

Restoration History

LESSON 3 – The Campbells in America

- by Charles Dailey

(This short lesson series was designed for a church class and gives an overview of our heritage in being like the church of the New Testament era. The series is not designed for the college classroom with documentation on each point. We have relied heavily on the class notes of Dr. Roger Chambers.)

Introduction:

1. In the first lesson, we noted that God used at least five different men in the U.S. to lead break outs from the established denominations just prior to 1800.
2. In the second lesson, we saw how God was working in the lives of Thomas Campbell and his oldest son Alexander while they were in Ireland.
3. Thomas came to America and soon broke with the Presbyterian hierarch in Pennsylvania, while Alexander broke with the Presbyterians in Scotland. They were anxious to meet again in Pennsylvania, but both were searching for an explanation of their break off without knowing the other had made the same move.
4. In this third lesson, we will follow the development of the Campbell portion of the story in Pennsylvania.
 - I. From the Presbyterians to the Brush Run Church.
 - A. There was a dispute because Thomas Campbell had administered the Lord's Supper to someone who was not a part of the Seceder branch of the Presbyterian Church. After some months, Thomas Campbell left the church, announcing that it did not have jurisdiction over him. The year was 1809.
 - B. Thomas Campbell formed his viewpoint into the *Declaration and Address*, a 56 page document. There are several fine summaries of this work. We have chosen the one by Donald G. Hunt for its brevity:

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.

That, although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate one from another, yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other, as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God. And, for this purpose, they ought all to walk by the same rule; to mind and speak the same thing, and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

That in order to do this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith, nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the Word of God. Nor ought anything to be admitted as of divine obligation in their Church constitution and

managements, 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!

The full original text is available at: www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/tcampbell/da/DA-1ST.HTM#Page1

- C. *The Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania* was formed. Campbell began preaching in homes, under trees and wherever he could get a hearing. His emphasis was on the inadequacy of creeds and the necessity of unity among believers. The focus was not to establish a church, but to spread the ideas of not having creeds for tests of fellowship and all believers stressing unity.

The Association had a motto which read:

Where the Scriptures speak, we speak and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.

- D. When Alexander and the rest of the family landed in New York, they made their way toward Washington, Pennsylvania where Thomas was living.

Roger Chambers writes:

Alexander was afraid to tell his father that he had broken with the Seceder church. Thomas met them on the road with the *Declaration and Address* in his saddle bags. He was afraid to tell Alexander of his separation from the Presbyterian and the position he was taking as the leader of the Christian Association of Washington. Both were amazed and pleased to find, as they broached the subject, that they were in basic agreement.

- E. Thomas was optimistic about others accepting such clear grounds for Christian unity. He wanted those with him to spread the truths into existing churches, but it didn't work.
- F. Soon it became necessary to form those who agreed with him into a church of their own - the *Brush Run Church*. Those who became members were "burning their bridges behind them." There was no turning back. The church was committing itself to local autonomy with no synod or other outside authority. It was located inside of Pennsylvania about 10 miles from its border with West Virginia and close to Bethany.
- G. The Lord's Supper was observed each week instead of semi-annually as in the Presbyterian Church.
- H. The practice of baptism went through several phases. All in the church were from backgrounds that practiced infant baptism. But as time passed, they realized that infant baptism was not commanded and practiced immersion for new believers. They would change even more in a short while.
- I. About the photo. There are some romanticized drawings of the *Brush Run Church* building, but this one is authentic, having been handed to the author at Bethany WV by the President of the *Brush Run Restoration Association*. For further details about the building, see the *Brush Run Church* entry in *Wikipedia*.



Brush Run building after it had been moved to Bethany for preservation. Photo courtesy of Jim McElhaney, President of the Brush Run Restoration Association.

II. From the Brush Run Church to Bethany.

- A. Young Alexander became the preacher while his father became the elder. Alexander studied hard with his dad. There was one hour per day of Greek, one hour of Latin, and one-half hour of Hebrew. There was two hours of memorizing 10 verses and reading them in the original language and studying commentaries on them. This was followed by two hours in Church History.
- B. First, Alexander closed one of his father's sermons with an exhortation, but soon he began preaching regularly. In his first year he preached 100 times. He never accepted pay. When he was at home, his sermons were 1½ hours, but when he was away, the sermons were twice that long. His policy of not being paid for his preaching created a hardship for those who needed to "live of the gospel." Churches strongly preferred Campbell's approach, adding to his popularity.
- C. Marriage. Campbell married 18-year-old Margaret Brown. Her father wanted to retire and soon deeded over the extensive family farm to the young couple, thus making Alexander a leading land owner in Virginia (now West Virginia). This gave him the financial freedom to travel about and preach where he was invited. The farm was at what became Bethany, West Virginia.
- D. When the Campbell's first child was born, the subject of the mode of baptism became paramount.



The Campbell "Mansion" as it is today.
Tours are available.

Donald G. Hunt writes:

The Campbells, having been Presbyterians, had known only infant baptism. It was the almost universal practice among Protestants, Baptists being the major exception, from which they were given their name. Principally, because of Thomas Campbell's dominating desire for religious unity, they seemed to be immune to any serious consideration of immersion although confronted with the topic several times, a few times even to their defenseless embarrassment.

But finally they had to make a decision concerning it because a baby was born to Alexander and his wife Margaret. In prospect of the baby's arrival Alexander had ordered every available book favoring infant baptism. But the more he read, the more disappointed he became in his justification of the practice. When he decided to turn to the Greek New Testament, he found only immersion and only believers' baptism. Finally convinced on the question he decided to turn from the teachings and practices of men and follow the Scriptures in harmony with what they as members of the Brush Run church (the name assumed by their church, located near West Middletown, Pennsylvania, about 10 miles from the West Virginia panhandle) had pledged themselves to do from the *Declaration and Address*.

What his father was going to think and what this would do to their unity efforts to Alexander would now have to be subordinate to his obedience to the gospel. But where would he find a Baptist preacher who would immerse him without his becoming a member of the Baptist Church? On his way to search for such, he stopped by his parents' home to tell them his decision. There was no confrontation between son and father, the father only requesting that if such were to take place, Alexander would be sure to let him and his mother know so they could attend. Alexander was acquainted with the Baptist preacher Matthias Luce, so he called on him to discuss the matter. It took some doing, but finally Luce agreed to immerse him without him becoming a Baptist, and upon the Scriptural confession of faith in Christ instead of upon his relating some unusual experience generally required of those about to be baptized. Alexander was overjoyed.

He knew his wife and sister Dorothea were as convinced in the matter as he was, and when he stopped to tell his parents, he found they had a change of clothes ready to be baptized also!

Since they were both preachers, would it be a private or a public baptism? They were not only going to be baptized by immersion in rejection of their previous infant sprinkling, but they wanted the public to know why. When a large crowd gathered at Buffalo Creek at the announced time for this unusual occasion they felt the necessity of explaining their action and at the same time wanted it to be an opportunity to convince others to make the same decision.

Before the baptisms Thomas gave a lengthy discourse in which he admitted he had been led to overlook the importance of baptism in his quest for religious unity but that he was forced by the Scripture now to do what they were about to do. Alexander followed with another message on the matter. The discourses and the baptisms lasted seven hours! Besides the two Campbell couples and Dorothea, Mr. and Mrs. James Hanen of Brush Run were also baptized, making a total of seven baptized on that memorable day (June 4, 1812).

- E. The change of views on baptism met with two responses in the greater community. Most turned against the new group even more. On the other hand, the Baptists warmed up to them, seeking their fellowship. The *Brush Run Church* cautiously joined an area association of Baptist churches with the understanding that they would be allowed to follow only the Scriptures.

The romance did not last. The Baptists were governed by the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, a creed. They claimed that faith was imparted by God and given only to the elect. They required a “conversion experience” before baptism and then claimed that baptism was because of a *prior* forgiveness of sins instead of *for* the remission of sins. They taught that only an ordained minister could baptize and the Lord’s Supper was to be observed quarterly. Most of these points were the doctrines of Calvinism.

- F. After a few years, the members of the *Brush Run Church* began relocating to other areas. Some settled at Wellsburg, West Virginia. It was not far from Campbell’s farm at Bethany and he began traveling about raising funds for the building project among churches that would grant him a hearing.

Alexander Campbell developed an enviable record as a fund raiser that stood him in good stead for the rest of his productive years.

- G. Using his experience in Ireland, Campbell opened a home for boys in his own house, but that did not prove successful.



Wellsburg, WV church building

III. The Bethany Years.

- A. Mr. Campbell was an avid reader and prized the printed page. He set up a printing plant at his farm and published from there. His publications included books as he wrote them, hymn books and a monthly paper.

His first monthly publication was the *Christian Baptist*, beginning in 1823. It was not connected

with the denomination of that name. One person described the publication in these words, “It shook up; it tore apart; it broke down many existing beliefs. It made enemies, it created friends.”

In about seven years (1830), Campbell launched a new publication with a less strident tone named the *Millennial Harbinger*. It was not a prophetic monthly, but allowed many falsehoods to be printed while Campbell and others would present a Biblical response.

When subscriptions expired, Campbell did not stop sending the Harbinger. It was not a financial success, but accomplished its intended purpose of influencing the church world and being a voice for the return to the simple gospel of the New Testament. On the other hand, Mr. Campbell became the postmaster of Bethany and a perk for the postmaster in that era was they had free mailing. So it did not cost to mail the Harbinger.

The versatile Alexander Campbell also worked at translating the New Testament. His may have been the first to translate *baptize as immerse*.

Two editions of his Living Oracles translation are available free at:
<http://ncbible.info/MoodRes/Transmission/LibTransmission.html#ver2>

Campbell’s office work was done in his custom-built six-sided office located in the yard of his home. It did not have windows or chairs, but tilted shelf space to lay out his research.

Several buildings connected with the Restoration Movement have copied this design. The Christian Church in Camas, Washington used it and probably the large Tabernacle that once stood in Santa Cruz, California.



Alexander Campbell’s Study

Campbell was the editor from 1830 until 1864 when he relinquished that role to W. K. Pendleton.

Some issues of the *Harbinger* are online and downloadable at Google Books.

B. The debates. Campbell proved to be very capable in public controversy.

In:

- 1820 he debated John Walker about baptism.
- 1823 he debated W. L. McCalla about baptism.
- 1829 he debated Robert Owen about atheism.
- 1837 he debated Bishop Purcell about the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1843 he debated Nathan Rice about baptism.

The audiences were large and Campbell printed and distributed each debate.

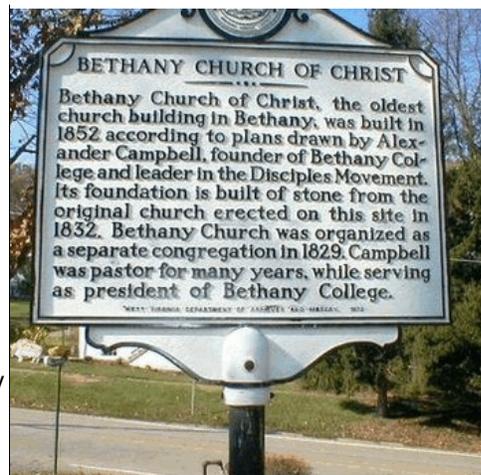
A useful analysis of the debates is at: www.christianchronicler.com/History2/campbell_debates.html

C. Bethany College and Church.

The church at Bethany was established in 1829 and continues to this day.

The sign in front reads:

Bethany Church of Christ, the oldest church building in Bethany, was built in 1852 according to plans drawn by Alexander Campbell, founder of Bethany College and leader in the Disciples Movement. Its foundation is built of stone from the original church erected on this site in 1832. Bethany Church was organized as a separate congregation in 1829. Campbell was pastor for many years, while serving as president of Bethany College.



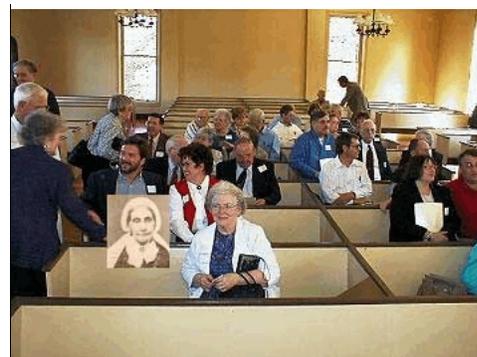
The floor of the building has a slope, with the back slightly higher than the front. Entrance to the building is through two doors. Originally, men used the door on the right while women entered through the left and set separately inside. Mr. Campbell had the notion that seating singles separately would improve their interest in the service. There is a considerable amount of carving on the back of the pews on the men's side.



Historic Church Building at Bethany

The pulpit was up front so it was necessary to enter or exit past the speaker's stand. Arriving late or leaving for the restroom were plain to everyone. Mr. Campbell was the preacher here for many years.

The lights shown are now electric lights, converted from oil lamps. The building is used for small occasions such as conferences and ordinations.



Lois Dailey in Salina Campbell's pew. The picture of Salina was superimposed with software.

Alexander Campbell believed that a liberal arts education was best achieved in a rural setting, away from the contaminating influences of cities. He led in the establishment of this college on what had been his own property.

Because of his ability as a writer and debater as well as a fund raiser, the college that he envisioned was established and grew rapidly.

The buildings are reminiscent of the architecture of the *University of Glasgow* in Scotland.



Students went out, carrying the message of New Testament Christianity around the country and into the far west. The College at Monmouth, Oregon had several from the Campbell family and from Bethany College on the faculty. A handful of pioneer preachers in Oregon were trained at Bethany College.

Bethany College became a model for other schools. According to former Bethany President Duane Cummings, 209 colleges and 205 academies among the Stone-Campbell churches have modeled their programs after Bethany.

- D. Family Life. Margaret Campbell died in 1827, at the age of 37 of tuberculosis. She and Alexander had five daughters. Before her death, she suggested that Alexander marry her long-time friend Selina Huntington Bakewell. Mr. Campbell had baptized Selina in 1821. Mr. Campbell married her and they had six children, most of who did not live to adulthood. She was 13 years younger than her husband.



Following Campbell's death, Selina wrote the story of her marriage in her memoirs, *Home Life and Reminiscences of Alexander Campbell*. The book is available as a free download from Google Books. It is also carried by Amazon Books.

IV. The Union of the Campbell and Stone Movements

- A. In our first lesson, we learned of the work of Barton W. Stone. He had left the Presbyterian Church to enjoy the freedom of just being a Christian. His work was in Kentucky and pre-dated the Campbells by nearly 20 years.
- B. The influence of Alexander Campbell was increasing in Kentucky because of the *Christian Baptist* and also the debates as well as his personal tours. In 1824 Campbell met Stone and discussed their likeness and differences.
- C. They agreed on the sufficiency of Scripture, the rejection of creeds, the character of faith, and agreed on emphasizing unity. They both rejected limited atonement and accepted believer's baptism, the autonomy of the local churches and both opposed sectarian names.
- D. They had differences too, but over time, Stone shifted to Campbell's views on most of their differences.

Campbell said,

Let us then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites, or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us all come to the Bible, and to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the Light we need.

Stone said,

I have not one objection to the ground laid down by him as the true scriptural basis of union among

the people of God; and I am willing to give him, now and here, my hand.

- E. Following their meeting, word was sent to the churches asking their views, and there was a wide acceptance of the agreement among the congregations. Those in the New England states were not totally in agreement and remained out of the new pact.
- F. At this point, we will change our vocabulary and use the term *Stone-Campbell Movement* rather than *Restoration Movement*. A number of religious groups have had restoration movements within their ranks making it difficult to talk with those people about “our Restoration Movement.” Stone-Campbell is historically precise and cannot be confused with something else.

Conclusion:

The Stone-Campbell Movement was drawing thousands together and accomplishing the goals that it set out to reach in its *Christian Association* days.

Next time we will look at the four prominent leaders that followed Campbell as he declined due to age.