

**“Reconciling Clashing Ecumenical Visions:
The Church of God (Anderson) and the Free Methodist Church.”**

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The concern of this proposed paper is reconciliation and the arena is the early combative and now the more recent fraternal relationships between two American-born holiness bodies with very different ecumenical visions.

In the 1880-1910 period, any holiness denomination like the Free Methodist Church that understood itself to be validly in the historical stream of orthodox Christianity at its best would obviously clash with a reform (even “restorationist”) movement like the Church of God (Anderson) that claimed that no “denomination” could possibly be a contemporary representation of the church God intends—the pure and undivided New Testament Church that stands above the chaos of denominationalism.

The proposed paper will trace this friction-filled and rhetoric-laden relationship of a century ago, document the considerable change in the relationship that now exists, and seek to trace and account for the significant transition. In part, the transition involves the power of a vigorous vision up against the institutionalized power of a “connectional” body, with the vision of the Church of God increasingly having to deal with its own institutionalization. A concluding statement would contain this:

Both of these holiness bodies now are seeking a better balance between *form* and *freedom* in the life of the church. The Free Methodist Church carries an episcopal heritage and seeks increased flexibility in the midst of structured accountability; the Church of God carries a free-church heritage and seeks more structured accountability without violating the treasured freedom in the Spirit of Christ.

A conclusion for the paper would focus around the question of what this experience of competing ecumenical visions has to contribute to the current quest for Christian unity by Christian bodies worldwide.

Sincerely,