

**THE DISCIPLES MOVEMENT:
BARTON W. STONE (1772-1844),
THOMAS CAMPBELL (1763-1854), AND
ALEXANDER CAMPBELL (1788-1866)**

Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together. There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

—Ephesians 4:2-6

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

—Thomas Campbell

BACKGROUND - CHRISTIANITY IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA

The American Revolution (1776-1783) proved to be very destructive to Christianity in America. Like all wars, the Revolution brought hardship and destruction, and many people were distracted from religion by the mere effort to survive. The War also created a shortage of pastors and preachers. Many clergymen who had been loyal to England left America, while few new clergymen could be educated during the War.

But perhaps the most devastating blow to Christianity, at least in the short run, were the new freedoms people now enjoyed. In most States, there was no longer an established church, and membership ceased to be compulsory.¹ Thus, Christianity had to raise both members and money through persuasion, rather than compulsion. Most of the churches were not yet equipped to do this.

The Anglican Church was hit hardest, since it had been the established church in 5 of the 13 colonies, and was the most closely associated with England—a considerable disadvantage during and after the Revolution. Most Anglican ministers left America when war broke out, and many Anglican churches were destroyed. The American Anglican Church renamed itself the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1789, and discarded those elements which were deemed inconsistent with the new American form of government.

John Wesley had long insisted that Methodism was inseparable from the Church of England. But in 1784, only a year after the War ended, he helped the American Methodists reorganize themselves into an independent church: the

Methodist Episcopal Church. Wesley trimmed the 39 Articles of the Church of England down to 24, by eliminating all traces of Calvinistic predestination² and by removing references to the English crown. Wesley also ordained American clergymen, prepared an American liturgy, and compiled a hymnbook to help the new church. At a conference in Baltimore in December 1784, the Methodists elected Francis Asbury (1745-1816) and Thomas Coke (1747-1814) as superintendents, and conferred upon them authority to ordain clergymen.

Of all the American churches, the Baptists and the Presbyterians—most of whom had supported the War—were in the best position to adjust quickly to the new order. The Baptists had long supported religious liberty. While they emphasized the independence of individual congregations, they had developed strong central organizations to promote cooperation and evangelism. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Baptists grew swiftly in the South, and quickly expanded into Kentucky and Tennessee as well.³

The Presbyterians had a predominantly American clergy and grew rapidly prior to the War, expanding in both the West (Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Ohio River valley) and the South. The leaders of the movements which would become the Disciples of Christ denomination came from these Presbyterian roots. The “Presbyterian Church in the United States of America” was officially established in 1788.

In the midst of these established denominations, new movements began to spring up, reflecting the American values of freedom, independence, and self-reliance. New religious leaders emphasized man’s free will to accept or reject the Gospel, in contrast to Anglican and Presbyterian predestination. They also insisted on the right of individuals to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, and rejected any creeds and doctrines which they considered inconsistent with the New Testament. The pioneers of these movements included Elias Smith (1769-1846), Abner Jones (1772-1841), and James O’Kelly (ca. 1735-1826).

Nevertheless, by 1800 the vast majority of Americans were not members of any church. Since they were no longer required to support or attend a particular church, many avoided religion altogether. Freedom of religion turned into freedom **from** religion. And yet a spiritual fire still smoldered, waiting for someone to ignite it into flame. Barton W. Stone would be one of the first to provide that spark.

BARTON W. STONE

Childhood. Barton Warren Stone was born on Christmas Eve, 1772, near Port Tobacco, Maryland,⁴ one of four sons born to John Stone and Mary Warren Stone. (Barton also had four half-siblings: 3 boys and 1 girl.) John Stone died shortly before the American Revolution began, when Barton was still only a few

years old. In 1779, Mary Stone sold the family farm in Maryland, and took the eight children, 1 grandchild, and family servants to Pittsylvania County, Virginia.⁵ For the next 4-5 years, young Barton learned the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic—from an Englishman, Robert W. Somerhays. Barton loved reading, but there were few books available other than the Bible, so he became very familiar with God’s Word. He admits to having a thirst for religion at an early age, but there was no one to show him what he should do. (Barton tells us that even the local parson “was what may be termed a man of pleasure.”⁶) He soon abandoned the effort.

When Barton was 15 or 16, he received his share of his father’s estate. A year or two later, he used the money to attend an academy run by David Caldwell (1725-1824), a Presbyterian minister, in Guilford, North Carolina—about 30 miles from his home. Entering the Academy on February 1, 1790, he studied to become a lawyer and joined those who ridiculed Christianity. But secretly, Stone was impressed with the sincerity and happiness of these Christians, and regretted his harsh treatment of them. He felt isolated from both groups, and decided to leave the academy. However, a storm delayed his departure. By the time it subsided, he had changed his mind.

Conversion. Not long after, he went with his roommate to hear James McGready (1760-1817), a popular Presbyterian preacher. Stone was transfixed. The imperative to reach heaven and avoid hell seemed to overshadow all else. After the meeting, when Barton was alone, he considered his options, and finally decided that he must follow God. He prayed for mercy. He did not immediately find it.

For about a year, in accordance with Calvinistic Presbyterianism, Stone labored and worried over his salvation, hoping and praying for that moment when God’s Spirit would instantly change him and make him a Christian. He found only discouragement and depression. Then, at a Sunday evening meeting in Alamance, North Carolina, he attended a sermon by William Hodge, entitled, “God is love.” Here was a startling message that completely contradicted Calvinism: that God wanted to save *all* sinners, and not merely the “elect”; that He would accept anyone who is truly repentant; and that all had the free will to accept or reject God’s free gift of salvation. After the meeting, Barton studied his Bible and gradually concluded that Hodge was right. Stone also realized that God wanted to save *him*. When he finally asked for God’s mercy and found the assurance of salvation for which he had been searching, a flood of gratitude and love toward God washed over his soul. From that time forward, Stone lived a life devoted to God.

Preacher. Barton continued his studies, but he gave up his dream of becoming a lawyer, and in 1793 he became a candidate for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church. Although approved by the local presbytery, his doubts about Calvinism dissuaded him from immediately seeking a position. Instead, he journeyed to Georgia, where he stayed for a time with his brother, Matthew. With

his help, Barton obtained a job in early 1795 as Professor of Languages in the Succoth Academy, a Methodist school near Washington, Georgia,⁷ founded by Hope Hull (1763-1818). Here he met John Springer (1744-1798), a Presbyterian minister who encouraged Barton in his desire to preach. In the springtime of 1796, Stone resigned and obtained his preaching license from his presbytery in North Carolina. Before long he journeyed to Tennessee and busied himself preaching in the new frontier towns and communities.⁸ But before the end of the year he departed for Kentucky.

Stone settled near Cane Ridge and Concord, Kentucky,⁹ where he served as preacher and interim minister for the Presbyterian churches in both towns. That changed in the fall of 1798, when he received a “call” from the two Presbyterian churches to be their permanent pastor. This required Stone to be ordained and to accept official Presbyterian doctrine, as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith. He did so, “as far as I see it consistent with the word of God.”¹⁰ That satisfied the presbytery and the congregations, and Stone was formally ordained on October 4, 1798, at the age of 25.

But as his concern for sinners continued to grow, so did his discontent with the Calvinism of his Presbyterian faith. Calvinism taught that people are so depraved that no sinner can have faith, and thus be saved, unless God first intervenes to soften the sinner’s heart and cause belief. But Stone saw that if God does not enable belief in every sinner—as Calvinism taught—this must mean that God does not want all sinners to be saved, and thus that He does not love all sinners. This conclusion, Stone decided, was hopelessly inconsistent with the Bible. He determined that sinners were kept from God’s salvation not by an inability to believe, but by an unwillingness to believe. And this demanded that each sinner have free will. Stone did not at first go public with this new belief, for he felt the need to study the Bible and prepare himself better to defend against the many objections he knew would come. As he did so, God forever changed his life in a single year.

An Eventful Year. The year was 1801. In the spring of that year, he attended a “camp meeting” in Logan County, Kentucky.¹¹ These camp meetings were run by James McGready, who, like Stone, had moved west. McGready began holding these outdoor gatherings in July 1800. He held them in rural areas, and attracted hundreds of people who came in wagons and camped there for several days. Stone witnessed the outpouring of emotion and of God’s Spirit, and saw many people being saved. Although skeptical at first, he gradually concluded that what he was witnessing had to be from God, for he saw many lives transformed from careless sinners to humble, repentant, joyful Christians. Stone decided to incorporate the “camp meeting” idea into his own ministry; he held his first such meeting in late May, 1801. In his “History of the Christian Church in the West,”¹² Stone tells us that this first camp

meeting lasted 4 or 5 days and attracted a crowd of between 5,000 and 6,000 persons.

A few months later, on July 2, 1801, Barton Stone was married to Elizabeth Campbell (1784-1810), of Mulenburg, Kentucky. She was a devoted wife and Christian, very intelligent, and with a cheerful spirit that helped Barton through the many difficulties he was soon to face. They would have a son (Barton Warren), who died in infancy, and four daughters before his wife's untimely death on May 30, 1810. But perhaps the biggest change in Stone's life was yet to come.

The Cane Ridge Camp Meeting. On August 7, 1801, Stone and a Presbyterian minister from Ohio, Richard McNemar (1770-1839), began the tremendously successful Cane Ridge Camp Meeting. It lasted six days, until August 12th. In his autobiography—written in 1843, at about age 70—Stone describes it as follows:

This memorable meeting came on Thursday or Friday before the Lord's Day in August, 1801. The roads were literally crowded with wagons, carriages, horsemen, and footmen, moving to the solemn camp. The sight was affecting. It was judged, by military men on the ground, that there were between twenty and thirty thousand collected. Four or five preachers were frequently speaking at the same time, in different parts of the encampment, without confusion. The Methodist and Baptist preachers aided in the work, and all appeared cordially united in it—of one mind and one soul, and the salvation of sinners seemed to be the great object of all. We all engaged in singing the same songs of praise—all united in prayer—all preached the same things—free salvation urged upon all by faith and repentance. A particular description of this meeting would fill a large volume, and then the half would not be told. The numbers converted will be known only in eternity. Many things transpired there, which were so much like miracles, that if they were not, they had the same effects as miracles on infidels and unbelievers; for many of them by these were convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and bowed in submission to him. This meeting continued six or seven days and nights, and would have continued longer, but provisions for such a multitude failed in the neighborhood.¹³

A Methodist minister, Peter Cartwright (1785-1872), who was converted during this revival, describes it in similar terms:

Somewhere between 1800 and 1801, in the upper part of Kentucky, at a memorable place called “Cane Ridge,” there was appointed a sacramental meeting by some of the Presbyterian ministers, at which meeting, seemingly unexpected by ministers or people, the mighty power of God was displayed in a very extraordinary manner; many were moved to tears, and bitter and loud crying for mercy. The meeting was protracted for weeks. Ministers of almost all denominations flocked in from far and near. The meeting was kept up by night and day. Thousands heard of the mighty work, and came on foot, on horseback, in carriages and wagons. It was supposed that there were in attendance at times during the meeting from twelve to twenty-five thousand people. Hundreds fell prostrate under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle. Stands were erected in the woods from which preachers of different Churches proclaimed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was supposed, by eye and ear witnesses, that between one and two thousand souls were happily and powerfully converted to God during the meeting. It was not unusual for one, two, three, and four to seven preachers to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from the different stands erected for the purpose. The heavenly fire spread in almost every direction.

The Cane Ridge Camp Meeting became both a religious and a social event, attracting not only sincere Christians, but also those who were merely curious or lonely. Many were attracted by the opportunity to be with other people—a rarity in the sparsely populated frontier areas.

The Meeting was especially notable for the excitement which it unexpectedly generated, which most of those present attributed to demons and/or the work of God’s Spirit. Some people danced or ran to the point of exhaustion. Others got the “jerks,” in which their heads or whole bodies would shake violently, often accompanied by a grunting or “barking” sound. Still others shouted and screamed, laughed uncontrollably, or sang as if to themselves. According to Stone, many sinners were converted as a result of these strange happenings.

The Springfield Presbytery. The dramatic and completely unexpected success of this largest of revivals attracted widespread newspaper coverage, even from as far away as the east coast. It also attracted the attention of many zealous Presbyterians, who were greatly disturbed by certain aspects of the camp meetings, including: the emotionalism generated; the fact that unordained and even uneducated preachers were allowed to proclaim the Gospel; and most particularly, the very anti-Calvinistic preaching that God would save any sinner who would

simply believe the truth of the Gospel and repent. Many Presbyterians began to see the revivals as a threat to their branch of Christianity. During 1801 and 1802, complaints were brought to church authorities that McNemar and John Thompson, a minister in Springfield, Ohio, ¹⁴ were not adhering to church doctrine—and specifically, to church dogma concerning predestination. ¹⁵

The matters were eventually referred to the Presbyterian Synod at Lexington, Kentucky, which met in September, 1803. ¹⁶ However, on September 10, 1803, before the matter could be formally considered by the Synod, McNemar, Thompson, Stone, and two other ministers, Robert Marshall (1760-1832), from Kentucky, and John Dunlavy (1769-1826), from Ohio, withdrew from the jurisdiction of the Synod. ¹⁷ Together, in late 1803, they formed the independent “Springfield Presbytery.” Fifteen congregations—seven in Ohio and eight in Kentucky—joined the Springfield Presbytery, including Stone’s congregations in Cane Ridge and Concord. In January, 1804, the five ministers published a 3-part “Apology,” in which they set forth: (1) the events which led to their breaking ranks with the Kentucky Synod, (2) an explanation and defense of their own views, supported by Scriptures, and (3) their objections to creeds in general, ¹⁸ and to the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith in particular, including especially its doctrine of Calvinistic predestination. Stone authored the 2nd part.

The Springfield Presbytery added a sixth minister when it ordained David Purviance (1766-1847) in 1804, after he was refused ordination by the West Lexington Presbytery on theological grounds. Thus far, these six men still considered themselves to be Presbyterians—but that would soon change.

The Birth of the Christian Church. On June 28, 1804, the six ministers dissolved their ten-month-old presbytery, primarily from concerns that: (1) such church government was unscriptural, since the New Testament churches had nothing of the kind, and (2) they were viewed by many as just another of the feuding denominations of Christianity. The six pastors therefore renounced allegiance to any denomination and simply took the name, “Christians.” ¹⁹ One of their number wrote “The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery” to explain their motives. (The complete “Last Will” is reproduced verbatim in Appendix 1 to this writing.) In the “Last Will,” the group pleaded for tolerance and unity, urging Christians to “pray more, and dispute less.” ²⁰ They highlighted the importance of the Bible “as the only sure guide to heaven.” The “Last Will” emphasized the right of each congregation to govern itself, to call its own pastor, and to admit and discipline its members, without reference to larger church bodies. The six ministers also stated their belief that ministers should be ordained on the basis of their knowledge of the Scriptures and their calling by God, rather than on the basis of man-made creeds, traditions, or credentials.

In 1804, the Presbyterian General Assembly appointed a committee to try to bring Stone and the Christians back into the Presbyterian Church. In a letter dated October 18, 1804, Stone, Marshall, Dunlavy, and Thompson responded that such reunion was impossible so long as they would be required to accept the Westminster Confession of Faith as a higher authority than the Bible. The General Assembly dropped the idea.

Christian Baptism. The cornerstone uniting the “Christians” was Stone’s belief that the Bible was the supreme authority in all matters of faith. Thus, the Christians rejected those church doctrines and traditions which, in their opinion, were contrary to Scripture. Stone’s study of God’s Word soon led him to the conclusion that baptism of infants was inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible. Since infant baptism was the only kind Stone himself had received, he sought and received baptism by immersion as an adult.

However, another central belief among the “Christians” was that each individual should be free to interpret the Bible for himself or herself; they required toleration of each other’s different opinions so long as each remained true to the Spirit of God’s Word. Thus, Stone did not attempt to force adult baptism on those who considered their infant baptism sufficient.

Defections and Growth. The years 1803 and 1804 saw rapid growth among the Christians. Prominent preachers of that day—including Clement Nance, James Read, Rice Haggard, and Matthew Houston—joined their ranks. This rapid growth was slowed in 1805, when the Christians’ ranks were thinned by defections to a group known as the “Shakers.”²¹ Founded by Ann Lee Stanley (1736-1784), the Shakers believed that Christ had appeared a second time in the form of “Mother Ann.” They forbid both marriage and sexual activity, and formed highly structured communities. Several Christian ministers—including McNemar and Dunlavy (two of the six signers of the “Last Will” of the Springfield Presbytery), as well as the recent convert, Matthew Houston—joined the ranks of the Shakers, along with many others.²² However, Barton Stone was not among them, and he labored diligently to prevent further losses by exposing contradictions between the Shakers and the Scriptures. In 1811, the Christians lost two more of their original six ministers, when Robert Marshall and John Thompson reunited with the Presbyterian Church.²³

Nevertheless, gains far outstripped the losses. The Christians trained new ministers, lay preachers, and travelling evangelists, many of whom farmed the land to support their families during their spare time. By the late 1820s the movement had grown to more than 12,000 members. From the original base in Kentucky and Ohio, Christians spread to Tennessee, Indiana, Missouri, Illinois, Alabama, Iowa, and other states. However, there was no central organization, as the Christians remained essentially congregation-driven.

Stone Leaves Cane Ridge. Meanwhile, after the deaths of his only son (Barton Warren) in 1809 and his first wife, Elizabeth, in 1810, Stone placed his four daughters with Christian friends and spent a year as a traveling evangelist, accompanied by another Christian widower, Reuben Dooley. The two preached and baptized together, and sometimes separately in order to cover more territory, and enjoyed many successes. Occasionally they returned to visit their children.

On October 31, 1811, Stone was remarried, in Nashville, Tennessee, to Celia Wilson Bowen (1792-1857), a cousin of his previous wife. Celia helped him raise his four daughters, and they had six more children together: four sons and two daughters. Stone and his new wife lived in Kentucky for the first year of their marriage.

However, at the request of Celia's relatives, Barton sold his Kentucky farm and moved his family to Tennessee. They stayed there for two years (1812-1814), and then moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where Stone got a job as a school teacher. He learned Hebrew from a Jewish doctor, and continued to preach on Sundays. Sometime later, they moved to Georgetown, Kentucky, where Stone served as principal for the Rittenhouse Academy. He also preached and served as pastor for the church, which grew as a result of his preaching. Before long he purchased 123 acres of farmland nearby, farming the land to help support his large family. But he always kept pen and paper close by, and jotted down notes as thoughts or inspiration came to him during his labors. Stone also continued to preach and eventually resigned as principal, so he could devote more time and energies to preaching.

The *Christian Messenger*. In November 1826, Stone began publishing a monthly journal, the *Christian Messenger*. This periodical discussed past and upcoming meetings of Christian leaders, and documented the spread of the young movement. The *Messenger* also gave Stone a platform for spreading his theology. Although Stone's positions on such issues as the Trinity, Christ's nature, and the atonement were not without controversy,²⁴ he always emphasized that an understanding of such issues was not essential to salvation and that honest disagreements about them must not frustrate God's will that Christians be united. In 1832, John T. Johnson (1788-1856)—a minister who had joined the growing Disciples movement of Alexander Campbell—joined Stone as co-editor.²⁵ The *Christian Messenger* continued publication until 1845, a year after Stone's death, with a brief interruption from 1837 to 1839.

Stone and Campbell. In 1824, two years before he began the *Christian Messenger*, Barton Stone met Alexander Campbell during a visit by Campbell to Kentucky. Stone describes it in these words:

When he came into Kentucky, I heard him often in public and in private. I was pleased with his manner and matter. I saw no distinctive

feature between the doctrine he preached and that which we had preached for many years, except on baptism for remission of sins. Even this I had once received and taught, as before stated, but had strangely let it go from my mind, till brother Campbell revived it afresh. . . . I will not say there are no faults in brother Campbell; but that there are fewer, perhaps, in him, than any man I know on earth; and over these few my love would throw a veil, and hide them from view forever. I am constrained, and willingly constrained to acknowledge him the greatest promoter of this reformation of any man living. The Lord reward him!²⁶

As we shall see, Stone would later work to unify his movement with that of Campbell. Although Stone continued to labor for the new movement, Campbell soon became its acknowledged leader, particularly after Stone moved to Jacksonville, Illinois in 1834. The move was prompted in part by advancing age (he was about 62 by then), but moreso by his growing aversion to the institution of slavery, which flourished in Kentucky.²⁷ Once in Illinois, he continued to preach—mostly in Illinois and Missouri—and to publish the *Christian Messenger*.

Stone's End. In the fall of 1836, Stone became seriously ill and was confined to bed for several weeks. Although he recovered, the illness left him weakened, and he never fully regained his strength. He was able to resume publication of the *Christian Messenger* in 1839 only with the help of two friends, T. M. Allen and Jacob Creath. At that time Stone was losing his hearing, and by late 1840 he was almost deaf. In August 1841, he suffered a stroke which left him partially paralyzed and unable to speak clearly. But he recovered enough by 1842 to resume some of his preaching and publishing duties. In May 1843, he began a preaching tour through Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky. Because of Stone's failing health, it was obvious to most that this was a farewell tour. Christians gathered in cities and towns where he preached, in order to express their gratitude and love, and to say good-by. In Ohio, Stone was able to visit his old comrade, David Purviance. Twice Stone visited Cane Ridge, where he renewed acquaintances with friends from his days as pastor there. He returned to Illinois in September 1843, and resumed his duties as co-editor of the *Christian Messenger*.

A year later, in October, 1844, Stone went with his wife and youngest son to Missouri to attend an annual church meeting and to visit some of his children. He preached his last sermon at the annual meeting on Monday, October 21, 1844. But soon thereafter, he became seriously ill. He was taken to the home of his son-in-law, Capt. Samuel A. Bowen, in Hannibal, Missouri, where many of his family and friends gathered to say their goodbyes.²⁸ Stone's attending physician, Dr. D. T. Morton, noted that this final illness left Stone's body "racked with torturing pain,"

and it was obvious that he was dying. Nevertheless, he met death without fear, confident in the grace and mercy of the Lord he had so long served. Indeed, he exhorted those around him to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, just as he had tried to be. Barton W. Stone passed into eternity at 4:00 a.m. on Saturday, November 9, 1844, at the age of 71.

A Few Words About the Man. Those who knew Barton Warren Stone testify to the sincerity of his faith, the wisdom of his guidance, and the gentleness of his spirit. He was a devoted husband and a caring father. His patience and self-control were such that his friends could not remember seeing him angry. Those opponents who were personally acquainted with Stone had to acknowledge the honesty and goodness of his character, even though they deplored his theology. He was subjected to many vicious attacks in the writings of other religious ministers—some of whom refused to even read his books or hear him speak. When he answered his critics, he did so with politeness, forgiveness, and simple truth, and he urged his friends to do likewise.

His preaching focused exclusively on the Gospel. He deliberately avoided politics, worldly controversies, and witticisms, so as not to distract from his primary goals of converting sinners and building up Christ's church.

THOMAS AND ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

The Campbells' Scotch-Irish Roots. Thomas Campbell was born on February 1, 1763, the son of Archibald Campbell, an Irish Anglican. Thomas joined the Irish Presbyterian Church and, with the financial assistance of a fellow Presbyterian, attended the University of Glasgow in Scotland (1783-1786). Thomas also attended a Presbyterian theological school. In about June 1787, Thomas was married to Jane Corneigle (1764-1835), a descendent of French Huguenots.²⁹ The Campbells lived in various locations in northern Ireland (Ballymena, Sheepbridge, Market Hill), where Thomas served as teacher and preacher for the Presbyterian Church before becoming pastor of a congregation in Ahorey, Northern Ireland, in 1798.

Alexander Campbell was born on September 12, 1788, in Ballymena, Antrim County, Northern Ireland.³⁰ Alexander's early schooling was in Northern Ireland, part of it at an academy run by his uncles, Archibald and Enos Campbell, in Newry. However, after several years Thomas Campbell taught the boy himself, instructing him in Latin, Greek, and the writings of John Locke (1632-1704). Like Locke, Thomas Campbell believed in toleration of differing religious views. During periods of fighting between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, Campbell consistently preached toleration and opposed the use of violence. Thomas and Jane

insisted that their children memorize Bible verses daily, so that by the time he was grown Alexander could recite from memory whole books of the Bible.

In about 1804, Thomas Campbell moved his family—which included three sons and four daughters—to Rich Hill, Northern Ireland, where he opened a school to supplement his income. In Rich Hill, he encountered an Independent congregation which was notable for its toleration of other religious viewpoints. This Independent Church often opened its pulpit to travelling evangelical preachers, regardless of denomination. Thomas sadly contrasted the Independents' tolerant and accepting attitude with the strife and bickering he saw within his own Presbyterian denomination, and within Christianity as a whole.

During 1804 and 1805, Thomas made determined efforts to unite the divided factions of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He very nearly succeeded, but the effort was killed by the General Associate Synod in Scotland. And the stress of battling intolerance apparently took its toll. Thomas developed a stomach ailment, for which his doctor prescribed a sea voyage and rest.

Thomas in America. Thomas decided to use the occasion to visit America and investigate the possibility of joining the large numbers of Scotch and Irish immigrants to the United States. It also gave him the opportunity to serve as escort for a young lady in his congregation, Hannah Acheson. Hannah was joining relatives who had settled in Washington, Pennsylvania,³¹ which at that time was on the western frontier and was being heavily settled by Scotch and Irish Presbyterians. Alexander Campbell, who intended to move to the United States as soon as he was old enough, no doubt also encouraged the visit. On April 8, 1807, Thomas Campbell sailed to America. Alexander, now 18 years old, was left behind to take care of the family and to teach in his father's place in the school at Rich Hill.

Thomas and Alexander Break From the Presbyterians. Thomas Campbell was received enthusiastically in Pennsylvania and was made a pastor in the Washington area of the western portion of the State. However, Thomas' tolerant attitudes soon got him in trouble with the local presbytery. At a celebration hosted by "Anti-Burgher" Presbyterians,³² Thomas allowed all Presbyterians to partake of communion. He preached that Christians must encourage unity, rather than promote divisions, and he sought to advance that unity by an appeal to the Scriptures over man-made creeds and traditions. In October 1807, he was accused of deviating from orthodox Anti-Burgher doctrine. In February 1808, he was censured by his presbytery, and in March it temporarily suspended him from preaching. Thomas' efforts to get the Associate Synod in Philadelphia to reverse the presbytery's actions were unsuccessful, and he soon found that efforts were underway to make the suspension permanent. When the Synod in Philadelphia approved the permanent suspension in May 1809, Thomas withdrew from the Presbyterian Church.

Thomas Campbell continued to preach, however, outside the Presbyterian Church, and in the summer of 1809 his followers formed their own organization, which they called “The Christian Association of Washington.” It was grounded on Thomas’ belief that Christian unity must rest on a return to the Bible as the foundation of all belief, as well as the abandonment of all religious doctrines which lacked Scriptural support. Thomas expressed the Association’s guiding principle in these words: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” Thomas drafted the *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* to set forth the organization’s beliefs, purposes, and reasons for existence.

Meanwhile, in Great Britain, Jane, Alexander, and the rest of the family made ready to join Thomas in America. They set sail on October 1, 1808, but a shipwreck on the Island of Islay³³ on October 7th delayed their journey. The shipwreck was fortuitous in two respects: (1) the family was rescued, and (2) the family’s departure was postponed for a year, allowing Alexander to attend classes at the University of Glasgow during the winter and spring months. He worked long hours and helped make ends meet by tutoring in Latin, grammar, and arithmetic.

At the University, Alexander became acquainted with the writings of John Glas (1695-1773) and Robert Sandeman (1718-1771).³⁴ He was also heavily influenced by Greville Ewing (1767-1841), the local leader of a movement begun by the Haldane brothers, James Alexander Haldane (1768-1851) and Robert Haldane (1764-1842).³⁵ Alexander concluded that he must reject all creeds and traditions which were not supported by the New Testament. This led to an uneasiness with many of the dogmas of the Presbyterian Church, which climaxed at the semiannual communion of the Seceders. Alexander refused to partake, symbolically throwing the Communion token back on the table.

Alexander Assumes Leadership of the “Reformers.” Alexander and the rest of the family arrived in the United States on September 29, 1809, and soon joined Thomas in western Pennsylvania. By this time, Alexander had decided to enter into Christian ministry. With this in mind, Thomas required Alexander to devote himself to the study of the Scriptures for six months.

Meanwhile, the Christian Association of Washington failed to grow as expected. In 1810, it sought to reunite with the Presbyterian Church by joining the Pittsburgh Synod, but was rebuffed. The Association’s future seemed in doubt when Alexander Campbell preached his first sermon on July 15, 1810. The response was so enthusiastic that Alexander preached 105 more sermons during the next 12 months, and soon took over leadership of the movement. That same year he also met 18-year-old Margaret Brown (1791-1827), the daughter of a prosperous farmer, and before long they fell in love. Alexander and Margaret were married on March 12, 1811, and moved in with Margaret’s father, John Brown.

On May 4, 1811, the Christian Association of Washington formed itself into the Brush Run Church (named for the stream near which it was built). The first building was a simple wood frame structure, and measured only 18 by 36 feet. Thomas Campbell became an elder of the new church, and Alexander was licensed as its first pastor. The first service in the new building (which was not quite finished) was held on June 16, 1811. Later that year, Alexander made the first of his many preaching tours—this one in northeastern Ohio.

Alexander's study of the New Testament had already led him to reject infant membership in the church as contrary to Scripture. Now he began to rethink his own baptism by "sprinkling," and gradually concluded that it was unscriptural and inadequate. Thus, on June 12, 1812, he received baptism by immersion from a Baptist preacher, Matthias Luce (ca. 1764-1831). Margaret Campbell, Thomas and Jane Campbell, and their daughter, Dorothea, were also re-baptized at the same time. Alexander's leadership on this issue of baptism by immersion probably marks his emergence from his father's shadow to become the acknowledged leader of the "Reformers"—as the Brush Run Church members were now being called by some. But his insistence on baptism by immersion erected yet another wall between the Reformers and the Presbyterians, making reconciliation all but impossible.

The Reformers Join the Baptists. At the same time, the Reformers forged new ties with the Baptists, who had long advocated baptism by immersion. They invited Thomas and Alexander Campbell to preach at Baptist churches, and the Brush Run Church considered applying for membership in the nearby Redstone Baptist Association. The Reformers' concerns centered on the Baptists' Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which was strongly Calvinistic. However, Brush Run also differed from the Baptists on other issues, such as the frequency of communion, which Brush Run observed weekly and the Baptists less often. The Reformers frankly stated their beliefs and reservations in their application for membership, including their insistence on the supremacy of the Bible over any man-made creed. The Association accepted Brush Run for membership in September 1815.

The honeymoon was short-lived. On September 1, 1816, Alexander delivered his "Sermon on the Law" to the Redstone Baptist Association at Cross Creek, Brooke County, Virginia. In this sermon, Campbell asserted that the New Testament Gospel had eclipsed the Old Testament law and was superior to it. This infuriated some of the Baptists, who regarded the Old and New Testaments as of equal importance. The Reformers would remain in the Redstone Baptist Association for eight more years, but the seeds of division were already planted.

Meanwhile, in 1814, Alexander Campbell's wealthy father-in-law, John Brown, persuaded him not to join the westward migration to Ohio by deeding his farm in Bethany³⁶ to Alexander and Margaret. This enabled Alexander to have some financial independence and to open a school in his home in 1818. He called

the school the Buffalo Seminary. (The school, also known as the Buffalo Academy, closed in 1823.)

Rational Christianity. Understanding the Bible became a passion for Alexander Campbell. A very intelligent man, he spent long hours in his study, reading and scrutinizing God’s Word, trying to mine its very depths. He was unusual in his day for his insistence that the Scriptures must be interpreted in the light of common sense and in the context of the whole Bible, as well as in the historical context of when, where, and why the particular Biblical book was written.

Campbell maintained that Christianity must be sensible and rational, and he always strove to present it as such. He asserted that any man who could think could be a Christian, for a man had only to believe the testimony of the New Testament writers and to respond with devotion to the person of Christ. (Thus, he rejected Calvinistic predestination.) Not surprisingly, Campbell believed that any effort to convert sinners must first appeal to the listeners’ intellect and understanding; in other words, the preacher must try to persuade his hearers of the truth of Christianity, through facts, evidence, and proofs.

Critic of Christian Leaders; Advocate of Christian Unity. Campbell was highly critical of revivalistic preachers who focused solely on emotional religion, without trying to help their converts grasp the whole Word of God. Emotionalism had its place, he agreed, for the heart as well as the head must be enlisted in Christian service. However, an appeal to emotion without a grounding in rationality could have no lasting impact on lives—like seed which fell upon rocky soil.

He was also critical of preachers who claimed to have had a special “calling” from God, and often challenged them to provide evidence of this “calling” in both the character of their lives and the wisdom of their message. He ridiculed such preachers when they did not adhere to the teachings of the Bible, arguing that God would never call one who was so ignorant of His Word. In any event, Campbell viewed such claims as egotistical. In his view, we are all “called” to do God’s work in this world to the fullest extent of our ability.

But Campbell reserved some of his harshest criticism for denominational preachers who took Biblical verses out of context to support creeds and traditions which were contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. Like Barton W. Stone and Thomas Campbell, Alexander viewed creeds as destructive of Christian unity, and he agreed that disagreements over the finer points of theology should not prevent Christian fellowship.³⁷ Alexander Campbell was willing to worship, pray, and share Communion with any Christian who accepted Jesus as the Christ, had submitted to baptism, and tried to live a Christian life of love and virtue. He supported efforts to unify Christians on the basis of these fundamentals. He rejected unification plans based on other criteria (such as prejudice against Roman Catholics). He consistently emphasized Ephesians 4:4-6 in his writings on Christian

unity: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.” (*Good News Bible* translation)

Following the model of the apostolic church, Alexander Campbell approved of such church titles as bishop, elder, deacon, pastor, and evangelist. However, he had little use for the ordained, professional clergy—most of whom he regarded as incompetent, unfruitful, and often self-serving. And he had no use whatever for church bureaucracies. Instead, he preferred that each congregation select one or more men from among themselves to shepherd the flock as its “bishop,” based on superiority of character, wisdom, and knowledge of the Scriptures. He consistently tried to eliminate or minimize the distinctions between pastor and laity, and was critical of almost every special “privilege” of the clergy, from their titles (for example, “Reverend”) to their monopoly on the administration of the sacraments. On the subject of church government, he insisted that each congregation maintain its rights of self-government and self-direction.

Despite his suspicions of professional clergymen, Campbell eventually came to appreciate the need for well-trained pastors who could devote themselves full-time to the care and training of God’s people. Indeed, one of the purposes of Bethany College, which Campbell established in 1840, was to train such pastors. He also recognized the value of associations which could perform some necessary tasks more effectively and efficiently, such as the support of evangelists and missionaries, or the training of new pastors. But he insisted that such associations be voluntary, and that they have no authority over any individual congregation.

Enemies and Friends. Not surprisingly, Campbell’s unorthodox theology, the excellence with which he presented it, and his unrelenting criticism of selfish and narrow-minded clerics won him many enemies. Many who disparaged him had never even heard him speak or read his writings. His success and popularity led to accusations of demagoguery and arrogance. Some even accused him of impiety.

We should recognize, however, that in the context of his time, some of this criticism was entirely justified. Many of his critics regarded as extreme arrogance Campbell’s implicit assertion that he had greater insight into the meaning of the Scriptures than the collective wisdom of their forefathers—from whom their creeds and traditions had been passed down. His opponents saw his stress upon individual interpretation of the Scriptures as an invitation to disunity, disputes, and anarchy in the Protestant ranks. They were horrified by his subordination of the Old Testament, upon which many of their moral principles were based. This, in combination with his stance that morality needed no emphasis or strict enforcement—but would naturally flow from a person’s devotion to Christ—must have seemed to some akin to antinomianism.³⁸

Campbell also had many enthusiastic supporters who welcomed his return to New Testament fundamentals, and who were deeply impressed by his knowledge of the Bible, his skill as a preacher, and his character as a man. Many testify to his efforts to live consistently with his beliefs. He opposed such social evils as slavery and the confiscation of Indian lands. He was humble, patient, devout, forgiving, moral, and hospitable—and serious at all times about things religious. He refused to be called “Reverend,” and despised the pompous dress and manners of many religious clerics.

While he often helped raise money for Christian churches and causes, he refused any personal compensation for his preaching and often turned down large sums of money for his services. He was courteous and respectful to all, including non-believers. He was also a devoted husband and father. His wife later testified to the sincerity of his prayer life. In his writings, teachings, and lectures, he consistently focused on Christ, the Bible, and how to live the Christian life—and he had little patience for any “Christian” preacher who focused on anything else. Indeed, for Campbell, the Christian life was neither real nor sincere unless it permeated the entire soul:

A Christian is not one who is pious by fits and starts, who is religious or devout one day of the week, or for one hour of the day. It is the whole bent of his soul—it is the beginning, middle, and end of every day His mind rests only in God. He places the Lord always before him. This is his joy and delight. He would not for the world have it otherwise.³⁹

Campbell’s Public Speaking. In all of his public speaking, Campbell deliberately used a conversational tone—believing it to be both Scriptural and more effective—and spoke extemporaneously, without notes or prepared remarks. By all reports, he was a very talented speaker, who could quickly capture his audience’s interest and hold it throughout long speeches. He would methodically and logically prove his point, often using illustrations and analogies adapted to the understanding of the audience he was addressing. Since his goal was to encourage his listeners to think about the Bible and draw their own conclusions, he encouraged questions during or after his lectures. Similarly, in his publications, Campbell encouraged questions and printed articles from those with different points of view.

Campbell carefully distinguished the roles of preacher and teacher: a preacher proclaims the Gospel, and calls sinners to repent and become followers of Christ; a teacher helps those followers to understand the Bible and what it means to live a Christian life. While Campbell had no objection to one person performing both functions, he protested against those who confused the two roles by lecturing to

sinner about morality or theology, or by failing to teach Christians how to obey the Word of God.

Campbell himself was more teacher than preacher. As we will see, he devoted much of his time to writing articles for his publications and teaching at Bethany College. During his many travels, his energy was primarily focused on teaching the faithful, rather than preaching to sinners. However, everywhere he went he attracted large crowds. In fact, he frequently had to lecture in town squares because the crowds were too numerous for the largest town buildings. And interestingly, his appeal cut across all races and classes of people—black and white, wealthy and poor, well educated and not.

When he preached or lectured, Campbell's topics consistently focused on Christ, and he emphasized the New Testament much more than the Old. Interestingly, he was accused by some Christians of his day of advocating licentiousness, for he refused to stress morality in his speaking. Instead, Campbell believed that if a man truly understands and accepts the example of Christ, morality will naturally follow. For who would want to live in sin after seeing the price God paid to redeem mankind?

Spreading the Message. On June 19-20, 1820, Alexander reluctantly engaged in a debate with a Presbyterian minister, John Walker, at Mount Pleasant, Ohio (23 miles west of Bethany). The topic was baptism. Alexander also used the debate as an occasion to present the views of the Reformers on such issues as the supremacy of Scripture over creeds and traditions.

Thomas and Alexander Campbell published their notes from this debate soon thereafter. The public reacted enthusiastically, and 4,000 copies were quickly sold. This encouraged Alexander to begin publishing a monthly periodical, the *Christian Baptist*, in August, 1823. He set up a printing office in Bethany, and more publications followed. In 1826, Campbell issued a modern language translation of the New Testament. He used a translation made by British scholars in the late 18th century, but added his own preface, critical notes, appendices, and certain editorial changes, such as replacing "baptize" with "immerse." In 1835, he published *The Disciples' Hymn Book*, which was soon changed to *The Christian Hymn Book* at the insistence of Barton W. Stone. Campbell also wrote and published books, such as *The Christian System* in 1835.

Campbell's growing prominence enabled him to win a seat as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention in Richmond in 1829, which was held to rewrite the state constitution. Campbell hoped to establish free public education and to gradually end slavery in the state. At this he failed. However, he preached every Sunday during the three months of the Convention, often to groups as large as 3,000, and this preaching helped spread his new theology throughout the state.

End of Brush Run. The opinions expressed in *The Christian Baptist* further estranged Campbell from many in the Redstone Baptist Association, who took steps to expel him. This prompted Campbell to switch his membership to a church in Wellsburg, Ohio—a member of the recently formed Mahoning Baptist Association. Since Campbell was no longer a member of the Redstone Association, he could not be expelled from it. Many of the members of the Brush Run Church followed suit, and the little church closed in 1824. Three years later, in 1827, Alexander lost his first wife, Margaret Brown Campbell. He would later remarry, to Selina Campbell (1802-1897).

Debate with Robert Owen. Alexander Campbell engaged in four more debates during his lifetime: (1) William L. Maccalla (1788-1859), a Presbyterian minister, in October, 1823, in Maysville, Kentucky (which led to Campbell's first meeting with Barton W. Stone); (2) Robert Owen (1771-1858), a Scottish social reformer, philanthropist, and critic of religion, in Cincinnati, Ohio, April 13-21, 1829; (3) John B. Purcell (1800-1883), the Roman Catholic Bishop of Cincinnati, in 1837; and (4) Nathan L. Rice (1807-1877), a Presbyterian minister from Paris, Kentucky, November 15 - December 1, 1843, at Lexington, Kentucky.

The most famous of these debates was against Robert Owen, “The Father of British Socialism,” who in some respects presaged both the determinism of B. F. Skinner and the Communist ideals of Karl Marx.⁴⁰ Owen denied the reality of free will, contending that a person's feelings, behavior, and opinions are all the result of heredity and environment. Thus, Owen believed that improvements in society and scientific advances in genetics would produce corresponding improvements in people's behavior. He wanted to abolish private property, marriage, and most especially, religion.

While in New Orleans, Owens issued a challenge to the local religious leaders—or anyone else—to debate the propositions that all religion is founded upon ignorance, that religion is the true source of vice and misery in the world, and that religion is the only real impediment to a better society. When none of the New Orleans clergy accepted the challenge, Alexander Campbell stepped forward. Campbell and Owen met at Bethany and arranged the details of the debate, becoming close friends in the process. After the debate, Owen again visited Bethany, where he remained with the Campbells for several weeks, making corrections to the stenographic report of the debate prior to its publication by Campbell.

The debate itself began on Monday, April 13, 1829. Robert Owen made the opening address, and Alexander Campbell replied, and they continued in this manner through 25 addresses and 25 replies. With one exception, each speech was limited to 30 minutes. The exception was Campbell's 22nd Reply, which lasted 12 hours! Campbell explains in an introduction to the published work that most of

Owen's addresses were read from written works, while most of Campbell's own remarks were extemporaneous.

Walter Scott. In the winter of 1821-1822, Alexander Campbell visited Pittsburgh and met for the first time Walter Scott (1796-1861). Scott was a Presbyterian minister who had been born in Moffatt, Scotland (October 31, 1796), and moved to the United States in 1818. Like Campbell, Scott was strongly influenced by the writings of Glas, Sandeman, the Haldanes, and Locke, and had studied the Bible intensely. Scott insisted that the only prerequisite for becoming a Christian was faith in Jesus as the Christ. Scott wrote four articles for the first issue of *The Christian Baptist*. In fact, Scott was the one who suggested adding "Baptist" to the title, to increase readership among Baptists. Scott also published his own journal, *The Evangelist*, from 1832 to 1844, which emphasized the theme of Stone and Campbell: Christian unity based upon a return to basic New Testament Christianity.

In early 1826, Walter Scott moved to Steubenville, Ohio.⁴¹ In August 1827, Scott was appointed as a travelling evangelist for the Mahoning Baptist Association. He made an immediate impact, converting at least 1,000 people in his first year in the frontier areas of eastern Ohio. Scott's preaching was said to be energetic and innovative, while at the same time simple to understand. He devised the "five-finger exercise" to help explain Christianity to the unpretentious frontier people: (1) a person must confess faith in Christ, (2) repent of his or her sins, and (3) be baptized; God would then (4) forgive the person's sins, and (5) grant the gifts of salvation, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. Scott's preaching appealed to people's intellect and common sense, without the emotionalism associated with Stone's movement in Kentucky and southern Ohio.

Scott would later move to Cincinnati, and then to Carthage, Ohio. In 1836 and 1837, Scott served as president of the first Disciples college, Bacon College, in Georgetown, Kentucky.⁴² Scott spent the remainder of his life outliving two wives, marrying a third, and serving the Disciples movement in various capacities in Ohio and Kentucky. He died in 1861.

The Reformers and the Baptists Split. As a result of Campbell's writings, and the tremendous successes of evangelists such as Scott and "Raccoon" John Smith (1784-1868), a former Baptist farmer-preacher in Kentucky, traditional Baptists gradually began to see Campbell's movement as more of a threat than a partner. Disputes arose over such issues as: (1) Baptist prerequisites for church membership, including acceptance of the Philadelphia Confession and approval by congregational vote, both of which the Reformers rejected; (2) frequency of communion, which Reformers observed weekly; (3) the Reformers' practice of allowing laypersons to administer the sacraments of baptism and Communion;

(4) the Reformers' emphasis upon the New Testament over the Old; and (5) the very name, "Baptist," which the Reformers perceived as divisive and sectarian.

As early as 1825, Reformers and Baptists began to split—almost always at the insistence of the Baptists. When churches divided, the Baptist associations consistently recognized the traditional Baptists as the "true" Baptist church and expelled the Reformers, regardless of which group had been in the majority. By 1830, the Baptists in Kentucky had excluded Reformers from virtually all Baptist churches. The same pattern occurred in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other states. Perhaps the final break occurred in August 1830, when the Mahoning Baptist Association—which was predominantly Reformist—disbanded.

The Millennial Harbinger. The break with the Baptists led many of Campbell's followers to adopt the name, "Disciples of Christ," the name favored by Campbell. Not surprisingly, the end of the Reformers' association with the Baptists also brought the end of *The Christian Baptist*, which Campbell last published in July, 1830. By then, Campbell had already replaced it with a new monthly, *The Millennial Harbinger*, which he began publishing in January, 1830.

In the *Baptist* and the *Harbinger*, Campbell wrote articles about the Christian faith, editorials on religious topics, critical reviews of lectures by other religious leaders, and reports on the evangelistic efforts of other Christian leaders. He also published articles and letters from other Christians, including those with opposing points of view. Campbell published the *Harbinger* until January 1864, when age and declining health forced him to give way to his son-in-law, William K. Pendleton (1817-1899), who continued to publish the *Harbinger* until 1870. Campbell wrote his last article for the *Harbinger* in 1865.

Disciples and Christians Unite. The most important result of the Baptist expulsion of the Disciples was the gradual union between Campbell's Disciples and Barton W. Stone's Christians. When Alexander Campbell had met Barton Stone in 1824, the two realized that their two movements were very close in both beliefs and goals. Although there were some minor differences between them,⁴³ they were in substantial agreement on such fundamental matters as the desire to unify Christians on the basis of primitive New Testament practices, rejection of creeds and man-made traditions, freedom of individuals to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, believer's baptism by immersion, and recognition of two sacraments (baptism and Communion). Indeed, the major stumbling block to complete unification seems to have been the friction that developed between Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell after Stone suggested such union.

The earliest known merger of Christians and Disciples was in Millersburg, Kentucky, on April 24, 1831. In January, 1832, Disciples and Christians in Georgetown, Kentucky (near Lexington) agreed to unite. The Disciples were led by "Raccoon" John Smith and John T. Johnson, and the Christians were led by Stone

himself. To help cement the union, Johnson became co-editor of Stone's periodical, the *Christian Messenger*. Stone would later say: "This union I view as the noblest act of my life."⁴⁴ Campbell, although still suspicious of Stone, tried to be supportive.

The newly united churches sent Smith and John Rogers (1800-1867) to jointly spread the message of unification. Most, though not all, of Stone's Christians eventually united with the Disciples. By 1860, the Disciples of Christ numbered almost 200,000 members and had spread to Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia.⁴⁵

The Lunenburg Letter. Campbell's home in Bethany became the headquarters for the growing movement, and Campbell became its *de facto* leader. In 1835 he published what would become the definitive statement of Disciples theology for at least the next 35 years: *The Christian System*.⁴⁶ In 1837, he published in the *Millennial Harbinger* his now famous "Lunenburg Letter," a reply to an inquiry from a Disciple in Lunenburg, Virginia. In the Lunenburg Letter, Campbell refused to condone baptism by immersion as a litmus test for Christianity. While of course acknowledging immersion as both desirable and Scripturally sound, Campbell pointed out that a person's devotion to Christ and efforts to be obedient to Christ's commandments are far more important:

There is no occasion, then, for making immersion, on a profession of the faith, absolutely essential to a Christian—though it may be greatly essential to his sanctification and comfort. My right hand and my right eye are greatly essential to my usefulness and happiness, but not to my life; and as I could not be a perfect man without them, so I cannot be a perfect Christian without a right understanding and a cordial reception of immersion in its true and scriptural meaning and design. But he that thence infers that none are Christians but the immersed, as greatly errs as he who affirms that none are alive but those of clear and full vision.⁴⁷

Bethany College. Alexander Campbell was a strong believer in education—and not merely education for the wealthy, as was customary in his day, but for all. He was an advocate of universal public education, which he viewed as essential to the future of both Christianity and the country. Campbell foresaw that literacy would enable all citizens to read the Bible for themselves, and that education would make them more productive citizens. Of course, he saw moral and religious training as the primary goals of such education, and he recommended the Bible as a necessary school book for this purpose. However, he opposed the use of religious books which favored one Christian denomination over another.

In 1840, Campbell founded Bethany College, on his farm in Bethany, West Virginia. The school's purpose was primarily to train school teachers and Bible preachers. Campbell donated the land for the College, which opened in 1841, and served as its President, as well as one of its professors, from 1841 until the early 1860's. Although Campbell favored education of women and Blacks, practical considerations limited enrollment initially to white men.⁴⁸ Church membership was not a requirement for enrollment.

The College was probably the first to emphasize studying of the Bible as part of its curriculum: the Bible was the subject of public readings and lectures for at least one hour each day. Campbell himself delivered many of these lectures. The College was also unique in its day for its emphasis on science and agriculture, and its lack of concern for Greek and Roman literature. Many other Disciples followed Campbell's lead and founded colleges, some of which survive today.⁴⁹

Early Disciples Organizations. Campbell also encouraged Disciples congregations to cooperate with one another and to organize for this purpose. Early cooperation usually centered around supporting evangelists, although one of the earliest gatherings was the "School of the Preachers," which first met in December, 1835. The "School" was a quarterly gathering of preachers who delivered public sermons which were then privately critiqued by their fellow preachers. In this way, skills were honed and religious issues were debated, to the benefit of all.

The first statewide assembly of Disciples occurred in Indiana in June 1839. Kentucky followed suit in 1840. In November 1843, the first multi-state meeting was held in Lexington, Kentucky, drawing representatives from Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and the Republic of Texas. However, because of the Disciples' opposition to the imposition of doctrine by a church hierarchy, the organizers of these meetings went to great lengths to explain that no such purpose was involved.

As Disciples strived for cooperation on issues of evangelism, training of ministers, and publication of religious and teaching materials, a national convention became inevitable. The first was held on October 24-28, 1849, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Among the results of this early effort at organization was the creation of the American Christian Missionary Society, to promote worldwide evangelism. Alexander Campbell was elected president of the Society, a position he held until his death.

Rapid Growth. The 30-year period ending in 1860 was a time of tremendous growth for the Disciples—particularly in the north and west. Campbell himself travelled through Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Indiana, Missouri, and other states, as well as Canada. The rapid growth was also fueled by the extensive travels of Disciples evangelists; by Disciples publications, which were numerous and widespread; and by the migration of

Disciples westward. The Disciples' views favoring individual freedom to interpret the Scriptures had strong appeal among individualistic, freedom-loving American frontier people.

Slavery and the Civil War. Alexander Campbell personally opposed slavery, and freed every slave he ever owned. Thomas Campbell and Barton W. Stone did likewise. However, Alexander could find no support in the Bible for abolishing slavery, and worried that the issue of slavery would split the Disciples. Therefore, he refused to support the abolitionist movement in the North. He also felt bound to obey the law, and Congress had not yet chosen to abolish slavery. Campbell viewed slavery as a political issue on which Disciples should be allowed to hold different opinions without jeopardizing Christian fellowship. And he saw that Disciples were on both sides of the issue, since they were numerous in slave and border states such as Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and Missouri, as well as Northern states such as Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. In any event, he opposed violence of any kind by either side.

When the Civil War finally broke out in 1861, Campbell refused to openly take sides. He opposed war, just as he had opposed violence. He considered both to be contrary to Scriptures and harmful to the Church, and some Disciples agreed with him. But many supported the North or the South, resulting in a *de facto* division of the Disciples movement. Indeed, the sons of both Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone joined the Confederate armies and fought for the South, and Campbell's own wife and daughter also sympathized with the South.

Deaths of the Disciples Leaders. By the end of the war in 1865, Alexander Campbell was the sole surviving member of the original four Disciples leaders. Barton W. Stone was the first to die, in 1844, followed by Thomas Campbell in 1854, and Walter Scott in 1861. By 1865, Alexander Campbell himself was in poor health. He preached his last sermon in late January, 1866, on the topic, "the spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." He died about six weeks later, on Sunday, March 4, 1866, in Bethany. However, the movement he and others founded lives on in Disciples churches throughout America, and beyond, and has helped rescue American Christianity from Calvinism, while promoting Christian unity across denominational boundaries.

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APPENDIX 1

“THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF THE SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERY”

The Presbytery of Springfield, sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being, through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make, and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following viz.:

Imprimis. We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

Item. We will, that our name of distinction, with its *Reverend* title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God’s heritage, and his name One.

Item. We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.*

Item. We will, that candidates for the Gospel ministry henceforth study the Holy Scriptures with fervent prayer, and obtain license from God to preach the simple Gospel, *with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,* without any mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world. And let none henceforth take *this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.*

Item. We will, that the church of Christ resume her native right of internal government—try her candidates for the ministry, as to their soundness in the faith, acquaintance with experimental religion, gravity and aptness to teach; and admit no other proof of their authority but Christ speaking in them. We will, that the church of Christ look up to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest; and that she resume her primitive right of trying those *who say they are apostles, and are not.*

Item. We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit, choose her own preacher, and support him by a free will offering, without a written *call* or *subscription*—admit members—remove offenses; and never henceforth *delegate* her right of government to any man or set of men whatever.

Item. 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.

Item. We will, that preachers and people, cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh.

Item. We will, that all our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future.

Item. We will, that the Synod of Kentucky examine every member, who may be *suspected* of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately; in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of gospel liberty.

Item. We will, that Ja _____, the author of two letters lately published in Lexington, be encouraged in his zeal to destroy *partyism*. We will, moreover, that our past conduct be examined into by all who may have correct information; but let foreigners beware of speaking evil of things which they know not.

Item. Finally, we will, that all our *sister bodies* read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

Springfield Presbytery, }
June 28th, 1804 } L.S.

Robert Marshall
John Dunlavy
Richard M'Nemar
B. W. Stone
John Thompson
David Purviance

Endnotes for “The Disciples Movement”

¹ An “established church” is one that is supported by the government, through taxes levied upon all citizens. The Anglican Church was the established church in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and New York City. The Congregational church was the established church in Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Rhode Island had no established church.

The Revolutionary War ended established churches in most of the states. Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts were the exception. Some form of State support of churches remained in these States well into the 19th century, ending in Connecticut in 1818, in New Hampshire in 1817 or 1819, and in Massachusetts in 1833.

² John Calvin (1509-1564), a contemporary of Martin Luther (1483-1546), advanced the theology of predestination, which he in turn inherited from St. Augustine (354-430). Under Calvin’s theology, God predestined some for salvation and others for damnation. Thus, free will is an illusion. If a person is one of the “elect” who is destined for eternal salvation, he can do nothing to lose that salvation, just as the damned can do nothing to save themselves. John Knox (ca. 1505-1572), a disciple of Calvin, founded Presbyterianism in his native Scotland and incorporated Calvin’s predestination into that denomination’s doctrines. The Anglican Church (Church of England) also adopted Calvinistic predestination into its basic dogmas, as did most of the Puritans. John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, was one of the few Anglican preachers of his day who rejected predestination. Wesley’s insistence that men are free to accept or reject God’s gift of salvation was a key factor in the rapid growth of Methodism in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries.

³ In 1790, according to the U.S. Census, only about five percent of the U.S. population lived west of the Appalachian mountains, in such areas as western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. However, people were rapidly populating these areas—a situation which would continue well into the 19th century. The 1800 Census reveals that Kentucky then had 221,000 inhabitants.

⁴ Port Tobacco is a small town in southern Maryland, about 25 miles due south of Washington, D.C.

⁵ Pittsylvania County is located in what is now south-central Virginia.

⁶ Quoted from *The Cane Ridge Reader: The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself, with Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers* (J.A. & U.P. James, Cincinnati, 1847), page 2.

⁷ Washington is a town in central Georgia, about 45 miles northwest of Augusta.

⁸ In his autobiography, Stone tells an amusing story about a confrontation he had with a Tennessean deist (i.e., a person who believes in God, but does not necessarily accept the Bible). As the deist relied on nature to prove God’s infinite goodness and justice, Stone pointed out that examples of evil and injustice can easily be found in nature, and in the nature of man, so that by his reasoning God must be as evil and unjust as He is good and just. When the deist asserted that God would render justice in the next life, Stone replied that nature “nowhere teaches this doctrine; you have stolen it from our Bible.” The deist left in confusion. Taken from *The Cane Ridge Reader:*

The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself, with Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers (J.A. & U.P. James, Cincinnati, 1847), pp. 23-24.

⁹ Concord, Kentucky is about 40 miles northeast of Lexington. Cane Ridge is about 20-25 miles northeast of Lexington.

¹⁰ Because of his reservations about the Confession, Stone had decided to refuse ordination, and privately confided in two prominent church members, Dr. James Blythe and Robert Marshall. After considerable discussion, they asked him to what extent he felt he could accept the Confession of Faith, and Stone answered, as far as he saw it consistent with the Word of God. That satisfied them, and they convinced him to proceed with ordination, making public his reservation regarding the Confession.

¹¹ Logan County is located in southwestern Kentucky, about 45-50 miles north of Nashville, Tennessee.

¹² Published in the *Christian Messenger* in 1827, from February to October.

¹³ Quoted from *The Cane Ridge Reader: The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself, with Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers* (J.A. & U.P. James, Cincinnati, 1847), page 38.

¹⁴ What was then known as Springfield is now Springdale, and is a suburb of Cincinnati in southwest Ohio, near the Kentucky border. (There is also a modern-day Springfield, Ohio, about 25 miles northeast of Dayton.)

¹⁵ The initial letter of complaint, from three elders of McNemar's congregation, was dated November 3, 1801. The Springfield Presbytery considered the complaint and, on November 11, 1801, declined to take any action on it. The parties appear to have been reconciled in March 1802, and McNemar left to take charge of a different congregation. However, the complaints were renewed in October 1802, at a meeting of the Presbytery in Cincinnati, Ohio, which condemned McNemar's theology as anti-Calvinist. By 1803, a group of Calvinist Presbyterians were lobbying for action against both McNemar and Thompson.

¹⁶ Stone and his colleagues contended that this inquiry violated accepted Presbyterian procedures, because it resembled an investigation rather than a trial. Among other defects, they complained of the lack of advance notice, the absence of specific allegations, and the denial of such procedural guarantees as the right to be present, the right to confront and cross-examine witnesses against them, and the right to call witnesses in their own defense.

¹⁷ The Synod nevertheless suspended all five men as ministers, and took steps to notify their respective congregations of the suspension. From the Synod's point of view, this action barred the five men from performing their ministerial duties, and left their congregations without ministers. Stone and his colleagues contended that this suspension was beyond the power of the Synod, both because of their withdrawal and because only a presbytery may take such action. In addition, they claimed that the Synod's action promoted the creeds of men over God and the New Testament.

¹⁸ Part 3 of the Apology well states this objection to man-made creeds:

Each has a *creed, confession of faith*, or brief statement of doctrines, as a bond of union among its members, or rather a separating wall between itself and other

societies. This is generally called the *standard* of such a church. . . . This sets aside the word of God, or at least binds the members of that particular society to understand the Scriptures as stated and explained in the *Creed*, on pain of being accounted unsound in the faith, or excommunicated from the church. This is indeed bringing the word of God to that *standard*. The people have the privilege of reading the Scriptures to *prove the standard to be right*; but no privilege to examine it by Scripture, and prove it to be *wrong*.

¹⁹ The name was suggested by Rice Haggard (1769-1819), a former Methodist lay preacher and minister. Haggard had joined James O’Kelly (ca. 1735-1826) in breaking away from the American Methodist Church in 1793, in protest against the authoritarian control exercised by Francis Asbury. Haggard and O’Kelly named their new church the Republican Methodist Church, but changed the name to the “Christian Church” in 1794, apparently at Haggard’s suggestion. Haggard later joined the Springfield Presbytery.

²⁰ The Christians’ position is reminiscent of a saying which first appeared in Germany in 1626, in a writing by “Rupertus Meldenius”: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” The true identity of “Rupertus Meldenius” is uncertain, although many suppose that it was Peter Meiderlin, a Lutheran theologian.

²¹ Their true name was the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing.

²² According to Stone, both Dunlavy and McNemar abandoned the Shakers and repented of their error before their deaths. See *The Cane Ridge Reader, supra*, at p. 63.

²³ According to Stone, the split grew out of efforts to resolve differences among Christians concerning such theological questions as the Trinity and the atonement. A Christian Conference in 1810 appointed a committee to study these issues and report back in 1811. The 5-member committee included Stone, Marshall, Thompson, Purviance, and H. Andrews. By March, 1811, when the report was due, the committee members found that they could not reconcile their differences. Marshall, Thompson, and Andrews adopted the Presbyterian views on these issues. In his *History of the Christian Church in the West, Vol. 8*, Stone tells us that when Marshall and Thompson could not convince the Christians to adopt their views (the Conference remained neutral), they returned to the Presbyterian Church.

²⁴ John Rogers, a contemporary and friend of Stone, states that late in life Stone regretted taking any position on such controversial topics, but that at the time he felt compelled to do so because of the harsh criticism leveled at him, including accusations that he was destroying Christianity and leading people away from it. See *The Cane Ridge Reader*, at pages 329-330.

²⁵ As we shall see, this joinder of Johnson and Stone as co-editors was incidental to the unification of Johnson’s Disciples and Stone’s Christians in Georgetown, Kentucky.

²⁶ *The Cane Ridge Reader, supra*, at pp. 75-76.

²⁷ Stone inherited some slaves upon the death of his mother. He took them with him to Kentucky and gave them their freedom. One of the reasons given by friends of Stone for his removal to Illinois in 1834 was his distress over the fact that his children had inherited slaves, whom Stone was of course powerless to free.

²⁸ Stone's wife, his sons, Barton and Samuel, and his daughters, Amanda, Polly, and Catharine, are known to have been present at his death-bed.

²⁹ Huguenots were French Protestants.

³⁰ Ballymena is about 25 miles north-northwest of Belfast, in the northeastern section of Northern Ireland.

³¹ Washington is located in far-western Pennsylvania, about 25 miles southwest of Pittsburgh.

³² The Presbyterian Church in Scotland and Ireland had split over the right of congregations to choose their own ministers. Those who insisted on preserving this right were called "Seceders." Some of the Seceders later split off from that branch of the Presbyterian Church, to form the "Anti-Burghers." The Anti-Burghers opposed the taking of an oath by Scottish members of Parliament to support the established Church. Thomas Campbell was a Seceder, and adopted the Anti-Burgher position.

³³ The Island of Islay is the southernmost island of the Inner Hebrides. The Hebrides, consisting of both the Inner Hebrides and the Outer Hebrides, are a group of about 500 islands along the western coast of Scotland.

³⁴ Glas was a Scottish Congregationalist who, like many others, tried to return to New Testament Christianity, stripped of the man-made creeds and traditions that had been grafted onto it. Sandeman, Glas' son-in-law, expanded on Glas' views, promoting such theological views as justification by faith, weekly Communion, love feasts, weekly contributions for the poor, etc. Sandeman founded a congregation in Danbury, Connecticut, which later joined the Disciples of Christ in about 1840.

³⁵ James and Robert Haldane were wealthy laymen who broke away from the Church of Scotland in 1799. The Haldanes spent money liberally on promoting evangelism in Scotland, including paying for visits by evangelistic preachers such as Rowland Hill (1744-1833), and opening schools in Edinburgh and Glasgow to train new preachers. Greville Ewing was a former Church of Scotland minister who was in charge of the Glasgow school. Like Glas and Sandeman, the Haldanes and Ewing emphasized New Testament teachings and practices, weekly observance of Communion, and congregational independence.

³⁶ Bethany is located about 15 miles west of Washington (Pennsylvania), in a rural area of what would later become West Virginia. Bethany is located in the sliver of northern West Virginia between Pennsylvania and Ohio. Bethany is about 30 -35 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

³⁷ For example, here is Campbell's position on the Trinity: "I have not spent, perhaps, an hour in ten years, in thinking about the *Trinity*. It is no term of mine. It is a word which belongs not to the Bible, in any translation of it I ever saw. I teach nothing, I say nothing, I think nothing about it, save that it is an unscriptural term, and consequently, can have no scriptural ideas attached to it." (From the *Christian Baptist*, vol. 7, no. 9, as reprinted in *The Cane Ridge Reader*, page 325.)

³⁸ Antinomianism is the belief that Christians are free from all moral law and can with impunity disregard it. Obviously, this was not what Campbell taught.

³⁹ *The Christian System*, by Alexander Campbell (Fifth Edition, Standard Publishing Co., Cincinnati, 1901), p. 244, as quoted in *Lectures in Honor of the Alexander Campbell Bicentennial, 1788-1988* (Published by Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee, 1988), “The Gospel as the Power of God to Salvation: Alexander Campbell and Experimental Religion,” p. 145.

⁴⁰ In 1842, one of the originators of the communist philosophy, Friedrich (Frederick) Engels (1820 - 1895), spent considerable time with Owen and was heavily influenced by him. Engels and Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) soon thereafter published their *Communist Manifesto* (1848), which was to have an enormous impact on the 20th century world.

⁴¹ Steubenville sits along the Ohio River in far-eastern Ohio, about 12 miles north-northwest of Bethany, West Virginia.

⁴² Bacon College was named for Francis Bacon. In 1839, the College was moved to Harrodsburg, Kentucky, and later merged with Transylvania University in Lexington.

⁴³ The differences included the following: (1) Christians emphasized unity more strongly than did Disciples; (2) Disciples required rebaptism by immersion for those who had been baptized in other ways, whereas Christians were usually more tolerant of other forms of baptism; (3) Disciples observed Communion weekly, Christians less frequently; (4) Disciples emphasized the laity, and de-emphasized the role of the clergy, more than Christians; and (5) Christians were more accepting of revivalism and emotional religious experiences than were the Disciples.

Interestingly, the name for the movement became another source of disagreement. Barton Stone, Walter Scott, and Thomas Campbell favored the designation, “Christian,” but Alexander Campbell insisted upon “Disciples of Christ.” Both names continued to be used, and in 1968 the denomination adopted “Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)” as its official moniker.

⁴⁴ See *The Cane Ridge Reader*, *supra*, at p. 79.

⁴⁵ Divisions among Disciples arose in the decades following the Civil War over the establishment of missionary societies and the presence of instrumental music—especially the organ—in worship. Those who opposed such practices, based on their absence from New Testament churches, gradually split off and formed a separate denomination, known as “Christians” or the “Church of Christ.” The split was virtually complete by the end of the 19th century, and was formally recognized by the U.S. Census in 1906. The Civil War may have played a significant role in causing this division, since two-thirds of the members of this new Church of Christ were located in the former Confederacy.

The Church of Christ merged with Congregationalists, and thereafter with the Evangelical and Reformed Church, to form the United Church of Christ in 1957.

⁴⁶ The original title of the work was actually somewhat more cumbersome: *A Connected View of the Principles by which the Living Oracles May Be Intelligibly and Certainly Interpreted*.

⁴⁷ Quoted from *Millennial Harbinger*, September 1837, pp. 411-414, as quoted in *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, by Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker (The Bethany Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 1975).

⁴⁸ Admission of Blacks was prohibited prior to the Civil War, because Virginia was a slave state. Women were first admitted to Bethany College in 1877.

⁴⁹ Among the early Disciples colleges which still exist are: Midway College, in Midway, Kentucky; Hiram College, in Hiram, Ohio; Columbia College, in Columbia, Missouri; Butler University, in Indianapolis, Indiana; Northwestern Christian University, also in Indiana; Eureka College, in Eureka, Illinois; Culver-Stockton College, in Canton, Missouri; Chapman College, in Orange, California; and Drake University, in Des Moines, Iowa. Many of these colleges were known by different names at the time of their founding.