

Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God

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President's Pen



Dr. Gary Agee, President

Given Bill and Gloria Gaither's unparalleled success in the gospel music industry, it comes as no surprise that a monograph length study examining their wildly popular Homecoming series, first produced in 1991, would be taken up at some point. Ryan P. Harper's *The Gaithers and Southern Gospel Homecomings in the Twenty-First Century* was published by University Press of Mississippi in 2017.

Harper claims that the Gaithers are to gospel music what the Beatles are to pop music (6). Between the two of them, the couple has earned an enviable collection of Grammy and

Dove Awards. The author rightly contends that the gospel music industry would not exist in its current form were it not for their music and administrative contributions (8). Even more impressive is the fact that roughly one hundred of their Homecoming recordings have earned platinum sales (6).

Yet for all their success, Harper's study shows that the Gaithers seem to be something of an anomaly. For example, they don't fit comfortably among the iconic southern gospel groups routinely featured in the early productions of the series, nor do they seem entirely at home among those who flock to fill the sold-out venues. Further, Harper claims that the Gaither's music is difficult to categorize (8). A number of their compilations seem to anticipate contemporary and praise music. Similarly, the Bill Gaither Trio helped to pave the way for "inspirational" Christian music (8). Harper views the Gaithers as "transitional, synthesizing reconciling figures... ever singing the anacrusis between past present, and future, between Larry Norman, Charles Wesley,

Andraé Crouch, George Beverly Shea, Amy Grant, Sandi Patty and Jake Hess." (8) Their recordings are often "genre-transgressive," produced by a duo eager to expand southern gospel's boundaries in order to evangelize on behalf of their genre (15). In the process, they manage to push their audiences toward the embrace of artists and musical forms that might otherwise be less palatable.

In this offering Harper casts light on the creation of the Homecoming series, more specifically on the collaboration between the Gaithers and their audience as they together negotiate three nodes of tension also extant in evangelical religion more broadly. These include particularity vs. universality, preservation vs. expansion, and authenticity vs. artifice (15). In so doing, Harper sheds light not only on the Gaither's strategic narrative introductions of their potentially controversial Homecoming performers, but also on the tensions inherent in evangelical religion more generally.

In his study of the last twenty years of Homecoming production, Harper discerns in the couple an intentional narrative approach used to make somewhat controversial additions to the Homecoming performance family. The Gaithers, according to Harper, are carried along in this narrative process by what he terms an “additive nostalgia” (53). Comparing the creation of the Homecoming series to the construction of a massive home, the Gaithers as master builders work in collaboration with their fans as the blueprints for this structure are constantly negotiated for “potential add-ons” (53.) In chapter two, for example, the “construction” of Guy Penrod is explored. Effort is put forth to present Penrod as a “rugged” yet “sensitive” man (61-69). In this construction the Gaithers both satisfy and challenge their audience’s expectations.

Nowhere is the Gaithers’ narrative handiwork more revealing than in their introduction of African American recording artist, Lynda Randle. Such a construction had to be done in a way that would be palatable to an audience prone to stereotypical views concerning race and urban space. Harper acknowledges that the Gaithers’ inclusion of Randle along with their celebration of black musical forms did not necessarily guarantee that any measurable change would result in their audience’s perspectives on these matters. In the end, however, Harper concludes that the Gaithers’ work did over time lead to significant revision (241).

In the epilogue Harper discusses a 2013 presentation of “Alleluia,” performed on the campus of Anderson University. Following the performance, the author claims that he had become more convinced than ever that to discover “how and why the Homecomings were so successful,” one had to “reach far back into Gaither history.” (250) He rightly concludes

after all that “Gaither history was not a southern gospel history—not theologically, not culturally, not stylistically.” (250) But for all Harper’s study has to offer, it fails to give an account of the extent to which the couple was influenced by the Church of God movement. No doubt, the theological elements of this tradition as taught and translated by individuals associated with Anderson College/University, were, and I suspect remain, representative of the “messy middle” of American evangelicalism. Viewed in light of other Anderson University alumni similarly socialized in the Church of God, the Gaithers appear paradigmatic. Despite Harper’s puzzling oversight, this work is a valuable contribution to both scholars and laypersons interested in the study of gospel music and evangelical Christianity.

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Please send your family stories and photos to the same address. We would love to print them in future issues.

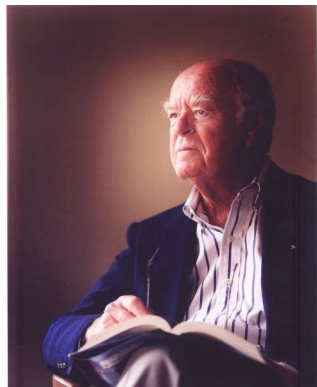
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Movers and Shapers in the Church of God: Enoch Byrum

By Robert Reardon

This on-going serial captures firsthand recollections from Robert Reardon regarding luminaries in the Movement. See the Winter 2019 issue for details.



E. E. Byrum came along in the nick of time. His inheritance, used to buy out one-third of The Gospel Trumpet Company, kept things solvent. It also put him quickly in a managerial position to organize, promote, and deputize while D. S. Warner was out on the road. Soon afterward, Warner was gone and the infant movement had a strong personality to give it cohesion.

Byrum was German in disposition—hard work, no nonsense, obedient to authority—coupled with a gift of divine healing. He was a practical man and no mean businessman. Under his leadership the fledgling company moved from Grand Junction to Moundsville and finally to Anderson. Although his brother Noah kept the books, it was Enoch who made the decision to move to Anderson, organized the resources, fought off the Zinzendorf anti-cleansing defectors, wrote the editorials laying down the rules, shaped the communally organized Missionary Homes through which to promote both literature and headquarters' policy. He was a towering figure even after he turned over the editor's chair and the company was reorganized under the Indiana Not-For-Profit Statutes.

During the last years of his life he was held in awe for his healing ministry. His office in the Company held scores of relics—braces, crutches—gathered there in answer to divine healing. He argued that healing was in the atonement, cleansing both the body and soul, and that when an individual had met the scriptural conditions it was God who made good on God's promises. Byrum sent thousands of anointed handkerchiefs to those requesting prayer, which he and Gospel Trumpet Company prayer groups had prayed over. He shaped the expectations for healing of the body throughout the church by his writing. His personal visits to pray for the sick ranged widely across the nation. He was still clinging to his faith in "contract

healing" on his death bed, where he was visited regularly by my father, his pastor.

There is abundant evidence that his ministry of healing inspired many miracles. His presence stimulated faith, although he never led the kind of spectacular, highly emotionalized miracle healing crusades we see today. He dealt primarily with individuals: those across the country who pled for him to come, or those who traveled miles to Anderson for his prayer. I often heard him testify in Park Place Church and pray at the altar for the sick. It was in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, no shouting appeals to the Almighty, no emotional outbursts. His style was to remind God of the divine promises, and trusting that the work would be done: "God has heard, brother, sister, now go forth and claim your healing." Brother Naylor never claimed his own healing, he said.

Byrum built a large home where Nicholson Library now stands, and raised his family there. One of his sons went on to Indiana University and became an outstanding athlete, later a national leader for the YMCA, I believe. Enoch's second wife, Lucena, was a saint who traveled with him, driving his car, caring for him until he died.

I have a particularly vivid memory of his driving stance—his portly frame well established, eyes straight ahead, arms stiff and straight-out on the wheel, head turning neither to the left or right. Since Byrum lived on the Indiana Railroad Traction Line he had to cross the tracks (now College and Third) many times. It was a source of amusement to all of us that as he approached the crossing he habitually gave a long sustained blast on his horn, warning whoever was coming down the tracks that E. E. Byrum, God's man, was crossing, and look out!

Few persons have left their imprint on the Church of God more effectively than Enoch Byrum. He took charge of the Movement at a critical time, organized the work and brought a semblance of order when "ecclesiasticism" was a highly emotional issue. He saw the Gospel Trumpet Company through its transition to a non-profit corporation owned and controlled by the Church. He kept his original agreement never to profit personally in the change. He brought untold numbers into the Church through his healing ministry. He left a formidable legacy.

Photo Courtesy AU&CHOG Archives

Toward an Understanding of the Church of God Role in the Black Social Gospel

A Review Essay
By Carl E. Kramer, Ph.D.

Gary Dorrien. *The New Abolition: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015; Marcia Walker-McWilliams. *Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.



Photo courtesy of
Mary Kagin Kramer

As an American urban historian, I have a long interest in the social gospel movement. Likewise, as one who had Church of God connections in Anderson, Chicago and Toledo, I have maintained an interest in the movement's history, and in recent years I have become convinced of a need for deeper examination of the its involvement in social reform, particularly the civil rights movement. In the spring of

2017, based on my own reading, I made a list of people whose ministries might justify such exploration. It included pioneers like J. D. Smoot, S. P. Dunn, Earnest E. Wimbish, L. A. Christman, and Daniel F. Oden and contemporary leaders such as Marcus Morgan, James Earl Massey, Benjamin Reid, Robert Culp, Claude and Addie Wyatt, Willie Barrow, Samuel Hines, and Edward Foggs.

Meanwhile, in April 2017 my wife Mary and I attended the H. Charles Grawemeyer Award in Religion Lecture delivered at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary by Union Theological Seminary social ethicist Gary Dorrien in honor of his book *The New Abolition: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel*. The lecture highlighted the impact of Du Bois' militance in sparking the Black Social Gospel during the decades between his debates with Booker T. Washington and the modern civil rights movement. As I listened, I became more convinced that Church

of God involvement in racial justice movements deserves deeper study. Dorrien strengthened my conviction when I asked if he had examined the participation of Evangelical, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations in the Black Social Gospel tradition. Although he had not, he affirmed their roles and emphasized a need for study of "sanctified" groups in the movement. So, we bought copy of *The New Abolition* and I read it soon thereafter.

Dorrien writes that "the social gospel was fundamentally a movement, not a doctrine, featuring a social ethical understanding of the Christian faith. It taught that Christianity has a mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice." He identifies four major streams of thought and action that comprised Black social Christianity. The first was the accommodationist stream represented by Washington. The second advocated nationalist separation and/or African emigration. The third and most dominant group rejected Washington's strategy and advocated Du Bois' militant "politics of racial and social justice." The fourth stream eschewed the "either/or" rivalry between the Bookerites and the Du Bois-style militants and took a more diplomatic approach that "conceived the social gospel as a both/and enterprise."

Dorrien devotes much space to historical context, including sexual violence, lynching, voter suppression, segregation, and other manifestations of the systemic racism that Black people experienced in virtually every area of their lives and the strategies used to attack them. In so doing, he addresses the roles of the NAACP and other secular groups as well as those of predominately Black denominations, such as American National Baptist Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the AME Zion Church. What sets Dorrien's book apart is his use of biographical sketches of pastors and activists such as Alexander Crummell, Henry McNeal Turner, William J. Simmons, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Alexander Walters, Reverdy Ransom, Nannie H. Burroughs, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., George W. Woodbey, Richard R. Wright Jr.,

[Cont. on p. 5]
[cont. from p. 4]

Howard Thurman, and Benjamin Mays as windows into the conflicts, strategies, and personal and institutional rivalries that shaped the Black Social Gospel.

Dorrien's use of biography seemed to provide a model for studying the roles of Church of God ministers in the movement. So, I was pleased in early 2018 when I came across a review of Marcia Walker-McWilliams' *Reverend Addie Wyatt* in a historical journal. I'm not sure if it was serendipity or providence, but it certainly was exciting, as Addie and Claude Wyatt had welcomed me warmly during a visit to Vernon Park Church of God when I was a Teacher Corps intern in Chicago almost fifty years ago. I have long been aware of her leadership in the Packinghouse Workers union, but Walker-McWilliams' book, based on her University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, broadened my perspective and filled in many details. Although *The New Abolition* was not yet available when Walker-McWilliams' was writing, her work fits the Black Social Gospel context. She narrates Addie Cameron's early childhood amidst the violence and poverty of Mississippi, her family's move to Chicago during the Great Migration, the challenges of life in the South Side ghetto, and the proliferation of black churches, including pastor S. P. Dunn's Langley Avenue Church of God, where she showcased her musical talent and married Claude Wyatt, her high school sweet heart. The book's central theme is Wyatt's commitment to the labor movement as a force for social justice and her rise to become the first female president of a United Packinghouse Workers of America local union. The author also highlights the obstacles Wyatt faced as a woman and an African American, which also made her a leader in the struggles for women's equality and racial justice and a force in Chicago reform politics. The common thread that ties together these themes is Wyatt's belief "in the power of faith . . . in the struggle for human freedom and equality." While well-researched and clearly written,

Reverend Addie Wyatt also has its faults. At times, the author speculates unnecessarily about Wyatt's motives, and the text would benefit from deeper research into the history of the Church of God Reformation Movement.

Nevertheless, the volume greatly enhances our understanding of the Church of God's role in the Black Social Gospel, and I hope it inspires Church of God scholars to undertake their own research and to encourage their students to pursue theses and dissertations on the remaining figures on my list, and perhaps even others unknown to me.



Addie Wyatt received an honorary Doctorate in Law from Anderson University in 1976. (Photo courtesy AU&CHOG Archives)

Historical Account of Danish Missionary Captured in New Book

By Carl Stagner



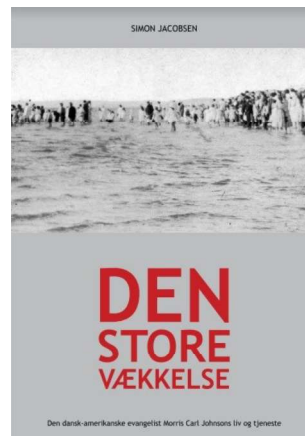
Simon Jacobsen, a Christian historian and author from Denmark, has recently published a book capturing the history of one of the first two Church of God missionaries to Denmark, Morris C. Johnson. Two years after surrendering his life to Christ at the age of sixteen at a Church of God congregation in the United States, he accepted a call to missions. Since his grandfather had immigrated to the U.S. in 1872 from Denmark, Johnson vowed that he would return to the Scandinavian country of his ancestry. The influence of Johnson's work, beginning in 1910, was thereafter extensive yet, until now, accounts of his impact for the Church of God—and the kingdom—have been scant, at best. Thanks to months of diligent research across national borders, through the Church of God Archives at Anderson University, and with Church of God Ministries, Simon Jacobsen has chronicled the unique story of Morris Johnson's life—one of drama, adventure, conflict, and Spirit-fueled perseverance.

Johnson's evangelistic fervor ultimately led to countless conversions, baptisms, and the establishment of Church of God congregations, but it was certainly not welcomed by all. Unitarian pharmacists are recorded to have written libelous articles in Danish newspapers, claiming that Johnson was not only a Mormon preacher, but also that he took money from the church and baptized naked women. Furthermore, the owner of a local inn became upset after locals chose to attend evangelistic meetings held by Johnson instead of going to the inn for a drink and dance. The innkeeper's cousin drafted a letter calling Johnson a white slave trader.

Not surprisingly, the police got involved, not only across Scandinavia, but in the United States, as well. Danish police reportedly wanted this Church of God missionary expelled from their country. At the very least, when Johnson

would return to the United States, the authorities would be "aware" of the allegations against him. After only three years of missionary work in Denmark, these initial complications saw some resolution when the Danish Prime Minister at the time announced he found no legitimate cause for expulsion.

On home assignment, Morris C. Johnson crisscrossed several states with the gospel. The drama of this little-known Church of God missionary continued to unfold as he was ostracized by some in the Movement who expressed nonconformity with doctrinal teaching regarding end times. Nevertheless, this bold character persisted, following the Spirit's leading alone, and finding himself connected with Moody's revival movement and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Before the Lord called him home at the relatively young age of fifty-seven, Johnson



would end up serving ecumenically for many years in the United States, including in Racine, Wisconsin, and Los Angeles, California. To this day, the Calvary Memorial Church in Racine, Wisconsin, has a prayer chapel named after Morris and his wife Rose.

The little-known story of Morris C. Johnson is marked by intrigue and would fascinate the avid historian, the prospective missionary, and even the person-in-the-pew. The problem Simon Jacobsen faces today is that only some of the book, complete with more than 200 old photos, has been translated into English. The author is actively looking for anyone who might be able to help him publish the book in the United States. To reach out to Simon, please send him an e-mail: simon@besaved.dk. By e-mail or via his website (www.besaved.dk), you can also purchase the book for \$38, plus shipping.

Photos courtesy Carl Stagner; Simon Jacobsen

INTO THE ARCHIVES

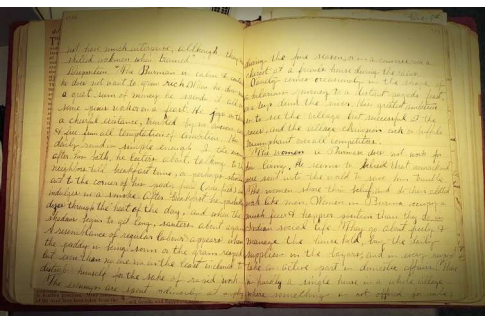
We commonly hear the expression “from the archives” when historical documents, photographs, and recordings are on display, but archival retrieval is multi-prepositional: materials move *into* the archives, preservation is performed *within* the archives, researchers work *with* the archives, and knowledge is broadcast *from* the archives. In this regular feature, we will keep readers informed about the work of the Anderson University & Church of God Archives.

Thaddeus Neff Materials Coming Into the Archives

As part of a process of transitioning important historical materials into the archives at Anderson University, Historical Society Vice-President Dale Stultz began the first part of a multi-stage donation of materials received by him from Thaddeus Neff (1885-1966). Neff was a lifelong Church of God missionary, who worked extensively throughout India and, later, Egypt, teaching himself Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and other local dialects during his travels. In the early 1960s, he and his wife Katrina (Burgess) Neff donated many materials to the Anderson University School of Theology Library, and many of the mint, archival copies of books published by Gospel Trumpet Company/Warner Press are from the personal library of the Neffs.



Thaddeus and Katrina Neff (courtesy AU&CHOG Archives)



Included in the recent Stultz donation of Neff materials were lists of prayer partners and supporters of the Neffs' missionary activities, correspondence from 1939-1955, minutes of various meetings conducted in Cairo and Alexandria, legal records of the Arabic Gospel Trumpet publication and Church of God congregations established in Egypt and several bound notebooks. Of particular interest is a bound volume titled “India’s Religions, India Manual, and Poems.” It consists of multiple folios of inconsistent dimensions, clearly originally from various notebooks bound together. Some pages contain cut-and-paste articles Neff had published in G.T. and elsewhere, but most are handwritten observations of religious, cultural, and medical practices in Bengal, Burma, Tibet and elsewhere, amounting to a missionary manual created by a knowledgeable and witty firsthand observer. Primary source documentation of this kind proves invaluable to researchers across a wide range of disciplines, and the archives is extremely gratified to be able to provide access to them.

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Awful Disease Healed by Prayer; Dreaded Cancer; Faith Only Hope

'I Had Been Dead; Crowd Fills Room; E. E. Byrum There; Brot Back to Life

Strange Abscess Formed in Boy; Body Doubled; Unable to Walk

CASE OF TUBERCULOSIS; HEMORRHAGES STARTED; BLOOD CAME WITH COUGH; TRIED FIVE PHYSICIANS

AUNT BEGGED TO SUBMIT CASE TO THE LORD—REFUSED UNTIL ALMOST TOO LATE—BYRUM CALLED IN TO PRAY—MARVELOUS CHANGE TAKES PLACE—NATURE TAKES HOLD—BODY RESULT—SYSTEM ENTIRELY CLEANS—PHYSICIANS SAID A YEAR REQUIRED—AFTER ANOINTING TWO WEEKS FOUND PERFECT RESTORATION—EASY AND QUICK RESULTS

POISONED BY POISON-OAK; FACE AND NECK SOLID SORE; SUFFERING INTENSE, BUT NO MEDICINE FOR ME

Another Time Nervous Chills—Then Heart Trouble—Smothering Spells—Couldn't Lie Down—Sat All Night in Chair—Hands Cold and Clammy—Family Sent for Doctor—Could Give No Hope

Hurt in Wreck; Machine Ran Off; Hip Fractured

Decay of Brain From Hard Work and Intense Heat

SWALLOWED BROKEN GLASS; FINGER THROUGH COGS; CUT OFF, HEALED AGAIN—DYING CHILD REVIVES

In this issue: E. E. Byrum remembered, book reviews galore