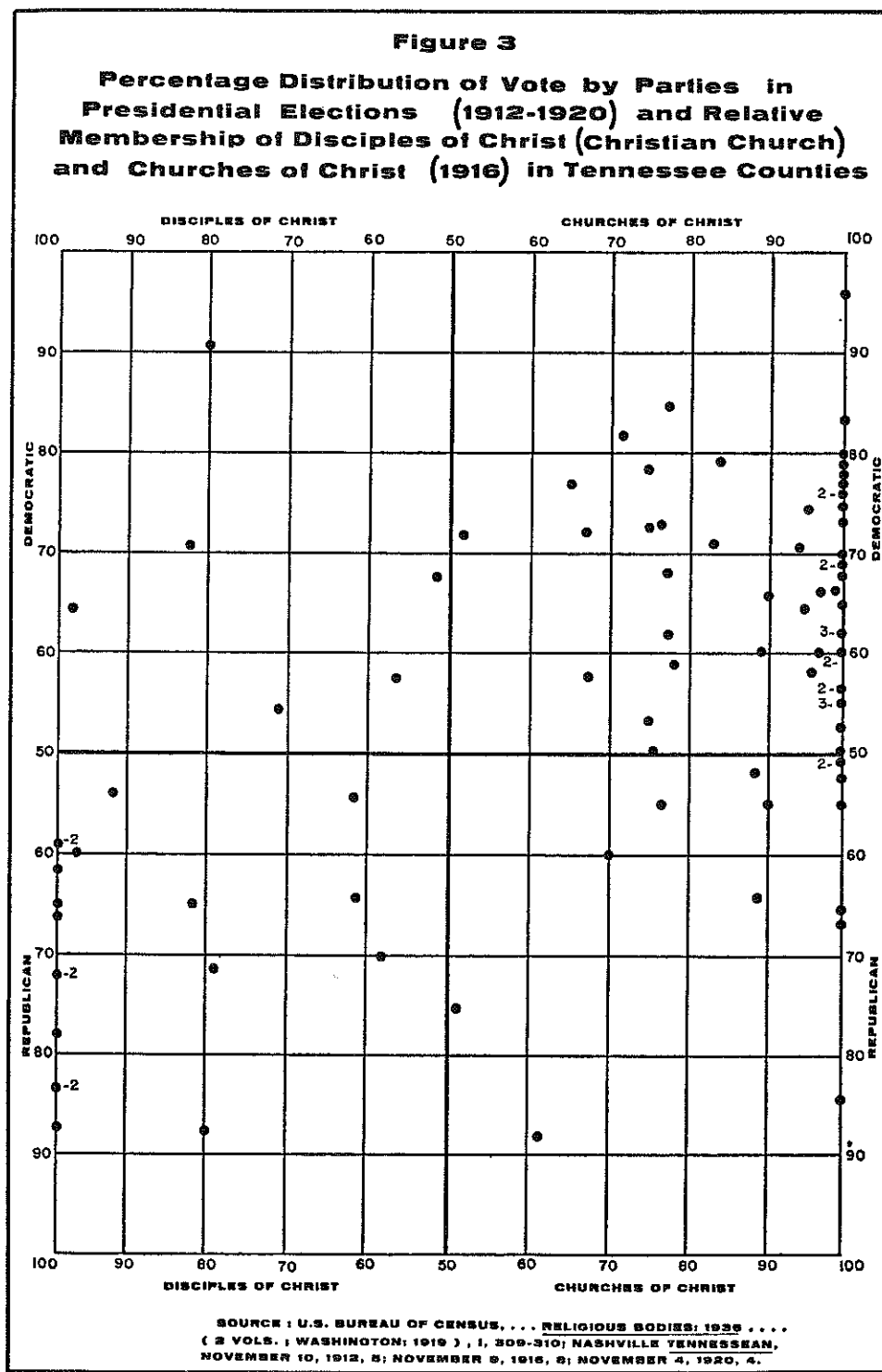


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But there are indications of the social basis of religious faith in East Tennessee. A Disciples preacher who moved into Tennessee shortly after the close of the Civil War summed up the situation in the state in a letter to a Kentucky friend. He wrote:

I have learned with sorrow that in the middle and western Districts of Tennessee that those who are Sympathizing [*sic*] with the Jeff Davis Rebellion are determined to Starve out of the State all True Union People by giving them no employment in any way So far as they can avoid it! We see and feel the effect now severely for the Unionists are greatly in the minority—! and many of them are moving off and Professors of Religion act toward each of them very coolly now since the Rebellion. Love and morality are freezing out here!

On the other hand he reported that he had "received invitations to settle in three union Counties in Tennessee one of which is Fentings [Fentress]" and indicated that he would probably move in that direction since he "loved to hear Union Men Preach!"²¹

When one of the large Disciples churches in Memphis installed an organ in 1869, the debate which followed was loaded with sectional prejudice. One of the defenders of the innovation caustically chided the southern conservatives:

Cease to mourn over Elder Walk's sad fall, and tell us what you really think of . . . Bible alone men, who fought through a most bloody civil war of four year's duration, for the purpose of extending that "divine institution"—African slavery. Let Elder Walk and the sisters in Memphis enjoy their organ in quiet. . . . At the worst, all the organs in the world, however lustily and loudly played in public worship, or elsewhere, could never get up an "Andersonville Prison," nor produce a "Fort-Pillow Massacre."²²

In short, it is a simple statistical matter to demonstrate that the religious schism in the Disciples of Christ was a sectional division. A study of Tennessee clarifies the nature of the line drawn in the church. Nevertheless, it was not simply a Mason and Dixon line, or in Tennessee a line dividing unionist from secessionist areas; it was also urban versus rural as well as political, dividing Republican from Democratic territory. Politically this was quite confirmatory, for the unionist regions in Tennessee became traditionally Republican and the secessionist areas Democratic.

remarkably similar to those made by Disciples leaders. *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1964), 1-3.

²¹ William D. Dorris to Isaac Tipton Reneau, December 26, 1866, Isaac Tipton Reneau Papers, College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky. Actually, Fentress County was in Middle Tennessee, but near the border and strongly unionist.

²² [Lewis L.] P[inkerton], "Lamentable," *Independent Monthly*, II (January, 1870), 26.

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Actually, there is a remarkable correlation in Tennessee between a county political breakdown and the membership distribution between the Churches of Christ and Christian church. Figures 3 and 4 show the average percentage of Republican and Democratic vote in each Tennessee county for the presidential elections from 1912 to 1920. They also give the percentage breakdown of the Churches of Christ-Disciples of Christ (Christian church) division in each county of the state in 1916. Recognizing the shortcomings of these figures, the correlation is useful. Theoretically, according to a sectional interpretation of the movement, percentages of Churches of Christ and Democrats should agree and percentages of Disciples of Christ (Christian church) and Republicans should agree. In reality, a large number of counties were carried entirely by one church or the other. But by dividing the graph into four quadrants, positive and negative correlation patterns may be established. Any county over 50 per cent Churches of Christ and over 50 per cent Democratic indicates a positive correlation. Any counties which fall into the other quadrants of the graph indicate negative correlations. The graph is revealing. Seventy counties show a positive correlation, while only 20 indicate negative correlations. Many of those with negative correlations lend themselves to simple explanations. Several (Shelby, Fayette, Hamilton) are Democratic urban centers which were controlled by the Christian church. These counties should be expected to violate the pattern. Two Christian church-Democratic counties are in East Tennessee—Sullivan and Meigs, both of whom were unionist in 1861. On the other hand, the most glaring Churches of Christ-Republican violations are such unionist East Tennessee counties as Sevier and Scott, where the movement controlled an insignificant segment of the church population.

Of course, these figures do not prove a direct relationship between political affiliation and church membership. What they do demonstrate is that there is a correlation. It seems obvious to suggest that the common causation was the social forces of the nineteenth century.²³ The

²³ For county voting statistics, see Nashville *Tennessean*, November 10, 1912, p. 4; November 9, 1916, p. 8; November 4, 1920, p. 4. It is worth noting that of the first group in Figure 4 all but three counties (Weakley, Decatur, and Marion) voted secessionist in 1861 or were carved out of counties which did. Of the second group every county was unionist or largely carved out of unionist areas. Of the third group all were unionist except McNairy, Lawrence, Monroe, and DeKalb. Of the last group all were secessionist except Hamilton; and within that county a majority of Chattanooga voted for secession. Mary E. R. Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union, 1847-1861* (New York, 1961), 291-93; Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, *The Chattanooga Country*

same forces which drove East Tennesseans and other Tennesseans into different armies and different political parties also drove them into different churches.

But, quite obviously, sectional feeling was not the only social force that influenced the controversy in the Disciples of Christ during the nineteenth century. Every urban county in the state, with the exception of Davidson, was dominated by the Christian church. According to the 1916 religious census, Shelby County was over 4 to 1 in the camp of the liberal Disciples and it is quite plausible to assume that the influence of these urban Shelby County churches accounts for the atypic behavior of Fayette County on its borders.²⁴ The strength of the Christian church in Madison County may well be accounted for by the presence of Jackson.²⁵ While the Churches of Christ won over half of the church in Davidson County, the liberal Disciples nevertheless had over 2,000 members in the county—all of whom attended congregations within the city of Nashville.²⁶

The success of the Christian church in winning members in the cities points up the second major social force underlying the Disciples schism. The more sophisticated urban churches increasingly drifted toward a more liberal theological position. The Disciples separation was a rural-urban division with strong economic undertones. The religious census of 1916 collected invaluable data on the economic cleavage in the church in the four major Tennessee cities.

For instance, in Memphis there were four Churches of Christ and four Christian churches. The average membership of the conservative

(New York, 1952), 180. Regarding the voting statistics consideration should be given to the tendency of many Tennesseans in the twentieth century to vote Republican in presidential contests and Democratic in state elections.

²⁴ *Religious Bodies: 1916*, I, 309-10. By 1936 the Christian church majority in Shelby County had decreased. The figures in the census of 1936 are: Disciples of Christ (Christian church), 3,170; Churches of Christ, 2,206. These changes were clearly a product of evangelization, since both groups grew steadily. Another interesting case of successful evangelization is Tipton County to the north of Shelby. Both churches grew steadily in the county but by 1936 the Christian church passed the Churches of Christ. This certainly must be explained in terms of the missionary interest of the urban Christian churches in Memphis and confirms the theory that the churches in Fayette County were similarly influenced. *Religious Bodies: 1936*, I, 820, 821.

²⁵ Madison County was very close in 1916: Disciples of Christ (Christian church), 250; Churches of Christ 239. *Religious Bodies: 1916*, I, 309-10. By 1936 the figures were: Churches of Christ, 672; Disciples of Christ (Christian church), 0. *Religious Bodies: 1936*, I, 820-821. This remarkable change must represent the conversion of the major Jackson church to the position which was overwhelmingly predominant around it.

²⁶ *Religious Bodies: 1916*, I, 442-45. All 996 members of the Christian church in Hamilton County lived in the city of Chattanooga; 794 out of 1,074 in Knox County lived in Knoxville; 1,688 of the 2,117 members in Shelby County lived in Memphis. *Ibid.*, 376-77; 422-23; 438-39.

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groups was 92, while the average for the liberal congregations was 422. All of the Christian churches owned buildings, but only two of the four Churches of Christ reported "edifices." The average value of the church buildings of the Christian church was nearly \$35,000; the average for the Churches of Christ was \$2,250. The average budget reported by the conservative churches was \$942 per year and that for the liberal churches was nearly \$6,000 per annum.²⁷

The same story was repeated in every major Tennessee city. There were 42 Churches of Christ in the four major cities of the state and only 20 Christian churches. And yet, the liberals outnumbered the conservatives in the cities 5,548 to 4,997. The average membership of the liberal congregations was 277 while the Churches of Christ was only 119. In terms of buildings, the Christian church owned 19 in the four major cities of the state which had an average value of nearly \$20,000; the Churches of Christ had 31, which were valued at around \$4,900 each.²⁸

Once again, the statistical evidence is impressive. But even if these figures were not available, a clear case of economic motivation within the church could be established. Agricultural and lower class economic prejudices had long been combined with theological conservatism in the writings of Tennessee Churches of Christ leaders.

The economic philosophy of the *Gospel Advocate* was essentially nineteenth-century Jeffersonianism. The life of the farmer was extolled; all those engaged in business were suspect. "It is . . . a mistake," wrote a conservative preacher in 1897, "for men to leave farms and seek easy, fat places in the towns and cities. Whenever they attempt it they will be disappointed."²⁹

If the farm was the best place to live, the poor were the group most attracted to Christianity. David Lipscomb wrote: "Paul said to the church in the wealthy . . . city of Corinth: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called!' The lowly, the humble, those considered base and despised of the world were called into the kingdom of God."³⁰ Lipscomb was sure that this was the explanation for the irreligion

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 438-39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 376-77, 422-23, 438-39, 442-45.

²⁹ "Miscellany," *G. A.*, XL (January 27, 1898), 56.

³⁰ "Money and the Church," *G. A.*, XLI (October 19, 1899), 660.

among the masses in the cities. "The churches rich in money cannot reach the poor," he wrote, "they must be reached by those poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith."³¹ The problem, according to Lipscomb, was that "the working people have been greatly weaned from the church by the building and conducting of churches, suited in style, buildings, and worship for the rich."³² Fletcher D. Srygley, the wit of the *Gospel Advocate*, wrote: "The Northern Christian published an article from the Oregonian on 'Why People Don't Go to Church.' This reminds me that a friend of mine asked a highly respectable and strictly moral but irreligious man why he did not go to church, and the man said he stayed away from such places out of respect for his deceased old mother who was a deeply pious woman and who always taught him never to attend places of fashionable amusement on Sunday."³³

One of the chief problems of American churches, these conservative preachers believed, was their subservience to the rich. David Lipscomb charged that many "preachers and churches . . . connive at drunkenness, gambling, licentiousness in their own members, because they are rich."³⁴ According to the editor of the *Advocate*, sophisticated denominations "required moral lives" of the "poor and ignorant members" while the rich were "courted and honored because they give large money to the church."³⁵

Another symptom of the deterioration of the church was the growing emphasis on large church buildings. One preacher warned that the building craze, which had its origins in the cities, was even finding its way into "the larger towns and villages." He added: "Let us have cheap, plain houses, that everybody will feel at home in."³⁶ David Lipscomb strongly objected to the proposal to build a \$30,000 church building in Atlanta in 1892. He wrote: "It will weaken instead of strengthen them. Half the money spent in preaching in the destitute suburbs of Atlanta, building a few modest houses as needed, will save a hundred fold more sinners, and God will reward such work. He will not reward us for building houses to gratify our pride."³⁷

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "A Visit to Chattanooga," *G. A.*, XXXI (April 3, 1889), 214.

³³ "From the Papers," *G. A.*, XXXIII (June 3, 1891), 338.

³⁴ "Law and Order," *G. A.*, XXXVI (May 31, 1894), 336.

³⁵ "A Point Well Taken," *G. A.*, XXXIII (July 22, 1891), 460.

³⁶ F. W. Smith, "What Pride Is Doing," *G. A.*, XXV (September 26, 1883), 615.

³⁷ "Fine Houses for Worship," *G. A.*, XXXIV (January 28, 1892), 52.

FIGURE 4

Democratic-Republican and Disciples of Christ (Christian Church)-Churches of Christ Distribution in Tennessee Counties Based on 1916 Religious Census and Presidential Election Returns 1912-1920

Counties Over 50% Democratic and Over 50% Churches of Christ

	Percentage Democratic	Percentage Churches of Christ		Percentage Democratic	Percentage Churches of Christ
Haywood	96	100	Trousdale	68	100
Obion	84	77	Montgomery	66	90
Marshall	83	100	Weakley	66	96
Davidson	81	72	Dickson	66	99
Moore	80	100	Wilson	65	100
Coffee	79	84	Giles	64	94
White	79	100	Overton	62	78
Tipton	78	75	Van Buren	62	100
Lincoln	78	100	Smith	62	100
Dyer	77	65	Cannon	60	100
Maury	77	100	Rutherford	60	86
Hardeman	76	100	Jackson	60	96
Sumner	76	100	Benton	60	100
Franklin	74	95	Clay	60	100
Warren	74	100	Perry	58	78
Henry	73	75	Putnam	57	96
Williamson	73	76	Crockett	57	68
Lake	73	100	Decatur	56	100
Stewart	72	51	Chester	56	100
Robertson	72	68	Hickman	55	100
Lauderdale	72	83	Lewis	55	100
Cheatham	71	94	Rhea	53	74
Sequatchie	70	100	Marion	53	100
Humphreys	69	100	Bedford	50	75
Grundy	69	100	Houston	50	100
Gibson	68	77			

Counties Over 50% Republican and Over 50% Disciples of Christ

	Percentage Republican	Percentage Disciples of Christ		Percentage Republican	Percentage Disciples of Christ
Carter	88	100	Greene	65	100
Johnson	88	80	Hardin	65	82
Union	84	100	Fentress	64	62
Unicoi	84	100	Hawkins	62	100
Jefferson	78	100	Roane	60	97
Blount	72	100	Morgan	58	100
Campbell	72	100	Washington	58	100
Cocke	71	79	Bradley	54	62
Cumberland	70	58	Knox	53	92
Grainger	66	100			

Counties Over 50% Republican and Over 50% Churches of Christ

	Percentage Republican	Percentage Churches of Christ		Percentage Republican	Percentage Churches of Christ
Sevier	88	62	Pickett	55	100
Scott	85	100	Carroll	55	90
Wayne	76	52	McNairy	55	77
Macon	67	100	Bledsoe	54	100
Loudon	66	100	Lawrence	54	88
Henderson	64	89	Monroe	51	100
McMinn	60	70	DeKalb	51	100

Counties Over 50% Democratic and Over 50% Disciples of Christ

	Percentage Democratic	Percentage Churches of Christ		Percentage Democratic	Percentage Disciples of Christ
Fayette	91	80	Sullivan	64	98
Shelby	71	82	Hamilton	57	56
Madison	68	51	Meigs	54	71

By the 1890's the central issue between the urban Christian churches in Tennessee and the agricultural, lower class Churches of Christ in the state was clear. The middle class southern urbanites wanted a religion somewhat "wiser, sweeter, and better" than the old "sectarian spirit" of the movement.³⁸ It was a religious transition demanded by the realities of the economic transition which had taken place among the membership.

In 1893, Robert C. Cave, an outstanding Disciples preacher from Memphis, delivered a well-advertised address on gambling at the Vine Street Church in Nashville, the largest and most sophisticated Christian church in the city. Cave took a "moderate and conservative view" of the subject and began his address by commending the moral values of many gamblers. Fletcher Srygley of the *Advocate* staff vigorously attacked Cave's speech:

It would seem from this that the churches of Nashville have a very inferior variety of gamblers in their membership. The gamblers who stand high in several of the churches in this city are not of the good sort Brother Cave speaks of . . . but a meaner specimen of the brood who have betrayed the most sacred trusts, deceived and defrauded their best friends and squandered the money of widows and orphans in their gambling schemes. If the churches of Nashville are determined to retain gamblers in their membership, therefore, they ought at least to turn out the sort they have and take in some of the better specimens of the craft.³⁹

The difference in attitude between Cave and Srygley perfectly illustrates the discord within the Disciples movement and its economic basis.

In an article in 1897 David Lipscomb perceptively summed up the economic differences which had developed within the church. Although his article did not recognize the prejudices involved in his own position, it did clearly point to the economic cleavage in the church and neatly tied it to the theological schism. He wrote:

I am fast reaching the conclusion that there is a radical and fundamental difference between the Disciples of Christ [Churches of Christ] and the society folks. These desire to build up a strong and respectable denomination. To do it they rely on strong and moneyed societies, fine houses, fashionable music, and eloquent speeches, too often devoid of the gospel truth. Disciples of Christ [Churches of Christ] do not wish fine houses; they wish people to come to Christ, to be saved by the truth. They do not wish any denomination or party, do not rely upon the favor of the rich or fashionable.⁴⁰

³⁸ Fletcher Srygley, "Concerning the Width & Sweetness of Things," *G. A.*, XXXIV (June 16, 1892), 370.

³⁹ "From the Papers," *G. A.*, XXXV (May 18, 1893), 305.

⁴⁰ "The Churches Across the Mountains" *G. A.*, XXXIX (January 7, 1897), 4.

In summary, in the nineteenth century the Disciples of Christ movement underwent one major schism and the roots of another division were firmly planted. Each of these separations had theological motivations but each also was a clear case of the bending of the Christian ethos to fit social needs. The Churches of Christ in Tennessee were labelled by geography and by their testimony as the religious expression of southern rural interests.⁴¹ The Christian church in 1900 contained two social classes. In East Tennessee the church was dominated by a rural but unionist point of view with close ties to Disciples institutions in the Midwest. This social element came to form the basis for the conservative "independent" Christian church of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the urban churches in Tennessee remained in the mainstream of the liberal Disciples church in the twentieth century.⁴²

Tennessee Disciples—secessionists, unionists, rich, poor, farmers, urbanites, Republicans, and Democrats—all found something in the historic message of the movement which answered their needs. But it would be unrealistic indeed to assume that a common message could have satisfied such a diverse group. If Middle Tennesseans and East Tennesseans had misgivings about living in the same country, it hardly seems remarkable that they found it impossible to live in the same church.

⁴¹ In the course of the twentieth century a large segment of the Churches of Christ has begun the transition toward middle-class denominationalism. Economic improvement and the urbanization of the South have brought inevitable changes in the life of the church. A new division is taking place between "liberals" and "conservatives" in the Churches of Christ. The "issues" are new ones but the basic attitudes and the sociological motivations are the same as those of the nineteenth century. It is somewhat ironic that the new center of "liberalism" is Middle Tennessee and the leading "progressive" publication is the *Gospel Advocate*. The new liberal movement has some of the characteristics of an institutional sect but there are strong symptoms that at least a segment of the church will make the full evolution into the mainstream of American denominationalism.

⁴² For a discussion of the "independent"-"cooperative" schism in the twentieth century Disciples movement see Alfred T. DeGroot, *Church of Christ Number Two* (Fort Worth, Tex., 1956). This division unquestionably has economic roots. In Tennessee, most East Tennessee Disciples are conservative in theology. In the cities and larger towns the Christian churches are generally liberal. The terms "independent" and "cooperative" date from a controversy immediately after World War I which involved the United Christian Missionary Society. The conservatives objected to some of the activities of the society, stopped supporting it, and began backing "independent" missionary work. Those who continued to support the society were known as "cooperatives."