

## Restoring the “Stone-Campbell” Movement

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It has been observed that what once used to be known as the Restoration Movement is now being referred to as “The Stone-Campbell Movement.” It has always been known as the Restoration Movement to my memory. So when did this new name become prevalent? Where did it come from? Why is it being used? These are questions on my mind.

I started doing some research as to where the “Stone-Campbell” moniker came from. All roads lead to a book published in 1981 by Leroy Garrett entitled, you guessed it, “The Stone-Campbell Movement.”<sup>1</sup> He states in the Author’s preface that “While my academic studies were preparatory to teaching philosophy and religion and not ‘Restoration History,’ I have nonetheless studied what I choose to call the Stone-Campbell Movement most of my life.”<sup>2</sup> In the book *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, it tells us “...the phrase ‘Stone-Campbell Movement’ [was] coined by Garrett for the book title....”<sup>3</sup>

In Garrett’s book he claims of Stone and Campbell, “it is misleading to call their effort ‘The Restoration Movement of the Nineteenth Century,’ which is the way it is often described by late twentieth century historians.”<sup>4</sup> Garrett tries to make the case that The Restoration Movement is a betrayal of the original intent of Campbell and Stone, because they only wanted to reform the existing churches, not create a movement to restore. He states:

It is interesting to note that in recent decades, with the emergence of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches, that it is the more conservative historians, and those representing churches more likely to be restorationists, that choose the dubious description of the Restoration Movement.....In these conservative circles there is often a put down of the idea of reformation, as if to say, *We are out to restore the church, not to reform it.* While this was precisely the view of the Anabaptists and other radicals, it was not the view of the pioneers of the Stone-Campbell Movement.<sup>5</sup>

While reading through the literature of Campbell and Stone, I find Garrett’s premise to be faulty, at best, misleading, at worst.

The opposite perspective can be seen early on in the writings of Campbell. Take, for example, what he wrote in the Feb. 7, 1825 edition on the *Christian Baptist*:

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<sup>1</sup> LeRoy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Foster, et al, (Editor) *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004. p. xxvii

<sup>4</sup> Garrett, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, 9

All reformation in religious opinions and speculations have been fated like the fashions in apparel. They have lived, and died, and revived, and died again. As apparel has the badge of rank, so have opinions been the badge of parties, and the cause of their rise and continuance. The green and the orange ribbon, as well as blue stocking, have been useful and as honorable to those that have worn them, as those opinions were to their possessors, which have been the shibboleths of religious parties.

Human systems, whether of philosophy or of religion, are proper subjects of reformation; but Christianity cannot be reformed. Every attempt to reform Christianity is like an attempt to create a new sun, or to change the revolutions of the heavenly bodies—unprofitable and vain. In a word we have had reformations enough. The very name has become offensive, as the term “Revolution” in France.

A restoration of the ancient order of things is all that is necessary to the happiness and usefulness of Christians. No attempt “to reform the doctrine, discipline and government of the church,” (a phrase too long in use,) can promise a better result than those which have been attempted and languished to death. We are glad to see, in the above extract, that the thing proposed, is to bring the Christianity and the church of the present day up to the standard of the New Testament. This is in substance, though in other terms, what we contend for. To bring the societies of Christians up to the New Testament, is just to bring the disciples individually and collectively, to walk in the faith, and in the commandments of the Lord and Saviour, as presented in that blessed volume; and this is to restore the ancient order of things. Celebrated as the era of reformation is, we doubt not but that the era of restoration will far transcend it in importance and fame, through the long and blissful Millennium, as the New Testament transcends in simplicity, beauty, excellency, and majesty, the dogmas and notions of the creed of Westminster and the canons of the Assembly’s Digest. Just in so far as the ancient order of things, or the religion of the New Testament, is restored, just so far has the Millennium commenced, and so far have its blessings been enjoyed. For to the end of time, we shall have no other revelation of the Spirit, no other New Testament, no other Saviour, and no other doctrine of Christ delivered to us by his apostles.<sup>6</sup>

That was not a conservative late twentieth century historian. That was Campbell, and he wrote it fairly early on. While what Garrett claims may sometimes be true, that, “It should be noticed that these pioneers referred to their efforts as *reformation*, not restoration,”<sup>7</sup> it is not true all of the time. There was an attempt, early on, for these men, Campbell and Stone, to try to bring about restoration from within the existing church bodies. Garrett seems to long for those times and seek unity for the sake of unity, without much consideration about obedience to the Word of God. This Movement, the Restoration Movement, has always had the principle of Scriptures first, union second. Campbell and Stone could unite with almost anyone if the commitment to Restoration was there.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Christian Baptist*, Alexander Campbell. Feb. 7, 1825

<sup>7</sup> Garrett, p. 6

The Restoration Movement cannot be anything more than a principle. Many have tried to make it into some kind of religious body but it will not work. The Restoration Principle is that whatever the Scriptures teach, in its proper context, that is what we will do.

To call this Movement “The Stone-Campbell Movement” is to betray the very thing these men taught against. The biographer of Campbell wrote in his massive work entitled *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, “Mr. Campbell never for a moment entertained the thought of becoming the head of a party or allowing himself to be recognized as the *founder* of a religious denomination.”<sup>8</sup> Richardson goes on to include a note written by Campbell to the editors of the *Commercial Bulletin*, which, in part says, “I have always repudiated all *human heads* and *human names* for the people of the Lord, and shall feel very thankful if you correct the erroneous impression which your article may have made in thus representing me as the founder of a religious denomination.”<sup>9</sup>

How about Barton Stone? Although Stone’s biography uses the word “reformation” one can clearly see the principle of restoration behind his words. He says:

Under the name of the Springfield Presbytery we went forward preaching, and constituting churches; but we had not worn our name more than one year before we saw it savored of a party spirit. With the man-made creeds we threw it overboard, and took the name Christian—the name given to the disciples by divine appointment first at Antioch. We published a pamphlet on this name, written by Elder Rice Haggard, who had lately united with us. Having divested ourselves of all party creeds, and party names, and trusting alone in God, and the word of his grace, we became a byword and laughing stock to the sects around. Yet from this period I date the commencement of that reformation, which has progressed to this day.<sup>10</sup>

To call this movement after the names of two prominent preachers, is to reject the very ideals they stood for and spent their lives promoting.

With the publication of Garrett’s book, it soon became a standard textbook in many Restoration oriented Bible colleges. Too many teachers failed to take a critical look at the history and tone of the book. For a critical examination written at the time the book became known see Roger Chambers’ entitled, *The Plea of History and History of the Plea*.<sup>11</sup> This popularity on Bible College campuses led to this term being used more and more often. It is now common-place. It is often used in numerous brotherhood journals. There is even a liberal publication that calls itself *The Stone-Campbell Journal*. Both Campbell and Stone would, and have already, rejected such terms as sectarian and not conducive to properly promoting the New Testament Church.

Campbell and others had joined a couple of Baptist associations in an attempt to work from within the existing Churches to bring about restoration. With the influence of Walter Scott, John Henry made a

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*. Vol. ii, p. 441

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Baron W. Stone, *Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone*. Cincinnati: J.A. and U.P. James, 1847. P. 50

<sup>11</sup> This article originally appeared in the *Restoration Herald*, February 1984 and can be viewed at [www.faithfulpreaching.com/Plea\\_of\\_History.pdf](http://www.faithfulpreaching.com/Plea_of_History.pdf)

motion at the 1830 meeting of the Mahoning Baptist Association to dissolve the organization. Campbell was about to stand up and oppose it but Scott persuaded him not to do so. It passed unanimously. This change happened because almost the entire Association was committed to the principle of restoration. This was not the beginning of the Restoration Movement, but it was a beginning. For the first time, they were a body, based upon Restoration, not a part of any other group. Many in our day desire for this Movement to be a unity movement. In one sense, it has always been a unity movement. But the only means for unity to take place is to have unity upon the Word of God. That is what Campbell and Stone wanted from the beginning. It was never about joining up with other religious bodies just so there can be a sense of unity. No. It was to be truly united upon the teachings of Scripture.

Restoration is hard. If we can get away from the theme of Restoration, then we can “unite” with all evangelicals and doctrine will not matter. If we can get away from the name “Restoration Movement” then those Baptists and others will not object so much to what we preach and teach. However, if we maintain the principle of Restoration, then we will continue to be called “legalists,” “narrow-minded,” and “unloving.” If we must be called names by others in order to be faithful to the Word of God, then I say, so be it.

“The Restoration Movement is a religious movement that began about 1800. Its purpose was and is to restore the Church to the original or apostolic model in doctrine, polity, and life. The standard for the restoration is the New Testament, and the Word of God is the basis for unity among believers.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Chambers, *Syllabus for An Intellectual History: The Restoration Movement*. nd, p. 1