

CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

Lesson 88

The Restoration Movement – Part 2

The Christian Church and the Churches of Christ

Last week, we began our study of the Restoration movement by looking at the lives of Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell, two early founders of the modern movement known as the “Restoration” or “Primitive” movement.¹ These names come from the concept that the movement sought something more than merely reforming the church. The movement sought to re-establish the church as it existed in the New Testament, the church in its most primitive form. Both Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell came out of a Presbyterian heritage into the Baptist church. From the Baptist church, they continued their efforts at restoration.

Stone and Campbell united their efforts in this cause in 1832 and their groups became known variously as Disciples of Christ, the Christian Church, and the Church of Christ. All of these groups were in fellowship together and most of them sought fellowship and unity with other facets of Christianity.

The restoration movement was seen as the means to an end – reuniting Christianity. Stone and Campbell believed that if Christians would leave behind their creeds and all come stand upon Scripture alone, then the church could end division and sectarianism and the millennium kingdom of Jesus could begin. In 1809 Thomas Campbell, Alexander’s father, delivered a *Declaration and Address* setting out the uniting pleas of the movement. The *Declaration* is seen as so significant that the date it was produced was seen as “bearing the same relation to the people now known as Disciples of Christ, Christians, or Churches of Christ, that July 4, 1775 holds to the United States of America.”²

The Declaration was careful to set out the principle that fellowship lines should be drawn only on core matters of Christian faith. That is not to say that opinions of

¹ While we set out these two people as the two early keys behind the movement, scholars frequently cite four people as the movement’s “founders.” In addition to Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, Thomas Campbell (Alexander’s father, see Lesson 87) and Walter Scott (referenced in this lesson) make up the “four founding fathers” (See, Garrett, Leroy, *The Stone-Campbell Movement, The Story of the American Restoration Movement* (College Press Publishing, Rev’d Edition 1994) p. 97).

² Richardson, Robert, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Standard 1897), p. 353.

other weighty matters are unimportant. It merely explains which matters form the basis for fellowship. In its sixth proposition, the *Declaration* reads:

Although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so... Therefore no such deductions can be made in terms of communion, but do properly to the after and progressive edification of the Church.

The movement's origins were careful not to draw lines of fellowship over matters of opinion or knowledge. As proposition eight of the *Declaration* declared, "It is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge or distinct apprehension of all Divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the Church." Alexander Campbell himself later noted, "We never did, at any time, exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not consent to our opinions."³

These churches were formed with the hope of eliminating division in the body of Christ, and as time went by, there was some success as large numbers of believers and entire congregations joined the movement. Hand in hand with the successes, however, history shows a great deal of division within the movement.

Over time, the mainline churches in the movement took on a different operating premise, or at least a different application of that premise from that initially conceived by Stone and Campbell. Charting through those changes as well as noting the distinctions of these churches is our goal in this class.

Before we begin, we should note one particular characteristic of these churches which serves as a qualification for the material in this lesson. These churches believed that the New Testament example indicated individual autonomy for each congregation. Therefore, each church within this movement has kept that autonomy. There is no national structure or convention that links the churches together. This is important to set out at the beginning of this lesson because it means that we must speak in generalities about the beliefs and practices of the churches in this movement. There are exceptions to most every trait we identify with these churches.

³ *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 90.

UNITY AND DIVISION

As noted in our last lesson, Campbell and Stone, upon their adult baptisms, found themselves ministering and teaching in the Baptist churches. They maintained the Baptist alliance for a number of years, but were eventually forced out of the Baptist fellowships for a number of reasons.⁴

To understand this eviction of the movement, we need to add to our working base of knowledge a fourth key person during these early years, Walter Scott. Scott began preaching in the movement after Alexander Campbell began taking Scott to various church meetings. Scott was to become Alexander's best friend, co-author, and a key player in many traditions of the movement.⁵

After his own baptism, and in efforts to establish unity among churches based upon restoring the New Testament practices of the church, Scott published a number of essays in Campbell's journals. In these essays, Scott taught the same principles of unity that were throughout most of the Movement. Scott wrote, "the bond of union among christians is the belief of a matter of fact, viz. that *Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God*."⁶ For Scott at this time, this was the only condition to being saved. "One has only to believe in this name, and his is eternal life."⁷ Later, Scott would again write, "Let no one think that any thing more is necessary to our salvation than to believe this fact."⁸

Yet, while Scott wrote such in 1827 and his teaching was the basis of Scott's own baptism and faith, Scott turned a corner in his public evangelism in the fall of 1827 when he spoke on Acts 2:38 ("Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will

⁴ We borrow the word "forced out" from Garrett. He notes that, "From the outset the Campbells sought to avoid separation...they did not choose to be separatists...It is equally clear that they did not want to start a new denomination, but to launch a movement of reform among the existing churches." Garrett at 145.

⁵ It was Scott who popularized the five-finger method of teaching conversion and as a counter point to the five tenets of Calvinism. Each finger on a hand was assigned a specific aspect of the conversion process. Eventually in the movement, the five steps became, "hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized." But at its inception, Scott used the five-step approach to teach children, "faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, and gift of the Holy Spirit."

⁶ *The Christian Baptist*, Vol. 1, p. 69 (reprint by Gospel Advocate Co. 1955). Scott wrote these essays under the pen name "PHILIP."

⁷ *The Christian Baptist*, at 70.

⁸ *The Christian Baptist* at 137.

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”). Scott began preaching on ‘baptism for the remission of sins’ in ways that many Baptists were finding challenging.

The lines of fellowship were drawn and the restoration movement churches were severed from Baptist union by a number of teachings. Garrett sets out the Baptist charges against the “reformers” for teaching “baptism procures salvation...there is no special call to the ministry...the law of Moses was abolished...and that there is no ‘mystery’ in the Scriptures.”⁹ Garrett himself goes on to note a number of other differences in the groups at that time:

1. The “Baptists were often rigidly Calvinistic and the Reformers strongly anti-Calvinistic.”
2. The “Baptists observed the [Lord’s] Supper periodically, while the Reformers believed they should do so each Sunday.”
3. “The Reformers did not want to wear any sectarian name; the Baptists were reluctant to surrender the name they proudly wore.”
4. While “both agreed that no organization should control the local churches,” the “Baptists did have their Associations to which the Reformers objected.”
5. “The Reformers rejected the idea of a special call to ministry and an ordained ministry, which the Baptists practiced.”
6. “The Reformers received members by confession and baptism, while the Baptists asked for a personal testimony and congregational vote.”¹⁰

Alexander Campbell was never happy with the separation. As late as 1831, Campbell was emphasizing that his movement and the Baptists were in substantial doctrinal agreement. On his deathbed in 1866, Campbell was told of talks aimed at re-uniting the movement with the Baptist church and Campbell responded with tears saying, “this is one of the happiest moments in my life.”¹¹

As the Campbell/Scott movement progressed it was fused, as mentioned earlier, with Stone’s movement in 1832. The joinder was possible because of the emphasis both groups put upon unity and simply Scripture as the authority and

⁹ Garrett at 158.

¹⁰ Garrett, at 160. Several points are interesting here. First, as Garrett notes, while the Baptists were excluding the Reformers from their midst, the Reformers did not expel the Baptists from their congregations for holding Baptist views! Second, as we follow these movements through history, many of the Reformer views and practices have found life in the Baptist churches. Meanwhile, many of the Baptist intolerances have become manifested in the Restoration movement churches!

¹¹ Garrett at 159 and 161.

model for the church. That is not to say that Stone and his followers saw and taught things the same as the Campbells, Scott, and their followers. The “Christians” (as Stone’s followers called themselves) tended to have a broader view of the Holy Spirit’s work than that of the “Disciples” (as Campbell and his followers termed themselves). Scott saw the Holy Spirit more active in the conversion process (witness the Cane Ridge Revivals discussed in lesson 87) while the Campbellites tended to emphasize or limit the Holy Spirit to its role in “producing” the Scriptures and the actual preaching of the Word.

A second difference in emphasis can be found in the overall efforts of the churches. The Christians were focused more severely on uniting the various sects of Christianity while some scholars see the Campbell movement more focused on restoring the ancient church of the New Testament.¹²

A great source of growth and strength for the Restoration movement churches was reliance upon Scripture as not only the sole authority and basis of the church, but also as something that every Christian had personal responsibility to know and study. Alexander Campbell believed and taught that the most solid foundation for a Christian’s life as well as a church’s doctrine was, as his father put it, to “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where they are silent, we are silent.” Alexander’s father, in the *Declaration and Address* put it this way:

Nothing is to be admitted of Divine Obligation but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church, either in express terms or by approved precedent.

In later years, as Alexander considered and studied his father address, he was particularly concerned with the last phrase “approved precedent.” Alexander saw this concept as a breeding ground for potential separation over matters that were not core faith issues. Alexander’s concerns were well founded.

The movement underwent numerous separations over the last 200 years. Most every time these separations were not based on issues of true “theology” but rather method of church practice. The root issues of division were generally based on what the Scripture taught by “approved precedent.”¹³

¹² Garrett at 194.

¹³ Over time, the fuller approach to scripture’s application came from a three pronged hermeneutic (A theological word referring to the basis for one’s interpretation of the Bible). The three prongs were direct command, approved example, and necessary inference.

The two issues that most seriously divided the movement, separating out the branches known today as the “Disciples of Christ” and “Christian” churches from the “Churches of Christ” were instrumental music and the Mission Society.

In the later half of the 1800’s, instrumental music was becoming more commonplace in the churches of America. Both Garrett and the *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* give 1849 as the year instruments were first introduced to these churches. Until the late 1880’s, there was no open division among the churches on the issue, although one man named Moses E. Lard wrote the issue up as one that should be the basis of fellowship.

Some scholars see the ultimate division over the issue as based on simple Bible interpretation. Other scholars point to more subtle causes and underlying issues. From the Biblical interpretation perspective, those churches that do not allow instruments do so believing the New Testament never provides for them in church worship. This viewpoint seeks to “speak where the bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.” So while the Bible contains the command to “sing,” the failure of the Bible to command or model instrumental singing makes the practice wrong.¹⁴

The more subtle issues pointed out by some reference the effects of the Civil war on the movement. While the northern churches in the movement were typically associated with larger towns that could afford the installation of large expensive organs, the southern churches were typically small and rural and could rarely afford such. History does show the northern churches more readily accessing and installing organs while the Southern churches did not. In the post-Civil war animosity between North and South, the instrument issue is seen by some as a galvanizing point that allowed, or even forced, separation of the true and faithful churches from those not so true!¹⁵

On the mission society, initially Campbell and others thought larger cooperative efforts of the churches at missions would detract from the autonomy and independent responsibility of each church. As such, the churches did not cooperate in mission efforts, but each church sent its own missionaries as money and opportunity allowed. Early on, however, Campbell began seeing the need for

¹⁴ Many who are new to this discussion might point to the many times the Old Testament exhorts and models singing to instrumental accompaniment, especially in the Psalms. The non-instrumental Restoration churches would typically note that the Old Testament was not binding upon worship practices of the New Testament church, citing examples of Old Testament sacrifices and temple worship no longer practiced in the church.

¹⁵ *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2004) at 414.

cooperation on the mission field. Eventually, those churches with agreed cooperative efforts in a Missionary Society coalesced, as did those who refrained from such larger cooperative societies.

It was this concern over mission societies that caused a withdrawal of 2,600 congregations from fellowshiping with the other churches of the movement in 1906. The churches that withdrew their fellowship called themselves “Churches of Christ” while the other churches maintained the name “Disciples of Christ” or “Christians.”¹⁶ Typically, these Churches of Christ were non-instrumental as well.

Within the history of the Churches of Christ, a number of other issues would continue to divide off some congregations from others. Issues of whether to use one cup in communion or multiple cups, whether to have Sunday School or not, whether to allow kitchens in church buildings, whether to use a primary preacher or lay members for preaching were some of the issues that served to divide off some congregations from fellowshiping others. Counting all these groups, however, gives a statistical size of over 3 million Church of Christ members world wide today, with 1,300,000 in the United States, over 1,000,000 in Africa and over 1,000,000 in India.¹⁷

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) did not undergo as many subsequent divisions as the Church of Christ. This is probably due to the Disciples early willingness to embrace more differences in opinions without drawing lines of fellowship. Key examples would include the issue of instrumental worship and missionary societies referenced earlier. Leaders among the Disciples were also quicker to embrace the more “liberal vision of American Protestantism” including types of scriptural analysis that tended to shift the way Scripture was read.¹⁸ As of 2001, the Disciples report just over 800,000 members.¹⁹

The third major group to survive from the Restoration Movement of Stone-Campbell is the “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.” This large and difficult name comes from the historical fact of using both names since the time of Stone. These churches severed out from the Disciples over issues of liberalism over Scripture, participation as a denomination in the Federal Council of Churches, and whether to admit non-baptized believers as members. The Christian Churches/Churches of Christ refrained from the liberal interpretations of Scripture

¹⁶ *Encyclopedia* at 535.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* at 212.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* at 179.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* at 182.

that found prominence in what became the Disciples. They also would not concur in admitting themselves as a “denomination” for any purpose. They insisted that they were “Christians only.” The Christian Churches/Churches of Christ also refused membership to any who were not baptized as believers. These churches report about 1,333,000 members today.²⁰

²⁰ *Ibid.* at 188.

POINTS FOR HOME

This week, we appropriately set out several concerns for home:

1. Unity is certainly a proper concern for all Christians. As noted last week, Jesus prayed, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn 17:20-21). Paul would later write to the Church at Ephesus the importance of “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Noting, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:3-6).”
2. Yet, speaking of unity and finding unity are not quite the same. We have a tendency to find our own views of Scripture and doctrine so compelling as to seek to make them binding upon others. In the midst of that, we urge all to remember that Paul emphasized, “I know *whom* I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to *him* for that day (2 Tim. 2:12).” Paul never says he knows “what” he has believed and entrusted. Our unity and orthodox teaches our salvation is based on WHOM we know, not WHAT we know.
3. It is hard to argue against the position of the Bible as authoritative. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Indeed, the core cry of the Protestant Church has always been Scripture only as against Church tradition. But how is that scripture to be read? Is there in fact a scriptural authority for finding a detailed “New Testament pattern” for the church? Does the scripture speak of such a pattern or is the pattern idea itself speaking where the scripture is silent? Similarly, does Scripture claim that the proper hermeneutic is to find church practice in “command, example and inference?” These questions lie at the heart of much of the division that the Restoration Churches have seen and are worthy of careful examination.