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Preserving the Truth _ Editors Preface

Julene L. Jones, *University of Kentucky*



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Preserving the Truth: the Church Without a Name and its Founder, William Irvine

Editor's Preface

Members of the sect known alternately as “the Truth”, “the 2x2s” or “the Two-by-Twos” were at one point, also known as the “Cooneyites”. This last appellation should give the reader some indication that the sect’s claim of apostolic succession, or the claim that the sect’s belief system was derived from the first century apostles by a continuous succession is untrue.

The origin and history of this sect are well documented in public records, in press coverage, as well as through the statements, letters, and sermon notes from early ministers, or “workers”, and sect members, known as “friends”. Unfortunately, those of us residing outside the British Isles have been told a story which differs radically from the truth.

As Ms. Kropp-Ehrig outlines in careful detail throughout her writing, two of the many restorationist Christians in Great Britain were William Irvine and Edward Cooney, who, in 1897 started a revolutionary sect that revived the New Testament practices of holding worship services in members’ homes and dispatching ministers in pairs. They and their fellow ministers were sent to declare the Gospel in pairs “two-by-two” following the descriptions in the New Testament’s book of Matthew, chapter ten.

Irvine was viewed by his followers as a prophet, a man said to have been raised by God to restore the methods of the original New Testament church. By 1907, Irvine became convinced that only his preachers were God's true preachers, and that salvation could only come to those who followed them. A celibate ministry evolved, not without issues. They became exclusive, works-based, denied both the trinity and salvation by grace through faith.

These facts and this monograph are singularly important because many sect members reject their history in an attempt to justify their practices as the single belief system to attain eternal salvation. Sect members excommunicated Irvine and Cooney in 1914 and 1928, respectively. Their names and roles in the founding of the sect were deliberately expunged from the oral history of the sect, thereby allowing the sect to continue to this day asserting that Jesus was their only founder and thus their lineage and practices untainted by any human intervention. A culture of blind faith or not questioning sect leadership decisions quickly developed. As a consequence, the majority of sect members are unaware of, or at minimum, unwilling to consider their amended history and banished founders. Further, those that have heard about this history are skeptical of it; many may be devastated to discover that their entire culture, religion and way of life, not to mention their convictions about their after-life, are based on fraudulent claims.

This text demonstrates the nature of the beliefs of the sect and how they originated and developed through time and differences in leadership in an accessible way. All of the records consulted have been verified by the author to accurately represent the origins, founders, and progression of the sect. Frequently, members of the sect believe that dissenters, particularly those who publicly dissent are angry or bitter or mislead. Contrary to that belief, the author of this monograph was a sect member for many years and since disaffiliating from the sect, has since spent many years investigating its factual, documented history, a difficult task to undertake since the sect deliberately publishes no records. She refrains from any partiality or bias in her documentation. Her ambition led her to create a discussion board and a website to discuss the sect and store the documents she uncovered. Further, she traveled to England and Ireland in 2004 and again in 2014 where she worked tirelessly to discover unassailable proof of the sect's origins in Ireland which she has now incorporated into this encyclopedic tome. Including letters, personal accounts and journals, newspaper articles, court cases, photographs and family trees, many of these sources are being examined here for the first time.

This monograph provides in meticulous detail objective insight into the history, divisions, key figures, pivotal events, teachings and traditions of this low-profile, unique sect. Hidden schisms, shocking scandals, exoduses, tragedies, betrayals, riots, and excommunications are revealed.

Beyond sect members or those who have disaffiliated from the sect, sociologists of religion, religious historians, and theologians would all be interested in this monograph. Despite the scarcity of written material and academic research, the author has successfully compiled the only monograph in print that explores in chronologic and fascinating detail the distinctive origins of the atypical, ahistorical sect of the Two-by-Twos.

Julene L. Jones, co-editor

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