

BRIEF OBSERVATIONS ON BROTHER HAILE'S OBJECTIONS TO FLORIDA COLLEGE

[Tim Haile's Response](#)

Ron Halbbrook

Recently brother Tim Haile wrote an article objecting to Florida College's announcement that the school chorus will sing some spiritual songs. The article is entitled "Some Reflections on the 2011 Florida College Chorus Tour." I will offer brief observations on his objections.

In the interest of "full disclosure," let me explain that brother Tim Haile is a longtime friend of mine. We do not always agree but we continue to respect each other. I am a Florida College graduate, but have expressed disagreement with the college at times. I taught for six years at Athens Bible School in Athens, AL. I understand that brethren conducting such schools are not perfect and will make mistakes at times. Service organizations can be properly utilized without being idolized. Therefore, the reader should not consider these observations as a blanket endorsement of everything said or done by service organizations, or as a blanket condemnation of brother Haile. The reader can consider Tim's objections and my observations without expecting me to engage in a long hassle or harangue back and forth with my friend.

I began to know about Florida College in the late 1950's because I grew up within about 200 miles of Temple Terrace, FL where it is located. As part of its curricula in teaching music, F.C. has *always* included instruction in both secular and spiritual songs. Athens Bible School has provided such instruction. Just as we can sing spiritual songs together in family gatherings and other gatherings of brethren outside the worship of the church, a school can do the same. The school chorus is not like a church choir which attempts to offer worship on behalf of the congregation. A school chorus simply learns music as part of the school's teaching program, and a presentation by the chorus simply illustrates or exhibits the results of this teaching program. The school chorus does not offer worship on behalf of any church. If the

school chorus would perform as part of the worship of a local church, faithful saints throughout the U.S. including myself would rise up in a mighty protest.

A school teaching the Bible does not violate God's plan for the work of the local churches, because the school does not function as the agency of churches but purely as the instrument of individuals. The school teaching Bible classes or giving a Bible reading in the chorus presentation is not like a missionary society which attempts to function on behalf of local churches. If the school would request and receive donations from churches in order to function as the agency of the churches, faithful saints throughout the U.S. including myself would rise up in a mighty protest.

Schools conducted by brethren are service organizations supplying the needs of individuals seeking an education and of families seeking an education for their children. Individuals and families thus provide funds either to purchase educational services or as donations to sponsor educational services. It is right for the school to offer prospective students, interested families, and potential donors opportunities to see the school in action and to assess the quality of its educational work. That is why a school such as Florida College invites people to attend Bible lectures, classes during the school session, and presentations by the chorus.

We do not expect people to buy "a pig in a poke" (meat in a bag which was not examined first). Why would we expect people to attend a school, send their children, or donate funds when they have no means to assess the quality of the school's work? People who go to lectureships and chorus programs can make their own assessment of the quality of the school's educational activities and then decide whether they wish to attend the school, or send their children to the school, or donate to the school. To sell books containing the lectures and to sell recordings of lectures, classes, or the chorus singing disseminates the information on a wider scale. This promotes the school by advertising the quality of its services. This is not sinister but is what a service organization ought to do in the interest of integrity and

transparency.

Men who operate such a school on an honest economic basis are not guilty of crass commercialism (seeking base gain by misrepresenting products and exploiting people). To operate as a service institution the school must charge for services and generate income, which is honorable rather than crass or exploitative. The Christians I have known through the years who have had a part in conducting various service organizations as board members and employees generally make financial sacrifices by participating rather than enriching themselves.

Unless the custom has changed in recent years, the audience at F.C. chorus programs is instructed to reserve applause for the chorus until it sings secular songs, not when it sings spiritual songs, so as to avoid the appearance of entertainment in connection with spiritual songs. The audience should observe and reflect in respectful silence when the chorus sings spiritual songs, recognizing that those songs are not sung to provide proxy worship or to entertain. Listening to recorded classes, lessons, or songs is neither proxy worship nor entertainment but provides opportunities for respectful reflection. A business or service organization has every right to sell Bibles, books, and recorded materials without being accused of denigrating the gospel, the church, or worship.

In short, individuals who sing, pray, and study the Bible together do not compete with the local church, do not denigrate the local church, do not profane the local church, and do not violate the organization or mission of the local church. In fact, it would be healthy if Bible reading and prayer were restored to all schools in our land. Such practices were never a threat to the function of local churches.

That being said, no school, business, or service organization run by brethren is sacrosanct or above criticism. All of us are subject to err as humans in such activities and we should not be offended by valid warnings. While not indispensable, these institutions are useful in limited and temporary ways, just as electricity is not indispensable for

life but is useful if properly utilized. Those who choose to utilize them should not idolize them. Those who choose not to participate in their services or activities should not be unduly critical of them.

If someone wants to go deeper in considering passages which discuss these principles pro and con, I offer three suggestions. 1. I will forward upon request my article "Let the Church Be the Church." 2. An excellent debate covering this ground was the *Humble-Garrett Debate*. Bill Humble affirmed and Leroy Garrett denied that the organization by Christians of schools such as Florida College "is in harmony with the New Testament." They reversed their roles to discuss the proposition that organizing such schools "is not in harmony with the New Testament." This book has been reprinted. 3. Additional material is available in Daniel King and Mike Willis, *We Have A Right: Studies in Religious Collectivities with a Compendium of Articles for Further Study, Revised Edition With a Response to We Have A Right, Answered by Gene Frost*. The books by Frost and by King and Willis offer a thorough exchange of views.

In Christian love,
Ron Halbrook