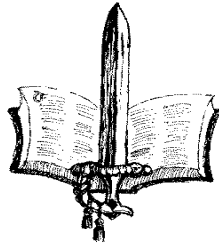


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The Stone-Campbell Movement

Most people are unfamiliar with the history of their own theological tradition, much less the history and heritage of other theological traditions such as the Stone-Campbell Movement or what is often referred to as the American Restoration Movement. Most people do not recognize the names of Barton Stone (1772-1844), Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) – all of whom were key pioneers of this movement in the United States, and from whom the movement gets its name.

This unfamiliarity is somewhat surprising when one considers the fact that the Stone-Campbell Movement was, at one time, the fastest-growing and most evangelistic effort in American history, not to mention the fact that it is perhaps the most eclectic theological tradition, drawing the elements of its beliefs from the theological strengths of a variety of other traditions. In his massive book, The Stone-Campbell Movement rev. ed. (College Press, 1994), Leroy Garrett observes that the movement that “dreamed of uniting the Christians in all the sects did not intend to become still another church, much less three

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more, which it eventually did” (Garrett, 1). The churches to which Garrett refers are the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), Churches of Christ, and Christian Churches (Independent). Garrett, himself a member of the Churches of Christ, also observes that historians in each of these three churches would likely be prepared to argue that their own segment is the true heir of the Restoration Movement. In this limited format, it is impossible to provide readers with anything like a full presentation. I highly recommend Garrett’s book for that. Still, we wanted to provide our readers with at least a brief introduction to and overview of this important segment of the church.

The men from whom the Stone-Campbell Movement gets its name, as noted above, were Barton Warren Stone, Thomas Campbell, and his son, Alexander Campbell. The movement began about 1800 in an effort to reform churches by *restoring* New Testament teaching about the church. Although the early origins of the movement were diverse, together the leaders represented a common pattern of religion arising from the appeal of *primitivism* – a desire in early American churches to restore the original order of things as revealed in Scripture, that is, teaching and beliefs which were free from the additions of later church history and tradition. Many church members and leaders were looking back to the New Testament as the basis for Christianity. In general there were two basic emphases which marked the beginning of the Restoration Movement: (1) a commitment to and a desire to practice Christian unity, and (2) a commitment to the authority of the Bible as the only guide for the faith and practice of the church.

The Restoration Movement united several different smaller

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movements. One such movement in the South began around 1792 when James O’Kelly separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church because of a dispute over the authority of Bishop Francis Asbury in appointing preachers to their circuits. O’Kelly’s followers were first called Republican Methodists in 1793, but by 1794 they had chosen the name “Christians” to the exclusion of all other labels. Using the New Testament as their guide, they taught local church autonomy, equality between all clergy (no hierarchy), and, further, in their application of the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and the fact that the New Testament does not distinguish between *cleros* and *laos*, equality between clergy and laity.

A similar group began in New England about 1801 under the leadership of Abner Jones and Elias Smith. These two men came out of a Baptist background. They were disenchanted with the Baptist name as well as some Baptist teaching, particularly predestination. Jones and Smith also did not greatly appreciate the organization of Baptist churches into associations. Their desire was to follow the Bible alone and work for Christian unity with like-minded believers. By 1811 they had become aware of some of the O’Kelly groups and formed a union with them.

In 1803 Barton W. Stone and several other clergymen in Kentucky left the Presbyterians and formed their own group, the Presbytery of Springfield. Within a year, however, they decided that there was no warrant in the New Testament for presbyteries, and they disbanded. Like the O’Kelly groups, they took only the name “Christian,” committed themselves to local church autonomy, and sought to work for the cause of Christian unity among all believers. In 1826 when Barton Stone finally met members of the Jones-Smith movement, they found they had so

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much in common they united in fellowship without the encumbrance of a formal merger.

Thomas Campbell was raised as an Anglican. He graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1786 and became a minister in the Seceder Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Campbell became increasingly disturbed by the divisions and disunity among Scottish Presbyterians and, at the cost of his health, worked tirelessly for unity. In 1807, on the advice of his physician, he left Northern Ireland and came to western Pennsylvania where he soon came into conflict with fellow Presbyterians over matters of Calvinist doctrine and the administration of the Lord's Supper. In 1808 he left his denomination to function as an independent minister and founded a fellowship called the Christian Association of Washington, named after Washington County, Pennsylvania. The purpose of the association was to promote biblical Christianity and Christian unity. Its sole creed was, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where it is silent, we are silent." If the Restoration Movement has a "patron saint," it would be Thomas Campbell, who gave it an even more famous quotation: "The church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."

The founding document of the movement was Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address, written in September 1809. This fifty-six page work of fine print consisted of thirteen propositions grouped around three concepts: (1) the sinfulness of divisions within the body of Christ; (2) the sufficiency of the Bible as the only standard for doctrine; and (3) the necessity of love and forbearance as essential manifestations of Christian spirit. That same year, 1809, Thomas Campbell was joined by his son, Alexander Campbell, who came from Northern Ireland, and

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soon became the major voice in the Campbellite Movement.

Together, Thomas and Alexander founded the Brush Run Church, and as the movement grew, Thomas handed the leadership over to Alexander and spent several restless years living and teaching in Ohio, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Burlington, Vermont. The Campbell's commitment to biblical authority rather than church tradition as the basis for all church teachings and practices led them to question infant baptism by 1812. Because they could find no solid support for the practice in the early church, they decided in favor of believers' baptism by immersion. This move made them appear to be Baptists, and from 1815 to about 1830, the Campbells worked mostly among Baptists, until the Baptists began to exclude them, together with those Baptists who had identified with the movement. This rejection was based primarily on the Campbell's anti-Calvinistic teachings, their belief that the Lord's Supper should be observed every Sunday, and their belief that baptism was for the remission of sins (see Garrett for an extended explanation, 159ff.), the latter based on their understanding of the injunction of Acts 2:38. But the Campbells rejected any concept of "baptismal regeneration."

When the followers of Barton Stone and the Campbells met each other they quickly discovered they held similar views on many points of belief and practice. In 1831 they joined forces in central Kentucky. However, about half of Stone's movement of Christians distrusted the Campbells' emphasis on baptism for remission of sins, considering them guilty of baptismal regeneration and refused to follow their leader into the union with the Campbellites. Instead, they chose to remain united with the Elias Smith-Abner Jones movement in New England and the Christian Connection, which established its national headquarters in

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Dayton, Ohio, but later, in 1931, it merged with the Congregational Church. In 1957 this body in turn united with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to become the United Church of Christ.

Alexander Campbell preferred the name “Disciples of Christ,” and thus this was often the label by which the movement came to be known, although Stone’s use of “Christian Church” was just as common. The movement grew at a significant rate, achieving 118,000 followers by 1850, and 192,000 by 1860, making it the sixth-largest religious group in the country. They refused to call themselves a denomination, however, feeling such identifications were unbiblical and meant an acceptance of religious division.

Although this attitude toward unity was admirable, the movement inevitably was marked by division. This took place when, in 1849, the American Christian Missionary Society was formed to facilitate the spread of the gospel through organized missions. Many members of the movement were opposed to this methodology, recalling the words of Thomas Campbell, “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where it is silent, we are silent.” This issue was where did the biblical text speak in terms of authorizing missionary societies?

Perhaps the most controversial issue came in 1859 when a church in Midway, Kentucky, was the first to use instrumental music to accompany congregational singing in worship. This was viewed by many members as an unscriptural means of worship. “Conservatives” saw both missionary societies and musical instruments as apostasy from the original commitment to the Bible as the *only* basis for the life and practice of the church. However, others saw these as tools to aid the work of

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the churches, tools which were *not prohibited* in the New Testament and which, therefore, were allowable.

Of course, the real issue at the heart of these controversies was how to apply biblical teaching – specifically biblical principles, particularly when the Bible was silent on a specific subject. In general, the more conservative churches, usually located in the South, refused to follow these innovations. Both sides often used the missionary societies and the use of musical instruments as tests of fellowship. The inevitable occurred in 1906 when the U.S. Census Bureau began to list the non-instrumental Churches of Christ separately from the Christian Churches, or the Disciples of Christ.

A second major problem emerged in the late 1800s with the impact of theological liberalism. The new views of higher biblical criticism undercut the authority of the Scriptures, and the young men who went to graduate schools of theology and accepted the new teachings found themselves in opposition to older evangelicals who still accepted and strongly held to the fundamentals. Gradually, liberals began to fill offices in the missionary societies and other organized agencies among the Christian Churches, including the movement's schools, particularly the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky.

Although evangelicals were able to adopt measures in national conventions to prohibit liberal practices, these measures were reinterpreted by the official (liberal) leadership and rendered harmless. As a result, the evangelicals felt betrayed and in 1927 developed their own convention, the North American Christian Convention. They sent out their own independent missionaries representing “independent” churches. Thus a further division developed between the Independent

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Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ, with the latter oriented toward liberalism. These divisions have led to some confusion over the names of the various branches of the movement. In some parts of the country today the terms “Christian Church” and “Church of Christ” are largely interchangeable, while in other areas they have distinct meanings. Some churches that go by “Christian Church” are actually related to the Disciples of Christ, while others are independent churches.

In recent years the non-instrumental Churches of Christ and the independent Christian Churches have discovered their theological and historical similarities may be more important than their differences regarding missionary societies (versus direct support of missionaries) and the use of musical instruments and have begun a series of tentative meetings. To date there is still a basic inability to agree on “where the Bible speaks.” Even so, these two bodies have always had much in common with the mainstream of evangelicalism, particularly in their understanding of Scripture as a divinely inspired and sufficient revelation and in their opposition to theological liberalism. They have also remained insulated from the controversies that have marked the larger evangelical tradition in America, including millennialism, glossolalia, and the ordination of women.

These churches are known for their conservative, solid, evangelical preaching and teaching and an overall balanced theology, although like most churches, they are guilty of not passing this on to a younger generation. If they have a significant distinguishing characteristic it is their belief that all ordinances should be observed as they were in the days of the

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apostles (i.e., weekly observance of the Lord's Supper), a practice that can hardly be argued against in light of the practice of the early church.

My Bookshelf



This month I want to quickly mention several books I have read since last summer which *Bulletin* readers will find very helpful. First, Isaac Manly's *Slaying the Dragon of Evolution* (College Press, 1999) is an excellent group study on the topic of evolution. While some evangelicals will not agree with Manly's dogmatic position on a young earth and a universal flood, his work is still one of the best small group studies available on this topic. The 85-page booklet is packed with excellent teaching material for the group leader and is so well-written that it may be given to evolutionist friends. Manly, a retired surgeon, became a theistic evolutionist in medical school, melding biblical and evolutionary teachings into one theory. Later, when he began to teach in the church, he realized that the Bible and Darwinism cannot really be mixed.

I am often asked about books dealing with speaking in tongues. George Gardiner's *The Corinthian Catastrophe* (Kregel, 1974) continues to be a calm, balanced exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14. Although it is only 62 pages in length, Gardiner's work is one of the best available on this topic.

Over the years many people have squirmed a bit when I have shared my views on mothers remaining at home with their young children. During that time I have recommended a spate of books in support of my position. The latest such work is Brian Robertson's *There's No Place Like Work: How Business, Government,*

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and Our Obsession with Work Have Driven Parents from Home (Spence, 2000). Robertson relates to the abundant evidence that children suffer when their mothers leave them for the workplace. He observes that the reason for this new norm is not so much the feminist movement, as before the 1960s the women's movement zealously fought against mothers' being forced to abandon their homes for wages, rather it was the change in our society's view of work. We once saw work as a means of supporting family life, now work is pursued as an avenue of self-fulfillment. In addition to this cultural change there were many new policies in both business and government that deliberately stacked the deck against one-income families. Robertson shows that the response of both political parties to the needs of families has been laughable. This would be a great resource for a challenging Labor Day sermon.

Editor's Ink: On Reading Books

Near the end of his Gospel John wrote these interesting words: "There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25, NRSV). Most pastors and church leaders are familiar with the feeling that the whole world has been filled with books on the text and topic of next Sunday's sermon or Wednesday night's Bible study. There is only one Gospel of John, but there are hundreds of commentaries and many more journal articles on John's Gospel, many of which would be of immense help in increasing the pastor's understanding of the text and context, but most of which will remain unread – even if they are assessable – because of lack of available time.

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My colleagues in ministry often call upon me for help with biblical and theological research. They believe that because my work allows me to focus on research and teaching I have read just about everything that is available before I write, teach or preach. I have friends who work for the post office and United Parcel Service who share this assumption. But the fact is, while I may allot more time than others each day and week to reading and research, I labor under the same general limitations that pastors do. No matter how much time we have, there will never be enough time to read everything we would like to read. The result is that choices must be made.

Just as some people look to me to help them with their reading choices, I look to others for help with mine. Before I begin any research project, whether it will be printed or not, I tap friends and colleagues who are experts in their particular fields. They point me in the right direction, usually limiting their recommended resources to some degree, which my creditors greatly appreciate. Few things are more maddening than receiving the sort of “essential” reading list which lists everything available but which also leaves you with no clues as to the best place to start and the books not to miss. Good readers and scholars are almost always discerning collectors of recommendations.

In our effort to keep up with biblical and theological books, including works on Christian education, pastoral counseling, church history, world religions – as well as evangelism and missions – we regularly listen to the advice of evangelical scholars about the important books in their discipline. We want to know the books that may well change the way people think about a subject or issue, books that will excite and cause the reader to want to know more, books that we will return to again

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and again, books that will make a difference when a pastor preaches or group Bible study leader teaches.

Every Bible college and seminary student has heard a professor say of a book, "Sell your bed and go out and buy this book." Or, "Mortgage your house if you must, but try to buy this set!" I always kept note of such books, no matter what the subject or the author's theological tradition, because they were books in which one or more scholars had identified something different which set that work apart from others. Sometimes it was a commentary which a man had spent thirty years of his life writing. At other times it was a set of books which had been in production for many years and of which there was no equivalent.

As a young married graduate student I recall saving back grocery money and eating every day peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in order to be able to purchase the next book on my "want list." Quite often I had already read the library's copy of the book, which made me want it all the more, because I knew I would refer to it again and again. Every now and then my parents would visit us and dad would purchase an expensive book – usually one costing about \$15-\$20 and published overseas – which would take me several months and many sandwiches to be able to purchase. He would then sign his name and the date in the front cover. Thirty years later those treasured volumes remain here in our library, still regularly used.

I challenge believers to read at least one book each month in addition to Scripture and devotional reading. I believe church teachers should read at least two to three books each month, and pastors a minimum of five books monthly just to keep up. This challenge is part of our calling to give our best effort.