

Thy Kingdom Come
A History of Zion City, Illinois

by

Aaron J. Dolan

Professor James F. Korthals
CH 3031
December 11, 2006

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	John Alexander Dowie and the Christian Catholic Church.....	2
III.	The Beginning of Zion City.....	8
IV.	The Fall of John Alexander Dowie.....	12
V.	The Rise of Wilbur Glenn Voliva.....	14
VI.	From Theocracy to Democracy	17
VII.	Conclusion	23

I. Introduction

Half way between Chicago and Milwaukee, near the shore of Lake Michigan, lies an unassuming city of 25,000 citizens. Its houses, businesses, and industries appear similar to those of many small Midwestern cities. But the street names—Emmaus, Enoch, Gideon, Galilee, among others—combined with the name of the city itself—Zion—supply hints that the history of this city is rather unique.

Many Christians and non-Christians alike recognize the term Zion as referring to the city of God where God's people live. Zion is paradise, where God rules over his people in holiness and perfection. Christians eagerly anticipate the day when they live in the new heavens and new earth, when Zion reaches its perfect and complete fulfillment.

But what happens when Christians become impatient? What is the result when they interpret "Thy kingdom come" as not only God's rule in hearts, but also in a community of Christians living out their faith? What happens when they try to build the city of God now on this old earth? The history of Zion, Illinois tells the story of people with such intentions. Dr. John Alexander Dowie and the Christian Catholic Church believed the kingdom of God could be a physical kingdom and that the city where God ruled over his people could be a physical city on this earth. The development and outcome of such a theocratic endeavor are fascinating, but not completely unexpected. This story is the history of Zion.

II. John Alexander Dowie and the Christian Catholic Church

Leading up to the founding of the city of Zion, Dr. John Alexander Dowie's travels and experiences helped shape his life and beliefs. He was born May 25, 1847, in Edinburgh, Scotland. By the age of six he had read through the entire Bible, and the next year he had a conversion experience.

An encounter with tobacco at the age of six provides insight into his insistence on its prohibition in the city of Zion. He stole his dad's pipe and headed to the hills to smoke it. As might be expected with such a young child, he became sick. "The first draw I took filled my eyes, and nose, and everything, and I thought that surely Abaddon or Apollyon from the depths of hell had got me now."¹ Due to this incident, "he was led of God to make his decision regarding the use of tobacco,"² and he signed a pledge against tobacco, opium, and alcohol.

In 1860, Dowie's parents moved to Australia. The six-month travel time allowed the young John Alexander to read and meditate. While working for his uncle as a shoe salesman, he suffered from chronic dyspepsia. It was likely because of his reading and meditations that he was "brought to trust God for healing, and in answer to prayer was completely delivered from this trouble, at the age of sixteen."³

Four years later, in 1867, Dowie returned to Scotland, where he served as an honorary chaplain at an infirmary. Here he witnessed many illnesses and injuries and saw many people suffering. But what bothered him more were the doctors and surgeons who often did not know how to treat the patients they saw. Several times these professionals would guess how to treat them and fail to provide any real comfort or solution.

¹Rev. Anton Darms, "Life and Work of John Alexander Dowie" (Zion, Illinois: The Christian Catholic Church), 3.

²Darms, 3.

³Darms, 4.

After only five years in Scotland, Dowie traveled back to Australia. He was ordained as a minister in the Congregational Church. Here he officiated at an unusually large number of funerals because of a plague. Like it did in Scotland, this suffering and death troubled Dowie. Searching for answers, he turned to Acts 10:38, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” The message, as Dowie saw it, was this: Satan still defiles, and Jesus still delivers.

This discovery marked a significant turning point in Dowie’s life and ministry. A short time later he was summoned to a woman’s deathbed. The doctor had done all he thought could be done. But when he began talking about the mysterious ways of God and how God uses sickness and death to call his children from earth to heaven, Dowie vehemently disagreed, saying that this sickness was the work of the devil, not of God. He prayed that God would manifest his healing power, and the lady recovered.

Not unexpectedly, Dowie began to attract local attention. This healing was the first of several. He became known for such healing power and for his active opposition of tobacco and alcohol. He was concerned about the whole person—spiritual, physical, and social. He even organized the International Divine Healing Association, and served as its president from 1882 to 1888.

Ready to take his ministry on the road, Dowie set out for London in 1888 to attend an international convention on healing. He crossed the Pacific and made a stop in San Francisco. Within two weeks he had healed a woman with a crippled foot and a woman with chronic throat cancer. In these instances of healing, he never claimed to possess healing powers in himself. He

first taught about God's plan of salvation. He then asked if the person truly trusted Jesus and believed that he had healing power. If they did, they could be healed.

Dowie saw the attention he received in San Francisco and recognized a great opportunity for ministry in the United States. For the next two years he "boldly proclaimed the message of Salvation, Divine Healing, and Sanctification"⁴ up and down the west coast. Then he moved to Evanston, Illinois, where many people viewed him as an imposter. But he received a modest amount of publicity after a few people were healed.

In 1893, Dowie set up a tent at the World Columbian Exposition across the street from Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show. Here he preached powerfully against all the people who were desecrating the Lord's Day by attending shows. He condemned the evils of society, politics, tobacco, and alcohol. He promoted salvation, healing, and holy living—the full gospel. People who had been healed gave testimonials. More people began to take notice.

Dowie began to organize in Chicago. He held meetings in the Chicago Auditorium, and in August 1894 he began the weekly periodical "Leaves of Healing," which contained sermons, testimonials, editorials, and reports. He also opened "diving healing homes." Since he did not have a license to operate a hospital or sanitarium, he faced opposition from the city government and the press, both of whom Dowie called corrupt and evil. "The very nature of Dowie's ministry aroused a formidable opposition. He unmercifully attacked 'Doctors, Drugs, and Devils' on many occasions. He flailed the hospitals, the liquor and tobacco interests and the 'dirty birds,' the press."⁵ In 1895 alone he was arrested 100 times, but none of the charges ever stuck.

⁴Darms, 7.

⁵Philip L. Cook, "Zion City, Illinois: John Alexander Dowie's Theocracy" (Zion Historical Society), 4.

Dowie's original intention was to preach and have healing meetings and conventions while allowing the people to remain members of their own churches. But many people came back from these meetings talking about divine healing and Dowie's preaching, and they wanted to change their own churches. In order to avoid factions, many of these churches released such members, who then returned to Dowie. For this reason, and because he wanted to "pray for the sick without medical interference,"⁶ Dowie founded the Christian Catholic Church on February 22, 1896 with 500 charter members.

The next year, Dowie made the Central Zion Tabernacle at 16th Street and Michigan Avenue the headquarters for the Christian Catholic Church. He leased the Chicago hotel to open Zion Home, "a place of prayer for the sick and suffering, where teaching on Divine Healing could be given to God's afflicted children."⁷ He started Zion Educational Institutions in order to teach young people how to pray and live a godly life. He also organized the Zion Seventies, groups that he sent out like Jesus did, two by two, to preach God's Word to the entire city of Chicago.

Dowie's church prided itself on a literal reading of the entire Bible. The following is a statement of beliefs by The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion:

The name—THE CHRISTIAN CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN ZION—signifies the following:

CHRISTIAN—Followers of the Lord Jesus the Christ in doctrine and in life; or, in other words, in principles, practices, and purposes.

CATHOLIC—Universal, or general; that is, a Church Home for all who are really and truly Christians.

APOSTOLIC—Founded upon the Lord Jesus the Christ as the Chief Corner Stone, the Apostles and Prophets being the Foundation Stones. It is plainly taught in the New Testament that the Church was to have twelve Apostles at all times throughout the Christian Dispensation. There are twenty-four Apostles named in the New Testament.

⁶Darms, 9-10.

⁷Darms, 10.

CHURCH—Literally meaning, “called out of;” that is, the members of the Church are called out of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God means the rule of God, and we become subjects in the Kingdom of God by the New Birth.

IN ZION—In the Kingdom of God.

THE CHRISTIAN CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN ZION stands uncompromisingly for “the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints!”

We believe in God the Almighty, Who exists in Three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in other words, we believe in the Doctrine of the Trinity.

We emphatically believe that God is a Person, and not a Principle.

We believe that God created the heavens and the earth, and that man was the immediate creation of God.

We believe that man sinned, that all men have sinned, and that there is no salvation in any other name than that of the Lord Jesus the Christ.

We believe in the Preexistence of Jesus the Christ, and that He was God manifest in the flesh.

We believe in His Incarnation.

We believe in His Virgin Birth.

We believe in His Crucifixion—in the efficacy of His Shed Blood.

We believe in His Physical Resurrection.

We believe in His Ascension.

We believe in His literal, personal Second Coming.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person in the Godhead, and that He now dwells in every Christian; that He will take full possession of all persons who make a full surrender to God and a complete consecration to Him.

We believe that the Bible, in the original languages in which it was written, was Verbally Inspired by God; that is, that He inspired not only the thoughts, but also the words.

We stand uncompromisingly, unqualifiedly for the Bible as the Inspired Word of God, from the first line in Genesis to the last line in Revelation.

We proclaim the following Triunities of the Bible:

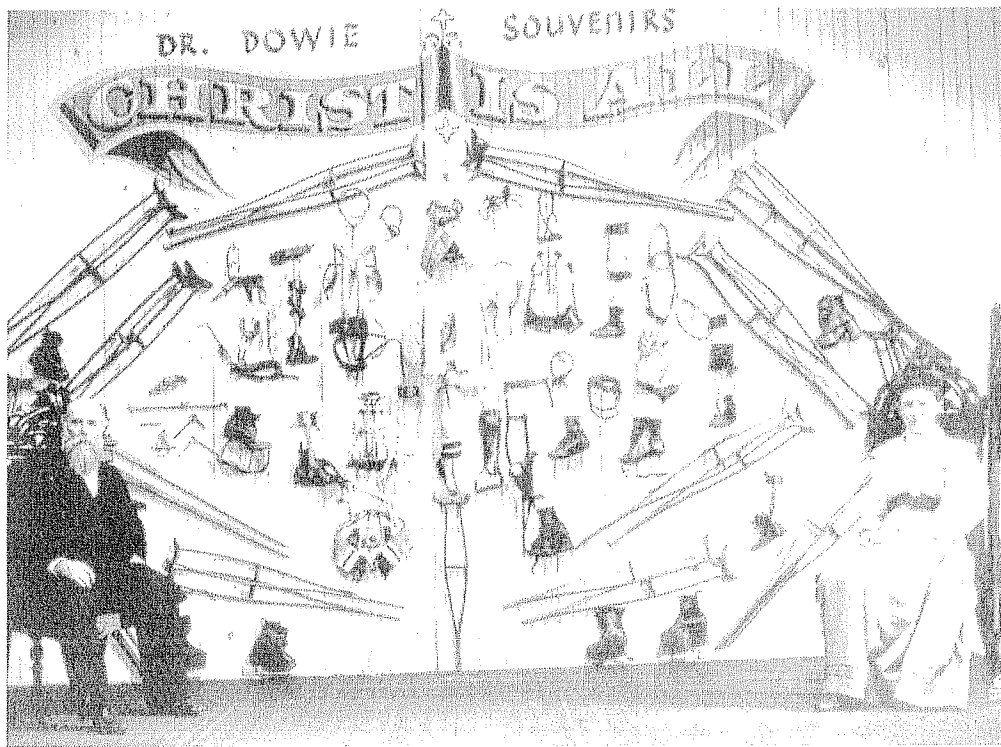
1. God in Three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Man in Three Parts—Spirit, Soul, and Body.
3. The Christian Faith, covering Three Things—Salvation, Healing, and Holy Living.
4. Christian Baptism by Triune Immersion—“into the Name of the Father, and into the Name of the Son, and into the Name of the Holy Spirit.”
5. Christian Baptism with a Triune Symbol—Death to sin, Life in God, and Power for service.

We believe in, teach, and live Divine Healing. Divine Healing simply means taking God the Almighty at His Word.

We believe in the Rule of God in every heart, in every home, in business, in the state, in the nation, and in the world.

We believe that where God Rules Man Prospers.

We believe that we are now in the closing years of the Dispensation of the Grace of God, and that ominous signs, multiplying and intensifying daily, indicate that the return of the Lord for the Church, His Bride, is near at hand.⁸



Dr. and Mrs. Dowie sit in front of a wall of "souvenirs"—braces and crutches left behind from people who were healed of their ailments.

⁸"The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion," *Leaves of Healing* (May 3, 1924), 139.

III. The Beginning of Zion City

Dowie's vision for the church was not limited to a place where God's people could gather once a week. He recognized faith as something that is important every hour of the day and every day of the week. Instruction in God's Word and godly living are not reserved only for Sunday but should be encouraged every day. Dowie envisioned a place where God's people could live.

This place would be the city of Zion, "where the social, industrial, commercial, educational, political and religious ideals and principles of the Kingdom of God should be put into practice."⁹ It would be a community where the people could live out their commitments to God and the doctrines of Christianity without the evil pressures and influences of the world, such as "intoxicating liquor, tobacco, gambling, dancing, deadly drugs, filthy foods, theaters, brothels, secret societies, and other abominations."¹⁰ It would be a home base from which missionaries would be sent out to evangelize the rest of the world. It would be "an easy place in which to do right and a difficult place in which to do wrong."¹¹

During the last few years of the twentieth century, Dowie began his search for land for such a city. Eventually he came upon 6500 acres between Chicago and Milwaukee, with a two and a half mile frontage on Lake Michigan. He scouted the land in disguise to keep his intentions secret from the press and then purchased the site in 1899.

On January 1, 1900, Dowie unveiled a map of the chosen site at an all-night meeting. He had already planned the layout of the entire city. 200 acres were set aside in the middle of the city as Shiloh Park, with ten of those acres reserved as the Temple Site, the one place of worship for all inhabitants. Streets were given biblical names to remind the citizens of the events and people of the Bible.

⁹Darms, 11.

¹⁰Darms, 13.

¹¹"The City of Zion," *Leaves of Healing*, 177.

The city which Dowie envisioned can aptly be described as an Old Testament theocracy. The city would keep God's people separate and distinct from the godless people around them and would keep the evils of the world away from God's people. They were to avoid tobacco, alcohol, drugs, pork and ham, theaters, and gambling. There would be no doctors, because Divine Healing means "taking God the Almighty at His Word," and doctors were evil and corrupt. God is the ruler of this city, not man, for "where God Rules Man Prospers."¹² Dowie would serve as General Overseer. God is the rightful owner of the land.¹³ For this reason, all lots were not to be sold, but leased for 1100 years, with the understanding that Christ would be returning in the next 100 years to begin his 1000 year reign on earth. All activity was to be centered on and grounded in God's Word. Every day would begin with the reading of the Word, a hymn, and prayer.

Soon after unveiling the city plans, Dowie began recruiting citizens. "Around the world in the *Leaves of Healing* went the message, 'I will bring you to Zion.' The prophet, himself, was asking the faithful to sell their all and come to a holy city. Many thousands did so."¹⁴ For 30-35 cents per round trip, hundreds rode the train from Chicago to view from observatory towers the land that would become their city and to choose lots that would become their homes. People from every corner of the globe were excited to come to the city of Zion, a city run not by men but by God, a city in which they could live out their faith and allegiance to God. That the prospect of such a city "would continue to gather adherents from mainline denominations, and

¹²"The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion," 139.

¹³Leviticus 25:23-24 – "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants."

¹⁴Cook, 5.

from all walks of life, was an indication of the powerful attraction of the founder and his dream.”¹⁵

The gates of the city of Zion officially opened July 15, 1901. 10,000 people took part in the dedication ceremony.¹⁶ Shiloh House, where Dowie lived with his wife and son, was one of the first structures built. By the end of March, 1902, a huge tabernacle with a seating capacity of 6,300 was completed, having taken only eight weeks to build.¹⁷ Soon its aisles would be strewn with crutches, braces, and wheelchairs, left by those who were healed of their ailments. By the end of July, the Elijah Hospice, later known as the Zion Hotel, was housing men who came to build their own homes. At the time, this 350-room hotel was believed to have been the largest frame structure in the world.¹⁸ “The chime of a bell from the tower of the hotel called for a minute of silent prayer at nine o’clock both morning and evening.”¹⁹

While Zion City was to be a theocracy, it still needed human officials. The city’s first election caucus for the Theocratic Party was held on April 7, 1902. This was the Theocratic Platform:

1. We declare our loyalty to the Constitution and Laws of the United States of America.
2. We affirm that both the Constitution and the Laws are capable of amendment and improvement in a Theocratic direction, and we simply propose to advocate the making of such alterations in the manner provided by the Laws of the United States.
3. We declare the motto of our party to be the unalterable and unassailable truth that “WHERE GOD RULES, MAN PROSPERS.”
4. Our object, therefore is the establishment of the RULE OF GOD in every department of government, by the free will of the people.
5. We declare our convictions that the Holy Scriptures, which contain the Ten Commandments, the inspired Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, constitute the principles of all righteous government for the individual, for the nation, and for the whole world.²⁰

¹⁵Cook, 6.

¹⁶Cook, 10.

¹⁷Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed. *What’s in Zion* (Zion Historical Society, Series 3, 1970), 15.

¹⁸*What’s in Zion*, 5.

¹⁹Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed. *Shiloh House* (Zion Historical Society), 13.

²⁰*What’s in Zion*, 19.

As he had done in Chicago, Dowie showed great interest and concern for education in the City of Zion. He had started schools while meeting in Chicago, and he made sure the Zion College Building was erected so that the youth could learn how to pray and how to live in service to God. Music was a major part of this education and of the city and church.

Dowie also planned for the economic well-being of the city. Men would enjoy profit-sharing work without competition and with the collective aim of serving God's kingdom and his people. A bakery, candy factory, lumber mill, and printing and publishing works were among the first industries, along with other stores and shops. However, the major industry was the lace factory. Dowie had sent an encouragement to a lace manufacturer in Nottingham, England, who then shipped his entire factory to Zion, along with skilled laborers to work and teach the craft.

It is not difficult to understand the attraction of this city of God. Hundreds of people who wanted a better life and an opportunity to live in an ideal Christian city were willing to risk a move.

Although the movement was often charged with fanaticism by the press, the truth is that high ideals and keen desire to make the Gospel real were the major factors drawing families to Zion City. These were not malcontents, nor backsliders; on the contrary, they were that great body of curious, searching individuals, many dedicated members of established churches who had come to believe that they were drinking at dry springs, or if unchurched, they had finally found something to believe that was worthwhile... Here was an opportunity for one to work at his faith in a community of like-minded believers. It would not be only a one day a week affair, but one for each waking hour of every day.²¹

Along with this idealism, the powerful preaching and healing power of Dr. Dowie convinced many that this city of God could actually work out to be everything he promised.

²¹Cook, 9.

IV. The Fall of John Alexander Dowie

The influence of Dowie and Zion City spanned the entire globe. Australia was still home to the many faithful Dowieites who had not moved to Zion. *Leaves of Healing* was distributed in several European languages to countries including England, Ireland, France, Germany, Sweden, and Iceland. James Joyce even mentioned Dowie several times in his masterpiece *Ulysses*. In addition to sending out literature, Dowie sent out people to spread the Word of God and word about Zion.

Zion Seventies continued to be sent out two by two. Dowie himself led a few national and international tours. In the fall of 1903, he took 3,000 followers to New York City. They canvassed the entire city and held a series of meetings at Madison Square Garden. The \$300,000 expense seemed worth it to those involved, but they faced more opposition than positive reaction. The next year he led a round-the-world tour to the west coast, Australia, Switzerland, France, and England. Again, they faced opposition and violence, but Dowie was eager to go to the people who had heard so much about him and were faithful to him.

These trips resulted in a depleted treasury back home. Perhaps an even worse side effect was the decline in excitement and support for Dowie from those living in Zion City. Dowie had talked about beginning another Zion in Mexico, and more than a few people were unsure about such an endeavor so soon. They found it easy to become excited and interested when he was around, “but the ardor waned and doubts became fears when he was gone.”²² How could he afford to start another city when their financial condition was declining at home? There was still unfinished business, including the construction of a grand temple, and they wondered what the future would hold if Dowie took his leadership and money elsewhere.

²²Cook, 17.

These were not the only financial concerns in Zion City. The city's policy had been to run businesses and industries without credit, but this was proving to be impossible. Seasonal unemployment began to weigh on the citizens. Discontent grew more common.

At the same time, murmurs began about Dowie's extravagances, ego, and family issues. Already in 1901 on the stage of the Chicago Auditorium he had declared himself to be the manifestation of Elijah, albeit Elijah III after Elijah I and John the Baptist. Even if some could accept this claim because of his preaching and healing, many did notice that he no longer lived the simple lifestyle he had in the past. He carried himself with an aristocratic air,²³ also calling himself the First Apostle and wearing ornate high priestly robes. He and his wife seemed to take a liking to extravagant living. They had purchased a vacation home in Michigan, and Mrs. Dowie and their son Gladstone began spending more and more time there. This led to rumors of dissension within the Dowie family.

The declining health of Dowie threw even more confusion and doubt into thoughts of the future. "Twice in the fall of 1905, while speaking to his people, Dr. Dowie had suffered attacks of paralysis."²⁴ When this powerful faith healer could not overcome whatever evil forces were threatening his own health, the invincible image he had always portrayed to his people was diminished.

Besides a dream of starting a new city, poor health gave Dowie another reason to spend more time in Mexico, which he did. He would never regain control of the city he had founded. "The twin storms of economic frailty and a weakened leadership which have caused so many ideal communities to flounder were decisive factors in ending the utopian era."²⁵

²³Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed., *Wilbur Glenn Voliva: Successor to John Alexander Dowie* (Zion Historical Society, Series 7), 4.

²⁴Cook, 17.

²⁵Cook, 17.

V. The Rise of Wilbur Glenn Voliva

While dreams of a Christian utopian city departed with Dowie and the city's financial health, Zion City itself still had life in it. That some type of change would be necessary was evident. This change came in the form of new leadership, that of Wilbur Glenn Voliva.

Voliva was born March 10, 1870, sixty miles west of Indianapolis. He worked on his father's farm as a child, but it soon became clear that ministry was his passion. He preached his first sermon at the age of sixteen and was ordained three years later. He served as pastor of various churches of the Christian Church for almost ten years before coming into contact with Dowie. He became interested in Dowie's work in Chicago and was ordained as an elder in the Christian Catholic Church in 1899. Dowie placed him in charge of work on the north side of Chicago, where Voliva was quite successful in gaining members and distributing literature. He was then transferred to Cincinnati, where he again experienced success. A short time later, since the church in Australia was struggling, Dowie sent him there in an attempt to revive the work. Once again, Voliva proved faithful in his tasks and pulled that church out of financial difficulties. He also sent 500 people from Australia and New Zealand to help populate Zion City.

In December 1905, with Dowie's health declining in Mexico and Zion "in chaos and in apparently hopeless financial difficulties,"²⁶ Dowie sent Voliva a telegram from Mexico telling him to return to Zion to serve as Deputy General Overseer. Voliva arrived to take control of the city on February 13, 1906, greeted by factions and corporate irresponsibility. City and church officials met with him in an attempt to persuade him to fix things according to their ideas. Many were accused of insubordination. Rumors continued to swirl that Dowie had used Zion City money for improvements to buildings in other places.

²⁶"Biographical Sketch of Wilbur Glenn Voliva," *Leaves of Healing*, 191.

Voliva took control in the same way he had achieved success in Cincinnati and Australia. He preached and lived the simple life. This was quite a shift from what the people had become accustomed to seeing in Dowie. Opposition was inevitable as Voliva stepped in to clean up the financial and legal mess. He immediately decreased the payroll of the financial and ecclesiastical departments because of the limited funds in the church treasury. When Dowie requested that financial aid be sent south, Voliva refused. Even though he claimed to still love him as a father, he and others decided to relieve him of his position as head of the church.

Dowie was obviously not happy with how things had transpired. He was allowed to return to Shiloh House, but found himself with very few followers and was not allowed to enter the Tabernacle. The courts ordered an election to decide the rightful Overseer of the Christian Catholic Church. Voliva and his followers won easily. Dowie's health continued to decline until he died March 9, 1907.

Voliva and his officials had many legal and political battles to fight. "The question as to who owned Zion City and its industries was fought in a Chicago court in the spring of 1906. Creditors made demands on the Zion institutions resulting in a receivership pending the outcome of the issue."²⁷ This situation allowed Voliva to display the shrewd administrative ability that had brought success in Cincinnati and Australia.

For some groups in Zion, the answer to the financial and industrial issues was to make Zion an "open city." Despite the initial opposition he had faced when he arrived, Voliva soon had the majority of leaders by his side, and he stubbornly refused to give in to creditors and those who wanted the dream of Zion City to die.

The plea was made that Zion should stand together as one man with one purpose in mind of continuing that which had been started—to build a city for God, and to have the church as it was originally designed, before Dr. Dowie succumbed to the temptations of

²⁷Cook, 18.

aggrandizement, wealth and squander, and had become intoxicated with success and a distorted vision.²⁸

While he stressed returning to the founding principles of the city—divine healing, fasting, prayer, focus on the Word of God—Voliva proposed a new administrative structure. But the more pressing issue was ownership of the city. With the entire Zion Estate held in receivership beginning in 1906, Voliva and the Christian Catholic Church were forced out of the Tabernacle and the Administrative Building. The Zion Home, or Elijah Hospice, became the North Shore Inn. Other shops and stores of Zion Institutions and Industries were no longer under control of the church.

Voliva and his officials responded by setting up a tent or wooden hut outside the city limits for worship. They rented other spaces for administration purposes. Voliva himself led the effort to pay back the debts. While preaching in front of the people, he took off his watch and cufflinks to show that he would do whatever it takes to buy back the city. The people responded by bringing rings and other valuables to be sold.

The fundraising and income generating plans that Voliva developed were successful. He was able to buy back the Tabernacle on July 3, 1908. By the end of 1909 he received back Zion Home, the Administration Building, and Zion Department Store. The next year, he was able to redeem the entire Zion Estate for the Christian Catholic Church.

²⁸*Wilbur Glenn Voliva: Successor to John Alexander Dowie*, 10.

VI. From Theocracy to Democracy

“Voliva’s entrenched position guaranteed his continued role as a theocrat even if a lesser one than his predecessor.”²⁹ Regardless of how much Voliva hoped his Zion would resemble Dowie’s original dream, the election that saw him defeat Dowie carried Zion City off the road of pure theocracy and onto a road that would lead to a regular American democracy.

But this is not to blame Voliva. He tried to retain the original ideals, a city that “is an easy place in which to do right and a difficult place in which to do wrong.” He wanted a city where there is no distinction between secular and spiritual, where people combine worship and work, thereby making both effective because they live according to the gospel. He wanted this city to be the Kingdom of God, a fulfillment of the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord’s Prayer and a powerful sermon and object lesson to the rest of the world. In 1924, *Leaves of Healing* was still promoting the ideals of this city:

A Citizen of Zion

“Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?

“He who walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

“He who backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.

“In whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoreth them who fear the Lord. He who sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.

“He who putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He who doeth these things shall never be moved.”

In this Psalm David describes a Citizen of Zion. An ideal! what a glorious undertaking! what an inspiration to every Christian to take part in the work of building such a City!

Ecclesiastically, the City of Zion must have but one organization, one place of worship, one leader, and a people who have but one mind, and that the mind of Jesus Christ.

Commercially, the City of Zion must be owned and controlled and managed by the one whom God places at the head of this work, which means the hearty and willing co-operation of all the people, with only one aim, and that THE EXTENSION OF THE

²⁹Cook, 19.

KINGDOM OF GOD. Competition is from hell, and brings with it all the evils that follow, such as lying, cheating, backbiting, stealing, selfishness, covetousness, deception, and so forth, and these must not be allowed to have a place in the City of Zion.

Politically, the City of Zion must be a unit, with no personal interest above the best interests of the whole people, with no purpose but to establish the Kingdom of God; not opposing one evil, but opposing every evil that exists in every branch of our government or among the people.

Educationally, the City of Zion must have the best facilities possible to teach the people how to pray, that the citizens may know what God wants and expects of us, first, last, and all the time. To learn to know God and to discern His will, and to know how to pray, puts us in a position to get everything that God has for us.

The opportunity for the people of God to come together and complete the building of a City of Zion is here NOW, TODAY.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Is God calling YOU to have a part in this great work for humanity, both for the present time and for unborn generations?

The City of Zion is now an established fact. This is known throughout the world. The City of Zion stands for high ideals in every department of life—the home, the state, the nation.

Zion people should have their investments in Zion Institutions and Industries.

Every Zion person should have a part of Zion Estate!³⁰

Voliva appointed the managers of Zion Institutions and Industries deacons. Time was set aside every morning for devotion, and everyone was encouraged to pay tithes, which could even be deducted from the paycheck.

A major part of the City of Zion and the Christian Catholic Church was music, especially while Voliva served as General Overseer. “The worldly amusements so common today in this country are not permitted in our city and in consequence, the young people find wholesome outlet for their energies in the better things of life.”³¹ Every person had the opportunity to study music at every educational level. The talent of Zion’s musical groups was world-class caliber.³² The main group was the White-Robed Choir, totaling 500 voices. There was a fifty piece senior

³⁰*Leaves of Healing*, 165.

³¹“The Musical Organization of Zion,” *Leaves of Healing*, 139.

³²Dolan, Henry and John (Personal Interview, December 11, 2006).

band, a twenty-five piece junior band, a forty-five piece senior orchestra, a twenty piece junior orchestra, a thirty-five member male chorus, a twenty member ladies' chorus, as well as several other smaller vocal and instrumental groups—octets, quintets, quartets, etc.³³

Recognizing the importance and advantages of new technology, Voliva established a 5000-watt radio station in 1922. WCBD out of Zion aired music, sermons, and other messages from the Christian Catholic Church with no commercials. Heard from as far away as New Zealand, this radio station gave Zion even more recognition.

Through it all, Voliva and his officials recognized the imperfections of all people, even those who are God's instruments. "We realize that only as the individuals who compose Zion are fully surrendered to God and wholly consecrated to Him will we succeed."³⁴ Although stated in such a simple way, that seems to be the reason this Old Testament style theocracy did not endure. The individuals who made up Zion City were not all fully surrendered to God. We point to the sinful nature to explain that. But the individuals who made up Zion City were not all fully surrendered to the ideals and aims of Zion City. How do we explain that? Did the excitement of the original settlers fade away? Did they desire to return to a regular democracy? Did they grow tired of the church's restrictions? Did they stop believing in the dream? Or should the blame be placed on the outsiders who moved in, who caused more than one original Zionite to exclaim years later, "Why couldn't they have left us alone?"³⁵

From the founding of the city, such "Independents" were present in Zion City. Dowie had imported the lace industry from England, including the workmen. These people were used to a life with smoking, alcohol, pork, and doctors, things that the Christian Catholic Church did

³³"The Musical Organization of Zion," 139.

³⁴*Leaves of Healing*, 177.

³⁵Williams, Marjorie I., *From Realism to Reality: The Followers of Dr. John Alexander Dowie* (River Forest, Illinois, Graduate paper submitted to Rosary College, 1963), 2.

not allow. Dowie did not require these workmen to join the church, although some did, especially the children who went to school in the College Building with the children of the members. But as long as the Christian Catholic Church held political control, they could maintain a “clean city.”

The tumultuous transition from Dowie’s to Voliva’s leadership brought more challenges in regard to Independents. One of the factions Voliva encountered when he arrived in Zion City consisted of men “who felt they had a right to an all American City and were opposed to Voliva and his Theocratic Party leadership. As in all politics, these political factions were conniving to gain control.”³⁶ But by 1914, almost all official city and education positions were once again held by “Zion men.”

Surprisingly, the Christian Catholic Church was never the only church in town. Long before the first building of Zion City appeared, a small Methodist church-schoolhouse was built in 1843 in the area. When this building burned down in 1908, members built a new building in the city limits and dedicated it on June 26, 1910. Memorial United Methodist Church is still standing. Some of the imported lace workers attended the Methodist church. Many others were Catholic. Instead of joining the Christian Catholic Church, most of these Catholics traveled to Waukegan to attend services there.

When Dowie lost control of the city and died, a few disenchanted groups left the Christian Catholic Church. Grace Missionary Church organized in 1906, and those who had Pentecostal roots joined with the Assemblies of God to form a church in 1908. In later years, other churches sprouted just as they would in any other city.

When members of the Christian Catholic Church became discouraged with their new church or with the leadership, one option was to leave the city and move away. But since they

³⁶*Wilbur Glenn Voliva: Successor to John Alexander Dowie*, 24.

were already settled, this was a tall task. Since many of these members had previously been members of other denominations, another option was to stay there and form their own churches. In this way, discontent in the Christian Catholic Church was bound to breed more Independents in the city, and Voliva's hostile personality and unique teachings caused much discontent.

From his gaudy pulpit, Voliva thundered against such horrors as cigarets [*sic*], silk stockings, oysters, alcohol, immodest dress and modern science. There was no room in Zion, he shouted, for those who refused to believe the world is flat as a stove lid, or who succumbed to the insidious lure of the demon nicotine, or the tinsel sham of the movies. This preaching did not commend itself to those resident in and about Zion who were not members of his cult, and they rebelled.³⁷

It would not be fair to say that all members of the Christian Catholic Church were so strict in following such teachings and prohibitions. Nor would it be fair to say that all Independents rebelled against such rules. Many Independents used tobacco and ate pork and went to doctors. Sometimes they were arrested, many times they were not. Many Zion people simply accepted the fact that Independents did these things, and so they usually did not say anything. There were many friendships between the two sides,³⁸ just as there are today between people of different denominations. But there was certainly a war of words between the leaders of each cause, as the "battle of the billboards" demonstrated.

First, a group of Independents posted the following billboard at the city limits, recruiting others to come to Zion and overcome the theocracy:

This is Different—Read It

Voliva boasts that he controls Zion City. He is, therefore, responsible for its present barbarous condition—years behind the times. If so, he proves that our constitutional city charter is null and void, and that our mayor, aldermen, police, and judiciary are practically his appointees, receiving their orders from him and their pay from the people, nearly half of whom do not belong to Voliva's church. There are 44 independent business enterprises and 12 denominational churches in this city, with room for more. Over half the taxes are paid by independents. One of the best resident and business sites

³⁷"Way Back When Prophet Voliva Flattened World," *The Chicago American* (Saturday, January 3, 1959, section 2), 15.

³⁸Dolan, Henry and John.

between Chicago and Milwaukee. Clean business enterprises solicited. We are not all fanatics here. Come and see. Help us redeem and civilize this city.³⁹

Voliva responded by setting up this billboard:

This is Not Indifferent

That wretched looking old dilapidated thing across the street (look at it) was placed there by a little bunch of idiots and lunatics. They have pimples where they ought to have heads. They vainly imagine that they can destroy Zion. God, and all of the Zion people are laughing at them. Some of their same bunch broke open the vault in the brick building across the street, mutilated the election tally-sheets, attempted to steal the election and were kicked out into the street by a mandamus of the Supreme Court of the State of Illinois. Most of their statements are absolute lies! Their invitation is a sufficient warning to all persons (except the loyal Zion people) to keep away from this city, as a place of business and residence! This city is the private home of loyal Zion people, and outsiders, who had any sense would not live in a “barbarous” town—a town “years behind the times,” a town “ruled by Voliva”—a town where a red-hot war is raging, and will continue to rage day and night until Zion people win a final and complete victory. In conclusion—pay no attention to this bunch of traitors, they are exactly like their old board—badly cracked.⁴⁰

Such signs were the exception not the rule, but they show that such battles did exist in the city, and they demonstrate Voliva’s fierce attacks on the opposition and less than temperate language.

As the original generation of Zion settlers began to pass away, so did Voliva’s political control. The number of Independents increased while the influence of his laws and restrictions decreased. The new generation, except for a few factions, did not hold the same excitement and dream of a Christian utopia that their parents did. The radio station WCBD was eventually sold to WAIT in Chicago. They still carried Zion programming, but only for a small amount of time each week. By the 1940s, Zion City looked very similar to most American towns. Voliva died in 1942, and by the 1950s and 1960s, the transformation to average city was practically complete. There were still a few original settlers left and families who did not eat pork and did not go to doctors, but these were in the vast minority.⁴¹

³⁹“Way Back When Prophet Voliva Flattened World,” 15.

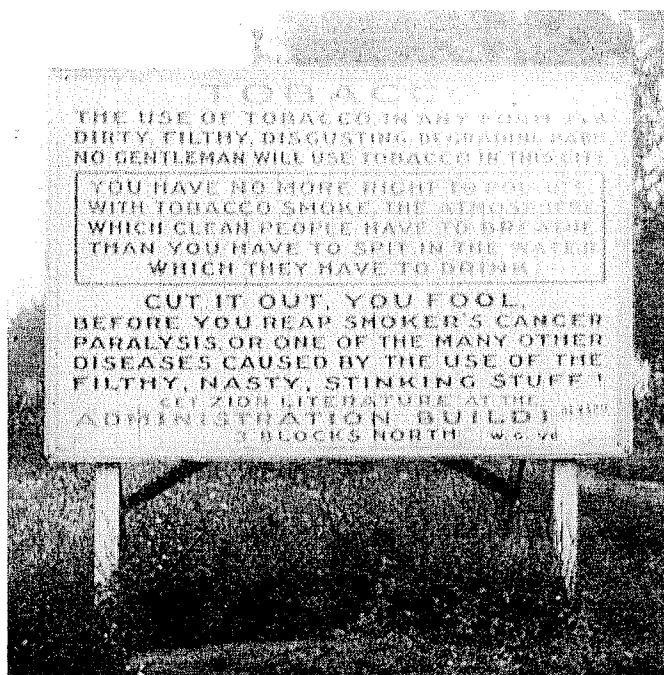
⁴⁰“Way Back When Prophet Voliva Flattened World,” 15.

⁴¹Dolan, Henry and John.

VII. Conclusion

Today in Zion, Illinois, there are not many obvious reminders of its unique history left. The Tabernacle burned down long ago. Plans for a great temple never came to fruition. The College Building and Administration Building are gone. Zion Home was demolished in 1979, and now only its dome remains where the impressive structure once stood. Even the Christian Catholic Church has changed its name to Christian Community Church in an attempt to separate itself from its past and appeal to the masses.⁴² The healing meetings of Dowie are long gone. The powerful preaching of Voliva has faded away.

But there are several original houses still standing in Zion, including Shiloh House. The home of John Alexander Dowie is now the home of the Zion Historical Society. There also remains living a few people from the Voliva era, who continue to relate the story of Zion City.



One of Voliva's billboards displaying his "less than temperate" language.

⁴²Dolan, Henry and John.

Bibliography

- Cook, Philip L. "Zion City, Illinois: John Alexander Dowie's Theocracy." Booklet compiled by Rev. Jabez Taylor, Zion Historical Society
- Cooper, Susan, ed. *The Zion Hotel*. Zion: Zion Publishing Co., 1980.
- Darms, Rev. Anton. "Life and Work of John Alexander Dowie". Zion: The Christian Catholic Church.
- Dolan, Henry and Dolan, John. Personal Interview, December 11, 2006.
- "Founder's dream was for perfect Christian city". *Zion-Benton News*. September 30, 1984
- Leaves of Healing*. Saturday, May 3, 1924
- Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed. *Shiloh House*. Zion: Zion Historical Society.
- Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed. *What's In Zion*, series 3. Zion: Zion Historical Society, 1970.
- Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed. *What's In Zion: Churches in Zion*, series 5. Zion: Zion Historical Society, 1972.
- Taylor, Rev. Jabez, ed. *Wilbur Glenn Voliva: Successor to John Alexander Dowie*. Continuing History of Zion, 1901-1961. Zion: Zion Historical Society, Series 7.
- "Voliva Backs Up on Busses, Lets 'Em Stop". *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*. April 28, 1927
- "Way Back When Prophet Voliva Flattened World." *The Chicago American*. Saturday, January 3, 1959.
- Williams, Marjorie I. "From Realism to Reality: The Followers of Dr. John Alexander Dowie." River Forest, Illinois. Graduate paper submitted to the graduate faculty of Rosary College, July, 1963.