

# CHURCH HISTORY

“Now these things took place as examples for us...”

Lesson 19

## Sectarianism

Sectarianism - “Noun; sectarian spirit or tendencies; excessive devotion to a particular sect, especially in religion.” It is also defined as: a form of prejudice, discrimination, or hatred arising from attaching relations of inferiority and superiority to differences between subdivisions within a group.

Sectarianism among the Scots was significant. Many Presbyterian groups had separated from the Church of Scotland by the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These included Covenanters, Seceders, Anti-burghers, Anti-Burgher Seceders, Reformed Presbyterian, Cumberland Presbyterian (in America) and, within the Church of Scotland itself, Moderates and the Evangelicals. Stone, the Campbells, and several other American Restoration leaders came from Presbyterian churches.

This sectarianism frustrated these men greatly. It was a major motivation in their leaving Presbyterianism. Coupled with struggles over Calvinism and infant baptism, they begin to seek a way to unite all the disparate groups. This led them to seek unity outside of creeds and follow the Bible as their only guide. The consequence of their view led these “reformers” to become “restorers” and break with the Presbyterian church and other denominations.

## Restoration Movement - 1800-1850

From 1800-1850 the Restoration Movement crystallizes and grows tremendously. There are four main streams to the movement. We have studied the early movements in Virginia and New England. Those two will form a loose connection with the Stone-Campbell movement but never fully unite with them.

We now want to discuss the growth of the movement by examining the lives of three of its most influential leaders - Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, and Alexander Campbell.

### Barton W. Stone

Stone grew up in near the Virginia-North Carolina border. In 1791 he became a Presbyterian minister, moved to Paris, Ky and began preaching for the Cane Ridge and Concord Presbyterian churches. He began to have doubts about Presbyterian theology. He struggled with Calvinism and the idea evangelizing the world when most were ordained to be lost. When he was ordained by the Transylvania Presbytery he was asked to “receive and adopt the Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible.” He replied: “I do, as far as I see it consistent with the Word of God.” Stone was greatly affected by the great Cane Ridge Revival and saw a need for ecumenical cooperation - based on the Bible alone. His movement would be characterized by a more open fellowship than the Campbell movement.

In 1804 Stone and four other members were suspended from the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky for their teaching. These men formed the Springfield Presbytery, supported by fifteen congregations, including Cane Ridge and Concord. But less than ten months later, they issued one of the most famous documents of the Restoration Movement - The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery - in which they stated,

“We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.”

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## Leading Restoration Preachers

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As Restoration ideas spread, many denominational preachers adopted them and became a part of this first generation of American Restoration preachers. They included:

- D.S. Burnet (1808-1867) Preaching in central Ohio he left the Baptist church and formed the Christian Chapel in Cincinnati.
- Jacob Creath (1799-1886) Preaching in Kentucky and later Missouri, he learned Restoration principles from Campbell's journal, *The Christian Baptist*. Expelled from the Baptist church he became a powerful preacher of New Testament Christianity.
- "Raccoon" John Smith (1784-1868) had little education but was a colorful homespun preacher. He left the Baptist church and reached many in Kentucky. He once reported 700 conversions and 5 new churches in a 6 month period.
- Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) was the most prominent preacher in the pre-Civil War south. His work was in Tennessee and north Alabama.
- Benjamin Franklin (1812-1878) After Alexander Campbell's death, he became the most prominent preacher in the brotherhood. Although uneducated he became a powerful preacher.

After this, they began to call themselves Christians, and calling their congregations Christian churches with no denominational designation. In its early years it was hindered by the defection of the other four suspended ministers going back to the Presbyterian church, as well as by some other very evangelistic groups such as the Shakers. But by 1830 the movement numbered about 10,000.

### Thomas Campbell

When *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* was written, Thomas Campbell had not yet arrived in America. He was preaching in the Antiburgher Seceder Presbyterian Church in Ulster, Ireland. There he preached and conducted an academy. He had been educated in Glasgow, Scotland where he associated with James and Robert Haldane and other like-minded independent preachers. Campbell had strong feelings about the bickering in the church and Haldane influenced his thinking about turning to the Bible alone. In 1807 he joined a large group of Ulster citizens who emigrated to America. He left his family behind to go set up their new home. They would join him two years later.

Campbell was admitted to the non-Seceder Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania and began to preach in the Washington, PA area. There he found the same bickering spirit among Presbyterians he had experienced in Ireland and began to advocate for union among them. When he offered communion to Presbyterians of all kinds, he was suspended by his Presbytery and finally expelled. Having no church in which to preach, he spoke wherever he could get an audience. Gathering with some like-minded men to determine their course, he stated his famous dictum, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scripture are silent, we are silent." A friend said that on such a basis "there is an end to infant baptism." Campbell replied "...if infant baptism be not found in the Scriptures, we can have nothing to do with it." Campbell, however, did not immediately put his own statement into practice. Like so many reformers, they understand the "Scriptures alone" principle, but had to spend time making application to all one's beliefs.

In 1809 Thomas Campbell and his friends formed the Christian Association of Washington, PA. To state its purpose, Campbell drew up the seminal document, "Declaration and Address." This 56-page document could be considered the "Magna Carta" of the Restoration Movement. Certain fundamental principles are stated in it. (See the accompanying link to review thirteen main points Campbell made.) It presents doctrines that would be anathema to most denominations including: rejection of the Old Testament as authoritative; only what is expressly taught in the Word of God should be a test of faith; tolerance of babes in Christ and young Christians who possess limited knowledge of

## Alexander Campbell's Debates

At first, Alexander Campbell had a distaste for debates. However, after his first two debates he was convinced "a week's debating is worth a year's preaching." He had several important debates over the years that had far reaching influence. The most significant debates were:

- 1820 - Campbell-Walker Campbell's first debate was on the mode of baptism, including baptizing infants. Walker was a Presbyterian.
- 1823 - Campbell-McCalla debate on infant baptism. McCalla was also a Presbyterian.
- 1829 - Campbell-Owen debate on socialism and Christianity. Robert Owen was a brilliant man Campbell called the champion of the skeptics.
- 1837 - Campbell-Purcell debate on Catholicism. Purcell was the Catholic archbishop of Cincinnati, Ohio.
- 1843 - Campbell-Rice debate. Rice was a Presbyterian and defended his position against Restoration principles.

The influence of these debates was far-reaching. Published copies were sold nationally as well as internationally. They contributed to Campbell's prominence as well as the advancement of the Restoration Movement.

the scriptures; that "division among Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils." And the most famous statement from the document: "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one, consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to Him in all things according to the Scriptures; and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians."

While he is still editing this document, Thomas' son, Alexander, arrives from Ireland. They learn each has independently come to the same conclusions expressed in the Address. Over the next few years their work will move to the fore of the movement.

### Alexander Campbell

Raised in Ireland he was a member of the same Anti-Burgher Seceder branch of the Presbyterian church. When the family left to join Thomas in America, they were shipwrecked off the coast of Scotland. He spent a year in Glasgow, where he attended the university and also came in contact with several of the independently minded preachers including James Haldane's disciple Grenville Ewing. No doubt he also knew of the writings of men like John Glas and Robert Sandeman we discussed earlier. By the time the family sailed for America, Campbell had rejected Presbyterian doctrine. Upon arrival in Pennsylvania, his father showed him the proof sheets of his Declaration and Address. Both were overjoyed to learn they had come to the same conclusions addressed in the document.

Alexander soon began preaching for the newly formed Brush Run church, a part of a more liberal Mahoning Baptist Association. He began his first journal, *The Christian Baptist*. In it he advocated "a return to the ancient order" and attacked the plethora societies attached to the church including missionary societies. (In later life he would repudiate his opposition to this and was instrumental in beginning the American Christian Missionary Society.)

### Campbell and Stone Meet

In 1824 Campbell was visiting churches of like persuasion and has a chance to meet Barton W. Stone. The men learned they shared the same views. The two movements eventually united in 1831, a milestone in Restoration history. Though differences continued to exist they were not of such significance that it separated the fellowship between the churches. By 1830 the rapidly growing movement included about 12,000 people.

It is not hard to understand why Alexander Campbell became the leader in the Restoration Movement. He was a man of exceptional knowledge and intellect. A warm, friendly personality endeared him even to his enemies. Earl West suggests

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## Links to Important Restoration Documents

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Two documents are considered the most significant of the Restoration Movement, one coming from the Stone Movement and the other from the Campbell Movement.

The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery is the dissolution of a presbytery of 15 congregations led by five preachers including Barton W. Stone.

<https://www.intotheword.net/pdfs/LastWillSpringfield.pdf>

The Declaration and Address, written by Thomas Campbell in 1809 is a lengthy 56 page document written shortly after he had been expelled from the Presbyterian Associate Synod of North America. Its ideas are summed up in 13 statements found at the link below. The article contains another link to the entire document.

<http://matt.dabbs.com/2017/03/06/thomas-campbell-and-the-declaration-and-address/>

Campbell's most outstanding trait was his power of concentration which gave him a rich storehouse of knowledge. His pulpit presence was powerful. He had an impeccable reputation and enjoyed influence far beyond the church. He was known to many of the political leaders of the day, serving as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention with James Monroe, James Madison and other prominent Virginians. On occasion he offered the invocation at the opening of Congress.

Campbell's public debates resulted in his being considered one of the leading religious figures in the country. His debates with skeptics Robert Owen and Catholic Archbishop John Purcell were widely published and read. He also debated two Presbyterian ministers, the second one moderated by Kentucky Senator Henry Clay. The publication of his religious journals, first the Christian Baptist, then the Millennial Harbinger spread his influence throughout the country. His influence would continue far beyond his years.

In 1821 a young Presbyterian minister named Walter Scott met Campbell. Also a Scot, he had been heavily influenced by the independent churches in his home country. He and Campbell became extremely close. Scott became the first highly successful evangelist, converting hundreds. He is the first to suggest the well-known five steps to salvation - hear, believe, repent, confession, and baptism for remission of sins.

### Conclusion

Differences continued to exist among the four main strains of the movement. The uniting of the Stone-Campbell branches caused it to dominate though some never fully identified with it. By 1850 Campbell's influence far outshone Stone's and the movement was united mostly around his ideas.

A generation of farmer preachers, like Raccoon John Smith in Kentucky, contributed greatly to the movement's increase. There were also other, more educated leaders, who played roles in establishing academies and some colleges, most short lived. Many, like Campbell, were readily willing to publicly debate their beliefs and found many converts among Baptists and Methodists. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the movement was firmly established and numbered around 200,000 members. But its unity will soon be shattered by major doctrinal differences.