



STATEMENT DC690

TWO BY TWOS

(Also known as: Go-Preachers, The Jesus Way, Cooneyites, and Christian Convention)

Research for this report has come from CRI's files, the Spiritual Counterfeits Project in Berkeley, from J. Gordon Melton's *Encyclopedia of American Religions, Heresies Exposed* by W. C. Irvine, from limited contact with members of the movement itself, and from generous contributions and correspondence from Mrs. Mary Schoeff of Cheney, Washington.

Because these people do not publish any material on their collective beliefs, and because the movement is a loosely-knit group of semi-autonomous house churches with no real central headquarters and whose ministers are traveling preachers, it is difficult to establish absolutely authoritative information on this group. The only way one can ascertain their beliefs is to study carefully their personal correspondence and meeting notes, attend numerous meetings, and personally interview its ministers and adherents. Even then doctrinal analysis is hindered by the group's significant lack of preaching on and interest in doctrine, which may cause some variation in beliefs within the group itself.

BRIEF HISTORY

William Irvine, a Scotsman and a member of the Faith Mission movement, a non-sectarian, evangelical ministry to rural areas (founded by J. G. Govan in 1886), went to Ireland as an outreach preacher for the Mission. Sometime between 1897-1900, he broke ties with the Faith Mission over their lack of total renunciation of possessions and began his own ministry in a town called Nenagh, in Tipperary county. There he was subsequently joined by a vibrant, fiery man by the name of Edward Cooney who threw his lot in with Irvine, as did a number of others, thereby acquiring the nickname "Tramp Preachers," because they gave up all their wealth and belongings to go preach "the gospel." They also earned the name "Go-Preachers" because they would go out "two by two" (hence the name by which they are called at the head of this report) without money and tramp from place to place. They claimed that this was in direct obedience to the word of Christ to His disciples in Matthew 10:7-10 — "As ye go, preach" (hence, "Go-Preachers"). Later, both Cooney and Irvine were put out of the movement by succeeding leadership, although Cooney's name stuck to the ministry. The movement grew rapidly and began to spread worldwide, reaching the United States around 1903 and Hawaii by 1923. Today the group has ministers and/or adherents in most countries of the world, including Iron Curtain countries.

Because there is so little structural organization to the group and it is averse to providing statistics, it is difficult to calculate the number of current adherents. However, based upon the available data on the number of conventions and convention attendance and the number of ministers, it is possible to speculate that there are 100,000 to 450,000 in the United States alone and 600,000 worldwide.

PRESENT ORGANIZATION

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This church, which claims no official name, is a loosely held together "episcopal" type of organization with the country divided into regions, usually by state, with an "elder bishop" known as a headworker overseeing the region. This region is then broken into separate "fields" to which a pair of ministers, or workers, is assigned annually. Each field is then broken down into house churches, each having up to 35 members, presided over by a "bishop: or "elder." The work of the ministry is carried out by teams of two men or two women who travel from place to place in their field, preaching and teaching, wholly supported by the private contributions of the "professing saints." No public offerings are ever taken. It is unclear what sort of arrangement holds the head bishops together but the ministers do have meetings at the time of the annual conventions and whenever problems necessitate. The headworkers make the final decisions with the concurrence of the other ministers.

CHARACTERISTIC TEACHINGS

Before dealing specifically with the "Go-Preachers" doctrine of Christ and their concept of salvation, it might be valuable to get a perspective on some of their other teachings.

The Cooneyites are extremely exclusive. They believe that they alone are the true disciples of Christ and that they alone are those who truly walk "The True Jesus Way." They boldly state that there are no true servants of Christ in any other church and that they are all false prophets, and that the only way to become a Christian is to attend their Gospel Meetings, hear one of their ministers preach, and make one's choice to "walk in the Jesus Way." This is tied up with their belief that the only real way to spread the gospel is by word of mouth of a preacher (Romans 10:14). They believe the King James Version of the Bible is the word of God, but only their ministers can make the Word of God come alive. One can only be saved by hearing their gospel through a Cooneyite preacher. The gospel they preach is that God established a way of salvation and it is only through the homeless, penniless ministry and the meeting in the home.

They are extremely ascetic (particularly the traveling ministers, who set the example for everyone else to follow), claiming that the "True Jesus Way" dictates that they leave all material possessions and reject the things of the world. Dress is very conservative and jewelry and makeup are frowned upon.

They gather every Sunday for Fellowship Meetings in the homes of their elders and there they "break bread." In addition, they attend midweek Bible Studies and the frequent Gospel Meetings which are their evangelistic outreach. Four-day long conventions are held annually, as well as midyear Special Meetings which gather together the numerous house churches in an area. They expect strict attendance by all at these meetings.

Besides the professing saints in the house churches, there are those who go about two by two preaching their doctrine. These are the main force of the ministry. According to their beliefs, to truly be a "Jesus Way" minister one must be unpaid (taking no salary), having given up all, travel two by two, and remain unmarried (based upon Matthew 8:20 -- "The foxes have holes...but the Son of Man hath no where to lay His head").

CHRISTOLOGY

Although at first glance this movement may appear to be biblical, serious questions are raised when we look at their view of the nature of Christ. Their stress on Jesus being a man who overcame His own sinful nature, references to His being "other than" and not one in essence with the Father, comments that He was "the perfect expression of God" and without any statements that He is truly God creates, if not a doubtful, at least a rather hazy picture of the Savior. They see Jesus as living again through them and that they are the "Word made flesh" in our day. Jesus is continually referred to as "the example of the life we are to live" rather than our substitute.

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SALVATION

There seems to be a tremendous lack in Two by Two preaching in the area of the atoning work of Christ. There is very little reference at all (if any) to the shed blood of Christ as grounds for salvation and there appear to be assertions that Jesus' work is not complete. They claim that they are finishing what Jesus began to do (from Acts 1:1 - "of all that Jesus began to do and teach..."). With their emphasis on "turning from the wrong way" and "following the Jesus Way," implying strict adherence to Cooneyite doctrine, they have added a not insignificant "works clause" to God's plan of salvation. Their claim that there can be no new birth without human agency, which means, in their opinion, a Two by Two preacher, certainly calls into question their understanding of salvation wholly of grace. In addition, they have been noted to mock openly the emphasis of other Christian churches concerning the blood of Christ and the focus of such churches on His death and resurrection rather than His ministerial life.

CONCLUSION

Paul said, "I have determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). Paul believed that what was essential for salvation was meeting the Lord who died for our sins. With their emphasis on the manner of the walk, their neglect of the atoning work of Jesus, their very shaky stand on the nature of Christ, their exclusiveness, and the focus on a life-style rather than a living Lord, leads us to conclude that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for someone to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through this ministry. From what we have learned so far, the Two by Two ministry is not only a much to be avoided legalistic trap, it is also a heretical cult "denying even the Lord that bought them" (see 2 Pet. 2:1).

The information in this report is as accurate as the limited resources for documenting the beliefs of the Two-by-Twos make possible. For further information on this movement, we recommend the book *The Secret Sect* by Doug and Helen Parker. This book may be ordered from the Parkers at P.O. Box 68, Pendle Hill, 2145, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA, or from Religion Analysis Service, 4724 42nd Ave. N, Robbinsdale, MN 55422.