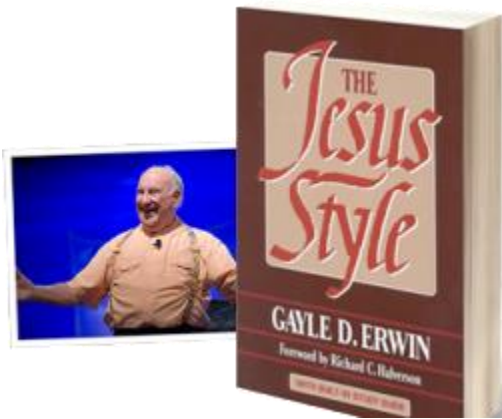


Gayle Erwin On the CC Split

BY MICHAEL NEWNHAM · JANUARY 3, 2017



Calvary vs. Calvary

I was there when Chuck Smith appointed the group of men now called CCA (Calvary Chapel Associates). I listened for a job description and/or passing of specific authority and none came. Some of the CCA members asked me what they should do. When I asked them what instructions Chuck gave, the reply was “none.” Then I said “Don’t do anything.”

Since the “Jesus Movement” revival that gave us Calvary Chapel (or maybe vice-versa) was so obviously a move of the Holy Spirit way beyond our best thinking, it would seem obvious that we should wait and pray to see what the Holy Spirit would do next and how we can cooperate.

If the news that came to me was accurate, the earliest “decisions” of CCA were to simply be there to build relationships so as to assist and counsel any pastors or other workers who chose to consult them. Further, they would not be a disciplinary group. If that was true, I thought it was brilliant. It gave me hope that we might truly be listening to God and taking our hands off the church.

One part of their decision fell apart when a major disciplinary action was taken against a person who, in his own way, was trying to take us “back” to historic (what a word to use for a 50-year-old movement!) positions and actions. He was ejected from this “non- organization, non-denomination”, because of his active desire to return to the past (as he defined it) and not because of personal misbehavior. So, part of the original design that CCA decided on fell by the wayside.

It is important to note that Calvary Chapel local churches are sovereign. They are not ruled from the outside. The minimum structure we had came from love and respect for Chuck Smith, not from organizational commands or directives. We were described, in print, by Chuck as “Co-operative Fellowships,” the same words, by the way, the Assemblies of God denomination used in their original formation in 1914 to avoid their deepest fear that they might become a denomination.

So, the earliest CCA decision, after losing the non-disciplinary stance, had one stance left, “Relationships!” I have long stated that the best thing going for Calvary Chapels was their regional pastor-worker gatherings that were wonderful for developing friendships and connections. Unnoticed

by those who attempt to “organize” us is that not one of those regional gatherings was organized by Costa Mesa Calvary. They were founded out of the heart of those who desired fellowship and inspiration in their area. Not all have survived, but that is fodder for another conversation. From recent observed actions, it appears that attempts are being made by CCA to develop an authority structure and organize Calvaries beyond Costa Mesa rather than focus on relationships.

A personal observation: There is actually a group that is doing what CCA originally approached. This is an “unofficial” (How can there be anything official among sovereign churches?) group dedicated to genuine servanthood and care for what God has been doing. They call themselves “Poimen,” based on the Ephesian Epistle statement that we are God’s workmanship or Poime (Poimen means “pastor” in Latin). They have worked in the purest servant-hearted, others-centered way as they serve churches that are struggling for whatever reason and who need outside wisdom and action. They just simply serve and make no attempt to bring people under their authority. They are fruitful and have my admiration.

Now for the other side of the coin. Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa is the “mother church” around which we have gathered through the years. I don’t recall Chuck ever truly designating his “replacement.” That would be left to the “sovereign” church he founded. Chuck told me that he never wanted to build a monster facility that would, in his words, become a mausoleum as he felt Angelus Temple of his former denomination had become.

Chuck Smith was a true builder who went beyond the local church to build conference centers and camp facilities in the USA and in Europe and South America. He could do that because of people with willing hearts to work and serve in these facilities and the amazing flow of funds from appreciative people of means whose lives were, in some way, changed for the better in the Jesus Movement. Since the intensity of The Jesus Movement has waned, the upkeep of those facilities, all of them “world-class”, becomes a burden to be solved. The problem is that Calvary Costa Mesa owns all of those facilities as well as certain licensing rights. How will they support them? How will they share them? It remains to be seen. Now, Calvary Costa Mesa is simply another “SOVEREIGN” church led by a pastor they chose who has the right to lead them in any way he feels most desired and trained-for by the founder he replaced.

This is all-the-more-reason to simply step back, focus on Jesus and the Word, pray, serve and wait on The Holy Spirit. May we lay aside all attempts to develop our rank and gather authority and seek ways to serve each other.

As for me, I don’t think there is a “side” to be had in this most-unfortunate controversy. I still think we should cease and desist all struggles and wait on the Lord and pray for each other.

In a book I have read called THE JESUS STYLE, there is one small sub-chapter called “Prisoners of History.”

It is prophetic.

Gayle Erwin

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