

# The Pioneer of the Middle Way

## J.C. O'Hair and the Birth of the Mid-Acts Movement

A historical reconstruction of the 1920s Grace Reformation. Standing between the traditions of Fundamentalism and the extremes of Bullingerism, J.C. O'Hair carved out a theological identity that would become the Grace Movement.

### The Man

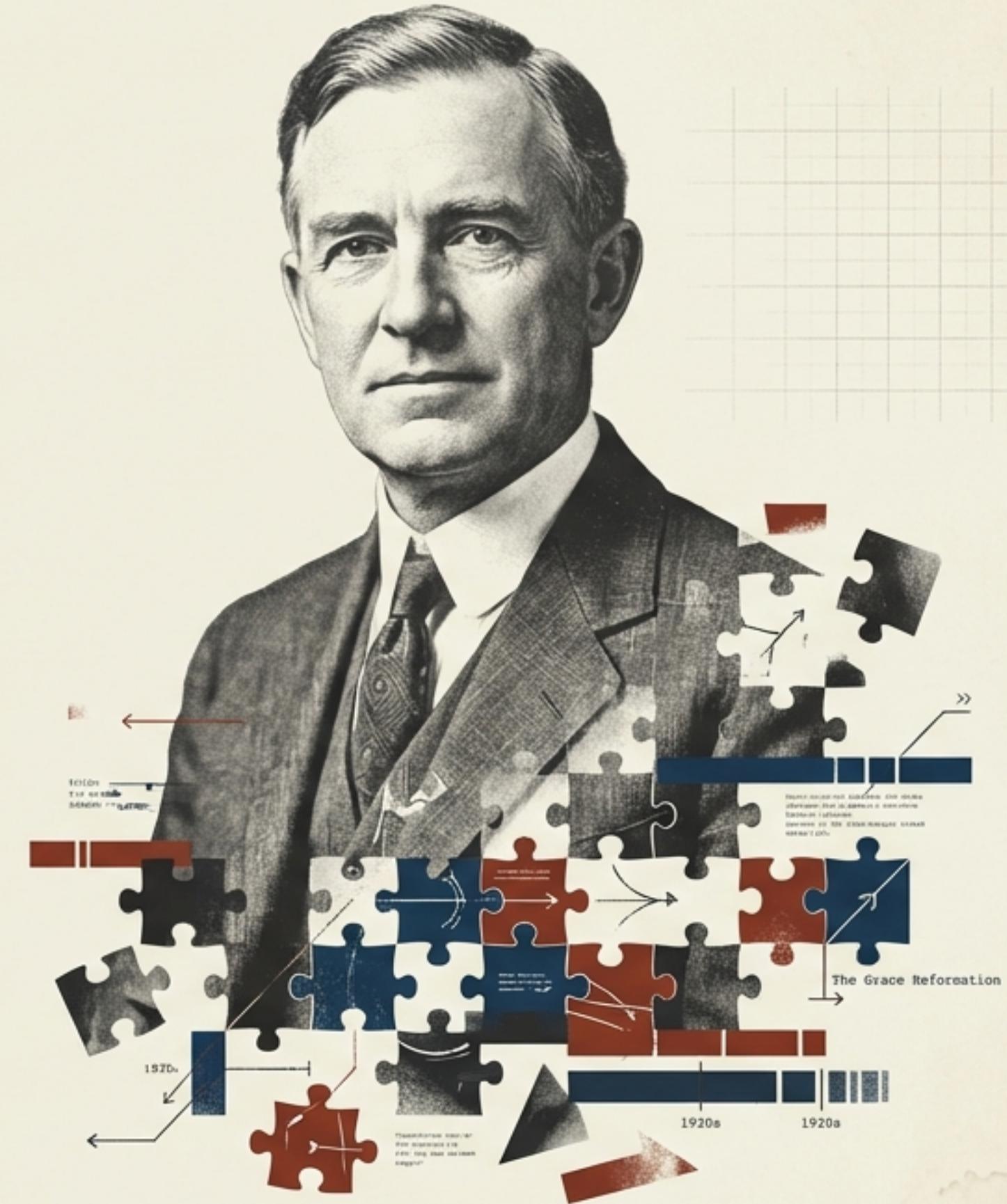
Diplomat and Businessman turned Pauline firebrand.

### The Conflict

A battle against Pentecostalism and Denominationalism.

### The Mystery

A detective story of undated manuscripts.



# A MAN OF THE WORLD BEFORE A MAN OF THE WORD

## John Cowan O'Hair

**Born:** 1876, Little Rock, Arkansas

**Died:** 1958, Chicago, Illinois



**1901**  
**Diplomat** /  
Secretary to U.S.  
Ambassador to Mexico



**1901**  
**Conversion**  
Led to the Lord by  
Miss Ethel Anderson (his  
future wife of 56 years)



**1923**  
**Pastor of North  
Shore Church**  
(Chicago)



**Pre-1916**  
**Building Contractor**  
**& Football Coach**

**1916**  
**Ordained to Ministry**  
(West Texas Presbytery)

"He was not an academic  
theologian in an ivory tower,  
but a man of action who lived  
a remarkably full life."

# The Historian's Dilemma: Reconstructing a Timeline

J.C. O'Hair published over 150 books and booklets but almost **never dated them**. To understand his theological evolution, historians must piece the timeline together using internal evidence and advertisements found within the pamphlets.



**Methodology:** Dating by Internal Clues.

# Indianapolis 1920: The Link Between Tongues and Water

## The Inciting Incident

**Premise 1:** The Sign Gifts (Tongues, Healing) ceased when Paul reached Rome.

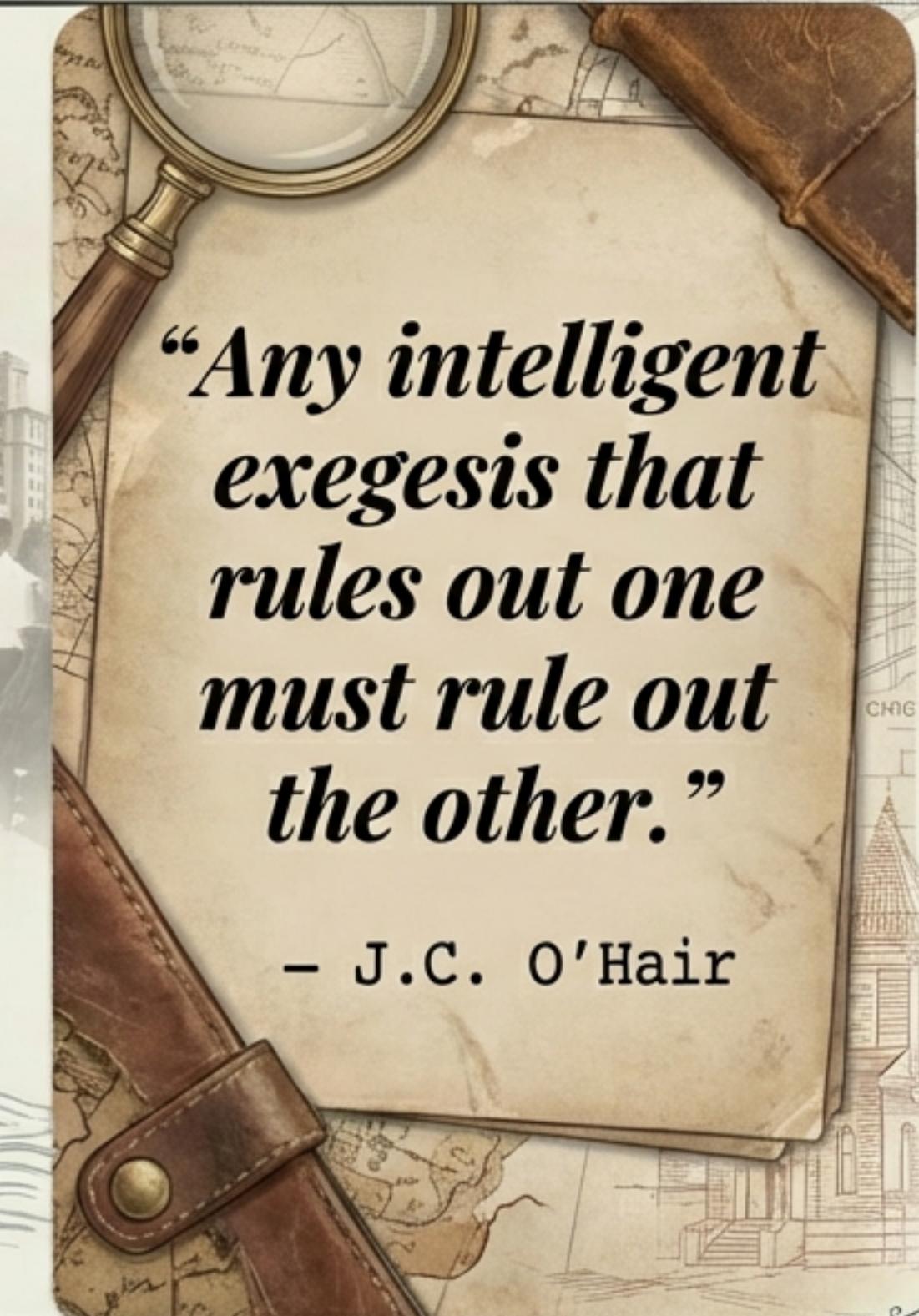
**Observation:** In Scripture, Water Baptism is always linked to Jewish feasts, miracles, or sign-gifts.

**The Realization**  
Logical Inference: Water baptism stands or falls with tongues. Intelligent exegesis cannot separate them.

**Conclusion**  
The Verdict: If signs have ceased for this age, Water Baptism must also have ceased.

*“Any intelligent exegesis that rules out one must rule out the other.”*

– J.C. O'Hair



# The 1923 Ultimatum at North Shore Church



**DATE:** July 17, 1923

**LOCATION:** North Shore Church, Chicago

**CANDIDATE:** J.C. O'Hair

**CONDITION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

Dr. John C. Page informed the congregation: "Mr. O'Hair did not believe in, or practice, water baptism."

**VOTE RESULT:** Unanimous Acceptance.

**The Significance:** O'Hair established the *negative* definition of his theology (No Water) years before he fully articulated the *positive* definition (Mid-Acts).



# The Transitional Decade (1920s)

## A Theological Tug-of-War

### Acts 2 Theology

Church began  
at Pentecost.



The  
1920s  
Conflict

### No Water Practice

Rejection of Pentecostal  
Ordinances.

O'Hair's 1925 booklet *Unscriptural Cathedrals*  
"I have always believed and taught that the Church began  
at Pentecost, and while I know with that view there arise  
**many questions and problems...**"



**Bottom Note:** O'Hair was an 'Acts 2' pastor with a 'Mid-Acts' practice, creating a contradiction he could not yet solve.

# Solving the Problem: The Shift to Mid-Acts

To resolve the contradictions of the 1920s, O'Hair realized he had to distinguish between Peter's ministry to Israel and Paul's unique revelation.

Standard View Start  
Pentecost

O'Hair's New Position  
Antioch

Acts 1 Acts 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Acts 10 Acts 11 Acts 12 Acts 13 Acts 14 Acts 15 Acts 17 Acts 19 Acts 21 Acts 22 Acts 23 Acts 24 Acts 26 Acts 27 Acts 28

## \*\*The Logic\*\*:

**The Logic**: The "Dispensation of Grace" was not given to the Twelve at Pentecost. It was given to Paul later. The Gospel of the Circumcision (Peter) is distinct from the Gospel of the Uncircumcision (Paul).

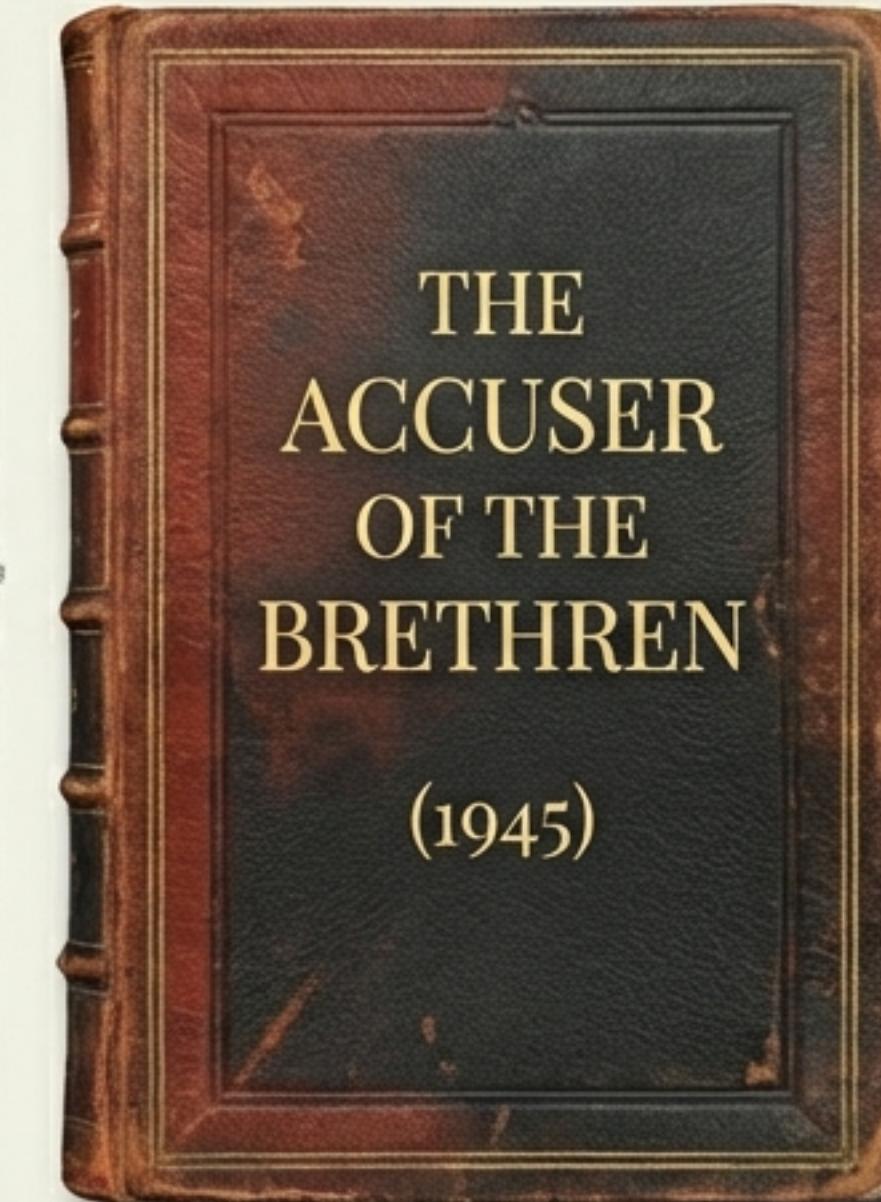
# O'Hairism Under the Searchlight

## The Attack



Attackers: W.A. Haggai and David Otis Fuller.

## The Defense



O'Hair vehemently rejected the 'Acts 28' extreme. He argued his 'No Water' position was an independent discovery from scripture, distinct from E.W. Bullinger.



# Defining the Middle Ground: The Three Camps

A comparison of theological positions distinguishing the Church's beginning and nature.

## Standard Fundamentalism

-  Church Begins:  
Acts 2 (Pentecost)
-  Key Apostle:  
Peter & The Twelve
-  Water Baptism:  
Required Ordinance
-  OT Ends:  
At Malachi

## O'Hair (Mid-Acts)

-  **Church Begins:**  
**Acts 13 (Antioch)**
-  **Key Apostle:**  
**Paul (Mid-Ministry)**
-  **Water Baptism:**  
**Ceased for the Church**
-  **OT Ends:**  
**At the Cross**

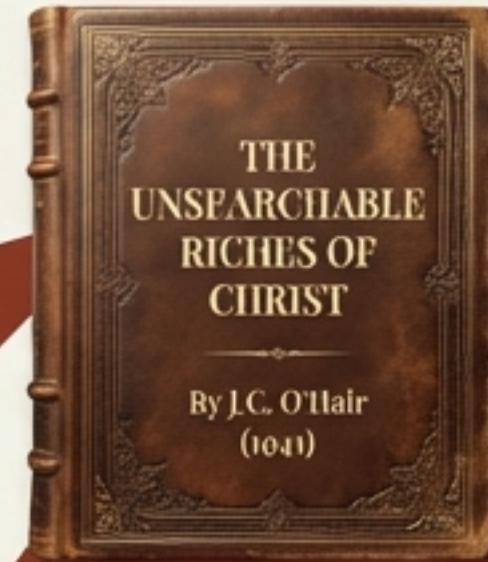
## Bullinger (Acts 28)

-  Church Begins:  
Acts 28 (Rome)
-  Key Apostle:  
Paul (Late Ministry)
-  Water Baptism:  
Ceased for the Church
-  OT Ends:  
At Acts 28



# Codifying the Doctrine: The Unsearchable Riches

The 1941 Magnum Opus



## The End of the Old

The Old Testament did not end with Malachi, but at the Cross (Colossians 2).

## The Pause

The prophetic clock stopped. The "Mystery" program began with Paul, hidden from the ages.

## The Capstone

Paul had a unique ministry to "fill up" or complete the Word of God (Colossians 1:25).

"The dispensation of the grace of God was not committed to the Twelve... but to Paul, by revelation some years later." — J.C. O'Hair

# Building the Institution

To ensure the message survived beyond his pulpit, O'Hair organized the movement, creating a vessel for the Grace Message.



**North Shore Church**  
(Pastorate 1923–1957)



**Worldwide Grace  
Testimony (Est. 1939)**

Missionary society for the  
furtherance of the Pauline Gospel.



**Milwaukee  
Bible College**

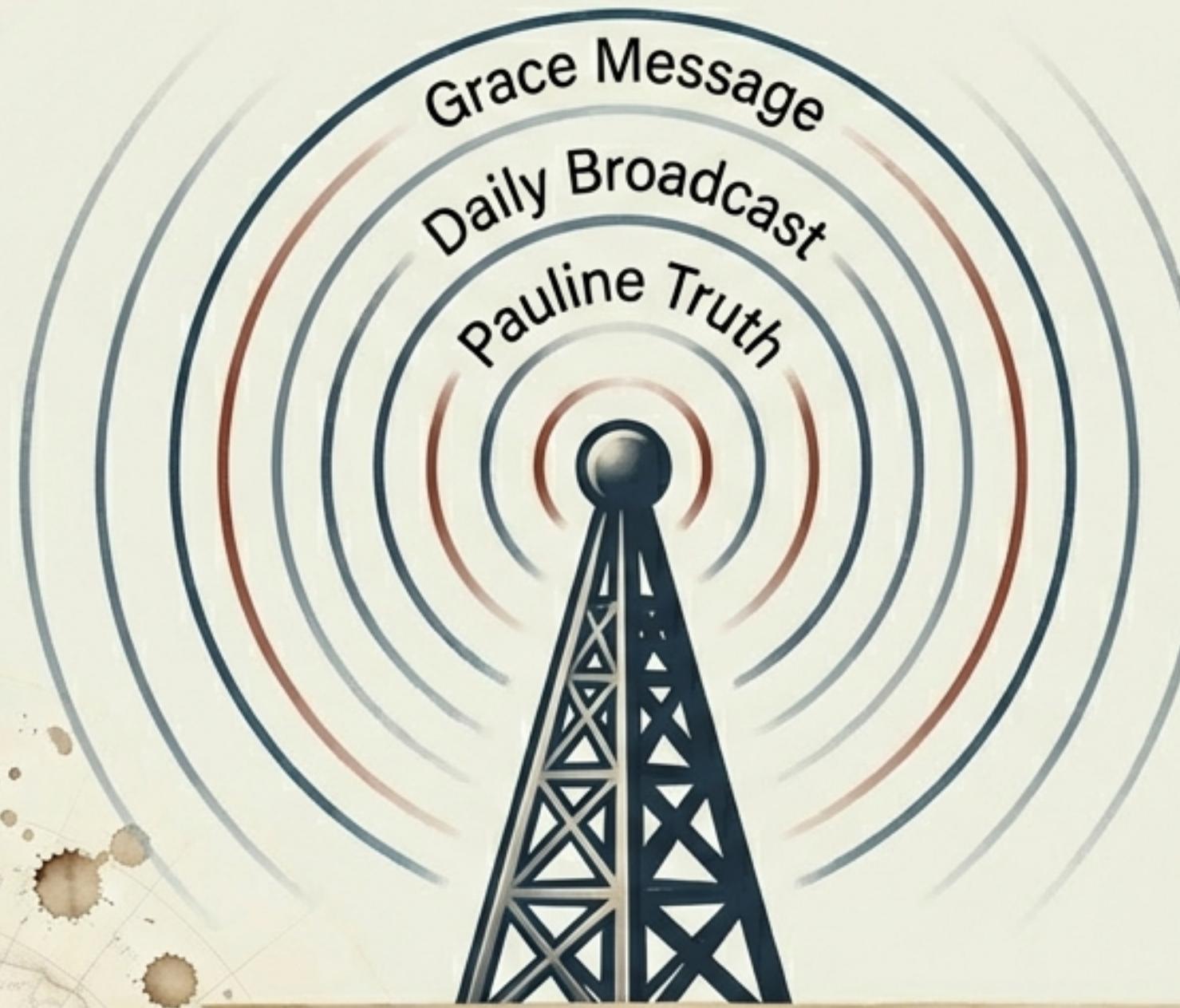
Training the next  
generation of pastors.



O'Hair served as president of both boards until his death.

# The Voice of the Movement: Station WPCC

We Preach Christ Crucified



**Established:** 1924



**Longevity:** 34 Years of Daily Broadcasts.



**Reach:** One of the longest continuous religious programs in history.



**Strategy:** Bypassed denominational gatekeepers to reach homes directly.

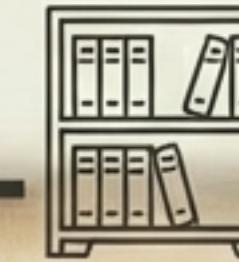
Bypassing institutions to bring the Grace Message into every home.

# The Lineage of Grace



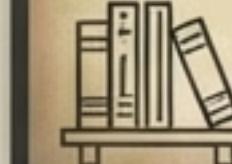
## J.C. O'Hair

The Pioneer.  
Cleared the forest  
and established the  
Acts 13 position.



## C.R. Stam

The Systematizer.  
Founded Berean  
Bible Society.  
Author of *Things  
That Differ.*



## Charles Baker

The Theologian.  
Founder of Grace  
Bible College and  
author of *A  
Dispensational  
Theology.*



While O'Hair was the firebrand who broke new ground, Stam and Baker built the theological cities that followed.

# Respect from the Opposition

“

I wish I knew as much about the Word of God as he has forgotten... The folks who disagree with him—I want to tell you brother, they respect him... I think that John O'Hair reminds me more of the Apostle Paul than anyone does.

”

**Dr. Louis Talbot**  
Chancellor of Biola University  
September 1953

# A Workman Not Ashamed

## RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH.

1. **1920:** The Negative Definition (Rejection of Water).
2. **1920s:** The Struggle (Reconciling with Tradition).
3. **1930s-50s:** The Positive Definition (The Mid-Acts Solution).

*J.C. O'Hair's life proves that Right Division is not just a method of study, but a cause worth dedicating a life to.*