

IN A CHRISTIAN WORK

# *Fifty Years of Digression and Disturbance*

By Edwin V. Hayden

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This edition (copy, slightly edited) prepared 2/2/12 by Ray Downen,  
721 S Kentucky Ave., Joplin, MO 64801

## A Review of Stephen J. Corey's Book, **"Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy"**

Tracing Mr. Corey's record of four major items in which the older missionary agencies of Disciples of Christ (Christian Churches) have made important changes from former Scriptural teaching and practice, and showing how these changes have become centers of disturbance among Christian Churches.

*All page references are to Mr. Corey's book unless otherwise indicated. quotations from it are made by permission of the Christian Board of Publication, owners of the copyright to the Corey manuscript.*

(Printed copies of this review may be made freely.)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The people known simply as Christians, or members of Christian Churches or Churches of Christ, have dedicated themselves to the proposition that the Lord's people ought to be one in Him, and that, by going back of *every* human creed and basis of denominational division to the New Testament, the Lord's people **can** be one in Him. It is especially tragic that, among these people themselves within the last fifty years there have arisen differences, contentions, and threats of division.

To some it seems that the differences exist only in matters of opinion and in various methods of doing missionary, educational,

**2** and benevolent work. They think that there ought to be no controversy over these matters, and that the less is said about them, the better. Those who have studied the matter more deeply, however, find that the differences which appear on the surface in matters of method are actually much deeper at their root. They begin in fundamental convictions. At their foundation they involve the acceptance or rejection of Christ as the Head of His church, the Bible as the Word of God, and the New Testament plan for conversion and Christianity.

### *Issues Deeper Than Organization*

The organizational issues are incidental to the deeper questions. It would be wrong, of course, to say that everyone who favors one type of organization is sound in the Christian faith, and that everyone who favors the other *type* has rejected the authority of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the validity of the New Testament pattern for the church.

It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the leadership of one organizational group is characterized by indifference to, or denial of, the fundamentals of the faith, and that the other, on the whole, is characterized by reverence for the revealed Word of God and all that it implies. The one group emphasizes organizational cooperation. The other emphasizes loyalty to Christ and His Word.

The largest and most characteristic organization – the rallying center for those who emphasize organization and make faith secondary—is the **United Christian Missionary Society**, which came into being in 1920 as a merger of the older Foreign Christian Missionary Society, the American Christian Missionary Society, the Christian Women's Board of Missions, and the Board of Temperance and Social Welfare.

Associated with the United Christian Missionary Society are many other boards, organizations, and state missionary societies more or less closely tied together through the International Convention of Disciples of Christ. This general body of organizations (in 1955) is represented in publication and promotion by the

Christian Board of Publication of St. Louis, Missouri, with its **3**  
weekly journal, the **Christian Evangelist**.

## *The Christian Standard*

There is no general organizational tie-up of those who major in the restoration of the church to the New Testament pattern and choose to work through missionary agencies other than the United Society and its associate corporations. These people (in 1955) support somewhat more than half of all the missionaries going out from the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, but most of these missionaries are supported directly by churches and individual donors.

In general the convictions of these Christians are represented (in 1955) editorially by the **Christian Standard**, published by the Standard Publishing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. This fact has led some people to the conclusion that the editors of the **Christian Standard**, through the influence of that paper, have been almost solely responsible for any opposition to the United Society and its kindred organizations.

One who holds to that theory is *Stephen J. Corey*, who from 1905 to 1938 was an officer in the Foreign Christian Missionary Society and the United Society, and from 1938 to 1945 was president of the College of the Bible associated with Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky, a school closely affiliated with the Disciples agencies.

Early in 1954 there appeared a book, "**Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy**," written by Mr. Corey, in which he traced the history of the agencies and their controversies from approximately 1900 to the present (1955), with the purpose of showing that the **Christian Standard**, which before that time had supported the "cooperative agencies," was almost totally responsible for the opposition which they have faced from that time forward.

We believe that Mr. Corey is wrong in this. Thousands who oppose the cited Society have hardly heard of the **Christian Standard**. More thousands have come to the "independent" position since 1950, when, according to Mr. Corey's record (p. 13), the

**4 Christian Standard** ceased to pay any attention to the United Society and its kindred corporations.

## *A History of Digressions*

In tracing the history of “attack and controversy” which he attributes to the **Christian Standard**, Mr. Corey does something far more important than to tell of journalistic opposition to an organization. He tells of the issues on which the opposition was based, and in doing so he lays bare the heart of the history.

He shows that, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Christian Church members organized several agencies for world-wide evangelism. Alexander Campbell was a founder of the *American Christian Missionary Society*, and Isaac Errett, the first editor of the **Christian Standard**, supported this and other agencies by influence and editorials.

Then about 1900, the officers of the *Foreign Christian Missionary Society* began to adopt policies and to engage in activities which were at variance with those which had formerly been approved both by the societies and the church papers. Mr. Corey’s history shows that each successive act of digression became a storm center of a new threat to the unity of the restoration movement, as persons and agencies even “within the structure of the brotherhood life of Disciples of Christ and its cooperative enterprises” (p. 56), objected strenuously and publicly.

The objections were regularly overridden by those in charge of the societies, who interpreted them as the unreasonable opposition of radical conservatives opposed to any progress, or as the fault-finding of persons who were determined to oppose the societies, no matter what they did. Hence from each digression and controversy the societies moved on to a greater digression and a more bitter controversy. It appears that the end is not yet.

## *Relationship to Cases in Civil Courts*

This picture takes on greater importance as it relates to the civil court cases which in recent years have been brought against local churches by groups of their members inspired and appar-

ently directed from the offices of the various state missionary societies. **5**

These lawsuits vary in their local details, but essentially they follow one pattern. A church decides to give its missionary money through other channels than the United Christian Missionary Society and its associates. The organization folk, usually spurred to action by some other local rift, take the matter to court, claiming that the support of "the state and national agencies forms a part of the tenets and doctrine" of the church; that the withdrawal of such support constitutes a change in the essential pattern of the church; and that those who refuse support to these agencies thereby forfeit their right to the church building and any other property they may possess in the name of the church.

The congregation which refuses support to the "regular agencies" is labeled "separatist," "digressive," or more often "dissident." See records of William Wright, et al, vs. J. Edwin Smith, et al, Marion County, Illinois, also similar cases at Pontiac, Illinois; Eldora, Iowa, Brookville and Oxford, Indiana; Harrisonburg, Virginia; Smithers, West Virginia; and others in California, Ohio and Texas.

In the face of the organization's claim that the "independents" have departed from the faith and changed the pattern of the church, comes Mr. Corey's record to show that the exact opposite is true. The organizations themselves, according to this record, have introduced the changes which stirred the controversy and ultimately brought the churches into court. Even if we were to agree with Mr. Corey that the innovations made by the organizations since 1900 were right, reasonable, and even necessary, the facts would still be the same. Innovations are still innovations; changes are still changes; and it is the U.C.M.S. party that has made them.

### *A Consistent Policy*

Under the circumstances it ought not to amaze Mr. Corey and his colleagues that the Christian Standard, which before 1900 had given hearty support to the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, should become critical of the increasing departures from the pro-

6 gram it had formerly approved, should come later (from 1926 onward) positively to oppose the organization which sponsored those departures, and should finally ignore it altogether (from 1950 onward).

Mr. Corey himself gives the key to the matter when on page two of his book he quotes a *Christian Standard* editorial of March 2, 1867, endorsing the missionary society. In the quotation are these lines:

“We have no idolatrous attachment to the General Missionary Society. If it can do the work proposed, we shall encourage it. If it fails to command sufficient confidence and sympathy to enable it to do its work wisely and well, we shall go in for whatever form of associated effort the general wisdom of the brotherhood may approve.”

Mr. Corey’s book shows that the **Christian Standard** maintained a policy consistent with that declaration.

While many people apparently did hold idolatrous attachment to the society and its organizational successors, the *Christian Standard* remained awake to those issues in which the Society failed to command confidence and sympathy through its failure to do its work wisely and well.

When many Christians, including the editors of the **Christian Standard**, accordingly went in for other forms of associated effort approved by the wisdom of the brotherhood, the officers of the Society asked, and are still asking, “Why the inconsistency?” Whose inconsistency? Certainly not the ones who declared that they would stick to Scriptural principles whether the Society did or not, and then acted according to their declaration.

Rather early in the twentieth century the Society became involved in four major digressions from the original Scriptural position of the Christian Churches. Mr. Corey traces these most clearly:

1. Federation in interdenominational activities—a digression from a forthright program of New Testament evangelism.
2. The acceptance of “the conclusions of historical criticism advanced by modern scholars,” together with a “Christian view

of evolutionary principles” (p. 50)—a digression from faith in the Bible as the Word of God. 7

3. Open membership, sheltered and condoned if not openly practiced—a digression from the Scriptural practice of evangelism.

4. The limitation of missionary fields and activities through comity agreements—a digression from obedience to Christ’s command to go into all the world.

### *A “Christian View of Evolutionary Principles”*

Before engaging in detailed discussion of these separate digressions, we observe that Mr. Corey’s phrase, “*Christian view of evolutionary principles*” (p. 50), helps much toward an understanding of these and many other digressions.

According to evolutionary principles there is no such thing as a special act of God, made once for all, in any field whatsoever; there is no such thing as special creation or special revelation. The evolutionist holds that everything, the world and the church alike, is in process of development from the lower and simpler forms to the higher and more complex; there is no such thing as a standard once for all set or a faith once for all delivered.

Hence, to him, the idea of restoration of the church to the New Testament pattern is an impertinence, since, according to the evolutionary principle, there was no “blueprint” for the church in New Testament times, and even if there had been it would have been irrelevant to our later and higher level of development.

Following this principle Mr. Corey concludes plainly that the group presently supporting the Disciples agencies “does not consider that the motto, ‘**Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent,**’ affords an adequate criterion for unity among ourselves or other religious bodies” (p. 276).

By this declaration, of course, Mr. Corey separates his party, not only from those in our own day who would seek to restore the church to the New Testament norm, but also from the company of

- 8 Thomas Campbell, who first gave the quoted and rejected lines as an adequate criterion for unity among all Christians.

## *Evolution and Denominationalism*

The attitude toward denominationalism is a good indication of the acceptance or rejection of the basic evolutionary concept. The evolutionist holds that denominationalism is a normal development in Christianity and that almost any of the modern denominations offers an acceptable expression of essential Christianity. Hence he considers it right to join hands with those of other denominations in almost any missionary enterprise; wise to divide territories by comity agreements in order to avoid overlapping of missionary effort; and unbrotherly to try to teach others the way of the Lord more perfectly.

There are two logical results to this reasoning. One is open membership. If the unimmersed denominationalist is fully a Christian already, the requirement of immersion for the transfer of membership is an impertinence. The other result is a refusal to initiate work in any community “already adequately served” by a denominational church or mission.

By this logic the movement of which we are a part would never have come into being, most of the congregations of which we are members would have been non-existent, and the missionary organizations beloved by Mr. Corey would never have been heard of.

Some who hold to the evolutionary and denominational principle have stated plainly that we ought to become a disappearing people. Those, on the other hand, who hold to the pre-1900 Scriptural convictions of the movement and reject the evolutionary theory, believe with the early leaders of the movement that there is in the New Testament a revealed pattern for the church, which pattern the Lord intended for all men to know and follow. They consider it no kindness to withhold the complete Scriptural plan from persons who have learned only part of it. They believe in going into all the world to preach the gospel.

Now let us consider the Society’s digressions from the practices approved by the founders and early supporters of the missionary organizations, as Mr. Corey traces them in his book.



## ***I. Federation in Interdenominational Activities— a Digression from a Forthright Program of New Testament Evangelism.***

Beginning on page 14, Mr. Corey records these facts:

1. Near the turn of the century the Home Missions Council of North America (an interdenominational body) made surveys of some industrial areas and recommended the establishment of federated religious activities in them.

**Comment:** “Federation” is a limited form of union in which each participant retains his own denominational connection while working with others in a joint effort. Thus in a federated church two or more separately enrolled denominational groups worship at the same hour in the same place under the same leadership; and in federated missionary activities workers who remain under the direction of separate mission boards work together as they are able.

In practice, the denomination represented by the largest forces frequently dominates and finally takes over the church or project. (See “Handbook of Denominations” by Frank S. Meade, pp. 90,91.)

2. The American Christian Missionary Society, predecessor of the home missions branch of the United Christian Missionary Society, “in a few instances” gave “support to the starting of this sort of community, federated program” (p.14.)

3. The National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers was organized February 6, 1901. In October, 1902, a resolution approving federation was presented to the National Convention of Disciples of Christ in Omaha, Nebraska, and was adopted, “amid much confusion, and with some opposition” (p. 14).

4. “For years the Christian-Evangelist supported the idea of federation as a necessary step in the right direction” (p. 15).

**Comment:** The news journal **Christian-Evangelist**, now (in 1955) called the “National Weekly of Disciples of Christ,” has

**10** regularly followed the path laid out by officers of the missionary societies.

5. The Federal Council of Churches was organized in New York City in November, 1905. In October, 1907, at Norfolk, Virginia, the National Convention of Disciples adopted a committee report endorsing the idea of federation and approving the appointment of delegates to the Federal Council. “Disciples of Christ thus became identified with the new council, now a part of the National Council of Churches, from its organization” (p. 16).

6. The Christian Standard consistently opposed federation as being “not a union in Christ – but union in denominationalism” (p. 16).

7. Bringing the matter up to date, Mr. Corey says that the right course for Disciples implies “our consistent and sincere participation in the ecumenical work of Protestantism on the world level” (p. 257).

**Comment:** The early leaders of the restoration movement stoutly denied being Protestants at all, but insisted on our being simply Christians. Anyone familiar with federated churches and church projects is well aware that the preaching and practice of undenominational New Testament Christianity is impossible in such a set-up.

The preaching must be carefully censored to avoid declaring what some participant does not believe. It is thus reduced to moral platitudes and social declarations. The practice of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is reduced to the whim of the individual or the minimum practice of the group.

The preaching of New Testament conversion and the Scriptural plan of salvation is an intolerable affront to the basic principle of federation that the members of every religious sect are all equally and completely Christian. The ultimate authority in federation is either the individual participant or the corporate will of the combined denominational organizations. The authority of Christ as expressed in Matthew 28 must of necessity be disregarded.

## **II. The Acceptance of "The Conclusions of Historical Criticism Advanced by Modern Scholars," together with a "Christian View of Evolutionary Principles"— a Digression from Faith in the Bible as the Word of God** 11

On pages 46-56 of his book, Mr. Corey makes reference to the rise of liberalism in preacher training at Transylvania College and the College of the Bible at Lexington, Kentucky. Mr. Corey was president of the College of the Bible for seven years, 1938-45. He approved the program there. Hence he would present it in the most favorable manner possible. He records these facts:

1. J. W. McGarvey, "one of the leaders in the ultra-conservative school of theological thought," was from 1895 to his death in 1911 "the revered teacher and president of the College of the Bible" (p. 47).

2. Within a short time of Mr. McGarvey's death, he and three others of the older faculty, having passed on, were replaced by A. W. Fortune, W. C. Bower, G. W. Henry, and Elmer E. Snoddy. "These were all devout and scholarly men who were sympathetic with many of the developments of historical biblical research and the newer methods of teaching, especially for graduate students" (p.48). "The professors had accepted many of the conclusions of historical criticism advanced by modern scholars and they also accepted a Christian view of evolutionary principles" (p. 50).

3. Some of the more mature and conservative students found it very difficult "to adjust themselves to the new methods of teaching and thinking" (p. 49). Some of those "began to take notes on the remarks of the professors" (p. 50).

**Comment:** Notes taken by student Lonnie E. Devcr include these quotations from Mr. Corey's "devout and scholarly men":

"Dr. George V. Moore: *The divinity of Christ is not one of kind but of degree. He was simply divine to a greater degree than any other man.*'

"Dr. E. E. Snoddy: *If Jesus is a kind of meteor come down from heaven, then he has nothing in common with me and cannot help me solve my problems.*'

**12** “Dr. A. W. Fortune: *‘The virgin birth and the bodily resurrection have nothing to do with my acceptance of Jesus as my Lord.’* And *‘If we are to have Christian unity the time must come when we accept all forms of baptism: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion.’*”

**Comment:** The writer of this present commentary knows Mr. Dever well. We have heard him speak often of the derision to which he and others were subjected by teachers and “progressive” students at the College of the Bible because they accepted and believed the Bible as the inspired Word of God. The quotations given above are not exceptional, but are typical.

4. Reports of “heresy” and the teaching of “destructive criticism” reached the Christian Standard and were published by it. “To Disciples unfamiliar with scholarly biblical study and lacking a modern conception of scholarship, these startling headlines in the Standard became a warning signal of danger” (p. 51).

5. An investigation was conducted, and “under the chairmanship of Mark Collis, then minister of the Broadway Christian Church in Lexington, the Board of Trustees of the College of the Bible made a statement dated May 9, 1917, clearing the professors of blame” (p. 51).

**Comment:** In the above Mr. Corey implies that Mr. Collis approved the clearing of the teachers. But seventy-three pages later in his book, and in connection with an entirely different matter, Mr. Corey remembers that “Mark Collis ... *opposed* Transylvania College and the College of the Bible in the earlier controversy” (p. 124). Mr. Collis’ “opposition” was published in the Christian Standard under the title, “Chairman of Board of Trustees Explains,” two weeks after the report of the Trustees’ action.

6. “Today, what the faculty of the College of the Bible stood for so valiantly has become mainly the conviction and the working principle of the faculties in all of our schools holding membership in the Board of Higher Education of Disciples of Christ” (p. 55).

**Comment:** We think this statement is a bit broad. We should hesitate to charge all of the thirty-four affiliated colleges with quite so bold a departure from the faith as is evident at Lexington. The trend toward humanistic views among them has been strong enough, however, so that the churches have demanded more Scriptural training for their ministers, and in answer to this demand, there has arisen an approximately equal number of Christian colleges which refuse affiliation with the Disciples Board.

### ***III. Open Membership, Sheltered and Condoned If Not Openly Practiced —a Digression from the Scriptural Practice of Evangelism.***

On no issue has there been more controversy or more confusion than the matter of open membership, or the receiving of unimmersed persons into the membership of Christian Churches at home and on the mission field. Federation, which Mr. Corey promoted, makes the practice of open membership a logical next step.

The evolutionary principles and liberal attitude toward the Bible which Mr. Corey acknowledged lead naturally to a relaxation of the Scriptural requirements for salvation and Christian fellowship. *Yet Mr. Corey refuses to acknowledge that open membership has existed under the United Christian Missionary Society.* He records the following pertinent material:

1. Guy W. Sarvis, candidate for the China Mission field, was encouraged by the Foreign Society to take graduate studies at Chicago University. While there he was a member, and part of the time associate minister, of the “theologically liberal” Hyde Park Church, which under the ministry of Edward Scribner Ames, was practicing open membership. The Hyde Park church arranged to send Mr. Sarvis as its living link missionary under the Society (p. 37).

2. The Christian Standard opposed the sending of a missionary with such connections and record. Mr. Sarvis denied that he approved or would practice the “Hyde Park plan.” He was sent to China, and there taught sociology and

**14** economics in Nanking University, in which Disciples shared responsibilities with Methodists and Presbyterians. “He neither practiced nor advocated what is called open membership on the mission field” (p. 42). In order to quiet the objections continually raised because of the Hyde Park connection with Mr. Sarvis, Mr. Ames and his church discontinued their living link support of him in 1912.

**Comment:** In all this there is a moral difficulty based on the Scriptural principle that a person is a responsible participant, not only in what he does but what he supports another in doing, whether it be evil (2 John 11) or good (3 John 8). If Mr. Sarvis did not approve the Hyde Park plan of open membership, how would he justify his participation in it as associate minister of the church? If the Hyde Park people considered it wrong to insist upon immersion as a test of fellowship, and if Mr. Sarvis did insist upon it as his denial of open membership implies, how could *they* justify their support of him as a missionary?

3. Beginning about 1917 there was discussion of the establishment of union church in China. The Disciple missionaries, led by Frank Garrett, were favorably inclined to the move, though they recognized that it would involve open membership and they were not sure that the matter would be approved by the churches in the United States (p. 71). Robert E. Elmore, Then a member of the executive committee of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, “raised objection to the attitude of our China missionaries” (p. 71).

**Comment:** Speaking on his own behalf and in reply to Mr. Corey's book, Editor Elmore presented in the summer, 1954, issues of the **Restoration Herald** strongly documented evidence that the missionaries' commitment to the open membership phase of the union church proposal was much more complete than Mr. Corey here admitted, that the officers of the society were much more active participants with them in the idea, and that his own activities as a member of the executive committee of the Foreign Society were far more explicit than a mere raising of an objection to an attitude.

4. On August 26, 1920, the theologically liberal *Christian Century* said editorially, “Most, if not all, of the mission churches of Disciples in China have been for some time receiving unimmersed Christians into their membership .... The membership reports sent to missionary headquarters in America have made no distinction between the immersed and unimmersed members” (pp. 74,75). According to Mr. Corey, the information to the *Christian Century* came from George Baird, missionary at Lochowfu, China, who had, without consulting either the other missionaries or the unimmersed Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians who were worshipping at Lochowfu, entered their names on the church roll (pp. 75,76).

**Comment:** The editor of the *Christian Century* was an honest liberal. He thought the U.C.M.S. ought to practice open membership boldly and quit its policy of apology and denial. It is rather hard to imagine that an editor of his scholarly standing would make so sweeping and inclusive a statement as the above on the basis of one statement from one man concerning one station, especially when the magazine had further direct contact with the China field through Mr. Sarvis and the Hyde Park church.

5. “Unimmersed Christians coming to us from various denominations have not given up their identity with their denominations.” Thus the temporary “guest membership” of “visitors” was described in a statement signed by eight missionaries, who re-affirmed their determination “to adhere to the principles formulated for our guidance by the authorized representatives of the Disciples of Christ in America” (p. 77).

**Comment:** In the phrase “unimmersed Christians,” used often and insistently by Mr. Corey and other officers of the Society, appears a great inconsistency in their position.

If immersion, attending one’s own confession of his own faith, has nothing to do with making one a Christian, and he is fully a Christian without it, why insist on the ordinance, or even practice it? It is disappointing to observe that the final authority for the missionaries was the “authorized representatives of the Disciples

**16** of Christ in America,” rather than Christ and His Word. It is too often thus with organizationalism.

One of the eight missionaries who signed the letter of loyalty quoted by Mr. Corey was Marguerite Harmon Bro, who, twenty-seven years later but referring to the same period, wrote something quite different for the **Christian Century**:

“We had our scrimmages on the mission field, too, where some churches accepted Presbyterians and Congregationalists and other unimmersed brethren on a par with the immersed and let them serve as deacons, elders and teachers. However, we settled that difficulty by keeping the names off the official roll sent to America for the yearbook” (Christian Century, February 8, 1949, page 171).

Is it possible that Mr. Corey was honestly unaware of that confessed practice when he wrote, five years after the published admission by Mrs. Bro, “There was no such practice under the United Society anywhere” (p. 105)?

6. At Nantungchow Mrs. Alexander Lee and Mrs. C. Y. Lee, members of the Episcopal church and the Presbyterian church respectively, were enrolled as “associate members” (pp. 78,79).

**Comment:** The idea of guest membership, temporary membership, associate membership, or separate listing, indicated here for the unimmersed communicants, seems to bear much the same relationship to the outright practice of open membership that infant dedication bears to infant baptism. It is getting as close to the anti-scriptural practice as the people will permit. The actual difference in each case is often very hard to distinguish.

7. The missionaries generally declared that open membership had not been practiced in China (p. 81), At the same time, L.N.D. Wells, member of the Board of Managers of the United Christian Missionary Society, said, “*If I were in China*” and “*if the denominational churches were not close I think I would receive the pious unimmersed*” (p. 83).

**Comment:** Perhaps the term “open membership” meant something different to the missionaries from what it means to most people, but if their acceptance of the unimmersed on a par



with the immersed, and making them elders, deacons, and teachers is not open membership, what is it? 17

8. In 1920 the Board of Managers of the United Society passed the “Medbury Resolution,” asking that the missionaries in question make an open avowal of support to a statement which included disapproval of “the advocacy or practice of open membership among the missionaries or mission stations supported by the Foreign Society” (pp. 83,84). The resolution was circulated among the missionaries, and “there was no dissent from it” (p. 84).

**Comment:** The moral problem rises again. Several of the missionaries had made known their approval of open membership, but now they agreed not to practice it while under the employ of the Disciples. Which would be worse – to violate their consciences for the sake of their jobs by insisting on immersion, or to violate the confidence of their supporters by practicing open membership? And which of the evils did they actually engage in?

9. In 1921 John T. Brown, a member of the Board of Managers of the Foreign Society, made a tour of the mission stations. On his return he reported that in the Taft Avenue Church in Manila, Philippine Islands, Missionary E. K. Higdon had been authorized to keep separate rolls of immersed believers on the one hand and unimmersed Protestants “who desired to work with and have a home in the congregation” on the other, and that he had “gone beyond his authority in that he received unimmersed persons and sometimes had put them in as deacons of the church” (p. 86). “Mr. Higdon stated to Mr. Brown that he had misrepresented the practice of the Taft Avenue church when he described it as open membership.”

Mr. Brown also reported the enrollment of unimmersed “associate” members in the Chinese mission stations.

**Comment:** From the Higdon incident at Taft Avenue it may be seen that the confession or denial of open membership rests largely on definition of the term. But if the thing described here is not open membership, what is it? And what would it take to constitute open membership?

**18** 10. At Winona Lake, Indiana, in 1922 the Board of Managers of the United Society approved the following statement:

“As a purely administrative policy, the Board of Managers of the United Christian Missionary Society announces the following:

*“In harmony with the teachings of the New Testament as understood by the Board of Managers, the United Christian Missionary Society is conducting its work everywhere on the principle of receiving into the membership of the churches at home or abroad, by any of its missionaries, only those who are immersed, penitent believers in Christ.*

*“Furthermore, it is believed by this Board of Managers that all of the missionaries and ministers appointed and supported by the Board are in sincere accord with this policy, and certainly it will not appoint and indeed it will not continue in its service any one known by it to be not in such accord. It disclaims any right and disowns any desire to do otherwise”* (p. 87).

Subsequently the following interpretation was made a part of the Society’s record concerning the Winona Lake statement:

*“We interpret the statement with regard to ‘being in sincere accord’ with the policy pronounced to mean that the missionary should be willing to earnestly carry on the work in the manner suggested. We feel that this was not meant in any sense to infringe upon private opinion or individual liberty of conviction ‘so long as none judges his brother, or insists upon forcing his own opinion upon others or on making them an occasion of strife.’”* (p. 88).

This interpretation was made “in the case of E. K. Higdon” (p. 104), whose practice in Manila had subjected him to strong criticism.

**Comment:** Mr. Corey's direct reference to the “case of E. K. Higdon” makes it, abundantly clear that the “interpretation” was made with the planned purpose of avoiding what seemed to most people to be the intent of the Winona Lake statement.

Such plain statements as the one at Winona Lake served to quiet the unrest at home, but, they were not allowed to interfere with persons or policies already well established on the mission field. The subsequent advancement of Mr. Higdon to his present post (in 1955), in which he screens all candidates for the foreign field under the United Christian Missionary Society, is most significant.

Just how Mr. Higdon's advancement, among other things, has worked to controvert the Winona Lake declaration is seen in the case of Hallam C. Shorrock, Jr. A member of the West Seattle, Washington church, Mr. Shorrock was chosen by his home church to go to Japan as its living link missionary under the United Society. For his training he was persuaded by Mr. Higdon to go to Yale Divinity School rather than to any college connected with the Christian Churches.

When he returned home he made it plain that he had come to believe in open membership and would practice it on the mission field. The West Seattle elders thereupon regretfully withdrew their recommendation for his support, and notified the United Society of their decision and the reasons for it.

Thus notified that Mr. Shorrock believed in and intended to practice open membership, the United Society nevertheless sent him to Japan without delay (Information from **Midwest Christian**, August, 1947). Before publication of Mr. Corey's book, Mr. Shorrock had completed a term in Japan, had been received and feted in the United States on an interim furlough, and had been returned for a second term in Japan.

11. The International Convention of Disciples in 1924 appointed a "Peace Commission," which was "charged with the task of drafting a statement for the next convention in 1925 in Oklahoma City in an effort to bring unity to the brotherhood" (p. 95). The commission reported the following resolution, which was finally passed in spite of the negative report of the Committee on Recommendations and the steadfast opposition of the officers of the United Society, who objected that its requirements would "necessitate certain intellectual policing"

**20** and that it “proposes to interfere with the freedom of men’s thought” (p. 103)

*“That if any person is now in the employment of the United Christian Missionary Society as its representative who has committed himself or herself to belief in, or practice of, the reception of unimmersed persons into the membership of Churches of Christ the relationship of that person to the United Christian Missionary Society be severed as employee”* (p. 102).

**Comment:** Mr. Corey's book makes it plain that a number of the missionaries, including specifically Frank Garrett and E. K. Higdon, had expressed themselves as believing in the reception of “unimmersed Christians” into the membership of the churches they served.

John T. Brown’s report was far more explicit and extensive, presenting documented evidence that, if the missionaries were not practicing open membership it was because prudential expediency had stifled their honest convictions. The “Peace Resolution” offered to them, to the Society, and to the churches at home an honorable way out of their moral dilemma – let these missionaries be released to serve under such denominational auspices as would do violence neither to their convictions nor to those of their supporters.

Far from doing any “intellectual policing,” the Society could have acted without prejudice on multiplied evidence already at hand. There was in the resolution no hint of infringing on men’s freedom of thought; there was only the effort, to relieve them of a situation in which their thought and action could never be in complete and open harmony.

12. Feeling that he could not comply with the evident intent of the resolution to discharge all employees of the U.C.M.S. who were “committed ... to belief in ... open membership,” Mr. Corey wrote his resignation as secretary of the Society, but was persuaded to withhold it until the Board of Managers had interpreted the resolution (pp. 104,105). Officers of the Society held that the open membership question had been settled in 1922 at Winona Lake, and “there was no such practice under

the United Society anywhere” (p. 105). “The action of the Oklahoma City convention was held to have been advisory, but an interpretation had to be made as to the course which the Society should take.” “The Board of Managers finally interpreted ‘committed to belief in’ . . . as not intended to invade the right of private judgment, but only to such open agitation as would prove divisive” ... “However, the *Christian Standard* and the *Touchstone* (a newer magazine of more controversial nature) were in no way satisfied with this conclusion on the part of the Board of Managers and the officers of the United Society” (p. 105).

**Comment:** Here is the frankest sort of admission that the ultimate “interpretation” was not what Mr. Corey knew that the people of the convention meant when they passed the resolution and he wrote his resignation. It was simply a legal maneuver by which the will of the Society’s supporting constituency was thwarted, because the doing of that will involved responsibilities the Society officers were unwilling to accept. No one, knowing of this action, can any longer take very seriously the claim of the United Society that it is a democratic institution, subject to the will of the Christian people who support it.

13. “At the Grand Rapids, Michigan, International Convention . . . 1942, Clarence E. Lemmon, pastor of the First Christian Church, Columbia, Missouri, was elected president” (p. 177) “The (Columbia) church had, in 1928, by vote of the congregation, approved open membership and recognized some unimmersed people as members of the church. This was before Mr. Lemmon became the minister there. It seems to be quite a general custom of our churches in college and university centers to provide a temporary church home for Christian students of different denominations during their time away from their home churches by extending them the status of guest membership” (p. 178).

**Comment:** The convention that elected an open-membership president was a vastly different gathering from the one which fifteen years earlier had passed the ill-fated “Peace Resolution.” Many staunch Christians, discouraged by the failure of that and

**22** other similar efforts to lead the Society in Scriptural paths, had ceased to attend the annual gatherings. By 1942 the liberal element could do with the convention what it chose. *Rather than being subservient to the convention, the Society had succeeded at last in making the convention subservient to itself.*

Mr. Lemmon himself has been frank enough in his advocacy of open membership so that the statements here about Columbia's prior action and the "customary" practice of "temporary guest membership" for students are without point. He himself would make no such excuses nor limitations upon his avowed practice. Cleveland Kleihauer, president of the International Convention in 1954, is an equally forthright and enthusiastic practicer of open membership.

14. As his summary comment on open membership, Mr. Corey says concerning "those supporting the agencies": *"All these churches practice only immersion as baptism, and the great majority accept only immersed believers into church membership. Yet they grant the right of congregational autonomy to those churches which maintain that they are practicing Christian unity by welcoming into membership recognized Christians who have not been immersed, and who do not make this action a test of fellowship"* (p. 279).

**Comment:** Again Mr. Corey presents open membership in the most favorable terms imaginable. Why should he still deny his own approval of it, except that such approval is still in disfavor in the majority of churches? How, moreover, is one to "recognize" a Christian except by his obedience to Christ's command? If personal devotion and moral character are to be the only tests, then the church accepting a member by transfer must accept a terrible responsibility for judging of personal matters. The nub of the matter lies, however, in the authority of Christ. What He has commanded is not subject to congregational autonomy.

#### ***IV. The Limitation of Missionary Fields and Activities Through Comity Agreements—a Digression from Obedience to Christ's Command To Go Into All the World*** 23

When the Disciples' agencies accepted the denominations, those practicing the sprinkling of infants as well as those practicing the immersion of believers, as full and equal partners in missionary labor, the first result was federation, or the participation in joint activities while maintaining separate organizational status. The second result was comity, or the parceling of territory by agreements which gave to each an area in which it would be free from interference by the others.

From the denominational point of view the procedure is entirely logical. If one body offers nothing important which the others do not supply, it is certainly wiser to avoid duplication of effort. This logic would, of course, have prevented the establishment of the restoration movement at its beginning. Applied to its fullest extent even now it would suggest the disbanding of the United Society with its duplication of the services already offered by various denominational agencies. This point is actually approached in the annual "Week of Compassion," wherein the Disciples agencies are for the most part mere fund raisers for denominational and interdenominational church-building and relief organizations.

That which brought the restoration movement into being was the conviction that denominationalism was not presenting the saving New Testament gospel. That same conviction brought about the establishment of missionary societies to send the pure Scriptural message to all the world. When the missionary societies thus established refuse to carry out the commission which brought them into being, the people who retain the original convictions will find other means to do the work which still needs to be done everywhere.

In his "Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy," Mr. Corey is consistent with other officers of the United Christian Missionary Society in an enthusiastic adoption and promotion of comity. He presents the following record:

**24** 1. In February, 1916, representatives of eleven mission boards, meeting in Panama, organized the “Committee on Cooperation in Latin America,” “and our own former missionary, Samuel Guy Inman, was named executive secretary” (p. 57). As a result of studies by the committee concerning the location of missionaries in Mexico, the Christian Women’s Board of Missions withdrew from its work in Monterey, in northern Mexico, where “the Methodists were strong and the Disciples weak,” and entered a territory surrendered by the Presbyterians in Central Mexico, while the Presbyterians turned to pioneer work in Yucatan. The Christian Institute was sold to the Methodists.

*“It was felt by the Christian Women’s Board of Missions that after twenty years of work, largely supported from the United States, these churches in Monterey which it was leaving could undertake self-support.”* E. T. Westrup, Mexican Christian minister at Monterey, “took strong exception” to the move and “found ready publicity for his complaint in the columns of the Christian Standard” (p. 58).

**Comment:** In 1953, *after another thirty-five years of work reported from the United States*, the U.C.M.S. has thirteen churches in Mexico, only two of which are self-supporting. Instead of the Christian Institute, the Union Evangelical Seminary trains its leaders. The reports for the year make one wonder if comity in Mexico had produced its logical offspring, open membership. Concerning the *Convention of Disciples* at Remedios in 1952, the 1953 *Yearbook of Disciples of Christ* (p. 176) says, “*The convention was marked by high evangelistic fervor with fifty confessions of faith, and twelve baptisms.*”

2. “It is the custom on mission fields where the Disciples of Christ function through the United Christian Missionary Society to have friendly understandings with other Protestant groups” (p.112). “We were late in entering the Philippine Islands, reaching the field in 1901. The Methodists, Presbyterians, and United Brethren had preceded our missionaries and quite naturally districted the Islands somewhat, designating territory each would attempt to occupy



... There was plenty of territory for each Mission, and as time went on the missionaries of the Disciples of Christ found unoccupied and very needy fields. There was, however, some overlapping and occasional misunderstanding and competition. Later the spirit of cooperation grew and there was counsel together as to how the area could be better occupied by the missionary groups” (p. 113).

3. "In one case an agreement was reached with the Presbyterian Mission so that each Mission would be responsible for a certain large field near Manila and thus able to do more effective work without controversy between the two groups. This was regarded by the Standard as ‘a sell-out to the denominations.’”

“There was a contradiction in all of this controversy. It happened that Mr. Wolfe had been on the committee that arranged the agreement with the Presbyterians some years before. He wrote a letter to R. A. Doan, a secretary of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, advising of the comity understanding. The letter, bearing Mr. Wolfe’s signature, and the accompanying comity agreement which he endorsed are reproduced in facsimile on succeeding pages” (p. 109).

In the “History of Philippine Mission Churches of Christ” its authors, Robert and Eleanor Wolfe Hanson, son-in-law and daughter of Mr. Wolfe, “claimed that Mr. Wolfe did not support comity in the Philippines and challenged the United Christian Missionary Society to produce any evidence that he did (History of the Philippine Mission Churches of Christ. p. 4).”

“Shortly after the publication of the Hanson challenge to the United Society, Spencer P. Austin, an executive secretary of the Society, sent a photostatic copy of the original Wolfe letter and the comity agreement with the Presbyterians to the editor of the Christian Standard. ... The challenge of the documentary proof remains unanswered by either the Christian Standard or the Hansons” (p. 112).

**Comment:** Leslie Wolfe, veteran missionary who was discharged by the United Society for “incompatibility” and continued in the Philippines as an independent missionary well spoken of by

**26** the Christian Standard and others of like faith, has been the center of much controversy. He was a highly successful evangelist both before and after his separation from the U.C.M.S. A study of the documents cited and provided by Mr. Corey reveals that his text does not present the facts of this “contradiction” quite as they are. Page four of the Hanson history which is referred to by Mr. Corey says this:

“The U.C.M.S. spokesman now makes the charge in writing that is bringing so many inquiries to us: ‘Our first written Comity agreement was achieved in the Philippine Islands. Mr. Wolfe was then a missionary with the Society and he signed the agreement on behalf of the Society and forwarded the agreement to the Society bearing his signature. The agreement was accompanied by a letter – handwritten from Mr. Wolfe, in which *he praised this agreement as one of the greatest forward steps in Protestantism.*’

“We challenge the U.C.M.S. to **produce any such letter.**”

Note that the Hansons did not, as Mr. Corey says, challenge the Society to produce any evidence that Mr. Wolfe ever supported comity in the Philippines. They challenged them to produce a handwritten letter in which Mr. Wolfe praised the comity agreement as one of the greatest forward steps in Protestantism.

That challenge remains unmet. What the Society so triumphantly brought forth is a *typewritten* letter, prepared in the routine duties of Mr. Wolfe as missionary secretary, in which he reported the facts of the agreement and said:

“Never before in the history of our Philippine work has the Christian mission ever entered a written agreement as to territory with another mission. There was opposition on the part of some of the Filipino workers to our entering any kind of agreement. In fact this agreement has not the formal indorsement of any of the native workers. Some of us approached this matter with fear and trembling, and in order to make possible a discontinuance of what may prove to be an undesirable arrangement, it is provided in this agreement that it shall be in force for three years from date. ...

“We have entered this agreement with the hope that it would greatly advantage our work, as it would offer us an opportunity to intensify our efforts, establishing our work in contiguous towns ...

“A word of advice or encouragement from you will be appreciated” – (from facsimile reproduction of Wolfe letter, p. 110 of Mr. Corey's book).

This hesitant, tentative, and vaguely hopeful agreement was entered and signed, incidentally, by the “Representatives of the *Christian Mission.*” The term “Disciples Mission,” used consistently by Mr. Corey, was not yet current in the Philippines. There is certainly very little to support Mr. Corey’s assertion that the comity agreement thus achieved was entered “with Mr. Wolfe’s hearty cooperation” (p. 113).

The letter in question was dated July 13, 1918. The records show that from 1923 onward Mr. Wolfe was consistently and unalterably opposed to comity.

Of course, the question as to whether Mr. Wolfe did or did not support comity has little to do with the present discussion. The policy is right or wrong, not by any man’s opinion, but by its relationship to the authority of Christ and His commands found in the New Testament. We believe that it stands condemned in the light of Scripture. We find it significant, however, that those who promote comity must support it with such dubious handling of historic facts as is here shown in Mr. Corey’s book.

4. “The larger comity plan was with the Methodists. They and the Disciples were overlapping in missionary effort in three of the provinces of Luzon ... One difficult place, the most serious, has been at Aparri in the extreme north of Luzon ... It is probable that more care should have been taken in connection with the native congregation there, where the church building, *largely built with mission funds*, was sold to the Methodists according to the comity agreement ... The Aparri congregation of Disciples of Christ did not agree to the transfer of the property ... The United Society afterwards *gave* our native Aparri congregation \$1,000 to reimburse it for its share in the building” (p. 113).

**28 Comment:** Understanding of this story will be helped much by information from the **History of Philippine Mission Churches of Christ:**

“The loyal native Aparri congregation, under shepherding of their faithful elder and evangelist, Faustino Peneyra, refused to be sold out to denominationalism. Their faithful missionaries had taught them well, they knew the Scriptures and they said, ‘*We must obey God rather than men.*’ They held a great congregational meeting and passed the following resolution: ‘*Comity agreement is not only anti-Christ and anti-Scriptural, but it is also a betrayal of the Lord. Our faith is not salable and transferable.*’

“Receipts in our files show that *the U.C.M.S. had advanced only \$540 total for the Aparri lot and ‘some work on the pastoral house.’* Over against this the Filipino congregation themselves gave \$1,725 for construction of their church building and house, besides furnishings for the chapel. ... After years of grievous postponements ... *they finally won a decision in the (civil) court and repayment of \$1,000* in settlement of the comity exchange.

“The Methodists to this day (1955), in spite of all the U.C.M.S. did for them, can not get a missionary family to live in typhoon-ridden Aparri” (History, p. 9. Col. 2).

**Comment:** It is a poor recommendation for comity that it achieves peace with the denominations at the expense of such betrayal of New Testament Christians.

5. “It should be a matter of just pride that our missionaries have often been leaders in cooperative work with other church bodies. These consecrated workers have felt that *since God was evidently cooperating with Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists*, they, too, should do so. Then, they have felt that from the very nature of our plea for Christian unity, we would be remiss if we were not the first to press for every possible cooperation and they have never sacrificed their convictions in doing so” (p. 165).

**Comment:** We do not know on what ground the assumption of God's cooperation with the various denominations is made, but it is highly probable that the same evidences could be given to support the idea that God is cooperating with the Roman Catholics, the Mohammedans, and the Hindus.

For some people, apparently including Mr. Corey, "our plea for Christian unity" seeks the outward form of oneness in an organization or an enterprise, no matter how that is achieved. For many others of us it goes deeper, and demands a spiritual oneness in obedience to Christ according to **His** Word. This is not gained, but is forfeited, in any commitment which hinders the proclamation of the pure gospel, unstained by denominationalism, everywhere.

The missionaries who entered comity agreements and interdenominational activities may not have sacrificed any of their convictions. Perhaps they believed only what the neighboring denominationalists believed in the first place. It is a matter of record, however, that in the comity agreements and commitments, the missionary society and its workers did most grievously sacrifice the convictions of some of the faithful people at home who supported them.

It was this sacrifice of their supporters' convictions which stirred the controversy so bewildering to Mr. Corey.

6. *"There is not a single comity agreement reached on a foreign field by our missionaries that has not enlarged rather than limited our field of effort"* (p. 222). Statements are made concerning the Belgian Congo, Paraguay, the Philippine Islands, and Mexico, to show that by the comity agreements the Disciples were given uncontested fields larger than the areas already occupied by them at the time the agreements were made.

**Comment:** Mr. Corey has been thinking, not at all in terms of a world-covering advance, but in terms of a static relationship to the fields already entered and occupied. It may be summed up in this: the Disciples had made some entry into a number of fields. Then when they began to encounter denominational competition, they gave up the opportunity and challenge to go into all the

**30** world, and accepted in exchange the security of being unmolested in going a little farther than they had already gone. The United Society does not have missionaries in Alaska, for example, because by comity they assigned Alaska to the Presbyterians and Episcopalians. We do not know how much more of the world they have agreed to stay out of.

7. “The type of work done in many areas has changed greatly since the establishment of the United Society. A number of services has been withdrawn, but other phases of the work have been strengthened. Increasingly the emphasis has been on quality rather than quantity. Rather than to begin additional work here and there, the Society’s policy has been to develop existing program and activity for a more effective Christian witness. All of the present foreign fields are far from being fully occupied” (pp. 261,262).

**Comment:** This is in harmony with the former paragraph, indicating that the Society is fully content to occupy the present fields, and perhaps a little more. In practice, it makes the Great Commission a dead letter. This is the kind of thinking which would ultimately destroy the foreign missionary enterprise entirely. When the people at home apply to their own towns the arguments Mr. Corey applies to the presently occupied mission fields, there will be no activity beyond the home church and the local community.

8. “A. Dale Fiers, president of the United Society, endorsed the commitment to comity on behalf of the Society thus (Leaven, February, 1952, page 1): *‘We believe in the practice of comity and we are thoroughly committed to it as a working policy in our missionary program’*” (p. 264).

## **CONCLUSION**

We agree with Mr. Corey that “the type of work done in many areas has changed greatly since the establishment of the United Society.” We believe that the changes are more numerous and more serious than Mr. Corey would care to admit. We have traced four of the changes, which began in the older societies before their merger into the United Society – changes which have been

much extended since that time – the practice of federation, the infiltration of a skeptical attitude toward the Bible, a favorable attitude toward open membership while illogically denying its practice, and a forthright commitment, to comity and a limited missionary program.

We might trace other changes made equally clear in Mr. Corey's book – an outright denial of the principle of New Testament restoration and the acceptance of denominational status (pp. 184, 257, 276, 280), an approval of the shift whereby state missionary societies have become agencies for a more or less complete control of the local churches (p. 226), and the making of support to the “regular agencies of the Disciples” a practical test of fellowship (pp. 234,244). We will not go into detail on these items, which are, after all, essential parts of the philosophy behind the digressions noted in this review.

The Society itself declares that these changes have taken place, and argues that they ought to have taken place, thus indicating that the future is likely to see even greater departures as the officers of the Society follow the evolutionary developments of modern Protestantism. The Society ought not, therefore, to expect support from those Christians who maintain unchanged the convictions which were held by the original founders of the organizations. Neither can it rightly blame others for the controversies which its own digressions have stirred up.

The Society, however, is not likely to cease its complaints. It will continue to wail of “attack” from those who oppose its policies, even as Ahab complained to Elijah, “Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?” And the faithful will continue to reply, as Elijah replied to Ahab, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou has followed the baalim” (I Kings 18:17,18).

## Appendix

### ***FORTY YEARS AFTER***

The January 1955 issue of Ladies Home Journal carries an article, “How Young America Lives – at Seventy-Five” (pp. 107.115),

**32** which brings up to date the story of Guy W. Sarvis, whom Mr. Corey defended as a thoroughly satisfactory missionary under the United Christian Missionary Society from 1911 to 1926 (pp. 36,43 of the Corey book; see p. 11 above).

The journal article introduces Mr. Sarvis as a professor of sociology, retired to Florida after thirty-eight years in a variety of colleges in the United States after his return from China. Of his work as a missionary it says only that “*technically, he was a missionary*” under the Disciples of Christ, and that for fifteen years he lived on “a substandard missionary salary.” Mrs. Sarvis is quoted as having been dissatisfied with the “narrow views” of some of the older missionaries, and having argued for “more tolerance, more room for other people’s faiths.”

In retirement the Sarvises are presented as active members of the Unitarian church in Orlando, where there are, incidentally, two Christian Churches. Central doctrines of Unitarianism include “the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the progress of mankind onward and upward forever” (Phelan: *Handbook of all Denominations*, p. 206). It *denies* the deity and atonement of Christ.

Remember that the Christian Standard and others said in 1911 that Mr. Sarvis did not represent the Scriptural position of the New Testament church, and that he should not be sent as a missionary. Mr. Corey insisted that they were wrong, praised Mr. Sarvis in glowing terms, and approved his service as a missionary under the United Society. Now how about it?

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