

Three Sects Founded by Wm. Irvine

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Comparison

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Three Sects/Groups Originally Founded by William Irvine What They Believe How the Two by Twos Differ From Orthodox Christian Beliefs

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- (1) The Two by Two Church/Sect of followers called Friends and Workers
- (2) The William Irvine Omega Message followers
- (3) The Edward Cooney followers

GROUP NAMES and COMMON MONIKERS

- (1) The Two by Two Sect (aka *the truth, the fold, the way*)
- (2) The William Irvine followers (aka *Irvinites*)
- (3) The Edward Cooney followers (aka *Cooneyites*)

NOTE: None of the three groups has an official name recognized by laity, although they are known informally by many monikers both by outsiders and among themselves. At times, the Two by Two Sect has registered with governments by various names to satisfy official requirements. The above monikers are respectfully used for identification purposes in this book.

1. STARTING POINT.

Two by Twos: In 1897, the Two by Two Sect was started in Ireland by William.

Irvinites: Beginning in 1918, Irvine began claiming that he received a new revelation; his senior workers refused to go along with it. Irvine left along with some loyal followers.

Cooneyites: In 1928, Edward Cooney was excommunicated. Many loyal to him detached themselves from the Two by Two Sect or were disfellowshipped.

CHARACTERISTICS

2. INFORMAL NAMES MEMBERS USE AMONG THEMSELVES.

Two by Twos: Call themselves: *The Friends, Saints, Children of God, Kingdom of God, Family of God, Two by Twos* , etc.

Irvinites: Call themselves: *Message People, Little Ones, and The Witnesses*. Informally refer to their group as the *Omega Message*.

Cooneyites: Brothers and Sisters

3. CLERGY – MINISTERS.

Two by Twos: Ministers have no formal religious training, education, and no knowledge of original Bible languages. Believe Jesus intended all preachers for all time to follow His instructions to His disciples in Matt. 10:5-14, Mark 6 and Luke 9. Workers are to be celibate, have no settled homes, travel in same-sex pairs (two by two), hold gospel missions and oversee the flock. They live as guests of those willing to host them. They are not to ask for contributions or accept any salary, taking literally Jesus' command: "freely give as you have freely received" (Matt. 10:8 KJV).

Irvinites: Preachers of the gospel ceased in 1914, and subsequently have employed no clergy, leaders, preachers, workers, or member hierarchy. All followers are responsible for witnessing to others.

Cooneyites: Following the deaths of Ed Cooney and Fred Wood, they have sanctioned no missionaries, workers, or gospel meetings. Their ministry is by the laity in contact with outsiders.

4. SIN.

Two by Twos: Sin is possible after the age of accountability, usually around twelve or 13 yrs of age. Transgression is a sin of presumption, or deliberately sinning. Disobedience to the Workers' dictates or interpretations of Scripture is sin. Sinners are (1) all those not walking in the Two by Two Sect; and (2) those in the Two by Two Sect who are being disobedient. There is a dispute in the Sect as to whether remarriage after divorce is an unforgivable sin.

Irvinites: The unforgivable sin is not accepting William Irvine as God's prophet. Sin is human nature, including all thoughts, feelings. If a person "has an honest heart" (believes in William Irvine), God will forgive everything, including murder; the exception being

wickedness; e.g. gossip, judging, despising or accusing others of sin, participation in church activities, religious rituals.

Cooneyites: Sin is disobedience to the Holy Spirit, who convicts believers of sin.

5. CHURCHES.

Two by Twos: Contend they have no headquarters, are not an organization or denomination; are not incorporated or tax-exempt. Assemble on on Sunday, first day of the week, which is a day of rest when most cease working. All other churches, sects, and denominations, including the Irvinites and Cooneyites, have been deceived; consequently, all their adherents will suffer in a lost eternity.

Irvinites: Contend there is no God in church buildings, nor in the people who go to buildings to worship God, or in their priest, ministers etc. View the Two by Twos as no different than Catholics, Protestants, or even Satanists. They have all been lied to by people who wanted place and power.

Cooneyites: Meet in members' homes.

6. CHURCH ASSEMBLY SITES.

Two by Twos: Congregation meets only in homes for fellowship meetings. No restrictions on sites used for gospel or special meeting services.

Irvinites: Do not assemble together for regular meetings; infrequently socialize with each other in small groups. Home ties and fellowship are of little value. Irvine discouraged "bunching up."

Cooneyites: Meet only in fellow-worshipper's homes.

7. WORSHIP SERVICES.

Two by Twos: Two principal types: (1) Participatory worship by members in Sunday and mid-week fellowship meetings using primarily King James Bible. (2) Episodic series of gospel meetings conducted by their evangelists for recruiting.

Irvinites: Hold no meetings, Bible studies or conventions. Any structured service is considered wicked. Irvine recommended using the King James Version.

Cooneyites: Sunday morning with communion and mid-week meetings. All may participate and have freedom to use any Bible translation.

8. PRINTED LITERATURE AND HYMNAL.

Two by Two : Use their own compilation: *Hymns Old and New*, 1987 Edition, published by R. L. Allan & Son, England.

Irvinites: No published hymnal or belief statement. Religious hymns are considered wicked trappings of corrupt churches. Irvine's letters about his Omega Message have been copied and handed down through the years. There is no central bank of letters, and no follower has all of his letters; everyone keeps their own collection and rereads them.

Cooneyites : Use *Hymns Old and New* , 1951 Edition

9. ORDINANCES.

Two by Twos: Observe ordinances of communion on Sunday. Baptism is by complete immersion; oppose infant baptism and sprinkling.

Irvinites: Baptism, communion, funerals are not observed.

Cooneyites: Same as Two by Twos.

10. PRAYER.

Two by Twos: Address their prayers to the Father, in Jesus' Name, asking for His spiritual aid and forgiveness; rarely ask for material, natural items. Recommend prayer be made privately twice daily, and to pray audibly in meetings and before meals.

Irvinites: Do not pray. They talk to God about anything and anyone.

Cooneyites: Same as Two by Twos. Private prayer is more important and should be as often as need is felt.

11. PROFESSIONS OR CONVERSION.

Two by Twos: Public profession in a gospel meeting is generally required to become a member. Previous baptisms are not recognized, and a convert must be baptized or re-baptized into the Two by Two Sect.

Irvinites: Converted when a person believes in their heart that William Irvine is the prophet of God for the latter days. No other acknowledgment is required.

Cooneyites: Each person's journey is individual. Baptism is a symbol of dying to the past life and being raised to a new life in Christ—not into a sect.

12. AFTERLIFE, HEAVEN AND HELL.

Two by Twos: Believe all people receive either eternal life in heaven or eternal punishment in hell, depending upon their beliefs and lifestyle while on earth.

Irvinites: Since 1914, believe everyone either receives eternal life in heaven or eternal punishment in hell, depending upon whether they believe in and submit to William Irvine's teachings.

Cooneyites: Accepting progressive revelation, many have come to see that hell is the second death and is aionion and remedial, rather than eternal and pointless. Christ will reign on earth during the millennium and until then there will be neither resurrection nor judgment.

POLICIES and PROCEDURES.

13. TABOOS.

Two by Twos: Some rules and taboos or expectations vary according to locality. The following unwritten taboos are generally recognized across the entire group as being unacceptable: televisions, movies, stereos, smoking, drinking, illegal drug use, swearing, gambling, dancing, reading Christian books/literature, current fads and fashions, and long hair for men. For women, no short hair, make-up, slacks, shorts or jewelry (except for wedding rings, brooches and watches).

Irvinites: None. All dress and behavior is of no consequence to God. They use the rule of moderation—nothing excessive. No rules regarding smoking, alcoholic beverages, dancing, movies, TV. No outward appearance customs for women. William Irvine smoked a pipe.

Cooneyites: All should be in the world but not of the world. Follow the rules of moderation, modesty, and morality. The Holy Spirit gradually reveals taboos to each individual.

14. HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS.

Two by Twos: Customs vary. Observe usual national and secular holidays, including Halloween and Thanksgiving. Easter and Christmas are not celebrated religiously.

Irvinites: Usual holidays observed except for Easter and Christmas.

Cooneyites: Christmas and Easter are heathen festivals and not celebrated religiously

15. EDUCATION.

Two by Twos: In general, they do not now discourage higher education, but did so in the past. Any profession that restricts the ability to rest on Sundays or regularly attend meetings is frowned upon as less than ideal.

Irvinites: Higher education is not encouraged, as "the more people are educated and exalted, the further from the possibility of hearing the Voice of the Lord God by The Man whom He sends" (Irvine to Hooes, Nov. 24, 1927, *TTT*).

Cooneyites: Freedom for parent to decide.

16. CONVENTIONS.

Two by Twos: Held annually in most countries for four days, three meetings per day. Size in the U.S. ranges from approximately 300 to 1,200 attendees. Members are strongly urged to attend one complete convention per year. Convention property is usually owned by members. Buildings used for the convention are constructed with funds controlled by the Overseers and/or donated by members. All-day Special meetings held semi-annually in most areas.

Irvinites: None (see Services above)

Cooneyites: None

17. MILITARY SERVICE.

Two by Twos: Pacifists. Approved method of serving in the armed services is in Conscientious Objector capacity, refusing to bear arms, taking literally the commandment "Thou shalt not kill."

Irvinites: Serving in the military to defend your country when necessary is the duty of a citizen.

Cooneyites: Same as Two by Twos.

18. MARRIAGE.

Two by Twos: Marriage is the second-best choice in spending one's life; the best choice is to become a Worker. Members are expected to intermarry. Workers do not perform ceremonies. Home weddings are common. Some elders perform marriages.

Irvinites: Families, eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage is all vanity and dust.. Marriage is of no consequence to God; it is a civil contract, a human issue. Parties have free choice but should only intermarry with another Irvinite.

Cooneyites: A civil ceremony performed by a registrar.

19. DIVORCE and REMARRIAGE.

Two by Twos: Discourage divorce but accept it. After a spouse dies, remarriage to a fellow member is acceptable. In some areas, remarriage after divorce is considered an unforgivable sin, and privileges permitted to those divorced and remarried vary depending on the Overseer in charge. Workers are not in agreement on this subject.

Irvinites: Considered to be "of the flesh" and of no consequence to God.

Cooneyites: They should not remarry while ex-spouse is alive; are not barred from fellowship

20. CHILDREN.

Two by Twos: God does not hold children accountable for their actions until after they reach the age of accountability, usually around twelve or thirteen years of age.

Irvinites: Children are in the covenant of either blessing or cursing with their parents till they become of age to choose for or against. Irvine strongly warned against having children, due to "woe to those who give suck in the last days."

Cooneyites: Bring up a child in the way he should go. At the age of majority he is responsible for his actions.

21. WOMEN.

Two by Twos: Have an equal part in worship services. Wives to be submissive to their husbands. Preferred that wives stay at home and be full-time homemakers. Women preachers are subordinate to the male preachers.

Irvinites: Irvine took a dim view of women preachers or leaders. "No woman can be an Apostle in going forth as He sent His chosen disciples to be, then, now and forever. They who were Apostles forsook houses, father, mother, brother, sister, wife and children and lands, which were necessary for the generation of the world" (to Edwards, May 18, 1944, *TTT*).

Cooneyites: Women have freedom to pray or prophesy in meetings. Wives should defer to their husbands.

22. DEATH – BURIAL.

Two by Twos: Funeral services officiated by Workers; usually held in funeral homes with interment. Attendance tends to be large with fellow members having only a passing acquaintance with the deceased showing up in support of officiating Workers and family.

Irvinites: Casket lowered into the ground without ceremony or preachers. Cremation and burial acceptable.

Cooneyites: Officiated by brothers. Held in homes or funeral parlors. Mostly interment.

GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZATION .**23. HEADQUARTERS.**

Two by Twos: Contends the group has no headquarters; is not an organization, religion or a denomination, is not incorporated, and is not tax-exempt.

Irvinites: None. Not affiliated with any group, church or organized religion. Against all organized religion. Members keep in contact with other followers through letters and visits. Followers are scattered across the world, with most located in U.S. West Coast.

Cooneyites : Same as Two by Twos.

24. NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS.

Two by Twos: No records of membership available. Member estimates range between 300,000 and 4 million (Wikipedia) in 2018.

Irvinites: No member list. Estimate for the year 2018 is less than 150 worldwide.

Cooneyites: No record. Not followers of Ed Cooney, but of Jesus Christ.

25. OUTREACH OR EVANGELISM.

Two by Twos: Established in majority of countries worldwide.

Irvinites: No organized collective outreach; do not go door-to-door. Witness to others as opportunity arises and "bring along" interested parties. Do not publish Irvine's writings as he encouraged one-on-one recruiting

Cooneyites: Individual witness to others as opportunity arises.

26. HIERARCHY.

Two by Twos: States, provinces or regions are controlled by a male head Worker who assigns fields to Workers under his authority. Each field contains a number of home churches, where up to around thirty meet. An elder presides over each house church. Head Workers and elders are males.

Irvinites: No single leader after William Irvine died. For a time, Willie Edwards was Irvine's right-hand man in the U.S. Any attempts to become a leader are considered wicked.

Cooneyites: Elder presides over each home meeting.

27. CONTROLS.

Two by Twos: Workers have absolute authority in all matters; members have no representation and no means of recourse. Unquestioning loyalty is expected.

Irvinites: None. Everyone does what their conscience dictates. There are no leaders, preachers, workers or saints.

Cooneyites: Christ and the Holy Spirit should be in control.

28. DISCIPLINE.

Two by Twos: Implemented with talks, threats, shaming and shunning. Not unusual for communion, baptism or the offender's part in prayer and testimony to be withheld. Meeting may be removed from an offender's home. Excommunication occurs infrequently, when the overseer sees no likelihood of submission from the offending member.

Irvinites: No formal process as there is no ruling authority. Those who leave are often shunned by members and family.

Cooneyites: Discipline is by their Heavenly Father by conscience and trials. Jesus said if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault.

29. FINANCES.

Two by Twos: No public collections are taken. No accounting is made regarding donations to the ministry. Claim ministers do not use bank accounts. Members leave legacies and make free-will contributions to various ministers and Overseers, rather than collectively. Do not accept donations from non-members.

Irvinites: None. Witness Irvine's Omega Message "without money and without price." While he lived, Irvine's followers sent him money and gifts by mail.

Cooneyites: None

WHAT THEY BELIEVE

30. DOCTRINE.

Two by Twos: No doctrinal statement published; state the Bible is their doctrine.

Irvinites: Their doctrine is the Bible, as interpreted by William Irvine in his letters.

Cooneyites : Same as Two by Twos.

31. AUTHORITY.

Two by Twos: Claim they believe and follow only the teachings of the New Testament. The Workers hold the final authority to interpret the Scriptures and make decisions. Senior Workers have equal or more authority than junior Workers, with the regional Overseer exercising the final say in his region. Some Senior Overseers have influence across regional boundaries.

Irvinites: State they follow the teachings of God's prophet, William Irvine, whose word supersedes the Bible.

Cooneyites: Christ is the head.

32. GOD.

Two by Twos: There is only one God. God is the Heavenly Father, the Creator.

Irvinites: There is one God, God the Father, the Creator. The trinity is the three sides of God's personality.

Cooneyites: Same as Two by Twos.

33. JESUS.

Two by Twos: View Jesus as God's only son, who is under the authority and position of His Father who alone is God. He is not considered God the Son or to be regarded as God. Jesus was the promised Messiah, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; lived a perfect life; came to establish a ministry pattern (Matt. 10) to be followed universally for all time. He was crucified, died and rose again bodily, before ascending to Heaven. They look forward to His second coming.

Irvinites: God's only son. Believe Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; lived a perfect life, was crucified, died and rose again bodily before ascending to Heaven and look forward to His second coming after the Tribulation. Jesus is Lord of Hosts; Jehovah in the Old Testament; the God-child. Jesus came as Alpha to finish the Old Testament work, and to offer himself as the supreme sacrifice for sin. After August 5, 1914, when Jesus took the throne, salvation is only obtained through the Jesus of Revelation 1 via Irvine's teachings. Irvine is the gate to salvation.

Cooneyites: Same as Two by Twos.

34. HOLY SPIRIT.

Two by Twos: God's Spirit. A force or power emanating from God or from Jesus to a child of God. It is often perceived as an emotional feeling or attitude. The Spirit comes and goes. Not considered a part of the trinity.

Irvinites: Believe the Holy Spirit is the mother side of the trinity; the one that leads, guides, teaches, nurtures and protects.

Cooneyites: He is the Spirit of Truth sent by Jesus to teach and guide his followers and give them His power.

35. SATAN.

Two by Twos: A fallen angel engaged in an age-long struggle to deceive and seduce men to follow him rather than obey God. He is evil, a deceiver, a murderer, a liar. They fear his power to deceive.

Irvinites: A fallen angel engaged in an age-long struggle to deceive and seduce men to follow him rather than obey God. He will play a big part in the last days.

Cooneyites: A deceiver, murderer and liar from the beginning and is the Prince of this world.

36. SALVATION.

Two by Twos: Salvation can only be obtained by hearing the Workers preach the gospel, accepting Jesus (professing) through one of their Workers, following their particular belief system that meets in homes and continuing faithfully in it until death. They believe they

earn salvation by their good works. They will only know after death if they are saved. Faith is proved by one's adherence to the Workers' interpretation of the Bible and their traditions.

Irvinites: No one is saved now, not even William Irvine or the Apostles. Only the people who accept and follow His Omega Message are God's people. Irvine's litmus test for salvation: "And men, good, bad or indifferent or perfect are to be Judged by their attitude to my reading of Revelation" (to Baessler, April 18, 1928, *TTT*).

Cooneyites: God's salvation is the Christ within, giving daily victory over sin.

37. GRACE.

Two by Twos: "Grace" is a thankful prayer before meals. The relationship of grace to salvation is not emphasized in the manner of evangelical Christian churches . Grace is viewed as the unmerited favor of God; God's graciousness, compassion and merciful empowerment. Grace is what God gives us that we don't deserve; while mercy is God *not* giving us what we do deserve. His grace enables us to do His will through the end of our lives . Saving grace comes through works.

Irvinites: God's favor. The grace and mercy God shows us should be seen, heard, and felt by all we come in contact with. Cannot have the grace of God without showing grace to others.

Cooneyites: Grace is God's unmerited favour. It cannot be earned. It is His sovereign choice, given in Jesus Christ. By grace we are given the faith that enables us believe in Jesus

38. REWARDS.

Two by Twos: Good works earn rewards and salvation. Rewards and salvation are not differentiated.

Irvinites: According to Irvine, "It don't matter whether people are unjust, filthy, righteous or holy. Their reward depends on their attitude to His man and message of Revelation. They will either be for or against him and their reward according to" (Hooes, Sept. 27, 1935, *TTT*).

Cooneyites: Good works are acts of obedience to the Holy Spirit. They follow salvation. Rewards are at the resurrection for being good and faithful servants of the Master.

39. HEALING, MIRACLES, SPEAKING IN TONGUES, CASTING OUT DEMONS.

Two by Twos: Viewed as divine signs occurring only in the first-century to confirm and convince. "Speaking in tongues" means speaking in foreign languages.

Irvinites: Viewed as works of Satan to deceive and lead people astray from God.

Cooneyites: Same as Two by Twos.

NOTE: Entries for Cooneyites provided by Mary (Wood) Rogers, daughter of Fred Wood, Ed Cooney's right hand man.

HOW THE Two by Two BELIEFS DIFFER FROM ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS.

In What Most Believe:

That Their Fellowship:

is a direct historical continuation of the New Testament church

is "from the beginning"

is God's ONLY true way; therefore, all other Christian churches, preachers and denominations are "false."

That Salvation:

comes through faith in Jesus and works

is earned or merited through faithfulness and righteousness

is determined at death

is not possible without being in their fellowship

is conditional upon works and not secure

sanctification comes before justification

That Jesus:

came to be a perfect example, pattern minister or way-shower

life is equal or more important than His death

created a way to Heaven through His death; and a way on earth by his life-which is their method, the Two by Two Sect.

That Their Ministers:

are God's only true ministers

one must go through them (mediators) to be saved

are the supreme authorities of Biblical interpretation
have authority and rule over members
viewpoints are as authoritative as the Bible
traditions are equal in importance to God's commands

In What Most Do NOT Believe:

in the Triune God
in the deity of Jesus (that Jesus is God the Son)
in the deity of the Holy Spirit (God the Holy Spirit)
the Holy Spirit permanently indwells every believer
in the finished work of Christ
that Jesus came to be our substitute in His life and death
that man is born in sin
in eternal security
in the priesthood of all believers
conversion can take place through the written Word without human agency
one can know they are saved in this lifetime
salvation can be attained without going through their ministers
in total reliance upon Jesus' shed blood for salvation
that salvation is an unconditionally free gift of God
in salvation solely by grace through faith in Jesus, and not of works

Compiled by Cherie Kropp-Ehrig