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The Emergence of an American, Capitalist Ecclesiology in the Independent Christian Churches: An Analysis of How the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement Created a New Theological Tradition Based on Scottish Common Sense Philosophy

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University of Glasgow  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies and describes the fundamental theological positions of the Independent Christian Churches, one of three main branches of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, an upstart church that had its beginnings on the American frontier in the early nineteenth century. The Independent Christian Churches theology is dependent upon the particular hermeneutic method developed by the Movement's founders and this thesis explores the implications of the Independent Christian Churches hermeneutic. This hermeneutic is based on the epistemological assumptions of the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism, and the theological positions of the Independent Christian Churches is a result of the amalgamation of this Common Sense hermeneutic, the experience of the Stone-Campbell Movement with the antebellum American landscape, the adaptation of core American values (individualism, equality, and freedom), the adoption of the widespread American expectation of a millennial dawn, and the embrace of American capitalism. The leaders of the Restoration Movement believed that they were not engaged in theological speculation, but were simply proclaiming the clear teaching of the "Bible alone." The result of this disregard of theology is that Independents produce few formal works of theology as such, and Independent theology is primarily advanced through histories of the Restoration Movement and through the developing beliefs and practices of an individual congregation. This thesis deals with the development of Independent Christian Churches theology from its inception in the early nineteenth century to the present day. In the theological formulations of the Independent Christian Churches, theology is subsumed under other discourses and, while theological language is retained, such language is actually a façade for the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense Realism, American ideals of individualism, equality, and freedom, and capitalist economics. As the intellectual foundations that undergird the Scottish Common

Sense hermeneutic fragmented and the experience of the American frontier faded away, they left behind the theological formulations created in response to this philosophy and to this experience, leaving the impression among adherents of the Independent Christian Churches that their religion was actually based on "the Bible alone." Without recourse to either of these narratives, capitalist economics has provided a new metanarrative for the Independent Christian Churches which offers new options for faith and practice. Under the circumstances that the Independent Christian Churches have created for theological discourse, where the continuities with Christian history and Christian theology have been sundered, theology is dependent on secular discourses in order to proceed. Therefore, this is an interdisciplinary investigation that draws upon the discourses of theology, philosophy, hermeneutics, history, sociology, and economics; fundamentally its concern is theological, and it is more specifically concerned with ecclesiology. This is a study of an example of a particularly American form of religion and the way in which American religion has drawn upon philosophy, theology, and American mythologies to construct its self-understanding and contributes to the understanding of American religion and the history of philosophical ideas in relation to Christian theology.

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hours of conversation, the many suggestions that improved my work immeasurably, the insight into the workings of American Christianity, and the probing questions, I remain forever grateful.

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

- 1763 February 1—Thomas Campbell born in County Down, Ireland
- 1772 December 24—Barton W. Stone born in Port Tobacco, Maryland
- 1788 September 12—Alexander Campbell born in County Antrim, Ireland
- 1796 October 31—Walter Scott born in Moffatt, Scotland
- 1797 Barton W. Stone moves to Cane Ridge, Kentucky
- 1801 August 6-12—Revival at Cane Ridge, Kentucky sparks Barton Stone's interest in Christian unity and the restoration of the New Testament Church.
- 1804 June 28—*Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* signed by Barton W. Stone and five other Presbyterian ministers. This document signaled the end of Stone's association with the Presbyterian Church and is one of two foundational documents for the Restoration Movement.
- 1807 May 13—Thomas Campbell immigrates to America
- 1809 September 7—*Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* published. The *Declaration and Address* spells out the principles of the Christian Association led by Thomas Campbell. It is the second of the founding documents for the Restoration Movement.
- September 29—Alexander Campbell, along with the remainder of his family, arrive in New York and travel to western Pennsylvania where Thomas Campbell settled.
- 1812 Following the birth of his first child, Alexander Campbell conducts a study of scripture which convinces him that infant baptism is not scriptural. This marks the beginning of the development of Campbell's baptismal theology, which demands the baptism of an adult believer by immersion. Campbell's baptismal theology is further developed over the course of several debates on the nature of baptism.
- 1818 July—Walter Scott immigrates to New York
- 1823-1830 Alexander Campbell publishes *The Christian Baptist*, an iconoclastic monthly newspaper that provides a platform for Campbell to spell out what he believes to be the pattern of the apostolic Church.
- 1830 Alexander Campbell begins publication of *The Millennial Harbinger*. The beginning of this publication represents the institution of a hermeneutic shift, from a concern for a precise restoration of the doctrine and practice of the New Testament Church to a greater concern for unity and a greater allowance for practices that could not be said to be authorized in the pages of the New Testament. With the introduction of this hermeneutic, the

groundwork is laid for each division that will to later occur within the Stone-Campbell Movement.

- 1844 November 9—death of Barton W. Stone
- 1854 January 4—death of Thomas Campbell
- 1861 April 12—The American Civil War begins. While the Stone-Campbell Movement does not formally divide over the Civil War, it sets in place social and economic conditions that lead, along with hermeneutic considerations, to the formation of the Church of Christ (a cappella) four decades after the end of the war.
- April 23—death of Walter Scott
- 1866 March 4—death of Alexander Campbell. With Campbell's death, there is no longer any clear and central figure to unify the increasingly factious Restoration Movement and what is to become the three distinct strands of the Restoration Movement begin to calcify around leaders who promote their particular concerns.
- 1880—1930 Liberal theology gains ascendancy among what is to become the Disciples of Christ branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement and plays a role in the division with the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Independent Christian Church.
- 1906 The Church of Christ (a cappella) is formally listed as a separate religious group in the United States census, marking the final division between it and the two remaining streams of the Restoration Movement.
- 1924 In response to the theological liberalism of the Disciples of Christ, the Independent Christian Churches creates its own educational institutions to prepare individuals for ministry within the Independent Christian Churches. Currently, over 90% of Independent Christian Church ministers are graduates of one of these institutions.
- 1927 October 12-16—The first North American Christian Convention is held in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Convention is created to represent the interests of the Independent Christian Churches, who feel that the annual convention they have previously been part of has been hijacked by liberal members of the Disciples of Christ.
- 1962 James DeForest Murch writes *Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement*, which is the first work to receive a broad readership that attempts to define the nature of the Independent Christian Churches as a middle path between what Murch and other Independents perceive as the legalism of the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Disciples of Christ.
- 1968 The Disciples of Christ officially acknowledge their status as a denomination and in the process cement the division between them and the Independent Christian Churches.

- 1981 Historian Leroy Garrett attempts to remove the restoration element from the conservative branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement by arguing in *The Stone-Campbell Movement* that the early leaders of the Movement were not concerned with the restoration of New Testament Christianity, but with the reformation of the Church.
- 1970-present Effective control of the denomination gradually moves from Independent Christian Churches Bible colleges and journals to prominent churches and ministers.
- 1980-present Many within the Independent Christian Churches find commonality with strains of American Evangelicalism and utilize Evangelical resources for teaching, attend Evangelical events, and embrace Evangelical sub-culture. Talk of unity with Evangelical groups is hampered by the exclusive nature of the Independent Christian Churches doctrine of baptism.
- 1990 Henry E. Webb issues a critical history of the Independent Christian Churches.
- 1994 Historian James B. North tries to balance the two competing aspects of restoration and unity in his history of the Independent Christian Churches, *Union in Truth*.
- 2002 The Independent Christian Churches is listed as the second fastest growing religious movement in America. This report is heralded by Independent leaders as evidence that God is blessing the Independent Christian Churches and that the Restoration Plea that comprises Independent theology is the reason for this growth.
- 2003-present Talk of denominational reconciliation between a number of leaders of the Independent Christian Churches and several leaders of the Church of Christ (a cappella) is promoted as fulfilling the vision of unity that was expressed by Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Independent Christian Churches is one of three main branches of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, an upstart church that had its beginnings on the American frontier in the early nineteenth century. The central concern of this thesis is to identify and describe the fundamental theological positions of the Independent Christian Churches and to explore the implications of the Independent Christian Churches hermeneutic, by which the Independent Christian Churches constructs its theology. This hermeneutic is based on the epistemological assumptions of the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism, and the theological positions of the Independent Christian Churches are a result of the amalgamation of this Common Sense hermeneutic, the experience of the Stone-Campbell Movement with the antebellum American landscape, the adaptation of core American values, namely, individualism, equality, and freedom, the adoption of the widespread American expectation of a millennial dawn, and the embrace of American capitalism. The theology of the Independent Christian Churches is an ahistorical construct that may be summarized in the Restoration Plea, which emphasizes restoration, unity, and the millennium. However, due to the deep suspicion that the founders of the Restoration Movement had for theology, theology only proceeds elliptically within the Independent Christian Churches. That is, the Independents produce few formal works of theology as such, and Independent theology is primarily advanced through histories of the Restoration Movement and through the developing beliefs and practices of individual congregations. It is the contention of this thesis that, in the theological formulations of the Independent Christian Churches, theology is subsumed under other discourses and, while theological language is retained, such language is actually a façade for the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense Realism, American ideals of individualism, equality, and

freedom, and for capitalist economics. As the intellectual foundations that undergird the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic fragmented and the experience of the American frontier faded away, they left behind the theological formulations created in response to this philosophy and to this experience, leaving the impression among adherents of the Independent Christian Churches that their religion was actually based on “the Bible alone.” Without recourse to either of these narratives, capitalist economics has provided a new metanarrative for the Independent Christian Churches which offers new options for faith and practice. Thus, it may be said that, under the circumstances that the Independent Christian Churches have created for theological discourse, where the continuities with Christian history and Christian theology have been sundered, theology is dependent on secular discourses in order to proceed.

### **What is the Independent Christian Churches?**

Bob Russell’s<sup>1</sup> article in the February 16, 2003 *Christian Standard*, a weekly magazine for the Independent Christian Churches, opened with the following statement:

It was thrilling to see the Christian churches/churches of Christ recently listed as the second fastest-growing religious movement in America. A research study quoted in *The New York Times* last fall listed the Restoration Movement churches as growing 18.6 percent during the 1990s. This left us less than one percentage point behind the Mormons as the fastest growing movement during the decade.<sup>2</sup>

For Russell and many other leaders within the Independent Christian Churches, this news was greeted with joy and proclamations that, due to the “plea” of these churches, “we *should* be the fastest-growing movement in America!”<sup>3</sup> Outside observers, however, may well have wondered about this group calling themselves only “Christian churches” or

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Russell is the senior minister at Southeast Christian Church, the largest church among Independent Christian Churches with an average weekly attendance of approximately 19,000.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Russell, “North American Christian Convention Theme—‘Imagine!’” *Christian Standard* Feb. 16, 2003, 6. The article that Russell refers to is: Laurie Goodstein, “Conservative Churches Grew Fastest in 1990’s, Report Says,” *New York Times*, Sep. 18, 2002, late ed.: A 22.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, “North American Christian Convention Theme—‘Imagine!’,” 6.

“churches of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Did they have no other designation or descriptive qualifiers? In what sense are they separate from the Christian churches distinguished as Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Catholic? What are the distinctives of this group? In short, the question likely to be raised was: who or what is the Independent Christian Churches? This is a question no less relevant for the Independent Christian Churches itself.

The Independent Christian Churches is one of three main branches of the Restoration or Stone-Campbell Movement, which began as an indigenous American religious movement in the early years of the American nation. From its inauspicious beginnings as an upstart sect, the Stone-Campbell Movement grew to be one of the largest religious groups in the United States by the time of the Civil War. The Stone-Campbell program for restoring the New Testament or first century Church came to be known as the

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<sup>4</sup> The difficulty in clearly designating the various branches of this particular Christian tradition, each branch employing rather vague denominational names such as “church of Christ” or “Christian church,” is readily apparent. For the purposes of this thesis, when speaking of the original Movement or speaking of characteristics of all three branches that find their roots in this tradition, the designators Restoration Movement or Stone-Campbell Movement will be used interchangeably. The conservative, non-instrumental branch will be designated as Church of Christ (a cappella)—the Church of Christ (a cappella) does not believe that musical instruments are sanctioned for use in Christian worship and the refusal to use instruments in worship is their most widely known trait. The more liberal branch of the Movement will be designated as Disciples of Christ, though they are formally known as Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The remaining conservative branch of the Movement, on which this study focuses, will be referred to as the Independent Christian Churches. Though the Independents often identify themselves as Christian churches or churches of Christ, where the uncapitalized “church” is meant to suggest nondenominational status, the word “Independent” is added and the word “church” is capitalized, both as an aid to the reader in readily identifying the Independent Christian Churches as a distinctive group and also to suggest that it has more characteristics of a denomination than its adherents may think. The plural appellation, Independent Christian Churches, does not represent the work or understanding of the author, but is an unfortunate change imposed upon this work as a requirement for the acceptance of this thesis. The reader should therefore understand that the author’s intention throughout this work was to refer to this denomination as the “Independent Christian Church;” thus the name “Independent Christian Churches” should not be understood as a group or collection of congregations, but as a singular entity and a defined denomination. Throughout the study all three branches will be treated as denominations, regardless of any claims to “non-denominational” status made by the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Independent Christian Churches. For a definition of denomination, see below, 166, fn. 102. The precedent for so treating the Independent Christian Churches is set by other scholars within the field. In his study of the Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, David M. Thompson begins by noting that “It is particularly difficult to write a ‘denominational history’ of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland. One obvious reason for this is that the Churches have never regarded themselves as a denomination but have looked upon themselves as a movement” (David M. Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall: A Short History of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland* (Birmingham: Berean Press, 1980), 7. However, Thompson also claims that “the question of whether a group is a denomination does not depend only on whether it thinks it is, and in many ways Churches of Christ have inevitably come to have many characteristics of a denomination over the years (7).” It is a central contention of this thesis that the Independent Christian Churches has developed enough characteristics of a denomination that it is best described as such.

Stone-Campbell or Restoration Plea. The Plea consists of the following three elements (1) submission to the authority of the Bible alone, which would restore the New Testament church in matters of doctrine and practice and, it was thought, would result in (2) Christian unity on the basis of a common understanding of the Bible, which in turn would lead to (3) world evangelization and the advent of the millennium, which was to usher in the kingdom of God.<sup>5</sup> Each of these three elements of the Plea is based on assumptions and understandings particular to the early American and Enlightenment Era context in which they were formed.

The central term in what follows is “restoration.” As such, it is necessary to define the nature of restoration within the Independent Christian Churches. Church of Christ (a cappella) scholar Richard T. Hughes recognizes that there are a variety of historical models of restoration, which he defines as ecclesiastical primitivism, ethical primitivism, experiential primitivism, and gospel primitivism,<sup>6</sup> where the Restoration Movement is best represented by ecclesiastical primitivism which regards “the primitive church as normative for all ecclesiastical practice.”<sup>7</sup> More narrowly, Independent Christian Churches scholar Robert O. Fife lists five understandings of restoration within the Stone-Campbell Movement: restoration as restitution, restoration as either dispensable or revisable, restoration within the context of the church, restoration through the church, and restoration for the church.<sup>8</sup> It is not only important that there is no common agreement on the meaning of restoration within the Independent Christian Churches, but also that the founding fathers of the Restoration Movement were not entirely consistent in their views

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<sup>5</sup> There is no universal agreement over these elements or their meanings. The above scheme represents how the Restoration Plea is defined for the purposes of this thesis. For an extended discussion of the origins and arguments over the Restoration Plea, see Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> Richard T. Hughes, “Restoration, Historical Models of,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, *et al.*, eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 635-8.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, “Restoration, Historical Models of,” 635.

<sup>8</sup> Fife, Robert O., “‘Restoration,’ Meanings of Within the Movement,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, *et al.*, eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 638-42.

of restoration.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, restoration within the Stone-Campbell Movement is understood to fall under Fife's restitution model, where restoration is "understood in terms of a strict adherence to the pattern of church faith and practice set forth in the New Testament."<sup>10</sup> Fife writes:

In the Stone-Campbell Movement, the embrace of this particular meaning of restoration went hand in hand with a rationalistic Common Sense hermeneutic that treated Scripture as a coherent body of facts and prescriptions. More strident advocates of this hermeneutic viewed the bible as a virtual manual for reinstating and maintaining the apostolic model of the church.<sup>11</sup>

It is precisely because of the close relation between the Common Sense hermeneutic and the notion that a pattern or blueprint of the apostolic church may be found in the New Testament that restoration may be, first of all, understood as the restitution of the New Testament church.<sup>12</sup> Other versions of restoration may reflect aspects of the thought of Alexander Campbell in his later years or may be revisionist understandings of restoration, but it is the restitutionist model that was the first and primary understanding of restoration among the founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Further, as the Stone-Campbell idea of restoration is so closely tied to the Common Sense hermeneutic employed by the early leaders, it is necessary to point out that the initiative for the restoration they sought did not spring from the Bible alone, as many within the Independent Christian Churches would claim, but from the intellectual background of the Scottish Enlightenment.

### **Research Questions and Dialogue Partners**

The central questions that this thesis seeks to address are: "What is the Independent theological identity?" and similarly: "How has the Independent Christian Churches continued to shape its theology?" Contrary to Independent Christian Churches belief, the

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<sup>9</sup> See below, 85-9.

<sup>10</sup> Fife, "'Restoration,' Meanings of Within the Movement," 639.

<sup>11</sup> Fife, "'Restoration,' Meanings of Within the Movement," 639.

<sup>12</sup> "Pattern" or "blueprint" restoration are terms commonly used to describe the idea that the New Testament contains an exact pattern or blueprint for faith and practice that all churches everywhere must exactly conform to in order to be identified as the true church or a New Testament church. See below, 83-108.

Independent identity is essentially shaped by the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism and by attitudes that are influenced more by American origins and contemporary American culture than by “biblical” values or by claims that through the Independent Christian Churches, the “New Testament Church” has been restored. At first blush these questions and this argument may seem to travel a well trodden path. That, however, is not the case. While there have been a number of fine studies on various aspects of the Stone-Campbell Movement in the past decades and critical studies of both Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ (a cappella) fellowships, the Independents have produced no critical studies on their own theology or on their epistemological assumptions. The Independent Christian Churches’ knowledge of itself comes from a number of histories, written by four different men from 1962 to 1994.<sup>13</sup> Each history offers a slightly different perspective on the Restoration Movement and the role and development of the Independent Christian Churches. What is not offered through these histories, however, is a sustained critique of Independent Christian Churches theological development. Closest to the critical mark is Henry E. Webb’s *In Search of Christian Unity*, which is a study vastly superior to the other three.<sup>14</sup> His concern is primarily historical and descriptive, however, and while he raises many valuable and pointed questions about the origins and theology of the Stone-Campbell Movement and the Independent segment of that Movement, this work does not meet the need for a careful critical look at the theology of the Independent Christian Churches in the twenty-first century. In this vein, this thesis continues in the tradition of the work of Richard T. Hughes, C. Leonard Allen, Nathan O. Hatch, Mark A. Noll, and George M.

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<sup>13</sup> One of these histories, Leroy Garrett’s, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* was written by a member of the Church of Christ (a cappella), but has rather broad acceptance within Independent circles, and all four histories have been used as textbooks at Independent Christian Churches colleges.

<sup>14</sup> Webb, in his work, indeed asks questions difficult enough to earn him the distinction of having the following disclaimer, from Standard Publishing, the most prominent Independent publishing company, placed on the verso of the title page: “Sharing the thoughts of his own heart, the author may express views not entirely consistent with those of the publisher.” Thirteen years after its original publication, a revised and updated edition was issued without the disclaimer, though this time from ACU Press, a Church of Christ (a cappella) company with a stronger tradition of publishing critical studies.

Marsden by exploring issues pertinent to the development of religion in American, particularly in regard to religious groups whose theology is closely tied to the founding of the American nation.

It is somewhat ironic that the Restoration Movement, which began by rejecting most of the developments of Christian history outside of its own existence, has found the use of histories to be indispensable, not only in telling its own story, but in shaping the theology and direction of the various parts of the Movement. These histories have often been a vehicle to critique and evaluate the state of the Restoration Movement, and at times, to attempt to launch the Movement's understanding of itself in a new direction. Within Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ (a cappella) circles the implications of their historical studies have led to attempts, in light of critical understandings of the origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement, to develop theologically reformed Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ identities.<sup>15</sup> Within the Independent branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement, attempts to revise the theological understanding of the Independents are few and far between and are often quite limited in scope and in the proposals they offer.

The hermeneutical choices of the founding fathers of the Restoration Movement dictated, not only the theological program of the Movement, but also the later historical developments that resulted in divisions and particularities arising within each of the three branches. The central problems of a hermeneutic based on the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism became evident before the Movement was thirty years old. In addition, the vagaries and inconsistencies of the manner in which the early leaders applied

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of attempts to reshape Disciples identity may be seen in Mark G. Toulouse's *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity*; Richard L. Hamm's *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*; and the final chapters, respectively, of M. Eugene Boring's *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* and Stephen V. Sprinkle's, *Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a People in Covenant*. Prominent attempts to reshape Church of Christ (a cappella) identity may be found in C. Leonard Allen's *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World*; Bill Love's *The Core Gospel: On Restoring the Crux of the Matter*; and Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese's *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition and the Future of Churches of Christ*.

this hermeneutic program contributed to later problems and divisions within the Movement. The Independent Christian Churches has not critically examined the problems posed by its inherited hermeneutic; that is, it has too often assumed that its hermeneutic program offers a precise correlation between its interpretation of the Bible and the mind of God as Independents believe it to be revealed in the Bible. A further consequence of this is that the Independent Christian Churches does not fully appreciate the historical and cultural differences that exist between the first century church they are attempting to restore and their own situation as twenty-first century Christians. In this regard, it is alone among the three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement; both Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ (a cappella) scholars have engaged in critical studies of the Common Sense hermeneutic employed by the founders of the Restoration Movement.<sup>16</sup> As such, this thesis is concerned with the hermeneutic program of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott and how their hermeneutic legacies have been appropriated today within Independent Christian Churches thought and have allowed the Independents to claim that their interpretation of the Bible is free of human interposition.

This thesis also dialogues with the phenomenon of American Evangelicalism,<sup>17</sup> which many Independents wish to be part of. In particular, the relation between the Independent Christian Churches and American Evangelicalism may be seen in the ecclesiological models adopted by the Independent Christian Churches. Many Independents utilize the ecclesiological models promoted by institutions such as Saddleback Community Church, the Willow Creek Association, and other groups associated with the church growth movement. An outgrowth of this relationship is the manner in which many in the Independent Christian Churches are attempting to reinvent

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<sup>16</sup> For just two examples, see M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997) and Michael W. Casey, *The Battle Over Hermeneutics in the Stone-Campbell Movement, 1800-1870*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> For a definition of American Evangelicalism, see below 182-5.

their tradition and practice. A major force behind this reinvention is a growing missiological approach to church growth that has attempted to evangelize new worshipers, largely through stylistic changes such as upbeat worship and sermons, drama, special facilities, and seeker-sensitive or seeker-oriented services. In some instances this approach has resulted in an increased church attendance or in new churches that begin with over five hundred worshippers on their first Sunday. However, this effort has not been undergirded with a theology that addresses the historic and hermeneutical challenges mentioned above. Instead, many churches and individuals find themselves drifting away from the historic positions of the Restoration Plea while simultaneously attempting to retain certain elements contained within that theological program. The theological program of much of the Independent Christian Churches, then, threatens to become an ad hoc conglomeration of doctrines, American values, and market-driven business practices.

### **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter Two surveys the theological program of the Restoration Movement, known as the Restoration Plea, and focuses particularly on the philosophic and American origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement as these origins influenced the direction of the Movement and the development of the Restoration Plea. As the theological program of the Stone-Campbell Movement is told through histories of the Movement, biographical and intellectual backgrounds of the founders of the Movement, Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott, are discussed. From their thought, the development of Independent Christian Churches theology is examined, with particular emphasis on competing views of the Restoration Plea among Stone-Campbell scholars. Particularly important to this discussion is the loss of the intellectual foundations that undergirded the theology of the founders of the Restoration Movement and current attempts to either support the original epistemological foundations of the Restoration Plea or to replace them while retaining the essential elements of Stone-Campbell theology.

Chapter Three examines the Independent Christian Churches conception of the restoration element of the Plea. The restoration sought by the Movement's founders was primarily ecclesiastical in nature and attempted to restore the pattern of the New Testament church in matters of faith and practice. There is, however, little agreement on the nature of that restoration among contemporary Independents, the result of which is a nascent division in the Independent Christian Churches, where traditionalists argue for the restoration of a pattern supposedly found in the New Testament, and progressives argue for a restoration of the spirit and achievements of the New Testament church. A primary clue to Independent attitudes and self understanding may be found in the way the Independents characterize the larger history of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Within the confines of the Movement, the Independent Christian Churches claims to have avoided the perils of "legalism" that the Church of Christ (a cappella) fell prey to or the "liberalism" that the Disciples of Christ embraced. The Independents often imply that in choosing the middle path and attempting to balance the elements of the Plea that the gospel is restored, or most nearly restored, in their theology and practice. Each division within the Stone-Campbell Movement finds its basis in a hermeneutic rule, based on the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism, that "where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent we are silent." This hermeneutic rule is further divided into a search of the New Testament for commands, examples, and, where these are lacking, necessary inferences that, it is believed, allow the interpreter to precisely reconstruct a given doctrine. However, this hermeneutic does not offer the certainty that Independents desire, but is actually a subjective approach to the Bible that allows the individual interpreter to create any doctrine and have the stamp of biblical authority upon it.

Chapter Four examines Independent claims regarding Christian unity. The Independent attitudes towards unity are found in their conversations on unity within the ranks of the divided Stone-Campbell Movement and with American Evangelicalism. For

the Independent Christian Churches, unity is a limited concept; there is little dialogue with the larger Christian world, such as the mainline Protestant denominations or the Roman Catholic Church, for example. For the Independents, unity is highly individualistic and may be found almost exclusively in the local congregation; such unity is based only on sharing the particular Independent understandings of a given set of doctrines. The development of the goal of unity is traced from the thought of Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone to the current appropriations of unity by traditionalist and progressive Independents. While traditionalists and progressives have different understandings of unity, where traditionalists demand adherence to a strict interpretation of the Restoration Plea as a restoration of the pattern of the New Testament Church and progressives seek unity among American Evangelicals, neither group has been successful in finding unity with other Christians. Part of the reason for this is that traditionalists and progressives alike consider the church to be a monolithic entity that was firmly established in the first century and may not be deviated from. However, as traditionalists and progressives differ on the characteristics of this church, they are struggling for control of the Independent denomination. This control is gained on the Independent religious marketplace, where traditionalists and progressives offer financial support to Independent Christian Churches institutions that perpetuate either the traditionalist or progressive agenda. These institutions comprise an informal power structure for the Independent Christian Churches, made up of prominent churches and ministers, Bible colleges, and Independent journals and editors. Lacking formal power structures, this decentered structure controls the discussion of unity within the Independent Christian Churches and the dictates of the marketplace are used to legitimize Independent Christian Churches theological pronouncements.

Chapter Five explores the Independent Christian Churches conception of the millennium. The goals of restoration and unity fed the expected millennial dawn, and thus

it is the millennium that is the zenith of Alexander Campbell's thought. For Campbell and other early leaders of the Restoration Movement, the millennial dawn had arrived and was expected to usher in a thousand year golden age of peace and harmony, at the end of which, Jesus Christ would begin his reign on earth. Campbell's millennial theology has been almost universally rejected among all branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement, and among contemporary Independents the millennium is identified with evangelistic efforts based on the logic of capitalist economics. Rather than a universal millennium, the current Independent understanding of the millennium is found only in the local church, and individual Independent congregations compete on the religious free market with other denominations and with each other for adherents. The result of this is a commodified Christianity that may be seen in the sale of Christian goods and events and in the abstraction of Christian doctrines from their theological and cultural contexts. As the Independent Christian Churches has grown numerically, Independents once again believe that they stand at the beginning of the millennial dawn where the triumph of Christ's kingdom on earth is synonymous with the spread of the Independent gospel.

Chapter Six draws together implications from the preceding chapters to describe the current state of Independent Christian Churches theology. Taking note of Jack Cottrell's attempt to perpetuate the theological assumptions of Alexander Campbell, the critical look at Independent theology found in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, and C. Robert Wetzel's attempt to describe a theological center for the Independent Christian Churches, this chapter briefly examines several options for Independent theology. The center of Independent theology is not to be found, however, in any of the options offered by Independent scholars, but in the commodified version of Christianity promoted by the Independent Christian Churches. This commodified Christianity is reciprocally a secular Christianity, and the Independent Christian Churches

has taken advantage of this commodified, secular Christianity to legitimate its theological program and to expand its share of the religious market through capitalist means.

### **Methodological Considerations**

This is an interdisciplinary study that draws upon theology, philosophy, hermeneutics, history, sociology, and economics; fundamentally its concern is theological, and it is more specifically concerned with ecclesiology. While this thesis is about the development of the theology of the Independent Christian Churches, the fundamental problems created within this theology are not theological in nature. Rather, the problems within its theology stems from the philosophical basis of that theology and the way in which that theology developed in America. As such, the theology of the Independent Christian Churches is best viewed within the history of ideas from Plato to the Scottish Enlightenment as a concrete example of how that history was applied to the American environment.

This study is conducted using qualitative research methods. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman define qualitative research as “a broad approach to the study of social phenomena” whose “various genres are naturalistic and interpretive” and which “draw on multiple methods of inquiry.”<sup>18</sup> Such an approach allows the researcher to “more closely [represent] the situation as experienced by the participants” and thus stems from a phenomenological rather than a positivist position.<sup>19</sup> Though this is a “broad approach,” it is a methodology that is well suited to identifying and describing the theological positions of the Independent Christian Churches. Because of the decentered nature of the Independent Christian Churches, where the Independent Christian Churches lacks a formal

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<sup>18</sup> Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 1999), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Pamela Maykut and Richard Morehouse, *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 2-3.

hierarchy that makes pronouncements for the denomination<sup>20</sup> or a formal creed or confession that serves as a standard for judging the faith and practice of the Independents, it does not lend itself to a top-down study. Rather, this religious tradition is best studied from the bottom up as a sociological phenomenon. The rationale for this is that the Independents have depended largely on sociological means to further their theological program. That is, theology within the Independent Christian Churches is developed, not through systematic theological reflection, but by a democratic process, wherein the practices of a successful, i.e. growing, church are adopted by other Independent congregations. This sociological study leads to theological reflection, particularly in regard to questions of ecclesial power and authority, and, ultimately, the legitimation of the Independent Christian Churches. A further methodological consideration for this thesis is that it is limited to the American instantiation of the Restoration Movement and the way in which the theology of the Independent Christian Churches has developed in this American context.<sup>21</sup>

A particular aspect of the qualitative research tradition that is utilized, and that requires further comment, is the use of ethnographic research methods. Rather than doing a traditional ethnography, ethnographic methods are used to critically examine the theology of the Independent Christian Churches. Max Travers defines ethnography generally as “observation and interviewing,” and more specifically as, “a method which

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<sup>20</sup> Though, there is a power structure that dictates acceptable behavior in matters of faith and practice for the Independent Christian Churches. See below, 166-70.

<sup>21</sup> A discussion of the non-American forms of the Restoration Movement is beyond the scope of what can be adequately dealt with in this project. For a brief account of the Stone-Campbell Movement in other countries from an Independent perspective, see Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 2003), 437-63. For a detailed history of the Restoration Movement in Great Britain and Ireland, see David M. Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall: A Short History of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland* (Birmingham: Berean Press, 1980). For several perspectives on the specifically American origins of the Restoration Movement, see Douglas A. Foster, ed., *American Origins of Churches of Christ: Three Essays on Restoration History* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2000). For commonalities with other American religious movements, see Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

requires a researcher to spend a large amount of time observing a particular group of people, by sharing their way of life."<sup>22</sup> Travers lists five primary methods for conducting qualitative research: observation, ethnographic field work, interviewing, discourse analysis, and textual analysis.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of discourse analysis, each of these research methods are employed at different points throughout the research process and each comes into play at key points in the thesis.

In regard to considerations of observation and ethnographic fieldwork, I was raised in the Independent Christian Churches and have been part of both Church of Christ (a cappella) and Disciples of Christ congregations. Though I have turned an increasingly critical eye on the events I witness, I have continued to be involved in the Independent Christian Churches as a member of a local congregation and a participant at larger conventions, conferences, seminars, and conversations of the group as a whole. Before and during the time of this study, I visited well over one hundred and fifty Independent Christian Churches in urban, suburban, and rural settings that represented a wide spectrum of cultural and socio-economic settings, as well as time spent in Independent Christian Churches mission efforts in North America, Europe, and Africa. Much of the information from conventions and seminars was gathered through such ethnographic methods, as was data from sermons, academic papers, and practical workshops.

Though they are not a primary source of information in this study, interviews come into the study in an indirect way, in that I have engaged a number of ministry practitioners, Bible college professors and other scholars in dialogue throughout this process and have relied on them heavily to discuss and critique my research and to discuss the state of the Independent Christian Churches today. I have also been able to talk to many lay people

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<sup>22</sup> Max Travers, *Qualitative Research Through Case Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Travers, *Qualitative Research Through Case Studies*, 2.

about the Independent Christian Churches and their involvement and experience in the churches that are part of this denomination.

In that this study must take into account a long history and a great body of written work, textual analysis is relied on quite heavily. This work is primarily concerned with the theological development of the Independent Christian Churches and the way that it has adopted and adapted the thought of Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott; therefore, the actual theology of these founders is less important than how the Independents have chosen to embrace and interpret the theology of Stone, the Campbells, and Scott. The primary focus is not on presenting arguments about the declensions and continuities between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation scholarship, as if one period represented a more “pure” theology than the other, but on how theology within the Independent Christian Churches has been actualized and altered in the 200 years since its founding and the mechanisms by which theology continues to develop in the Independent Christian Churches. As this thesis is primarily concerned with how the thought of Stone and Campbell has been interpreted, it is the interpretations of Stone-Campbell theology, rather than the founding documents themselves, that are the primary sources. The founding documents of the Restoration Movement will be utilized, but the primary sources for this study are the histories of the Restoration Movement from all three branches (though the four histories utilized by the Independent Christian Churches are emphasized) and current work within the Independent Christian Churches from both academic and non-academic categories. Further, in my understanding of Independent Christian Churches theology, Alexander Campbell is the primary force behind its evolution because of his influence on the intellectual development of the Restoration Movement and the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic that he employed in the construction of Stone-Campbell theology. Thus, it is the thought of Alexander Campbell that takes precedence in this study and the theology of Barton W. Stone plays only a secondary role.

James DeForest Murch's 1962 history, *Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement*, is a good starting point for much discussion of Independent theology and practice. Murch's history was among the first significant works that was specifically addressed to a "middle group" of believers to receive a broad readership—what he regarded as the true heirs, not just of the Restoration Movement, but of the apostolic church. He writes in the chapter discussing the Independents:

In the broad sense the Center [the Independent Christian Churches] might be characterized as consisting of all those who continue to hold to the basic Biblical principles set forth in Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* and Isaac Errett's *Our Position*. Let it be emphasized: *to the basic Biblical principles*—not to the historic documents themselves as such. . . . the Center is inclusivist, rather than exclusivist, in spirit and purpose, but unwilling under any circumstances to abandon the Biblical revelation and New Testament standards to gain desirable ends.<sup>24</sup>

The Independent histories that follow Murch adopt his basic view that the Independent Christian Churches represents the true heart of the Restoration Movement with the Church of Christ (a cappella) and Disciples of Christ representing legalistic or liberal, respectively, perversions or failings in regard to true "New Testament Christianity." This understanding of its place in the wider Stone-Campbell Movement functions as a powerful apologetic for the Independent Christian Churches by allowing it to believe that it, among all other denominations, most closely resembles the Christianity of the New Testament. This belief has, in many respects, prevented the Independent Christian Churches from engaging its own theological program critically. It is this lack of critical engagement with its own theology and with academic thought outside the confines of the Independent Christian Churches that is the impetus for this thesis.

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<sup>24</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 293.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE RESTORATION PLEA: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESTORATION PLEA IN LIGHT OF ITS ENLIGHTENMENT AND AMERICAN ORIGINS

The theological program of the Stone-Campbell or Restoration Movement is often designated the “Restoration Plea,” a shorthand description for what adherents believe to be the essential elements of Stone-Campbell theology. The Restoration Plea is not an element original to Stone-Campbell theology; that is, Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell did not develop the Restoration Plea and then argue for its acceptance, but first developed theological arguments that were distilled into various incarnations of the Restoration Plea.<sup>1</sup> For the Independent Christian Churches, that Plea is usually defined as an appeal to restore the authority of the Bible alone and thus to restore “New Testament Christianity,” which is to result in Christian unity, which, in turn, leads to the millennial dawn. The development of this Plea must be traced back to the early leaders of the Restoration Movement: Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott. The restoration that they sought was ostensibly the restoration of the faith and practice of the New Testament church, but was, more fundamentally, an attempt to restructure Christianity outside the realm of “theological speculation” in light of the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense, which drew heavily on the philosophy of John Locke and Francis Bacon, and supposedly provided a means to empirically apprehend reality, and therefore religious truth, as it is. This restoration was furthermore a rewriting of Christianity onto what these men perceived as the virginal, American landscape and which drew on American concepts of liberty, equality, and individualism.<sup>2</sup> While the Restoration Plea has continued to be championed

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<sup>1</sup> Several different understandings of the Restoration Plea are discussed below, notably the competing definitions provided for it by Alfred DeGroot and Harold Ford, see 50-81.

<sup>2</sup> See above, 4-5, and the remainder of this chapter, which discusses in detail how early Stone-Campbell leaders conceived of the concept of restoration.

by many Independents today (often without referring to its constitutive elements),<sup>3</sup> the fissures created by attempting to ground Christian theology upon the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense and the utopian dreams for the American continent have become increasingly evident, as the intellectual ground of Scottish Common Sense Realism and the experience of the American frontier have vanished. While there is some agreement among Independents on the formulation of the Plea, there is little agreement on its interpretation or on the larger theological program of the Independent Christian Churches. Some Independent scholars believe that the Restoration Plea and its underlying epistemology need no change, while others believe that the Plea itself is valid but needs to shake off the association with Scottish Common Sense, and still others believe that there are more fundamental questions than the nature of the Restoration Plea to be addressed.<sup>4</sup> Where the Scottish Common Sense epistemology and the loss of the frontier experience have also caused a loss of theological authority for the Stone-Campbell Movement, the Independent Christian Churches has attempted to shore up its theology with other philosophies and ideologies, such as its understanding of “postmodernism” and, on a much larger scale, the appropriation of capitalist logic to provide a metanarrative for Independent Christian Churches theology.<sup>5</sup>

### **History of the Restoration Plea: The First Generation Leaders**

In order to understand how the concept of the Restoration Plea developed, it is necessary to examine in some detail the historical backgrounds and the spiritual and intellectual development of the early leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement which led them to argue for restoration, unity, and the approaching millennium. The early leaders did not regard their own fellowships as the only groups interested in restoring “primitive

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<sup>3</sup> See Bob Russell’s appeal to the “plea” above, 2, and below, 159-64.

<sup>4</sup> See below for representatives of each of these views, Jack Cottrell, 47; Robert Kurka, 63-7; and Philip Kenneson, 61-3, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> These attempts to fill the voids in Independent theology are discussed extensively in Chapter Three, Four, and Five. For Independent Christian Churches attempts to use postmodernism as a way out of the theological morass it finds itself in, see below 221-2 and 227. For its use of capitalism, see Chapter Five.

Christianity.” Indeed, significant components of the thought of Thomas and Alexander Campbell<sup>6</sup> were shared in large part by many other individuals and denominations, among both established churches and upstart sects, in antebellum America.<sup>7</sup> However, while certain aspects of the restoration that Thomas and Alexander Campbell sought may have been widely shared by other American religious groups, only a few such groups shared significant portions of the Campbells’ theological program. Three groups that are regarded by some Independent Christian Churches historians as precursors to the Restoration Movement are the Republican Methodists led by James O’Kelly, the New England “Christians” of Abner Jones and Elias Smith,<sup>8</sup> and Barton W. Stone’s Kentucky “Christians.” Of these groups, the most important for the Stone-Campbell Movement was the movement led by Barton W. Stone, comprising as it did, half of the primary influence on the churches that trace their heritage to the Stone-Campbell Movement.

Barton W. Stone was born on December 24, 1772 near Port Tobacco, Maryland and was the only one of the four most influential leaders of the early Movement to be born in America. Predating the Campbells’ efforts by eight years, the unity movement led by Stone originated at the great Cane Ridge revival in Kentucky, which began on Friday,

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<sup>6</sup> See below for biographical information on Thomas Campbell, 23-7, and Alexander Campbell, 27-30.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Gutjahr sees Alexander Campbell’s desire to produce a “pure” and accurate translation of the Bible, based upon the earliest available texts, and concern with seeking the original meaning of these texts, to be similar to the desires of many Unitarians. Campbell’s attempt to render the language of the Bible in understandable, everyday language was also shared by a number of other Bible translators in antebellum America. In a similar manner, Gutjahr regards the particular emphasis that Campbell placed on the role of baptism, always translated as “immersion” (and thus designating a key figure in the gospel narratives “John the Immerser”), as something of a precursor to the more sectarian and heavily theologically biased translations among Unitarian, Seventh Day Adventist, and Mormon groups (though Gutjahr correctly notes that Campbell’s translation should not be viewed merely as a sectarian translation that emphasizes immersion, given Campbell’s primary concern to produce a work that was readable by any common person), Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 89-111. Nathan Hatch argues that aspects of the programs of Methodists, Baptists, black churches, Mormons, and the Stone-Campbell Movement each contributed to the democratization of American Christianity, where the (usually) theologically uneducated and unsophisticated common person dethroned the elite clergy that, up to that point, governed the churches, Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Each of these groups eventually called themselves “Christian Church,” in favor of what they perceived as sectarian names. Among Independent historians only James North regards these groups as fully a part of the Restoration Movement (see North, *Union in Truth*, 13-31), though O’Kelly only indirectly influenced Barton Stone and there was likely little contact between the Jones-Smith movement in New England and the movements of O’Kelly, Stone, and the Campbells (see Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 84 and 92).

August 6, 1801. Hosted by the Presbyterian Church at Cane Ridge, Kentucky and its pastor, Barton W. Stone, the Cane Ridge revival is notable both for the size of the revival and for the controversial “religious exercises” which accompanied the revival. Estimates of the number of people present at Cane Ridge over the course of the week range from 10,000 to 20,000 people; however, no accurate count was made. The “religious exercises” were described in detail by Barton Stone and named by him as “the falling exercise—the jerks—the dancing exercise—the barking exercise—the laughing and singing exercise.”<sup>9</sup> Each of these the result, it was claimed by some, of a spiritual manifestation—a modern-day Pentecost; detractors, however, attributed such actions to decidedly non-spiritual influences. In any event, the Cane Ridge revival was an important point in American religious history, not only for what was to become the Stone-Campbell Movement, but for American Christianity in general, preceding later revivalistic efforts and drawing participants from Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations.<sup>10</sup> While Independent Christian Churches historian James DeForest Murch credited this revival meeting with merely setting the stage for the restoration that was yet to come, and in fact, vehemently denied that this revival meeting exhibited any of the characteristics of the Restoration Movement,<sup>11</sup> his interpretation of the events at Cane Ridge is not shared by later historians within the Independent Christian Churches. Both James B. North, Professor of Church History at Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary, and Henry E. Webb, Professor of Church History Emeritus at Milligan College, note that a by-product of the revival was the emphasis on unity as Christians of Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian

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<sup>9</sup> Barton W. Stone and John Rogers. *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: with Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers*. (Cincinnati, 1847; rpt. Joplin: College Press, n.d.) 39.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the Cane Ridge meeting, see Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 432-5 for a view of the proceedings from outside the Restoration Movement; D. Newell Williams, “Cane Ridge Revival,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 164-6 for an interpretation within the Restoration movement; and Stone and Rogers, *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone*, 37-42 for Stone’s own account of the meeting.

<sup>11</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 30-31, 86.

denominations labored, preached, and worshiped together for the six or seven days and nights that the revival lasted.<sup>12</sup> Webb, with perhaps too much triumphalist sentiment, characterizes the situation thus:

In the enthusiasm of preaching, singing, and fellowship, there was little sectarian consciousness . . . The auditors were eager to hear the Bible and, in this context, sectarian distinctions were matters of little import. The indelible impression of the singleness of purpose and intent of the vast gathering at Cane Ridge would linger long in the minds of many present and express itself in Stone's passion for unity, which he frequently described as his "Polar Star."<sup>13</sup>

Certainly the revival left an indelible mark on Barton Stone. Disciples of Christ scholar D. Newell Williams, President of Brite Divinity School, argues that three aspects of the frontier revival convinced Stone that the advent of the millennium was approaching. First, the ecumenical nature of the revival indicated that divisions between the sects and denominations of Christianity were on the verge of being mended.<sup>14</sup> Second, through the revival the antislavery cause was furthered.<sup>15</sup> Third, Stone believed that the revival shed new light on theological difficulties, solved them, and offered instead what Stone characterized as the "simple gospel of Jesus."<sup>16</sup> Ultimately these considerations led to the dissolution of Stone's ties to the Presbyterian Church three years later, marked by the publication of *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* in June of 1804.<sup>17</sup> Among other things, this document advocated the death of the distinct body of the Springfield Presbytery that it might merge into union with the "body of Christ at large" and that people might look to the Bible alone for the "simple gospel" that is free of "any

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<sup>12</sup> James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994), 47; Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 2003), 49. The precise end of the meeting is subject to divergent reports, it is known that the meeting began on Friday, August 6, 1801 and ended six or seven days later, either the following Wednesday or Thursday.

<sup>13</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> D. Newell Williams, "Barton Stone in 1804: From Port Tobacco to Cane Ridge" *Stone-Campbell Journal* 7, no. 2 (2004): 205.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, "Barton Stone in 1804," 205-6.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, "Barton Stone in 1804," 206-7.

<sup>17</sup> For other references to *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, see below, 130 and 145.

mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world.”<sup>18</sup> As with the Campbells, and in the spirit of the revivals of 1801, Stone and the other signers of the *Last Will and Testament* regarded the divisions of the church as the fault of “human creeds and forms of [church] government.”<sup>19</sup> Stone continued to promote the principles outlined in the *Last Will and Testament* and gained many followers throughout Kentucky and Indiana during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The next stage of development of the Restoration program, however, came at the hands of Thomas and Alexander Campbell.

While the revivals of the early nineteenth century were sweeping the Kentucky frontier, Thomas Campbell was undergoing his own awakening of sorts in the village of Richhill, Ireland. Thomas Campbell was born in County Down, Ireland, on February 1, 1763. Though he spent much of his youth in the Anglican Church,<sup>20</sup> he left that body as a young man to join the Seceder Presbyterian Church. It was as a member of this group that he felt a call to ministry and, as a result, Campbell studied at the University of Glasgow from 1783 to 1786.<sup>21</sup> Upon completion of his studies at Glasgow, he enrolled in the theology school of the Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian Church. Thomas Campbell spent eight weeks a year for five years at Divinity Hall located in Whitburn, after which

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<sup>18</sup> John Rogers, *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: with Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers* (Cincinnati, 1847; rpt. Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 51-53.

<sup>19</sup> Rogers, *Biography*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Campbell's father, Archibald, was raised in the Roman Catholic Church, but became a member of the Church of England when he married and remained an Anglican for the rest of his life. For a brief account of Thomas Campbell's conversion to the Seceder Presbyterian Church, see Lester G. McAllister, *Thomas Campbell: Man of the Book*, (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1954), 21-23.

<sup>21</sup> Though there is no official record of Thomas Campbell's time at the University of Glasgow, it is likely that he was a student at the University. The University of Glasgow Matriculation Albums reveal that he did not matriculate during the period of 1783-1786; however, matriculation was not required for all students prior to 1843. Thus it is not possible to claim, on a basis of the records available, that any one student was not a student at the University of Glasgow. See W. Innes Addison, ed., *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1913), xi. For the years relevant to Thomas Campbell's time at the University of Glasgow, see Addison, *The Matriculation Albums*, 135-44.

time he was examined by the Associate Synod of Ireland and appointed a probationer whose duties were to preach the gospel while being observed by the Synod.<sup>22</sup>

During the course of his studies at Divinity Hall, Thomas Campbell also taught school in Ulster. He married Jane Corneigle in June 1787 and just over one year later their first child, a son named Alexander, was born. Campbell served several small churches in Ireland until 1798 when he moved to Ahorey, County Armagh where he ministered with a Secession congregation and later taught at a school in nearby Richhill.<sup>23</sup> During his ministry at Ahorey, Thomas Campbell joined a newly formed Evangelical Society which claimed members from all types of churches and promoted union meetings which featured the preaching of the gospel and an invitation to its hearers to accept Christ.<sup>24</sup> Campbell also was involved in unity efforts within his own denomination in a failed attempt to reunite the Burgher and Anti-Burgher groups of the Seceder Presbyterian Church in Ireland.<sup>25</sup>

Thomas Campbell became familiar with an independent congregation at Richhill that, though according to James Murch was essentially Calvinistic in outlook, but taught the right of private judgment (that is, the right of each person to determine for him or herself the meaning of scripture), congregational independence, evangelical preaching, and

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell: Vols. I and II* (1897; rpt. Germantown, TN: Religious Book Service, n.d.), 19-27.

<sup>23</sup> For Campbell's time as a minister at Ahorey see *A History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1610-1982* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1982), 9; James McConnell, *Fasti of the Irish Presbyterian Church: Fasti of the American Presbyterian Church* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1937), 6; and David Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland with Annals of Their Congregations* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1950), 233-4.

<sup>24</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 38. See also Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, Vol. I*, 19-58; and David M. Thompson, "Campbell, Thomas," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 130..

<sup>25</sup> The division over the Burgher oath was, for Campbell, a particularly insidious example of division in the church over political issues. The issue in question was whether the members of the Seceder church, who would become burgesses, could take the oath to uphold "the religion presently professed within the realm." According to Campbell, the Burgher issue should not divide the church in Ireland, since it was a Scottish law and not required in Ireland. For a fuller discussion of the divisions that Thomas Campbell confronted in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Scotland see John McKerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, Revised edition. (Edinburgh: A Fullarton and Company, 1845), especially pages 37-110 which discusses the secession from the Church of Scotland and pages 208-38 which examines the Burgher oath and the breach between Burgher and Antiburgher churches. For Independent Christian Churches discussions, see James DeForest Murch's *Christians Only*, 37-38 and Henry Webb's *In Search of Christian Unity*, 63-65.

the observation of weekly communion.<sup>26</sup> Each of these elements was to play an important part in the later Restoration program. For the leaders of the Restoration Movement, the right of private judgment was invoked to urge each individual to interpret scripture for him or herself, congregational independence was an outgrowth of the right to private judgment which subverted the authority of presbyteries, synods, conventions, and the like and placed authority on matters of doctrine and practice with the local congregation, evangelical preaching gave the individual the opportunity to respond to the gospel, and weekly communion was a restoration of the apostolic practice. These ideas likely came, in part, from the restorationist ideas of Scottish reformers John Glas and Robert Sandeman and were certainly influenced by the thought of James and Robert Haldane.<sup>27</sup>

After some years of teaching at Richhill, Thomas Campbell fell ill. James Murch claims that Campbell's illness was the result of the burdens he felt from the division and strife within the Presbyterian Church, his ministerial duties, and the responsibilities of the school he ran.<sup>28</sup> His doctor eventually prescribed an extended sea voyage and rest and, at the urging of his son Alexander, Thomas Campbell sailed for the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 8, 1807 to see about the possibilities of sending for his entire family at a later date, which he did the following winter.<sup>29</sup>

As it happened, on the day that Campbell arrived in Philadelphia, the Anti-Burgher Synod of North America was assembled and after presenting his credentials from Ireland, Campbell was quickly assigned to the Presbytery of Chartiers in western Pennsylvania

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<sup>26</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> See Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 62-75 for these events. For more on these reformers see Derek B. Murray, "Glas, John," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 364; Derek B. Murray, "Sandeman, Robert," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 744; Deryck W. Lovegrove, "Haldane, James Alexander," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 385; and Deryck W. Lovegrove, "Haldane, Robert," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 386-7. See also Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 66-68 for more on the Haldanes and Sandeman and see Murch, *Christians Only*, 16-18 for more on the Haldanes.

<sup>28</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 38. See also, Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Vol. 1, 78-81.

where several old neighbors from Ireland had settled. Thomas Campbell soon sent for his family and began work in his new ministry. Before long, Campbell found himself embroiled in many of the same difficulties he had faced in Ireland regarding the division of the church. Thomas Campbell officiated at a communion service that drew men and women from different branches of the Presbyterian Church, and in his sermon he condemned the divisions in the church and invited any who were prepared to receive communion to partake regardless of their particular affiliation with one branch of Presbyterianism or another. William Wilson, another Seceder minister who was present, reported Campbell's deviation, and charges were brought against Campbell at the October 27-29, 1807 session of the Presbytery. Although Campbell was cleared of the charges brought against him, he was censured and found himself unwelcome in the Chartiers Presbytery. Campbell sent a letter to the Presbytery on September 13, 1808 informing the Presbytery of his departure from the Presbyterian ministry.<sup>30</sup>

Without a formal church body or ecclesiastical hierarchy, Campbell began to speak in the homes of friends and acquaintances, at their invitation, on the importance of Christian unity which he felt could be accomplished if all would simply read the Bible without any admixture of human philosophy or speculation. Before long a growing number of people came to agree with Campbell's stance against denominationalism and his interest in seeking unity through the teaching of the Bible alone. This group began to discuss how they might best seek Christian unity and agreed that they should create an organization with the principal goal of encouraging such unity. The group agreed to the following proposition: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent,"<sup>31</sup> and on August 17, 1809 the Christian Association of Washington was formed. Thomas Campbell was given the task of constructing a document, *The Declaration and Address of*

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<sup>30</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 38-9. See also, Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 222-30.

<sup>31</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 237.

*the Christian Association of Washington*,<sup>32</sup> which stated the goals of the association, while other members constructed a log meetinghouse to serve as a school and a meeting place for the Association's twice annual meetings. However, the members found themselves gathering more regularly, and though it had not been their intention to begin a new church, in May of 1811 they constituted themselves as a church.<sup>33</sup>

Before proceeding to the theological influences on Alexander Campbell, it is necessary to look at the interrelatedness between his thought and that of his father. Much is made in Independent historiography of the fact that when Thomas and Alexander Campbell were reunited in mid-October of 1809 they had each left the Old-light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian Church and shared similar conclusions in regard to the use and interpretation of the Bible and unity of the church. James DeForest Murch describes the "trepidation" of Thomas Campbell at divulging the changes his theology had undergone to his son and concludes his version of these events by stating "Strangely enough, Alexander, thousands of miles away, had been led by the Holy Spirit to an almost identical position."<sup>34</sup> Henry Webb proclaims, "Independently of each other, father and son had reached similar conclusions."<sup>35</sup> James North expands even further on the implications of this meeting, saying

Thus father and son, separated by a generation in age and over three thousand miles of distance, had gone through different experiences with sectarian bigotry but had come out at the same place—desiring the union of all followers of Christ on the basis of the practices and beliefs of the ancient church as indicated in the Scriptures.<sup>36</sup>

While it is true that the paths of Thomas and Alexander Campbell diverged for a time, and while there is some truth to the claim that each man made changes in his theological understandings, it is highly suspect to claim that they arrived at the same

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<sup>32</sup> *The Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* is discussed below, 84, 95, 113-5, 124-5, and 137-41.

<sup>33</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 365-69.

<sup>34</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 104.

conclusions “independently of each other.” Such an interpretation of these events again reveals the triumphalist leanings of the Independent Christian Churches. Rather, father and son certainly shared the experiences at Ahorey and Richhill, and Thomas served as Alexander’s primary teacher. Alexander Campbell’s biographer, Robert Richardson, makes clear that Thomas instructed his son in “the preliminary English branches, . . . in Latin and Greek, and, as time wore on, even to anticipate in part the usual college course.”<sup>37</sup> It was apparently under Thomas’ guidance that Alexander Campbell gained his deep appreciation and knowledge of the work of John Locke. In addition to his scholastic education, Alexander received religious training from his father, participating each day in the family’s worship and memorizing Bible passages.<sup>38</sup> While the experiences of Thomas Campbell in America and Alexander Campbell in Glasgow may have differed, it is difficult to support the claim that they arrived at the same conclusions “independently” of each other. Indeed, Leroy Garrett quotes a letter from Alexander Campbell, in which Campbell states that “A reformation, or a restoration of primitive Christianity, in letter and in spirit, in word or in deed, was proposed by my Father before I left the University of Glasgow.”<sup>39</sup> It would have been rather more surprising had father and son, with such similarities in educational and ministerial background, not made the same theological moves. It could perhaps be better argued that the different experiences of the elder and younger Campbell led each to a conclusion to which they were already predisposed.

On October 1, 1808, Alexander Campbell, along with his mother and brothers and sisters, set sail for America as passengers on the *Hibernia* where, at the end of their voyage, they planned to be reunited with Thomas. However, this journey ended less than a week later in a shipwreck on the Isle of Islay, just off the Scottish mainland. This

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<sup>37</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 33-4.

<sup>38</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 35-6.

<sup>39</sup> Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin: College Press, 1981), 9. This letter is discussed below, 85 and 92-5. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1858, rpt.*, (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 471.

misfortune resulted in two things that were to greatly affect Alexander Campbell: first, during the course of the storm that drove the *Hibernia* onto the rocks, Alexander decided to dedicate his life to ministry; second, after the delay of the shipwreck it was too late in the season to travel to America, a delay that afforded Alexander the opportunity to study at the University of Glasgow during the winter.<sup>40</sup> At the University he took classes in Greek, science, logic, philosophy, and continued his studies of French and English literature.<sup>41</sup> As such, Alexander Campbell was not trained in a Bible college nor was he educated specifically in the area of theology; rather, he was enrolled in a course of study that emphasized the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, upon which Campbell based his theology. It was the empiricism of the Scottish philosophy that allowed Campbell to develop his hermeneutic approach to the Bible. By searching the Bible for “facts” which needed to be categorized and organized to give the “scientific” interpretation of the Bible, Campbell thought that he could bypass the vagaries of Christian history and the uncertainty of competing elements of Christian theology. The Restoration Plea itself relies on such empirical categories—once the Bible “facts” are properly organized the authority of the Bible will be restored for all humanity, who will then be unified, which will result in the millennial dawn. Thus, what came to be known as the Restoration Plea is fundamentally based on the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense Realism, rather than Christian theology.<sup>42</sup>

During his time at the University of Glasgow, Alexander Campbell also became friends with Greville Ewing, a minister who had joined the evangelistic efforts of James

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<sup>40</sup> See Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 95-114. Alexander Campbell did Matriculate at the University of Glasgow—see Addison, *The Matriculation Albums*, 233. Notes from Campbell’s time at Glasgow are extant and are readily available as Alexander Campbell, *Alexander Campbell at Glasgow University, 1808-1809*, Lester G. McAllister, ed. (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1971).

<sup>41</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 131.

<sup>42</sup> The relation between Stone-Campbell theology, Scottish Common Sense Realism, and the hermeneutic developed from that philosophy is discussed at length in Chapter Three.

and Robert Haldane.<sup>43</sup> As with the independent congregation at Richhill, Ewing emphasized a primitive Christianity that provided a stark contrast to the theology of the Presbyterian Church in which Alexander Campbell was raised. Robert Richardson claims that Alexander Campbell's exposure to the thought of Greville Ewing made a "deep impression" on Campbell<sup>44</sup> and Henry Webb credits the time spent in Ewing's company with convincing Campbell that "he could no longer give the Seceder Church his allegiance because he had concluded . . . that it did not represent the church of Christ as seen in the New Testament."<sup>45</sup>

In August of 1809 Alexander and his family set sail once again for America, arriving in New York two months later, on September 29. From the time of his arrival in America, Alexander Campbell continued his education under his father's instruction and, within a year, began to preach to those who were interested in the message of Alexander and his father.<sup>46</sup> The contribution of Alexander Campbell to the idea of a Restoration Plea is rather complex and not at all consistent. There were, however, several elements of Campbell's thought that remained always at the forefront of his theological program throughout his career, though the meanings and reasoning behind these elements changed as Campbell faced the task of leading a small sect through the process of becoming a large denomination.<sup>47</sup>

Alexander shared with his father a concern for restoring the "New Testament church," and like his father regarded the New Testament as revealing a perfect model of

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<sup>43</sup> For more on Campbell's relation to Ewing, see David M. Thompson, "Campbell, Alexander," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 125. For more on Ewing, see Kenneth J. Stewart, "Ewing, Greville," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 309. See also Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 98-100 for information on Ewing and the relation to the Haldanes. See also 25, fn. 27, above.

<sup>44</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 176.

<sup>45</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 100.

<sup>46</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 100-2.

<sup>47</sup> See above, 3 and below, 159-70 for a discussion of the denominational characteristics of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

the church for all time.<sup>48</sup> However, the task of creating a theology designed to recreate this “model” for the Restoration Movement churches fell largely to Alexander. The development of Alexander Campbell’s thought can be traced through his first periodical, the combatively sectarian *Christian Baptist* that denounced denominations and the denominational clergy, as well as what Campbell perceived to be false teachings and heresies not based on the Bible alone, to the more moderate *Millennial Harbinger* where Campbell found himself needing to change some of his earlier positions in light of the fact that he was now at the helm of a developing denomination.

A final figure of importance needs to be mentioned alongside these other three early leaders. Walter Scott was born on October 31, 1796 in Dumfriesshire, Scotland and was raised in the Presbyterian Church. Scott was educated at the University of Edinburgh, where he embarked upon a course in Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, studying, among other subjects, Greek, Hebrew, logic, and philosophy. Like Thomas and Alexander Campbell before him, Scott was steeped in the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism and was a great admirer of John Locke, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton.<sup>49</sup> Like the Campbells, Scott immigrated to America, arriving in New York on July 7, 1818. The following year he moved to Pittsburgh where he became involved with a church that had brought the ideas of Robert Sandeman and James and Robert Haldane to America. While this church was not concerned with seeking Christian unity, it did emphasize the restoration of New Testament Christianity. All three Independent historians remark that it was during this time that Scott determined to develop his theology only from the words of the Bible and determined that, as Independent Christian Churches historian James North puts it, “infant baptism was without scriptural warrant, and further discovery brought [Scott] to the conclusion that sprinkling and pouring were human substitutes for the

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<sup>48</sup> See below, 85-88.

<sup>49</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 30-31.

biblical practice of immersion.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, Murch quotes Scott as claiming that, “wherever baptism was enjoined, it was a personal, and not a relative duty; that it was a matter that no more admitted of a proxy than faith, repentance, or any other act of obedience.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, for Scott, the proper form of baptism was a duty that was not subject to change or revision and was as essential to one’s salvation as faith or repentance.

In the winter of 1821-22, Walter Scott met Alexander Campbell, and the two became close friends. More than any other person, it was Walter Scott who was able to translate Campbell’s theological program into practical application. Thomas Campbell wrote of Scott’s evangelical efforts:

We have long known the former (the theory), and have spoken and published many things *correctly concerning* the ancient gospel, its simplicity and perfect adaptation to the present state of mankind, for the benign and gracious purposes of his immediate relief and complete salvation; but I must confess that, in respect to the *direct exhibition* and *application* of it for that blessed purpose, I am at present for the first time upon the ground where the thing has appeared to be *practically exhibited* to the proper purpose.<sup>52</sup>

In 1826, when the Campbell movement was associated with the Baptists, Scott was chosen to be the evangelist for the Mahoning Baptist Association. The Association was experiencing rather slow growth in its membership at a time when the population was rapidly increasing, and they desired to stimulate growth. It was in the capacity of evangelist that Scott offered his unique contribution to Stone-Campbell thought and practice. Scott traveled the frontier preaching a message that had at its heart Peter’s confession of faith in Jesus: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”<sup>53</sup> Believing that this expressed the foundation of the Christian faith, Scott’s program of restoration focused not only on this foundation, but also on the proper response to this

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<sup>50</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 130.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Murch, *Christians Only*, 98.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 136. For the original citation, see William Baxter, *Life of Elder Walter Scott*, Ed. B. A. Abbott, (St. Louis: Bethany, 1926), 65.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew 16:16, *NRSV*; see Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 133.

confession. From these convictions Scott developed his “Five-Finger Exercise” which focused, in large part, on the proper order of salvation, a predilection which developed from Scott’s study of baptism. When Scott entered a town where he would be preaching, he would gather any children present and teach them on his hand the sequence of events he believed was necessary for salvation: faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit—each finger representing one step in his understanding of the salvation process. After the children had learned this exercise he would then instruct them to tell their parents that “a man will preach the gospel tonight at the school house, as you have it on the five fingers of your hands.”<sup>54</sup> It was this ancient gospel, properly understood and ordered, that Walter Scott felt to be the basis for Christian unity.

### **Philosophic Origins of the Restoration Plea**

It is important to understand the mechanisms that allowed Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott to make the claims that they did. The Restoration Plea arose out of the philosophy of John Locke and the inductive method of Francis Bacon as the thought of these men was interpreted through the lens of Scottish Common Sense Realism. The Restoration Plea was also grounded in the American values of freedom, equality and individualism, which provided a particularly ahistorical position from which the Movement made its theological claims.

The philosophical origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement can be traced to the country of Scotland and to the philosophic program that developed there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Three of the four founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement were born into the bosom of the Scottish Enlightenment when that Enlightenment was at the height of its power and influence and, through their training at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, were steeped in this philosophy. Given that Scottish Common Sense

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 137. For the original citation, see Baxter, *Life of Elder Walter Scott*, 81-2.

philosophy sought to determine the reality of things as they are through empirical study, it is not surprising that when Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott applied this philosophy to the Christian Scriptures, they believed that they had a method for removing the “rubbish of ages”<sup>55</sup> from the Church and for proclaiming the pure teachings of the New Testament.

However, there is little direct discussion of this influence in Independent Christian Churches histories. Independent historians Murch, Webb, and North do not spend much time discussing the influence of this philosophy, if they mention it at all. It is important for such a restorationist group to demonstrate that its theology is not influenced by the philosophy and theology of the intervening centuries between the New Testament and its own age. To the extent that the Independent Christian Churches considers itself to have restored, at least in some degree, the New Testament Church, it is necessary for it to downplay the areas of its tradition that have been formed by outside influences in the realm of philosophy, theology, or culture.<sup>56</sup> James North mentions that both Thomas and Alexander Campbell studied at the University of Glasgow, but he does not discuss the impact of the philosophies taught there upon the theological speculations of the Movement.<sup>57</sup> Henry Webb improves on this somewhat by pointing out that the University of Glasgow was a particularly influential academic institution at the time that both Thomas and Alexander Campbell were students, due to the influence of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart and their appropriation of Enlightenment Era philosophy, and that Thomas and

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<sup>55</sup> This phrase was used by Thomas Campbell to describe the accretions of Christian history. See Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Washington: Brown and Sample, 1809); rpt. in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*, eds. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000). Campbell borrowed this expression from John Locke's use of the word “rubbish” to describe the detritus of history that lies in the way of true knowledge (See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Peter H. Nidditch, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 10). Thomas Campbell adopted the phrase in the *Declaration and Address* to refer to the accretions of Christian history that he believed obscured the plain meaning of the Bible and this phrase found popularity among other Restoration Movement leaders. See Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 32, footnote 31.

<sup>56</sup> See below, 90-2, 150-1, and 213 for a discussion on how Independents believe that they have in some sense restored the “New Testament Church.”

<sup>57</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 74, 100.

Alexander Campbell's approach to the study of the Bible was "profoundly conditioned by Scottish Common Sense philosophy."<sup>58</sup> Webb does cite the influence of Thomas Campbell's education at Glasgow and the influence of Enlightenment thinking on the presuppositions of the *Declaration and Address*,<sup>59</sup> but leaves it largely up to the reader to draw any implications that this philosophical basis might have for Stone-Campbell theology.

In order to find a more extensive treatment of the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism, one must look to the work of Church of Christ (a cappella) and Disciples of Christ scholars. Leroy Garrett dedicates a more substantial portion of his history of the Restoration Movement to the influence of European philosophies on the theological program of the Stone-Campbell Movement, and he locates the reasonable approach of Stone-Campbell theologians to Bible study and worship in the prevalence of Common Sense philosophy throughout the Movement.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Garrett traces one of the Movement's predominant slogans, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent," to the influence of "the Scottish philosophers who traced all valid religious knowledge to the divine revelation in the Scriptures."<sup>61</sup> Disciples of Christ scholar S. Morris Eames claims that it is doubtful that Alexander Campbell ever read the work of idealist George Berkeley and that Campbell had little regard for David Hume's skepticism.<sup>62</sup> Rather, it was Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart for whom he had great admiration.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 63.

<sup>59</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 90-1.

<sup>60</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 35-6.

<sup>61</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> S. Morris Eames, *The Philosophy of Alexander Campbell* (Bethany, WV: Bethany College, 1966), 20.

<sup>63</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 20.

The importance of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy for the theological program of the Restoration Movement cannot be overemphasized.<sup>64</sup> The phrase "Common Sense," as it was used by the Realist philosophers, may be said to refer to an innate faculty of the mind that is found in all humans, which gives an observer the ability to immediately and directly comprehend the existence and character of external objects through the five senses, without the need for reason to prove their existence.<sup>65</sup> Alexander Campbell adapted the philosophical speculations of the Scottish Realists to theological ends by first accepting the Scottish philosophy as a means to directly apprehend reality, and second by assuming that the Bible could be read as a book offering direct and unmediated facts about the mind of God that only needed to be inductively organized to reveal the only true and proper doctrines and practices for the Christian church. It is the naïve acceptance of the theological conclusions that Alexander Campbell drew from his application of the Scottish philosophy to the Bible that allows the Independent Christian Churches to uncritically perpetuate aspects of Campbell's theology to the present day.

The philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism does not exist in a vacuum, but is part of a tradition of Scottish and British philosophy; it is intimately connected to the philosophy of both John Locke and David Hume and to the inductive method of Francis Bacon.<sup>66</sup> From Locke, the Realists adopted the position that an individual knows things

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<sup>64</sup> For the role that Scottish Common Sense Realism has played in other American religious expressions, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). For a positive evaluation of the role of Common Sense Realism in American theology, see Mark Ellingsen, *A Common Sense Theology: The Bible, Faith, and American Society* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995). For a critique of Common Sense Realism in American theology, see William DiPuccio, *The Interior Sense of Scripture: The Sacred Hermeneutics of John W. Nevin* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> See Grave, *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, 112-19; McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 217-24; Alexander Broadie, "Scottish Philosophy in the 18th Century," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2005 Edition)* Edward N. Zalta, ed., <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/scottish-18th/>>; and Gideon Yaffe, "Thomas Reid," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2005 Edition)* Edward N. Zalta, ed., <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/reid/>>.

<sup>66</sup> See Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, Derek R. Brooks, ed., (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 3-6; 16-24 for Reid's discussion of how his work fits within the history of ideas up to that point; James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy: Biographical, Expository, Critical: From Hutcheson to Hamilton* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers,

and ideas only from the sensations presented to that individual through the five senses of smell, taste, hearing, touch, and sight. While the Realists had no sympathy for the skeptical philosophy of Hume, Hume's skepticism was necessary for the development of Common Sense philosophy in that the Realists used Hume's thought as a foil for their own speculations.<sup>67</sup> Following John Locke and George Berkeley, Hume carried their thought to skeptical conclusions which the Realists understood as an absurdity and believed Hume to live his life in contradiction of the philosophical principles that he espoused.<sup>68</sup> Where the Common Sense philosophers believed Hume and other skeptics to disavow the reality of the material world, they saw no need to argue against these skeptics. Rather, as S.A. Grave notes, for the Common Sense Realists, any contradiction of a common sense belief, such as one's existence or the materiality of an object, "is 'absurd' and is properly met not with argument but with laughter."<sup>69</sup> For the Realists, Common Sense is self-evident and does not require proof or argument for its acceptance. Grave describes this opinion thus:

To have absurd opposites is one of the criteria which distinguish common-sense beliefs from inveterate prejudices. And apart from the fact that the

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1874), 1-11; S.A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 1-10; and Casey, *Battle over Hermeneutics*, 35-50 for the way that Alexander Campbell utilized these philosophers.

<sup>67</sup> See Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 3-5, 19-24. Reid states in his introduction: "I acknowledge . . . that I never thought of calling in question the principles commonly received with regard to the human understanding [the idealist system developed by Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, in turn] until the *Treatise of human nature* was published, in the year 1739. The ingenious author of that treatise [Hume], upon the principles of Locke, who was no skeptic, hath built a system of skepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary. His reasoning appeared to me to be just: there was therefore a necessity to call in question the principles upon which it was founded, or to admit the conclusion" (3-4). See also, Grave, *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, 8-9, 11-12.

<sup>68</sup> See Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 19-21. The Realists' evaluation of Hume is not shared by all modern commentators. Alexander Broadie claims that the designation of Hume as a skeptical philosopher is, in a sense, overly simplistic. He argues: "Hume is indeed skeptical about our basic beliefs . . . but his skepticism is directed to the allegedly rational basis for them. He is not saying that the beliefs are false, but only that they lack rational justification. Hume does not deny the existence of what we call the external world; what he adds is that that world is in large measure a product of our imagination. He does not deny the existence of what we call a necessary connection between cause and effect—on the contrary he tells us in some detail about its constituents and metaphysical status; what he adds is that necessary connection is in large measure a product of our imagination." Alexander Broadie, *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy: A New Perspective on the Enlightenment* (Savage: Barnes and Noble Books, 1990), 102. For more on Hume, see McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 113-61; Grave, *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, 11-81; Broadie, *Tradition of Scottish Philosophy*, 92-104 and 119-26; and William Edward Morris, "David Hume," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2001 Edition) Edward N. Zalta, ed., <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2001/entries/hume/>>.

<sup>69</sup> Grave, *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, 82.

absurd is the absurd and any argument against it too late once it has been reached, argument aimed at establishing the truths of common sense and not merely at breaking up objections to them would require, Reid maintains, premisses [*sic*] more obviously true than the truths of common sense, and there are none.<sup>70</sup>

The most important figure in regard to Scottish Common Sense philosophy is Thomas Reid; he is therefore a central figure in the development of Stone-Campbell theology. Reid's philosophy, constructed as a response to Hume, emphasized the capacity of the common person to understand reality as it is through belief in what is revealed by the five senses of smell, taste, touch, hearing, and sight. Alexander Campbell treats sensory data as the raw material from which we construct our ideas. He defines, in *The Millennial Harbinger*, sense as the "five senses, and that these *five senses* are the only avenues through which intelligence concerning material things can reach us."<sup>71</sup> From these sensory experiences, claims Campbell, we have all the materials necessary from which the intellect might work to construct ideas.<sup>72</sup> This philosophical thought is evident in Thomas and Alexander Campbell's appeal to the ability of the common person to read the Bible for him or herself and understand its meaning.<sup>73</sup>

Thomas and Alexander Campbell adopted this Common Sense view of reality to aid their study of the Bible. Their deep aversion to the speculations of philosophy and theology may be traced to the Common Sense notion that such speculations prevent an individual from perceiving reality as it is, allowing speculative philosophy to needlessly cloud the mind. The Campbells believed that theological reasoning prevented individuals from discovering the plain meaning of the Bible and, likewise, they believed that the many creeds, liturgies, and other practices developed by the Church prevented individuals within the Church from following the proper forms of worship that the Campbells and other

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<sup>70</sup> Grave, *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, 83.

<sup>71</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 20. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1858*, (rpt. Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 353-354.

<sup>72</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 20.

<sup>73</sup> See below, 48-9, 131-6.

Restoration Movement leaders believed could be clearly and explicitly found in the New Testament.<sup>74</sup> A further intermingling of their theological program with philosophical speculation is found in the theological foundation of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy itself. Alexander Broadie claims that Thomas Reid evidently believed that “the truth of common sense beliefs is underpinned by a benevolent God who created us with such a nature as to find those beliefs irresistible. Such a God would not give us an irresistible belief in falsehoods.”<sup>75</sup> For the founders of the Restoration Movement, it was no stretch to claim that this benevolent God was the same God revealed in the Bible and that such a God would clearly define the laws and doctrines necessary for proper worship. As such, they believed that these laws and doctrines could unmistakably be discerned by the common person who approached the biblical text with an open mind operating on the principles of Common Sense.

In addition to Common Sense Realism, the philosophy of John Locke had a major influence on Restoration Movement theology. Alexander Campbell was tutored in Lockean thought from an early age, by his father Thomas.<sup>76</sup> While there are substantial differences between Locke’s philosophy and Thomas Reid’s, namely in regard to the concept of ideas and the operation of the mind,<sup>77</sup> Church of Christ historian Michael Casey claims that for Alexander Campbell’s theology, “there was no serious antagonism between the Lockean and the Realist influence on Campbell.”<sup>78</sup> Rather, Campbell “borrowed naively from both to suit his theological scheme.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Broadie, *Tradition of Scottish Philosophy*, 118.

<sup>76</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell: Vol. I*, 33-4. The most important works of Locke for Stone-Campbell theology are *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. See Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 35-40; and, for more on Locke’s philosophy, William Uzgalis, “John Locke,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2005 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta, ed., <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/locke/>>.

<sup>77</sup> See Yaffe, “Thomas Reid,” <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/reid/>>.

<sup>78</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 35.

<sup>79</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 35.

Independent Christian Churches historians mention the influence of John Locke upon Stone-Campbell theology, but do not explore in detail the impact that Locke's thought had on key Stone-Campbell doctrines. Particularly influential on Stone-Campbell theology is the Lockean notion of *tabula rasa*, which the early leaders of the Restoration Movement applied to the study of the Bible, believing this *tabula rasa* to be the mechanism that allowed individuals to read the Bible as if they had laid eyes on it for the first time, and which they also applied to the American landscape, viewing the American continent as if nothing was there and was thus an ideal location for the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth, free as it was, they believed, from corruption at the hand of humanity. James North mentions that Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* "influenced [Thomas] Campbell's concepts of man and man's ability to understand the Scriptures plainly."<sup>80</sup> North also points to the influence of Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, which makes an appeal for the church to obey only the New Testament teachings and argues that doctrines used to determine who is and is not a Christian should be clearly stated in Scripture—points that Stone-Campbell leaders were to utilize.<sup>81</sup> To his credit, North also includes several quotations from Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*, which he places alongside mirror statements in Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*; while North does not comment extensively on these parallels or their possible implications, their inclusion demonstrates the debt that Thomas Campbell owed to Locke.<sup>82</sup> Henry Webb points to many elements of Locke's thought that the early Stone-Campbell leaders were to draw on, which Webb characterizes as Locke's rejection of the "pointless and often obscure speculations that could be found in the numerous creeds" and his insistence "that simple confession of the Messiahship of Jesus coupled with repentance

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<sup>80</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 77.

<sup>81</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 78.

<sup>82</sup> See North, *Union in Truth*, 78, 93.

for sins was all that the early church required for salvation.”<sup>83</sup> In addition, Webb notes that Locke dismissed the “accretions of Christian history . . . as superfluous” and imagined Christianity “as a simple matter of belief of facts set forth in the Scripture and compliance with concepts that are also found in the biblical record.”<sup>84</sup> However, neither of these historians indicate that Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, or Walter Scott actually had a philosophical perspective of their own.<sup>85</sup>

S. Morris Eames in his writing on Alexander Campbell’s philosophy, points to the work of John Locke as the basis of Campbell’s philosophical program.<sup>86</sup> For Eames, it was Locke’s empirical method, that is, “the careful and cautious scrutiny of sensory experiences and what they yield” that, according to Campbell, “form the basis of science and scholarship.”<sup>87</sup> For Campbell, as for Locke, “human knowledge originates by means of the sense organs; that out of these sensory impressions are *constructed* ‘ideas,’ and, in turn, these ideas must be brought back to sensory observations for test and verification.”<sup>88</sup> Though Campbell did modify Locke’s empirical method, he held firmly to Locke’s two central axioms: that all children are born *tabula rasa* and thus have no inborn ideas, and that all ideas derive from reflection on sense experience.<sup>89</sup> While it is important to acknowledge the debt the Stone-Campbell Movement owes to John Locke and to Francis Bacon, it is equally important to acknowledge that the thought of each of these men was largely mediated to the leaders of the Restoration Movement through the Scottish Common

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<sup>83</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 30.

<sup>84</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> The work of James DeForest Murch has been notably absent in this discussion because he had even less to say about the influence of European philosophy on Stone-Campbell theology than Webb and North.

<sup>86</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 19. Eames, in his regard for Locke as the central figure in Campbell’s philosophy, does not deal with the influence of the thought of Thomas Reid and other Common Sense Realists as completely as he should. As such, there is a great need for a reevaluation of Alexander Campbell’s philosophy in light of its reliance on Common Sense thought.

<sup>87</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 19.

<sup>89</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 19.

Sense philosophy in which Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott were schooled.

A further contribution to the development of Stone-Campbell theology is the application of Francis Bacon's inductive method to the study of Scripture. In this regard, the Campbells were following in the tradition of Scottish philosophers who James McCosh claims were "the first, avowedly and knowingly, to follow the inductive method, and to employ it systematically in psychological investigation."<sup>90</sup> While the Stone-Campbell Movement is not alone among Christian groups in employing empirical methodologies that call for inductive study through observation,<sup>91</sup> Thomas and Alexander Campbell "were among the first to apply the method to religion and to the Scriptures."<sup>92</sup> Central to this methodology was an understanding of history that placed great emphasis on the ability of the biblical author to impartially observe the events around him and to faithfully record those observations in an intelligible manner. For Campbell, if the biblical writers could be shown to accurately report details that could be verified, then it followed that the things that could not be so verified were necessarily accurate. As such, the demonstrable details vouchsafed the truth and factuality of the whole.

The influence of Francis Bacon's inductive method on the development of Stone-Campbell theology is such that the descriptor "Baconianism" has become, outside the Independent Christian Churches, shorthand for the hermeneutic program of the early leaders of the Restoration Movement. Within the Independent Christian Churches

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<sup>90</sup> McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 3.

<sup>91</sup> For other groups who utilized Common Sense Philosophy as a springboard for theological reflection see Sidney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History*, 24.3 (1955) : 257-72; and Michael W. Delashmutt, "Nathaniel William Taylor and Thomas Reid: Scottish common-sense philosophy's impact upon the formation of New Haven theology in Antebellum America," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 58.1 (2005) : 59-82. Many commentators note the alliance between Scottish Common Sense Realism and antebellum American theology. See McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 9; Grave, *Scottish School of Common Sense*, 4; and Carisse Mickey Berryhill, "Common Sense Philosophy," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 230-1.

<sup>92</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 40.

histories, however, the influence of Bacon's philosophy on Stone-Campbell theology is not discussed. This is significant in that the first Stone-Campbell institution of higher learning, Bacon College, was named after Francis Bacon, and it is only in this context that Bacon is even mentioned. Murch points out the establishment of the college, but not the origin of its name;<sup>93</sup> North merely points to the fact that it was named for Francis Bacon, "the philosopher and scientist considered the father of empirical enquiry,"<sup>94</sup> and Webb does not consider the import of Bacon's influence beyond the fact that the name of this college reflected "the type of scientific thinking valued by its founders."<sup>95</sup> As is the case in regard to the contributions of Locke and Scottish Common Sense philosophy, the failure of Independent historiography to adequately address the contributions of Francis Bacon to Stone-Campbell theology has deep implications for current Independent Christian Churches thought. Without an understanding of the forces and influences that shaped the theology of the Restoration Movement, the ahistorical predisposition of the Independent Christian Churches is further enhanced and perpetuated.<sup>96</sup>

For an understanding of Bacon's influence on the Stone-Campbell Movement, it is necessary to look to Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ scholars. Leroy Garrett claims that Bacon's inductive methods in regard to the study of language were most influential on the development of Alexander Campbell's theology. Garrett points to Bacon's *Novum Organum* as a work which provided part of the basis for the Stone-Campbell rejection of "sectarian creeds and theological speculation."<sup>97</sup> Garrett connects Bacon's "idols of the mind," which he defines as "those fallacies from tradition and faulty

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<sup>93</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 144.

<sup>94</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 201.

<sup>95</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 160.

<sup>96</sup> The ahistorical nature of the Stone-Campbell Movement is discussed below, 90-2 and 191-207.

<sup>97</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 28.

thinking that blind people to facts,” to Alexander Campbell’s claim that such “idols,” or prejudices, prevented people from understanding the facts found in Scripture.<sup>98</sup>

Bacon’s inductive method, defined by S. Morris Eames as “starting with minute observations or facts and building up a belief by heaping fact upon fact until a generalization results,” was used by Alexander Campbell as one of the foundational elements in the study of Scripture.<sup>99</sup> Campbell borrowed Bacon’s definition of a fact as “something said” or “something done”<sup>100</sup> as a means of thinking about Scripture as a “book of facts.” Campbell believed “that all true and useful knowledge is acquaintance with facts, that all true science is acquired from the observation and comparison of facts,”<sup>101</sup> an understanding that he applied to the study of the Bible. Church of Christ scholar Michael W. Casey notes that

Under the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism, Alexander Campbell and other early leaders in the Churches of Christ assumed that the Bible contained the primitive pattern for church practices scattered across the pages of the New Testament. Just as a scientist studies the facts found in “God’s book of nature,” these biblical “facts” could be inductively gathered together to find the definitive answer to any issue found in God’s other book, the Bible. Campbell, trained in the Scottish Enlightenment at Glasgow University, followed rhetorician George Campbell and other Scottish intellectuals in accepting the Baconian method of inductive reasoning in all areas of knowledge, including scriptural interpretation and authorization of church practices.<sup>102</sup>

As such, interpretation of the Bible, for the early leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement, was less a matter of interpreting the biblical texts, but more a matter of searching for every reference to a given event or doctrine (e.g. baptism) and amassing fact upon fact which would then give the appropriate empirical construction of the event or

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<sup>98</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 27-8.

<sup>99</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 19-20.

<sup>100</sup> Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 28. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1830*, rpt. (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 9.

<sup>101</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> Michael W. Casey, “‘Come Let Us Reason Together’: The Heritage of the Churches of Christ as a Source for Rhetorical Invention,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 7.4 (2004): 489-90. For more on George Campbell, see John R. McIntosh and Henry R. Sefton, “Campbell, George,” *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 127-8.

doctrine. Once a doctrine was produced on this basis by the early leaders of the Restoration Movement, it was difficult for later followers to offer a contrary interpretation of an event or doctrine. The doctrine had, after all, been “scientifically” constructed on the basis of what these early leaders regarded as the unchanging facts found in the Bible. This, in effect, locked the Restoration Movement into certain narrow interpretations of events and doctrines that have persisted to the present day in the conservative Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella).

Finally, to properly evaluate the theology of the Independent Christian Churches, it is necessary to state the obvious in regard to the use of the philosophies of Scottish Common Sense, Realism, John Locke, and Francis Bacon in the construction of Restoration Movement theology: these philosophies do not spring from the pages of the Bible alone, but are in continuity with philosophical speculation that stretches back to Plato and Aristotle. Where the leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement have relied on these philosophies to undergird their theology, they have created a theology that is contingent upon the acceptance of the philosophical conclusions of the Common Sense Realists and the thought of John Locke. As such, before one could give assent to the theological program of the Independent Christian Churches, one would have to agree to the epistemology upon which that theology is based. While this heavy reliance upon philosophy is not necessarily problematic for theology as such, it is hugely problematic for a theology that claims as one of its central points that it is not based on philosophy or theology, but on a plain reading of the Bible alone. Further, as the Independent Christian Churches has lost its connection to the philosophical underpinnings of Scottish Common Sense Realism, it has also essentially rejected the basis of its theological program, leaving the doctrines created by that theology unmoored to the philosophical and theological reasoning that provided authority for the existence and perpetuation of said doctrines.

### **Continuing Enlightenment Influence on Independent Christian Churches Theology**

James DeForest Murch argues throughout his history that the theological program of the Stone-Campbell Movement was based on the "Bible alone" rather than the "philosophical and theological speculation about Bible facts."<sup>103</sup> While Murch, along with Thomas and Alexander Campbell, admits that philosophy and theology in and of themselves do not negate true Christianity, it is better to base Christian doctrine "exclusively in Bible terminology."<sup>104</sup> One of the slogans adopted by the adherents of the Restoration Movement was that they had "No creed but Christ," and as such, they claimed that they only required the confession of Peter: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"<sup>105</sup> to acknowledge that one was a Christian. Of this position, Murch writes:

In this faith the Disciples [here Murch is referring to the entire Stone-Campbell Movement] stood almost alone throughout the nineteenth century, but the beauty and simplicity of it caused the religious world to see the folly of involved philosophical and theological statements as essential to church membership and to broader ecumenical fellowship. The premise for Disciples' faith was divine revelation in Holy Scripture and therefore fully comprehensive and meaningful. It was not a nebulous human concept of a Christ that satisfied emotional or intellectual fads or fancies, but the historic Christ of the New Testament, living and reigning today and forever.<sup>106</sup>

Here Murch points to the Bible as the sole basis for faith, standing against philosophical and theological formulations of faith. Murch perpetuates the idea that his own religious tradition is lacking philosophical and theological perspectives, an idea bequeathed to the Restoration Movement by its Scottish Common Sense origins.

Some scholars within the Independent Christian Churches are beginning to explore the impact that theology and philosophy have had on their denomination. That Independent scholars have been slow to acknowledge that the Independent Christian Churches owes a great deal to the realm of theology and philosophy is hardly surprising,

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<sup>103</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 220.

<sup>104</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 220.

<sup>105</sup> Matthew 16:16, *NRSV*.

<sup>106</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 221.

given the contempt that Restoration Movement adherents have often held for theology. Disciples of Christ scholar M. Eugene Boring notes that the Restoration Movement from its inception exhibited a great deal of hesitancy towards theological thinking. In the sense that theology can be defined as “faith seeking understanding,” he argues that Stone and the Campbells, along with every Christian who has thought about their faith and attempted to understand and express it is engaged in theology.<sup>107</sup> But he also notes that many of the theological formulations of the various denominations were attacked by the Movement’s founders “as human speculations that merely serve to obscure the ‘simple’ gospel as revealed in scripture.”<sup>108</sup> For the Independent Christian Churches today, that ambivalence towards theology is tempered somewhat as the problems of the Enlightenment Era philosophy upon which Stone-Campbell theology is based have become all too apparent to some Independent scholars. This is evident in the discussion between John Castelein, Philip Kenneson, and Robert Kurka,<sup>109</sup> who each show an awareness of and explicitly argue from certain theological and philosophical positions outside of Enlightenment assumptions, with Castelein occupying a position closest to traditional Independent theological expressions in his discussion of the Restoration Plea.

Others within the Independent Christian Churches are quite concerned to protect the philosophical and theological grounds on which the Stone-Campbell Movement was formed. The most prominent Independent scholar in this regard is Jack Cottrell, who is Professor of Theology at Cincinnati Bible Seminary. Cottrell makes many of the same assumptions about the nature and interpretation of the Bible that Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell did; as such, his theology is thoroughly grounded in the Baconian

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<sup>107</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 19. See also Stephen Sprinkle’s comments on Stone-Campbell claims that they lack theology, below, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Discussed below, 52-60.

induction of Scottish Common Sense philosophy.<sup>110</sup> Thus Cottrell's orientation to the Restoration Plea is similar to that of Harold Ford and others who continue to hold firmly to Enlightenment philosophy to construct their theology.<sup>111</sup>

### **American Origins of the Restoration Plea**

In addition to the philosophical origins of the Restoration Movement, there are also important American influences on the development of Stone-Campbell theology and the Restoration Plea. The first of these influences is what Nathan Hatch has called the "democratization of American Christianity,"<sup>112</sup> of which he considers the Stone-Campbell Movement to be a prime example. Hatch characterizes this democratization as involving religious reforms based on the concepts of liberty and equality established in the founding documents of the United States of America. According to Hatch, this reform took place in the following three areas:

First, they [the Restoration Movement's founding fathers] called for a revolution within the church that would place laity and clergy on an equal footing and would exalt the conscience of the individual over the collective will of any congregation or church organization. Second, they rejected the traditions of learned theology altogether and called for a new view of history that welcomed inquiry and innovation. Finally, they called for a populist hermeneutic premised on the inalienable right of every person to understand the New Testament for themselves.<sup>113</sup>

This popularization of Christian theology led, in part, to the first element of the Restoration Plea which called for submission to the authority of the Bible alone and which entailed the rejection of the theological traditions of the church and, as a consequence of the Scottish

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<sup>110</sup> See Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today*, (Joplin: College Press, 2002).

<sup>111</sup> For Cottrell's treatment of the Restoration Plea, see Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 440-1. See below for a discussion of Harold Ford's interpretation of the Restoration Plea, 74-8.

<sup>112</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>113</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, "The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People," *The Journal of American History*, 67 (December 1980), 551.

Common Sense hermeneutic, located the ability to rightly interpret the Scriptures with the individual interpreter.<sup>114</sup>

As such, the Restoration Movement was also subject to the forces of American individualism. Particularly in the early thought of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell, there was a strong appeal for the right of private judgment, wherein it was incumbent upon the individual reader to determine for him or herself what the Bible said and meant. This was a cry for ecclesial liberty and freedom from the perceived tyranny of the religious establishment which echoed the larger American cry for political liberty from the supposed tyranny of the British monarchy.<sup>115</sup> While Alexander Campbell and other early Restoration Movement leaders later found this principle of individual interpretation untenable due to its tendency to fragment rather than unite believers, they were unable to reverse the forces they had set in motion. The commitment that the Independent Christian Churches has made to church autonomy stems in part from this individualistic aspect of Stone-Campbell theology. For many within the Independent Christian Churches, Christian unity is found, not among churches or communities that are united with each other, but

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Casey in *The Battle Over Hermeneutics in the Stone-Campbell Movement*, very perceptively notes that part of the reason for the division in the Stone-Campbell Movement rested with different conceptions of authority and church government. The liberal and moderate side made use of democratic metaphors in their conception of authority and church government, while the conservative element appealed to monarchical metaphors that emphasized the revealed laws of God.

<sup>115</sup> See Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 68-81. For an example of Alexander Campbell's denunciation of the clergy and the improper sway that he believes the clergy held over the church, see Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, Vol. II*, 27: "You have heard,' said [A. Campbell] to the audience, 'and patiently attended to this tedious debate. What are you now to do? I will answer this question for you: Go home and read your Bibles; examine the testimonies of these holy oracles; judge for yourselves, and be not implicit followers of the clergy. Among the clergy of different denominations, I charitably think, there are a few good men; but, as a body of men, 'they have taken away the key of knowledge from the people.' And *how*, do you say? By teaching you to look to them for instruction as children to a father; by preventing you from judging for yourselves, through an impression that you are not competent to judge for yourselves. . . . This is to make you the dupes of haughty leaders, who will cause you to err. To attempt, directly or indirectly, to dissuade you from thinking and examining for yourselves, by putting creeds already framed into your hands, or the works of men instead of the pure Word, is, in my opinion, so far depriving you of the key of knowledge. I do not say that all the clergy are doing so, but I am sure that a vast majority of them are doing so."

entirely with the individual believer as he or she is united with other individual believers.<sup>116</sup>

A final important contribution to the development of the Restoration Plea and Stone-Campbell theology is the appeal of Protestant primitivism in early American thought.<sup>117</sup> Not limited to religious expression, the myth of the inauguration of a golden age with the founding of the American nation has played a part in American political life since the beginning of the nation and continues to operate today as America attempts to spread the principles of democracy throughout the world. Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell drew on this mythology and thought that in restoring the New Testament church in its form and practice, they would usher in the millennial dawn that would spread over all the earth, and all peoples would be drawn to Christ.<sup>118</sup> Here the millennial hope of Stone and Campbell and their desire for world evangelism mirrors the millennial expectations of the nation. In addition to the coming of the millennium, the appeal to primitive purity also involved the belief that the New Testament church represented a golden age from which the church had subsequently fallen. As such, the Stone-Campbell Movement is essentially an ahistorical movement, believing that it is possible to bypass the intervening centuries of Christian history in order to restore the first century church in the nineteenth or, now, the twenty-first century.

### **What is the Restoration Plea?**

The Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement began on the American frontier, which in this instance is the westernmost expansion of settlers in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky, in the early 1800s. Never static, a frontier is “an area of new

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<sup>116</sup> See below 143-50, 170-2, and 176-80.

<sup>117</sup> The seminal work in this regard is Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>118</sup> This description of millennial hope is more characteristic of Alexander Campbell's postmillennialism, rather than Stone's millennial thought. For the differences between the two men, see Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, particularly Chapter Five “The Apocalyptic Outlook of Barton W. Stone,” p. 92-116; and Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 27-30, 64-5. See below, Chapter Five.

settlement and rapid population growth. . . . populated with newcomers and strangers.”<sup>119</sup>

As such, the frontier was a place that lacked strong social ties and as people were always on the move, it was equally difficult to sustain religious organizations; therefore, there were few churches on the frontier.<sup>120</sup> As such, the Restoration Movement developed in an environment that was advantageous to its development for two reasons: first, there were few established churches to compete with for adherents and second, there were few organizations of any kind to establish social ties and draw people together.<sup>121</sup> Further, the Restoration Movement’s emphasis on individualism, liberty, and equality fit perfectly with the frontier values that emphasized these same elements.<sup>122</sup>

A primary force for the Movement’s inception was the conviction of its early leaders that the Christian Church suffered a “great apostasy” that occurred around the end of the first century A.D.<sup>123</sup> For Alexander Campbell, the preeminent leader of the Restoration Movement, the notion of such an apostasy was at the forefront of his theological thought. Indeed, without such a divergence from the doctrine and practice of

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<sup>119</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1992) 31.

<sup>120</sup> Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 31-2.

<sup>121</sup> In significant respects, particularly in relation to the rapid population growth and the lack of social ties and competing organizations, the environment in which the Restoration Movement developed bears some resemblance to the suburban environment that the Independent Christian Churches is now targeting for new church plants. See below, 226-8.

<sup>122</sup> For more on frontier religion in America, see Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 429-54; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; and Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 31-9.

<sup>123</sup> The idea that such an apostasy occurred is the first and most important component in any restorationist program. Many restorationists would point to the Emperor Constantine’s incorporation of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire as the impetus for this apostasy. The Restoration Movement, however, has generally placed the time of this apostasy earlier, around the end of the first century. For the Restoration Movement the apostasy was the result of the abandonment of the precise structure of the Church and the forms it believes were dictated for the Church’s worship—as Richard Soule claims regarding liturgy and worship, “The church strayed off path very soon after the apostolic age.” (Richard Soule, “Restoring Romans 16,” *Christian Standard*, (August 31, 2003) 7. This supposed apostasy is a key background for Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* and is alluded to in much of Alexander Campbell’s writing. Independents’ today believe that this apostasy has been perpetuated through a variety of avenues. They see this apostasy as prevalent among other Christian denominations and remain very strongly biased against Roman Catholicism. Apostasy is also understood by Independents to be present in the rejection of the correspondence theory of truth (see Ben Cachiaras, “What is Truth?,” *Christian Standard*, (July 10, 2005) 8-10) and in the theological scholarship of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which is “written, taught, and lived by those in many mainline liberal denominations” (Rubel Shelly, “The DaVinci Code . . . and Beyond (Part 2 of 3),” *Christian Standard* (June 19, 2005) 4; see also parts 1 and 3 of Shelly’s article in *Christian Standard*, (June 12, 2005) and (June 26, 2005) respectively).

the early church there would be no need for a restoration of first century or “New Testament” Christianity. Campbell chose to begin his most comprehensive theological statement, *The Christian System*, whose stated purpose was to put forth the “capital principles” of “those who rallied under the banners of the Bible alone,”<sup>124</sup> with a discussion of the state of Christianity since the time of this apostasy. Campbell claims that from the time of the “full development of the great apostasy foretold by Prophets and Apostles, numerous attempts at reformation have been made.”<sup>125</sup> For Campbell, the most promising of these reforms was the work of Martin Luther which Campbell believed ushered in many great, positive changes to the scientific, political, moral, and religious state of society, making the era of the Protestant Reformation “one of the most splendid eras in the history of the world.”<sup>126</sup>

Campbell lodges no complaint against Luther, rather, crediting him with “[restoring] the Bible to the world” and acting as a defender of the Biblical faith “against the impious and arrogant pretensions of the haughty and tyrannical See of Rome.”<sup>127</sup> As such, Campbell fails to recognize the profound differences between the hermeneutics of Martin Luther and his own hermeneutic program. Luther operated out of the hermeneutic tradition of scholasticism, though some aspects of this tradition, particularly allegorical interpretations of scripture, he rejected in favor of more literal interpretations of the biblical texts.<sup>128</sup> Luther’s hermeneutic was also christological; that is, Luther sought to interpret both Old and New Testaments as a unity, harmonized through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, Lutheran hermeneutics are irrevocably theological

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<sup>124</sup> Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System: In Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pleaded in the Current Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1835; Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 2001), xii.

<sup>125</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, vii.

<sup>126</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, vii.

<sup>127</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, vii.

<sup>128</sup> Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (1991; London: SCM Press, 1994) 32.

<sup>129</sup> Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 33.

and Luther was quite respectful of the theological differences between biblical texts.<sup>130</sup> Campbell, however, essentially refused the hermeneutic systems available to him and created his own hermeneutic intentionally set apart from theological reasoning, based on Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, and adapted to suit the American environment. Contrary to Luther, Campbell begins his hermeneutic with the assumption that the Bible may be read as an objective book of facts, and he rejects the idea of harmony between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, seeing in them a series of progressive revelations.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, Campbell does not criticize the Lutheran reformation and argues that with Luther's death the spirit of his reformation was extinguished by the political realities of Europe and the lust for power that quickly developed among the "Protestant Popes."<sup>132</sup> According to Campbell, the various Protestant groups formed and organized themselves into separate churches around "creeds and manuals, synods and councils" and relied on "speculative theology" that serviced debates on "forms and ceremonies" and the propagation of human opinions.<sup>133</sup> The end result of these arguments, according to Campbell, was a Church deeply divided by the extremes forced upon it by "philosophy, mysticism, and politics"<sup>134</sup> and which continued to divide and argue over issues that, for Campbell, were not worthy of being argued over. In Campbell's thought, the apostasy of the Church was closely associated with the development of creeds and theologies that he believed could not be supported by a "'*thus saith the Lord,*' either in express terms, or in approved precedent, 'for every article of faith, and item of religious practice.'"<sup>135</sup> Campbell believed that the problem of the Church was that the creeds and theologies it had

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<sup>130</sup> Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 34.

<sup>131</sup> See below, 156-7.

<sup>132</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, vii.

<sup>133</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, vii-viii.

<sup>134</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, ix.

<sup>135</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, x-xi. Campbell's hermeneutic of command (express terms), example (approved precedent), and inference (a category developed to provide authoritative teaching on subjects with no command or example in scripture) is discussed below, see 87-8.

developed over the centuries had created a situation where the Bible could not be obeyed.

Campbell states:

As the Bible was said and constantly affirmed to be the religion of Protestants, it was for some time a mysterious problem why the Bible alone, confessed and acknowledged, should work no happier results than the strifes, divisions, and retaliatory excommunications of rival Protestant sects. It appeared, however, in this case, after a more intimate acquaintance with the details of the inner temple of sectarian Christianity, as in many similar cases, that it is not the acknowledgement of a good rule, but the walking by it, that secures the happiness of society. The Bible in the lips, and the creed in the head and in the heart, will not save the church from strife, emulation, and schism. There is no moral, ecclesiastical, or political good, by simply acknowledging it in word. It must be obeyed.<sup>136</sup>

For Campbell, then, the use of creeds and theologies do not only mislead the Church, but actually prevent the Church from obeying the Bible and, therefore, from achieving peace and unity among its warring sects.

Campbell claimed that it was only in recent history—that is, the twenty-five years since the publication of his father Thomas' *Declaration and Address*<sup>137</sup> and during which time he also saw other groups arise with similar goals—that a group of Christians determined to abandon the myriad controversies that raged through the Church and make “faith in Christ and obedience to him that only *test* of Christian character, and the only *bond* of church union, communion, and co-operation.”<sup>138</sup> This program, Campbell claims, “was indeed approved by all; but adopted and practiced by none, except the few, or part of the few, who made the future.”<sup>139</sup> The future that Thomas and Alexander Campbell and their followers determined to create was a future that looked back to what they believed was a pristine era of Christianity from which they could “build upon the Bible alone” that they might “*restore primitive Christianity.*”<sup>140</sup> In the preface to *The Christian System*,

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<sup>136</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, x.

<sup>137</sup> This document is discussed below, 90-1, 101, 120-1, 131-2, and 143-8.

<sup>138</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, xi.

<sup>139</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, xi.

<sup>140</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, ix.

Campbell conceptualizes the need for such a restoration and records what he considers to be the primary elements of this restoration:

Tired of new creeds and new parties in religion, and of the numerous abortive efforts to reform the reformation; convinced from the Holy Scriptures, from observation and experience, that the union of the disciples of Christ is essential to the conversion of the world, and that the correction and improvement of no creed, or partisan establishment in Christendom, could ever become the basis of such a union, communion, and co-operation, as would restore peace to a church militant against itself, or triumph to the common salvation; a few individuals, about the commencement of the present century, began to reflect upon the ways and means to restore primitive Christianity.<sup>141</sup>

In this statement the formative elements of what would become the Restoration Plea are evident: a Christianity that is based on the restoration of primitive Christianity, which is accomplished by appealing to the “Bible alone” and therefore cuts across denominational and sectarian lines, which leads to Christian union, which in turn leads to world evangelism and the millennial dawn.

James DeForest Murch’s definition of the Restoration Plea is the definition most often referred to by Independents and, for the purposes of this thesis, is regarded as normative for the Independent Christian Churches due to the unique time and situation in which it was formulated,<sup>142</sup> the continuity that it retains with former Independent definitions, and the use that contemporary Independent scholars have made of it. Murch begins his definition of the Restoration Plea by claiming that the “plea for unity begins at a point of almost universal agreement—*the centrality of Christ*.”<sup>143</sup> He follows this argument with the statement that “The Restoration plea for unity involves a return to *Biblical authority*.”<sup>144</sup> This return is of utmost importance because it is the Bible, according to Murch, that is the only “tangible and objective criterion” by which humanity

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<sup>141</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, ix.

<sup>142</sup> Murch is writing five years before the Independent Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ formally divided. In addition, Murch engaged in a great deal of unity talks with the Disciples of Christ and with evangelical denominations.

<sup>143</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 367-8.

<sup>144</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 368.

might know the truth of God and God's requirements for the proper "religious belief, practice, or institution."<sup>145</sup> Murch writes that "To admit other sources is to open the gates to a flood of all manner of human subjectivisms and opinions."<sup>146</sup> The unity and universal nature of the church would "be discovered only in the New Testament Scriptures."<sup>147</sup> Murch claims that the purpose of restoring the authority of the Bible was for the Campbells, "no mere form but the Biblical principles of catholicity—the universalities of the church in which lie the secret of its unity and effectiveness."<sup>148</sup> Murch's approach to unity is to find the least common denominator—since all denominations accept the validity of baptism by immersion, therefore that is the form that all Christians should adopt, all agree upon the name church of Christ, therefore that is what all should accept.<sup>149</sup> Murch argues that the Restoration Plea for unity is not an end in itself, but it is a vital component to the mission of the church. Murch cites Jesus' prayer in John 17 as evidence that the testimony of the church may be accepted as those outside the church witness its unity.<sup>150</sup> Thus we see the three aspects of Independent Christian Churches versions of the Restoration Plea: restoring the authority of the Bible alone, which results in Christian unity on the basis of a common understanding of the Bible, and which in turn results in world evangelization and the advent of the millennium which is to usher in the kingdom of God.

There is not, however, wide agreement on what exactly is included in the Restoration Plea, and the term is often used without any explanation of its meaning. To arrive at a broader understanding of the present state of Independent Christian Churches theology requires a survey of the elements of the Restoration Plea from current scholarship on the Plea and an exploration of how the concept of such a Plea has been constructed and utilized throughout the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

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<sup>145</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 368-9.

<sup>146</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 369.

<sup>147</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 369.

<sup>148</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 370.

<sup>149</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 370-1.

<sup>150</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 372-3.

## Contemporary Popular Appeals to the Restoration Plea

During the 1950s the sectarian characteristics of the Independent Christian Churches were at their full strength, and thus produced statements of the Restoration Plea, such as Harold Ford's,<sup>151</sup> which were indicative of the environment that Independents had created. In time, this strictly sectarian character gave way to a less overtly divisive approach to restoration, unity, and evangelization. Although the Independents have made tentative efforts to include other, primarily Evangelical, Christians as a part of their quest to restore the New Testament Church, the basically sectarian nature of the Independents has changed little.<sup>152</sup>

Evidence of this is seen in Sam E. Stone's *Simply Christians: New Testament Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a representative appeal to the Restoration Plea for the present day. Stone was the editor of *Christian Standard* for many years and wrote this short book in order to offer an overview of the goals of the Independent Christian Churches for those outside of the Independent denomination and for those within who want to expand their knowledge of their denomination. The ahistorical predilection of Stone-Campbell theology is evident throughout Stone's book.<sup>153</sup> Stone argues that Christianity is a simple institution that has been corrupted by the accretions of the ages and has become a complicated affair, full of infighting and with a powerful hierarchy that legislates the beliefs of the faithful.<sup>154</sup> To combat what he views as an unnecessarily "official" and "powerful, political church," Stone argues that "the church of the Lord Jesus

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<sup>151</sup> Discussed below, 68-72.

<sup>152</sup> Many Independents would disagree with this characterization, claiming that their engagement with American Evangelicalism is indicative of their more tolerant approach towards other Christian groups. However, their engagement with this particular segment of American Christianity merely shifts their sectarian leanings into the nebulous territory of Evangelicalism. Many other Independents have merely continued the sectarianism of Ford apace. See below, 170-90.

<sup>153</sup> For more on ahistoricity and the Restoration Movement, see below, 96-8 and 198-215.

<sup>154</sup> Sam E. Stone, *Simply Christians: New Testament Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Joplin: College Press, 2004), 13.

Christ is just what people want and need.”<sup>155</sup> Stone claims that for at least two hundred years a group of Christians, by which he means a limited group within the Restoration Movement (i.e., the Independent Christian Churches), have attempted to find “a better way,” and have in fact discovered that way. Essential to Stone’s conception of the Restoration Plea are the three basic elements of restoration, unity, and millennium. Stone is intent on restoring the “New Testament church,” a phrase that he uses to designate what he feels are the best or ideal elements of the church, rather than the restoration of an exact pattern or blueprint of the church as it is portrayed in the New Testament. For Stone, the goal is to “restore the kind of Christianity practiced in the New Testament.”<sup>156</sup> To this end, Stone claims that:

These believers insist on no more than Scripture requires: a person is free to accept God’s grace by obedient faith in Christ; encouraged to turn from sin in repentance; helped to demonstrate and mark his or her choice to identify with Christ through baptism; supported in the daily process of learning to live for Jesus. This perspective reflects the primary goal of the Christian Churches—trusting God and His Word as the perfect guide for every aspect of faith.<sup>157</sup>

What Stone and most other Independents do not admit is that this little creed does not outline what “Scripture requires,” but what the Independents require based on their particular interpretation of Scripture.

Stone continues with an appeal to Christian unity. This unity, however, is limited and dependent upon agreement with the fundamental points that Stone outlines above. Stone writes that the Independent Christian Churches desires “to work together with all who accept the lordship of Jesus and the authority of His Word.”<sup>158</sup> What this means is that unity is limited to those who agree with Independent understandings of the lordship of Jesus and with Independent interpretations of Scripture—few Christian denominations

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<sup>155</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 13.

<sup>156</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 14.

<sup>157</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 14.

<sup>158</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 14.

would deny that they “accept the lordship of Jesus and the authority of His Word.”

Finally, Stone alludes to the millennial element of the Restoration Plea, pointing to the “thousands of earnest believers [who] have identified with this approach” and who follow the program he has outlined. He claims that God has indeed blessed this approach, citing the millions of people who are trying to live as “Christians only.”<sup>159</sup> Where, for Alexander Campbell, the expected millennium was to be a time of peace and harmony upon the earth which would last for one thousand years and be followed by the reign of Christ on earth, this millennial aspiration has been translated into capitalist terms, where the millennium is inaugurated by the volume of souls saved.<sup>160</sup>

### **Contemporary Academic Study of the Restoration Plea**

There are some Independents today engaged in academic work on the Restoration Plea and asking searching questions about the nature of the Plea (though they have provided few answers to their questions). The most prominent example of this type of work within Independent Christian Churches circles is an exchange that appeared in the *Stone-Campbell Journal* in 1998 and 1999 between John P. Castelein, Professor of Contemporary Christian Theology and Philosophy at Lincoln Christian Seminary, and Philip D. Kenneson, Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Milligan College. Castelein initiated this dialogue through a study on the Restoration Plea, which was occasioned by an earlier paper by Kenneson, who argues that the notion of objective truth, as appropriated by many Christians is “corrupting the church and its witness to the world.”<sup>161</sup> As such, Castelein’s inquiry into the nature of the Restoration Plea focuses on whether or not the Plea can continue to exist if Christians no longer believe in objective truth.

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<sup>159</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 14-5.

<sup>160</sup> This claim is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>161</sup> Philip D. Kenneson, “There’s No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It’s a Good Thing, Too,” *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, Ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 156.

Castelein offers few conclusions to the issues he raises, though he asks a number of questions that are vitally important to Independent Christian Churches theology. After briefly surveying how the concept of truth has changed in the areas of science, philosophy, and theology, Castelein broaches the question of the relation of the Restoration Plea to the concept of objective truth.<sup>162</sup> He first asks if there is “one clearly definable Plea central to the Stone-Campbell Movement,”<sup>163</sup> and while he implies that there is not, citing the conflicting views of Alfred DeGroot and Harold Ford<sup>164</sup> and the quarrel over whether or not the Stone-Campbell Movement is a “restoration” or a “reformation” movement, Castelein nevertheless offers the three elements of restoration, unity, and millennium as a basic definition of the Plea. Castelein claims:

A working definition of the plea for the “restoration of the ancient order of things” by “taking up things as the apostles left them” should at least include the following three principles. First, let all Christians submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Scripture, restored to their full authority as the Church’s sole constitution. Second, let them unite in faith and practice on all matters of fact revealed therein by God, without making the private opinions and inferences found in the creeds the terms of Christian fellowship. Third, the result will be a Christianity—united on essential truths yet with liberty and tolerance for a diversity of Christian opinions—that will usher in the Kingdom of God in individual discipleship, Christian community, and world evangelism (the “millennium”).<sup>165</sup>

While Castelein, unfortunately, does not offer a critique of these “principles,” and it is therefore difficult to determine to what extent he agrees or disagrees with the tenets of the definition he provides (though he is certainly a sympathetic commentator), there are several elements in his definition that must be briefly examined. First, it is not entirely clear what Castelein means by suggesting that the theological program argued for in the Stone-Campbell Movement is a restoration of the authority of Jesus and the authority of

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<sup>162</sup> Concern within Independent Christian Churches circles on the nature of truth has been widespread in recent years, with many Independents arguing for the necessity of belief in “objective” or “absolute” truth. See below, 176-8.

<sup>163</sup> John D. Castelein, “Can the Restoration Movement Plea Survive if Belief in Objective Truth is Abandoned?,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 1.1(1998): 34.

<sup>164</sup> Discussed below, 67-78.

<sup>165</sup> Castelein, *Can the Restoration Plea Survive*, 34-5.

Scripture as the “sole constitution” of the Church. Particularly problematic is the idea that this dual restoration of the authority of Jesus Christ and the Christian scriptures somehow forms a “constitution” for the Church. Here Castelein perpetuates the language used by first generation Stone-Campbell leaders who argued that the New Testament was a perfect “constitution for the worship, discipline and government of the New Testament church.”<sup>166</sup> The use of such language betrays the American influences on the Stone-Campbell Movement, (in this case the idea that a document can guarantee the rights and responsibilities of an individual living under a sovereign, whether that sovereign be God or the state, and the idea that the Bible, like the Constitution of the United States, clearly spell out the law by which its subjects are governed) and it also retains the early leaders’ idea that they could read the New Testament primarily as a book of laws for the organization of the Church. Further, the first generation leaders, particularly in their early thought, seem to have focused principally on restoring the authority of this New Testament law and obligating all who would be called Christians to follow the Stone-Campbell understanding of that law, rather than restoring the lordship of Jesus Christ, per se.

Second, and in a similar fashion, Castelein points to unity on the basis of “fact” revealed in Scripture, which echoes Alexander Campbell’s understanding of Scripture as a “book of facts.”<sup>167</sup> Campbell is drawing on Scottish Common Sense philosophy, particularly the Scottish appropriation of Francis Bacon, for this approach to Scripture “facts.”<sup>168</sup> Again, while Castelein does not offer a specific critique of this second principle, he does raise the related question of whether the Restoration Plea is “inextricably dependent on the problematic epistemology of Common Sense Realism.”<sup>169</sup> Castelein rightly argues that the “distinction between the objective Word of God [facts] and

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<sup>166</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 18.

<sup>167</sup> A. Campbell, *Christian System*, 6.

<sup>168</sup> The influence of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy on Stone-Campbell theology is discussed above, 27-8, 32-9, and below, 79-86.

<sup>169</sup> Castelein, “Can the Restoration Plea Survive,” 35.

subjective human interpretations [private opinions and inferences] is crucial to the plea.”<sup>170</sup> Without such a distinction, there would be no basis for unity, dependent as the Plea is on all arriving at the same conclusions based upon the pure reading and understanding of Biblical facts. However, as Castelein also points out, “in instances when one cannot appeal to common rational foundations of biblical truth other grounds of evidence and assurance need to be adduced,” which are not likely to be easily accepted by “traditional Restorationist protagonists.”<sup>171</sup> Here Castelein touches on a central question for Independent scholars: on what ground might the Independent Christian Churches seek authority for its understanding of the Bible and its Plea? As Castelein notes, there are a number of competing and contradictory claims regarding the nature of authority of Scripture.<sup>172</sup>

Philip D. Kenneson responded to Castelein in a subsequent issue of *Stone-Campbell Journal*. While Kenneson’s article deals only peripherally with the Restoration Plea, it is important to note the response that Kenneson has to the Restoration Plea. Kenneson argues that there is a more fundamental question to be asked before moving on to questions of the survival of the Restoration Plea. This question is whether “the Christian faith [can] survive if belief in objective truth is abandoned.”<sup>173</sup> Kenneson argues in the affirmative. He asks two preliminary (and obviously rhetorical) questions relating to the Restoration Plea before moving on to a larger discussion of truth. First he asks “if we say that belief in objective truth is essential for the Christian faith to survive, are we suggesting that belief in this philosophical concept is more fundamental than actual belief in God?”<sup>174</sup> Kenneson then rephrases this question, asking, “are we suggesting that belief in God presupposes or requires a prior commitment to a certain way of conceiving the concept of

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<sup>170</sup> Castelein, “Can the Restoration Plea Survive,” 37.

<sup>171</sup> Castelein, “Can the Restoration Plea Survive,” 38.

<sup>172</sup> Castelein, “Can the Restoration Plea Survive,” 38.

<sup>173</sup> Philip D. Kenneson, “Can the Christian Faith Survive if Belief in Objective Truth is Abandoned? A Reply to John Castelein,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 2.1 (1998): 44.

<sup>174</sup> Kenneson, “Can the Christian Faith Survive,” 45.

truth?”<sup>175</sup> Second, Kenneson asks, “if we say that belief in objective truth is essential for the Christian faith to survive, are we suggesting that the contemporary church’s fate is inextricably tied to a philosophical concept no more than 200 years old?”<sup>176</sup> From these two questions, Kenneson argues that it would be “odd, if not inconsistent” for members of the Stone-Campbell Movement to employ such nonbiblical language to argue for a “philosophical conception of truth that the apostolic church never had.”<sup>177</sup> He suggests that an insistence on the necessity of the concept of objective truth for the survival of the Restoration Plea could be indicative of the fact that some within the Stone-Campbell Movement are unaware of the historical situation in which the Plea arose and the particular philosophical assumptions that gave rise to it which were not “part of the apostolic heritage.”<sup>178</sup> Here Kenneson precisely identifies one of the central problems of much contemporary Independent scholarship—the ahistorical patterns of thought that have been inherited from earlier generations of scholars and the subsequent inability to look beyond the confines of Independent Christian Churches dogma. The situation that Kenneson describes is exactly what should be expected, given the Independents’ lack of critical inquiry into their history.

Robert C. Kurka entered the debate between Castelein and Kenneson with a paper at the 2004 Stone-Campbell Journal Conference titled, “‘If Bacon is not Raised is Our *Plea* in Vain?’: How an American Religious Tradition Lost Its Intellectual Platform with a Shift in Science.”<sup>179</sup> Kurka is Professor of Bible and Theology at Lincoln Christian College as a colleague of John Castelein, and he is clearly aware of the Castelein-Knesson dialogue.

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<sup>175</sup> Kenneson, “Can the Christian Faith Survive,” 45.

<sup>176</sup> Kenneson, “Can the Christian Faith Survive,” 45.

<sup>177</sup> Kenneson, “Can the Christian Faith Survive,” 45.

<sup>178</sup> Kenneson, “Can the Christian Faith Survive,” 45.

<sup>179</sup> Robert C. Kurka, “‘If Bacon is not Raised is Our *Plea* in Vain?’: How an American Religious Tradition Lost Its Intellectual Platform with a Shift in Science” unpublished paper, Stone-Campbell Journal Conference, Cincinnati Christian University and Seminary, March 27, 2004.

In this paper he attempts to address an issue raised by Castelein: "Is the Plea inextricably dependent on the problematic epistemology of Common Sense Realism?"<sup>180</sup>

Kurka's larger intention in this paper is to link the Stone-Campbell Movement to American Evangelicalism,<sup>181</sup> and he constructs his version of the Plea to argue for this coupling. Kurka cites James DeForest Murch's version of the Restoration Plea as a normative definition of the Plea: "(1) Submission to the authority of the Bible alone, which in turn produces (2) unity of Christians, which enables (3) world evangelization."<sup>182</sup> He argues that "the 'Restoration Plea' is still valid today," and that the divisions and problems that the Stone-Campbell Movement has encountered stem not from the nature of the Plea itself, but from the "unfortunate" grounding of that Plea in a "Baconian philosophy of science and epistemology."<sup>183</sup> As such, he believes that it is necessary for that philosophy of science and epistemology to be discarded, but that this does "not have to bring such a crushing blow to the Stone-Campbell's [*sic*] vision of ecclesiastical unity-via-a [*sic*] return to biblical authority."<sup>184</sup>

Kurka argues that the Stone-Campbell Movement (here, Kurka presumably is referring only to the conservative branches of the Movement) was and is very similar to other evangelical groups<sup>185</sup> that arose during the course of the "Second Great Awakening."

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<sup>180</sup> Castelein, "Can the Restoration Plea Survive," 35.

<sup>181</sup> A connection that he also makes in Robert C. Kurka, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion: Why Restorationists Appear to Be out of the Evangelical Mainstream," *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, William R. Baker, ed., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 138-151. This identification of Independent Christian Churches as a part of American Evangelicalism is a movement within the Independent Christian Churches that will be discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>182</sup> Kurka, "If Bacon is not Raised," 2.

<sup>183</sup> Kurka, "If Bacon is not Raised," 2-3. Kurka argues that the rejection of Baconian philosophy as a hermeneutic program was a result of the influence of Darwinian thought, which he claims "brought with it a suspicion about the adequacy of language to convey 'facts,'" and, as a result of this loss of confidence in the objective meaning of words, many Stone-Campbell scholars rejected the restoration concept and embraced European liberalism (4). While it might be argued that Darwinian thought played some role in the development of liberal Disciples of Christ theology, it is simply not accurate to point to Darwin as initiating such a suspicion of language's ability to convey facts. This suspicion arose long before Darwin and can be seen in the thought of Immanuel Kant and may also be found, in part, in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

<sup>184</sup> Kurka, "If Bacon is not Raised," 2.

<sup>185</sup> Kurka does not specify which groups, exactly, he is thinking of. The problems associated with identification with Evangelicalism are discussed in Chapter Four.

The similarities that Kurka points to are commitment to the authority of the Bible and worldwide evangelism, but he also notes a number of doctrines that are particular to the conservative elements of the Restoration Movement: its five point plan of salvation that emphasizes the role of baptism in this process, its insistence on baptism by immersion of an adult believer, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, and the insistence on the autonomy of individual churches, with no denominational hierarchy.<sup>186</sup> What Kurka does not specifically acknowledge is that in the theological understanding of the Independent Christian Churches, these doctrines require a Baconian inductive hermeneutic. Without such an approach to Scripture, there could be no appeal to an inductively arrived at plan of salvation or to the Restoration Movement doctrine of baptism. As such, what Kurka is ultimately, and perhaps inadvertently, arguing for by removing Baconian philosophy from Independent Christian Churches thought is a thoroughgoing rejection of traditional Restoration Movement hermeneutics that inductively search the Bible for "facts" and create doctrines upon the basis of these facts. This, in turn, involves a rejection of the doctrines created through this hermeneutic, or it requires a new hermeneutic approach that allows the Independents to retain these doctrines, albeit on different theological grounds.<sup>187</sup>

To the extent that this is Kurka's intention, such a critique is long overdue, given that many within the scholarly community of Independent Christian Churches, as well as many Independent ministers and laypeople, no longer employ a hermeneutic couched in Baconian terms.<sup>188</sup> However, Kurka does not seem inclined to make the necessary hermeneutic leaps that such a critique would entail, given his desire to retain the

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<sup>186</sup> Kurka, "If Bacon is not Raised," 2.

<sup>187</sup> Church of Christ scholar Michael Casey argues that the need for a reformed Restoration theology "is the most serious challenge facing the [Stone-Campbell] tradition today." He notes that "the traditional hermeneutic of command, example, and necessary inference" is not a divine hermeneutic (see below, 85-8 for a discussion of this hermeneutic), but is "grounded in the human history of Reformed theology, Scottish Common Sense philosophy and logic, and the nineteenth century American culture." Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 268-9.

<sup>188</sup> They do, however, retain the doctrines created by and dependent upon such a hermeneutic, which is obviously quite problematic.

Restoration Plea. Rather, he seems to regard the Restoration Plea as a sacrosanct injunction that does not suffer from its questionable Baconian origins or from the aims of its program. For Kurka the Plea needs no defense, only a recovery of its elements for a “post-Baconian and postmodern world.”<sup>189</sup> In the interest of this recovery Kurka employs a number of strategies that have a great deal of currency among contemporary American Evangelicals.<sup>190</sup> He first argues for the “primacy of Scripture” based on the “creator/creation distinction” and claims that when the concept of “Biblical revelation” is discussed in relation to the disciplines of philosophy or science, theology will lose.<sup>191</sup> For an epistemological position Kurka calls for a critical realism which acknowledges human limitations while simultaneously insisting on the observer’s ability to know things as they are, partial as that knowledge may be. Kurka’s version of restoration is to restore, not the New Testament church, but a “Biblical worldview,” which he claims calls for a canonical ecclesiology that includes both the Old and New Testaments and a “theological read of Scripture.”<sup>192</sup> Kurka’s desire is to encourage “the participation of all legitimate expressions of evangelical orthodoxy” in “submission to biblical authority,” and his vision for unity is found in the ecumenical creeds, which he feels “do a fairly good job of laying out the boundaries of orthodoxy” and “define the Christian identity and scope of mission.”<sup>193</sup>

However, due to the shifts in understanding that Kurka proposes, the grounds of the Plea are actually much shakier than before. Kurka enters highly questionable arguments in

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<sup>189</sup> Kurka, “If Bacon is not Raised,” 6.

<sup>190</sup> Kurka only briefly mentions these strategies, each of which would require book length treatments. As such, it is not my intention to enter into lengthy dialogue with these points, but to merely point to their Evangelical origins.

<sup>191</sup> Kurka claims that “the Church invites intellectual trouble when it grounds its theological systems in the prevailing science/philosophy of the day,” and that the problem with Stone-Campbell thought is that the early leaders grounded their theological program in the scientific and philosophical thought of their day.

<sup>192</sup> Kurka, “If Bacon is not Raised,” 6. Kurka is not clear about what this “theological read” involves, or how one could judge between conflicting theological readings. He merely says that it is “a thick or . . . intertextual” reading “where the didactic informs the narrative.”

<sup>193</sup> Kurka, “If Bacon is not Raised,” 6-7.

regard to the nature of Biblical revelation and the epistemology in which he is attempting to ground his argument. Kurka does not adequately address the question of where the authority of the Bible may be based (which Kurka seems to assume) and on what ground he is basing his claims to the knowledge of reality. Further, his vision of a restored “Biblical worldview”<sup>194</sup> is reductionistic and does not take into account the complexities of the different times and cultures that produced the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Finally, Kurka’s appeal to unity with “orthodox” believers begs the question—Kurka does not address who would be competent to determine what a “legitimate expression of evangelical orthodoxy” looks like or how one could make such a determination, why it should be “evangelical,” or how believers or theologians might arrive at a consensus on this issue. What is evident at this juncture is that the construction of the Restoration Plea as defined by the Independent Christian Churches requires the use of the hermeneutic formed from the amalgam of Scottish Common Sense philosophy, the experience of the settlers on the American frontier, their adoption of American values of liberty, equality, and individualism, and the identification of this intermixture of elements with “New Testament Christianity.”

### **History of the Restoration Plea: The Formulation of the Restoration Plea**

Having examined the backgrounds and circumstances of the earliest leaders of the Movement and traced some of the paths that the Movement has taken over the two centuries of its existence, the next task is to discover how the thought of Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott contributed to the development of their theological program into the Restoration Plea. It should be noted at this point that by the early 1830s the seeds of future division had already been sown in the Stone-Campbell

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<sup>194</sup> Studies on worldview have become something of a cottage industry within American evangelicalism in recent years, and are used to contrast a “Christian worldview” against Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheistic Monism, New Age, and Postmodernism. The prominent work in this regard is James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), from which this list is taken.

Movement and that by 1840 segments of the Movement had begun to go their separate ways.<sup>195</sup> This division occurred as a result of warring conceptions of restoration and unity, conflicting goals even for the early leaders who attempted to balance the exclusivity of a restorationist doctrine and the inclusivity of a plea for church unity by arguing for Christian unity based on the restoration of essential Christian doctrine and practices.<sup>196</sup> The conservative segment of the Stone-Campbell Movement adopted a more severe restorationist attitude that hampered their goal of unity, and the liberal segment felt free to leave behind aspects of the restorationist program in the interest of Christian unity. To see the two directions that Stone-Campbell thought took, it will be helpful to scrutinize representative examples of both conservative and liberal constructions of the Restoration Plea. The work of Alfred DeGroot (representative of Disciples of Christ) and Harold Ford (representative of the Independent Christian Churches) on the Restoration Plea is a good point of reference to employ when speaking of the divergence of Stone-Campbell theology. Each scholar wrote during the time in which the Disciples of Christ and the Independent Christian Churches were coalescing into separate denominations and each promotes the version of the Restoration Plea that would generally be followed by each group. As such, they provide a portrait of the various emphases these two segments of the

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<sup>195</sup> Michael W. Casey, *The Battle Over Hermeneutics in the Stone-Campbell Movement 1800-1870* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 154. Richard Hughes also offers the date of 1840, or perhaps earlier, as the time that this division began to be evident in the Stone-Campbell Movement. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 17. Both Hughes and Casey, Church of Christ (a cappella) scholars, address the division primarily as between what would become the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Disciples of Christ and do not adequately address the origin of the Independent Christian Churches. Hughes in particular, in this and other work, seems to regard the Independent Christian Churches as a later division within the Disciples of Christ, rather than a separate body that developed its own emphasis alongside the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Disciples of Christ (cf. *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 13 for an example of his treatment of the first division as between “the restorationist Church of Christ [(a cappella)]” and “the ecumenical Disciples,” which is a characterization that does not include the Independents). However, in terms of their appropriation of the Restoration Plea, their hermeneutic principles, and their sectarian nature, the Independent and A Cappella groups have much more in common with each other than with the Disciples of Christ. Rather than regarding any of these groups as splitting from the others and thereby suggesting that one of the three is somehow closer to “true” Stone-Campbell principles, it is better to see each of these groups as developing their own particular emphasis within Stone-Campbell theology and remaining unified until the emphasis of each group forced it to strike out on its own, away from the others.

<sup>196</sup> Michael W. Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 51.

Stone-Campbell Movement drew from the thought of Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott.

### **Disciples of Christ and the Restoration Plea**

In 1960 Alfred DeGroot published *The Restoration Principle*, which was his attempt to present for his day the “need to restore [the church’s] original, pristine, life-giving aims, aspirations, and dreams,” that is, a restoration of “spiritual principles” rather than a “legalistic primitivism.”<sup>197</sup> Alfred DeGroot was a Disciples of Christ historian who taught at several Disciples of Christ universities and served as a representative for the denomination in meetings with the World Council of Churches. In 1958 he collaborated with W. E. Garrison to write a history of the Disciples of Christ in which they claimed that, with the second generation of leaders came a decline in Stone-Campbell academic work in which “the training of preachers came to be conceived as indoctrination in ‘the plea,’” which resulted in “an intellectual inbreeding that was fatal to thought and blighting to scholarship.”<sup>198</sup> While this was true of the segments of the Restoration Movement that would become the Church of Christ and the Independent Christian Churches, the Disciples of Christ pursued a course of critical scholarship and sought education at the notable theological centers of America, which has continued to the present day.<sup>199</sup> It is in this tradition of critical scholarship and the theological liberalism of the early twentieth century that DeGroot writes.

From the outset it is important to understand what Alfred DeGroot’s conception of the Restoration Plea is not—it is not a call to restore the precise form or pattern of the New

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<sup>197</sup> Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1960), 7-8. DeGroot is not necessarily representative of current Disciples of Christ scholarship, which has obviously changed and developed over the course of time. DeGroot’s work, however, is a good point of reference for this discussion of the Restoration Plea, written as it was at a time when the Independent identity was being formed.

<sup>198</sup> Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958), 375.

<sup>199</sup> See Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1975), 371-374.

Testament Church in matters of organization or worship.<sup>200</sup> As DeGroot writes elsewhere in rejecting such a conception of restoration, “the principle of restoring a fixed pattern of a primitive Christian church is divisive and not unitive.”<sup>201</sup> DeGroot’s treatise traces his version of the Restoration Principle from the early church through the present day, concluding with a special consideration of the Stone-Campbell Movement and a discussion on what elements of Christianity should be restored. Key to DeGroot’s restoration is reestablishing the “religion of Jesus” rather than particular elements of the “religion about Jesus.”<sup>202</sup> In the first category DeGroot places “the Founder’s vital faith, his rapturous identification with the very heartbeat of the Creator so that the prosaic world is seen to be verily the substance of a kingdom of God”<sup>203</sup> and against this he characterizes a religion about Jesus that has grown stagnant in its observance of the ideals that originally gave it life and that performs its worship by rote.<sup>204</sup>

In regard to the Stone-Campbell Movement, which, at the time of DeGroot’s writing had divided once<sup>205</sup> and was on the verge of dividing again, DeGroot notes that the fragmented Movement retained in common “loyalty to a ‘restoration plea,’ variously interpreted.”<sup>206</sup> In DeGroot’s interpretation

the validation of the proposal of Disciples of Christ has rested not upon the program itself, what it has done in the realm of events, and especially in creating church unity, but upon what its advocates would like to believe it could do.<sup>207</sup>

Through this statement DeGroot hopes to avoid a judgment of the efficacy of the Restoration Plea on the basis of temporal success, and instead wants to focus on how this particular Plea has, over the course of time, made a positive contribution to Christian

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<sup>200</sup> See below, 74-7.

<sup>201</sup> In Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1975), 34.

<sup>202</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 14.

<sup>203</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 16.

<sup>204</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 22-3.

<sup>205</sup> In 1906 when the Church of Christ (a cappella) was listed as a separate denomination in the US census.

<sup>206</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 135.

<sup>207</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 135.

unity.<sup>208</sup> The reason DeGroot gives for the difficulty of creating unity by way of the program of Thomas Campbell is that Campbell's *Declaration and Address* "is Bible-centered rather than focused on loyalty to Jesus Christ."<sup>209</sup> As such, DeGroot levels a criticism at the Church of Christ and the conservative elements of his own dividing denomination, which he regards as placing the Bible above Jesus. DeGroot notes that while none of the early leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement—Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and Barton W. Stone—formulated a concise definition of the Restoration Plea, they did not hesitate to describe the basic facets of what was later summarized as the Plea.<sup>210</sup> DeGroot believes that the lack of a precise definition for the Restoration Plea is a positive thing, in that this allowed individual liberty in interpretation of the Bible and therefore a broader range of options for Christian unity. DeGroot claims that the first attempt to offer such a definition of the Restoration Plea was undertaken by L.L. Brigance in 1940, a Church of Christ (a cappella) author who wrote a series of articles for the Church of Christ (a cappella) journal, *Gospel Advocate* and developed a list of the five things that the Stone Campbell Movement was attempting to restore.<sup>211</sup> DeGroot notes the "utter futility" of such a list as a basis of union, but he does not explicitly acknowledge that the two conservative branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement were more concerned with a restoration of "correct" doctrine and practice than with a restoration of Christian unity, and thus the "common loyalty" that he believes these groups

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<sup>208</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 135-6.

<sup>209</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 139. DeGroot's critique here anticipates the argument that Church of Christ (a cappella) scholars began to make in the 1970s, that following Jesus took precedence over following a pattern found in the Bible by some of their Restoration Movement forerunners. See above, 7, fn. 15 for some of the revisionist works by Church of Christ (a cappella) scholars.

<sup>210</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 151.

<sup>211</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 155. DeGroot copies the substance of Brigance's list as: "1. The Names and Descriptive Title of the Church and its Members 2. Organization, or Church Government ' . . . the saints, or members in general, the bishops, or elders; and the deacons. . . . Any organization other than this is unauthorized in the Scriptures.' 3. Doctrine 'The Doctrine taught by the early church . . . is the New Testament.' 4. Work Development of its own members, benevolence, and the preaching of the Gospel. 5. Worship."

have to a Restoration Plea is not held in common at all but is actually two different and diametrically opposed versions of the Restoration Plea.

The Restoration Plea, for DeGroot, is primarily a plea for Christian unity. This unity is accomplished through a restoration of the goals and aims of the Christian religion, rather than a restoration of the forms and patterns of church government and worship which conservative Stone-Campbell heirs focused on.<sup>212</sup> Thus he claims that a restoration is needed within the Restoration Movement itself inasmuch as “a recognizable segment of these people and churches [are] not vitally interested in unity and [refuse] to accept any responsibility for Christian world leadership.”<sup>213</sup> However, it is precisely at this point that DeGroot’s argument falls prey to the same kind of critique that he levels against the conservative branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement. In much the same way that conservative scholars fixated upon the details of a supposed pattern for the church recorded in the New Testament, DeGroot makes a fetish out of unity. It is simply unreasonable to claim as he does that the Restoration Movement goal of Christian union is largely tantamount to the “original, pristine, life-giving aims, aspirations, and dreams” of Jesus. In so doing, DeGroot offers his version of restoration as a counterpoint to the restoration vision of the conservative interpreters of Stone-Campbell thought and he essentially claims that his understanding of restoration is the singular meaning of the Christian religion, which is a claim that is at odds with his desire that individuals be able to believe as they wish.

DeGroot further argues that the “modern restoration will be the recapture of the optimism and expectancy of the primitive Christian church.”<sup>214</sup> By this, DeGroot intends

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<sup>212</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 169.

<sup>213</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 170. The argument for a restoration of the Restoration Movement is a perennial cry among Stone-Campbell adherents. In recent years, traditionalists among the Independent Christian Churches have made this same appeal, though they are attempting to restore the aspect of Stone-Campbell theology that emphasizes identification and conformity to what they believe is a precise pattern of the Church that is presented in the New Testament. See below, 123.

<sup>214</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 175.

that the Church will continually reinvent itself “by the sluffing [sic] off of outgrown forms, rituals, and creeds”<sup>215</sup> as it looks expectantly for the fulfillment of “the promise of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit shall lead [the Church] into truth for [its] day.”<sup>216</sup> This millennial hope closely parallels the expectancy that Alexander Campbell had for the spread of the Gospel and the rule of the Holy Spirit over the earth and, like Campbell and the other early leaders of the Restoration Movement, attempts to remove the accretions of the centuries of Christian practice from the life of the modern church.

DeGroot claims that “the grand concept of freedom is the overarching ideal under which this divine-human enterprise is to be realized.”<sup>217</sup> Here he not only stands in solidarity with early Stone-Campbell demands that each individual exercise his or her right to read and interpret scripture for him or herself, irrespective of the authority of the tradition of the church or a creed,<sup>218</sup> but he also demonstrates the close relationship that Stone-Campbell theology, of whatever persuasion, has with certain core American values, particularly American notions of freedom, equality, and individualism.<sup>219</sup> DeGroot sees it as a great virtue of the Disciples of Christ’s restoration program that the denomination has emphasized “freedom based on personal loyalty to Christ” and has demonstrated that such a “church shorn of theological and ecclesiastical standards for the corralling and branding of its particular members can be an effective and witnessing ‘church’ today.”<sup>220</sup> DeGroot here repeats a widespread Disciples of Christ dogma of the day: that individual opinion trumped scriptural or theological authority and that it was possible to remove from the Church dogmatic theological formulations. Stephen Sprinkle, a contemporary Disciples of Christ theologian, has argued that, in a denomination that has been unwilling to even use

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<sup>215</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 175.

<sup>216</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 178.

<sup>217</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 178.

<sup>218</sup> This concept is discussed below, 111-5.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Robert N. Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xli-xliii; 23-25; 142-163.

<sup>220</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 178.

the term “theology,” a more systematic theological understanding is needed.<sup>221</sup> Under what Sprinkle terms the “liberal synthesis,” a period of Disciples of Christ thought that encompasses DeGroot’s output, Sprinkle critiques the notion that “theology was ‘irrelevant’ if it proposed any authoritative position,” noting that privileging opinion in this manner opens up “the possibility of the existence of a church with no beliefs.”<sup>222</sup>

Compounding the problem of DeGroot’s version of the Restoration Plea is his argument that “what the qualified judgment of sincere Christians can agree is essential to worship and life becomes our fifth restoration objective.”<sup>223</sup> Here DeGroot again harks back to the first generation leaders who thought that by restoring the essential elements of Christianity that all could agree on, they would produce a united church. Like those early leaders, DeGroot appeals to this principle as something that will develop Christian unity. In support of his appeal to “qualified judgment,” DeGroot quotes James Gray who says “The consensus of rational opinion of all Christian scholars of whatever Church or age is the deciding factor on matters of interpretation.”<sup>224</sup> In making this claim, DeGroot ignores, first, that the desire to obtain such a consensus on essentials conflicts with his goal of freedom for individual opinion, and second, that his own Christian tradition has twice divided over arguments of what was and was not essential. Further, the consensus that DeGroot seeks across all of Christian history is not tenable—there is no monolithic understanding of Christianity that has continued throughout the centuries to which DeGroot might appeal.

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<sup>221</sup> Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a People in Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), vii-viii.

<sup>222</sup> Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology*, 65-67. See also, in Sprinkle, p. 105-110 for a discussion of the attempt by Disciples of Christ scholar William R. Baird to constructively engage the problem of authority for Disciples of Christ theology and Baird’s strong critique of autonomy and the right of private judgment.

<sup>223</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 181.

<sup>224</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 181.

Finally, DeGroot concludes his work on the Restoration Plea with an appeal to “recapture a conquering spiritual life.”<sup>225</sup> This spirituality, for DeGroot, is another element in the quest for Christian unity. He approvingly quotes historian and philosopher Will Durant who claimed “If Christianity would go back to its origins, cleanse itself resolutely from the silt of time, and take its stand with fresh sincerity upon the personality and ideals of its founder, who could resist it?”<sup>226</sup> DeGroot argues that restoration consists of “the will to do the will of Christ” which “should be our basic ground of union.”<sup>227</sup> As such, DeGroot thoroughly rejects the restoration of “correct church organization” sought by the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella) for a restoration of “Christ’s life and the spirit of God” as it is understood by Disciples of Christ.<sup>228</sup>

### **The Independent Christian Churches and the Restoration Plea**

The division between Disciples of Christ and the Independent Christian Churches occurred slowly, stretching from 1927, when conservatives began the North American Christian Convention to serve their own interests in protest of what they perceived to be the hijacking of the International Convention (which had served both the future Disciples of Christ and the Independent Christian Churches) by liberal interests, to 1968, when the Disciples of Christ constituted themselves as an official denomination.<sup>229</sup> The reasons for this division may be seen, in microcosm, in the differences between the theological formulations of Alfred DeGroot and Harold Ford. Harold W. Ford was an Independent Christian Churches scholar who compiled many different statements of the Restoration Plea for his Bachelor of Divinity thesis at the School of Religion at Butler University in 1949 and then published his work in 1952 as *A History of the Restoration Plea*. There is a marked difference in tone between Ford’s work and DeGroot’s that reflects the opposing

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<sup>225</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 184.

<sup>226</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 184.

<sup>227</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 185.

<sup>228</sup> DeGroot, *Restoration Principle*, 185.

<sup>229</sup> See Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 307-12 and 355-71; and Tucker and McAllister, *Journey in Faith*, 382-6 and 435-59, respectively, for Independent and Disciples interpretations of these events.

conceptions of the Restoration Plea of their respective denominations—emphasizing either restoration of “apostolic Christianity” or Christian unity. Ford’s understanding of the Plea is a direct outgrowth of that aspect of the hermeneutic program of Thomas and Alexander Campbell that created doctrines based on the system of facts they found in Scripture.

Thus, Ford argues that the facts of history are directly understandable and unchanging:

History has the very distinct characteristic of being absolutely unchangeable, since it is made up of the happenings of time. Attempts to change the facts of history or to erase the things that have been recorded, would be about as futile as trying to change the course of the sun or the flow of the tides. Facts do not change.<sup>230</sup>

Thus, Ford believes that the unchangeable facts of New Testament history may be discovered and recreated for the present day. As a result, the precise pattern of the New Testament Church, in terms of doctrine, government, and worship may be restored and can serve as an objective, verifiable point around which Christians may be unified.

Ford’s definition of the Restoration Plea is essentially the same as that used by other Independents, which reveals the coalescence around the basic elements of the Plea within Independent circles. Ford claims that the ultimate goal of the founders of the Restoration Movement was

the restoration of the Christianity of the New Testament and the resultant rebuilding of the church of Christ as it is recorded in that volume [the New Testament], looking to the unity in Christ of all people in the world who wish to be known as Christians and, ultimately, to the conversion of the world.<sup>231</sup>

Unity for Ford is dependent upon the adoption of the proper understanding of New Testament Christianity; therefore, he writes that “the requirements for salvation [by which Ford means faith, repentance, and the immersion of the adult believer for the forgiveness of sin] become the only tests of . . . fellowship, and beyond that the widest freedom must

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<sup>230</sup> Harold W. Ford, *A History of the Restoration Plea* (Joplin: College Press, 1952), 1.

<sup>231</sup> Ford, *A History of the Restoration Plea*, 1.

be allowed.”<sup>232</sup> Thus unity, for Ford, is based upon fundamental agreement with Independent Christian Churches doctrine about salvation and only indirectly on the understanding of other aspects of Christian doctrine.<sup>233</sup>

Ford traces his conception of the Restoration Plea, which is retained by many Independents today, to the early writings of Barton Stone and Thomas Campbell through their later reiteration and further development by Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and other prominent figures in Stone-Campbell history. The conclusions that Harold Ford draws from Barton Stone’s *Last Will and Testament* are twofold: first, that the signers of this document were “protesting the oppressions of the ecclesiastics and proclaiming their favor of local church autonomy,” and second, that they were proclaiming that “the Bible was the only sure guide in existence, pertaining to matters of eternal life.”<sup>234</sup> From this Ford concludes that the signatories of the *Last Will and Testament* were:

advocating the elimination of all that is human in the church and the acceptance of all that is divine. It is to be especially noted that they were interested in a sure guide to heaven, in other words, it was the salvation of the world that took first place or at least a prominent place in their considerations at this time.<sup>235</sup>

On this point, Ford and DeGroot are in agreement that they seek the extermination of what they regard as human theological speculation within the Church. Ford emphasizes this with his summary of Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address*, claiming that:

1) The *Declaration and Address* asserts the rightness of the New Testament due to the authority of its author, 2) it exposes the inadequacy and divisive nature of all human expedients and opinions when thrust forward as authoritatively binding upon Christians, 3) it emphasizes that the conversion of the world awaits the unity of believers, 4) it suggests a solution to the problem in calling all Christians to the express injunctions and approved precedents of the original divine standard.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 3.

<sup>233</sup> This basis for unity is also generally true of the larger Independent body, as can be seen in their emphasis on the proper order of salvation. See below, 185-8.

<sup>234</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 17.

<sup>235</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 17.

<sup>236</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 28.

Present in this summary are the ideals of the Restoration Plea of the Independent Christian Churches—that Christian unity and the subsequent conversion of the world are dependent on the proper understanding of the New Testament (which has been lost and must be restored). In Ford's own restatement of the Plea, he offers five points: that all individuals must learn to read the New Testament alike, that all must look to the "New Testament Christ"<sup>237</sup> as the object of their faith, that all must obey the "New Testament Plan of Salvation,"<sup>238</sup> that individuals must gather in a New Testament church, which is limited in its definition to a local congregation, and that the purpose of the restoration of the "church of the New Testament" is to bring about world evangelism—that is, "the uniting of every person in the world with Jesus, as Lord and Savior."<sup>239</sup>

The Restoration Plea that Ford describes, then, is not primarily a petition for unity, as DeGroot's is, but an argument for a certain and limited understanding of what it means to be a Christian. That is, one can only be a Christian "in the New Testament meaning of the term," which Ford, appealing to Alexander Campbell, defines as being determined by whether an individual "has believed the one fact [that Jesus is the Christ] and submitted to the one institution [baptism by immersion] expressive of the fact."<sup>240</sup> The Restoration Plea is not seen by Ford and other Independents as the construction of a doctrine by various scholars within the Stone-Campbell Movement, but as the precise teaching of the New Testament on matters of salvation, church government, and Christian worship. As Ford says:

All the authors [that Ford has examined thus far] have agreed that the Restoration movement has fallen upon the message which will effect the healing of the wounds of the body of Christ. It is not "our message" nor

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<sup>237</sup> By this, Ford claims that the New Testament provides a complete and unadulterated picture of Christ, which one can apprehend through the proper hermeneutic apparatus.

<sup>238</sup> As mentioned before, this includes the following steps in their proper order: faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. As with his conception of the "New Testament Christ," Ford believes that this "Plan" is "clearly outlined in the records of conversion set forth in the New Testament." Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 200.

<sup>239</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 200-2.

<sup>240</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 59.

“our plea,” but it is the message of the New Testament and the plea of the New Testament, a message and a plea not being proclaimed in its purity by the existing groups in Christendom.<sup>241</sup>

However, as has been demonstrated, the Restoration Plea that Ford appeals to as springing directly from the pages of the New Testament, is in fact dependent upon the particular hermeneutic created through Scottish Common Sense philosophy and the cultural values and assumptions of life on the American frontier.

### **The Restoration Plea Today**

Many within the Independent Christian Churches continue to argue for the validity of the Restoration Plea and some even argue that, now more than ever, the Plea is particularly needed two hundred years after its inception. After surveying what he regards as the problems of the modern Ecumenical Movement, James DeForest Murch claims “All this indicates that the ecumenical situation is ripe for the introduction of certain principles of the Restoration plea into the current milieu.”<sup>242</sup> The problem, though, as Murch describes it, is that “the passion for modulation and peace outweighs the passion for Biblical truth.”<sup>243</sup> Murch admits that the “traditional presentation of ‘the plea’ is outmoded,”<sup>244</sup> but argues that the

principles of the *Declaration and Address* are still valid, and the truth of the Holy Scriptures is eternal; but they must be applied to an era of Christian history which is not at all like the one in which the Restoration movement was born.<sup>245</sup>

The difficulty for Independent Christian Churches theology is that the Holy Scriptures must also be applied to an era of Christian history which is not at all like the one in which these scriptures were written and the principles that they appeal to as being “still valid,” whether found in the *Declaration and Address*, *The Last Will and Testament*, or the

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<sup>241</sup> Ford, *History of the Restoration Plea*, 80.

<sup>242</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 364.

<sup>243</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366.

<sup>244</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366. Murch does not go into detail about what this “traditional presentation is” or what about it is outmoded.

<sup>245</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366.

writings of Alexander Campbell, are, in many respects, regarded by many Independents as bearing the same "eternal truth" as the Christian scriptures.

A further problem for Independent theology are the internal stresses within the Restoration Movement due to the dependence of its theology on Scottish Common Sense philosophy and its development on the American frontier. As the intellectual underpinnings of Scottish Common Sense Realism fell away and as the frontier disappeared from existence, the basis of theological authority for the Stone-Campbell Movement was effectively undermined and eventually shattered. As a result, the members of the Stone-Campbell Movement were forced to change their theological program or to seek a new basis for their Plea. These stresses and changes resulted in the Movement dividing into three branches: the Church of Christ (a cappella), the Disciples of Christ, and the Independent Christian Churches. While overly simplistic it is none-the-less fair to say that the Church of Christ (a cappella) places greater emphasis on the authority of the Bible and the restoration of New Testament practices, while the Disciples focus on Christian unity, to the abridgement of the other elements of the Plea. The Independent Christian Churches has, in one sense, been the most successful of the three branches of the Movement in attempting to retain all elements of the Plea, though it is currently engaged in efforts to recreate the basis of that Plea. They have not, however, succeeded in addressing the hermeneutic problems that they inherited from Scottish Common Sense Realism, nor have they successfully identified the problems presented to them. Chief among these problems is Murch's claim that the Christian scriptures represent the only "tangible and objective criterion" for the truth of God. The Independent tendency is to naïvely assume the "tangible and objective" authority of scripture from its Stone-Campbell heritage. Furthermore, the Independent Christian Churches would do well to rethink their approach to and relationship with Christian history. An admission that their theology has been conditioned and molded by the intervening centuries of Christian thought would be a

valuable step down this path. In addition, the Restoration Plea, as it is formulated by both liberal and conservative branches of the Movement, results in a somewhat schizophrenic theological statement that attempts to argue for conflicting positions of restoration and unity.

Some Independents recognize that the Restoration Plea and Stone-Campbell theology are fundamentally flawed due to their grounding in Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Dick Alexander, senior minister of LifeSpring Christian Church in Cincinnati, OH and president of the 2004 North American Christian Convention, claimed in his keynote sermon during that convention, that it is due to the overconfidence in and reliance on human logic that “the Restoration Movement failed.”<sup>246</sup> There are a few other denominational leaders making this admission or argument, though most would not agree that this is the case. However, it is precisely because of its reliance on Scottish Common Sense philosophy and the appropriated values of American individualism and democracy that the Restoration Plea, as it was originally formulated and as it is being appealed to today, is untenable, and that the Independent Christian Churches as it exists today has failed to come to terms with what this means for its faith and practice. In short, without Baconian induction and the Lockean concept that all people are equally capable to logically arrive at the same conclusion in regard to interpretation of the Bible, there can be no Restoration Plea as it is formulated by Independent Christian Churches scholars, nor the doctrines that were developed through the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism. While the goals of the Restoration Plea may be noble, they represent an attempt to recreate Christian theology through the amalgamation of the philosophic discourse of Scottish Common Sense Realism, the American ideals and values of individualism, liberty, and equality, the American tendency toward utopianism, and, in time, the use of capitalist language as a carrier for Christian theology.

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<sup>246</sup> Dick Alexander, “Captivating Truth” *Christian Standard* 26 Sep. 2004, 8.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESTORATION

The first and most essential element of the Restoration Plea is the component of “restoration.” Restoration within the Independent Christian Churches is primarily ecclesiastical; that is, it is concerned with restoring the structures, doctrines, and attitudes of the first century Church. There is not, however, any measure of agreement among the Independent Christian Churches on the precise nature of what this restoration entails. As such, the Independent Christian Churches is undergoing a new division between traditionalist and progressive interpreters of the restoration concept. Traditionalist interpreters of the Independent doctrine of restoration are chiefly concerned with restoring the Church according to a detailed pattern or blueprint that they believe may be found in the New Testament, whereas progressive understandings of restoration have moved further and further from an attempt to restore the pattern of the New Testament Church to an endeavor to restore the attitudes and success (in terms of gaining a large number of converts to Christianity) of the New Testament Church.

As with other divisions in the Stone-Campbell Movement, this division hinges on hermeneutics. The traditional hermeneutic of the Stone-Campbell program, which constructed doctrines based on commands, examples, and necessary inferences found in or made from the New Testament, is inextricably dependent on Enlightenment Era reasoning rather than the Christian tradition. Thus, from the outset of the Restoration Movement, Restoration scholars have used the categories of reason available to them through the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism to construct their theological pronouncements. As problems arose with this reason-based hermeneutic, notably when the Movement confronted questions that its hermeneutic could not adequately address, some Stone-Campbell adherents attempted to retain the philosophic program of the Scottish

Enlightenment. Others, however, sought new discourses by which they might continue their program of “restoration,” arguing that the Stone-Campbell Movement was more concerned about the reform of the Church than it was with its restoration.

The restoration concept of the Stone-Campbell Movement does not find its impetus in any biblical or Christian notion of restoration.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the restoration concept that is at the center of Stone-Campbell theology is a construct that allows the individual interpreter to potentially create any doctrine using biblical language that he or she may claim is contemporary with Christianity as it is depicted in the New Testament. This is demonstrated through a discussion of how the Restoration Movement created its salvation theology, which emphasizes baptism by immersion as the central ingredient of its five part “plan of salvation.” As Restoration Movement theologians argue that doctrines must be based on the Bible alone, with no admixture of theology or philosophy, they actually argue for a hermeneutic that bases doctrines on the subjective understandings of the individual interpreter. That hermeneutic also provides the interpreter with absolute certainty that one has available the means by which one may discover the will of God, as it is revealed in the “restored” teachings and practices of the New Testament Church.

### **Restoration: A Definition of Restoration**

Don Wilson, the senior minister of the 9,000 plus member Christ’s Church of the Valley located in Peoria, Arizona (the second largest church in the Independent Christian Churches denomination), published an article in the December 22, 2002 issue of *Christian Standard* which makes the case for the use of Saturday night worship services among Independent Christian Churches. This short article was occasioned by the recognition that many Independent Christian Churches are conducting both Saturday night and Sunday morning worship services, and Wilson wanted to offer some thoughts on Saturday night

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the pictures of a restored humanity presented in Isaiah 11:1-16 or Revelation 21:1-22:7, for example.

worship.<sup>2</sup> The first question that Wilson raises is whether or not it is “biblically correct to have worship on Saturday night.”<sup>3</sup> He quickly concludes that it is in a short paragraph that consists primarily of a quotation of Acts 2:46-47 which mentions that the early believers met together daily to break bread and praise God. The remainder of the article does not consider other possible Biblical foundations for such a service but is an argument for using Saturday night services to promote numerical growth when a congregation is faced with space limitations due to the size of its facilities. In what seems to be a rather innocuous article, Wilson describes what his own church has done with Saturday night services and offers some strategies for other churches interested in starting such a service.<sup>4</sup>

The February 16, 2003 *Christian Standard* carried a response to Wilson’s article from Harold N. Orndorff, Jr., who is the campus minister for Christian Student Fellowship at Northern Kentucky University and a monthly contributor to *The Restoration Herald*.<sup>5</sup> In his letter Orndorff questions the appropriateness of Saturday night worship services. Orndorff states that “there is nothing wrong with a church meeting on any day and as often as people are willing,” but that he feels the need to “raise some questions that no one seems to be answering.”<sup>6</sup> The question that he poses is based on the Stone-Campbell desire to restore the practices of the early church as they are recorded in the New Testament. Orndorff wants to know if the Saturday night worship gathering can be a replacement for the local church meeting on the first day of the week. Orndorff asks if the church meets on the first day of the week only out of tradition, or if there is a greater reason. Clearly, for Orndorff, the question is asked to determine if it is legal for the church to worship on a day other than the first day of the week. He states:

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<sup>2</sup> Don Wilson, “Why Saturday Night Worship?,” *Christian Standard* December 22, 2002, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, “Why Saturday Night Worship?,” 4.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, “Why Saturday Night Worship?,” 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> See below for more on *The Restoration Herald*, 102-3, 140, and 154, fn. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Harold N. Orndorff, Jr., “Mailbox,” *Christian Standard* February 16, 2003, 17.

If the reason for gathering on the first day of the week is because it is in harmony with approved apostolic practice found in the New Testament, in what sense are we attempting to restore New Testament Christianity if we replace first-day assemblies with assemblies on other days of the week?<sup>7</sup>

Orndorff is quite correct to assert that few are answering the questions he poses because there is little need to answer them. If, as Orndorff would apparently claim, the New Testament clearly and universally defines when the church can and cannot gather, and therefore functions as a constitution for the church that may not be deviated from, then the only answer to his question is to admit that the churches and individuals who gather on Saturday nights to worship have fallen away from the apostolic precedent and are thus guilty of heresy.<sup>8</sup>

Yet there is another reason why Orndorff's questions are unanswerable. The Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic that would allow one to demand strict conformity to apostolic practices, such as meeting on the first day of the week, has been subject to numerous revisions in emphasis, to the point of outright rejection, since the time of Alexander Campbell. Orndorff and other traditionalist interpreters of the Restoration Plea, however, retain many aspects of this Enlightenment hermeneutic; thus, the questions that he is asking are grounded in a hermeneutic approach to the Bible that his addressees do not share. Alexander Campbell employed a hermeneutic based on Baconian induction as the concept was filtered through the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism.<sup>9</sup> Campbell regarded the Bible as a collection of facts, following Bacon's

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<sup>7</sup> Orndorff, "Mailbox," 17.

<sup>8</sup> Rick Chromey responds to Orndorff in May 2003 in a letter written for the same forum. Chromey offers a playfully literal apologetic for Saturday night worship, claiming that since the New Testament documents were penned in and for a Hebrew context and since the Hebrew concept of a "day" ended and began at sundown, worship on what is our Saturday night actually corresponds to the beginning of the first day of the week in the Hebrew way of thinking. Rick Chromey, "Mailbox," *Christian Standard* May 4, 2003, 13. See also, Murch, *Christians Only*, 61, where Murch claims that early in the development of the Brush Run church under the leadership of Alexander Campbell, the church "looked upon the first day of the week as a sort of Jewish Sabbath moved up one day on the calendar, and they applied many of the old Sabbath laws in its observance. They could show no Scripture authorizing the change. The Brush Run Brethren discovered that the early church met on the first day of the week for fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers, and observed it as the Lord's Day commemorating His death, burial, and resurrection."

<sup>9</sup> See above, 33-45.

definition of a fact as “something said or something done.”<sup>10</sup> However, since the events recorded in the Bible are not directly available for study or confirmation, Campbell saw that students of the Bible must depend heavily on the reports of others, in this case the New Testament writers, for their information regarding these events.<sup>11</sup> Disciples of Christ scholar S. Morris Eames describes Campbell’s method of determining the reliability of the Biblical reports as a two-fold process, first asking “does the report seem reasonable to us?” and second asking, “does it conform to the criterion for the examination of the testimony of others?”<sup>12</sup> This second question is further broken down into four additional parts wherein the interpreter must consider: 1) whether the facts are “sensible,” that is, whether they are understandable through the five senses of the spectators;<sup>13</sup> 2) whether these facts are publicly attestable, seen by several persons; 3) whether from these facts extend “certain ‘monumental and commemorative’ institutions existing from the time of an event to the present” (such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper) which show an historical confirmation of the facts; and 4) whether these institutions existed from the time that these facts occurred.<sup>14</sup>

Eames argues that a key part of Alexander Campbell’s hermeneutic method was the study of language, from “the consideration of the meaning of a word, to the purport of a

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<sup>10</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Here Campbell’s views are entirely consistent with Scottish Common Sense philosophy. M. A. Stewart cites the work of Scottish philosopher George Campbell who, in a work defending supernatural miracles against David Hume’s skepticism, popularized “the thesis that testimony is ‘a natural and original influence on belief’, moderated rather than proved by experience. The burden of proof lies with someone who wants to contest rather than accept a testimony . . . , and then the weight of contrary testimony on the particular occasion is more significant than the extraordinary nature of the event attested. A witness to a disaster does not lose credibility from the fact that no such disaster has occurred before, but only from a proven record of unreliability; unreliability cannot, however, be established by opposing putative testimony to the experienced course of nature since, on the contrary, our knowledge of the latter embodies testimony.” M. A. Stewart, “Religion and Rational Theology,” *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment*, Alexander Broadie, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See George Campbell, *A Dissertation on Miracles: Containing An Examination of the Principles Advanced by David Hume*, Lewis White Beck, ed., rpt. (Originally published: Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1762), p. 15-16, 19, 21-8, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Again, Alexander Campbell reveals the debt he owes to Scottish philosophy by locating knowledge in the five senses.

<sup>14</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 22-23. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell and Robert Owen, *A Debate on the Evidences of Christianity: Containing an Examination of “The Social System,” and all of the Systems of Scepticism of Ancient and Modern Times: Vol. I and II*, (Cincinnati: Robinson and Fairbank, 1829), I, 170; and Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1836*, rpt., (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 411-418.

sentence, to the production of entire documents.”<sup>15</sup> His debt to Locke and Bacon in this regard is not small. Eames notes that Campbell is in agreement with Bacon that “the relation between a word and the idea which it represents ‘is the nearest of all relations in the universe, for the idea is in the word, and the word is in the idea.’”<sup>16</sup> From this comes the notion that the Bible, properly translated, can reveal its exact meaning to the average reader who need not rely on philosophies or theories of interpretation to understand, not only the meaning of the Bible, but the truth contained therein.<sup>17</sup> According to Eames, it is Bacon to whom Campbell is most heavily indebted for his understanding of the Word of God. For Bacon, words and ideas are inextricably bound together, and Campbell uses this understanding of language to create a doctrine of the Word of God where God reveals himself through the words of the Bible. Eames summarizes Campbell’s position by stating that the ideas of God are so closely bound to the language of the Bible that an empirical study of the reports in the Bible is “the only method by which man may now, at this stage in human history, come to know God.”<sup>18</sup> A further implication of this methodology is that the study of the Bible becomes, in effect, a science wherein one might arrive at the correct meaning of a given passage only through applying the proper technique. It was believed that such a “scientific” study of a given passage reveals the singular meaning of the passage and all contrary readings are necessarily incorrect.

In his early thought Campbell searched the Christian scriptures in this empirical manner for commands, examples, and, only when neither of the first two could conclusively address a theological issue, necessary inferences that would allow him to construct a theology that exactly conformed to the “ancient gospel.” The categories of commands and examples relied on direct evidence from scripture, either an explicit

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<sup>15</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> This understanding of scripture is still used to “prove” a point, as in Victor Knowles’ claim that “What makes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ an indisputable matter is that these events are firmly grounded in Scripture.” Victor Knowles, “I’m Not Going There!,” *Christian Standard* (July 13, 2003), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell*, 24-25.

command from Jesus or an apostle, or the example of the first century church, which provided definitive instruction of a given doctrine or practice. Thus, the leaders of the Restoration Movement reckoned, if Jesus commanded that his disciples be baptized, and if the early church carried out this command by baptizing new converts by immersion, then the apostolic practice is clearly revealed and may not be changed. However, in other matters where there is no clear command or example to rely on to provide such objective evidence of the apostolic practice, it is necessary for Stone-Campbell scholars to make an inference of what the apostolic practice may have been. In the example given above, Harold Orndorff and other traditionalists believe that the New Testament contains clear and sufficient commands and examples to limit the gathering of the church to the first day of the week, while Don Wilson and progressive Independents claim that the New Testament offers no such clear command and infer that they may therefore conduct worship services on Saturday night.

As might be expected, such conflicting understandings of apostolic practices, made in an environment where some adherents of the Stone-Campbell Movement believe that it is necessary to restore the exact pattern of the apostolic Church, produces no end of controversy and discord within the various segments of the Stone-Campbell Movement. With nothing to adjudicate between conflicting inferences and interpretations, and no objective way to tell a "good" inference from a "bad" inference, outside of the opinion of the individual making the inference, conflict over different understandings of scripture is almost guaranteed to become acrimonious. Indeed, it was largely the conflict over the use of the Stone-Campbell hermeneutic that looked for commands, example, and necessary inference that led to the first division in the Stone-Campbell Movement, between the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the remaining body of the Stone-Campbell Movement, and this hermeneutic has also played a role in subsequent divisions within the Movement.

Church of Christ scholar Michael Casey notes that from 1830, when Alexander Campbell stopped publication of the *Christian Baptist* and issued a new journal, the *Millennial Harbinger*, Campbell's emphasis began to shift from a sectarian to a more denominational outlook.<sup>19</sup> By the end of the decade, following his debate with Catholic Bishop John Purcell, which cast Campbell in the role of defender of Protestantism, and the publication of the Lunenburg letter,<sup>20</sup> where Campbell argues that there are Christians among the denominations, Casey claims that "Campbell openly embraced Protestantism and a common civil religion of the United States as the chosen nation of God that would usher in the millennium."<sup>21</sup> This shift in emphasis required a considerable change in hermeneutics that accorded a greater role to necessary inferences drawn from Scripture, as opposed to earlier in Campbell's career when he had demanded strict conformity to the express commands and examples from the New Testament. Casey then argues that by the time of Alexander Campbell's death, the Stone-Campbell Movement "had already developed conservative and moderate interpretations of restoration that argued respectfully against the validity of inferences and for the validity of inferences."<sup>22</sup> That is, the Movement was increasingly divided between those who employed a hermeneutic that demanded a command or example for the theology and practices of the church and those who developed a hermeneutic that allowed the church to make inferences to solve problems that are not addressed in the Bible.

In addition to the impact that this hermeneutic shift had on the Stone-Campbell program of restoration, M. Eugene Boring perceptively notes an important distinction

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<sup>19</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 97-8.

<sup>20</sup> See below, 110.

<sup>21</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 196. These conservative and moderate interpretations may be seen as representing what would one day be the three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Most conservative, and most insistent on the illegitimacy of inferences made for the practices of the modern church, is the Church of Christ (a cappella). Initially taking a moderate view on the use of inferences, the Independent Christian Churches, while remaining more moderate than the Church of Christ, nevertheless allowed this moderation to coalesce into a highly sectarian form of Christianity. The Disciples of Christ have continued to promote a moderate to more liberal approach to Christianity.

between the first generation Stone-Campbell leaders and subsequent generations: that Alexander Campbell *created* a hermeneutical tradition, whereas following generations *inherited* a hermeneutical tradition.<sup>23</sup> Lester McAllister and William Tucker, Disciples of Christ historians, claim that “second generation preachers and editors of the Disciples were alike in one respect: they moved into positions of power and influence without the benefit of theological education.”<sup>24</sup> Boring notes that the first generation of Stone-Campbell leaders had

been aware of philosophy and the categories of philosophical thought. It was the second and following generations that had grown up only in the American Disciples tradition that was oblivious to philosophy, and they supposed they were devoid of it. The Second Generation thus had a naïveté the First Generation did not have.<sup>25</sup>

It is evident that the Campbells had a much greater awareness of Locke, Bacon, and the Scottish Common Sense Realists than did later generations, and it is true that Alexander Campbell often referred to the writings of these philosophers in his own work. However, when Thomas and Alexander Campbell utilize these philosophies in the interest of their theological and hermeneutic program, they are not regarded as speculative philosophy, as such, but as a means to comprehend reality as it is.

While Boring’s assessment of the second generation’s relation to philosophy is certainly accurate, there is an important sense in which Thomas and Alexander Campbell and other early leaders believed that they lacked a particular philosophical orientation, a perspective that they bequeathed to subsequent generations. This “lack” of philosophy is evident in the founding documents of the Restoration Movement. Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* proclaims the possibility of promoting a “simple evangelical

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<sup>23</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1975), 230.

<sup>25</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 115.

christianity, free from all mixture of human opinions and interventions of men.”<sup>26</sup> It is apparent that the Campbells failed to make a sufficient distinction between the philosophical approaches that they applied to the interpretation of the Bible and the results of that interpretative strategy.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in a letter from Alexander Campbell printed in the *Millennial Harbinger* (utilized by Leroy Garrett in Garrett’s argument against the restoration concept),<sup>28</sup> Campbell claims that it is precisely the traditions of the church and philosophy that have hindered the movement he leads:

Tradition and philosophy, falsely so-called, have been the obstructions which have stood in my way. I never thought nor intended to introduce a new or an improved philosophy to annihilate any theory so-called—any philosophy ancient or modern. I profess to apprehend, if not to comprehend, the materials of all the existing sectarian theories of any notoriety, domestic or foreign. Strictly educated in the science and details of Calvinism, the politics and polities of Calvinism in the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregational forms, and having witnessed as well as experienced much of its influences, personal and social, I was induced to substitute the Christian Scriptures alone, as all sufficient, and alone sufficient for the church and the world—Jewish and Gentile.<sup>29</sup>

Campbell felt that by appealing to the Bible alone he could bypass the vagaries and controversies of ecclesiastical history in favor of the simple gospel.

It is a central part of the Independent Christian Churches mythology that Campbell and other first generation leaders actually succeeded in using the Bible alone, without any admixture of human philosophy or theology. In reality, they read the Bible through the particular epistemology of Scottish Common Sense philosophy, and thus they never read the Bible alone as they believed they did. By the end of the Civil War, Campbell and many other Restorationists employed an inconsistent hermeneutic where they used the competing categories of commands and examples found in the New Testament (which

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<sup>26</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Casey notes that Robert Richardson, a close friend and disciple of Alexander Campbell, recognized the danger of the amalgamation of philosophical teaching with divine revelation. Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 172-3.

<sup>28</sup> This letter and Garrett’s argument against restoration are discussed below, 89-96. This portion of the letter is not mentioned by Garrett.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*: 1858, 471-2.

could conceivably be portrayed as relying on the Bible alone) and necessary inferences drawn from the Scriptures (which, by necessity, involved human reasoning) as it best suited them and allowed them to maintain their position and to win arguments against those within and without the confines of the Movement.<sup>30</sup> In spite of the obvious inconsistencies and problems of this hermeneutic, Alexander Campbell continued to make an effort to place his theology into a non-theological and non-philosophical framework, or as Michael Casey says, “Campbell was still trying to place his theological system on a rational foundation that would be beyond doubt or refutation.”<sup>31</sup> Casey goes on to argue that conservative interpreters of the restoration concept looked to the Bible for immutable laws and facts, and moderate interpreters looked to the common sense of the church to determine what practices were approved and expedient. “Each side,” writes Casey, “was rationalistic and thought that its view was correct and validated by ‘reality.’”<sup>32</sup>

Due to the inherited hermeneutic tradition and the Scottish Common Sense philosophic outlook that, it was believed, corresponded directly to reality, subsequent generations did not need to search the scriptures inductively for Bible facts presented as commands and examples—they had the received tradition of the de facto Stone-Campbell denomination to rely on. The Independent Christian Churches felt free to utilize a hermeneutic that allowed for a great number of methods and innovations that the Church of Christ rejected, most notably the use of musical instruments in worship, missionary organizations (though it should be noted that such organizations are not sponsored by a formal Independent denominational hierarchy, but by individuals and autonomous congregations), and formal annual meetings (which do not claim to make doctrinal pronouncements or set the direction of the Independent Christian Churches).<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> See Michael Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 159-167, 211, 216, 248.

<sup>31</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 197.

<sup>32</sup> Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 198.

<sup>33</sup> This claim is examined below, 159-63.

Independents did not, however, follow the Disciples of Christ in adopting a hermeneutic that disallows the possibility of a restoration of certain forms and practices of the New Testament church. The Independent Christian Churches continues to demand strict conformity to certain restorationist elements—most notably in the area of salvation theology, particularly its insistence on believer's baptism by immersion.<sup>34</sup> However, within the Independent Christian Churches there is a great difference of opinion on what aspects of restoration are essential and what aspects are malleable. The Independent Christian Churches did not take the approach of the Church of Christ (a cappella) that demands exact conformity to the minutia of their understanding of the Biblical pattern of the early church, nor did they follow the path of Disciples of Christ which rejected the concept of pattern restoration outright. Rather, they occupy an intermediate position that uncritically combines moderate and conservative positions and thus, in walking the middle path between what they consider to be the legalism of the Church of Christ and the liberalism of the Disciples of Christ, the Independents imagine that they are the true heirs of Stone-Campbell theology, as they alone attempt to retain the twin doctrines of restoration and unity. This allows the Independent Christian Churches to believe that it represents the true church, where the faith and practice of the New Testament church are more perfectly restored than in other branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement or in any other Christian denomination.

Since the 1940s aspects of the inherited Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic of the early Restoration Movement leaders have been left behind by some Independents as they have attempted to find fellowship with other Christian groups.<sup>35</sup> While Harold Ford was constructing a strictly sectarian version of the Restoration Plea that appealed to individuals to leave the "denominations" and unite with a non-denominational church that based its

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<sup>34</sup> See below, 108-30.

<sup>35</sup> See above, 58-67.

doctrine on the "Bible alone," James DeForest Murch, along with other Independent Christian Churches ministers, was engaging the broader evangelical community.<sup>36</sup> In the 1940s Murch became a prominent leader in the National Association of Evangelicals, which Murch claims attracted some Independent Christian Churches ministers and churches "because of its strong biblical position and its similarity to the World Evangelical Alliance that Alexander Campbell had so generously endorsed."<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that the National Evangelical Association began in 1943, at the impetus of evangelical leaders, in reaction to the theological position of the Federal Council of Churches, which Murch claims promoted division due to its liberal theological bias that was neither "Bible-believing" nor "Christ-honoring" and failed to testify to the "historic Christian faith."<sup>38</sup> Murch served as president of several national evangelical boards, and beginning in 1945 he assumed the role of editor of *United Evangelical Action*, the official journal of the National Association of Evangelicals, which attained prominence in the evangelical community. While alliance with the National Evangelical Association was strictly voluntary, involvement with the National Evangelical Association resulted in shifts in Independent theological understanding. As Independents voluntarily associated with evangelical Christians who derived different teachings from scripture than Independents, and accepted them as members of the body of Christ, it was only natural that the exclusive doctrines created through the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic of the Independent Christian Churches would begin to lose some of their distinctiveness in this changing context.<sup>39</sup> This resulted in a shift in Independent hermeneutics, which occurred unconsciously, that

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<sup>36</sup> Evangelicalism is defined and discussed below, 175-81.

<sup>37</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 350. Murch notes that involvement with the National Association of Evangelicals drew strong criticism from certain Independent Christian Churches quarters, which felt that the NAE position was fundamentalist, denounced the creedal aspects of the NAE, disagreed with the doctrines applied to the nature of the Bible, and argued that joining such an organization condoned denominationalism.

<sup>38</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 234-5.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of the relationship between the Independent Christian Churches and American Evangelicalism, 182-88.

eventually led many individuals and ministers away from attempts to restore the New Testament Church in its exact form and pattern.

Thus, the exchange between Don Wilson and Harold Orndorff provides representative examples of the two sides of Independent hermeneutics. Wilson utilizes a hermeneutic that allows the individual church to determine the practicality of an expedient that is not directly authorized in the New Testament, whereas Orndorff employs a hermeneutic that does not allow human intervention in changing what he believes is a command clearly stated in Scripture. Consequently, the component of restoration in contemporary Independent Christian Churches theology is a subject of considerable discussion and debate. Some parties, of which Orndorff is an example, continue to argue for a strict restoration of the early Christian Church according to the pattern or blueprint found in the New Testament, such as was argued for in the early thought of Alexander Campbell, while others, exemplified by Wilson, are more concerned to restore New Testament Christianity according to a "biblical worldview," a set of overarching principles derived from the New Testament documents. To this end, there is a debate over whether or not Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott even wanted to restore the early church according to a pattern found in the New Testament.

Perhaps the most innovative and influential contribution to Stone-Campbell theology in recent decades, and the source that brought this debate to greater public awareness, is Church of Christ scholar Leroy Garrett's discussion of the restoration concept in his history, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, which was published in 1981. In the opening pages of this work, Garrett goes to great lengths to sanitize the restoration element of Stone-Campbell theology, arguing that the early leaders were interested in reformation rather than restoration.<sup>40</sup> Garrett sweeps aside the early years of the

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<sup>40</sup> Some form of Garrett's revisionist argument, at least the aspects that downplay restorationism, has been rather broadly, but by no means universally, accepted among Independent Christian Churches scholars.

Restoration Movement, even the contributions of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott, and instead points to a nineteen article series on "Reformation," written by Alexander Campbell's disciple Robert Richardson starting in 1847, as a contribution to Stone-Campbell theology that "above all other of the early sources . . . probably represents the true character of the Stone-Campbell Movement, reflecting as it does the genius of the plea in the most attractive terms."<sup>41</sup> Garrett quotes Richardson as claiming that the primary aim of the Movement was Christian unity, and he characterizes Richardson's development of the Stone-Campbell program of union as urging "two important truths: there can be unity of faith and at the same time liberty of private judgment."<sup>42</sup> These seemingly contradictory truths, Garret writes, were reconciled by Richardson through the claim that "the divine basis of union is the acceptance of the great fundamental truths of the Christian faith."<sup>43</sup> This program, claims Richardson, addresses two important failures of Protestantism: Protestantism is too concerned with defining the details of doctrine and making those details into the basis of communion, and it makes opinions into matters of faith. Thus, the Stone-Campbell program addresses these errors "by recognizing that people can never agree on details but only in generals."<sup>44</sup>

Central to Garrett's argument is his claim that the early leaders of the Movement conceived of their labors as a reformation and not a restoration.<sup>45</sup> While the concepts of restoration and reformation are closely related, they represent two very different approaches to Christian renewal. Garrett claims that Campbell saw himself as a reformer in the line of the Protestant Reformation and that he "sought to finish what Luther and Calvin had begun."<sup>46</sup> Garrett acknowledges that restoration movements did exist

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<sup>41</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 4-5. These "truths" echo the central claims in Alfred DeGroot's version of the Restoration Plea (discussed above, 62-8) and are subject to the same problems and criticisms.

<sup>43</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 5. The quotation is Garrett's paraphrase of Richardson.

<sup>44</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 7.

throughout the history of Protestantism, notably in the Radical Reformation, but that the idea of restoration contradicts that of reformation.<sup>47</sup> It is worth quoting Garrett at length to understand how he distinguishes between these two terms:

A restorationist rejects existing denominations as in any sense the church, ignores whatever has happened in intervening centuries, and insists upon restoring the primitive church. He assumes that the New Testament provides a fixed pattern for that church, and so there have been literally *hundreds* of sects, each claiming to be the true church. . . .

While this concept was present in the Stone-Campbell Movement, it was the principle of reformation that dominated, at least for five or six decades. The reformer holds that the church *does* exist, but that it may be decadent and in need of reform. In fact it has *always* been in need of reform, even from the beginning, including those churches founded by the apostles. And reform must take place *within* the church, and it is an ongoing process.

This was the view of Stone and Campbell, and 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>48</sup>

Garrett, however, does not describe the characteristics of this always existent church or how one might determine which aspects need to be reformed and which do not. He rightly notes the ahistorical basis of restoration, but his concept of reform is no less ahistorical in that Garrett regards “the great fundamental truths of the Christian faith” as truths that can be described in generalities, outside of the contexts in which the various theologies and doctrines were created. Garrett is partially correct in his definitions of restoration and reform. However, neither restoration nor reformation should be understood as monolithic entities—each may have a variety of different interpretations.<sup>49</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, reformation may be understood to be reform undertaken within a Christian tradition, in light of its historical continuities. Reformation is an effort to amend or undo certain

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<sup>47</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> See two articles in the *Encyclopedia of the Stone Campbell Movement* for different understandings of restoration throughout Christian history and within the Restoration Movement itself, Richard T. Hughes, “Restoration, Historical Models of,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 635-38; and Robert O. Fife, “‘Restoration,’ Meanings of Within the Movement,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 638-42. Likewise, Alister McGrath details four reformations for the period of 1500 to 1750 (the Lutheran Reformation, the Calvinist Reformation, the Radical Reformation, and the Catholic or Counter-Reformation). See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 61-66.

practices or theologies that have become problematic for that tradition, but would leave largely intact the existing structures of polity, worship, and theology. Restoration, on the other hand, may be said to entail the ahistorical desire to restore the theology and practice of a specific bygone time in Christian history, in the belief that current instantiations of the Church have strayed so far from the correct practices and theologies as to no longer be Christian and must be bypassed in order to restore what restorationists believe to be a pure form of Christianity.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the two approaches to Christianity are mutually exclusive—there is no reform that can be carried out within a church that is entirely apostate, nor is there a need to restore something that merely requires reform.

In his argument against understanding Stone-Campbell theology as restoration theology, Garrett claims that the phrase “Restoration Movement” was not used by the founders of the Movement and did not appear until 1913, after which time it was primarily used by conservative Independent Christian Churches and Church of Christ (a cappella) historians and scholars.<sup>51</sup> Due to the late date that the phrase came into use, the term “Restoration Movement” is not, for Garrett, a valid description of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Garrett allows that the founding fathers of the Movement “occasionally used the word *restoration*,” but he argues that they used it as “either a synonym for reformation or a means for accomplishing it.”<sup>52</sup> To support this assertion, Garrett cites a letter written by Alexander Campbell,<sup>53</sup> printed in the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1858, in which Campbell seemingly equates reformation with restoration. Interestingly, the restoration that Campbell speaks of is subject to the “demands of . . . reason, [and] conscience,” that is, reason and conscience are prioritized above scripture in accordance with the

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<sup>50</sup> See above for a comparison of the hermeneutics that Alexander Campbell and Martin Luther employed for their respective restorative or reformatory efforts, 51-3, and below, for the different understandings that each had of the character of reformation or restoration, 202-3.

<sup>51</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> See above, 28.

epistemological assumptions Campbell adopted from Scottish Common Sense Realism. In this letter, Campbell writes:

I have been, in my own weak and imperfect way, advocating a *reformation*, not so much in *doctrine*, but for the advancement of the best interests of mankind, for the honor of our Lord and Master, for the good of his people, for the union of Christians, and the conversion of the world. To this end I have for years been pleading for a *catholic basis*, broad as the foundation on which the Lord Jesus said he would build his church or kingdom. . . . A reformation, or restoration of primitive Christianity, in letter and in spirit, in word and in deed, was proposed by my Father before I left the University of Glasgow, but as then conceived, only in its pedo-Baptist and political attitudes and gestures. This did not, by any means satisfy the demands of my reason, my conscience, or my understanding of the teachings of the inspired Apostles.<sup>54</sup>

Garrett seems to regard this statement as a path out of what he considers to be the quagmire of pattern or blueprint restoration in Stone-Campbell theology. Indeed, he quotes Alexander Campbell again speaking of a “Reformation, or restoration, of the ancient order of things” and claims that this statement “cannot mean that Campbell looked to the New Testament as providing an exact blueprint or pattern for the church, which he sought to ‘restore’ in an age when the church no longer existed, which is the traditional restorationist concept.”<sup>55</sup> Garrett does not, however, suggest how one might reform “primitive Christianity,” when, by definition, primitive Christianity can exist only in the distant past and is therefore not subject to reform. Garrett also stresses that the reformation Campbell describes here is based “not so much on doctrine, but on a catholic basis.”<sup>56</sup> Thus Garrett argues that Campbell held a “broad view of Christian unity” that was ultimately thwarted by the introduction of restorationist thought. Garrett claims that

When the Movement eventually began to fracture a half century later [ca. 1880] . . . , it is because the catholic, reformational position, so long preserved by the influence of Stone and Campbell, gave way to the exclusivistic, restorationist persuasion.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1858*, 471-2. Garrett’s use of this letter is found in Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 10. Disciples of Christ scholar, M. Eugene Boring argues that Alexander Campbell was aware of some of the problems involved in restoring the New Testament church.

However, Garrett's argument is far from convincing. It is important to note that the period of time (1840s and 1850s) in which Garrett finds the "true character" of the Restoration Movement is after the first hermeneutic shift had taken place and had greatly influenced Robert Richardson, whose writing Garrett refers to as best characterizing Stone-Campbell theology.<sup>58</sup> More glaringly problematic is Garrett's claim that the founding fathers of the Movement used "restoration" as a synonym for reformation or a means of accomplishing that reformation—this is simply not the case. At best one might argue that the words were used synonymously only after the shift in hermeneutics when the Stone-Campbell Movement had become more denominational in its outlook and therefore less sectarian and less concerned with an exact restoration of the New Testament church. Alexander Campbell on many occasions emphatically denies that reformation is even possible in Christianity. In his first journal, the *Christian Baptist*, he states:

Human systems, whether of philosophy or of religion, are proper subjects of reformation; but *Christianity can not be reformed* [emphasis mine]. 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. . . . 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,) [*sic*] can promise a better result than those that have been attempted and languished unto death. We are glad to see, in the above extract, that the thing proposed, is to bring 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

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Like Garrett, Boring claims that Campbell was not "attempting to replicate a supposed pattern for the church in all particulars." Rather, Boring argues that Campbell "considered 'restoration' to be an adjective modifying 'movement'—a dynamic process always on the way, not the claim to have achieved a static result." However, he also acknowledges that in making this claim he is not attempting "to absolve Campbell of the fundamental hermeneutical error of pattern restorationism. . . . I [Boring] am simply arguing that, for Campbell, pattern restorationism is in the same category as verbal inspiration: both were surface epiphenomena of a deeper-lying reality, the canonical function of the New Testament for the life, thought, and mission of the church." Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 83-4.

<sup>58</sup> See above, 88-9, for this hermeneutic shift.

presented in that blessed volume; and this is to *restore the ancient order of things*.<sup>59</sup>

In a like manner, much early Stone-Campbell theology certainly fits under Garrett's definition of restorationism. From its inception, Stone-Campbell theology demanded a rejection of other denominations as, in any sense, representative of the Church, ignored the centuries of Christian history by arguing for the apostasy of the denominations and by arguing that it was not only possible, but necessary, to restore the primitive church. Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* does precisely this. In it Campbell appeals to the "genuine subjects of christianity" to join with the Christian Association of Washington. Campbell states that it is the goal of this Association to "heal and remove" the divisions of the church—but by this he does not intend to find unity among the denominations, but to destroy the denominations that have "corrupted . . . the church."<sup>60</sup> The unity that he seeks is not with already existing churches divided over denominational creeds and human speculations, but with the Christian individuals who are part of these groups, and whom Campbell invites to leave their denominations to join with those who desire to "conform to the original pattern laid down in the New Testament."<sup>61</sup> Thomas Campbell's goal is not reformation, but to "exhibit a complete conformity to the Apostolick [*sic*] church."<sup>62</sup> In a like manner, Alexander Campbell began as a restorationist and continued to hold restorationist positions throughout his life. In the same letter that Garrett uses to argue for the synonymous use of restoration and reformation, Alexander Campbell, speaking of the difficulties his movement had encountered, states:

Of course we have had to encounter fearful odds in power; indeed the combined power of Papal and Protestant Christendom so far as we came in contact with their respective idols. The only oasis in this desert that came within my horizon was the Baptist community [the recipient of this letter

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Ford, *History of The Restoration Plea*, 31. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist: Seven Volumes in One*, (Joplin: College Press, 1983), 128 [Vol. II, No. VII, February 7, 1825].

<sup>60</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 10.

was a Baptist]. True, I found a number of my acquaintance in all the denominations of the day with whom I cordially sympathized, and of these a considerable portion sympathized with me. . . .

The Baptists in Scotland and in America, as you know, are generally nothing more nor less than immersed Calvinists or Arminnians. Both denominations are purely sectarian, and do not build on the simple foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.<sup>63</sup>

A few years later, in 1853, Alexander Campbell writes: "The Restoration of Original Christianity, and not the reformation of Popery or of Protestantism, is the polar star of all our aims and efforts ecclesiastic."<sup>64</sup> Thus Campbell, late in his career and in the same letter that Garrett regards as containing a catholic appeal to unity, essentially rejects all of "Christendom" for its "idols" (a sentiment that Garrett fails to mention in his discussion of the letter). Campbell recognizes the possibility of Christians outside his Movement, but it is a unity only with individual members of these denominational churches and not with the churches themselves.

Where Leroy Garrett has endeavored to remove restorationist elements from Stone-Campbell theology, other contemporary Independent Christian Churches leaders are laboring to see that the restoration emphasis is retained among the Independents. At the forefront of this effort is the Christian Restoration Association. Headquartered in Mason, Ohio, this group states its purpose as lending a "helping hand to the churches," to which end it has engaged in establishing "new churches in 'destitute places,' meaning places where there is no church of Christ," the Association supported the creation of Cincinnati Bible Seminary,<sup>65</sup> and continues to support missions, and Christian service camps, and engages in money lending, leadership training, and the production of a monthly periodical,

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<sup>63</sup> A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*: 1858, 472.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 162. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*: 1853, rpt., (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 61.

<sup>65</sup> This occurred in 1924 at the height of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. The reason for the establishment of the school was to "combat the infidelity being espoused in the preacher training schools." H. Lee Mason, "A Brief History of the Christian Restoration Association," *The Christian Restoration Association*, Jan. 26, 2005 < <http://www.thecra.org/history.htm>>.

*The Restoration Herald*.<sup>66</sup> In an article posted on the Christian Restoration Association website, Robert Mallett claims that in the United States and around the world there are many people who desire to “be known as ‘Christians’ only” as they seek to “restore the church of the New Testament.”<sup>67</sup> Mallett follows the early Stone-Campbell leaders in his claims that his version of restoration allows no human philosophies or thought to taint the Church’s doctrine. He says:

This movement is not “just another denomination,” since we have not chosen a denominational or “man-made” name, creed, or book of doctrine. Our name, as individual members, is Christian and as congregations, Churches of Christ or Christian Churches. As these terms are scriptural and based upon the Word of God, we can honestly claim to be “Christians only.” We are not the only Christians; we are Christians only! As to our creed (from the Latin “credo,” meaning “I believe”) we believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, as Lord and as Savior. Our book of doctrine, or list of beliefs, is simply the Word of God. Thus as one man has expressed it, “We have no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the name Christian.”<sup>68</sup>

Mallett speaks of the New Testament church as a “pure and simple” entity. He claims that “it was organized at the command of Christ and under the direction of His Spirit-directed Apostles. Its teachings, doctrines, and ordinances, free from all pomp and ritual, were plainly revealed within the pages of God’s Word.”<sup>69</sup> In a passage that echoes Alexander Campbell’s comments in the *Christian Baptist*, Mallett argues against the possibility of reform, claiming:

If we take the church as we find it today, after nearly 2000 years of wear and tear, abuse and disuse, and try to reform it, we will never bring it back to its original simplicity and purity. Our efforts might result in a beautiful ritual and ceremony—that which the average individual thinks he wants in a church—but you would not have the original New Testament church! On the other hand we can take this plan-book or “blueprint,” this verbal picture of the early church, and “restore” it to its original doctrines, ordinances, and faith. The desires and doctrines of men would be ignored; the Bible alone would furnish all the necessary details. If this were done,

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<sup>66</sup> Mason, “A Brief History of the Christian Restoration Association.”

<sup>67</sup> Robert Mallett, “What Do You Mean, Restoration Movement?,” *The Christian Restoration Association*, Jan. 26, 2005 < <http://www.thecra.org/restmovement.html>>.

<sup>68</sup> Mallett, “What do You Mean, Restoration Movement?”

<sup>69</sup> Mallett, “What do You Mean, Restoration Movement?”

what would be the result? We would find ourselves face to face with the 1st century church alive and functioning within a 20th century society!<sup>70</sup>

It is necessary to briefly examine one aspect of the claim that there are many people around the world wanting to restore the New Testament teachings and to be known as “Christians only.”<sup>71</sup> Mallett’s argument that the segment of the Independent Christian Churches that he represents claims to be “not the only Christians, but Christians only,” repeats a popular slogan in Stone-Campbell circles. While it may appear, at first glance, to be an ecumenical statement, it actually functions in the opposite manner. In claiming to be “Christians only,” it is suggested that other denominations have erroneously added to the gospel and are Christians *plus* a given set of doctrines and philosophies that are not found in the Christian scriptures. One cannot be a “Christian only” and be Episcopalian or Pentecostal—it is necessary to leave those (supposedly false) teachings and accretions behind in order to be fully accepted by the restorationists. It is here that the denominational character of the Independent Christian Churches becomes evident. While they may not have a structured hierarchy, the Independents do have a more or less rigid set of teachings on which they demand conformity. This denominational aspect may be further seen in Lee Mason’s comments on church planting. The phrase “church of Christ,” as Mason uses it is entirely sectarian and is used in a denominational sense as some of the locations for these new church plants are in “Ohio, Oklahoma, Illinois, Arkansas, Virginia, Michigan, and Iowa.”<sup>72</sup> It is obviously not that there are no Christian churches (Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, etc.) in these “destitute places,” but that there

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<sup>70</sup> Mallett, “What do You Mean, Restoration Movement?” It is not my intention to extensively treat the minutia of the positions outlined above, as these positions are critiqued throughout this thesis. For a broad critique of some of the assertions and assumptions that Mallett and Mason make, see James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM Press, 1981). For a discussion of the development of fundamentalism in its American setting, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>71</sup> The argument that there are many groups attempting to restore New Testament Christianity is similar to James DeForest Murch’s attempt to identify Stone-Campbell restorationists among diverse groups throughout Christian history (see below, 140-2). Each is based on a poor reading of the groups claimed to have such similarities, where similarities to the Restoration Movement are emphasized and dissimilarities are ignored.

<sup>72</sup> Mason, “A Brief History of the Christian Restoration Association.”

are none that the Christian Restoration Association recognizes as being properly conformed to the New Testament pattern. Therefore, what the author is essentially saying is that there are no churches of the Independent Christian Churches *denomination*.<sup>73</sup>

The claims that Mallet makes about the restoration of the New Testament church and the nature of the Bible, when taken at face value, are exceedingly naïve. A number of challenges to and problems with the views that Mallett holds have already been examined and shown to be grounded in the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism. His views are, however, entirely in line with Independent Christian Churches theology, and there is a sense in which the claims he makes represent the original, and desired, end of Independent theology. Mallett fulfills Stone and Campbell's theological program in a way that Stone and Campbell never could, in that they were to some extent aware of the philosophies they were using to create their hermeneutic.<sup>74</sup> Mallett is simply proclaiming the received tradition that Eugene Boring spoke of in the second generation of Disciples leaders. Now five generations removed from Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott, it is the genius of the pattern restorationist segment of the Independent Christian Churches to create, in a very real sense, a church that they believe has no admixture of human philosophy and theology. The Independents inherited a hermeneutic and a theology based on Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, which one-hundred fifty years removed from that inheritance allows them to believe that they are not a denomination, but are Christians only and that their particular (and often peculiar) interpretations of Christian scriptures are nothing more than the simple, revealed truth of

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<sup>73</sup> A further indicator of denominational status and a common critique of the restorationist position is seen in the fact that there are no "Christian Restoration Associations" mentioned in the "blueprint" of the Church, the New Testament. In a group that lacks a formal denominational hierarchy, organizations such as the Christian Restoration Association actually function as a denominational headquarters to make pronouncements and changes in doctrine and practice. This claim and the denominational aspects of the Independent Christian Churches will be explored more fully in Chapter Four.

<sup>74</sup> An awareness of the philosophy they were using does not mean that they acknowledged their philosophical assumptions as philosophy as such. See above, 33-45.

the New Testament. Their doctrines, ordinances,<sup>75</sup> and “plainly revealed” teachings come from the pure and simple New Testament scriptures—which, it is understood, do not need any hermeneutic apparatus to be understood. In the same fashion, Mallet would argue that this theology was not created by Alexander Campbell, but only discovered, or more accurately, rediscovered, by him. Thus, these Independents have done something that was actually impossible for Stone and Campbell—they have imagined that they have succeeded in creating a church that is based on the “Bible alone.”

The two groups created by the division among Independent Christian Churches adherents argue for and against the concept of pattern restoration, with traditionalists supporting such a conception of pattern restoration and progressives adopting an approach to restoration that attempts to restore the character, rather than the pattern, of the New Testament Church. Given the sharp division between these two groups, it must be asked: What, if anything, do these groups have in common? The fundamental identity of the Independent Christian Churches, among both traditionalists and progressives, is found in the restoration concept. Broadly speaking, there are certain elements that are common to both groups—most notably they both claim to have a high view of the Bible<sup>76</sup> and both groups place a great deal of emphasis on immersion. However, these commonalities do not represent the core of Independent theology. The Independent identity is shaped by “restoration,” yet this restoration is not the restoration of either the progressives or the traditionalists. Rather, the concept of restoration has been stripped of any objective meaning, which is replaced with whatever meaning the individual wants to give it.

Discussing a conference on restoration studies, held at Abilene Christian University in July

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<sup>75</sup> By ordinances, Mallett refers to baptism by immersion of an adult believer and the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. The word “ordinance” is preferred over “sacrament” among many Independent scholars because of the use by the Roman Catholic Church of the term sacrament. See C. Robert Wetzel, “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ at 2001: In Search of a Theological Center,” *Stone-Campbell Journal*, 4.1 (2002), 9.

<sup>76</sup> Though, as has been noted, their interpretation of the Bible is subject to the dictates of their reason-based hermeneutic which actually allows them to contrive whatever doctrine they want to construct, so long as they use biblical language. See, above 83, and below, 107-8.

1985, that included work on how the restoration concept was appropriated within Puritan, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Mormon, and Church of Christ groups, Richard T. Hughes writes:

As the diversity of traditions the conference explored was impressive, so was the diversity of meanings that, as conferees discovered, these various traditions have given to the theme of restoration. Struck by this dissensus, Henry Bowden finally suggested that “the meaning of the term [*restoration*] is relative to different people who appropriate it, to what they say it means, and to what activities they pursue under its aegis. Based on historical usage of institutional, doctrinal and biblical categories, *there is no meaning intrinsic to the title, and we can find no common agreement on any set of organizational forms or ideas* [emphasis added].”<sup>77</sup>

One person, such as Don Wilson, may “restore” the New Testament church through a Saturday night worship service through which a congregation may “continue to grow and reach the lost.”<sup>78</sup> Another person, such as Harold Orndorff, may “restore” the apostolic practices with an insistence on meeting only on the first day of the week. It is this eviscerated restorationist doctrine that lies at the center of Independent Christian Churches theology; therefore, at the center of Independent theology is not the Bible or the Christ, but a vacuum around which any doctrine might be constructed. This vacuum is a product of the Restoration Movement’s Scottish Common Sense origins, where the vacuum is the *tabula rasa*—but a *tabula rasa* that presupposes the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense as normative. The vacuous nature of restoration potentially allows any discourse to serve as a carrier of Independent theology. It is for this reason that Independent theology has progressed not only through Scottish Common Sense Realism, but through American values, and capitalist economics.<sup>79</sup>

The word “restoration” has become, and perhaps always has been, a carrier for biblical language that is used to create doctrines based on the Scottish Common Sense

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<sup>77</sup> Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>78</sup> Wilson, “Why Saturday Night Worship?,” 5.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter Five for the influence of capitalism on the Independent Christian Churches.

hermeneutic, which maintains certain continuities with some of the historical doctrines of the Christian Church, but these continuities are maintained through the discourse of Scottish Common Sense philosophy rather than through Christian history or Christian theology. By infusing the concept of restoration with biblical language, a minister, layman, or scholar can claim that his or her particular theological understanding is not only thoroughly biblical (which is a perfectly appropriate theological task), but is actually the uninterpreted and unmediated word of God as it springs directly from the New Testament. It is the vacuousness of restoration that allowed Alexander Campbell to argue for pattern restoration in one context and against it in another. It is around this void that Walter Scott “restored” the ancient gospel,<sup>80</sup> while at the same time another early leader of the Restoration Movement, Sidney Rigdon, left the restoration movement of Barton Stone for the restoration movement of Joseph Smith and the Mormons.<sup>81</sup> It is the vacuous nature of restorationism that pits Alfred DeGroot’s restoration against Harold Ford’s, Don Wilson’s Saturday night worship against Harold Orndorff’s demand for the church to gather on the first day of the week, and for the progressives and traditionalists to seek, each in their own way, to restore the New Testament Church.

### **Restoration in Context (I): Salvation**

The doctrine that has played the largest role in the restoration program of the Independent Christian Churches is the Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism, or more broadly, the entire salvation doctrine known among Independents as the “plan of salvation.”<sup>82</sup> The Independent Christian Churches’ doctrine of baptism eclipses every

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<sup>80</sup> See North, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 134 and Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 41-2 for two discussions on Scott’s claim to have restored the gospel on November 18, 1827. See below, 188, fn. 164.

<sup>81</sup> See North, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 140-1 and Garrison and DeGroot, *Disciples of Christ*, 300-1. Garrison and DeGroot offer particularly interesting comments on this event, in that they note a Mormon historian who regarded “the Disciples [of Christ] as forerunners of the Mormon gospel, regarding Campbell and Scott as being ‘sent forth to prepare the way before the Lord’” (300). For more on the relation between the Stone-Campbell Movement and the Mormons, see below, 126-8, and 192-3.

<sup>82</sup> This plan of salvation consists of five steps that Independents believe must occur in this order: faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The words “baptism” and “plan of

other doctrine within Independent theology, which often places this doctrine at the center of conflict for Independents.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, this doctrine has been a central conflict in all eras of Restoration Movement theology as it is among the most distinctive of the doctrines promoted by the Movement and is the only substantially original doctrine created by the early thinkers within the Movement.<sup>84</sup> The Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism has been among the first doctrines to be changed by more liberal elements when the Movement has faced challenges to its theological position or unease within its own ranks about Restoration theology. As Alexander Campbell became more denominational in his outlook in the 1830s, he found that he needed to alter his baptismal theology from the hard, sectarian stance he had approached in his *Christian Baptist*. Richard Hughes claims that it was precisely because of the “growing sectarianism” of the Restoration Movement that Alexander Campbell was led to a denominational position that embraced Protestantism.<sup>85</sup>

In December 1837 Campbell wrote in the *Millennial Harbinger*:

Some of our brethren were too much addicted to denouncing the sects [by which Campbell means all Christian denominations, excepting his own Movement] and representing them *en masse* as wholly aliens from the

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salvation” are used more or less synonymously in this discussion of Independent soteriology. The Independent plan of salvation contains five elements, but, for Independents, the most important part of the plan of salvation is obedience to what they believe is the explicit command for adult believers to be baptized by immersion.

<sup>83</sup> Many within the Independent Christian Churches would likely not agree with the first part of this statement. This, however, is the individual doctrine that Independents are known for and it is the doctrine with the most highly developed theology. It is this doctrine that led to Walter Scott’s claims of restoration of the gospel, and it is the Independent doctrine of baptism (which is essentially shared with the Church of Christ (a cappella)) that receives book length treatments in its defense. See Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin: College Press, 1989) and David W. Fletcher, ed., *Baptism and the Remission of Sins: An Historical Perspective* (Joplin: College Press, 1990). The demand for following the proper form and function of baptism is such that even academic work on other topics devolves into an apologetic for the Restoration doctrine of baptism. This is particularly apparent among some of the essays included in William R. Baker, ed., *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Assigned to address the role of faith in conversion, both Independent scholar Jack Cottrell and A Cappella scholar John Mark Hicks spend significant time addressing the doctrine of baptism (Stone-Campbell scholars have inextricably tied these two subjects together). See Cottrell, “The Role of Faith in Conversion,” 84-90; Hicks, “The Role of Faith in Conversion: Balancing Faith, Christian Experience, and Baptism,” 91-124 in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*. In a like manner, in Church of Christ scholar Everett Ferguson’s essay in the same volume, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Church,” 193-201, the theme of baptism appears at several points, and he concludes his discussion with an “ecumenical” appeal to utilize only baptism by immersion (Ferguson’s comments may be found below, 164, fn. 114).

<sup>84</sup> Other doctrines were created by borrowing aspects of other theological formulations and recombining them into new forms, see below, 165-6.

<sup>85</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 38.

possibility of salvation—as wholly antichristian and corrupt . . .  
[Therefore], we have been always accused of aspiring to build up and head  
a party. . . . On this account I consented the more readily to defend  
Protestantism.<sup>86</sup>

Controversy over Campbell's shift in theology had arisen in July of that year, with his response to a letter written by a woman from Lunenburg, Virginia who expresses her great surprise at reading within the *Millennial Harbinger* Campbell's statement that he "found in all Protestant parties Christians."<sup>87</sup> She pointedly asks if any can be called "Christian" other than "those who believe the *gospel*, repent, and are buried by baptism into the death of Christ." In reply Campbell states:

I observe that if there be no Christians in the Protestant sects, there are certainly none among the Romanists, none among the Jews, Turks, Pagans; and therefore no Christians in the world except ourselves, or such of us as keep, or strive to keep, all the commandments of Jesus. Therefore, for many centuries there has been no church of Christ, no Christians in the world; and the promises concerning the *everlasting* kingdom of Messiah have failed, and the *gates of hell have prevailed against his church!* This cannot be; and therefore there are Christians among the sects.

Should I find a Pedobaptist more intelligent in the Christian Scriptures, more spiritually-minded and more devoted to the Lord than a Baptist, or one immersed on a profession of the ancient faith, I could not hesitate a moment in giving the preference of my heart to him that loveth most.<sup>88</sup>

Richard Hughes argues that Campbell had earlier hoped that his own Movement might serve as a beacon around which all Christians might gather, but by 1837 that hope had considerably dimmed and he then looked "to Protestant America as a fuller embodiment of the primitive faith and as the basis for the final realization of the millennial kingdom on

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<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 38-9. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1837*, rpt., (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 564-65. A common claim among adherents of the Restoration Movement is that they are neither Roman Catholic or Protestant since they are not protesting anything, and since they believe that their doctrines and practices predate what they believe to be the false doctrines of these other two groups.

<sup>87</sup> Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1837*, 411-14.

<sup>88</sup> Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1837*, 411-12.

earth.”<sup>89</sup> As discussed above, Alexander Campbell’s shift in theology, on this and other issues, created conservative and moderate positions that divided the Movement.

It was in 1869 that the implementation of Campbell’s open approach to the Protestant sects led to another conflict over baptism that was ultimately to play a role in dividing the Movement further. Once members of other denominations were regarded as Christians, regardless of the form of, and theology behind, their baptism, moderate and liberal ministers in the Stone-Campbell Movement began to advocate “open membership,” that is, to allow people to be full members of Stone-Campbell churches, even if they had been baptized as infants or if they had otherwise not been immersed. Predictably, the conflict occurred along lines similar to those set out in the Lunenberg letter and Alexander Campbell’s response to that letter, though in this controversy there was the added accusation that those who advocated open membership were imperiling the unity of the Movement and subverting its aims. Ultimately, this quarrel did play a large role in the division between the Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ.<sup>90</sup>

The role of believer’s baptism by immersion in determining the status of a believer as a Christian has played a prominent role in creating disagreement within the Independent Christian Churches in recent years.<sup>91</sup> The controversy over the role and meaning of baptism goes back at least as far as the 1940s when Independent Christian Churches

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<sup>89</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 45-6. Hughes quotes a comment from Alexander Campbell’s 1851 book, *Christian Baptism*, in which Campbell says: “Among them all [i.e., the various Protestant sects], we thank the grace of God that there are many who believe in, and love the Saviour, and that, though we may not have Christian churches [i.e., churches built on the primitive pattern], we have many Christians” (46). For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With its Antecedents and Consequences*, 1851, rpt., (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing, 1913), p. x.

<sup>90</sup> See Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 264-71 and McAllister and Tucker, *Journey in Faith*, 376-9, for, respectively, an Independent Christian Churches and a Disciples of Christ view on this conflict.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, The Remnant project of Camelback Christian Church, led by its pastor, Joe Carson Smith, which essentially offers a baptism creed. In a letter sent to the Independent Christian Churches, Smith lists seven tenets that must be adhered to in order to be recognized as a part of The Remnant, a group of churches faithful to what Carson believes is true Restoration theology. The first one demands belief in the truth of the New Testament, the next five have to do with baptism, and the last says that leaders in the Church should believe and teach these points. For Smith and many other traditionalists, the dividing line between a Christian and a non-Christian is a particular view of baptism. Joe Carson Smith, letter to the Independent Christian Churches, n.d.

historian James DeForest Murch became a leader in the evangelical community, a move that entailed accepting as Christians individuals who did not share Restoration Movement salvation theology and thus did not accept the Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism.<sup>92</sup> As the Independent Christian Churches has made more forays into the evangelical community, the division among Independents has become more apparent. In response to a 2003 issue of *Christian Standard* dedicated to addressing the question “Are We Evangelicals?,” a reader responded to the articles included in this issue by criticizing *Christian Standard* for supporting “false teachers” by championing evangelicalism. The subject singled out by the reader was that of baptism. Concerning evangelicalism and its presumed de-emphasis on baptism, Robert L. Brunk wrote:

Someone who says that there is such a thing as a “sinner’s prayer,” and that baptism is not when and where one puts on Christ and receives salvation is, in fact, a false teacher, and God’s people should not be helping them spread false doctrine in any way.

...  
There is no good when the plan of salvation is blurred, and the New Testament church is sold down the river for popularity and “growth.”<sup>93</sup>

An issue of *Christian Standard* dedicated to the subject of baptism<sup>94</sup> also drew heavy criticism with letters to the editor complaining that the articles “[sowed] the seeds of a weaker theology in our own churches” due to a “softer voice” on this doctrine.<sup>95</sup> One of the authors, Greg Nettle, was accused of “embracing denominationalism’s view of baptism” in his article because Nettle claimed that baptism is not what saves an individual, but that one is saved “by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ,” which the critic says contradicts the teaching of Scripture which places this salvation at the moment of

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<sup>92</sup> See above, 9305, and below, 185-8.

<sup>93</sup> Robert L. Brunk, “Mailbox,” *Christian Standard* (May 18, 2003), 11.

<sup>94</sup> Mark A. Taylor, ed., *Grace and Truth About Baptism: What We Believe, What We Practice*, Themed issue of *Christian Standard*, May 11, 2003.

<sup>95</sup> Rick Brown, “Mailbox,” *Christian Standard* (July 6, 2003), 9.

baptism.<sup>96</sup> Michael Hines accurately (though antagonistically) diagnoses the division present among Independents in a letter to the editor in *Christian Standard*. Hines states:

While baptism has not yet become an “optional extra,” *it is becoming a membership issue, not a salvation issue* [emphasis mine]. This kind of thinking leads to crisis. Most congregations take one of two tacks as a result. First, baptism is made a part of a process. This neglects clear biblical teaching that justification occurs at the time of one’s baptism (Acts 2:38; Colossians 2:12, 13) because of their faith in Christ. Second, biblical teaching about baptism is hidden in typical evangelical terminology. For those who understand the importance of this doctrine, this is tantamount to lying and is a kind of mental reservation.<sup>97</sup>

What Hines fails to recognize is that, while baptism has always been a salvation issue for the Independent Christian Churches, it has also always been a membership issue.

Furthermore, in Stone-Campbell theology, baptism becomes subject to the dictates of reason and the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense philosophy.

Baptism is not primarily understood as being sacramental in nature, but is construed as part of an orderly, biblical plan of salvation; that is, in the Stone-Campbell system the theology of baptism yields to the empirical analysis of biblical texts on baptism, which the Independent Christian Churches has traditionally understood to reveal the one, correct doctrine of baptism. Being properly baptized, for the proper reasons, is the moment that one becomes a member of, not the universal Church, but due to the emphasis placed on congregational autonomy, a local church.

In order to understand the centrality of baptism in Independent Christian Churches thought, it is important to understand how and why this doctrine developed.<sup>98</sup> The origin

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<sup>96</sup> Allan Payne, “Mailbox,” *Christian Standard* (September 7, 2003), 13.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Hines, “Mailbox,” *Christian Standard* (November 9, 2003), 13. In contrast to the numerous criticisms of a “soft” view of baptism, Jack Cottrell’s two part “The History of Baptism” (*Christian Standard* (June 20, 2004), 7-9 and (June 27, 2004), 7-9), which defended the exclusive nature of the Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism, drew only one printed criticism (Steve Bond, “Readers Write,” *Christian Standard* (August 22, 2004), 11.)

<sup>98</sup> It is not my intent to provide a comprehensive critique of the Restoration Movement doctrine of baptism, but to suggest that this Restorationist doctrine is not the “pure” doctrine of baptism as it is presented in the New Testament (which Independents believe they have rediscovered) and to point out that it is not possible to develop such a “pure” doctrine. Rather, I will consider the influences that caused Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott to develop their salvation theology and to thereby demonstrate the human or reasoned, rather than the divine or revealed, origin of this doctrine. My argument is not with the

of the Restoration doctrine of baptism dates back almost to the founding of the Movement itself. Early in his career, in 1812, Alexander Campbell, through a study of the Greek New Testament, concluded that the practice of infant baptism was entirely without scriptural warrant and that the only meaning the Greek word *baptizo* could have was immersion.<sup>99</sup> Due to this belief, Campbell and his followers quickly developed a relationship with the Baptists.<sup>100</sup> However, Campbell's understanding of baptism continued to develop, particularly over the course of three debates that Campbell participated in on the subject of baptism. In the first debate, held in 1820 against Presbyterian minister John Walker, Campbell's use of the Bible, in particular his firm division between Old and New Testaments,<sup>101</sup> gave him a strong rhetorical edge over his opponent (who compared infant baptism to circumcision in the Old Testament), and he coupled the form of baptism with the meaning of the ordinance, arguing that the church was not authorized to change the form of a command, because the form is the very thing that is commanded. In his second debate in 1823, against Presbyterian minister W.L. McCalla, Campbell made a rhetorical move that represented the final piece of his baptismal theology. The McCalla debate was on the purpose of baptism, and during the course of this debate, Campbell, using the words of Peter and Paul as prooftexts, expanded his theology to link the moment of baptism with the moment when salvation is received.<sup>102</sup> From this time on it became standard Campbellite dogma that one could not be certain of salvation or a member of the church

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particulars of the Restoration doctrine of baptism, such as immersion or the connection between baptism and salvation which are perfectly acceptable and well attested to throughout Christian history. Rather, I am arguing against the empirical manner in which this doctrine was constructed, the use and misuse of the Bible to form this doctrine, and the exclusivity that Independents use this doctrine to promote, in that the form of one's baptism often serves to determine who is and is not a Christian.

<sup>99</sup> Barton Stone had become a proponent of immersion in 1807, though as yet he had no contact with the Campbellite churches. See John Mark Hicks, "'God's Sensible Pledge': The Witness of the Spirit in the Early Baptismal Theology of Alexander Campbell," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 1, no. 1 (1998): 7.

<sup>100</sup> For discussions of this move from infant baptism to adult believer's baptism and association with the Baptists, see Murch, *Christians Only*, 59-62; North, *Union in Truth*, 110-3; Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 92-5.

<sup>101</sup> See below, 149-50, and 156-7.

<sup>102</sup> See Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 108-112, 114-116, 163.

without being immersed. Interestingly, in the McCalla debate, after stating that “baptism *saves us*” Campbell declared:

we confess that the blood of Jesus Christ alone *cleanses* us who believe from all sins. Even this, however, is a metaphorical expression. The efficacy of his blood springs from his own dignity and from the appointment of his Father. The blood of Christ, then, *really* cleanses us who believe from all sin. Behold the goodness of God in giving us a formal token of it, by ordaining a baptism expressly “for the remission of sins.” The water of baptism, then, *formally* washes away our sins. The blood of Christ *really* washes away our sins. Paul’s sins were *really* pardoned when he believed, yet he had no spoken pledge of the fact, no *formal* acquittal, no *formal* purgation of his sins until he washed them away in the water of baptism.<sup>103</sup>

While Campbell is certainly not alone among theologians in his attempt to define and describe how one’s sins are forgiven, his argument does create problems for a doctrine that is supposed to be clearly and explicitly discovered by a reading of the Bible alone. What is critical for an evaluation of Independent theology is that the distinction that Campbell makes between *real* and *formal* cleansing does not reflect the unadulterated teaching of the Bible alone, but is a product of speculative theology. While Campbell certainly makes use of biblical examples to establish his argument, his theological claims regarding the role and function of baptism are largely a product of the nineteenth century American environment in which Campbell lived.<sup>104</sup>

The need for a “formal” sign of cleansing, or an assurance of salvation, as it was linked to baptism, reflects Alexander Campbell’s Common Sense approach to Scripture as Campbell applied his Common Sense hermeneutic to his experience of the American

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 115-6. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *A Public Debate on Christian Baptism between the Rev. W.L. Maccalla, a Presbyterian Teacher, and Alexander Campbell* (rpt. Kansas City: Old Paths Book Club, 1948), 116.

<sup>104</sup> John Mark Hicks makes precisely this point in his article on salvation in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Of Alexander Campbell’s salvation theology, he writes that Campbell “most often stressed the past dimension of salvation [which focused on justification and an understanding of salvation as a legal state]. His corpus is primarily concerned with the assurance and enjoyment of forgiveness. Even his ‘systematic’ discussions often leave little space for present and future soteriology. This emphasis is understandable given Campbell’s engagement with the frontier’s search for the assurance of forgiveness and the importance he attached to baptism as God’s ‘sensible pledge’ of salvation” (John Mark Hicks, “Salvation,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 664).

frontier. John Mark Hicks points out that “Campbell stressed the objective character of the Christian faith”<sup>105</sup> and that baptism was the objective assurance that a believer had of his or her salvation. Baptism was regarded by Campbell as a “sensible pledge” on God’s part, through which God promised the believer that his or her sins would be removed through obedience to this ordinance.<sup>106</sup> Hicks recognizes that Campbell uses the word “sensible” to refer to the five senses of the body through which the experience of baptism is mediated and which offers believers the assurance that their sins have been removed and the Holy Spirit given to them. Hicks fails to note, however, that Campbell’s reliance on sensation in the development of his baptismal theology is dependent upon the philosophy of Thomas Reid and other Common Sense realists. Such an understanding of the philosophy that lies behind Restoration theology is vital for an understanding of the theological development of the Restoration Movement, yet is almost completely ignored by Independent Christian Churches scholars.

The need for an objective assurance of salvation also stems from the frontier revivals and their generally Calvinistic salvation theology. Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott were all raised as Presbyterians and thus began their theological careers as Calvinists. As such they understood salvation to be an act of God, to which they were elected outside of any control that they might exert over the destiny of their souls. Barton Stone’s struggle with and ultimate dismissal of Calvinism is particularly famous within the Stone-Campbell Movement. An oft-quoted passage from Stone’s biography about his desire to seek religion describes Stone’s emotions following a revival meeting and his experience of waiting for salvation:

The meeting over, I returned to my room. . . . I . . . seriously reasoned with myself on the all-important subject of religion. What shall I do? Shall I embrace religion now, or not? . . . After due deliberation, I resolved from

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<sup>105</sup> Hicks, “God’s Sensible Pledge,” 19.

<sup>106</sup> Hicks, “God’s Sensible Pledge,” 20.

that hour to seek religion at the sacrifice of every earthly good, and immediately prostrated myself before God in supplication for mercy. According to the preaching, and the experience of the pious in those days, I anticipated a long and painful struggle before I should be prepared to come to Christ, or, in the language then used, before I should get religion. This anticipation was completely realized by me. For one year I was tossed on the waves of uncertainty—laboring, praying, and striving to obtain saving faith—sometimes desponding, and almost despairing of ever getting it. The doctrines then publicly taught were, that mankind were so totally depraved, that they could not believe, repent, nor obey the gospel—that regeneration was an immediate work of the Spirit, whereby faith and repentance were wrought in the heart. These things were pourtrayed [*sic*] in vivid colors, with all earnestness and solemnity. *Now* was not *then*, the accepted time—*now* was not *then*, the day of salvation; but it was God's own sovereign time, and for that time the sinner must wait.<sup>107</sup>

After a year of these struggles, Stone listened to a sermon by William Hodge on the text “God is love.” After the sermon Stone retired to pray and came to believe that God would not reject one who sought Him. Of this experience Stone writes:

I confessed to the Lord my sin and folly in disbelieving his word so long—and in following so long the devices of men. I now saw that a poor sinner was as much authorized to believe in Jesus at first, as at last—that *now* was the accepted time, and day of salvation.<sup>108</sup>

In a similar manner, Alexander Campbell struggled to have a conversion experience that would provide confirmation of his salvation. In an article on the development of Alexander Campbell's baptismal theology, Church of Christ scholar John Mark Hicks points to the central part that such conversion experiences played in the religious life of frontier America and in Britain, and he examines the relatively unknown struggles of Alexander Campbell to obtain such an experience.<sup>109</sup> Hicks argues that Campbell's baptismal theology must be understood in light of Campbell's rejection of a subjective conversion experience in favor of an objective understanding of baptism as God's pledge to the believer that his or her sins were pardoned.<sup>110</sup> Here again the

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<sup>107</sup> Stone and Rogers, *Biography of Barton Warren Stone*, 8-9.

<sup>108</sup> Stone and Rogers, *Biography of Barton Warren Stone*, 10-1. For an extended analysis of Stone's conversion see Chapter Two of D. Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 17-28.

<sup>109</sup> Hicks, “God's Sensible Pledge,” 5, 9.

<sup>110</sup> Hicks, “God's Sensible Pledge,” 8.

influence of Scottish Common Sense philosophy is evident, as Hicks notes that Campbell claimed that it was not until he began to read the Bible as “‘naked text,’ [following] common sense” that he could arrive at this doctrine of baptism.<sup>111</sup> Thus, for Campbell, the apostolic teachings on baptism could be clearly and absolutely discerned through an empirical study of the New Testament, which resulted in a doctrine of baptism discovered under the auspices of human reason.

Nathan Hatch, discussing the experience of Calvinism on the American frontier, argues that there was a widespread revolt against Calvinism among American religious bodies:

On one level this revolt seems simple enough to understand. The heady concepts of liberty that had led to denunciations of institutional constraints also rendered meaningless such concepts as unconditional election and limited atonement. *After great intellectual turmoil, each of these men [the leaders of the Restoration Movement] came to the point of harmonizing theology with their social experience [emphasis mine].* As a Calvinist, [Barton W.] Stone confessed that he was “embarrassed with many abstruse doctrines.” . . . What he called the “labyrinth of Calvinism” left his mind “distressed,” “perplexed,” and “bewildered.” He found relief from this dissonance of values only as he came to attack Calvinism as falsehood.<sup>112</sup>

What is present, then, in the development of the Restoration Movement doctrine of baptism is the rebellion of a group of men against a set of doctrines that had lost the ability to shape the intellectual and social world in which these men lived. Rather than representing the restoration of the biblical doctrine of baptism, the doctrine developed by Alexander Campbell was conditioned as much by the environment in which it was formed and the philosophical underpinnings of Campbell’s theology, as it was by the biblical text. What Campbell did was to recreate Christian theology for the American frontier through the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Hicks, “God’s Sensible Pledge,” 11.

<sup>112</sup> Hatch, “Christian Movement,” 556.

<sup>113</sup> Campbell’s use of the Bible to develop this doctrine is discussed below, 121.

A major factor in the development of the Restoration Movement was the fragmentation of the ordered religious world of European Christianity as it was relocated into the American environment. This relocation entailed major changes to some of the basic theological premises of European Christianity. The transplantation of European Christianity to the American frontier created a dissonance between the generally Calvinistic theological orientation of some prominent European denominations, most notably the Calvinist teaching on double predestination, and the American emphasis on the ability of humanity to choose its own destiny.<sup>114</sup> In addition to this, American notions of democratic government challenged authoritarian hierarchical models of church government, and an emphasis on equality undermined the formerly privileged position of the clergy.<sup>115</sup> As Christianity adapted itself to the American environment, the various denominations found that they had to adapt their religious language to fit the context of the New World. While the leaders of the Restoration Movement were at the fore in confronting the loss and subsequent reconstitution of religious language, they were not alone; rather they faced a problem common to other Christian denominations in the new nation. Historian Sidney Mead claims that the dissolution of the religious world imported from Europe occurred with the advent of a new form of Christian commonwealth without, for the first time in fourteen centuries, a church controlled by the state. Mead writes:

In the environment provided by such a strange new commonwealth Christians, if they were to survive as such at all, had to adapt their institutions and their institutionalized . . . ways of thinking to meet the exigencies of a world they did not make and only grudgingly permitted to be born. The history of the old religion in the brave new world is the complex story of the nature and results of such adaptations. Naturally as

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<sup>114</sup> The salvation theology of the Stone-Campbell Movement was constructed as a reaction against Calvinist understandings of predestination, in light of American understandings of freedom. The Calvinist theological orientation was particularly prominent among the Puritans, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, out of which the Restoration Movement developed. See Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), for Noll's perspective on the Americanization of Christianity. Particularly relevant is p. 31-50 on the "disintegration" of the Puritan theological construct; and 253-68 for Noll's summary of the "Americanization of Calvinism."

<sup>115</sup> See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3-46.

the old Christianity was poured into the new environmental molds it assumed new shapes.<sup>116</sup>

While the philosophy that undergirded Restoration Movement theology originated in Scotland, it required the environment of the new American nation to allow those philosophic speculations to flourish and to essentially recreate the Christian tradition for its American context. With the advent of a political government that emphasized equality, personal liberty, and freedom, there arose a concomitant desire for church government that was founded on these same values.<sup>117</sup> Thomas Campbell recognized the profound changes brewing around him and took them as an opportunity to launch his reform. The opening words of his *Declaration and Address* locate a reform based on such liberty and equality in the new nation:

FROM the series of events which have taken place in the churches for many years past, especially in this western country, as well as from what we know in general of the present state of things in the christian world; we are persuaded that it is high time for us not only to think, but also to act for ourselves; to see with our own eyes, and to take all our measures directly and immediately from the divine Standard; to this alone we feel ourselves divinely bound to be conformed; as by this alone we must be judged. We are also persuaded that as no man can be *judged* for his brother, so no man can *judge* for his brother: but that every man must be allowed to judge for himself . . . .<sup>118</sup>

The ideas presented in Campbell's *Declaration and Address*, which is the most overtly, but by no means comprehensively, theological of the founding documents of the Restoration Movement, are primary examples of one of the new shapes that Christianity took in the new world as the Restoration Movement is one of the most successful of indigenous American religious movements.<sup>119</sup> It could not have been written, however, without a

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<sup>116</sup> Sidney E. Mead, *The Old Religion in the Brave New World: Reflections on the Relation Between Christendom and the Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 16.

<sup>117</sup> See Nathan O. Hatch, "The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People," *The Journal of American History* 67.3 (December 1980): 545-567.

<sup>118</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 3.

<sup>119</sup> The religious tradition that, in many respects, shares the greatest similarity to the Stone-Campbell Movement is the restoration effort of Joseph Smith. Like Stone and the Campbells, Smith decried the divisions among the Christian denominations and thought that this plurality of voices had no ability to proclaim truth. Smith was responding to many of the same problems and influences that Stone and the

crisis of language and meaning that called for a new theological understanding; that is, the language of tradition and hierarchy that created authority within an established denomination was meaningless in an environment where tradition and hierarchy were eschewed in favor of authority created of, by, and for the people and where denominations, without state sanction, competed with one another on the religious free market. Thomas Campbell takes, literally and broadly conceived, the American pronouncements of equality, liberty, and freedom for all people and uses them to critique the religious world carried from the European setting to the American setting. Thus, he sought to remove, among other things, the clergy/laity distinction that privileged the interpretations of the educated clergy over the common layperson, theology handed down through the tradition of the church, and the prevalent Calvinist doctrine that ran afoul of the American doctrines of equality and liberty. The New World provided American reformers and restorers an opportunity to do what their European counterparts could not—to literally wipe the slate clean and begin again at the founding of the church, pulled into a new century and onto a new continent.

Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, and other early leaders confronted a world where language and culture became suddenly malleable, where words, in the phrase of James Boyd White, “lose their meaning.”<sup>120</sup> White says that his argument:

is about such changes in the meaning of language and of the world: about the ways in which words come to have their meanings and to hold or to lose them and how they acquire new meanings, both in the individual mind and

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Campbells were. The difference is that Smith wrote a book of new, American scriptures, and created a new religion, whereas Stone and the Campbells retained the Christian scriptures, but re-created Christian theology for their American context and remain demonstrably Christian. For more on the similarities and differences between the Stone-Campbell Movement and Mormonism, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 1989), 113-122; Hughes, *American Quest for the Primitive Church*; and Murch, *Christians Only*, 120-1. For an interpretation of the theology of other indigenous American religious groups see Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984).

in the world. This means . . . that it is also about the ways in which character is formed—and maintained or lost by a person, a culture, or a community.<sup>121</sup>

It is this malleability of language that allowed the early leaders of the Restoration Movement to identify their theological aims with the founding of the American nation. The interpenetration of political and religious language in the new nation is well attested and may be seen in the Deistic language that permeates the Declaration of Independence and the First Amendment to the Constitution and in the manner that religious leaders adopted political language for theological ends.<sup>122</sup> In a passage that effectively, though unintentionally, draws together elements of Sidney Mead's argument for the adaptation of the "old religion in the brave new world" and White's analysis of the failure of language and meaning and the subsequent creation of new meanings and character formation, Nathan Hatch regards the period between 1780 and 1830 as a time of "cataclysmic" upheaval in the realm of politics and society. Hatch maintains:

People confronted new kinds of issues: common folk not respecting their betters, organized factions speaking and writing against civil authority, the uncoupling of church and state, and the abandonment of settled communities in droves by people seeking a stake in the back country. These events seemed so far outside the range of ordinary experience that people rushed to biblical prophecy for help in understanding the troubled times that were upon them.<sup>123</sup>

During this time, what it meant to be a citizen of a particular class, a citizen of a nation, a member of the church, and a member of a community underwent profound changes and, as a result, a new way of speaking about this changing world was necessary to form and reform the character of individuals, a church community, and the nation.

The history of the Stone-Campbell Movement is not only based on such a time of changing language and world, but is rife with instances where the Movement has

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<sup>121</sup> White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning*, 3.

<sup>122</sup> See Mark A. Noll, ed., *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 34-35; 44-47; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 73-92; and Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 3-16.

<sup>123</sup> Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 6.

confronted the failure of its own language and the subsequent transmutation and recreation of its rhetorical and theological world. The Restoration Movement has, time and again, shown its ingenuity in reconstituting its language and theology to create a world that seemingly maintains continuity with its own earliest expressions. Yet, it is actually a recreated and restored version of its own beginnings and is therefore a new and different theological expression for a changed (and ever changing) world and a changed corporate character. Evidence of the restoration of its own beginnings may be seen in the Independents' journals. No longer do the Independents look to the future vision of *The Millennial Harbinger* or to the restoration of New Testament Christianity, as it was conceived by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott. Rather, through the pages of *The Restoration Herald*, traditionalists are now attempting to restore the 200 year old Restoration Movement.<sup>124</sup> The progressives, on the other hand, imitate the origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement by attempting to divest themselves of their inherited theological tradition and to create a populist religious expression that seeks freedom and liberty.

These crises of language may be seen in: 1) the hermeneutic shift of the 1830s that led to the creation of moderate and conservative positions within the Restoration Movement, which led to the creation of the Church of Christ (a cappella); 2) the onset of biblical criticism and liberal theology among moderates in the late 1800s and early 1900s and the ultimate division of the Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of

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<sup>124</sup> This argument is actually being directly stated by traditionalists, an odd position for a group that believes that they preach a doctrine as old as the New Testament itself and that argues vehemently against the idea that they constitute a denomination. Yet Danny R. Gabbard, Professor of Bible and Theology at Louisville Bible College argues precisely this: "The fact is the 'Restoration' Movement needs to be 'restored.' We need men with not only the courage to say that, but the willingness to preach the tenets of restoration. We need men who will preach the inerrancy of Scripture, the New Testament church as the only model for the church of our day, the beauty and simplicity of the Restoration plea, the wisdom of God demonstrated in the local church, and finally teaching [restored] to its central importance in the church." Danny R. Gabbard, Sr., "What Social Security and the Restoration Movement Have in Common," *The Restoration Herald*, 84:6, (2005): 6.

Christ;<sup>125</sup> and 3) the engagement of Independent Christian Churches with American Evangelicalism that began in the 1940s, which hastened the current traditionalist/progressive division within the ranks of the Independent Christian Churches. Where these failures of language have occurred within the Stone-Campbell Movement, the result has usually been the creation of conservative, moderate, and liberal positions that serve to further fragment the Movement. In each rupture, all sides have interpreted their own position as being contiguous with the intentions of the founding fathers of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Thus, as discussed in Chapter Two, Harold Ford and Alfred DeGroot attempt to retell the story of the Restoration Plea and to recreate, for their own time, the original vision of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell.

A central factor in each of these divisions, and the example *par excellence* of the loss of meaning and recreation of religious language in the Independent Christian Churches, is the Stone-Campbell “plan of salvation.”<sup>126</sup> Stone-Campbell salvation theology is literally the only doctrine that the leaders of the Restoration Movement fully developed. Certainly, the Movement displayed some unique ideas about the church, but these teachings did not result in a fully formed ecclesiology.<sup>127</sup> Regarding other doctrines, early Stone-Campbell leaders simply borrowed from the received teachings of Christian history, which they mistakenly believed they derived from the “Bible alone.” For example, while the first generation leaders attempted to forge their own “biblical” approach to Christology, subsequent generations within the conservative branches of the Restoration Movement have generally accepted the Chalcedonian definition of the dual nature of Jesus

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<sup>125</sup> For an Independent Christian Churches perspective on the arrival of Modernism within the Stone-Campbell Movement, see Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 239-77. For a Disciples of Christ perspective see McAllister and Tucker, *Journey in Faith*, 360-86.

<sup>126</sup> See above, 113-17.

<sup>127</sup> The restoration of the Stone-Campbell Movement was largely concerned with the recreation of the ecclesiological structures of the New Testament Church, yet only certain features of this ecclesiology were carefully described. Rather, there was never much agreement about what aspects of this ecclesiology were to be restored, which has resulted in most of the divisions occurring over issues of ecclesiology, such as the proper forms of worship, mission work, or the proper forms of baptism and the Lord's Supper. See below, 150-8.

Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity as it was outlined at the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople (despite Barton Stone's well known aversion to this doctrine).<sup>128</sup> However, to acknowledge the debt owed to such Councils and theological formulations would largely undermine the claim that the doctrines were arrived at utilizing "the Bible alone." Where the Church of Christ (a cappella) and Disciples of Christ have worked to solidify some aspects of their theology (or to admit that they *have* a theological perspective), the Independent Christian Churches has not, in that it believes that it is continuing the Stone-Campbell program of restoring the New Testament church on the basis of the Bible alone, without any admixture of theological or philosophical speculation. The Independents do retain the Restoration Movement doctrine of salvation, which is the only doctrine entirely created within the hermeneutic and cultural context of the formative years of the Movement. As such it is the only area of theology of which the Independents can truly claim ownership; therefore, it has been catapulted to a level that makes it the central doctrine of the Independent Christian Churches. It represents the dividing line between the conflicting goals of restoration and unity, in that the Independents have determined that their understanding of baptism is essential, not only to salvation, but to restoration of the apostolic church, and thus they require agreement on this doctrine before they can have unity. However, in each division within the Stone-Campbell Movement, the conviction that there are Christians outside the confines of the Movement who, consequently have not been properly baptized according to Restoration Movement dogma, has played a key role

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<sup>128</sup> Neither Alexander Campbell nor Barton W. Stone would agree to this characterization of their theology, and both expended a great deal of effort to construct their own "biblical" theological definitions of Christology and the Godhead using only biblical language. Though each certainly developed peculiar arguments, Robert D. Cornwall claims that they "departed from the ecumenical christological tradition more linguistically than materially," (Robert D. Cornwall, "Christology," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 205). Compare Cornwall, "Christology," 204-6 and Paul M. Blowers, "God, Doctrine of," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 356-9 with "Christology," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1997, and "Trinity, doctrine of the," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1997.

in the division. Thus, the Restoration Movement rhetoric concerning baptism begins to fragment once it is acknowledged that individuals may be saved in spite of the fact that they do not follow Restorationist prescriptions on baptism. Strict traditionalist understandings of this doctrine cannot allow Christians outside the boundaries of the Independent Christian Churches, and softer progressive understandings of baptism do not elevate baptism to such a central position. Each time the issue of limiting salvation to strict interpreters of the Stone-Campbell plan of salvation has arisen, a new division has emerged.

The Stone-Campbell plan of salvation, however, is by no means as self-evident as many in the Independent Christian Churches believe. A useful comparison may be made between the respective clarity of the Independent doctrine and the teaching of Mormons on baptism.<sup>129</sup> The apparent similarities between the salvation theologies of the Stone-Campbell Movement and the Mormons are so great that Walter Scott grumbled that former Campbellite leader Sidney Rigdon had stolen the doctrine of believer's baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins from the Stone-Campbell Movement when he converted to Mormonism and that this stolen doctrine accounted for the success of Mormon preachers.<sup>130</sup> Scott's allegation, however, was entirely false. *The Book of Mormon*, which proclaimed this doctrine, was written while Rigdon was still firmly within the Campbellite fold. Indeed, both Alexander Campbell and Joseph Smith created their nearly identical doctrines of baptism at almost the same time, with Smith trailing Campbell by only a few years.

In *The Book of Mormon*, after inviting the multitude to touch his hands and side, the first thing Jesus does when he appears to the Nephites is to commence an extensive

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<sup>129</sup> This comparison is apt due to the close relationship between the two religious groups. The Restoration Movement and the Mormons developed on the American frontier during the same period of time, exchanged leaders and members, and were the two fastest growing religious groups in America during the 1990s.

<sup>130</sup> Richard T. Hughes, "Mormonism," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 544.

dialogue on the proper mode and meaning of baptism,<sup>131</sup> which he very clearly describes. Jesus does this for the express purpose that “there shall be no disputations among you,”<sup>132</sup> a sentiment that he feels strongly enough about to repeat later in the passage. Jesus instructs Nephi and others whom he authorizes to baptize, that baptism must be by immersion of an adult believer, with the trinitarian formula spoken over the subject, and is tied to salvation—Jesus proclaims that whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe and is not baptized, shall be damned.<sup>133</sup> Jesus concludes with this: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.”<sup>134</sup> Thus Joseph Smith says clearly and explicitly what Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott and many of their followers only imply: that baptism is the rock upon which the believer builds and is the central doctrine of the church.

In one important respect, though, the baptismal doctrines of these two restoration movements are entirely dissimilar. In the *Book of Mormon*, the doctrine of baptism is clearly detailed by Jesus himself, whereas in the New Testament the doctrine is nowhere treated as clearly or as extensively. For the Mormon, teaching on baptism is clear and authoritative, given that it is discussed in such detail in one passage. For the Christian, however, the doctrine must be created from texts scattered throughout the Gospels and Epistles. More problematic is that extensive exposition on baptism comes, not from the mouth of Jesus, but from the pen of Paul. Alexander Campbell and his followers had to pull together the disparate New Testament passages that address baptism and to argue that these passages were so clear in their meaning that the true doctrine of baptism could be

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<sup>131</sup> 3 Nephi 11:21-41.

<sup>132</sup> 3 Nephi 11:22; 28.

<sup>133</sup> 3 Nephi 11:33-34.

<sup>134</sup> 3 Nephi 11:39.

found therein, if the reader would only set aside his or her preconceived notions to read the Bible alone.

This naïve approach to hermeneutics and the doctrine of baptism continues among many, and perhaps most, individuals in the Independent Christian Churches today and is supported by a number of Independent scholars. Representative of this approach is Jack Cottrell, Professor of Theology at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, who claims in his book *Baptism: A Biblical Study* that the Bible offers “many clear and straightforward statements” on baptism and that “the main problem underlying the modern confusion on baptism thus is not paucity of Biblical material, but rather an *a priori* commitment to certain theological presuppositions.”<sup>135</sup> While acknowledging the difficulty of reading the Bible objectively, Cottrell nonetheless says that it is his “goal in this study . . . to examine the main New Testament passages<sup>136</sup> on the meaning of baptism as if we were hearing or seeing them for the first time.”<sup>137</sup> Cottrell casually rejects any approach to the Bible that might cause difficulty for his own hermeneutic, saying

We must reject all theories of hermeneutics that say the original meaning of a text is either irrecoverable or irrelevant. We must approach the Bible with the conviction that the original meaning of most texts, both as intended by their authors and as understood by their first recipients, is recoverable to a high degree of probability. Also, we must take this originally intended meaning as the definitive, authoritative one.<sup>138</sup>

Cottrell does not offer any explanation of what these theories are, how they impact his understanding of the texts he has chosen, or why they must be rejected. In framing the argument as he does, Cottrell suggests that he is not employing a particular hermeneutic for his study, but is simply embarking upon a pure reading of the relevant biblical texts.

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<sup>135</sup> Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin: College Press, 1989) 7. Cottrell’s work is seen by many in the Independent Christian Churches as the definitive work on baptism.

<sup>136</sup> The passages Cottrell includes for the study are Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16 (which he acknowledges is a disputed text, but assumes to be canonical); John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38-39; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 5:25-27; Colossians 2:11-13; Titus 3:5; and I Peter 3:21.

<sup>137</sup> Cottrell, *Baptism*, 8.

<sup>138</sup> Cottrell, *Baptism*, 8.

Cottrell approaches the Bible through the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic that he inherited from earlier generations of Stone-Campbell scholars, and, not surprisingly, he finds that the Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism, conjoining the time of baptism with the time of salvation, is taught as “the central theme”<sup>139</sup> of all the passages he chose for study. Cottrell’s work largely involves demonstrating that each of the twelve passages he examines relates the same doctrinal truth. He does this by referring one text to another, creating a tightly reasoned Biblical theology where the meaning of one text may be proved by the meaning of another. For example, Cottrell interprets Romans 6:3-4 through John 3:5 and Acts 2:38-39, claiming:

These are all just different ways of referring to the same reality: being born again, being regenerated, dying to sin and rising again with Christ. This is accomplished within our soul specifically by the Holy Spirit, whose presence within us as a gift is one of the main benefits of the redemptive work of Christ and our union with Him.<sup>140</sup>

None of these passages say anything of the sort on their own. Rather, only by combining these separate texts can one arrive at the conclusions Cottrell reaches.

Cottrell concludes his study by claiming that:

We recognize that the view of the meaning of baptism presented here is very different from the view held by most Protestants, but *we earnestly contend that it is the New Testament’s own view* and that the content of the texts themselves *cannot be construed in any other way*. . . . I believe that *no one can study these texts objectively and then deny that this is the meaning of baptism*, without developing a troubled conscience [emphasis mine].<sup>141</sup>

However, the texts that Cottrell utilizes are by no means as clear and straightforward as he claims. It is difficult, for example, to see how a reading of Matthew 28:19-20 “as if . . . seeing [it] for the first time” might allow the reader to make the connection between baptism and salvation. More dubious, however, is Cottrell’s claim to read a number of passages, the meanings of which are disputed in the wider scholarly community, as a

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<sup>139</sup> Cottrell, *Baptism*, 165-6.

<sup>140</sup> Cottrell, *Baptism*, 86.

<sup>141</sup> Cottrell, *Baptism*, 165-6.

coherent unity. Cottrell provides, not the Bible's singular teaching on baptism, but his own interpretation of the doctrine. In taking a number of texts and approaching their interpretation through an inbred hermeneutic apparatus that locates the meaning of one text in the other, Cottrell creates a system of circular reasoning that, upon examination, begins to appear utterly capricious and arbitrary. The doctrine of baptism that Cottrell develops is based not on the biblical text, as such, but on a new text created by Cottrell as he daisy-chains one Bible passage to another. Thus, a study such as Cottrell's, rather than solidifying the doctrine that he seeks to protect, actually calls into question the authority that he claims to make such pronouncements and the hermeneutical apparatus he applies to the New Testament to arrive at such a doctrine.<sup>142</sup>

### **The Continued Appeal to the Bible Alone**

The Stone-Campbell hermeneutic may be summed up by the common American appeal to "the Bible alone."<sup>143</sup> The assumption that the Bible alone is sufficient for determining Christian faith and practice is present in Barton Stone's *Last Will and Testament*,<sup>144</sup> but is even more prominent in Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*.

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<sup>142</sup> For another example of the problems created for Independent theology by attempting to maintain the essentiality of the Independent Christian Churches doctrine of baptism, see Robert O. Fife, "Not the Only Christians," *Christian Standard*, May 11, 2003, 4-7. Fife asks if baptism is essential to salvation; that is, may adults who have not been immersed for the remission of sins properly be called Christians (4)? While Fife ultimately answers in the affirmative, that those who have not been immersed may be Christians (7), his argument falls prey to the same types of criticism that Cottrell's does. Fife writes: "We must remember that while we are in a Covenant relationship with God, God and we are not on the same level . . . In the sense that the purpose of baptism is to bring us to the Savior, baptism is *essential to man*. It is a divinely given condition of the everlasting Covenant mediated through the blood of Jesus and enunciated on Pentecost. . . . But does this mean that a believer's baptism is *essential to God*? Can we correctly assume that because baptism is an essential *Covenant command* to which we are subject, it is an essential *Covenant limitation* to which God is subject? . . . God is not limited to the Covenant conditions (as we are), for God is the gracious Lord of the Covenant. . . . But this does not permit us who are subjects of the Covenant to neglect the commands and promises we are commissioned to proclaim. Nor does it permit us to say to unimmersed believers that they need not be immersed. Thankfully, it is for us to confess that God 'will have mercy on whom He has mercy' (6-7). Nowhere does Fife say where the terms and conditions of this covenant are clearly spelled out. Rather, Fife, like Cottrell, engages in theological speculation that supports the Independent doctrine of baptism.

<sup>143</sup> Nathan Hatch points to an analyst of American Protestantism in the 1840s who "concluded, after surveying fifty-three American sects, that the principle 'No creed but the Bible' was the distinctive feature of American religion." Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 81.

<sup>144</sup> I am aware that Stone did not personally pen this document (see Williams, *Barton Stone*, 97-8). However, as Stone was the only one of the five original signatories to remain faithful to the sense of the document (of

However, for Thomas Campbell and subsequent generations within the Restoration Movement, the emphasis on the Bible alone is made into an entire hermeneutic program through the adoption of one rule of interpretation (this overriding hermeneutic is: “where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent”) that many within the Independent Christian Churches strive to remain faithful to, though they may not use the same language to express this hermeneutic rule.<sup>145</sup>

Thomas Campbell instituted this hermeneutic approach in a meeting with the Christian Association of Washington<sup>146</sup> where, in an assembly called to discuss the cause of unity that the group championed, Campbell argued that the Bible should be the basis of Christian union and that union had been sundered by men who had left the sure foundation of the Bible for theory, opinion, and speculation. To avoid a similar declension within his own group, Campbell proposed a hermeneutic rule that would allow the Christian Association to stand on the solid ground of scripture. Robert Richardson, biographer of Alexander Campbell and early historian of the Movement, reports that Thomas Campbell ended his address thus: “That rule . . . is this, that WHERE THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK, WE SPEAK; WHERE THE SCRIPTURES ARE SILENT, WE ARE SILENT.”<sup>147</sup>

Richardson expounds on the import of this rule thus:

*Henceforth, the plain and simple teaching of the Word of God itself was to be their guide. God himself should speak to them, and they should receive and repeat his words alone. No remote inferences, no fanciful interpretations, no religious theories of any kind, were to be allowed to alter or pervert its obvious meaning [emphasis mine]. Having God’s Word*

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the other four, two rejoined the Presbyterian Church and two joined the Shakers) it is useful to attribute “ownership” of the thoughts contained therein to him.

<sup>145</sup> This hermeneutic rule, “Where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent” does not contradict the hermeneutic program of commands, examples, and necessary inferences outlined above, 79-83, but is an overarching principle under which commands, examples, and necessary inferences fit. That is, the early leaders of the Restoration Movement believed that they could speak where the scriptures spoke, and remain silent where the scriptures are silent, by determining precisely what the scriptures said through the apparatus of searching the scriptures for commands, examples, and where those were lacking, making a necessary inference.

<sup>146</sup> The Christian Association of Washington is the name given to the group of people who met with Thomas Campbell, after he left the Presbyterian Church in 1808, to discuss Christian unity. See Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 72-3.

<sup>147</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, 236.

in their possession, they must speak it faithfully. There should be no contention, henceforth, in regard to the opinions of men, however wise or learned. Whatever private opinions might be entertained upon matters not clearly revealed must be retained in silence, and no effort must be made to impose them upon others. Thus the *silence* of the Bible was to be respected equally with its revelations, which were by Divine authority declared to be able to “make the man of God perfect and thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” Anything more, then, must be an encumbrance. Anything less than “the whole counsel of God” would be a dangerous deficiency. Simply, reverentially, confidingly, they would speak of Bible things in Bible words, adding nothing thereto and omitting nothing given by inspiration. They had thus a clear and well-defined basis of action, and the hearts of all who were truly interested re-echoed the resolve: “*Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.*”<sup>148</sup>

As has been noted, it was not the “plain and simple teaching” of the Bible that was promoted by the founders of the Restoration Movement, but a hermeneutic apparatus based on Scottish Common Sense philosophy that in time became exceedingly complex as it struggled to work within the environment it created for itself. Despite this eventual complexity, the Independents retained the language of speaking where the scriptures speak and being silent where the scriptures are silent. Many Independents still believe that they are reading the Bible alone, that the import of scripture is simply available to any honest reader who seeks their plain meaning—there is even a tradition within the Movement that claims that the Bible needs no interpretation at all.<sup>149</sup> Like Jack Cottrell, who believes that “no one can study these texts objectively and then deny that this is the meaning of baptism,” the Independents have no way to deal with alternative interpretations of the Bible. For example, as has been demonstrated, for the Independent there is one doctrine of

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<sup>148</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, 237.

<sup>149</sup> Tolbert Fanning, an early leader among the developing Church of Christ (a cappella) argues: “The scriptures are really and truly the interpretation of the mind of the Lord—are explanations themselves—need no expounder—are for the sovereign people—and must be believed as they are written by the Spirit, in fair translations. All other views in regard to religious teaching we regard as infidel.” in Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*, 170. This approach to scripture persists among many within the Church of Christ, and to a lesser extent, among the Independent Christian Churches.

baptism, clearly defined, and anyone who believes otherwise rejects the very word of God.<sup>150</sup>

There are traditions within the Stone-Campbell Movement that place a greater emphasis on critical study of the Bible and reject the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic developed by the early leaders. Alexander Campbell was an astute Bible scholar who had access to the best grammatico-historical-literary scholarship of Britain, America, and German works translated into English.<sup>151</sup> As a text critic, Campbell in his translation of the New Testament, *The Living Oracles*, anticipated many of the changes made by the translators of the *Revised Version*, noting in an appendix to *The Living Oracles* a great number of texts in the New Testament that contained additions not original to the earliest documents.<sup>152</sup> Among the changes Campbell made were to remove the long ending from the Lord's Prayer and to remove Acts 8:37, which is a text that actually supports Campbell's understanding of salvation. It is in this tradition of grammatico-historical criticism that Disciples of Christ scholars, on the eve of the twentieth century, embraced higher critical methods of studying the Bible and have continued to engage in critical scholarship to the present day. It is beyond the scope of this work, however, to provide a complete picture of the hermeneutics of Alexander Campbell and others in the Movement, especially since this subject has been adequately treated elsewhere.<sup>153</sup> Crucial to an understanding of contemporary Independent Christian Churches theology, and to an

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<sup>150</sup> This attitude is also apparent in cultural and moral teachings where Independents might claim that there is only one Christian response to issues such as abortion and homosexuality, the role of women in the church, or to issues raised in the realm of politics and science.

<sup>151</sup> See Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hermeneutics," *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 389 and Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 55-112.

<sup>152</sup> See Alexander Campbell, *The Living Oracles*, 1826. (rpt. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 2001), Appendix 30-36.

<sup>153</sup> See Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*; Casey, *Battle Over Hermeneutics*; Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hermeneutics and the Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*. eds. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000; Bruce E. Shields, "The Hermeneutics of Alexander Campbell," *Restoration Quarterly* 43.3 (2001): 167-179; and Thomas H. Olbricht, "Walter Scott as Biblical Interpreter," in *Walter Scott: A Nineteenth-Century Evangelical*, Mark G. Toulouse, ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999): 79-107.

understanding of the Stone-Campbell Movement in general, is that, for the conservative heirs of the Restoration Movement, any move that Alexander Campbell may have made towards a critical scholarship is almost entirely irrelevant. Independent Christian Churches doctrine does not depend on Campbell's trenchant scholarly work, but on Campbell's epistemological assumptions, which have largely been retained in the Independent Christian Churches to the present day.

The Independents have approached the study of the Bible as an examination of a self-authenticating document whose meaning can be revealed through an inductive approach to scripture where, by adding together a number of passages or verses on a given subject, the original doctrine emerges as if it were direct from the mouth of Jesus himself. The final and complete word of God regarding the nature of God, baptism, the church, science, sexuality, or any other topic may be easily and absolutely discovered by compiling the relevant passages and proclaiming the doctrine that emerges from such a study. Thus the Independents have managed to supply, in many instances, what the Bible lacks. Without a definitive and authoritative doctrine on baptism, such as that found in *The Book of Mormon*, the Independents created a hermeneutic that offers the same certainty. The use of the Bible among Independents has thus involved a reconstruction of Christian theology as they have strung together biblical texts to form or re-form a given doctrine, and it has resulted in an understanding of scripture in which Independents claim that they have found certainty in matters of faith and practice which are otherwise missing from the biblical text.

Many, and perhaps the majority, of scholars, ministers, and laity within the Independent Christian Churches continue to support the "Bible alone" approach to hermeneutics. This approach to hermeneutics places a great burden on the Bible as a self-authenticating document that interprets itself. A few scholars, ministers, and individuals recognize the problems presented in the traditional Bible alone hermeneutic of the Independent Christian Churches. As one of the very few truly critical studies of a Stone-

Campbell dogma from an Independent Christian Churches perspective, one of the best examples of this disquiet among Independents is found in Robert F. Hull's article, "The Bible Only? Too Many (Cracked) Eggs in One Basket,"<sup>154</sup> in which Hull argues that the Stone-Campbell appeal to the Bible alone is inherently flawed. Hull argues that the authority of the Bible "is *always* mediated to us by fallible instruments, opinions, and decisions; and there is no way for us to opt out of this situation," noting that a Common Sense approach to hermeneutics tends to elevate reason over scripture.<sup>155</sup> Hull argues that the process of the creation of the canon, the reconstruction of the Hebrew and Greek texts, and the interpretation of the biblical text are mediated to us through the Church throughout history. Few, if any, scholars within the Independent Christian Churches have attempted to continue Hull's critique and explore its implications for Independent theology. Indeed, Hull's argument strikes at the heart of both the traditionalist and progressive groups, each of whom in their own way believe that they base their teaching on the Bible alone.

Thus, the Independent Christian Churches approach to hermeneutics and its effort to restore New Testament Christianity continues to exist on both sides of the divided Independent Christian Churches. Rather than restoring New Testament Christianity, the Independent Christian Churches in both the traditionalist and progressive camps has, in the words of Nathan Hatch, "reshaped [Christianity]" and "molded it in [its] own image."<sup>156</sup> Thus, Independents have created a theology in which they have retained the language of the Christian tradition, but made that language dependent upon the dictates of Enlightenment Era reason as it is mediated through American values of liberty, equality, and individualism. As such, the Independents have actually subverted their own stated

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<sup>154</sup> Robert F. Hull, "The Bible Only? Too Many (Cracked) Eggs in One Basket," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 5, no. 1 (2002): 3-23. Hull is the Dean of Emmanuel School of Religion and Professor of New Testament.

<sup>155</sup> Hull, "The Bible Only?," 6.

<sup>156</sup> Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

aims by privileging the individual interpreter over, not just theology, philosophy, the traditions of the church, and other interpreters, but ultimately over the Bible itself.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### UNITY

The supreme irony of the Restoration Movement's quest for Christian unity is the deep division among the heirs of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell regarding the purpose of the Stone-Campbell Movement—whether the Movement is concerned primarily with the restoration of the New Testament Church or if it is first of all seeking Christian unity. Disciples of Christ scholar Alfred DeGroot claimed that “the spectacle of *divided unionists* is the most obvious indication that somewhere in the program of the Movement is to be found a cause for schism.”<sup>1</sup> For DeGroot, the “cause for schism” was located in the desire of some restorationists to restore the precise pattern of the New Testament church. Progressive interpreters of the Restoration Plea have, like DeGroot, sought to remove aspects of the goal of pattern restoration in favor of a more ecumenical understanding of Christian unity. Traditionalist interpreters of the Restoration Plea, however, not only see nothing amiss in the division of unionists, but actually demand division in service to their own desire to maintain the unity of a “pure” Church. For traditionalists, defection from true Restoration Movement teaching (which is safeguarded by traditionalist Independents) is the cause of disunity among the various branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement and individuals who refuse to give up the beliefs of their denomination in favor of Independent dogma is the cause of disunity between Independents and other denominations. As such, H. Lee Mason, editor of *The Restoration Herald*, argues that the Restoration Movement is indeed a unity movement, but only with the “proper understanding” of unity;<sup>2</sup> that is, unity may be found only through agreement with Independent teaching.

It is this division between ecumenism and unity based on pattern restoration which reveals that the divided Independent Christian Churches, with the two primary groups

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 496.

<sup>2</sup> H. Lee Mason, “Editor’s Viewpoint: A Unity Movement,” *The Restoration Herald*, 84, no.8 (2005), 2.

identified as progressives and traditionalists respectively, no longer share a common criteria or language for unity.<sup>3</sup> For both traditionalist and progressive Independents, unity is found only through agreement on what they believe are the essential aspects of the New Testament Church. However, progressives and traditionalists do not agree on a definition of the New Testament Church, and there is therefore limited unity within the denomination. What they do share is an approach to ecclesiology that understands the Church as a monolithic entity, an objective reality that must be restored, either in the form and pattern of the first century Church or in regard to the character and attitudes that distinguished apostolic Christianity. Both groups seek their own version of restoration and both attempt to create their own version of “the Church” in accordance with the way that they read the New Testament. For both progressives and traditionalists, the Christian religion is really about the life and actions of the church (both the apostolic church and, in a reflexive reading of their claims to restore the New Testament church, the contemporary instantiation of Independent ecclesiological institutions), rather than the life and teaching of Jesus. These two churches, the version of the New Testament church created by the Restoration Movement and the contemporary “restored” church of the Independent Christian Churches, are authoritative for traditionalists and progressives alike.

The Independent Christian Churches, with its emphasis on congregational autonomy and insistence that it is not a denomination, operates through an informal power structure that seeks to control the direction of the Independent Christian Churches. This power structure is made up of influential churches and their ministers, Independent

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<sup>3</sup> While an exhaustive definition of Christian unity is outside the bounds of this work, for the purpose of this thesis, Christian unity is understood to be the union of all believers in the universal Church. The universal Church may be said to encompass the various Christian denominations. As such, unity is a state where different Christian denominations acknowledge and recognize the common Christian faith of other denominations, and where believers are accepted as fully Christian without having to conform to the minutia of another denomination’s theological system. A starting point for the determination of a shared Christian faith may be the Apostles’ and the Nicene creeds, and the four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church) where unity may be said to exist through the continuity that various denominations maintain with the historic positions of the Christian tradition.

Christian Churches Bible colleges, and Independent journals and their editors. Both progressives and traditionalists maintain institutions within this power structure that attempt to wrest control of the Independent denomination from the other side. Power is accorded to a given group through the forces of the marketplace; that is, constituents financially support institutions that they believe are most representative of their beliefs. The amount of money a given institution has is an indicator of its supporters relative to other Independent institutions and, therefore, the power it has to shape and guide the Independent Christian Churches. As such, understandings of Christian unity within the Independent Christian Churches are shaped by the institutions that are placed in positions of power by the forces of the market.

For both traditionalists and progressives unity is less a doctrinal point than a utopian ideal. There has always been an element of utopianism within the Restoration Movement desire for the restoration of the New Testament church, and the belief that this restoration will bring about Christian unity, which will in turn create the necessary conditions for the millennial dawn. Both traditionalists and progressives have retained aspects of this utopianism, notably in their understanding of the Church as an objective entity that was clearly and firmly established in the first century, and their demands that others acquiesce to their narrow definition of what constitutes a Christian. While this severely limits who Independents may be united with, many within the Independent Christian Churches (both progressive and traditionalist) are still seeking a version of unity that will ultimately lead to the advent of the millennium.

### **Unity: Backgrounds of Independent Unity**

Independent Christian Churches historian James DeForest Murch ranks among the most central figures in the creation of the Independent Christian Churches identity. In a career that spanned almost sixty years, from 1916 until his death in 1973, Murch was a complex figure who lent his efforts to many diverse organizations. As the

fundamentalist/modernist controversy struck the branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement that was to divide into the Disciples of Christ and the Independent Christian Churches, Murch was a strong proponent of the conservative perspective adopted by Independents.<sup>4</sup> He served as an office editor for the *Christian Standard*, and played a role in the founding of the Christian Restoration Association, where he acted as president from 1925 to 1933 and editor of *The Restoration Herald* from 1925 to 1934, which “became the voice of the most conservative Disciples of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> However, in spite of his conservative understanding of the concept of restoration, Murch sought unity outside of the Restoration Movement and found common cause within the ranks of American Evangelicalism.<sup>6</sup>

Kevin Kragenbrink notes that

Murch ardently believed that the “Free Church” tradition stood in a direct line of descent from the apostolic church, and that it was incumbent on the faithful remnant of conservative evangelicals, led by Disciples “independents,” to rally in restoring New Testament Christianity and thus to bring about church unity in a way that the mainstream ecumenical movement could never do.<sup>7</sup>

While Murch acknowledges that the New Testament Church has not as yet been restored, he nonetheless believes in the efficacy of the Restoration Plea to produce Christian unity, and he continues to utilize the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense Realism in his approach to the Bible.<sup>8</sup>

Murch begins his history of the Restoration Movement with a discussion of the “preservation of the faith” throughout history.<sup>9</sup> Murch claims that “when Christ announced His intention to establish His church (Matthew 16:18), He certainly intimated His intention to preserve and perpetuate it in all its pristine purity and power,” and that the

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin R. Kragenbrink, “Murch, James DeForest (1892-1973),” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 549.

<sup>5</sup> Kragenbrink, “Murch, James DeForest (1892-1973),” 549.

<sup>6</sup> See above, 93-4, for Murch’s contribution to and involvement with American Evangelicalism, and see below, 182-5, for contemporary Independent engagement with American Evangelicalism.

<sup>7</sup> Kragenbrink, “Murch, James DeForest (1892-1973),” 550.

<sup>8</sup> See below, 175.

<sup>9</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 9.

church has in fact been so preserved throughout all of history.<sup>10</sup> Murch and other Independents thus view the Church as an institution that was definitively established at a specific time with clear and detailed precepts. Murch argues that

It was not long after the church was established that departure from the original pattern caused division and it became necessary to rebuke heresy and restore the declaration and practice of the true faith.

True to His promise, our Lord has, in every time of declension, raised up men to restore apostolic preaching and practice by an appeal to the revealed Word of God. The story of that apostolic succession is one of the most thrilling in the annals of man.<sup>11</sup>

Like Alfred DeGroot, Murch attempts to trace what he regards as the core elements of true Christianity from the time of the New Testament to the present day. Unlike DeGroot, Murch traces, not the vital spiritual aspects of Christianity, but the apostolic pattern for the Church as it has continued through the centuries. Thus, Murch complains about the development of church hierarchy and governance that enervated what Murch regards as the proper form of “Scriptural eldership” and congregational autonomy, and he is likewise grieved at the appearance of infant baptism and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, the development of Roman Catholicism, and the blending of church and state.<sup>12</sup> It is these additions to Murch’s construction of “New Testament Christianity” that Murch credits with creating division in the Church.

However, while many strayed from what Murch believes to be the divine pattern for the Church, others remained faithful, and it is these diverse individuals and groups that Murch heralds as representing the pure Church throughout the ages. Murch traces his highly improbable version of apostolic succession through individuals, such as Clement of Rome, Tertullian, and Montanus, and through groups condemned by the Roman Catholic Church as heretical, such as the Priscillians (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries), Paulicians (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries), Bogomils (8<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries), Albigenses (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries), and Waldenses

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<sup>10</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 10.

(12<sup>th</sup> century to present).<sup>13</sup> Murch does list some individuals closer to the actual concerns of the founders of the Restoration Movement, namely the reformers John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and, immediate influences on Thomas and Alexander Campbell, the Scottish brothers Robert and James Haldane.<sup>14</sup>

According to Murch, these small sects and isolated communities maintained apostolic Christianity in the face of severe persecution by the Roman Catholic Church. Murch essentially picks and chooses the elements of each of these groups or individuals that most align to the particular theology of his own religious tradition, while ignoring aspects of their theology that would be problematic within Restoration Movement thought. Thus, he celebrates Tertullian's opposition to infant baptism and "human ecclesiasticism" (though Murch surprisingly says nothing about Tertullian's famous distrust of philosophy),<sup>15</sup> but ignores, for example, Tertullian's teaching of Traducianism, a doctrine that suggests that the soul is imparted to a child through his or her parents, which played a role in the development of the doctrine of Original Sin, with which Murch and other Independents would severely disagree.<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Murch can praise the Paulicians for their commitment to believer's baptism, study of the Bible, and observance of the Lord's Supper under the authority of "duly-ordained elders,"<sup>17</sup> while ignoring the Paulicians' dualism, which posited the creator God opposed by the Demiurge, their Marcion-like disregard for the Old Testament (which Murch may actually regard as a positive trait!),<sup>18</sup> and their denial of Christ's redemptive work on the cross.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the accuracy of Murch's claims, it is significant for the present discussion of unity in the

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<sup>13</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 10-12. Dates are taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

<sup>14</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 13-18.

<sup>15</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> See Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 179-90.

<sup>17</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> See below, 149, for Alexander Campbell's rejection of the use of the Old Testament to provide rules of faith and practice in the Christian era, and for the difference between Campbell's understanding of the OT and Marcion's.

<sup>19</sup> "Paulicians," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1997.

Independent Christian Churches that Murch was able to make such claims, as he suggests that the Independent Christian Churches is the current representative of pure, apostolic Christianity as it has been passed down through the centuries. Further, it is important to note that, for Murch and many other Independents, it is the Independent branch of the Restoration Movement that maintains continuity with apostolic Christianity and not the Disciples of Christ or the Church of Christ (a cappella).<sup>20</sup> To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to examine the nature of the Stone-Campbell quest for Christian unity and how the Independent Christian Churches demands conformity to its interpretation of the New Testament as a basis for unity.

James DeForest Murch claimed that the hand of God was evidently upon American Christianity in the years before 1830, in that many diverse groups “began to coalesce into one body.”<sup>21</sup> As evidence, he offers the observation that “without consultation with or prior knowledge of each other, men [from a number of denominations] had been led by the Holy Spirit to abandon human dogmas and traditions and turn to the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice.”<sup>22</sup> For Murch, Christian unity was not an isolated concern within the Stone-Campbell Movement alone, but was a movement of “national importance” with “the American unity movement seeking to restore the New Testament church by an appeal to the Bible alone as a rule of faith and practice.”<sup>23</sup> Murch believes that this desire for unity was present across the entire nation and thinks that it will ultimately lead to the unification of all believers.

Throughout his life Murch believed that the Restoration Plea, as it was interpreted by conservative Independent Christian Churches scholars and ministers, represented a viable path forward for Christian unity. He looks to Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and*

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<sup>20</sup> See above, 92-3, and below, 172-5.

<sup>21</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 123.

*Address* to clearly present the ideas of unity held by so many in antebellum America, and he regards the *Declaration and Address* as “a most important document in the background of the modern Ecumenical movement,” which clearly states “the basic Biblical principles by which the union of all Christians might be accomplished.”<sup>24</sup> Murch regards the *Declaration and Address* as a background document only, and though he does claim that his own denomination played a role in contributing to and aiding the modern Ecumenical Movement,<sup>25</sup> he also acknowledges that “the immediate motivation for [the Ecumenical Movement] came from other sources.”<sup>26</sup> It is precisely in this respect that the different approaches to ecumenism among conservative and liberal branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement become apparent. The modern Ecumenical Movement, championed by the Disciples of Christ, is an effort to seek unity among the various Christian denominations in a manner that transcends theological differences in areas of doctrine and church government; whereas Christian unity, as argued for by many conservatives within the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella), must be based on agreement with what the Independent Christian Churches or the Church of Christ (a cappella) believes are the fixed doctrines of the one, true Church. As such, the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella) believe that an approach to Christian unity that leaves intact doctrinal differences is not a valid path to unity, but a sure way to corrupt the truth of the gospel. The Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella) have therefore generally conceived of unity as individuals from other denominations adopting the theological program of the Independent or A Cappella fellowships and thereby destroying denominationalism and creating a union of “Christians only.”

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<sup>24</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> At their 1910 International Convention, the Disciples of Christ created an organization, the Commission on Christian Union, to seek Christian unity with other denominations. Disciples of Christ leaders were also present at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, which marks the beginning of the modern Ecumenical Movement.

<sup>26</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 360.

Unity, as it is portrayed in Murch's understanding of the Independent Christian Churches as the heir of the apostolic church, can only be accomplished when individuals leave their errors of human opinion and speculative theology behind and unite with the Independents, the true church. Conversely, Disciples of Christ have sought unity with other denominations as an end in itself, which would leave the denominational apparatus and theological differences intact. The founding documents of the Movement provide support for both positions, but it is the precedent set in *The Last Will and Testament* which calls for the institutional church to "die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the body of Christ at large"<sup>27</sup> and the appeals of Thomas and Alexander Campbell for others to leave the denominations and their human theologies and speculations for unity as "Christians only" on the basis of the Bible alone, that form the basis of the Independent Christian Churches plea for unity. As such, the plea for unity among the conservative branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement is generally sectarian in nature and highly individualistic.

Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* begins with a lengthy petition to the reader to listen to the appeal of the Christian Association of Washington. The *Address* is written in the context of the "present evil world" from the midst of the "corrupted"<sup>28</sup> or "ruined" church,<sup>29</sup> and Campbell's goal is to "heal and remove" the "sad divisions which have so awfully interfered with the benign and gracious intention of our holy religion."<sup>30</sup> To develop such a spirit of union and put an end to the "hapless divisions" within the Church is to "restore to the church its primitive unity, purity and prosperity."<sup>31</sup> The only way to restore this purity is to "conform to the model, and adopt the practice, of the primitive church, expressly exhibited in the New Testament," that through the exhibition of "complete conformity to the Apostolick [*sic*] church" they should be "as perfect as Christ

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<sup>27</sup> B. Stone, *Biography*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 10.

intended us to be.”<sup>32</sup> Along with the idea of conforming to “the original pattern laid down in the New Testament,” is the goal of removing the differences between the sects which Thomas Campbell states “are about the things in which the kingdom of God does not consist, that is, about matters of private opinion, or human invention.”<sup>33</sup> According to Campbell, the errors and interpolations of human endeavors to interpret scripture through speculative theology or philosophical means would necessarily give way to the “universally acknowledged, and self-evident truths” found in the “solid basis of divinely revealed truth.”<sup>34</sup>

For Murch, the circumstances surrounding the publication of the *Declaration and Address* were humble, but the document was destined to be used by God to reveal His glory from the time of its publication to the time of Murch’s writing.<sup>35</sup> The goal that Thomas Campbell had was, according to Murch, not to create a new denomination, but to appeal to “his friends in the churches” to unite the divided church.<sup>36</sup> In short time, however, the Christian Association of Washington<sup>37</sup> saw the need to constitute itself as an autonomous congregation, which it did on May 4, 1811, calling itself the Brush Run Church and modeling its doctrine and practice closely on the churches started by James and Robert Haldane in Scotland.<sup>38</sup> It is not surprising that the Christian Association found the need to establish itself as a separate body, given the nature of Campbell’s plea for unity. The very language that Campbell employs in the *Declaration and Address* reveals that, from the beginning, the Restoration Movement sought separation from other Christian denominations and adopted a theological stance that ultimately put it on the path of continued division.

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<sup>32</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 44.

<sup>37</sup> See above, 26, 131-2.

<sup>38</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 51.

Campbell's petition is addressed "to all that love our Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity, throughout all the Churches," and it is assumed that those who will agree with the tenets of the document will represent "the genuine subjects of christianity."<sup>39</sup> It may be implied, therefore, that those who do not agree with the argument that Campbell presents for Christian unity are not "genuine" Christians. The language that Campbell utilizes throughout the document all but entrenches the divisions that Campbell laments and sets the stage for future divisions. Where Campbell states emphatically that "the Lord himself, and all that are truly his people, are decidedly on our side,"<sup>40</sup> he creates a sharp division between the true people of God and all others who do not give their assent to Campbell's understanding of the New Testament. In so doing he makes his own interpretation of scripture equivalent to the word of God, while railing against the denominationalists who do not wish to give up their human interpretations of scripture. The entire document is full of Biblical allusions and quotations, a practice that gives Campbell's own writing the weight of scriptural authority as he relies on Biblical language to carry his argument. For Campbell, the only option for Christian unity is for others to join his own group and to conform to his own interpretation of scripture—which he does not believe to be an interpretation of the Bible as such, but the plain meaning of the Bible which is determined by the express commands and approved precedent found in the New Testament.<sup>41</sup>

Campbell argues, on the basis of Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17, that the "express command [of Jesus] to his people is, that there be no divisions among them; but that they

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<sup>39</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 16. Eugene Boring claims that a document, such as the *Declaration and Address*, which is a human opinion that inveighs against human opinions, is "not as naïve as it first appears, since the Campbells recognized the indispensability of such books of 'human opinion' alongside the Bible; the problem was when they became tests of fellowship." Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 53. Boring may well be correct that the Campbells' view on such books and opinions was more complex than might be imagined from an initial reading of their position. However, that in no way excuses them from the responsibility of creating a denomination that used their work to claim that they alone interpreted the Bible correctly, nor does Boring's comment address the inherent problems of this aspect of Stone-Campbell theology. For the purposes of this study, what the Campbells, Stone, or Scott may have meant by their writings, or the sophistication of those writings, is far less important than how their writings have been interpreted and used by later generations of believers within the Restoration Movement.

all walk by the same rule, speak the same thing, and be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.”<sup>42</sup> Thomas Campbell describes seeking unity as a “duty” universally placed upon all members of the kingdom, irrespective of party or creed.<sup>43</sup> To reject the prospect of such unity is, therefore, to essentially neglect one’s duty to God and to fall into apostasy. The Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella) have historically sought unity only on the basis of individuals leaving behind their “errors” of interpretation to join the Restoration Movement which, alone, has most correctly interpreted the Bible to arrive at the “rule” decreed by Jesus. Thus, these bodies have experienced little unity with other denominations or even within their own ranks.<sup>44</sup>

Taking the principles enumerated in the *Declaration and Address*, the Brush Run Church,<sup>45</sup> as Murch describes it, “proposed a restudy of the Scriptures to discover the foundations of the New Testament church and to rebuild the entire structure of primitive Christianity.”<sup>46</sup> This restudy fell primarily to the leadership of Alexander Campbell. As an independent congregation the Brush Run Church was unable to foster a great deal of Christian unity, and they desired fellowship with other Christians. Murch claims that with the beginning of the Brush Run Church, “there had been and was now no intention to set up a new and separate communion or denomination.”<sup>47</sup> Due in large part to their common commitment to believer’s baptism by immersion, Alexander Campbell felt the group he led had the greatest affinity with the Baptists, and in the fall of 1813 the Brush Run Church petitioned to join the Redstone Association, though with a lengthy caveat stating that they were opposed to human creeds and would draw their preaching only from the Scriptures, without respect to creeds or denominational formulations. Though there was some

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<sup>42</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> See below, 153-8, 165-70, and 182-88.

<sup>45</sup> See above, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 52.

<sup>47</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 61.

discussion about such an admission among the Baptists, the Brush Run Church was welcomed into the Redstone Association.<sup>48</sup>

This affiliation was somewhat strained from its inception due to the Campbells' insistence on rejecting Baptist creeds in favor of what they believed to be the "Bible alone." A shaky relationship was made even weaker by the "Sermon on the Law" that Alexander Campbell delivered at the Redstone Association's annual meeting on August 30, 1816.<sup>49</sup> In this sermon Alexander Campbell drew a hard distinction between the Old and New Testaments, arguing not only that the Old Testament could not provide authority for Christian faith and practice but also that it was not necessary to preach the law before the gospel was preached.<sup>50</sup> Campbell was attacked as a heretic by many within the Redstone Association, and the remainder of his involvement with the Baptists was fraught with conflict. James Deforest Murch claims that the results of the "Sermon on the Law" were far reaching for Campbell:

The "Sermon on the Law" marked the beginning of a brief but tremendously effective period of Alexander Campbell's ministry. Entrenched denominationalism resented him and his revolutionary biblicism. The clergy treated him with contempt or willfully ignored him. In this situation he realized the need of some drastic strategy if the reformatory movement he represented were not speedily to disappear from view. He began coldly to contemplate and diagnose the illness of contemporary sectarianism and the ecclesiastical institutions which coddled and protected it. He determined that regardless of the feelings of his friends

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<sup>48</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 61-2. See also, Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 94-5 for more on the similarities (baptism) and differences (the Baptist use of creeds) of the Campbells' church with the Baptists, and the problems this union was later to create, 106-8.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1846*, rpt., (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 493-521.

<sup>50</sup> A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1846*, 502, 506, 507-8, 510, 513, and 520. The sharp division that Campbell made between the Old and New Testaments has repeatedly drawn the criticism that Campbell was a Marcionite. While both Campbell and Marcion rejected the Law as carrying any authority for the Christian, Campbell does not, as Marcion does, believe that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are two different gods: one a God of Law (the Demiurge) and the other a God of Love; nor does Campbell reject large parts of the New Testament in favor of a truncated version of Luke and the Pauline corpus as Marcion does (See "Marcion," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 1997). Rather, Campbell's distinction between the Old and New Testaments is a result of his dispensationalism, what he regards as the progressive revelation made between the Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian eras (see below, 156-7). For Campbell, the God of the Old and New Testaments was quite certainly the same God, who revealed different constitutions for His people in different times. See Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 70-1 and Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology*, 24-33.

he would discover and destroy the virus of theological infallibility and religious bigotry.

In this resolution Campbell displayed all the boldness of Farel and the uncompromising spirit of Knox in their battle with Rome in the Protestant Reformation. In his new role he was to employ the weapons of sarcasm and irony, incisive and desolating logic, and the idol-smashing tactics of the true iconoclast. While he realized that he would incur the everlasting hatred of entrenched ecclesiastics, he believed he had to destroy false religious concepts and clear the ground of their debris before he could build constructively on the one foundation, the church after the divine pattern. At heart he still maintained his affectionate sympathy for all men and yearned for their salvation, but he believed the time had come to declare all-out war on sectarianism and to challenge its leaders to battle.<sup>51</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Campbells' relationship with the Baptists unraveled in 1823, and the Movement led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell began to calcify into a separate denomination.

As is evident from the preceding discussion, unity for the leaders of the Restoration Movement, and particularly for the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella), has always been conceived of primarily in individualistic terms. To the degree that Independents believe that they have restored, in some sense, the apostolic pattern of the church in form and doctrine, they claim that they represent pure New Testament Christianity. As heirs to the apostolic Church, it is incumbent on others to unify with them, and there is little need to seek out unity with other churches. However, while many Independents would argue that Christian unity can only be present among individuals, the individual must seek that unity through a proper relationship with a local church. Therefore, in order to understand the state of Independent Christian Churches unity today, it is necessary to examine how the Independents construct their ecclesiology.

### **Restoration in Context (II): Church**

Like baptism, the realm of ecclesiology is another area that the Independent Christian Churches has exerted tremendous effort to restore in its particularities; and like baptism, ecclesiology has served as a cause for division within the Stone-Campbell

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<sup>51</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 65-6.

Movement. In the opening chapter of *Simply Christians*, Sam Stone triumphantly cites the September 18, 2002 *New York Times* article<sup>52</sup> which reports that the Independent Christian Churches was the second fastest growing religious group in America between 1990 and 2000. Stone claims that this fact is not surprising, given that “the primary goal of these churches [that are part of the Independent Christian Churches] resonates with many people.”<sup>53</sup> Stone describes this resonance in the following words:

In today’s religious world, people are tired of fighting over inconsequential details. They are impatient with partisan bickering and constant complaining. They want to see an inclusive fellowship, reaching out to all. They are ready to see lives that match liturgy, people who practice what they preach. It is “back to basics” time.  
The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is just what people want and need.  
Not some “official” church.  
Not a powerful, political church.  
But just *the church*. Christ’s church. The church we read about in Scripture.<sup>54</sup>

At the heart of Stone’s understanding of the church is the idea that the true church, the church of the New Testament, is a simple institution that, at one time, was lost and 200 years ago was restored (or, at least, began to be restored). It is a central part of Independent mythology that the Independent Christian Churches embodies this simple, recovered New Testament Christianity.

However, the Independent Christian Churches is not an embodiment of simple, recovered New Testament Christianity. Not only is it evident that Independents base their theology on a philosophy that was unknown in the first century and developed their doctrinal positions in the context of antebellum America and conflated American values with Christianity, but almost any given denomination or sect would argue that it is also

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<sup>52</sup> See above, 2.

<sup>53</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 13. A body that has divided over issues such as the use of musical instruments in worship, the form and function of baptism, and the use of missionary societies, might themselves be accused of fighting and bickering over inconsequential details. However, the Independent Christian Churches regards these divisions as instances of the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ (a cappella) disagreeing on the plain meaning of scripture, against the “correct” Independent interpretation, and thus find no fault with their own role in these arguments.

representative of “New Testament Christianity” or “the church of the Lord Jesus Christ,” as Wesleyan minister Jim Garlow points out in an appendix to *Simply Christians*.<sup>55</sup> What sets Independents apart in this regard is that they are in a better position to perpetuate this mythology than most other denominations, due to their ahistoricity, the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic developed by the early leaders, and their attempt to construct a systematic theology entirely within the confines of the language of the New Testament.<sup>56</sup> However there is no substantial agreement on what a restoration of the New Testament Church actually is. Sam Stone himself does an inadequate job of defining the nature of the church that he claims resonates with so many people. Where Stone attempts a brief definition of the Church, the definition that he offers is simply a list of the characteristics attributed to the “Church” by the Stone-Campbell Movement,<sup>57</sup> which are not necessarily innate ideas among people in “today’s religious world.” He claims that:

When the church began, the Christian religion was simple, clear, and basic. Those earliest believers confessed their faith in Christ, putting complete trust in Him. They willingly obeyed His every command. They were loyal, even to the point of death. No wonder that first-century church grew so rapidly!<sup>58</sup>

The difficulty of associating loyalty to the point of death with the rapid growth of the church notwithstanding, the early Christian religion was anything but “simple, clear, and basic.” The disciples repeatedly ask Jesus what he means by his teaching,<sup>59</sup> and the New Testament documents display a remarkable level of complex theological reasoning<sup>60</sup> in addition to a number of difficult and, at points, contradictory passages.<sup>61</sup> The New

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<sup>55</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 93-4.

<sup>56</sup> Discussed above, 79-81.

<sup>57</sup> See S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 14, where Stone emphasizes Stone-Campbell salvation theology, the claim that there is no clergy/laity distinction, church autonomy and lack of denominational hierarchy, the goal of “unity with all who accept the lordship of Jesus and the authority of His Word,” and the claim that Independent Christian Churches “follow only Scripture as [its] source of authority.”

<sup>58</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> See Mark 4:10-13; 6:45-52; 7:17-23; 8:14-21; 9:30-32.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Romans and Hebrews.

<sup>61</sup> Among these: whether Jesus cleansed the temple at the beginning of his ministry (as suggested in John 2:13-17) or at the end of his ministry (with the synoptics placing this event during the Passion Week: Matthew 21:10-17; Mark 11:15-19; and Luke 19:45-48), or if he did this twice (as harmonizing accounts

Testament documents only become “simple, clear, and basic” when they are subjected to a hermeneutic that functions as a harmonizing device and dictates the manner in which Scripture may be appropriately interpreted.<sup>62</sup> Stone recognizes, to some extent, that this is what the Restoration Movement has done. He notes a criticism often leveled against the restorationist position:

Some critics are caustic in their response to those of us who seek to restore the church as seen in the pages of the New Testament. “Which church do you want to restore?” they laugh. “Do you want to restore Corinth with its sin? Jerusalem with its prejudice? Which one?” The answer, of course, is that we do not want to restore the church of Corinth *or* the church of Jerusalem, but the church of Christ. Where the Christians in any city did what was right, we can follow them. Where they were wrong, the inspired account corrects them, and we can choose to follow the biblical way.<sup>63</sup>

What this statement reveals is that “the biblical way” is not, even for Stone, as simple, clear, or basic as one might desire, but requires a hermeneutic perspective by means of which the interpreter may determine what he or she believes to be taught in scripture and what may not be taught from scripture. In Stone’s case, “the biblical way” refers to the theological program created by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, Walter Scott, and some of their latter day heirs; that is, what Stone claims is immediately found in the New Testament documents is actually his own two-hundred year old Christian tradition.

The Independent Christian Churches is a microcosm of the entire Stone-Campbell Movement. Within its confines are the progressives who wish to restore the spirit of the New Testament Church, the traditionalists who seek to restore the pattern of the apostolic Church, and those who attempt to walk a middle path between the two extremes. The

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would have it); what day Jesus was crucified on and the number of days he remained in the tomb (with John and the Synoptics placing the crucifixion on different days: John 19:14 and Mark 14:12, 15:1, 25); and how long Jesus remained with the disciples after the resurrection (just one day as in Luke 24 or forty days as Acts 1 has it).

<sup>62</sup> See James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 46-49, 55-72. Barr argues that Fundamentalists do not read the Bible literally, as is often claimed, but through such a harmonizing device.

<sup>63</sup> S. Stone, *Simply Christians*, 48.

difference is most acute between traditionalists and progressives, as seen in an exchange which took place in the pages of *Christian Standard*, one of the two primary magazines that serve the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>64</sup> With an article that sounds as though it could be a companion to Alfred DeGroot's Plea for freedom in the church, Richard Soule, a deacon at Newark church [*sic*] of Christ in Newark, Delaware, argues against the pattern or blueprint<sup>65</sup> conception of restoration of the New Testament Church. Soule is primarily concerned with restoring New Testament worship, which like DeGroot, he believes has been given over to a crushing legalism. Soule desires worship that manifests itself in "faith and . . . works" and is displayed in "the character and attitudes of the individuals who make up the church."<sup>66</sup> Soule claims:

The church strayed off path very soon after the apostolic age. In the late first or early second century, the first detailed liturgical manual appeared. *The Didache* . . . dictated the manner of baptism, the days for fasting, and the precise ritual of the Eucharist among other things. . . .

Almost immediately, people forgot their freedom in Christ, forgot that salvation is not found in rituals and regulations, forgot that the mission of the church was to seek and save the lost. The church started down a path of rigid orthodoxy that led to the execution of any who suggested that God's Word said something different than ecclesiastical tradition.<sup>67</sup>

Like the early leaders of the Restoration Movement and most Restorationist followers since, Soule posits an apostasy that occurred soon after the time of the apostles. However, this is not a reason, for Soule, to attempt a restoration of one particular form or pattern of the New Testament Church. Rather, Soule states, "Let's . . . face the fact that we cannot restore the first century church."<sup>68</sup> Soule desires to restore, "not the 'New Testament church,' but Christ's church."<sup>69</sup> Soule argues that to restore the pattern of the New Testament Church would require the restoration of the culture in which that church

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<sup>64</sup> The *Christian Standard* portrays the perspective of the progressive Independents and *The Restoration Herald* argues for a traditionalist position in regard to Restoration theology.

<sup>65</sup> See above, 83-108.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Soule, "Restoring Romans 16," *Christian Standard* (August 31, 2003), 7.

<sup>67</sup> Soule, "Restoring Romans 16," 7.

<sup>68</sup> Soule, "Restoring Romans 16," 7.

<sup>69</sup> Soule, "Restoring Romans 16," 7.

developed. Instead, he wants to restore Christ's church—what he believes is the spirit of love that pervaded the early church. Soule claims that we cannot “restore first century/New Testament culture, but we can restore the attitudes and character the first century church embodied.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, Soule's version of the church is, like so many other aspects of Independent theology, deeply ahistorical. While he rejects the idea of pattern restoration, he nonetheless assumes that there is an objective model of the Church, based on the spirit of love and Christ, which is recoverable for his own day. Like DeGroot, Soule claims that a spiritual restoration, rather than a restoration of some pattern found in the New Testament, is not only possible, but necessary. Soule stands in solidarity with the early leaders of the Restoration Movement who sought liberty and freedom to read and interpret the Bible according to their own individual interpretations. However, as is apparent from DeGroot's version of the Restoration Plea, this search for freedom ultimately leads to a subjective understanding of faith and practice which ultimately undermines theological authority and unity as only the individual interpreter can determine what “Christ's church” looks like.

As might be expected, Soule's article came under fire from the traditionalist side of the Independent Christian Churches. Donald A. Nash, a retired professor of Greek and New Testament from Kentucky Christian College,<sup>71</sup> responded to Soule with a letter that was published in the December 14, 2003 issue of *Christian Standard*.<sup>72</sup> Nash is particularly critical of the inability of Soule's program to clearly spell out the doctrines of the New Testament Church. Nash claims:

the whole idea that we can't restore the church as practiced and taught by Christ and the apostles because we can't restore the first-century culture is ridiculous. If we can, as brother Soule claims, restore the attitudes and character of the first-century church, then we can and must restore the doctrines and ordinances outlined in the New Testament teaching.

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<sup>70</sup> Soule, “Restoring Romans 16,” 7.

<sup>71</sup> Kentucky Christian College is now known as Kentucky Christian University.

<sup>72</sup> Donald A. Nash, “Mailbox,” *Christian Standard* (December 14, 2003), 9.

Individuals will fall short of the “right attitudes and character,” but the church as Christ’s body on earth in the local congregation can teach and practice what is set forth in the New Testament.<sup>73</sup>

Nash does not offer any indication, however, of how individuals who lack the “right attitudes and character” might adequately teach and practice the doctrines set forth in the New Testament, nor does he offer any indication as to how such a church might attempt to bridge the historical and cultural distance between the first century church and the church of the present day. Nash assumes that the Bible can be interpreted in such a way as to clearly and universally define the doctrines and duties of the church.<sup>74</sup>

In making the apostolic church normative for faith and practice, the Independent Christian Churches finds itself in a difficult theological position. In a sense, for the Independent Christian Churches, the Christian religion is not about the life and teaching of Jesus, but is actually about the life and teaching of the Independent construction of the Church. This is perhaps most clearly seen among traditionalists who attempt to carefully maintain the theological tradition of Stone and Campbell, but it may also be seen among progressives who have all but divested themselves of a theological tradition, relying instead on the life of the local church to create a religious community that is the embodiment of the spirit of the New Testament Church.<sup>75</sup> This church-centric theological orientation is not at all new to the Restoration Movement as it has roots in the dispensational theology of Alexander Campbell. Having noted Campbell’s strict division between Old and New Testaments in the “Sermon on the Law,” it is perhaps even more important to note that he further divided the scriptures into three epochs, only the last of which carried binding legal authority for the Christian. Eugene Boring notes that Alexander Campbell divided the Bible into three dispensations, “the patriarchal (from Adam to Moses), the Jewish (from Moses to Peter’s Sermon on Pentecost), and the

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<sup>73</sup> Nash, “Mailbox,” 9.

<sup>74</sup> See above, 83-108.

<sup>75</sup> This statement is explored in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Christian (from Pentecost to the eschaton).”<sup>76</sup> With the Gospels and Acts 1 lodged firmly in the Jewish era, the authoritative teaching for the early Restoration Movement, which it viewed as the constitution for the church, is found in the remainder of Acts and the Epistles.<sup>77</sup> While Boring correctly divides these dispensations, for the Independent Christian Churches the “Christian era” extends from Pentecost only to the death of the apostles or the close of the New Testament canon before the end of the first century.<sup>78</sup> With the death of the apostles, the office of “apostle” ended, as did the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and to some extent, the direct action of God in the world.<sup>79</sup> While the particular aspects of this dispensational emphasis, including the exclusion of miraculous works and the role of the Holy Spirit, have largely faded from view in the Independent Christian Churches, the idea of a sixty or seventy year period of apostolic purity has not, and it is for this reason that Independents have traditionally placed, and continue to place, the role of the first century church in such an authoritative position.

What the perspectives of Stone, Soule, and Nash reveal is that the Independent Christian Churches is not able, nor has it ever been able, to distinguish between its current practices, attitudes, and cultural assumptions and the “New Testament Church,” nor can its

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<sup>76</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 63.

<sup>77</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 64. This division plays a valuable role in light of the discussion of salvation theology above. Following Campbell’s division of scripture, the Restorationist can allow the repentant thief on the cross (who, as far as can be determined, was not properly immersed) to join Jesus in Paradise as he was still under the Jewish dispensation and not subject to the laws of Christian baptism.

<sup>78</sup> Independents almost universally assign the earliest possible dates to the New Testament writings. Most would argue vehemently for traditional views of authorship and the independence of the gospel writers, and some would argue for such widely discredited theses as Pauline authorship of the letter to the Hebrews.

<sup>79</sup> This understanding is based on an interpretation of I Corinthians 13:8-10 (Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.), where the “complete” is understood to refer to the New Testament. Once the New Testament was completed there was no need for the miraculous, any sort of further revelation or action from God, or the action of the Holy Spirit, whose role was only to illuminate the perfect Bible text and not to operate in any way within the believer, according to early Stone-Campbell theology. This passage, so understood, functioned as a powerful apologetic for Stone-Campbell scholars who invested the Bible with the greatest possible authority. See Byron C. Lambert, “Holy Spirit, Doctrine of the,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 403-6 for more on Stone-Campbell views on the working of the Holy Spirit, particularly the rationalistic approach to this doctrine.

members even agree on many of the details of a “restored church.”<sup>80</sup> Rather, the language that the Independents employ and the assumptions that they make create more divisions as various Independent groups struggle to order their religious and cultural world. By reacting to changes in the social and cultural setting that they inhabit, Independents constitute new religious languages and new ways to order their theological world that function to bring the “apostolic church” into whatever time or situation the Independents find themselves. What they create is not a restoration of the New Testament Church, either in form and doctrine or in attitude and character, but a multiplicity of New Testament Churches, each carefully defined in biblical language to give the appearance of coequality with the first century church, and each contributing to the disunity and fragmentation of the Independent Christian Churches. Conflict over Stone-Campbell ecclesiology has rivaled the problems created by the Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism, but the difference between the two is that there has never been a finished and comprehensive doctrine of the church that provides common understandings to argue over. As a result, ecclesiological divisions, notably the divisions that splintered the Restoration Movement into three main factions, have occurred over the course of decades and are recognized well after they have already happened and a new sect has formed. Since the 1970s such an unacknowledged division has occurred within the Independent Christian Churches. As progressives and traditionalists have fought for control of the Independents, their respective understandings of unity have become more and more divergent and the possibilities of unity, even within the Independents’ own ranks, are quite limited.

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<sup>80</sup> Writing about the divisions present in the Independent Christian Churches, McAllister and Tucker portray the Independents as “A loosely knit and splintered body of self-governing congregations . . . [that] resist any threat—real or imagined—to their complete autonomy. Like the Churches of Christ [(a cappella)], they champion the restoration of New Testament Christianity but cannot agree among themselves as to the precise details of ‘the ancient order of things.’” McAllister and Tucker, *Journey in Faith*, 386.

## Unity: A Definition of Unity

In a February 2003 *Christian Standard* article promoting the upcoming 2003 North American Christian Convention, Bob Russell, the president of that year's convention,<sup>81</sup> heralds the Glenmary Research Center's report that listed the Independent Christian Churches as the second fastest growing religious body in the United States in the 1990s. Russell writes that this growth was expected by many who witnessed the "new wave of enthusiasm, effectiveness, and evangelism that has been sweeping our movement the last two decades."<sup>82</sup> Russell believes that this growth is a result of a changed focus within the Independent Christian Churches, from trying to convince "denominational people to change their doctrine," presumably to align with the ideas of the Independents, to "focusing on bringing lost people to Jesus Christ."<sup>83</sup> This new focus may be seen in the Independent Christian Churches' "new church plants, the explosion of megachurches, the revitalization of many smaller churches, the increased enrollment in Bible colleges, and the multiplication of missionaries and short term mission trips."<sup>84</sup> In summarizing his comments, Russell makes the following observation:

God is really using our movement to impact his world right now. But rather than glorying in the past decade, let's imagine what he could do in the future if we'll dream bigger dreams and take bigger steps of faith. We have the most wonderful plea—a most needed plea—we *should* be the fastest-growing movement in America! And we can be if we'll dream, envision, pray, plan, and let God work through us!"<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The North American Christian Convention is a yearly convention for members of the Independent Christian Churches that began in 1927 as a reaction against the perceived liberalism of the Disciples of Christ, which is why many scholars date the division between Independents and Disciples in 1927. The North American Christian Convention is not a meeting that sets doctrinal standards for the Independent Christian Churches, but conducts a number of main sessions with worship, special music, and sermons, and a number of workshops on a variety of topics. The Convention is operated by a Board of Stewards, an Executive Committee, and a Continuation Committee. Each committee is comprised of volunteers chosen from the Independent Christian Churches, and a different President is selected for each year.

<sup>82</sup> Bob Russell, "North American Christian Convention Theme—'Imagine!,'" *Christian Standard*. (February 16, 2003), 6.

<sup>83</sup> Russell, "North American Christian Convention Theme—'Imagine!,'" 6.

<sup>84</sup> Russell, "North American Christian Convention Theme—'Imagine!,'" 6. See Chapter Five for more on the success orientation of the Independent Christian Churches.

<sup>85</sup> Russell, "North American Christian Convention Theme—'Imagine!,'" 6.

At the Convention itself, during the president's sermon, Russell labors to paint a picture of what he thinks the future of the Independent Christian Churches should be. Russell carefully describes standards for how Independents should behave morally and how churches should minister to their communities through compassionate ministry.<sup>86</sup> Russell challenges every church among the Independents to double in size within the next five years, and he suggests that they can do this by focusing on "lost people;" that is, individuals who are unaffiliated or only nominally affiliated with a church, and by changing methodologies so that the church can best reach those who might be turned off by older styles of "music, programs, and architecture."<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, on the issue of doctrine, Russell claims that the Independent Christian Churches needs to seek "harmony as opposed to dividing over secondary opinions."<sup>88</sup> Russell says:

We have this great slogan, "In essentials, unity; in opinion, liberty; and in all things, love."<sup>89</sup> Isn't that what they practiced in the New Testament church? They allowed for differences of opinion about the observance of the Sabbath and eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Growing churches practice liberty in opinion because they place a high value on unity. I would challenge church leaders to list what you believe are essentials, what a person must believe to be saved. Then allow for liberty in the other areas."<sup>90</sup>

Thus, while Russell is apparently willing to prescribe behaviors that influence the way that the church is perceived by non-Christians and that might be helpful in evangelism, he is

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<sup>86</sup> Bob Russell, "The President's Message: Imagine God's Glory Revealed in Your Church," *Christian Standard*. (September 21, 2003), 9-11. For ease of reference, I will cite the text of this sermon as it was printed in *Christian Standard* after it was delivered, rather than citing the tape of the sermon.

<sup>87</sup> Russell, "The President's Message," 11-12.

<sup>88</sup> Russell, "The President's Message," 12.

<sup>89</sup> This slogan was coined by Lutheran theologian Peter Meiderlin in the seventeenth century and adopted by the Stone-Campbell Movement as a description of their efforts for unity and restoration; that is, by restoring essential doctrines and allowing liberty of opinion on non-essential doctrines, all Christians might be united as Christians only. For a discussion on this particular slogan see Hans Rollmann, "In Essentials Unity: The Pre-history of a Restoration Movement Slogan," *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 39, no. 3 (1997): 129-39; for a brief discussion on the wider use of slogans within the Restoration Movement, see Terry Miethe, "Slogans," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 688.

<sup>90</sup> Russell, "The President's Message," 12.

not willing to make similar doctrinal pronouncements regarding what these churches teach.<sup>91</sup>

Russell's comments reveal that what began as a movement that proclaimed Christian unity as one of its primary goals and believed that such unity would naturally occur as Christians shed their denominational differences to "sink into the body of Christ at large," is capable only of finding unity within a given congregation. Promoting "liberty in opinion because they place a high value on unity" within the local church means that unity will be relegated to the internal policies and beliefs of the local body, and that unity with other churches, whether part of the Independent Christian Churches or another denomination, is dependent on the character and practices of each individual congregation and the desire of that particular body to seek unity outside the bounds of its own fellowship. A further abdication of the idea of a quest for Christian unity is seen in Russell's reliance on personal pronouns to describe the Independent Christian Churches. Where Russell speaks of a "revitalization of the Restoration Movement"<sup>92</sup> that came about because the Independent Christian Churches quit trying "to persuade denominational people to change *their* doctrine," or where he speaks of "God . . . using *our* movement to impact His world," he describes and delineates a group that defines itself in a manner that separates it from other denominations. This particular form of sectarian language is not unique to Russell or to modern day Independents, but merely reflects the way that the various conservative branches of the Restoration Movement have come to define themselves. They have simply continued to utilize the "us" versus "them" language

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<sup>91</sup> This is not meant to imply that Russell does not think that doctrine is important, only that the power structure of the Independent Christian Churches does not allow anyone to make such doctrinal pronouncements.

<sup>92</sup> The phrase Restoration Movement is here limited to the Independent Christian Churches (perhaps to a lesser extent Russell might extend this comment to certain quarters of the Church of Christ (a cappella), but would certainly not include Disciples of Christ) and is indicative of the fact that Independents believe themselves to be the true continuation of the Restoration Movement program.

employed by Thomas Campbell in the *Declaration and Address* and the strict divisions made by Alexander Campbell in *The Christian Baptist*.<sup>93</sup>

Where Russell does refer to doctrinal or theological ideas, he does not define them. In his article promoting the North American Christian Convention, he speaks of the Restoration Movement's "most wonderful . . . [and] needed plea" as a reason that the Independent Christian Churches "should be the fastest-growing movement in America," but he does not say what that plea is or how it contributes to the growth and revitalization of the life of the Independent Christian Churches. In a similar vein, during his sermon, Russell's only doctrinal challenge to the churches is to have the leaders "list what you *believe* are essentials, what a person must believe to be saved [emphasis mine]." The implications of this statement are twofold. First, the essential doctrines will necessarily change from church to church and, lacking a coherent theological tradition, will reflect what the leaders of a given church *believe* the New Testament teaches, which ultimately results in further doctrinal fragmentation as each church will interpret the New Testament documents differently. Second, the purpose of defining these doctrines is essentially to determine the minimum requirements for salvation and to then allow the individual to believe whatever he or she desires about other aspects of Christian theology. What this actually promotes is rampant individualism within a given church, where there can be little

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<sup>93</sup> This argument is not lost on the traditionalists who continue to seek restoration and unity. Donald A. Nash wrote a letter to *Christian Standard* in response to an article in which the author claimed that Independent Christian Churches is no longer a "movement," but has "become simply another denomination" (see Robert Lowery, "Being a Member of Christ's Church," *Christian Standard*, (July 25, 2004), 15). Nash argues "The slogan 'We are not the only Christians, but Christians only' [which Lowery refers to in his article] has been a bane on Christian churches/churches of Christ which desire to restore the church established by Christ (Matthew 16:18) that is revealed in the New Testament through inspired apostles (John 16:13). Why? The term *we* indicates an organized group separate from an implied *they*, other professed Christian groups. Since this slogan is used by and about Christian churches, it makes them a denomination. This is contrary to the goal of the effort to restore the New Testament church. . . . The only time this slogan would be proper would be on the level of the local congregations about which brother Lowery rightly spoke so well. When a visitor asks what that congregation stands for, this would be a legitimate reply and could lead to further discussion of the gospel truths. In such case the 'we' does not represent any denominational group, but only the local congregation of Christians only," (Donald A. Nash, "Reader's Write," *Christian Standard*, (November 14, 2005), 13). Nash's statements reveal two things: first, when speaking of the entire group of Independent Christian Churches, the only language one has recourse to is that of a denomination; and second, the only place where one might be a "Christian only," and thus the only place one might hope for unity, is within the local congregation.

agreement on many issues of theology or practice as each person demands the liberty to believe what he or she desires.

That Russell would decline to make doctrinal statements for the Independent Christian Churches is hardly surprisingly, given the Independents' traditional suspicion of authoritarian doctrinal statements and their concomitant emphasis on congregational autonomy. However, this does have profound implications for the Independent appeal to unity. Independent Christian Churches historian Henry Webb claims that aside from Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ in Matthew 16:16, "there is no creedal formula that unites Christian Churches/Churches of Christ."<sup>94</sup> Webb contends that "theological definitions are viewed as barriers to Christian unity and hence rejected as a basis of fellowship."<sup>95</sup> It is evident, though, that the Independent Christian Churches has much more stringent demands when it comes to unity than simple agreement that "Jesus is the Christ." Webb incorrectly argues that Christian unity for the Independent Christian Churches is not based on "theological definitions." Unity, for the Independent Christian Churches, is actually based entirely on shared theological definitions; that is, for the Independent Christian Churches to find Christian unity there must be agreement on doctrines that Independents have elevated to central importance, such as the Independent definitions of baptism or their version of the New Testament Church.

What the Independent Christian Churches lacks is not theological definitions, but common understandings of these definitions. That is, while all Independents might agree on the importance of restoration, unity, baptism, or the Lord's Supper, various factions within the Independent Christian Churches will assign different degrees of importance and different emphasis to each of these doctrines and different approaches to the exclusion of

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<sup>94</sup> Henry E. Webb, "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 188.

<sup>95</sup> Webb, "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," 188.

other groups and individuals with whom they do not share a common definition. Further, many Restoration Movement arguments for unity actually demand division. H. Lee Mason makes precisely this point in an editorial in *The Restoration Herald*:

We have been told, and are being told, with some regularity that the Restoration Movement was and is a “unity movement.” This is true, but only with proper understanding. The early leaders of our movement believed that it should be easy to get people united by just going back to the Bible. They wanted to do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names. The problem was not with their idea. The idea was scriptural and good. The problem was with the heart of man who wanted to cling to his man-made ways and names.

...

[Alexander] Campbell was calling not just for unity, but, dare I say it (?), division. Biblical unity is not just uniting or getting together, no matter what. True unity also calls for division. True Biblical unity calls for a division or separation from that which is not of God and harmful to itself, and then it seeks what is the best of God for others. A person has cancer. Before he can be whole, the cancer must be removed. Before there can be unity there must be division as the cancer, or what is not of God, is removed.

...

Unity is not always correct. Division is not always wrong. What is always correct is following the Word of God and doing the will of God. Perhaps we need more division from what is not of God, in order to be more united in the things of God.<sup>96</sup>

Mason’s argument is a thinly veiled polemic against progressive elements within the Independent Christian Churches, which he believes have sacrificed “true Biblical unity” for unity at any cost. However, the progressives are not more concerned about unity than the traditionalists; they have just adopted a different set of definitions upon which to base unity. Progressives are seeking unity only among certain limited strains of American Evangelicalism and with progressive elements of the Church of Christ (a cappella)—they are not interested in unity with the mainline Protestant denominations or with Roman Catholicism.<sup>97</sup> It is here that the vacuous character of the restoration concept comes into play. Unity for traditionalists is found among like-minded restorationists, intent on restoring the Movement begun by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and

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<sup>96</sup> Mason, “Editor’s Viewpoint: A Unity Movement,” 2, 22.

<sup>97</sup> See below, 182-8.

Walter Scott; for the progressives, unity is found among other evangelical groups who are intent on restoring what they believe is the “spirit” of New Testament Christianity. Thus, both groups are seeking unity, not on the basis of the Bible alone, but on the basis of a reconstruction of Christianity that owes more to Scottish Common Sense Realism, the values of liberty and individualism as they were experienced on the American frontier, and American capitalism.<sup>98</sup>

The divisive nature of the Independent Christian Churches’ attempts to create unity is indicative of the continued fragmentation of a theological tradition that has, necessarily, been a cause of division from its inception. While the Independent Christian Churches would claim that it holds tightly to a set of doctrines, there is little agreement among its members about which doctrines they must adhere to. This is, in part, a result of the haphazard manner in which the early leaders borrowed doctrines from other Christian traditions. It is not without irony that Jack Cottrell condemns the Zwinglian view that baptism is not connected in any way to salvation,<sup>99</sup> while essentially adopting the Zwinglian doctrine of the Lord’s Supper as principally a memorial meal<sup>100</sup> (this bifurcated view of the two sacraments recognized by Independents is not Cottrell’s invention, but merely reflects traditional Stone-Campbell teaching). By creating their theology piecemeal, adopting the christological definitions of Chalcedon while arguing against the idea of the Trinity,<sup>101</sup> the Roman Catholic meaning of baptism coupled with the Anabaptist

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<sup>98</sup> The links to Scottish Common Sense philosophy and American values and experience have been explored in Chapters Two and Three. The relation to American capitalism is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>99</sup> Cottrell, “The History of Baptism: Part Two,” 7-9; Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once For All: Bible Doctrine For Today*, (Joplin: College Press, 2002), 370-1.

<sup>100</sup> Jack Cottrell, “The Greatest Memorial,” *Christian Standard*, (June 6, 2004), 10; Cottrell, *Faith Once For All*, 454.

<sup>101</sup> Though they were not Unitarians—see above, 20, fn. 7 and 125, fn. 128. The argument against the doctrine of the Trinity was, for the most part, more linguistic than substantial, though Barton Stone’s views on the subject caused considerable suspicion to be cast upon him by the followers of Alexander Campbell. Suspicion of Trinitarian doctrine has largely fallen away in recent decades and most Independents today would accept the doctrine. For more on Stone-Campbell understandings of Christology and the Trinity, see Robert D. Cornwall, “Christology,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 204-5; and Paul M. Blowers,

form of baptism, and accepting the Zwinglian doctrine of the Lord's Supper, for example, the Independent Christian Churches created a theology that lent itself to fragmentation as scholars attempted to explore the working of these doctrines and developed different emphases based on the different theologies present in these doctrines. As is evident from the challenges to the Independent doctrine of baptism, which is an example of the one instance in which their amalgamation of theology, philosophy, and the American environment worked to create a fully developed doctrine, and the challenges to the Independent doctrine of the church, which is an example of a doctrine where their synthesis of sources could not construct a comprehensive ecclesiology, the Independents are even beginning to lose their grasp on doctrines that they have claimed are most important to them.

While Independent understandings of unity tend to fragment the denomination, there are agencies within the Independent Christian Churches that attempt to unite facets of that fragmented denomination. The Independent Christian Churches is a denomination that attempts to operate without formal denominational control.<sup>102</sup> However, in the absence of a formal denominational apparatus, certain groups and institutions within the Independent Christian Churches have necessarily filled the void. Church of Christ scholar Robert Douglas describes how such an informal power structure functions to provide control over a "non-denominational" denomination. Using the Church of Christ (a cappella) as a case

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"God, Doctrine of," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, *et al.*, eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 356-9.

<sup>102</sup> That the Independent Christian Churches constitutes a denomination is obvious to those outside the denomination yet is a concept fiercely resisted by insiders. It is necessary, in this instance, to state the obvious. For the purposes of this thesis a denomination is a religious organization that determines the boundaries of faith and practice for a group of congregations, and by so doing designates that group as a discernable body separate from other religious groups. A denomination also suggests solutions to challenges to faith and practice through some means of power, whether that power is formally bestowed upon a governing body or is decentered and expressed through a variety of informal channels, with the Independent Christian Churches being governed by the latter informal power structure. As such, denominational character is not dependent upon having a structured hierarchy, denominational headquarters, or governing body, as Independents would narrowly define the concept of denomination, but is determined through the sharing of a common heritage, religious beliefs and practices, and through the denomination, that is, the naming, of a particular religious tradition (in this instance the preferred denominator among Independents being Christian church or church of Christ).

study, Douglas situates power with the ministers of prominent churches, Bible college presidents and professors, and Church of Christ journals.<sup>103</sup> These three centers of power determine the social dialogue of the Church of Christ (a cappella) by encouraging a "general uniformity of opinion," by minimizing dissent, and isolating and neutralizing non-conformists.<sup>104</sup> Douglas's analysis is applicable to the Independent Christian Churches as the same types of institutions have functioned in the same way within both of these branches of the Restoration Movement. Moreover, his work gives substantial insight into the current divisions within the Independent Christian Churches. Douglas argues that such institutions rely on the continual consent of the governed for their authority in matters of faith and practice. Douglas writes:

These three centers of power have a relationship of reciprocal confidence with a substantial number of Church of Christ members. Without this confidence the power centers could not survive in their present form. Should the centers of power under consideration in this study fail substantially to reflect the views of their constituents on critical identity-related issues, they would quickly lose their influence. In the absence of any formally constituted denominational hierarchy most centers of power depend largely, if not solely, upon the good will of a voluntary base of support. The continued influence of a journal, school, or minister is evidence of a constituency's confidence.<sup>105</sup>

As a result, where there are divergent opinions over matters of faith and practice and a given institution or set of institutions fail to satisfactorily represent the views of its constituents, or where a substantial portion of the group vocalizes concerns not shared by others, either the institution must change its position in order to retain the power it had previously enjoyed, or the vocal group must create new institutions that adequately reflect its concerns. Further, if an institution attempts to respond to the concerns of a segment of its support base, and if doing so alienates another segment of that base, the alienated

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Christy Douglas, "Power, Its Locus and Function in Defining Social Commentary in the Church of Christ, Illustrated by a Case Study of Black Civil Rights," diss., University of Southern California, 1980, 7-8.

<sup>104</sup> Douglas, "Power," 8.

<sup>105</sup> Douglas, "Power," 7.

segment will create a new institution that addresses its interests. In either case, the result is the creation of new institutions that address specific groups within the denomination and that ultimately lead to division within the denomination. This is the process currently being played out between traditionalist and progressive segments of the Independent Christian Churches—traditionalists attempt to unite the segment of the Independent Christian Churches that desires to restore the pattern of the New Testament Church, and progressives seek to unite the portion of the Independent Christian Churches that embraces the idea of restoration of the attitude and successes of the New Testament Church. As such, where both sides have tried to consolidate power to shape the direction of the Independent Christian Churches, they have actually contributed to the continued atomization of Independent theology and practice.

The progressives are unaware of or do not wish to acknowledge how their agenda has challenged and changed traditional Independent Christian Churches understandings of faith and practice, nor do they acknowledge how their institutions have gained greater and more consolidated control over the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>106</sup> However, as vocal progressive segments of the Independent Christian Churches demand changes in doctrinal matters and in how the church operates, the most powerful Independent institutions have catered to this group. The traditionalists have argued that this represents a loss of freedom within the church which leads to a watered-down doctrine that undermines truth. Russell James, president of Central Christian College of the Bible in Moberly, Missouri, argues that the pragmatism that is a central part of the progressive segment of the Independents

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<sup>106</sup> The traditionalists, however, are very aware of how progressive understandings have changed Restoration Movement ideals (See Russell James III, "Concerning Trends," *The Restoration Herald*, 84, no. 4 (April 2005), 3-6, 20). The institutions that are at the forefront of the traditionalist critique of the consolidation of power are the North American Christian Convention, Provision Ministry Group (which is the umbrella organization of the Church Development Fund, Stadia: New Church Strategies, which is a church planting organization, and Visioneering Studios, which specializes in "architectural evangelism," that is, designing church buildings that are welcoming to non-Christians), and *Christian Standard*. The power that progressives wield is further strengthened since over 90% of Independent Christian Churches ministers are trained in Independent Bible Colleges where they are likely to be exposed to progressive agendas, not necessarily in matters of doctrine, but in regard to issues related to practical ministry.

has lead some Independents down the path of ecumenism rather than restoration. James writes:

A Restorationist holds that we must strive for unity by restoring the ancient order of things. We can work towards agreement by using Bible words for Bible things, discarding all human creeds, and seeking to recreate the church polity and theology as described in the New Testament pattern. An ecumenical approach says that we must strive for unity by accepting the strongly held beliefs of others. Basically, it is a unity based upon the idea that we agree to disagree, or that all truth is relative and hence we should accept others beliefs as equally valid as our own.<sup>107</sup>

While James' characterization of progressive approaches to unity is entirely unfair, in that progressives certainly do not believe in an ecumenism that believes that "all truth is relative," nor are the options offered by James the only possible ground for ecumenism, he nonetheless points to the central issue in the ever widening gulf between traditionalists and progressives—the fact that traditionalists and progressives no longer share a common language or a common criteria for Christian unity.

James laments that the Independents, once known as the "free churches of Christ,"<sup>108</sup> have given up their freedom because "it is politically more comfortable to behave like some denominational underling, mandated to support the assigned institution located in the church's assigned region, regardless of its change of purpose, mission or activities."<sup>109</sup> James argues that

the blame for this transition lies not with some administration, but it lies clearly and squarely with church leaders who have voluntarily given up their freedom to choose.

Once our churches give up that willingness to choose, the power shifts from hundreds of free churches, to a single centralized authority.<sup>110</sup>

However, the churches and church leaders that James critiques did choose, and they exercised the freedom that James prizes to democratically side with the progressives. As such, the problem that James and other traditionalists ultimately have with the progressives

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<sup>107</sup> James, "Concerning Trends," 3.

<sup>108</sup> James, "Concerning Trends," 3.

<sup>109</sup> James, "Concerning Trends," 6.

<sup>110</sup> James, "Concerning Trends," 6.

is not that the progressives have unnaturally claimed power that is not rightly theirs, but that the traditionalists are losing their ability to control the direction of the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>111</sup> The constituents of the Independent Christian Churches have quite naturally accorded more power to the progressive side of the denomination through the only voice they have: their financial support. That is, as an institution gains more constituents who give money to further the institutional aims, the power of the institution grows in proportion to the number of constituents it has and the amount of money they give. Unity, therefore, is a function of power, and the future of the Independent goal of unity is determined, not by theological reasoning, but by the power ceded to a particularly powerful group within the denomination, which may or may not seek this unity among other Independents or other denominations. Progressives and traditionalists alike continue to speak of unity as a goal of their movement, though they mean very different things by unity. Each group attempts to exert its power to gain control over the denomination so that they might promote their own understanding of unity. However, while both progressives and traditionalists continue to talk about unity, neither group has identified a way to find unity outside of the confines of the Restoration Movement.

### **Christian Unity and Power**

A particularly revealing insight into the Restoration Movement concept of unity is Leroy Garrett's claim that "there have always been unitists and ecumenists, but this is the

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<sup>111</sup> Contrary to James' claim, the traditionalists are not interested in freedom and congregational autonomy, but are rather interested in consolidating their own power and control over the teaching and practices of the Independent Christian Churches. H. Lee Mason makes this point in an editorial of *The Restoration Herald* where he critiques churches planted by Stadia, a progressive church planting organization, for their fundraising practices and salvation theology. Mason writes: "If what is seen on the web sites of some of the Stadia churches is what Stadia wants to produce, perhaps some of the brethren should take a second look. . . . *Without local or area oversight* [emphasis mine], some new churches will indeed follow the leadership of poorly trained church planters who may have a personality for new church work but lack proper theological training or maturity." (H. Lee Mason, "Editor's Viewpoint: Little Things Mean A Lot," *The Restoration Herald*, 84, no. 6 (June 2005), 20). Mason does not suggest what this oversight would look like, how a church might preserve its congregational autonomy with such oversight, who would provide oversight, how it would differ from a presbytery, and under what authority oversight might be provided if such control is not authorized in the New Testament, as traditionalists would claim.

only movement dedicated to the union of all believers.”<sup>112</sup> This statement suggests three things; first, Garrett attempts to separate the unity movement of Stone and Campbell from other unity movements throughout Christian history. For Garrett, the Stone-Campbell quest for unity is of a different substance from all other attempts to find Christian unity; therefore, the Stone-Campbell Movement is a special instance of the quest for unity that demands broader attention and broader acceptance from other Christians. Second, Garrett makes clear that unity is not to be found among denominations at the level of the institutional church, but only among individual believers. However, since the conservative branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement offer such a narrow definition of what makes one a “believer,”<sup>113</sup> the only way for this to be a viable path to unity is if other Christians give up their theology and practices in order to adopt key Stone-Campbell doctrines.<sup>114</sup> Under this understanding of unity, unity costs the members of the Restoration Movement nothing—it merely serves to reinforce the idea that the conservative branches of the Restoration Movement have been right all along and that the pure, apostolic Church may be found safeguarded within the confines of this Movement. The third point revealed by Garrett’s comment is that there are no other options available for unity. Due to the perpetuation of the Independent myth that they represent a form of non-denominational Christianity, the Independents have constructed no apparatus with which they might seek unity on an organizational level with other denominations. As such, the Independents have

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<sup>112</sup> Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> See above, 139-50.

<sup>114</sup> Some Restorations do make this argument. See Everett Ferguson, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Church,” *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, William R. Baker, ed., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 193-201, where Ferguson argues that “the most distinctive thing about these ‘distinctives’ [of the Restoration Movement] is that they are not distinctive . . . .

Take the matter of immersion. The practice rests on strong indications in the New Testament texts and is widely accepted in scholarly circles as the normal practice in primitive times and the prevailing practice for long after the first century. With the exception of those who do not administer water baptism at all, no Christian group refuses to accept immersion as a valid form of baptism. . . .

They [other denominations] take exception only to the exclusive stand on immersion, but do not say the practice itself is wrong. Would not the truly ecumenical approach be to practice what everyone agrees is acceptable? This is to say nothing about the textual, linguistic, historical, and theological arguments that may be advanced in favor of immersion. Immersion is the consensus practice; sprinkling and pouring are the divisive practices (200).”

placed themselves in a double-bind; their limited approach to unity among other believers severely impedes the potential for unity with individual Christians, and they have no way to seek unity on an organizational level. It is at this juncture that the importance of the Independent power structure becomes evident. For the people in power to retain that power, they cannot question the Independent doctrines that prevent them from having unity with other Christians, and they must continue to reject the idea of unity at a denominational level. Nor can they make pronouncements that could alleviate either of these conditions—to do so would result in a loss of constituents, who would turn to more traditional interpretations of Restoration Movement doctrine, which would result in a loss of financial contributions, and therefore, in a loss of power to control the direction of the Independent Christian Churches.

While the conditions for unity are determined by the power structure of the Independent Christian Churches, that power structure is created in service of Independent conceptions of truth, or Independent claims that they alone correctly understand and interpret the Bible. For traditionalists, these claims are limited to the restorationist doctrine that they proclaim; for progressives, the truth claims that they make are extended to include much of the American Evangelical community.<sup>115</sup> The Independent Christian Churches attitude toward unity is easily seen in James DeForest Murch's characterization of how the Independent Christian Churches is related to the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Disciples of Christ.<sup>116</sup> Murch considers the divisions among Stone-Campbell churches to be the result of defections from true Restoration Movement doctrine, eventually leading to the splintering of the Movement into what he believes to be the too legalistic Church of Christ (a cappella) and the too liberal Disciples of Christ, with the Independents continuing

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<sup>115</sup> See below, 182-5.

<sup>116</sup> Attitudes toward unity among Independents have obviously changed since Murch's writing, most notably among the progressives. However, as Murch was writing as an Independent in the 1960s, when the Disciples of Christ were dividing into Independent Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ denominations, Murch's comments serve as a baseline for considering future unity efforts.

to follow the true path of the restoration promoted by Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. As such, many in the Independent Christian Churches regard their denomination as most wholly or perfectly Christian.

Regarding the division between the Church of Christ (a cappella) and the Disciples of Christ, Murch lists a number of controversies within the Movement, claiming that the use of an organ in the worship of the church produced the most strife, followed by the issues of “close[d] Communion, open membership, attitudes toward denomination bodies, the paid ministry, and extracongregational organizations.”<sup>117</sup> Murch characterizes this division as developing “largely in the absence of deeply spiritual commitment to Christ and in an inability to discern between matters of opinion and matters of faith.”<sup>118</sup> Murch writes that the Church of Christ (a cappella) group which split from the Disciples in 1906 was “a very determined minority” outside of the “mainstream” of the Disciples.<sup>119</sup> He writes that the larger body of Disciples rejected “the legalistic view of the Scriptures requiring strict obedience and conformity to a written code of law” and that the Church of Christ (a cappella) was guilty of employing Scripture “without regard to the demands of common sense and human progress.”<sup>120</sup> Murch drives to the heart of the problem, though he does not recognize the implications of his statement:

Strangely enough they found themselves quarreling, not over the Scriptures themselves but over interpretations of a methodology of unity set up by Thomas Campbell: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”<sup>121</sup>

Actually, there was nothing strange at all about this quarrel. Rather, this division was merely the expected and necessary consequence of the Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic that the early Restoration Movement leaders employed to create Christian

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<sup>117</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 157.

<sup>118</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 158.

<sup>119</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 215.

<sup>120</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 215.

<sup>121</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 215.

unity. It is precisely the methodology chosen to create unity and the attendant assumptions employed by the early leaders of the Restoration Movement that has led to every major division within the Movement. It is important to note that while Murch allows that “both groups of brethren were actuated by the highest motives, and believed that their course of action was necessary if they were to be loyal to Christ and teachings of the Holy Scriptures,”<sup>122</sup> he believes that the Church of Christ was clearly in the wrong and that the remainder of the Disciples followed the Biblical path where the Church of Christ deviated from it.

Murch begins his discussion of the second division within the Restoration Movement by offering the years 1909-1959 as “the background of the Great Apostasy in world Protestantism.”<sup>123</sup> This “Apostasy,” as might be expected, centered on the nature and understanding of the Bible, when textual criticism grew beyond what Murch believed to be its allotted boundaries of providing a “valid text,” to a point where, due to pressures from Darwin’s evolutionary hypothesis and the influence of Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsch, “the Bible was all but abandoned.”<sup>124</sup> It is at this point where Murch’s history takes on a strident tone as he offers a contentious rebuke of the evils and abuses of the liberal takeover of “true” Christianity.<sup>125</sup> As with the Church of Christ (a cappella), the churches who accepted the conclusions of liberal theology were, according to Murch, outside the mainstream of the Movement.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, as Murch describes it, “in their hour of greatest achievement,” the churches of the Restoration Movement “began to recognize the infiltration of ‘another gospel’ which denied the credibility, inspiration, and authority of the Bible in the name of science and modern culture.”<sup>127</sup> In 1926 the division at the Disciples annual meeting had become so sharp that the conservative members

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<sup>122</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 215.

<sup>123</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 223.

<sup>124</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 223.

<sup>125</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 223-35.

<sup>126</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 235.

<sup>127</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 237.

gathered at that convention determined to establish their own convention, the North American Christian Convention, to be held in Indianapolis, Indiana the following year. This represents the beginning of the second formal division among the Disciples and the ultimate creation of the Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church). As with the division with the Church of Christ (a cappella), Murch characterizes the Independents as staying faithful to true Christianity, whereas the Disciples of Christ had strayed from that path.

James DeForest Murch concludes his history of the Restoration Movement with a renewed plea for Christian unity. Murch believes that

The principles of the *Declaration and Address* are still valid, and the truth of the Holy Scriptures is eternal; but they must be applied to an era of Christian history which is not at all like the one in which the Restoration movement was born. Pharisaical insistence that “we are right” and “they are wrong” will get no place in the counsels of men who are as eager—possibly more eager—for Christian unity as the Disciples. There must be admission of the fact that there have been misinterpretations and misapplications of Restoration and Scriptural principles, accompanied by a woeful lack of true Christian spirit.<sup>128</sup>

Murch acknowledges “that the New Testament church has not yet been perfectly restored anywhere within the Restoration movement” and that the disunity among the three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement is evidence that they have little understanding of Christian unity.<sup>129</sup> He maintains that “the Restoration plea for unity” has much to offer in regard to discussions of unity,<sup>130</sup> however, he continues to perpetuate the problematic Scottish Common Sense view that the Bible operates as an “objective criterion” by which mankind might understand “God’s truth” and “judge the validity or worth of any religious belief, practice, or institution.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366.

<sup>129</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366-7.

<sup>130</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 367.

<sup>131</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 368-9.

While traditionalist attitudes toward unity have changed little since Murch's day, or have possibly become more sectarian, some progressives have recognized that the Restoration Movement quest for Christian unity has largely been a failure. Perhaps the most telling indication of this divergent understanding of unity is seen in the titles of the most recent Independent Christian Churches histories. With strong traditionalist leanings, James North's *Union in Truth* suggests that there is an objective set of Christian "truths" that must be identified and accepted before there can be unity, and it is strongly implied throughout the book that these truths have been discovered by the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>132</sup> Henry Webb's more progressive history, *In Search of Christian Unity*, implies that the grounds of Christian unity are somewhat unclear and that the conditions for such unity are quite difficult to establish. A look at both traditionalist and progressive approaches to Christian unity reveals that both have different standards for Christian unity and that neither has been successful in finding unity.

Traditionalists do not think of unity as a theological concept that can be accomplished on a large scale or in a universal sense. Joe Carson Smith has noted the difficulty of seeking unity on a national or worldwide level. Smith, who has served as the minister of Camelback Christian Church since its founding in 1973, contributed an article, "Concepts and Conditions of Christian Unity," to a collection of essays in honor of Harold Ford. Smith correctly notes that Alexander Campbell's plan for achieving Christian unity through the restoration of the New Testament church, which would then result in the millennial dawn, was thoroughly utopian.<sup>133</sup> Smith seeks to examine and undo this

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<sup>132</sup> North exhibits a mix of traditionalist and progressive traits, in that he seems to regard the Restoration Movement as, in some sense, the purest repository of Christian truth, while at the same time he has been involved in unity talks with Evangelical denominations. North would say that these objective truths are found in the Bible and in the person of Jesus, but he does not address the hermeneutic issues involved in defining these supposedly objective truths, nor is he willing to question the epistemological assumptions that he makes. See North, *Union in Truth*, 363-9 for more on this bifurcation within North's thought.

<sup>133</sup> Joe Carson Smith, "Concepts and Conditions of Christian Unity," *Essays on the Restoration Plea: in honor of Dr. Harold W. Ford*, ed. Mark S. Krause (Edmonds: PSCC Litho, 1986), 43.

utopianism by asking the question, “‘If the unity for which Jesus prayed [in John 17]<sup>134</sup> were realized, what would it look like?’ That is, what would be the specific visible conditions, ideas, actions, institutions, relationships, human artifacts, etc., which would then prevail?”<sup>135</sup> Smith argues that Jesus prayed for a visible unity between individuals, and he rightly claims that “when Alexander Campbell linked Christian unity and the evangelization of the world to the millennium, he forged a formula for perennial frustration.”<sup>136</sup> However, Smith’s solution to the problem of seeking Christian unity is no less frustrating, in that he mistakenly argues that this passage has a single, objective meaning that precisely identifies the “concepts and conditions of Christian unity” and, as a result, he further erroneously argues that the utopian goals of Alexander Campbell lead to a charge of utopianism that can be laid at the feet of anyone who seeks to understand Christian unity in a more universal or abstract sense than Smith does. As such, Smith’s argument is undermined by his traditionalist restoration assumptions and, rather than offering a path to unity, Smith’s argument actually reveals the difficulty of seeking unity through his own limited restorationist tradition.

Further complicating Smith’s argument is a stringent anti-institutionalism that is not generally shared by progressives among the Independent Christian Churches. Again, Smith’s traditionalist leaning colors his evaluation of the issues involved in his discussion of Christian unity. Smith writes that by the time of Alexander Campbell’s death, “a

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<sup>134</sup> The Independent Christian Churches, following early Stone-Campbell teaching, regards Jesus’ prayer in John 17 as clearly detailing the desire of Jesus that his church might be one and offering biblical support for the restoration plea. This is most pronounced in John 17:20-23: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” The Stone-Campbell Movement has traditionally understood this passage to mean that a united church would result in greater evangelical success around the world, or, in the terms set up in the restoration plea: once the divided churches became one unified church, the millennium would be ushered in.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, “Concepts and Conditions,” 44.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, “Concepts and Conditions,” 46.

substantial and able cadre of leaders had shifted their focus from the service of truth and freedom to the management and application of power.”<sup>137</sup> For Smith this shift in focus represents a declension that is still seen today among Independents as individuals and churches have given up freedom and truth in the service of power. Smith claims that the Independents had been stripped of their religious institutions and their concomitant power as the Disciples of Christ gained control of those institutions and, to his dismay, the Independents have once again “built up substantial institutions” which serve to direct the course of the Independents, and whose direction individuals and churches may not wish to submit to; thus, for Smith, the power wielded by these institutions “harms the unity of the Church.”<sup>138</sup> Smith’s naïve belief that such ecclesiastical institutions could simply be abolished is as thoroughly utopian as Campbell’s belief in the inauguration of the millennium through the unification of the churches, in that Smith is attempting to institute an ecclesiology that does not and cannot exist, as a given church or group of churches will necessarily develop institutional aspects to provide structure for and to perpetuate their beliefs.<sup>139</sup> Smith’s arguments about Christian community reveal three things about traditionalist approaches to unity. First, Smith and other traditionalists are not upset about institutions as such, or their use and abuse of power, as long as said institutions promote traditionalist ends. Much traditionalist anti-institutionalism is actually an attempt to prevent the Independent Christian Churches from making the inevitable move from sect to church.<sup>140</sup> Second, traditionalist understandings of unity are so local and highly

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<sup>137</sup> Smith, “Concepts and Conditions,” 51.

<sup>138</sup> Smith, “Concepts and Conditions,” 53-4.

<sup>139</sup> See Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded Ed., (New York: Image Books, 2002), 26-38. Dulles argues “that the Church of Christ [Dulles is here referring to the Church universal, not the denomination that is the subject of this thesis] could not perform its mission without some stabilizing organizing features. It could not unite men of many nations into a well-knit community of conviction, commitment, and hope, and could not minister effectively to the needs of mankind, unless it had responsible officers and properly approved procedures. Throughout its history, from the very earliest years, Christianity has always had an institutional side. It has had recognized ministers, accepted confessional formulas, and prescribed forms of public worship” (27).

<sup>140</sup> The categories set up by Ernst Troeltsch are helpful here in describing the development of the various branches of the Restoration Movement. Troeltsch offers three competing typologies of Christian community

individualistic that it is difficult or impossible for them to conceive of Christian unity on a broader scale. Third, traditionalists have no desire for unity outside of the narrow boundaries they have defined for Christian belief, with the test of fellowship being baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

While Smith occupies a position on the traditionalist side of the divided Independents and would likely find little agreement from progressives, he nonetheless accurately describes a central component of the ecclesiology of both traditionalists and progressives.

Most people actually see the Church on the scale of the local congregation, or in individual Christian relationships. It is in specific situations of various, but limited, extent that Christian unity has its cutting edge. The embarrassing truth is that the witness of the Church depends upon our unity with saints that we know. They are the members of our families, our friends and enemies, the Christians in our home churches, the brethren in surrounding congregations, the ministers in our local areas. Jesus' prayer was practical, not utopian. It is personal, not institutional. The unity it has in view is finite and concrete, not infinite and abstract. It is visible to ordinary people.<sup>141</sup>

It is evident from Smith's comments that Independent ecclesiology is extremely limited in its scope and that "Church" refers only to the local congregation. There is little sense in which the Independents can refer to any concept of a universal Church or to a communion of saints, as such language is entirely foreign to them and is antithetical to the Independent insistence on congregational autonomy and their doctrine that the entire church is represented in the local congregation. For the Independents, there is nothing outside of the local communion. Many among the progressives, however, have recognized the

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throughout the history of the Church: Church, Sect, and Mystical. For Troeltsch, the Church type is an institution that can accommodate its society and culture and offers religion for the masses. The Sect type is a group that attempts to stand apart from its society and culture and seeks strict holiness based on a legal understanding of the Christian religion where Church and world are clearly delineated. The Mystical type places the Christian religion into the personal and experiential realm. Parts of each branch of the Restoration Movement have made the transition from sect to church, leaving behind, in the process, a portion that attempts to retain the "Sect" nature of the Movement. See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, Vol. I*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); and Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, Vol. II*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>141</sup> Smith, "Concepts and Conditions," 46-7.

insufficiency of traditionalist understandings of unity and have begun to seek various avenues to recognize Christian unity in a broader sense than what is afforded by traditionalist teachings.

Where progressives are seeking unity, their efforts are divided into two areas. They are first seeking unity with the other two branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement, though their energy is primarily focused on unity with the Church of Christ (a cappella). Serious dialogue between the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella) began in 1984 at a series of annual meetings between the two groups, known as "Restoration Forums."<sup>142</sup> It is possible that this unity effort would have gone largely unnoticed among the larger Independent Christian Churches community were it not for an announcement made by Rick Atchley at the 2003 North American Christian Convention. Atchley is the senior minister of the Richland Hills Church of Christ, located in Fort Worth, Texas (Atchley's congregation is the largest church in the Church of Christ (a cappella) fellowship). Just before Bob Russell's sermon, Atchley took the stage to make the following announcement:

Several years ago I spent some time really searching for the heart of God, asking him to give me a mission in the second half of my life. Only he could do it. And God put something on my heart. And I shared it that next Sunday in all three services of our church. I shared with them that God wants me to devote myself, for the rest of my life, to seeing reconciliation among the A Cappella and instrumental Churches of Christ and Christian Churches in America.<sup>143</sup>

The 11,000 in attendance responded to this pronouncement with a lengthy standing ovation.

Atchley continued his address by issuing an apology on behalf of the Church of Christ (a cappella):

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<sup>142</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 467. All three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement have engaged in talks through the Stone-Campbell Dialogue, which began in 1999 and is an effort to bridge and heal the divisions in the Movement. Discussions on unity are not as far along with Disciples of Christ as they are between the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella). See also, Chris DeWalt, "Restoration Forums," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 642.

<sup>143</sup> Rick Atchley, Main Session Address on Unity, North American Christian Convention, RCA Dome, Indianapolis, 10 July, 2003. (all quotes from Atchley are taken from an audio recording of the event).

It's going to take several things for this family reunion to take place. We're going to need to do some repenting and some forgiving. Now, speaking from the A Cappella side it seems to me that we need to do most of the repenting and ask for most of the forgiving. But I'm sure that some of you would say tonight that from your side there has been some things that would have grieved the heart of God too. All I can tell you tonight, if you've ever heard a sermon, if you've ever seen an attitude by anyone from one of our churches that was ugly, sectarian, or cruel, I want to tell you how sorry I am. That's not who we want to be anymore. And I'm going to beg you: let's not let old wounds define who we are; let's let the prayer of Jesus for one body define who we are.<sup>144</sup>

Atchley's comments first of all solidify the Independent perception that they have followed the path of true Christianity and that one branch of the Movement has seen the error of its ways and is returning to the fold. Second of all, and more importantly, Atchley's apology and appeal depend on the power structures of both Independent and A Cappella denominations to produce the desired result of unity between these two Restoration Movement denominations. Atchley acknowledges that he cannot speak for all Churches of Christ, but claims that he can speak for a lot of them; that is, Atchley speaks for the progressive powers that be among the Church of Christ, which exert enough influence to maintain their power in the face of the significant resentment generated among more traditional members of the Church of Christ (a cappella). This resentment is caused, not only by Atchley's announcement, but by the broader progressive trend developing in the Church of Christ (a cappella). As this announcement was made at a gathering that is controlled primarily by progressive Independents, it allowed the progressives among Independent Christian Churches to control the discussion of this reunification and to use it to further their progressive goals. While this reconciliation does represent a significant step for both the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ (a cappella), it is certainly not the unity of all believers that Stone-Campbell adherents have claimed they sought. To the extent that Independent and A Cappella leaders believe that this reconciliation between the two denominations is a fulfillment or partial fulfillment of the

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<sup>144</sup> Rick Atchley, Address on Unity.

original appeal for Christian unity among the denominations, it functions to provide a cheap avenue to Christian unity; that is, the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of Christ alike can claim that they are fulfilling what they believe is a Biblical mandate to be unified, by seeking to undo a division that occurred within their own ranks and without having to move outside of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Discussions of unity within the Independent Christian Churches often focus exclusively on the reunification of Independent and A Cappella denominations,<sup>145</sup> with more limited discussions on Independent Christian Churches relations with the wider spectrum of Christian denominations.

It is in this second area of discussion on Christian unity that the limitations of Independent Christian Churches unity efforts come to the fore. Interest in unity outside the boundaries of the Independent Christian Churches has primarily focused on unity with American Evangelicals. Attempts to precisely define American Evangelicalism are notoriously difficult—as Mark Noll rightly notes:

“evangelicalism” has always been made up of shifting movements, temporal alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals. . . .  
. . . evangelical impulses have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, easily definable, well-coordinated, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians.<sup>146</sup>

However, for the purposes of this thesis, American Evangelicalism is understood to be a broad American religious subculture that has three defining attributes: 1) Evangelicals claim to utilize the Bible as the only authority on matters of faith and practice, usually interpreting the Bible in opposition to the liberal theology that developed in the late 1800s

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<sup>145</sup> See Rick Atchley, “Back to the Future,” *Christian Standard*, April 18, 2004: 14-15; Mark A. Taylor, ed., *At Least We’re Talking: New Steps Toward Unity*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, October 17, 2004; and Mark A. Taylor, ed., *Unity: Past, Present, and Future: Can Three Streams Become One?*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, January 30, 2005.

<sup>146</sup> Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 8. Noll offers the aspects of evangelicalism identified by David Bebbington as a general definition of evangelicalism: “the key ingredients of evangelicalism [are] conversionism (an emphasis on the ‘new birth’ as a life-changing religious experience), biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross) (8).”

and early 1900s—a practice that attests to the roots that modern American Evangelicalism has in the Fundamentalist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. 2) Evangelicals promote what they believe to be Christian versions of knowledge and learning, principally by attempting to explain conflicting religious and philosophical beliefs in terms of a battle between worldviews, in which they posit the existence of an objective Christian worldview that stands against other non-Christian worldviews.<sup>147</sup> One result of this is the development of alternative versions of knowledge that stand outside of the mainstream of academic inquiry in regard to a wide variety of topics—such as theology, philosophy, medicine, and science. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the creation of what Evangelicals claim is a Christian version of science that stands far outside the mainstream of scientific thought, primarily in regard to geological and biological questions that are present in the theory of evolution. 3) Evangelicals combat what they perceive to be a secular and unregenerate culture, which produces lifestyles that Evangelicals believe stand in opposition to the Bible, through an engagement in political processes, by which they attempt to shape the laws of their state and country to fit their religious beliefs.<sup>148</sup> Evangelicals further endeavor to create a Christian society by converting non-Christians and non-Evangelical Christians to Evangelical beliefs. There is little uniformity in regard to the interpretation of the Bible among American Evangelicals; rather, Evangelicalism is a largely sociological phenomenon, with Evangelicals often sharing similar social and political values (notably in regard to matters of sexuality and the

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<sup>147</sup> See above, 65-6. For more on this point, see Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

<sup>148</sup> Evangelical attempts to shape American culture according to Evangelical beliefs are particularly evident in regard to issues surrounding the public observance of religious rites, such as prayer and Bible reading in public schools and the display of the ten commandments on government property, and medical issues that Evangelicals believe relate to the value of certain kinds of human life, such as stem-cell research, fetuses, and terminal care patients

family, their understanding of American culture, and the role of the American nation in the world), and participating in an Evangelical consumer culture.<sup>149</sup>

Modern American Evangelicalism is primarily the outgrowth of two movements among conservative American Christians, both of which have parallels within the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>150</sup> The first is the Fundamentalist Movement, which spanned roughly fifty years from the 1870s to the 1920s and was, at its most basic, a reaction against the onslaught of critical scholarship in theology and science as it arrived in America.<sup>151</sup> Central to the Independent relation with Fundamentalism and modern American Evangelicalism is the appeal that each of these groups make to Scottish Common Sense philosophy to provide a method for precisely interpreting the Bible.<sup>152</sup> While the use of this Common Sense hermeneutic is one of the greatest commonalities Independents share with Evangelicals, this common hermeneutic never results in common interpretations. Rather, as was the case in the divisions between the Independent Christian Churches, the Disciples of Christ, and the Church of Christ (a cappella), such a hermeneutic leads to further division as different groups within the Stone-Campbell

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<sup>149</sup> For discussions on Evangelicalism from an Independent Christian Churches perspective, see Taylor, ed., *Was Murch Right? Are We "Evangelicals"?*; and William R. Baker, ed., *Evangelicalism and The Stone-Campbell Movement*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), in particular the chapters by William R. Baker, "Introduction," 17-26; "Christian Churches (Independent): Are We Evangelical?," 29-49; and "Conclusion" 235-45; and Edward P. Meyers, "Churches of Christ (A Cappella): Are We Evangelical?," 50-67. See also the critique of this volume, Doug Kennard, et al., "Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement: A Review from Four Perspectives," *Stone-Campbell Journal*, 5.2 (2002): 249-63. For a broader overview of Evangelicalism, see James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987); Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, Third ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and for a critique of Evangelical perspectives on learning, politics, and science, see Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

<sup>150</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to exhaustively discuss the relationship between the Independent Christian Churches, the Fundamentalist Movement, and modern American Evangelicalism. It is merely necessary to draw attention to the commonalities that are shared among these movements in order to understand the affinity that these groups share with one another.

<sup>151</sup> See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 11-39, 212-28.

<sup>152</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 14-17. One of the interesting parallels between the Restoration Movement and the Fundamentalist Movement is the way that each developed peculiar doctrines through an inductive study of the Bible based on Scottish Common Sense Realism. For Restorationists, the key doctrine created through this methodology is their doctrine of baptism; for Fundamentalists, the central doctrine to stem from the Scottish philosophy is premillennial dispensationalism. See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 55-62.

Movement claim to have correctly, and scientifically, determined the precise meaning of the biblical text, in opposition to other interpretations.

The second movement that feeds modern American Evangelicalism is the Evangelical resurgence that began in the late 1970s, which may be marked by the advent of conservative Christian participation in politics and the development of an Evangelical consumer culture.<sup>153</sup> Related to the rise of the Evangelical consumer culture, and especially important in regard to the Independent Christian Churches, is another movement that began in the 1970s and was embraced by Evangelicals—the rise of the church growth movement. The ascendancy of American Evangelicalism coincided with the emergence of the Independent Christian Churches as a separate denomination and the subsequent desire of Independents for legitimization among the wider denominational world. As Independents developed their own institutions they found commonalities with Evangelicals on a wide variety of American social and political issues, utilized a great deal of Evangelical publications, ranging from systematic theologies and commentaries to church growth manuals and Bible studies, and participated in a number of Evangelical events, such as Billy Graham Crusades and Promise Keeper rallies.

The Independent Christian Churches has had little success, however, in promoting unity with Evangelical churches. A survey of articles in *Christian Standard* on unity between Independents and Evangelicals reveals that while “unity” is mentioned in each of these articles, none of the arguments are framed primarily around the goal of unity.<sup>154</sup> Rather, Russ Blowers, senior minister emeritus at East 91<sup>st</sup> Street Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, argues that the goal of the Independent Christian Churches’ interactions with other denominations should be fraternity, which Blowers defines as “to

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<sup>153</sup> See George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 257-73.

<sup>154</sup> See Mark A. Taylor, ed., *Was Murch Right? Are We “Evangelicals”?*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, March 16, 2003; and Mark A. Taylor, ed., *“Us” and “Them”*: *Independent Christians and the Denominations*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, August 10, 2003.

associate in a brotherly manner, to have intimate or friendly relations with others who may be different.”<sup>155</sup> Merely being friendly with or associating with other Christians, however, is certainly a step removed from the unity of all believers sought by the early leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement. However, Blowers’s comments do provide insight into the concept that the Independent Christian Churches has of unity, where “unity” is simply affiliation or alliance with likeminded individuals or institutions. As such, the identification of the Independent Christian Churches as Evangelical is primarily a result of the association of prominent Independent leaders with Evangelical institutions and associations and the use of “books from evangelical authors and publishers [which] dominate Christian church Bible college and seminary classrooms.”<sup>156</sup> The problem for Independents in regard to the Evangelical denominations is that, while the Independents are interested in utilizing Evangelical resources and working with Evangelicals in areas of common concern, many Evangelicals do not accept key Independent doctrines on issues pertaining to salvation, making unity discussions difficult.

Perhaps the most revealing picture of the Independent Christian Churches’ quest for unity is seen in the talks between the Independent Christian Churches and the Church of God (Anderson) that took place beginning in 1989 and lasted through the mid-1990s. One of the results of this dialogue was a book, *Coming Together in Christ: Pioneering a New Testament Way to Christian Unity*,<sup>157</sup> co-authored by Barry Callen, a representative of the Church of God (Anderson), and James North, a representative of the Independent Christian Churches. The two denominations share a number of commonalities, which the authors list as:

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<sup>155</sup> Russ Blowers, “How ‘We’ Should View ‘Them’: Free to Fraternize,” *Christian Standard*, (August 10, 2003), 5.

<sup>156</sup> William R. Baker, “Why Can’t We Be Comfortable as Evangelicals?,” *Christian Standard*, (March 16, 2003), 4.

<sup>157</sup> This book is somewhat misnamed as the discussions between the two denominations did not end in unity. The title also raises questions about how unity discussions between two denominations that have only existed for 150 to 200 years might be said to have parallels in the New Testament.

Both groups had a conservative view of Scripture and a commitment to its authority. Both saw themselves as a movements [*sic*] to reform the church according to biblical guidelines. Both had a sincere commitment to Christian unity and baptized only adult believers, and only by the process of immersion. Both rejected denominational structure and emphasized the autonomy of local congregations. Whatever the differences, that seemed enough of a foundation on which to build something potentially significant.<sup>158</sup>

Using the issue of baptism as a “test-case,”<sup>159</sup> the authors confront that this doctrine, as it is formulated by the Independent Christian Churches, emerges as a sticking point. Callen and North note that :

It is important to emphasize that both groups are convinced that their position on baptism is the more biblical one. Both groups constantly refer to biblical texts for proof of their positions and subpoints of those positions. Both want to do what is biblically correct; they just have different understandings of what that correctness is at one or two points.<sup>160</sup>

Given the emphasis that is placed on the Independent doctrine of baptism and the certainty with which they hold their conclusions regarding baptism, the progressives have no ability to negotiate or maneuver on this subject. The Independent Christian Churches quest for Christian unity is held hostage by the hermeneutic apparatus that it applies to the Bible and the doctrine of baptism that it created as a result of the intermixture of that hermeneutic and the situation of the Restoration Movement on the American frontier.<sup>161</sup> As such, the central issue in regard to Christian unity for both traditionalists and progressives is the

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<sup>158</sup> Barry Callen and James North, *Coming Together in Christ: Pioneering a New Testament Way to Christian Unity*, (Joplin: College Press, 1997), 51.

<sup>159</sup> Callen and North, *Coming Together in Christ*, 91. It is helpful to understand the similarities and differences between the two doctrines of baptism. The authors claim “that both groups have a significant number of similarities in their respective practices of baptism—no infant baptism, immersion only, and no clerical monopoly. Even so, there is not complete agreement. . . .

The [Independent Christian Churches] generally understands baptism as being ‘for the remission of sins’ . . . . [However,] the Church of God sees the phrase ‘baptism for the remission of sins’ as appearing to reflect baptismal regeneration, the conviction that it is the water that saves, that salvation is in the baptismal act itself. . . . The [Independent Christian Churches] has vehemently denied that they do [teach baptismal regeneration]. . . .

[Independent theologian Jack Cottrell argues that] ‘such ‘baptismal regeneration’ is *not* the same as the Biblical teaching that generation occurs **during** baptism *but only when faith is also present.*’ . . . Church of God theologians agree fully with Cottrell when he insists that faith must be present—it surely is not the ritual of baptism that regenerates. But they question the time reference of ‘*during* baptism,’ arguing instead that baptism is to *follow* the regeneration that has occurred because of an act of faith” (91-3).

<sup>160</sup> Callen and North, *Coming Together in Christ*, 91.

<sup>161</sup> See above, 108-30.

Independent doctrine of baptism. As unity in Christ can only be found among Christians, and given that, for Independents, their doctrine of baptism represents the moment of salvation and, therefore, the dividing line between Christians and non-Christians, Christian unity must be predicated by the adoption of what Independents believe to be the true and only doctrine of baptism. In progressive understandings of Christian unity, it is evident that progressive Independents are much more comfortable than traditionalists in utilizing the institutional apparatuses available to them to seek unity and that progressive Independents are actively seeking legitimization as “church” in the categories laid out by Ernst Troeltsch.<sup>162</sup> Further, while progressive understandings of unity, like those of traditionalists, are highly individualistic, they are attempting to enlarge their understanding of Christian unity. However, like the traditionalists, they cannot maneuver around the roadblock to unity that is created by their salvation theology.

If these limitations could be overcome, there might be a greater opportunity for the Independent Christian Churches to engage in more fruitful dialogue on Christian unity. However, overcoming the isolated position that Independents find themselves in will be difficult for two reasons: first, their Scottish Common Sense hermeneutic does not provide them with tools to deal with differing conclusions in the interpretation of scripture; and second, the Independents’ sense of identity has fragmented over the past three decades. The first claim has been adequately explored up to this point, and the second may be seen most readily in the changes that have occurred in Independent historiography. It is highly significant that the Independent identity no longer relies on James DeForest Murch’s history of the Restoration Movement, *Christians Only*, to supply a narrative that traces the development of the Independent Christian Churches back to the New Testament. Most important in this regard is that Murch’s belief that some remnant of true New Testament Christianity, as conceived by the Restoration Movement, has existed in isolated pockets

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<sup>162</sup> See above, 178, fn. 140.

throughout history has been thoroughly discredited.<sup>163</sup> To the extent that Independents have not attempted to create an alternative to Murch's line of pure Christianity, this reveals that the Independent Christian Churches is no longer concerned with developing an understanding of its origins and theological program that is capable of providing continuity with "apostolic Christianity." As such Independents have few available options that might serve to legitimate the claim that they, more than any other denomination, have restored the New Testament Church.

Given this lack of legitimization, the Independents have struggled to create an approach to unity that is consistent with their 200 year old theological tradition or with their desire for unity with other denominations and within their own ranks. To legitimize their position, the Independents have several avenues available. They may argue that the true Church ceased to exist for a number of centuries, then Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott successfully and completely restored the New Testament Church, and now the Independents alone possess this true doctrine.<sup>164</sup> They may acknowledge that they came into existence through the efforts of a number of men who read the Bible through the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism, and then adapted their understandings of scripture to the American environment, and they may attempt to create a theology for their present circumstances that reflects this reality, much as the Disciples of Christ have done. Or they may simply carry on as they are, pragmatically appealing to the thought of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott or to the current thought of American Evangelicalism as it best suits the needs of the moment.

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<sup>163</sup> See above, 141-3, for Murch's claims. Even traditionalist scholars reject Murch's version of apostolic succession. See North, *Union in Truth*, 10; and Cottrell, *Faith Once For All*, 424.

<sup>164</sup> This claim has often been made throughout the history of the Restoration Movement, most notably by Walter Scott, whose biographer even offered a date, November 18, 1827, as the time that the gospel was fully restored to the church. Alexander Campbell never agreed with this claim. See Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 133-4.

Another option exists for the legitimization of contemporary Independent faith and practice, which relieves Independents of the burden of seeking legitimization through an argument for continuity with the apostolic Church. Contemporary Independent avenues for legitimization may be found in the power structure of the Independent Christian Churches, which operates through the forces of the capitalist marketplace. As Independent institutions must respond to the needs of the religious marketplace in order to retain power over their denomination, capitalism provides a powerful metanarrative that shapes the future of the Independent Christian Churches. Thus, the third element of the Restoration Plea, the millennial dawn which is defined by the success and growth of the Independent Christian Churches, naturally grows out of an understanding of restoration that leads to a concept of Christian unity based on power given and removed by the whims of the marketplace.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MILLENNIUM

The culmination of the Independent Christian Churches' theological program is found in the concept of the millennium. Millennial and utopian thought was rife in early 19<sup>th</sup> century America and lent itself well to the ahistorical Stone-Campbell program of restoration. The millennium was at the heart of Alexander Campbell's theological program and was characterized by Campbell's belief that an age of peace and harmony was beginning and would soon spread over the earth and would last for a thousand years, at the end of which, Christ would return and begin his reign over the earth. This millennial thought was thoroughly utopian and optimistic. The millennium for the modern Independent Christian Churches is no less utopian, but substantially more pessimistic. Millennial thought now revolves around ever expanding evangelistic efforts, which are based on capitalist business methodologies and result in a commodified Christianity. This commodification occurs through the Independent use of Christian books, movies, music, and other merchandise, through the marketing of Christian events and Sunday worship, and through the Independent attempt to abstract Christian doctrines from the theological and cultural contexts in which those doctrines were created. The capitalist ecclesiology of the Independent Christian Churches is further exacerbated by the free-market religious economy created in the United States by the disestablishment clause in the Bill of Rights. In this religious economy individuals choose to belong to a particular religious denomination on the basis of the perceived value of membership in that group, where value is accorded by the perceived tension with the surrounding society; that is, where there seems to be more tension with the society in which a religious group is located, the value accorded that group is higher. Independents consciously exploit the dynamics of this economy to create a positive environment for church growth. As such, the Independent

Christian Churches has developed a version of the millennium that appeals to a millennial order of evangelism and church growth.

### **Millennium: A Definition of the Millennium**

It is in the advent of the millennium, the third element of the Restoration Plea, that the perfection of the Restoration Plea is accomplished. For Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and other early leaders of the Restoration Movement, the concepts of restoration and unity were not ends in themselves, but were to create the conditions necessary for the millennial dawn. Alexander Campbell expected an earthly millennium wherein it was anticipated that the world would be “governed according to Christian principles rather than an era when Christ will literally reign on earth and it will be introduced by the gradual triumph of the church over the wickedness of the world rather than a cataclysmic reappearance of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> The expected outcome of the restoration of apostolic Christianity was the production of Christian unity, which was to bring about the evangelization of the world and this, in turn, would usher in the millennial dawn. It was thought that this golden age would be characterized by peace and harmony among humanity and, at the close of this period, it was believed that Jesus Christ would begin his earthly reign. As such, the millennial hopes of Stone and Campbell were thoroughly utopian—the millennium was not inaugurated with the reign of Christ, but with the idealized perfection of human society. The confidence that Stone and Campbell had in the imminent advent of the millennium was closely aligned with the prevailing spirit of the age and was an outgrowth of both a spiritual and nationalistic hope. The utopian nature of the Stone-Campbell millennium resonates with other utopian projects in antebellum America, most notably in the intersections of the Stone-Campbell Movement with the Shakers,

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<sup>1</sup> David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Quest for a Christian America: A Social History of the Disciples of Christ, Volume I*, 2003 ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 40.

Mormons, and the socialist project of Robert Owen.<sup>2</sup> Both the Shakers and the Mormons were responsible for siphoning off a significant number of members and leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement, which according to David Edwin Harrell had the effect of “drain[ing] off the most radical fringes” of the Restoration Movement.<sup>3</sup> As such, the Restoration Movement never embarked on a project of communitarian utopianism. Rather, their utopian program was allowed to play out through the capitalist structures of their day.<sup>4</sup> One of the most interesting relationships developed by Alexander Campbell was with the socialist reformer Robert Owen, who founded a community at New Harmony, Indiana based on his confidence in the ability of humanity to guide its own destiny toward a greater degree of peace and unity.<sup>5</sup> Alexander Campbell and Robert Owen met for a debate in 1829, in which Campbell defended the Christian religion against Owen’s atheism.<sup>6</sup> Richard J. Cherok notes that

Robert Owen . . . came to the United States in 1825 with the hope of establishing a utopian community that would effect worldwide social reform. Influenced by radical Enlightenment rationalism, Owen opposed revealed religion and espoused a conviction that human character is, without exception, formed by one’s environment. Thus to reform society, people had only to create a controlled environment that would expose

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<sup>2</sup> For more on early American utopian efforts, see Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 491-509, for a discussion of utopian communitarian groups. For more detailed works on early American utopias, see Ira L. Mandelker, *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Brian Thompson, *Devastating Eden: The Search for Utopia in America*, (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2004); and Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Harrell, *Quest for a Christian America*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> See below, 198-215.

<sup>5</sup> For an extended discussion of the economic basis of the project of Owen and other “utopian socialists,” see Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1999) 105-135.

<sup>6</sup> The debate did not only function as a debate as such, but as a form of public entertainment. Presenting the views of Frances Trollope, who witnessed the Campbell-Owen Debate in Cincinnati, Ohio, R. Laurence Moore writes: “To [Trollope’s] further surprise, Owen and Campbell, who ought to have been bitter ideological foes, seemed to enjoy their performance as a team. They applauded each other’s jokes in public and dined together with apparent satisfaction in private. During a period of days punctuated by fifteen public encounters, the two had the best and close to the only show in town. . . . The orchestrated debates between Owen and Campbell aptly illustrated [Trollope’s] point that religion had the double burden of making Americans behave while providing diverting entertainment” (R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 120-1. Thus, Campbell was a precursor of the later day members of the Restoration Movement who have sought to tie religion and entertainment together. See below, 207-13.

children from their earliest infancy to rational thought and good habits, while protecting them from religious superstition and vice.<sup>7</sup>

As such, Campbell and Owen drew on the same philosophical sources and relied on similar assumptions to undergird their respective endeavors—Campbell, however, certainly did not reject revealed religion, but taught that God revealed His will to each successive generation through a series of progressive revelations.<sup>8</sup> Both sought worldwide social reform—the difference lay in Campbell’s commitment to an explicitly Christian, and capitalistic, society and Owen’s rejection of a religious basis for his proposed socialist society. At the same time, Stone and Campbell shared with other Christian denominations the expectation that the millennial dawn was fast approaching,<sup>9</sup> and they fully expected the new American nation to lead the world in developing the political structures that would allow the world population to live together in peace and harmony.<sup>10</sup>

While the consummation of the Independent Christian Churches Plea for restoration and unity is found in the millennium, the Stone-Campbell millennium is equally, and necessarily, as vacuous as the Stone-Campbell doctrines of restoration and unity that were imagined to precede and form the basis for the inauguration of this millennial age. In the case of the millennial expectations of Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott, the problem for the contemporary heirs of the Movement is exacerbated by the fact that the millennial dawn, which the founders claimed was beginning during their lifetimes, never materialized. The restoration of New Testament Christianity and the unity of all Christians did not occur either. However, the millennial

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<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Cherok, “Campbell-Owen Debate,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 143.

<sup>8</sup> Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology*, 26-7. The connection with Campbell’s dispensational theology, which separates history into the Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian dispensations (see above, 156-7) is obvious. Each dispensation represents a new stage of revealed religious development. So, while Campbell affirmed divine revelation, such revelation occurred only at certain points in history and there has been no further revelation since the production of the New Testament.

<sup>9</sup> See Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, 18, 19, 20, 72-3, 98, 147-152, 171-77 for the millennial hopes at the time of the Great Awakening, the American Revolution, and among the Puritans, Baptists, Mormons, and the Restoration Movement.

<sup>10</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 47-8.

expectations of the early leaders of the Movement have been easier to alter than the more fundamental doctrines of restoration and unity.<sup>11</sup> As such, none of the three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement now understand the millennial component of the Restoration Plea in the same way that the early leaders did, making this aspect of the Plea unique due to the universal rejection of the millennial expectations of the Movement's founders among later adherents of the Movement.<sup>12</sup> This rejection does not mean that the millennial concept has simply been left out of Stone-Campbell thought or excised from the Plea. Rather, where the failed millennial expectations of the earliest leaders left a void in Stone-Campbell theology, new understandings arose to fill the gap created by the loss of this aspect of the Restoration Plea. Within the Independent Christian Churches many accept amillennialism or the premillennial dispensationalism that developed in the later part of the nineteenth century; however, these doctrines on the precise ordering of the 1000 year period mentioned in the twentieth and twenty-first chapters of the book of Revelation are not the replacements of the millennial expectations of the founders of the Movement. Rather, Independents have transformed the anticipation of a millennial golden age of peace and harmony into initiatives for world evangelization and church growth. The current emphasis on evangelization reveals that there is some continuity with the earlier anticipation of a utopian dawn in that both anticipate similar ends of world evangelization. However, instead of expecting a wave of peace and prosperity to sweep over the earth and encompass all social systems, Independents are much more pessimistic about the future of the society they live in and the world they inhabit. As such, the current millennial discussion is often characterized, not by the goal of peace and harmony, but by militant

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<sup>11</sup> The doctrines of restoration and unity have also been altered, but they have maintained a greater degree of continuity with the theology of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell than their millennial doctrine.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief overview of how the Stone-Campbell Movement moved from the postmillennialism of Alexander Campbell and the premillennialism of Stone to the ultimate rejection of an earthly millennial golden age, with an emphasis on Church of Christ (a cappella) developments, see Kevin James Gilbert, "The Stone-Campbell Millennium: A Historical Theological Perspective," *Restoration Quarterly* 43.1 (First Quarter 2001): 33-50.

language that portrays the Independent Christian Churches and its members in severe conflict with its culture.<sup>13</sup>

Where there are foundational voids or gaps in Independent Christian Churches theology, created as the intellectual foundations of Independent hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and eschatology have fallen away, these gaps must be filled by something else in order for the Independents to continue to appeal to the ideas of restoration, unity, and the millennium. These voids are not filled by appeals to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the tradition of the Church, or by theological reflection that maintains continuity with Christian theology throughout the centuries. The gaps are filled instead by an American adaptation of Christianity that is modeled upon the European settler's vision of the American land as a *tabula rasa* upon which they could project their understanding of the Bible. The Christian tradition created by the Independent Christian Churches is principally a product of the transplantation of Christianity to America where, in a setting divorced from the historic Christian traditions,<sup>14</sup> it developed into an expression of Christianity that conformed itself to the American environment. Without the continuity of a religious tradition or community to provide meaning, control, and organization of their sect, the founders of the Restoration Movement were able to do what could not be done in Europe—to reform Christianity by literally beginning again in the New World, by taking the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* to its logical extreme, and by attempting to restore the first century church through a “scientific” study of the New Testament which they believed provided a blueprint for the Church in all ages. Thus the Restoration Movement appeal to “the Bible alone” further refined (and redefined) the doctrine of *sola scriptura* to *sola New Testament*, and concomitant with the idea of the New Testament as a blueprint or

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<sup>13</sup> The most strident and militant language is generally reserved for sermons and other public pronouncements. However, it may also be found in many print articles. For examples see H. Lee Mason, “Editor’s Viewpoint: 10 Commandments Not Permitted to Stand,” *Restoration Herald*, 84, no. 9 (2005), 2, 23; Ben Cachiaras, “What is Truth?,” *Christian Standard*, (July 10, 2005): 8-10.

<sup>14</sup> See below, 198-215.

constitution for the Church grew the belief that through inductive study of the New Testament, all people might arrive at the same conclusions about the meaning of the New Testament, which would produce the goal of unity among the various Christian denominations. Another factor in the development of the Stone-Campbell Movement (and other denominations) is that in the transplantation of Christianity to America, Christianity was forced to adapt itself to a secular state for the first time since the Emperor Constantine aligned the Roman state with the Christian religion (ca. 313 A.D.). It is the disestablishment clause of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights that set the stage for the religious pluralism which resulted in the creation of a religious free market economy in the United States of America.<sup>15</sup> Along with these beliefs was a confidence in the rapid approach of the millennium; these doctrines together were necessary inventions that gave Christianity meaning in the new nation.<sup>16</sup> While the restorationists reshaped Christianity in their own image, they were also reshaped by their American context, which placed high value on freedom, equality, individualism, and, over the two centuries from the Movement's inception to the present day, by American capitalism. The Independent Christian Churches' amalgamation of selected moments in Church history, Scottish Common Sense philosophy, the American landscape, and the influence of capitalism resulted in a commodified version of the gospel that is bought and sold on the American marketplace. Thus, the millennial component of Independent Christian Churches thought is now expressed in terms of evangelism and church growth that is a product of the Independent Christian Churches' location in a capitalist society and the subsequent commodification of Christianity.

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<sup>15</sup> See below, 231-4.

<sup>16</sup> Aspects of the Stone-Campbell approach to interpreting the Bible, their concern for Christian unity, and their understanding of the millennium can be seen in many other American religious traditions, which is indicative that their concerns tapped into a broader cultural phenomenon that was also apprehended by other religious groups (such as Baptist, Methodist, Unitarian, and Mormon groups).

## The Stone-Campbell Millennium

The millennial thought of both Alexander Campbell and the Independent Christian Churches share in common the idea that the millennium is principally temporal in character. M. Eugene Boring claims that within Alexander Campbell's postmillennial theology

the influence of Christianity in the world gradually grows until the whole world is brought under the sway of the Christian message. This affects the political and economic life of the world so positively that it experiences a thousand-year "golden age" under the reign of Christ through his earthly kingdom, the church. At the *end* of this period the Parousia occurs, and the kingdom of God comes in its full, transcendent manifestation.<sup>17</sup>

As such, the millennial views of Alexander Campbell are limited primarily to this-worldly events, with more overtly supernatural or celestial aspects of the millennium delayed for one thousand years. Church of Christ (a cappella) scholar Richard Hughes claims that this idea of an earthly millennium is at the heart of Alexander Campbell's theology. Hughes argues that both the heirs of Stone-Campbell thought who believe that restoration was Campbell's primary concern and the followers of Campbell who claim that the overriding goal of the Stone-Campbell Movement was Christian unity have misplaced their focus on the less central emphases of Campbell and failed to see that "Campbell's ultimate concern was for the kingdom of God, the millennium on earth."<sup>18</sup> As is noted above, unity was to be the mechanism that ushered in the millennium and the restoration of apostolic Christianity was to be the foundation of that unity. Hughes argues that the changes that Campbell was willing to make in his understandings of restoration and unity reflected his primary concern for the millennial dawn:

When recovery of the New Testament Church of Christ failed to bring the unity he [Campbell] sought, he increasingly embraced a broader vision to achieve his objective—namely, a Protestant "*common* Christianity . . . in which all good men of all denominations are agreed," and an American republic the ideals of which were inspired by that common faith. Thus,

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<sup>17</sup> Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 45.

Campbell's millennial dream was one of the constant factors upon which his other, penultimate commitments shifted and changed.<sup>19</sup>

Hughes not only points to Campbell's millennialism as the central concern of Campbell's thought, but he also points to the American environment which allowed that millennialism to flourish.

Indeed, in Campbell's thought, the fate of the American nation, Protestant Christianity, and the coming millennium were thoroughly intertwined. In 1852 Campbell wrote:

In our country's destiny is involved the destiny of Protestantism, and in its destiny the destiny of all the nations of the world. God has given, in awful charge, to Protestant England and Protestant America—the Anglo-Saxon race—the fortunes, not of Christendom only, but of all the world.<sup>20</sup>

Thus it is apparent that in Campbell's mature thought, he saw himself and the movement he led as the champion of Protestantism, and he framed this in ethnocentric terms that suggested that the only hope for the world was to adopt the religious practices and the language of the Anglo-Saxon race. Campbell not only linked the fate of the world with the fortunes of his religion, race, and country, but also regarded the dominance of Protestantism, the Anglo-Saxon race, and America over the earth as an accomplished fact. In a lecture on the English language, Campbell claimed:

The Lord Almighty, who has now girdled the earth from east to west with the Anglo-Saxon people, the Anglo-Saxon tongue, sciences, learning and civilization, by giving a colossal power and grandeur to Great Britain and the United States over the continents and oceans of the earth, will continue to extend that power and magnificence until they spread from north to south, as they have already from east to west, until, in one vernacular, in one language and with one consent they shall, in loud acclaim and in hallowed concert, raise their joyful and grateful anthem, pealing over all lands and from shore to shore, from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. Then will "they hang their trumpet in the hall, and study war no more."

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<sup>19</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Harrell, *Quest for a Christian America*, 53. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger: 1852*, rpt., (Joplin: College Press, n.d.), 462.

Peace and universal amity will reign triumphant. For over all the earth there will be but one Lord, one faith, one hope and one language.<sup>21</sup>

Thus for Campbell the millennium had already begun to spread over the whole earth during the course of his lifetime. God had singled out the Anglo-Saxon race, their language and science—which provided the Common Sense mechanism by which all might interpret the Bible alike—to be his chosen people to carry the gospel over all the earth and usher in the millennium. While many details of Campbell's millennial expectations have been dismissed by the Independent Christian Churches, the American mythologies and pathologies that informed Campbell's millennial theology continue to play a role in the thought of the Independent Christian Churches. It is necessary, therefore, to look at the American idea that the new world represented a pristine environment offered to the European settlers by the hand of God, the expectation that the nation was inaugurating a new order for the ages, and the ahistoricity that these mythologies fostered.

From the time of its discovery by Western Europeans, the American continent was regarded by many observers and explorers as a picture of the world in its original, primordial state, the discovery of which was a miracle writ large and guided by the hand of God. The confidence in the providential hand of God upon the European discovery of America may be seen as early as Christopher Columbus who recorded at the close of his first voyage to America that:

I know respecting this voyage that God has miraculously shown his will, as may be seen from this journal, setting forth the numerous miracles that have been displayed in the voyage, and in me who was so long at the court of your Highness, working in opposition to and against the opinions of so many chief persons of your household, who were all against me, looking upon this enterprise as folly. But I hope, in our Lord, that it will be a great benefit to Christianity, for so it has ever appeared.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) 122-3. For the original source, see Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1861), 44.

<sup>22</sup> In Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 37.

The conviction that God had orchestrated the discovery and future conquest of the New Land for the benefit of His people and for Christianity was a refrain oft heard from European settlers, for they modeled themselves upon the Old Testament nation of Israel as a chosen people, and they infused the land with the Biblical imagery of a new Eden or a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>23</sup> Confronted by a seemingly limitless landscape that Harold Bloom spoke of as “the American experience of the abyss of space”<sup>24</sup> and influenced by their own rhetoric as a nation chosen by God, religion in America took on mythic qualities that have influenced both religious and secular life throughout its history.

Indeed, many observers saw in the New World a pristine, uncorrupted land whose goodness and bounty harkened back to the primordium, that primitive purity that existed before and outside of time. It was as a result of this amalgamation of Biblical imagery, physical landscape, and perceived purity that John Locke could write “in the beginning, all the World was America.”<sup>25</sup> For Locke saw in America the world in its natural state, wherein the natural person’s needs might be provided for by the bounty of nature and his own labor outside the boundaries of laws and the rule of money. It was not simply that America was seen as the primal world, but that the American continent represented the last primal world, the last place on earth that might truly be seen in its natural state. Thus Locke could speak of the American land and its inhabitants as a place where men living in independent communities still exist in a “State of Nature,” and he could refer to the American scene as “a Pattern of the first Ages in Asia and Europe”<sup>26</sup>

Robert Bellah sees these primitivist tendencies running throughout the whole of American history, arguing that the American appetite for primitive purity is a foundational

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 1-60.

<sup>24</sup> Bloom, *American Religion*, 103.

<sup>25</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 319.

<sup>26</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 294; 357.

part of the American myth of origins. Bellah sees in this origin myth, not simply claims about the origin of America, but the very origins of the world. Of this mythology Bellah claims:

The newness which was so prominent an attribute of what was called the “new” world was taken not just as newness to its European discoverers and explorers but as newness in some pristine and absolute sense: newness from the hands of God. That sense of indelible newness, which has been a blessing and a curse throughout our history, has not evaporated even today.<sup>27</sup>

Church of Christ (a cappella) scholars Richard Hughes and Leonard Allen, following Bellah, argue that this presumed innocence and concern for primitive purity is one of the fundamental founding myths of America. Hughes and Allen have carefully traced the primitivist impulse in America, arguing that it is the primitivist impulse that lies behind American millennial pretensions.<sup>28</sup> Hughes and Allen argue that the primitivist impulse was occasioned by the conviction that the ancient primordium which stood outside of history and before the Fall was recoverable—that is, that humanity could somehow restore the world to its prelapsarian state.<sup>29</sup> Of particular interest to Hughes and Allen are the primitivist impulses that grew out of the Protestant Reformation.

Hughes and Allen understand the reformation impulse to be divided into two types: the first, Lutheran type, is ontological reform which does not attempt to return to an earlier time but seeks a “ground of being” for its own time; the second type, which descended through the Reformed tradition, Christian humanism, and the Puritans, is primordial reform which seeks to identify the “ancient tradition” and the “primitive church and apostolic practices.”<sup>30</sup> It is the second type of reform that the Stone-Campbell Movement concerned itself with. The goal of primordial reform is a legal concern—to determine the boundaries

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<sup>27</sup> Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, 4-5.

of ancient faith and practice and to institute that exact pattern in a later time. For the diverse groups concerned with this primordial reform, their project was to determine rules of faith and practice established by God and recorded in the Bible and to faithfully carry out what they perceived as their part of the bargain which would ensure God's blessing upon them.

A result of the primitivist impulse for both America and the churches that developed in America is a profound sense of ahistoricity. Where so many came to see America as the world in its natural state, it should hardly be surprising that many Americans who bought into this myth came to believe that the very institutions of America, such as democracy and capitalism, and the ideas that informed these institutions, such as freedom, equality, and individualism, were representative of the world in its natural state. Both the polity of the newly created American government and the churches were, and in many respects still are, regarded as springing directly from the primordium without being subject to the corrupting influence of human history. Other historical moments, namely the gospel records, are likewise seen as lying outside of profane history. Hughes and Allen assert that "for many strands of the Reformed and English Protestant traditions, the examples of Israel, Jesus, the apostles, and the primitive church belonged to the primordium; they were not products of history"—the only untarnished history then, was Christian history which was regarded as consisting only of the early church and its Protestant instantiation.<sup>31</sup> It was this ahistoricity that allowed Puritan leaders like John Cotton to declare that their version of Christianity "was as close as could be to what 'the Lord Jesus [would erect] were he here himselfe in person.'"<sup>32</sup> Cotton Mather echoed this sentiment saying, "the Churches of New England are [not] the most regular that can be; yet I do say, and am sure, that they are very like unto those that were in the first ages of

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<sup>31</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, 13.

Christianity.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, there is a strong tradition of religious groups in America who identify their particular set of doctrines with the supposed purity of the early Church, which has the effect of ignoring or dismissing the intervening history of the Church as either irrelevant or apostate.

The American attempt to identify its institutions of religion and government with a time of primitive purity is one of the most important influences on the development of Stone-Campbell thought. The idea that the primitive purity of the early Church is recoverable for a later time, naturally led to an attempt to restore that Church, which in turn led to an effort to seek unity on the basis of that restoration. While European Christians had the epistemology of Common Sense Realism available to them and ideas of unity or purity, it took the perceived *tabula rasa* of the American landscape to give this methodology and these ideas the space that they needed to fully develop. Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott took advantage of this situation by attempting to create a church that exists outside of the vagaries of history and that is not influenced by the fallibility of the men and women who have passed on the Christian faith over the centuries. James DeForest Murch reports that Alexander Campbell had little regard for being labeled as “the founder of the Christian church.”<sup>34</sup> Campbell emphatically claims that “he had founded nothing in the field of religion, but had sought to restore the church that Jesus built.”<sup>35</sup> By 1900 the churches of the Restoration Movement claimed 1,120,000 members. Murch summarizes the perspective of the members of the Restoration Movement on what they felt they had accomplished by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and his description reveals the impact of the ahistoricity and the American influences that formed the identity of the Restoration Movement. Murch writes:

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<sup>33</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 156.

<sup>35</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 156.

The Disciples credited their success to the unadulterated gospel, “the power of God unto salvation.” They had disposed of the excess baggage of Roman Catholic and Protestant ecclesiastical dogma and tradition, and in their newly found freedom in Christ were evangelizing and baptizing hundreds every day. They had also unwittingly capitalized on “the American dream” of a burgeoning “Utopia.” Theirs was a “free church” in a “free land.”<sup>36</sup>

By removing the vagaries and declensions of profane history, the heirs of the Stone-Campbell Movement believed that they had restored the New Testament Church in their American context. While Murch does not believe that this is the case, stating that “there must be admission that the New Testament church has not yet been perfectly restored anywhere within the Restoration movement,”<sup>37</sup> he does not reject the ahistorical point of view that allows the Stone-Campbell Movement to make such claims. Rather, he argues that “there have been misinterpretations and misapplications of Restoration and Scriptural principles”<sup>38</sup> and that there is a renewed need to “[bypass] all the problems of diverse philosophies, creeds, traditions, and institutions.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, Murch continues to argue for an ahistorical restoration that removes the traditions, philosophies, and theologies that have influenced the Christian religion up to the present day. While some Independents have become more aware of the way that history has influenced their own tradition, a substantial ahistorical predisposition continues to exist today. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in James North’s timeline of Church history, which skips from Pentecost in 29 A.D. to the Protestant Reformation in 1500, and on to the Beginnings of the Restoration Movement in 1800 (See *Figure 1 on page 199*). In his history of the Restoration Movement, North covers 1800 years of history in less than three pages, noting that the accommodation of “the Christian message to the world views and thought forms of the Greek and Latin

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<sup>36</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 193.

<sup>37</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366.

<sup>38</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 366.

<sup>39</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 367.

worlds caused theological abstractions” which “added theological nuances and concepts that were not in the original apostolic preaching.”<sup>40</sup> As such, North claims that

later generations of Christians identified with the adaptations [of Christianity to its environment] rather than the original model of apostolic churches . . . the church has constantly gone through cycles of revival in order to cast off some of the accretions that have built up around the structure of the church.<sup>41</sup>

North argues that the church strayed so far from “the original New Testament teachings” that the Protestant Reformation was necessary “to cleanse the Church from papal despotism and theological error.”<sup>42</sup> However, for North, even the Protestant Reformers erred by producing many more divisions within Christendom,

creating theological statements in the forms of creeds that were “equivalent to biblical teaching,” and continuing to perpetuate “some of the presuppositions and concepts of Roman Catholic theology and practice” which kept them from fully embracing “biblical

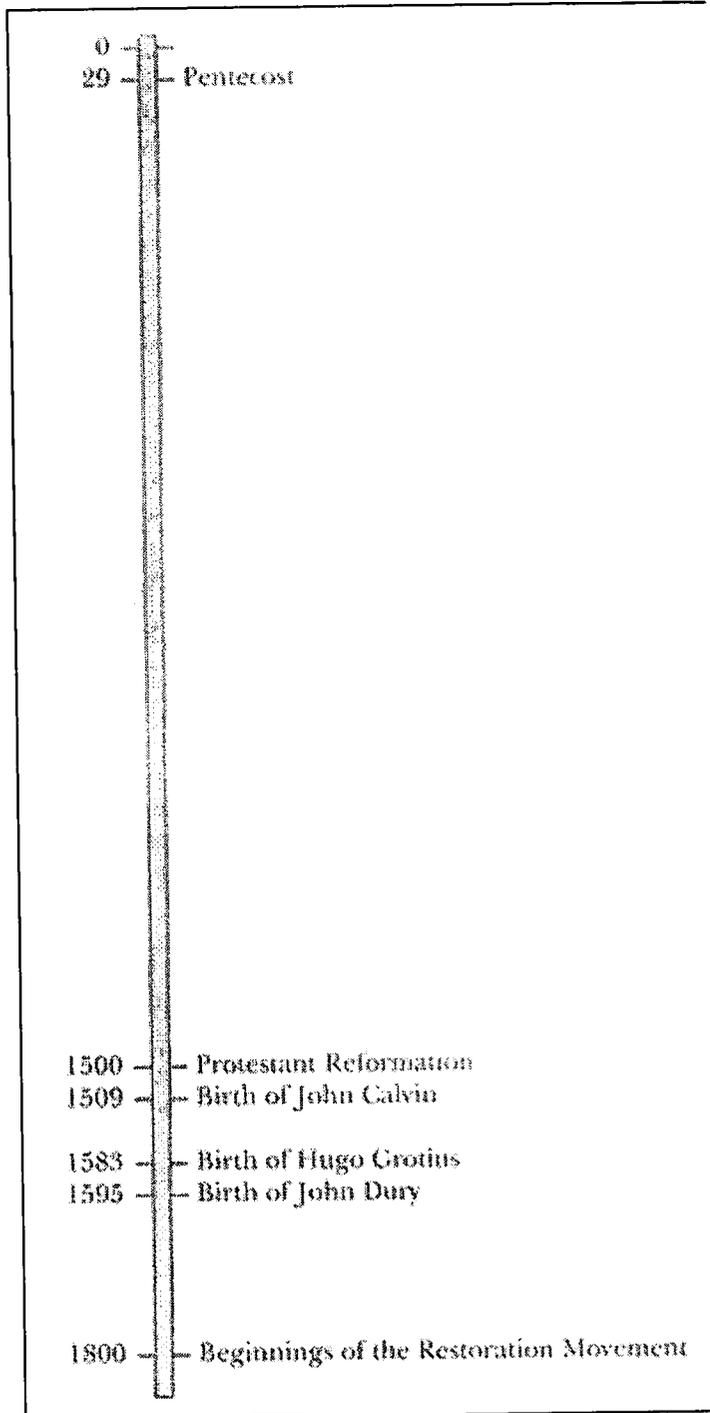


Figure 1<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 2.

<sup>43</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, xiv.

teaching.”<sup>44</sup> North’s critique is heavily biased by his own tradition’s belief that the Church was corrupted by its failure to adhere to a pattern allegedly found in the New Testament, and it displays a great degree of naïvety in its assumption that the Restoration Movement tradition is not an adaptation of the Christian message to a particular environment; it is precisely because of these elements that North’s work is characteristic of the ahistorical tendencies of the Independent Christian Churches. Though North has authored a history of the Church that spans the two thousand years of church history,<sup>45</sup> he does not refer the reader to that work or to any other history that might provide a broader context for North’s claims. Rather, North contributes to the misconception that where other instantiations of Christianity have been unduly influenced by their culture, the Restoration Movement has not. The irony of North’s position is evident in that the Restoration Movement is itself an adaptation of the Christian religion to the world views and thought forms of Scottish Common Sense philosophy as it was instantiated in the American context. Further, many of the “theological abstractions” that North attacks, such as the doctrine of the Trinity or the teachings on the dual nature of Christ as fully God and fully human, are accepted by most adherents of the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>46</sup>

Nathan Hatch, writing about the rebellion of the founders of the Restoration Movement against the prevalent Calvinist theology on the American frontier (which was the theological system in which the founders were raised through the Presbyterian Church), argues that “this was no mere revolt against Calvinism but against theology itself.”<sup>47</sup> Hatch argues that

Whatever else the Christians demanded, the rallying cry of their theological revolution was a new view of history. They called for a new dispensation of gospel liberty, radically discontinuous with the past. They advocated

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<sup>44</sup> North, *Union in Truth*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> See James B. North, *A History of the Church: From Pentecost to the Present* (Joplin: College Press, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> See 165, fn 101.

<sup>47</sup> Hatch, “The Christian Movement,” 557.

new theological ground rules that dismissed everything since the New Testament as irrelevant, if not destructive.<sup>48</sup>

Hatch argues that the founders of the Restoration Movement demanded this new view of history because of their millennial hopes and the conviction that they were taking part in a *novus ordo seclorum*, a new order for the ages.<sup>49</sup> Thus, it is apparent that the Restoration Movement is an attempt to create a version of Christianity that is abstracted from the history that had necessitated the development of its theological components. That is, the founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement sought a Christianity that was unconnected from the particular historical setting in which it developed in the first century A.D., the contextualization of Christian theology throughout history, and the doctrines that developed as a result of that contextualization. It is further obvious from North's account of the history of the Restoration Movement that many within the Independent Christian Churches continue to divorce their theological beliefs from the contexts in which they were created. For the Independent Christian Churches this abstraction is doubled, for it is first of all divorced from the Christian history that created many of the doctrines it teaches, and it is second of all divorced from its own history, believing the teachings of the Independent Christian Churches to be one and the same with the teachings of the first century Church rather than understanding that the Independent tradition springs from the amalgamation of the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment and the experience of the American environment.

These historical abstractions play a large role in allowing the Independent Christian Churches to develop and embrace a commodified form of Christianity.<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> Hatch, "The Christian Movement," 557.

<sup>49</sup> Hatch, "The Christian Movement," 557.

<sup>50</sup> The concern of this thesis is with the theological implications of a church or denomination that embraces the methods of consumer capitalism to market Christianity. As such, it is beyond the scope of this project to exhaustively treat the nature of capitalism and commodification. However, it is necessary to point out that capitalism and commodification are not unchanging entities and that, while related, they are distinct from one another. For classic studies on capitalism, see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations: Vol. I* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981); Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and*

commodification of religion is defined by R. Laurence Moore as “the ways in which churches have grown by participation in the market, or more specifically how religious influences established themselves in the forms of commercial culture that emerged in the nineteenth century” in the United States.<sup>51</sup> For Moore, the entrance of religion into

“the marketplace of culture” began in the nineteenth century as an effort to influence and in some cases to ban altogether the commodities being offered for sale. . . .

However, the work of religious leaders and moralists in the marketplace of culture was immediately entangled in a related but distinguishable enterprise. Rather than remaining aloof, they entered their own inventive contributions into the market. Initially these were restricted to the market for reading material, but their cultural production diversified. Religious leaders even sponsored “non-profit” organizations with moral and reform goals that competed with the appeal of popular entertainments. By degrees, religion itself took on the shape of a commodity.<sup>52</sup>

Thus it may be said that the commodification of Christianity, as it is currently developing in the Independent Christian Churches, is a continuation of the desire of American religious groups to control culture and to dictate the way that Americans use their leisure

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*Causes of the Wealth of Nations: Vol. II* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981); and Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, (New York: International Publishers, 1967). For a history of the primary thinkers who have impacted economic theory, see Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1999). Classic studies on the relation between religion and capitalism are Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002); and R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000). For other studies on the development of consumer society see Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2002); Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>51</sup> Moore, *Selling God*, 5. For Moore, Commercial culture “designates a number of commodities that are marketed with the promise of their being helpful, indeed essential, to any person wishing to attain ‘culture.’ To consume them in large quantities is a way to indicate that one is ‘cultured.’ . . . [I]n the United States the expansion of the marketplace of culture in the nineteenth century entailed a significant democratization that brought commercial culture and popular culture into close proximity. . . . A larger market for culture (the vast majority of it related to what we now call the entertainment and leisure industry) grew up to meet the consuming tastes of ordinary folk. In pre-industrial societies, popular culture rested on traditional folkways that were only marginally related to buying and selling. That was no longer the case after large industries grew up to sell cheap fiction, newspapers, melodrama, minstrel shows, baseball, and movies to the democratic masses. In this sense mass culture is commercial culture carried to the largest possible number of consumers” (5-6).

<sup>52</sup> Moore, *Selling God*, 6.

time and their money by offering imitations of the offerings of non-religious popular culture.<sup>53</sup>

The commodification of Christianity may develop through two primary avenues. First (and somewhat unrelated from the specific historical abstractions of the Independent Christian Churches, though the Independent Christian Churches is still subject to this broader form of commodification), Christianity may literally be commodified in the form of Christian books, music, movies, home decorations, fashion, and so on, where consumption of Christian products functions as an expression of or an extension of one's faith.<sup>54</sup> Commodification may also occur where money is exchanged for services provided by the church or denomination or where a religious program or facility is created to compete with a similar non-religious program or facility; that is, an "offering" to a given church may be seen as purchasing entrance to a community or it may be used to construct buildings that the church deems necessary. The church may also provide daycare or other lifestyle aids, such as sports leagues, health and fitness centers, or organized trips to sites or events deemed to be of sufficient interest to both members and non-members of the church (by offering these programs and events to non-members, churches engage in soft-sell evangelism).<sup>55</sup> It would be overly simplistic, however, to suggest that every instance of religious expression in material form is an example of the commodification of Christianity. Rather, material goods have played a key role in religious observance for

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<sup>53</sup> See Moore, *Selling God*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> See also, R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) for an examination of how material goods function in American religious culture. See p. 45 for McDannell's comments on how Christians may use religious goods to express their faith.

<sup>55</sup> For an example of this, see Wes Dillon, "Meeting Strangers," *Christian Standard*, (September 4, 2005), 3-5, 11, where Dillon describes the efforts of the Cedar Ridge Christian Church, which uses facilities, programs, and events as "outreach" to its community: "In the Kansas City suburb of Lenexa, Cedar Ridge realized it could use a multipurpose community center to intersect with its neighbors. A gymnasium, locker room, coffee shop, meeting rooms, indoor playground, and climbing wall are open all week to the community and—oh yeah—a church meets there on Sunday morning. The adjacent park hosts a number of city festivals. In exchange for parking, Cedar Ridge is granted free booth space. Each event provides an opportunity to inform the community of upcoming children's basketball leagues, fitness classes, and other happenings at their facility. Arts, education, and recreation fill the weekly calendar of the community center" (5).

millennia and have been a part of American religious expressions of all types throughout American history.<sup>56</sup> Colleen McDannell argues that a false dichotomy has been created between the realms of sacred and profane and that, rather than standing apart from each other, the sacred and profane are necessarily intermixed.<sup>57</sup> McDannell writes that

The assumption that true Christian sentiments can be, must be, set apart from the profane cannot be upheld when we look at how people use material culture in their religious lives. While there are certainly Christians who disdain the material world and strive to eliminate visual representations of it from their communities, there is no compelling reason to hold these groups up as the standard to which all other Christians must be compared. . . . If we immediately assume that whenever money is exchanged religion is debased, then we will miss the subtle ways that people create and maintain spiritual ideals *through* the exchange of goods and the construction of spaces.<sup>58</sup>

While McDannell's argument may be accepted to the extent that she has correctly identified a tendency among many people, whether scholars or adherents of a religious tradition, to simplistically attempt to make a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane, McDannell treats religious objects too monolithically and does not address the issue of commodification. That is, while McDannell rightly argues that it is inappropriate to suggest that religion is automatically debased by the exchange of money, she fails to address the possibility that religion could be debased through such an exchange, that religion might be subject to certain value judgments where the embrace of the secular is seen to outweigh the observance of the sacred, or that there are tendencies within segments of American Christianity that have begun the process of transformation into a religion of capitalist economics.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Both Graham Ward and Philip Goodchild have made similar arguments along this line. Ward argues that religion is the last object to be commodified by capitalism, and that through this final commodification, capitalism arrives at its ultimate, religious (and idolatrous) end (Graham Ward, "The Commodification of Religion or the Consummation of Capitalism," *The Hedgehog Review* 5.2 (2003): 50-65). Goodchild argues that Nietzsche's announcement of the murder of God is representative of a "shift in pieties," where the worship that had previously been offered to God is redirected toward a new god, Mammon (Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (London: Routledge, 2002), 27; see also p. 1-38).

Following the work of Karl Marx, Graham Ward claims that “the production of a commodity must be understood in relation to desire.”<sup>60</sup> It is the nature of this desire that determines the commodity status of an object. Ward writes that

Some objects enter the exchange system and become commodities and others do not. Those that do not enter the exchange system remain either objects of utility or potential objects of exchange for which there is no demand as yet. This process is a politics not of objects but of desires. We can ask, then, what is the relationship between objects and desire such that some objects are chosen and some are not? Are all desires with respect to objects the same? If they are not the same, then the commodity that emerges through the process of desiring is not the same either. The production of a religious artifact, a crucifix say, can be interpreted differently—an aid to worship, on the one hand, or a piece of costume jewelry, on the other. The way it is interpreted and desired will affect the manner in which that object is or has become a commodity.<sup>61</sup>

As such, commodification is, in this sense, a rather subjective determination that is dependent on how one views the object or event in question. However, there is another force at play, closely related to desire, which may help to determine the point at which religious objects and events become commodified: that force is seduction.

Vincent J. Miller argues that desire is not limited to individual objects but is “stretched out across an endless series of potential objects.”<sup>62</sup> As such, “seduction spurs consumption by prolonging desire and channeling its inevitable disappointments into further desires.”<sup>63</sup> Miller follows Zygmunt Bauman’s account of seduction, which Bauman claims may now serve “as the paramount vehicle of systematic control and social integration.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Bauman claims that “the weapon of legitimation,” which is clearly at issue in the commodification of Christianity,<sup>65</sup> “has been replaced with two mutually complementary weapons: this of *seduction* and that of *repression*.”<sup>66</sup> Bauman argues that

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<sup>60</sup> Ward, “The Commodification of Religion,” 55.

<sup>61</sup> Ward, “The Commodification of Religion,” 55-6.

<sup>62</sup> Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*, (New York: Continuum, 2003) 109.

<sup>63</sup> Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 109.

<sup>64</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 51.

<sup>65</sup> See above, 190, and 208-10.

<sup>66</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 97.

Both [seduction and repression] need intellectually trained experts, and indeed both siphon off, accommodate and domesticate an ever growing section of the educated elite. Neither has a need, or room, for those “hard-core” intellectuals whose expertise is “legitimation”, [sic] i.e. supplying proof that what is being done is universally correct and absolutely true, moral and beautiful.<sup>67</sup>

As such, in a commodified Christianity, legitimation is made irrelevant, replaced by seduction that “is made possible once the market succeeds in making the consumers dependent on itself.”<sup>68</sup> Bauman goes on to note that “market-dependency is guaranteed and self-perpetuating once men and women, now consumers, cannot proceed with the business of life without turning themselves to the logic of the market.”<sup>69</sup> It is evident that, in the Independent Christian Churches, some degree of market-dependency has already occurred, as evidenced by the fetish that many Independents have made of numerical growth.<sup>70</sup> While the Independent desire for numerical growth may be viewed as an outgrowth of their commitment to evangelism, the pursuit of numerical growth found among many individuals, institutions, and organizations within the Independent Christian Churches may be more properly viewed as an end in itself.<sup>71</sup> The numerical growth that the Independent Christian Churches experienced in the 1990s is regarded by many Independent leaders as evidence that the Independent Christian Churches most nearly represents pure, New Testament Christianity.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 97.

<sup>68</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 98.

<sup>70</sup> See below, 215-30.

<sup>71</sup> See below, 230-5.

<sup>72</sup> See Stone, *Simply Christians*, 6-29. To this end, former *Christian Standard* editor Sam Stone claims that: “The validity of any movement must first be tested by its conformity to truth. Are things taught in harmony with God’s Word? . . .

But it is also appropriate to see how God has blessed the efforts of those committed to restoring New Testament Christianity today. . . .

If these churches are following biblical principles—and we believe they are—it should come as no surprise that they are enjoying both numerical and spiritual growth” (18). As evidence of the Christian truth that is safeguarded by the Independent Christian Churches, Stone refers to the Glenmary Research Center study which placed the Independent Christian Churches as the second fastest growing religious group in the United States, the number of foreign missionaries sent out by the Independent Christian Churches, the growth of Independent Bible colleges, seminaries, and liberal arts colleges, the number of new church plants, and the number of Independent megachurches (congregations that average over 1,000 attendees at weekend services) (18-23).

The second form that the commodification of religion takes is in line with Karl Marx's analysis of commodity production and how commodities are presented to the consumer.<sup>73</sup> In this instance commodification occurs through an abstraction of Christianity from its history. The Independent Christian Churches has attempted to separate Christianity from the historic creeds and theologies that make up important aspects of the Christian religion and from the continuity of the Church throughout history. It has tried to reframe the Christian religion around the idea of creating theology from the "Bible alone," which is actually a reading of the Bible based on the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. The result is a religion that is profoundly ahistorical, lacks continuity with Christian tradition, and relies on a philosophy that held sway for a brief period of time. As such, for Independents, the Christian religion presents itself as a commodity that is simply "out there," obvious to all, and easily apprehended. However, Christianity is an historical religion. Christianity arose in the particular cultural milieu of first century Palestine under the governance of the Roman Empire, and was subsequently contextualized for different cultures, times, and places in response to the different challenges and questions raised in those cultures, times, and places. Vincent J. Miller notes that "commodities appear on the scene, as if descended from heaven, cloaked in an aura of self-evident value, saying nothing about how, where, and by whom they were produced."<sup>74</sup> The doctrines of the Independent Christian Churches similarly manifest themselves as unproduced, as Independents believe that the doctrines they teach arrived in their full form and are self-evidently present in the pages of the New Testament. The important thing for Independents is the doctrine itself, not how or why the doctrine was created, what need it met and what needs it now fails to meet, removed as it is from the context that gave it life. However, the commodification of the doctrines of the church is only the beginning, leading

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<sup>73</sup> See Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 43-8, 76-87, 106-15, 178.

<sup>74</sup> Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 3.

to the material commodification of ecclesiological and spiritual elements of religious practice. In this way, the two forms of commodification operate in a related fashion. Where abstract Independent doctrine is commodified through its ahistoricity, it becomes easier to commodify those doctrines in material and concrete forms—there is no continuity with history or tradition to prevent such commodification. As such, where commodification has occurred within the Independent Christian Churches, little in the realm of Independent tradition or doctrine could prevent or critique such commodification.

### **Restoration in Context (III): Millennium**

James DeForest Murch claims that one-hundred years into the history of the Restoration Movement, the Movement was united around its “glorious ideal”—Christian unity.<sup>75</sup> Murch writes that the Disciples “were sincerely seeking to demonstrate in churches after the New Testament pattern that they had the plan for a united, aggressive, invincible, and glorious church,” a church built “not on a catechism, or creed of man’s formulation, but on the Holy Scriptures,” and a people “seeking the evangelization of the world and the realization of the great commission program in their day and generation.”<sup>76</sup> As has been demonstrated, the Restoration Movement is the product of a body of doctrines created by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott in response to the transplantation of Christianity into the new American nation. It is also evident that no part of the Restoration Movement plan for restoration, Christian unity, and the advent of the millennial dawn has come to fruition. However, what is less obvious in Murch’s description of the Movement circa 1900 is that the millennial hope of the Restoration Movement had undergone a subtle shift in focus. The belief that all Christians would leave their denominations and be united as “Christians only” on the basis of a supposed pattern for the church found in the New Testament, which was to usher in an age

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<sup>75</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 204.

<sup>76</sup> Murch, *Christians Only*, 204.

of peace and prosperity upon the earth, had been replaced with a triumphalist vision of an “aggressive, invincible, and glorious church” that existed as a denomination that sought to convert the world to its denominational principles. The way that Murch describes the state of the Movement in 1900 is equally descriptive of how the Independent Christian Churches saw itself in the 1960s at the time of Murch’s writing, as the Independents came to believe that the restoration of the New Testament church could be accomplished, not through the restoration of apostolic Christianity, but through the Independent commitment to aggressive evangelism and church growth, where growth was offered as evidence that through them, the New Testament Church had been restored.

Lacking a comprehensive theological understanding of their own history that could provide the necessary context to give meaning to the doctrines that were created in response to the integration of Christianity and Scottish Common Sense philosophy in the new American context, the Independent Christian Churches has had to recreate its doctrines to give the appearance of continuity with the earlier concerns of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and Walter Scott. In an environment far removed from the founders’ experience of frontier Calvinism and the need for an objective assurance of one’s salvation, the Stone-Campbell doctrine of baptism no longer functions as a solution to a particular theological problem, but now exists as received dogma.<sup>77</sup> In the same way, the concern for unity has undergone profound changes in that, almost a century into the modern Ecumenical Movement, other Christian denominations are much more interested in Christian unity than the Independent Christian Churches is.<sup>78</sup> And without the optimism and confidence in the imminent advent of the millennium, Independents portray themselves as a beleaguered minority that must battle against what they perceive as the secularizing forces in society. Thus, many Independents are no longer

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<sup>77</sup> See above for the problem that the Stone-Campbell salvation theology addressed, 113-8.

<sup>78</sup> See above, 175.

interested in restoring the New Testament Church, but in restoring the Restoration Movement; many Independents are no longer seeking Christian unity among the divided church, but are seeking unity among the divided Restoration Movement; and many Independents have replaced Campbell's expectation of peace and harmony on earth with an expectation of conflict in a battle to create and protect a "Christian society." The Christian society that the Independents expect to be created is dependent upon the domination of the Independent Christian Churches (and other conservative Christians) over the earthly affairs of politics, morality, and religion. This domination is accomplished primarily through capitalist ideals of expansion.

The use of capitalist business practices to provide a metanarrative for the Stone-Campbell churches is not a recent innovation. Church of Christ (a cappella) scholar David Edwin Harrell, Jr. suggests that the comingling of Christianity and capitalism goes back to the beginning of the Movement:

Most Disciples of Christ leaders during these years [prior to the Civil War] accepted and Christianized the economic principles of unrestricted capitalism. Their heritage in Enlightenment optimism, Biblical primitivism, and frontier experience convinced them that if a man was honest, diligent, and frugal he would prosper. The gospel of success, carefully documented with Biblical proof-texts, was intricately combined with their theological doctrines.<sup>79</sup>

After the Civil War the Restoration Movement continued to appeal to capitalist principles, particularly in the Northern churches (which were to become a stronghold of the Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ) where the "urban congregations, business leaders, and middle-class religious norms" exerted great influence

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<sup>79</sup> Harrell, *Quest for a Christian America*, 63. Harrell notes that this view of prosperity conflicted with the "antiaristocratic prejudices" that were also a central part of Restoration Movement thought (64). However, he also points out that this bias diminished over time, that "the frontier, lower-class orientation of Disciples of Christ, everywhere apparent before 1840, was markedly less conspicuous in the thought of many of the group's leaders by 1865. . . . Prosperous, middle-class congregations were common in the small towns of Kentucky and the emerging Midwestern cities by 1865" (67). Further, Harrell argues, economic factors directly contributed to the first division within the Restoration Movement, claiming that for the lower-class churches of the Movement, "'instrumental music' became a symbol of all that was pretentious, aristocratic, and corrupt" (68).

over the Restoration Movement churches and encouraged the use of economic theory as an aid in the preaching of the gospel.<sup>80</sup> Harrell writes:

A leading Northern preacher suggested the “greatest need” in the church was the use of “*strictly business principles* in our religious enterprises.” In 1894 the Board of Church Extension began publication of a quarterly magazine entitled *Business in Christianity*, that, according to its promoters, would aid ministers to avoid “so much blundering.”<sup>81</sup>

The “gospel of success” that was applied to individual economic affairs, is now applied to the Independent Christian Churches, where success is judged on the basis of numerical growth, the variety of programs that a given church offers, the expansion of its facilities, and, particularly in small towns, the market share that a particular church commands—that is, to have a significant percentage of the available population choose to worship at a particular church. The pages of the March 2, 2003 *Christian Standard* were filled with articles on healthy, growing churches and the “Annual Megachurch Listing,” that is, churches with over 1,000 members, for the Independent Christian Churches. In the lead article in this issue, Dick Alexander, Senior Minister of LifeSpring Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio claims that the Independent Christian Churches focus on church growth has been, in some respects, positive.<sup>82</sup> Alexander claims that this growth is the result of the Independent Christian Churches’ “nondenominational” status and the “shift to more contemporary worship styles.”<sup>83</sup> However, where Alexander attributes Independent growth to freedom “from the constraints of hierarchy and ingrown denominational programming” and attempts to implement “new strategies tailored to their communities,”<sup>84</sup> he fundamentally misinterprets the reasons for Independent growth. The Independent

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<sup>80</sup> Harrell, “Sectional Origins,” 59.

<sup>81</sup> Harrell, “Sectional Origins,” 59.

<sup>82</sup> Dick Alexander, “Christian Churches are Growing Churches—So What?” *Christian Standard* March 2, 2003, 4. Alexander does acknowledge that there have been some negative aspects to that growth. He briefly critiques the concept of “growth” in the Independent Christian Churches, asking if growth could become “an idol that outweighs all other concerns” and whether the growth comes from conversions or from dissatisfied members of other churches (9).

<sup>83</sup> Alexander, “Christian Churches are Growing Churches—So What?,” 4.

<sup>84</sup> Alexander, “Christian Churches are Growing Churches—So What?,” 4.

Christian Churches is certainly governed by a powerful hierarchy, and it is not at all unique in attempting to tailor its methodologies to its communities.<sup>85</sup> However, Alexander is much closer to the reasons for Independent Christian Churches growth where he claims:

Erwin McManus, one of the leading American advocates for a culturally-engaged faith, claims the first-century church was more mission driven than theology driven. That's also part of our DNA. While some denominations debated theological and social issues, this fellowship was focused on reaching lost people, with results that have now been confirmed [in the study that named the Independent Christian Churches as the second fastest growing religious movement in the 1990s].<sup>86</sup>

While the efficiency of Independent Christian Churches evangelistic efforts may have been confirmed in the recent growth they have experienced, it is precisely the disregard for Christian theology that has allowed the Independent Christian Churches to grow. While Independents have not been “free from the constraints of hierarchy,” they have been free from the constraints of maintaining continuity with the theological constructs of the Christian tradition through the centuries. Taking the place of theological reflection is a pragmatic, capitalistic ecclesiology that constrains the Independent Christian Churches to

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<sup>85</sup> See above, 166-70, for the Independent Christian Churches hierarchy. For other groups attempting to create methodologies specific to their communities, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 163-230 for a variety of contextualized ecclesiologies. Perhaps the best examples of such methodologies are found in the various liberation theologies that have been developed among oppressed peoples. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Revised Edition, (London: SCM Press, 2001); Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985); and James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998). Evangelicals have also engaged in extensive attempts to adapt the Christian message for particular cultures. See Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995). See also, work from The Gospel and our Culture Network: George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996); and Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998). The Independent Christian Churches, however, has developed little, if any, scholarly work on the use of such methodologies, and they have had limited interaction with other scholarly work on contextualization—for example, there has been no article in the *Stone-Campbell Journal* that explores the implications of the methodologies appropriated by the Independent Christian Churches for evangelism. Rather, where Alexander speaks of churches tailoring their methodologies to a specific community, he is talking about the strong pragmatism that infuses the Independent Christian Churches. For the Independents, it is not necessary to have a theology to undergird a particular practice or methodology—it is only necessary for that practice or methodology to work for its intended purpose.

<sup>86</sup> Alexander, “Christian Churches are Growing Churches—So What?,” 4.

practice, not merely a “culturally-engaged” form of Christianity, but an expression of Christianity that is actually governed by its culture.

This form of Christianity is directed largely by capitalist ideals, chief among them the principle of unrestrained growth. Joe Ellis, a former dean at Cincinnati Bible Seminary and professor of church growth, unwittingly argues for this capitalist ecclesiology in a *Christian Standard* article titled “Healthy Churches Are Growing Churches.”<sup>87</sup> Ellis claims that church growth is a natural part of being a healthy church. As a normative part of the life of the church, Ellis states that “If your church is not growing, either something is lacking and must (not ‘should’) be provided; or something is hindering and must (not ‘should’) be dealt with. Lack of growth must not be tolerated as normal.”<sup>88</sup> Ellis argues that the Bible, rather than culture, must provide the model for how the church is to function, yet Ellis is actually laying Christian terminology over a cultural model of the church.

Ellis describes the moment in history that we currently inhabit as a “hinge-pin” or “turning point” which has produced “a remarkable converging of conditions that could make the world receptive to Christ as never before.”<sup>89</sup> Ellis claims that

The concept of restoring the biblical church is amazingly compatible with today’s populations. When these people encounter the church as God designed it, the results are breathtaking. Authentic Christianity was made for just such times—and people—as these.

Many churches today are becoming more like the biblical model. They are dynamic, motivating, and magnetic. . . . The time is right for such churches.<sup>90</sup>

It is curious to think that “authentic Christianity” would be more appropriate now than at other times and that “dynamic, motivating, and magnetic” describe the early church rather than an idealized version of the contemporary church that must be “dynamic, motivating,

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<sup>87</sup> Joe S. Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” *Christian Standard* (March 2, 2003), 7.

<sup>88</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 7.

<sup>89</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 7.

<sup>90</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 7.

and magnetic” in order to grow. Ellis provides little help in determining what “authentic Christianity” is, nor does he indicate how one could distinguish between “authentic” and “inauthentic” Christianity. Rather, Ellis has termed his own version of Christianity as “authentic” while dismissing other forms of Christianity. To this end he quotes Donald McGavran, founder of the Church Growth Movement, as saying:

Being a real New Testament church means believing and doing what the New Testament church did. . . . if a congregation is not reproducing [itself to create new congregations], it is not a New Testament church, no matter what it calls itself.<sup>91</sup>

The irony of Ellis’ position is that he severely criticizes other American churches for engaging in practices determined by their culture, which is precisely what the Independent Christian Churches has done since its founding in the early 1800s. Ellis writes:

This failure to function authentically grows out of the fact that most churches (at least in America) are unwittingly influenced by a paradigm of church that comes not from Scripture, but from the culture around us. Yet this nonbiblical cultural model is widely assumed, persistent, taken-for-granted, and—to a large extent—unwittingly subscribed to and practiced by the majority of American churches.<sup>92</sup>

The quest for the “real” New Testament church is as illusory as the quest for the historical Jesus.<sup>93</sup> In this case, Ellis’ quest has him merely replacing one cultural form of Christianity with another. Ellis claims that in the 1960s

a great social and cultural revolution struck America. . . . The resulting cultural model is referred to as postmodernism. In this transition, history did not just move further down the track it had been on for five centuries;

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<sup>91</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 7.

<sup>92</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 7.

<sup>93</sup> See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ed. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 478-487, for Schweitzer’s conclusion on the attempt to recover the historical Jesus, which, excepting the theological liberalism which influenced this quest, has many parallels to the Restoration Movement attempt to recover the primitive Church. Schweitzer’s conclusion could, with few changes, be as easily applied to the Restoration Movement: “The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and died to give his word its final consecration, never existed. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in a historical garb.

This image has not been destroyed from outside; it has fallen to pieces, split and shattered by the concrete historical problems which came to the surface one after another . . . .

Whatever the definitive solution may be, the historical Jesus whom research will depict, on the basis of the problems which have been recognized and admitted, can never render modern theology the services which it claimed from its own semi-historical, semi-modern Jesus” (478).

it jumped to a different track and headed off in a fundamentally different direction.<sup>94</sup>

While such a statement reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the development of postmodernism, in addition to a misuse of the term,<sup>95</sup> what is particularly important are the conclusions that Ellis draws from the idea of such a cultural shift in the 1960s. Ellis claims that as a result of this revolution, “America has now become a mission field,” where churches must view themselves as “‘missions’ to a pagan society.”<sup>96</sup> Ellis argues that many American churches have operated out of “1950s church patterns,”<sup>97</sup> rather than “biblical norms.”<sup>98</sup> However, Ellis’ argument does not really offer a choice between “1950s church patterns” and “biblical norms.” Rather, the choice that Ellis offers is between the cultural instantiation of what he believes to be representative of 1950s Christianity and the cultural form of American Evangelical Christianity of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The real problem for

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<sup>94</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8.

<sup>95</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into a lengthy discussion of the Independent use of “postmodernism,” which is almost universally naïve. Independent understandings of postmodernity generally posit a monolithic postmodern culture that stands in opposition to an equally well-defined modern culture. It is necessary, however, to point out that postmodernism is not representative of history jumping “to a different track,” but is in continuity with the intellectual developments of the last five centuries (See Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, (London: Routledge, 1992) for a discussion of the modern roots of postmodernity). Further, Independents do not relate postmodernism to the loss of metanarrative, as Jean-Francois Lyotard does in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, nor do they relate the concept of postmodernity to Derridian deconstruction or Foucault’s genealogical project, to name just a few of the scholars to whom Independents could appeal. Rather, Independents relate postmodernity to changes in culture, particularly in the areas of technology, morality, and to a lesser extent, ways of thinking. They may regard these changes as either good or bad, but Independent analysis of postmodernity rarely goes beyond immediate cultural phenomena. As such, it is difficult to tell, from Independent accounts, what exactly makes this particular time different from other ages, as culture is constantly changing in regard to technology, morality, and ways of thinking. See Rick Chromey, “Welcome to a Whatever World: Part: 1: The Times, They Have Been Changing,” *Christian Standard*, (April 6, 2003): 4-6; Rick Chromey, “Welcome to a Whatever World: Part: 3: The Church Must Change or Die,” *Christian Standard*, (April 13, 2003): 4-6; Rick Chromey, “Welcome to a Whatever World: Part: 3: Ideas for Reaching Postmoderns,” *Christian Standard*, (April 20, 2003): 4-6; Charles Colson and Anne Morse, “The Postmodern Crackup,” *Christian Standard*, (September 12, 2004): 4,7; Jonathan Huddleston, “Confessions of a Postmodernist,” *Christian Standard*, (September 12, 2004): 5-6; and Lee Snyder, “Ambushed by an Open Door,” *Christian Standard*, (September 4, 2005): 6-8.

<sup>96</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ellis claims that this pattern involves churches serving as benefit societies that exist for their members’ benefit and are unconcerned about non-members, rather than existing for evangelization and the benefit of non-Christians, (Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8). Contemporary Independent Christian Churches, however, certainly function, at least in part, as benefit societies for members and non-members alike. See below, 226-7, 234.

<sup>98</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8.

Ellis is not the abandonment of a biblical model, but that the church is not experiencing enough numerical growth. Ellis writes:

If the church is to be effective in fulfilling its evangelistic mandate, it cannot go on as if this crack in history [which, for Ellis, is represented by the advent of postmodernism in the 1960s] had not occurred. We cannot bring back the conditions of the 1950s; and the church cannot impact the present and future world most effectively with a paradigm that was developed to fit that decade. But in most cases churches have clung even more tightly to their default paradigms, “borrowing from our fathers’ altars, not the fire, but the ashes.”<sup>99</sup>

It follows that if the church cannot recreate the conditions of the 1950s, neither can it bring back the conditions of the first century. According to Ellis, the majority of American churches are “five to 40 years behind the times,” projecting “an image of being closed circles that are angry, hostile, and negative, with no ‘good news’—of having no clear sense of values, beliefs, or direction—of being oblivious to the real world and real life.”<sup>100</sup> In actuality, however, the situation in the Independent Christian Churches, particularly among the progressive group, is the opposite of what Ellis describes. Whatever diverse factors may be involved in the recent growth of the Movement, an “angry, hostile, and negative” group of churches is unlikely to grow by 18.6% over the course of a decade. The situation that currently exists within the Movement is one where the leaders and influencers within the Movement have seen all too clearly the problems of the “1950s church patterns” that Ellis describes, have already far surpassed his call for a church “for just such times as these,”<sup>101</sup> and are busy promoting the acculturated, capitalist Christianity of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the Independent Christian Churches, this capitalist form of Christianity is promoted in a number of venues. One of the most prominent is The Blueprint Tour which was created in 1998 with the intention of offering “encouragement and education to

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<sup>99</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8.

<sup>100</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8.

<sup>101</sup> Ellis, “Healthy Churches are Growing Churches,” 8.

ministers, staff, and leaders of independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.”<sup>102</sup> A look at one of the Blueprint Tour conferences illustrates the impact of capitalism on the Independent Christian Churches. The “Blueprint for the Future of the Church . . . 2003 Emerging Church Conference” was held in Indianapolis, Indiana from April 28-30 and was subtitled “Raising the Roof: How the emerging churches of yesterday became the megachurches of today.” The brochure suggests that these emerging churches became megachurches through good business practices, by “multiplying leadership teams, minimizing frustration, managing facilities, mastering finances, maximizing staff, maintaining relevance, ministering through chaos.”<sup>103</sup> The seven speakers at the event were drawn only from large churches, with ministers from three of the four largest Independent Christian Churches present, and with no speaker representing a church of less than 1,000 attendees.

Two of the speakers offered some critiques of the business model incorporated by the Independent Christian Churches. Allan Dunbar, former Senior Minister of Canada’s largest Christian Church, former President of Puget Sound Christian College, and current Executive Director of the North American Christian Convention, questioned the trajectory of the Movement wondering if “the whole idea of church [has] become a business with methods and seminars,” and he argued that successful ministry will not come about “just because we have great programs and facilities—[we] heard that in an earlier message.”<sup>104</sup> Brett Andrews, founder of New Life Christian Church in Washington D.C., also offered a model of church work that deemphasized the capitalist orientation of the Independent Christian Churches and encouraged reliance on God through waiting, humility, and

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<sup>102</sup> *Blueprint For the Future of the Church*, May 17, 2005, <<http://blueprinttour.org/aboutus/default.asp>>.

<sup>103</sup> Blueprint for the Future of the Church presents: 2003 Emerging Church Conference, Advertisement, n.d.

<sup>104</sup> Allan Dunbar, “Lost People Matter to God . . . How Much do they Matter to Us?” 2003 Emerging Church Conference, Kingsway Christian Church, Indianapolis, 29 April, 2003.

weakness of the staff.<sup>105</sup> However, the majority of the remaining speakers promoted an ecclesiology based on models of power, business, and numerical success.

According to several of the speakers, the main problem with the American church is its reliance upon tradition. Rex Brown, the former senior minister at Eastside Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, actively promotes the ahistoricity of the Independent Christian Churches, and suggests that established churches “downplay tradition and become more user friendly.”<sup>106</sup> Part of this downplaying of tradition is to do whatever is necessary to bring new people into the church, which often has the effect of alienating longer term members. However, Brown claims that “if you have to have everybody you started with finish with you, then you will not finish with any more than you started with.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the bottom line is most important in assessing the success of the church. Brown says that he is “going to build the kingdom two ways—through the front door and the backdoor. If God and Jesus did not keep everyone on board—[for example] Judas—we shouldn’t feel bad to lose people.”<sup>108</sup>

However, it is in marketing and business models that Brown’s ecclesiology comes into its own. For Brown, the secret to success is how the church is marketed. Brown claims that “the church has done a horrible job with marketing, with delivering God’s word, with tapping into spirituality.”<sup>109</sup> Brown notes that Eastside Christian Church sent out 50,000 postcards at Easter that claimed that Eastside “isn’t your Grandma’s church,” and not surprisingly, they had a record attendance that Sunday.<sup>110</sup> In addition, it is written into Eastside Christian Church’s by-laws that Brown is the “visionary leader” of the church. Brown says: “Our board is made up of people who are sold out to the vision. You

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<sup>105</sup> Brett Andrews, “Who Captures the Power?,” 2003 Emerging Church Conference, Kingsway Christian Church, Indianapolis, 29 April, 2003.

<sup>106</sup> Rex Brown, “Seven Questions Every Church Must Ask,” 2003 Emerging Church Conference, Kingsway Christian Church, Indianapolis, 29 April, 2003.

<sup>107</sup> Rex Brown, “Seven Questions Every Church Must Ask.”

<sup>108</sup> Rex Brown, “Seven Questions Every Church Must Ask.”

<sup>109</sup> Rex Brown, “Seven Questions Every Church Must Ask.”

<sup>110</sup> Rex Brown, “Seven Questions Every Church Must Ask.”

may be a better Christian, older, more experienced, but if you are not sold out [to the vision] you won't be on our board."<sup>111</sup> Many congregations within the Independent Christian Churches are adopting a structure where the senior minister is effectively the CEO of the organization who determines the "vision" and direction of the church—a far cry from the populist beginnings of the Restoration Movement.<sup>112</sup> The minister as CEO must first look to the concerns of the business—a healthy bottom line that returns the best dividend for the shareholders, or in this case, the members of the congregation.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Blueprint Tour is the name of the tour itself and what it is promoting. Within the Independent Christian Churches, the New Testament has historically been referred to as the only "blueprint" for the future of the church, whereas for the Blueprint Tour, the "blueprint" is no longer the New Testament, but the model provided by large churches that have successfully incorporated capitalist business practices in their ecclesiology. Like any other commodity, the Independent Christian Churches offers a Christianity that may be bought and sold, where members exchange offerings for goods and services: small group fellowship, daycare, youth groups, an experience of worship, and a place to belong within a homogenous group of Christians. This capitalist focus of the Independent Christian Churches is promoted by many of the leaders within the Independent Christian Churches, who encourage the marketing of the church as an edgy adventure,<sup>113</sup> and who have come to regard the church as a brand. Mark Taylor's "From the Editor" column in the June 1, 2003 *Christian Standard* reveals as much where he writes about the trend of multi-site churches (a single congregation that meets simultaneously in several different locations) and says that one of the benefits of a multi-site church is that it is

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<sup>111</sup> Rex Brown, "Seven Questions Every Church Must Ask."

<sup>112</sup> See above, 47-9.

<sup>113</sup> The Independents have, for example, three churches by the name of Adventure Christian Church and five churches known as Journey Christian Church, among other "cutting-edge" names.

Brand new *and* [a] trusted brand. A new site of a multisite church is like the opening of a new Starbucks. It attracts people because it is brand new, but they also come because it is a known and trusted brand.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to branding Christianity, Independents have also systematized the process of planting new churches.

Lee Snyder, Professor of Rhetorical Studies at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, relates this systematization to the emergence of postmodernism:

Some savvy Christian leaders decided the arrival of postmodernism was not an ambush but an open door, and they figured out how to enter it. Their congregations adapted to the new postmodern (“pomo”) public. Worship services became seeker sensitive. Instead of some poorly prepared man leading old hymns, well-rehearsed praise teams performed “contemporary Christian music.” Sermons were delivered via PowerPoint slides, dialogues, video, and drama. The outer-directed passion of the church was redefined from “evangelism” to “reaching people.” Other congregations imitated the innovative examples of these leaders. The results are mixed.<sup>115</sup> We have more megachurches than ever. Our professionally managed worship services are never boring. *Church planting is now an efficient science because we have mastered public relations techniques* [emphasis mine].<sup>116</sup>

Nowhere is the Independent relation to American Evangelicalism more evident than in this “science” of church planting. A May 23, 2005 *BusinessWeek* article described a “new generation of evangelical entrepreneurs” whose “runaway success is modeled unabashedly on business. They borrow tools ranging from niche marketing to MBA hiring to lift their share of U.S. churchgoers.”<sup>117</sup> The article takes note of the techniques used by the Southern Baptist Convention, which

plans to “plant” 1,800 new churches using by-the-book niche-marketing tactics. “We have cowboy churches for people working on ranches, country music churches, even several motorcycle churches aimed at bikers,” says Martin King, a spokesman for the Southern Baptists’ North American Mission Board.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Mark A. Taylor, “From the Editor,” *Christian Standard* June 1, 2003, 3.

<sup>115</sup> The mixed results are, according to Snyder, due to the need for constant change to keep up “with our attention-deficit culture,” which may entail making “revolutionary change without considering the unintended consequences” (Snyder, “Ambushed by an Open Door,” 7).

<sup>116</sup> Snyder, “Ambushed by an Open Door,” 7.

<sup>117</sup> William C. Symonds, “Earthly Empires: How Evangelical Churches are Borrowing from the Business Playbook,” *BusinessWeek* (May 23, 2005), 80.

<sup>118</sup> Symonds, “Earthly Empires,” 84.

The article could have as easily described much of the niche-marketing and business techniques adopted by the Independent Christian Churches in planting and developing churches.<sup>119</sup>

An outgrowth of the business and marketing techniques used by Independents, is that a large part of the success of the Independent Christian Churches is due, not only to how it plants churches, but where it plants them. Choosing suburban communities with similar demographics ensures success within the accepted ecclesiological model that progressive Independents have chosen for themselves.<sup>120</sup> The growth of the Independent Christian Churches is, therefore, largely the result of business models developed for successful church plants.

Much of the current focus of the Movement lies in the use of “new” strategies and methodologies for evangelism. Many of the methods of evangelism currently employed by Independents focus on church planting in so called “unreached” or “unchurched” areas.<sup>121</sup> Brent Foulke, a member of Orchard Group Church Planting, recounts the “risk” of “new church planting methods” in the Northeast United States that began in the early 1990s.

By the early 1990s, however, the ‘Go Ye’ Chapel Mission, now Orchard Group Church Planting, pioneered the development of new, vibrant

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<sup>119</sup> For some examples of the use of niche-marketing, business models, and other similar evangelistic techniques adopted by the Independent Christian Churches, see Mark A. Taylor, ed., *New Fruit from New Churches: Surveying the Harvest from Coast to Coast*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, (November 2, 2003), 4-10; Mark A. Taylor, “From the Editor: Should You Start a Cowboy Church?,” *Christian Standard* (August 31, 2003), 3; Daniel Schantz, “Bluegrass Bridge,” *Christian Standard* (August 31, 2003), 4-5; Brad Canning, “Tempest in a Coffee Shop,” *Christian Standard*, (July 31, 2005), 5-6; Dillon, “Meeting Strangers,” 4-5, 11; Mark A. Taylor, ed., *What Does Your Building Say?*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, (August 28, 2005), 4-11; Paul S. Williams, “10 Changes in a New Century,” *Christian Standard*, (July 3, 2005), 8-10; and Rick Chromey, “The Changing Church,” *Christian Standard*, (July 10, 2005), 4-6.

<sup>120</sup> Congregations affiliated with the Independent Christian Churches are located almost entirely in rural and suburban areas and many, if not the majority, of new church plants are in rapidly growing suburbs of large cities. See Kendi Howells Douglas, “Facing the Challenge of the Urban Frontier: Creating Effective Christian Church Congregations in the Cities of the United States,” diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2004, 7-28.

<sup>121</sup> The designation of an area as unchurched is less an indication of the lack of churches in that area than it is an indication that no Independent Christian Churches exists in that area. As Brent E. Foulke says: “There are still more than a dozen cities of several hundred thousand where our fellowship [has no presence].” “Orchard Group Church Planting: New Churches for New York and the Northeast,” *Christian Standard* November 2, 2003, (5). See above, 104-5.

communities of faith in the region [New York and the Northeast part of the United States] by taking a risk to try new church planting methods. The result was the cooperative planting of a new Christian church in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1992. Two church planting organizations and several large congregations were involved in planting that new church with a staff of four ministers and a major marketing campaign before the first service. The new church was the first in the region to begin with more than 400 at the first service. (Up to that point, most new churches began with five to 50 people.) Shortly thereafter, similar churches were planted in Albany, New York, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania.<sup>122</sup>

The risk present in this venture is no different than in any business venture that begins with powerful sponsors and a large marketing campaign. Having already demonstrated the Independent Christian Churches' antipathy towards Church history and the use of marketing to create such a community, it may be said that such efforts are based more on capitalism than on Christianity. Tim Cole explicitly connects Christianity and capitalism for church planting, claiming:

Bob Logan, the noted church planting guru, asserts that a team orientation to church planting produces a greater harvest with less turnover. In *The Church Planter's Toolkit*, Logan cites the extensive research by *Forbes* magazine of 1,000 new businesses in America. *Forbes'* resulting article, "Two for the Money" explained that businesses starting with partners were four times more likely to succeed than those starting with solo entrepreneurs.

Virginia Vision was launched in 1990. The first batch of new churches were typical single-staff plants. After three years all averaged about 120 in attendance. In 1997 the multiple-staff ingredient was added, with a resulting batch of new churches averaging nearly 350 in attendance, almost a threefold increase in the same amount of time.

Of course this critical ingredient was first suggested by Jesus himself when He sent His evangelists out into towns two-by-two. Later this two-man combo was replicated in the book of Acts with Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, and Paul and Silas.<sup>123</sup>

There are two important things to note in Cole's description of church planting: first, for Cole, church planting and new businesses operate under the same basic rules; and second, it is critically important for the first point to be accepted to understand that this practice is

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<sup>122</sup> Foulke, "New Churches Strategies Harvests," 4-5. Such strategies raise questions, which have not been addressed by Independents, about what happens when a church comes into existence *ex nihilo*—to not exist one week and to begin with 400 people a week later.

<sup>123</sup> Tim Cole, "Virginia Evangelizing Fellowship: BAM! Kicking it Up a Notch!," *Christian Standard*, November 2, 2003, 7.

not something discovered by a business magazine, but is actually as old as Jesus himself. Fitting neatly into the Restoration Movement program of restoring the first century church is this business practice of working with multiple-staff.

While the critique to this point has focused primarily on the efforts of the progressive side of the Independent Christian Churches, it is by no means limited to the progressives. Traditionalists participate in the capitalist orientation of the Independent Christian Churches as well. Traditionalists are somewhat more averse to using the language of business to describe their ecclesiology. That does not mean, however, that capitalist principles are not operating among traditionalists. Rather, the traditionalists operate by the same capitalist principles that progressives do—traditionalists are involved in planting churches, lending money to congregations, leadership training, and publishing,<sup>124</sup> each of which is designed to expand the power and influence of the traditionalist segment of Independent Christian Churches. The difference between progressives and traditionalists, in respect to the capitalist tendencies of the Independent Christian Churches, is not that the progressives have adopted a capitalist ecclesiology and the traditionalists have not, but that the traditionalists are less adept at engagement with their culture, believing that doing so destroys the gospel. The capitalist orientation of the Independent Christian Churches represents the culmination of Restoration Movement doctrine—over two centuries the theological program of the Stone-Campbell Movement has transformed itself into a program where the lines between religion and culture, capitalism and Christianity, are so blurred that one cannot be distinguished from the other. To understand why this is the case, the relation between Christianity and capitalism must be examined.

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<sup>124</sup> See H. Lee Mason, ed., *The Restoration Herald*, (September 2005), which contains advertisements for several church growth seminars, which focus on building congregations into megachurches (5), church leadership and teaching with excitement (8), using any method (“so long as it is consistent with scripture”) in the interest of evangelism (11), advertising for the church (12), and building new facilities (22); and Mason, “A Brief History of the Christian Restoration Association,” <<http://www.thecra.org/history.htm>>.

## Christianity and Capitalism

Two related market-based critiques of American religion apply to the Independent Christian Churches. The first is the work of sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, who argue that religion in America functions as an economy where religious consumers make their religious choices on the basis of the perceived costs and benefits of a given denomination. According to Finke and Stark, religious choice is an expression of “rational choice theories of behavior.”<sup>125</sup> Finke and Stark argue that

individuals will evaluate religion in essentially the same way that they evaluate all other objects of choice. They will evaluate the costs and benefits (including the “opportunity costs” that arise when one action can be undertaken only by forgoing others) and will “consume” those religious goods that, together with their other actions, maximize net benefits. In particular individuals will weigh the promise of tremendous rewards (for which the supernatural is the only possible source) against both the cost of qualifying for these rewards and the risk that the rewards will not eventuate.<sup>126</sup>

Finke and Stark have correctly identified the market economy that exists as denominations compete with one another on a level playing field since there is no established, state religion in the United States. Each denomination competes with the others for adherents, and according to Finke and Stark, the more stringent a religious tradition is (in terms of its doctrine and demands on time, money, and behavior), the more likely it is to gain adherents—that is, “people tend to value religion according to how much it costs—and because ‘reasonable’ and ‘sociable’ religion costs little, it is not valued greatly.”<sup>127</sup> The Independent Christian Churches certainly has some demanding standards that it has utilized to enhance the perceived value of the Independent version of the Christian religion, and Independents have certainly participated in the religious free market of America, competing, not just with other denominations, but, due to their strong commitment to

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<sup>125</sup> Finke and Stark, *Churching of America*, 252.

<sup>126</sup> Finke and Stark, *Churching of America*, 252.

<sup>127</sup> Finke and Stark, *Churching of America*, 249-50.

congregational autonomy, often with other Independent Christian Churches for adherents. However, Finke and Stark's analysis is lacking at their points claiming that individuals rationally choose a particular religious tradition over another and that the only possible rewards are supernatural.

It is at this juncture that the second market-based critique comes into play. While there certainly is an element of rational choice involved in choosing a religious tradition, the Independent Christian Churches does not merely offer a rational choice, but seeks to manipulate the outcome of that choice through the use of various technologies—architecture, advertising, music, drama, video, the printed and spoken word, conferences, conventions, and books and other material goods.<sup>128</sup> J. Michael Shannon, professor of ministries and biblical studies at Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary, writing a cautious article on the use of technology in preaching, says:

More and more sanctuaries and worship centers are equipped with projection screens or other high-tech equipment. These may well enhance communication, although the jury is still out. There is an advantage for a church to use some of these technologies if, for no other reason, it proves the church is not out-of-date. The preacher who uses Power-Point will communicate something to an audience that may be of value beyond the specific content of the sermon.<sup>129</sup>

Communication is certainly enhanced—the question is not if the communication is enhanced, but how it is enhanced. How information is communicated always changes what is communicated—in Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum, "the medium is the message."<sup>130</sup> The use of many of the technologies mentioned above is not new—

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<sup>128</sup> For some representative examples of how Independents use these technologies, from both proponents and critics, see Bob Russell, *When God Builds a Church: 10 Principles for Growing a Dynamic Church*, (West Monroe: Howard Publishing Company, 2000), 107-125; Tim Foot, "Experience Life!," *Christian Standard*, (November 16, 2003): 4-5; Vince Antonucci, "Beyond Human Traditions," *Christian Standard*, (January 25, 2004): 6-7; Mark A. Taylor, ed., *40 Days of Purpose*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, (February 22, 2004):3-11; Mark A. Taylor, ed., "Evangelizing With The Passion," *Christian Standard*, (May 23, 2004): 8-10;; David Ferguson, "Take a Risk!," *Christian Standard*, (July 25, 2004): 4-5, 10; Shockley Flick, "Where to Draw the Line?," *Christian Standard*, (July 25, 2004): 8-9; John Caldwell, "Whatever Happened to Jesus?," *Christian Standard*, (December 26, 2004): 4-6; Taylor, ed., *What Does Your Building Say?*, themed issue of *Christian Standard*, 4-11.

<sup>129</sup> J. Michael Shannon, "Preaching at the Speed of Light," *Christian Standard* (September 28, 2003), 4.

<sup>130</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

architecture, advertising, music, drama, the printed and spoken word, and Christian merchandise have been utilized by Christianity for centuries. However, it must be asked, at what point are technologies no longer a means to an end, but become an end in themselves? It is evident in the use that Independents have made of such technologies that, even if the technologies are not used as an end in themselves, the lines between the goal of using such technologies for the purpose of evangelism and the technology itself have been blurred to the point as that it makes little difference if the technologies serve the end of communication or evangelism, for example, or if technologies are used simply for the sake of using new technology.

In any event, these technologies function to ground the millennium in temporal terms. In Finke and Stark's analysis, the "supernatural is the only possible source" of promised rewards. However, Independents have always severely limited the operation of the supernatural in their theological program, which limits their eschatology to the earthly realm.<sup>131</sup> The costs and benefits of joining the Independent Christian Churches are defined almost entirely in this-worldly terms. Evangelism and church growth efforts among Independents focus primarily on meeting individual's immediate needs—for friendship, daycare and child care, experiences of worship, and a variety of self-help programs.<sup>132</sup> In addition, an individual's faith is often expressed through consumptive means; the mark of a Christian is less a standard of belief or behavior, but the consumption of Christian goods and services. As such, there is a large consumer industry created to specifically meet these needs. Indeed, the multi-billion dollar Christian entertainment industry exists to meet these perceived needs, but more so, it exists largely to serve itself—that is, to reap a material profit.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> See above, 157, fn. 79, and Lambert, "Holy Spirit, Doctrine of the," 403-6.

<sup>132</sup> See above, 210.

<sup>133</sup> See Symonds, "Earthly Empires," 80-88; Loraine Ali, "The Glorious Rise of Christian Pop," *Newsweek*, July 16, 2001: 38-44; Marc Peyser, "God, Mammon, and Bibleman," *Newsweek*, July 16, 2001: 45-8;

Taken as a whole, this situation suggests that the form of Christianity existing in the Independent Christian Churches is, in many respects, a product of advanced capitalism. While the Independent relation to capitalism has always been favorable, over time the amalgamation of sources that the Independent Christian Churches draws on have functioned to allow capitalist, rather than Christian, ideas of the millennium to become the unifying principle of Independent thought. For Independents, capitalism began to function as an ordering principle where gaps and fissures appeared in the Independent theological program, which opened the path for new religious expressions. These fissures are, first of all, epistemological, springing from the problematic use of Scottish Common Sense Realism, second, they result from the limited hermeneutic (which is derived from that philosophy) that Independents attempt to apply to the Bible, and third, a consequence of the belief that Christianity exists as a static religion whose true expression was restored on the American frontier. As these gaps appeared, capitalist thought was able to fill them and create new meanings for the concepts of restoration, unity, and the millennium. That capitalism was able to supply what was lacking in Independent theology should hardly be surprising as capitalism expanded in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century "into hitherto uncommodified areas."<sup>134</sup> Where Independents thought that they were restoring the New Testament Church, they actually succeeded in creating a syncretistic church formed around the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, in the context of the American frontier, and on the values of American capitalism. For the Independent Christian Churches, the

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Associated Press, "Largest Christian Retail Chain to Open on Sundays," *Hosier Times*, 28 September, 2003: A6; John Leland, "At Festivals, Faith, Rock and T-Shirts Take Center Stage," *New York Times*, 5 July, 2004, late ed.: A10; Peg Tyre, "The Almighty Dollar: Christian Bookstores Go Bust After Chains Find Religion," *Newsweek*, January 24, 2005: 68; Reuters, "U.S. Bible-zine for Boys Set for Easter," *Cnn.com*, 17 March, 2004 <[www.cnn.com/2004/US/03/16/life.bible.reut/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/03/16/life.bible.reut/index.html)>; Associated Press, "Religion as a Sales Tool," *Cnn.com*, 4 March, 2004 <[www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/books/03/04/publishing.religion.ap/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/books/03/04/publishing.religion.ap/index.html)>.

<sup>134</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 35-6

harbinger of the millennium once again proclaims that the millennium has already arrived.

It is in this spirit that Bob Russell proclaims:

Our movement traces its roots to that time [the revivals of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century], when [Barton W.] Stone and others called for a permanent disbanding of denominational distinctions, chose to be called Christians only, and sought union based on the Word of God alone.

We are on the verge of something greater than that second awakening, if we will allow God's glory to be revealed in His church. God can again choose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

Imagine a church so attractively pure that it draws people out of darkness into His marvelous light. Imagine a church so compassionate to the needy that the world acknowledges, "Those are the people who help people." Imagine a church growing so rapidly that the excitement of the massive assembly causes the world to note that Jesus Christ is being lifted up and He is "drawing all men to Him."

Remember, "With God all things are possible." In fact God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Ephesians 3:20,21).<sup>135</sup>

Once again, Independents are convinced that the millennium is here. It is an American millennium, based on individualism, capitalism, and the peculiar theology of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement. If only it can create a church that is pure, a church that is compassionate, and a church that grows numerically, participating in an "awakening" greater than the one that launched the Restoration Movement at Cane Ridge, the Independent Christian Churches believes that it can play a part in ushering in the reign of Christ on earth through the domination of the American marketplace of religion.

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<sup>135</sup> Russell, "The President's Message: Imagine God's Glory Revealed in Your Church," 13.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

The Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement began as an attempt to restore what its founders regarded as the pure, New Testament Church which they believed had been corrupted by centuries of theological speculation and could be rediscovered and carefully delineated through an inductive study of “the Bible alone.” As such, inherent in the Restoration Movement program is a belief that Christian history after the first century was apostate and, therefore, necessitated a rejection of the theological formulations developed throughout that history. This thesis has explored how the Independent Christian Churches subverted the historic development of Christianity through the adoption of the epistemological position of Scottish Common Sense Realism and the integration of that philosophic program with the experience of the American landscape, American values of equality, individualism and freedom, the widely shared American expectation of a millennial dawn, and capitalist economics. Through this amalgamation of sources, the founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement endeavored to forsake Christian theology and history in favor of a theology based on a hermeneutic developed from the rationalism of the Scottish Enlightenment. From this Common Sense hermeneutic, men such as Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott developed a program of restoration, unity, and millennialism that they believed would spread across the earth and culminate in the return and reign of Jesus Christ on earth. Disagreement over the implications of this hermeneutic lead to the division of the Stone-Campbell Movement into three branches: the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church), the Church of Christ (a cappella), and the Independent Christian Churches. The Independents, believing that they have followed a middle path between what they perceive as the liberalism of the Disciples of Christ and the legalism of the Church of Christ (a cappella), imagine that they alone

have safeguarded true apostolic Christianity. In actuality, however, the Independent Christian Churches has created a theological tradition that maintains the appearance of continuity with apostolic, or New Testament, Christianity through discourses and practices that were fundamentally unknown in the apostolic era. Where the Independents have rejected Christian history and Christian theology, theology for the Independent Christian Churches is carried out principally by secular means.

Within the Independent Christian Churches, however, there is little awareness of how its theological formulations have been developed and of the variety of sources that the founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement drew on in constructing their theology. Scholars within both the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ (a cappella) have embarked on erudite academic ventures that have explored the development of Stone-Campbell theology and have articulated the possibilities and limitations of Stone-Campbell thought.<sup>1</sup> For the Independent Christian Churches, however, its unwillingness to engage in critical examination of its own intellectual tradition, in particular the hermeneutic developed on the American frontier through the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense Realism, has left the Independents with a set of doctrines that are detached, not only from Christian history, but from the intellectual foundations of the Restoration Movement and which, consequently, cannot support or legitimate its theological pronouncements. Where the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ (a cappella) have attempted to reclaim theological discourse as part of the renewal of their respective Christian traditions, the Independents have continued to downplay the significance of theology while developing a pragmatic, capitalist ecclesiology that functions through the secular realm, with little need for theological reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> For some examples, see Michael W. Casey, *The Battle Over Hermeneutics in the Stone-Campbell Movement, 1800-1870*; Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*; Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875*; M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America*; Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a People in Covenant*. See above, 7, fn. 15.

The only significant, extended theological excursion by a scholar within the Independent Christian Churches is Jack Cottrell's systematic theology, *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today*. While Cottrell unashamedly designates his study as a work of theology, in opposition to the negative attitude toward theology within the first generation of the Stone-Campbell Movement,<sup>2</sup> he is hardly critical of the assumptions made by the founders of the Stone-Campbell tradition. Rather, Cottrell regards theology as a science,<sup>3</sup> wherein the Bible, as God's objective revelation,<sup>4</sup> is searched for data relevant to the construction of a given doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott, Cottrell constructs his theology through the correspondence view of truth, which he says is "the common-sense approach to truth and the one assumed by most people even if they have not thought about it formally."<sup>6</sup> Cottrell further claims that the Bible "throughout assumes the correspondence concept of truth."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Cottrell excuses his reliance on the philosophy of Common Sense Realism by claiming that this philosophy is equivalent to the Bible's own view of reality. While Cottrell's systematic theology is more than a mere rehashing of the theological positions of Stone and Campbell, his work does not substantially deviate from their central positions, and it perpetuates the problems and limitations of the Restoration Movement tradition.

To find a critical examination of the assumptions of Independent Christian Churches theology, the best beginning point is the entry on "Theology" in the *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. That such an entry exists is indicative of how the Stone-Campbell Movement's attitude toward theology has changed since its founding. Writing on the use of theology in the nineteenth century, James O. Duke notes that

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<sup>2</sup> See below, 240.

<sup>3</sup> Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 28-32.

<sup>6</sup> Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Cottrell, *Faith Once for All*, 12.

The word “theology” was rarely used in the early Movement except pejoratively and in reference to the speculative opinions of outsiders. This use was a social protest against the pretensions of theologians and theologies (especially Calvinism) of the day. It was also a matter of theological and hermeneutical conviction. . . .

Fond references to “theology,” itself a nonbiblical term, were considered indicative of neglect of the *sola scriptura* principle, the basis of confusion, error, tyranny, and division in Christian history. Stone-Campbell churches therefore urged avoiding theology, making the Bible the church’s *sole* rule of faith and practice, and adhering to its “pure speech” about the confessional core and other terms of Christian fellowship and communion.<sup>8</sup>

Duke claims that the rational religion of Alexander Campbell and his followers “was a reformulation and defense of classical theism in response to new learning gained by free, critical inquiry, Newtonian science, Lockean epistemology, and Common Sense philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Campbell sought to take the Christian scriptures and weave them together into a system of facts, which would reveal the essential elements of the Christian religion without the need for theological speculation. Where Campbell believed his system to scientifically reveal the original faith and practice of the New Testament church, it provided a powerful apologetic for his followers who could claim that their doctrines were not based on an interpretation of the Bible, as such, but on the scientifically derived facts of the Bible.

In Paul Blowers and Richard Phillips’s description of Independent Christian Churches theology, Independent theology has always encompassed a variety of opinion, but has agreed on some central tenets, which they claim included, for the first generation of Independent leaders,

a high view of biblical authority; the understanding of conversion as a rational decision, with the Holy Spirit given only after baptism; a restorationist emphasis on New Testament precedent for all aspects of church organization and practice; and protection of the “local autonomy” of congregations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James O. Duke, “Theology: 1. Nineteenth Century,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 731-2.

<sup>9</sup> Duke, “Theology: 1. Nineteenth Century,” 732.

<sup>10</sup> Paul M. Blowers and G. Richard Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 738.

While these traits have been largely passed on to contemporary Independents, more consequential for the future of Independent theology was “an increasing resistance to critical learning in some quarters, among those persons and institutions (e.g., the early Bible colleges) sharply reacting to the snares of liberalism and modernism.”<sup>11</sup> Further, according to Blowers and Phillips, in the second generation of Independent leaders, “after World War II, anti-liberal and separatist tendencies intensified,” and “Bible colleges reasserted a model of ministerial education that was biblically centered yet resistant to discussion of current theological trends.”<sup>12</sup> It is precisely this resistance to critical learning and current theological discussion that has continued to handicap Independent Christian Churches theology. One result of the lack of critical inquiry into their origins and the lack of dialogue with other theological currents, is that the Independent Christian Churches has not come to an understanding of how the philosophical concepts of the founders of their denomination and the American environment has shaped their theology and has particularly formed their ecclesiological structures into an image of American capitalism.

It is evident that there is an increasingly wide spectrum of opinion among Independents on what constitutes the core beliefs of the Independent Christian Churches, which has been described in this thesis as a new division in the Independent Christian Churches between traditionalists and progressives. For Blowers and Phillips, the third generation is marked by an engagement with American Evangelicalism that “has often manifested itself less in theological dialogue than in the pragmatic sharing of ideas and methods for evangelism, church growth, discipleship, worship, and spiritual life.”<sup>13</sup> This exchange of ideas has “led to modification of commitments once cherished by conservatives in the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ—to the approval of some [i.e.,

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<sup>11</sup> Blowers and Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 738.

<sup>12</sup> Blowers and Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 738-9.

<sup>13</sup> Blowers and Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 739.

progressives] and the displeasure of others [i.e., traditionalists].”<sup>14</sup> These modifications have been made primarily to aspects of Restoration Movement salvation theology (though almost all congregations within the Independent Christian Churches practice baptism by immersion as a requirement for salvation and church membership), the purpose of the worship service, and they have involved a de-emphasis on historic positions of the Restoration Movement, brought about, in part, because of “an increasing lack of awareness of, or interest in, their churches’ roots in the Stone-Campbell heritage.”<sup>15</sup> What is particularly interesting in Blowers and Phillips description of Independent theology is that it is evident that the Independent Christian Churches has increasingly little need for theological reflection, where traditionalists remain entrenched in their demands for “a literal restoration of the apostolic order” and progressives have embraced “evangelical pragmatism.”<sup>16</sup>

In one of the very few Independent endeavors to define Independent theology, C. Robert Wetzel attempts to describe the “theological center” of the Independent Christian Churches.<sup>17</sup> Wetzel believes that this theological center runs throughout the Independent Christian Churches, and is therefore present in both traditionalist and progressive groups. Wetzel offers a brief description of nine items that he believes make up the core theology of the Independent Christian Churches: a high Christology, a high view of inspiration, an understanding that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is the mission of the church, a desire for Christian unity, the restoration of New Testament Christianity, the ordinances or

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<sup>14</sup> Blowers and Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 739.

<sup>15</sup> Blowers and Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 739-40.

<sup>16</sup> Blowers and Phillips, “Theology: 2.3. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 740. Blowers and Phillips also note “a small minority” (which both Blowers and Phillips are a part of) which is “theologically conservative [and] identifies with a more sacramental view of the church and of baptism and the Lord’s Supper and is generally more open to prospective ecumenical interaction. It is also more positively disposed toward historic formularies like the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition” (740). This small minority has not been highlighted in this thesis because of the relative lack of influence it has over the direction of the Independent Christian Churches. However, the best Independent academic work discussed herein, from Henry Webb, Robert Hull, and Paul Blowers contributions to *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, has come from this minority.

<sup>17</sup> C. Robert Wetzel, “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ at 2001: In Search of a Theological Center.” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4.1 (2002): 3-12.

sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, a commitment to the priesthood of all believers, and congregational autonomy.<sup>18</sup> However, there is nothing particularly theological about his theological center. These commitments do not make up a theological center, as such, but are primarily aspects of a theological category (namely, ecclesiology) that would normally be derived from a theological center.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, Wetzel's title, "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ at 2001: In Search of a Theological Center," is apt in that he describes certain elements of Independent theology, but is unable to describe the theological center itself.

The center of Independent theology is to be found in the commodification of Christianity within the Independent Christian Churches, which is in turn a form of secularization. Following Peter Berger, R. Laurence Moore argues that "much of what we usually mean by speaking of secularization has to do not with the disappearance of religion but its commodification [and] the ways in which churches have grown by participation in the market."<sup>20</sup> For Berger, secularization is the "process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."<sup>21</sup> This secularization takes on a particular form in America where, by way of the first amendment, religion was legally removed from the public or national sphere and relegated to the private realm.<sup>22</sup> While Berger's analysis was written in 1967 and thus addresses a different time and situation, just as the Protestant mainline dominance had begun to wane and before the Evangelical resurgence of the 1970s, it is nonetheless prescient of the argument developed

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<sup>18</sup> Wetzel, "In Search of a Theological Center," 8-11.

<sup>19</sup> A theological center, for example, would be the hermeneutic apparatus that Alexander Campbell applied to the Christian Scriptures. This hermeneutic was the overarching principle from which all of Campbell's doctrine flowed.

<sup>20</sup> Moore, *Selling God*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 107.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), where Chadwick argues that secularization in Europe began as a subtle social development, and then became an intellectual process, that had as its foil the comingling of church and state. As such, secularization in America developed through different avenues than it could have in Europe; principally, where the state and religion were legally separated, secularization was free to develop through religious mechanisms.

in this thesis. Berger argues that “the original ‘carrier’ of secularization is the modern economic process, that is, the dynamic of industrial capitalism.”<sup>23</sup> As the Christianity of the Independent Christian Churches has become commodified and has relied on capitalism as a metanarrative to carry its theological pronouncements, it has contributed to the process of secularization as the denomination itself has become secularized.

Further, in a secularized *laissez-faire* religious economy, religious pluralism reigns.<sup>24</sup> Berger claims that:

The key characteristic in all pluralistic situations, whatever the details of their historical background, is that the religious ex-monopolies [i.e., churches that are no longer backed by the authority of the state] can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations. Allegiance is voluntary and thus, by definition, less than certain. As a result, the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed*. It must be “sold” to a clientele that is no longer constrained to “buy.” The pluralistic situation is, above all, a *market situation*. In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities. And at any rate a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics.<sup>25</sup>

At this stage, the desire of the consumer comes to the fore. In order to be successful, that is, to retain a large share of the market, the religious institution must target its goods to the consumer’s perceived “needs,” which is done by demonstrating the relevance of religion to the private life of the consumer, where the consumer preference is for a secularized religious product.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the consumer exerts substantial control over the religious product, making the product susceptible to change and leaving the religious group in a position where, due to the demand for a religion relevant to consumer needs, “it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the religious traditions as unchanging verity.”<sup>27</sup> Further,

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<sup>23</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 135.

<sup>25</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 146-7.

<sup>27</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 145.

in this secularized and commodified environment, the nature of theology has necessarily changed, becoming inconsequential to the ministry of a church. Berger argues that:

Theological scholarship was traditionally central to the role of the Protestant minister; it has become both increasingly irrelevant to the roles of the ministry both in “wholesale” (bureaucratic administration) and “retail” (local marketing) operations; Protestant educational institutions for the ministry have been accordingly modified, with concomitant modifications in their legitimating rationales.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of his study, Berger identifies a “crisis of credibility” within religion, which is a result of secularization, pluralism, and the ever changing religious fashions, which in turn cast doubt upon the proffered truth of that religion.<sup>29</sup> The result of this is that:

Religion no longer legitimates “the world.” Rather, different religious groups seek, by different means, to maintain their particular subworlds in the face of a plurality of competing subworlds. Concomitantly, this plurality of religious legitimations is internalized in consciousness as a plurality of possibilities between which one may choose. *Ipsa facto*, any particular choice is relativized and less than certain. What certainty there is must be dredged up from within the subjective consciousness of the individual, since it can no longer be derived from the external, socially shared and taken-for-granted world. . . . The religious traditions have lost their character as overarching symbols for the society at large, which must find its integrating symbolism elsewhere. Those who continue to adhere to the world as defined by the religious traditions then find themselves in the position of cognitive minorities—a status that has social-psychological as well as theoretical problems.<sup>30</sup>

Where Berger was writing primarily about mainline American denominations, even greater problems exist in regard to legitimization for upstart churches, such as the Independent Christian Churches, which never had recourse to the kind of tradition or theology that could have provided legitimation in the terms set out by Berger. Rather, if it is true, as Berger asserts, that theological scholarship is becoming increasingly irrelevant for Protestant ministers whose denominations have a strong tradition of scholarship, then it would follow that such scholarship is in an even more perilous state in the Independent Christian Churches. This is certainly the case, as the Independent Christian Churches has

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<sup>28</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 151.

<sup>30</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 153.

not held either critical scholarship or the traditions of the church in high regard, and therefore has little recourse to these areas in legitimizing its own tradition. While the Independent Christian Churches is a Christian tradition that is deeply isolated from other Christian traditions, from Christian theology and Christian history, from philosophical discourse, and from its own culture, this isolation has not proved to be detrimental to the Independent Christian Churches. In a curious way, the Independents have managed to use each aspect of this isolation to their advantage, by discounting the legitimacy of other Christian traditions, by wielding masterful rhetorical arguments against the aspects of Christian theology, history, and philosophy that do not conform to Independent accounts, and by tapping into key aspects of American culture that allow Independent congregations to grow, while simultaneously rejecting that culture. Having no responsibility to the past, in terms of Christian tradition or theology, the Independent Christian Churches is open to any possibility which may provide new avenues for growth and development. Thus, the Independent Christian Churches has taken advantage of the process of secularization described by Berger to continue to expand its particular brand of Christianity, not through an appeal to the Bible alone and the practices of the New Testament Church, but through the secular juggernaut of American capitalism.

Consequently, the problems of Independent Christian Churches theology are not solvable as theological problems. Rather, they are problems that stem from the way in which the founders of the Restoration Movement attempted to couch Christian theology in the philosophical framework of a limited moment in the history of ideas as that thought was adapted for the American setting. The Independent Christian Churches is successful precisely because it is a particularly American religion and is able to adapt itself to the changing currents and fashions of American life. As such, the connection between the Restoration Plea of the Independent Christian Churches and theological thinking becomes

increasingly tenuous as the Independent Christian Churches legitimates its doctrine and practice on the basis of its acceptance within American culture.

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