EARLY HISTORY OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

1801 - 1832

By

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Bachelor of Science

Phillips University

Enid, Oklahoma

1945

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1951

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PREFACE

Many members of the Disciples of Christ today know comparatively little about their church's customs and practices, and even less about its background. Relatively little is taught in the church concerning these matters. Few persons take the initiative to study for themselves, while the majority passively accept what is told them. The reason for this lack of knowledge may be the literal acceptance of the founders' firm belief in the unity of all Christians and their equally firm opposing of every form of indoctrination.

I have therefore attempted to explain the generally held beliefs of the Disciples of Christ by showing how religious conditions in the United States in the early part of the nineteenth century caused not only growth in church membership but splits within denominations. Out of these separations came the two stems, the Christians and the Disciples, which resulted in the forming of the Disciples of Christ. I have described the lives of the central figures, Stone of the Christians, and Thomas and Alexander Campbell of the Disciples, to show how each independently developed a theology which, amazing as it might seem, was similar to that of the other two. They had all patterned their systems after those used by the Apostles and had attempted to discard all man-made institutions. Because of their similarities the two branches united in 1832.

This is thus an administrative and a doctrinal history, with some attention to the social background of the movement. It is based largely upon original sources, namely, the Autobiography of Stone, the Memoirs of

Alexander Campbell (depending largely on his writings), and the magazines edited by Alexander Campbell, the Christian Baptist and the Millennial Harbinger. By this study I have gained a greater understanding of the Disciples of Christ, and I hope it inspires others to carry the research even further.

The writer wishes to acknowledge the following persons whose assistance made this thesis possible: Mr. Theodore L. Agnew, professor of history, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, for his valuable guidance and criticisms in writing the manuscript; Dr. George T. Lewis and Dr. Norbert R. Mahnken, professors of history, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, for their suggestions and criticisms; Mr. Rolland Huff and Mr. Charles M. Bretz, ministers of the Disciples of Christ church, Pond Creek, Oklahoma, for the materials they secured for me; and the library staff of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, for the arrangement of inter-library loans. And to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Humphreys, without whose support this thesis would have been impossible, I shall ever be grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

INTRODUCTION

The denomination known as the Disciples of Christ had its beginning in the early nineteenth century during the "Second Awakening." This revival of religion, like most great movements, was a gradual process, having begun after a period of religious indifference born of the Revolutionary War.

"The decade and a half following the close of the American Revolution was one of spiritual deadness among all the American churches."[1] One authority concludes that there was a definite decline in church membership.[2] Another states that the combined membership of the various denominations was not over ten per cent of the total population.[3] In some areas churches were doing without ministers because none were being ordained; unpopularity of the profession among young men was closely tied to the low salaries which prevailed. People in general were said to have had little concern with religious matters, being more interested in agriculture, business, and politics.[4] Students in the colleges frequently lived disorderly lives and

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[1] William W. Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1939), 322.

[2] Catharine C. Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West 1797-1805 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), 30.

[3] Winifred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ Church (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948), 59.

[4] Henry K. Rowe, The History of Religion in the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 104.

boasted of infidelity.[5] Altogether, moral and religious conditions were at a low ebb along the eastern seaboard, but they were deplorable in the West.[6]

Settlers had started moving to the West during and immediately following the Revolution. First they went into Kentucky and Tennessee; later, after the ending of Indian hostilities, they moved north of the Ohio River into the old Northwest. In spite of an almost steady stream of people moving westward, by 1800 less than a tenth of the nation's population lived west of the Alleghenies.[7]

These Western inhabitants represented all classes of society and a great variety of nationalities.[8] Often isolated from contact with their neighbors on the frontier, they were of course cut off from their former homes and especially from the churches of the East. Those who had been indifferent toward religion in the past naturally ignored it completely out West. Those who clung to their religion and tried to rear their children to be faithful were handicapped by the lack of preachers on the frontier. Many migrants, religiously inclined but ignorant, became quacks.[9] "Great was the need of the new country, where the circumstances of pioneer life and the rapid increase in population rendered the regular administration of church ordinances an impossibility."[10] Among other handicaps of

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5 Sweet, op. cit., 323.

6 Ibid., 324.

7 Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 76.

8 Cleveland, op. cit., 1.

9 Rowe, op. cit., 111.

10 Cleveland, op. cit., 13.

religion on the frontier were the scattered location of the people and the prevalence of many sects, both influences making cooperation in organizing churches difficult.

The main interest of the Western pioneer had to be building himself and his family a new home. Little time or thought was given to education; few books were to be found. Social life was less refined than it was in the East. "Spinning-bees, corn huskings, singing-schools, and similar gatherings ministered to the craving for social life."[11] There were gambling, card playing, dancing, and hard drinking among the lower classes.[12] Peter Cartwright in his Autobiography states that the Methodists' rule forbidding dram-drinking as a condition for church membership had become a dead letter. "From my recollection," he wrote, "drinking drams, in family and social circles was considered harmless and allowable socialities."[13]

Thus to many people conditions demanded that a new emphasis be put upon religion. There is some disagreement among historians as to whether this movement known as the "Second Awakening" began in the East and moved west or whether the new interest in religion occurred in the two sections simultaneously.[14] It is certain, however, that several denominations were affected. The "Second Awakening" has been credited in part to the spread of Methodism with its emphasis upon evangelism.[15] At the same time there

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11 Ibid., 11.

12 Cleveland, op. cit., 30; Peter Cartwright, Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, The Backwoods Preacher (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, n.d.), 27.

13 Ibid., 212.

14 Alice F. Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 33.

15 W. W. Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, 33.

appeared a revivalistic spirit in the colleges of the East, especially those of the Presbyterians.

This awakening in the East was different from that in the West. In the Eastern churches membership grew, while college students' attitudes changed, more entering the ministry and missionary fields. "The obligation to give religious training to children resulted in the organization of the Sunday School."[16]

The Western awakening, on the other hand, was characterized by a great display of emotion. Drastic measures had to be used to bring about conversion of the people on the frontier.

> Upon men accustomed to the terror of the wilderness--loneliness, wild animals, Indian raids--mild homilies had no effect, but vivid pictures of hell-fire and damnation contrasted with the happiness and peace of salvation, if used with sufficient dramatic force, would bring the strong man to his knees.[17]

Camp-meetings introduced the new spirit in the West. It is not certain where or when the idea of camp-meetings originated, but similar meetings were known to have been held by some groups of Baptists and Methodists in Virginia and North Carolina as early as 1794. These meetings, however, lasted only a few days.[18]

Strange as it may seem, the first great camp-meeting was called by a minister of the supposedly conservative Presbyterians. The Reverend James McGready held this gathering in Logan County, Kentucky, in 1797.[19]

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[16] Rowe, op. cit., 105.

[17] Tyler, op. cit., 35.

[18] Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 52-53.

[19] William W. Sweet, The Presbyterians 1783-1840 (Religion on the American Frontier, II, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [c1936]), 84.

The camp-meetings were unique in many ways. They were held out-of-doors. Logs were used for benches, with the preacher standing on a stump, in a wagon bed, or indeed on anything which would give him elevation. People came from miles around with provisions to stay for several days. Several ministers, perhaps of different denominations, would be preaching at the same time. The congregation would go through various exercises which were interpreted as the manifestation of the power of God working on the hearts of the people.[20] An individual might be affected by one of the following "exercises": falling, jerking, rolling, or dancing. The following is an eyewitness description of the most common exercise, falling:

> The persons who are struck are generally first observed to pay close attention to the preaching; then to weep and shed tears plentifully for a while; after this a twitching or yerking [sic] seizes them, and they fall to the ground helpless, and convulsed through the whole frame as if in the agonies of death. In the beginning of this awakening, it was common for those who fell after they had been lying for a while to speak in an astonishing manner as to length of time, matter, and loudness of voice....[21]

Camp-meetings continued to spread throughout the West. Barton W. Stone, a Presbyterian minister, instigated the greatest of all of them, which was held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801. It has been estimated that between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand attended this meeting.[22]

By this time the regular Presbyterians began to express their disapproval of the meetings because of the emotional excesses which frequently

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[20] William W. Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 122.

[21] Cleveland, op. cit., 95, citing letter from the Rev. Thomas Moore, dated Ten Miles, Pennsylvania, March 9, 1803, Massachusetts Missionary Magazine, I, 198-199.

[22] Winifred E. Garrison, An American Religious Movement (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1945), 51. For further information see below, page 13.

accompanied them. These Presbyterians were happy with the established form of worship and they had no patience with the disorderly services of the camp-meetings.[23]

The Presbyterians were soon to lose ground in the West. In large part this was due to their insistence upon an educated clergy, a requirement which was difficult to fulfill in the wilderness. Some Presbyterian ministers, however, continued to sanction the camp-meeting type of evangelistic preaching, a policy which threatened a division.

The Methodists and Baptists adopted the institution of the camp-meeting about the time that the Presbyterians began to express their disapproval of them. The former were thus able to assume the leadership in winning souls. These two churches had the advantage in the West in that they did not insist on college-trained ministers. The Baptists' religious work was carried on by farmer-preachers, largely uneducated and self-supporting, as they worked in the field during the week and preached on Sunday.[24]

The Methodists proved to be the most successful religious sect on the frontier. They whole-heartedly approved the revivalistic methods. Perhaps the most important explanation of their success, however, lay in their system of organization for activity on the frontier. The central figure, the circuit rider, usually had to be young and unmarried; the inconveniences and difficulties he would encounter and the small salary he could expect made this a necessity.[25] He had many duties, the most important being to

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[23] Cleveland, op. cit., 134.

[24] Sweet, Revivalism in America, 128; Tyler, op. cit., 33.

[25] In 1803, Cartwright states, "a single preacher was allowed to receive eighty dollars per annum, if his circuit would give it to him; but single preachers in those days seldom received over thirty or forty dollars, and often much less...." Autobiography, 521.

preach anywhere, to instruct the local ministers, and to supervise twenty to thirty local societies,[26] all of which meant he would be preaching nearly every day of the week.

About the time of the development of the camp-meeting, there was also forming in Kentucky and Pennsylvania a denomination which was later known as the Disciples of Christ. The Disciples of Christ had two stems, each a group of believers dissatisfied with its denomination. Barton W. Stone and the Campbells, Thomas and Alexander, were the central figures in this movement. Stone, a "New Light" Presbyterian, who has previously been mentioned in connection with the Cane Ridge camp-meeting, and his followers withdrew from the Presbyterians in 1803. They took the name Christians. Alexander and Thomas Campbell originally had been Presbyterians. They had withdrawn in 1803 and remained independent until 1813, when they became affiliated with the Baptists. In 1827, they broke from the Baptists and again became an independent group, the Disciples of Christ.

The Christians and the Disciples of Christ had many common beliefs. They had a great dislike for church creeds and for centralized church government. To them these were man-made institutions. They were striving to pattern their systems after those used by the Apostles; the New Testament was their sole guide. They believed that faith, not the Holy Spirit, causes one to be converted, and that the Holy Spirit is not received until one has accepted Christ. They also believed that Christ died for all those who would believe and be saved and not for a limited number, the elect.

The Christians and the Disciples of Christ had been aware of common principles for some years before they united in 1832. After their union

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[26] Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, 33.

their membership grew rapidly, especially in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and the Ohio Valley. Later they took rank among the leading Protestant denominations.

II

BARTON W. STONE AND THE CHRISTIANS

By following the life and activities of Barton W. Stone, we can see the "Christians" break from the Presbyterians and gradually move toward the formation of their own organization.

Barton W. Stone, the son of John and Mary Warren Stone, was born near Port Tobacco, Maryland, December 24, 1772. Following the death of his father, which occurred a few years before the Revolutionary War, Mrs. Stone moved to Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Life among the people there -- near the North Carolina line midway between the two boundaries of Virginia -- was different; the manners and customs were simpler; fewer people were interested in religion.

Stone received his elementary education, such as it was, in a local school. In February 1790, he entered a Latin grammar school at Guilford, North Carolina, about thirty miles from his home. The school was conducted by David Caldwell, a Presbyterian who followed the "New Light."[1]

The "New Light" Presbyterians differed from the regular Presbyterians in that they favored revivalistic methods. These "New Lights" had ready gained ground in Virginia and the other Southern states when James McGready, a Presbyterian evangelist, came to the Guilford, North Carolina community.

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[1] Barton W. Stone, "The Autobiography of Barton W. Stone," in James R. Rogers, The Cane Ridge Meeting House (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1910), 113-119. This printing of Stone's Autobiography will be used throughout the study and will be referred to as Stone, "Autobiography."

Shortly before Stone's arrival McGready had converted most of the students of the school,[2] and it had developed a warm "religious atmosphere and was hospitable to the revivalism...."[3] It had been Stone's intention to study law, but the environment of great religious excitement which he found at the Latin grammar school changed his mind. The religious influence worked slowly with Stone, however.

Barton Stone at first had little admiration for the newly converted students and ignored them, but after a time he consented to attend some of the lectures. The preaching disturbed him; he wanted to find religion, but McGready had taught that one must wait for "God's sovereign time." After a year of praying and waiting, still nothing had happened.[4] His situation was relieved when another "New Light" minister pointed out that one need not wait for a miracle. Stone was at once converted[5] and at the same time resolved to forget his study of law and become a minister.

In 1793, Stone was a candidate for the ministry in the Orange Presbytery.[6] It was the custom of the presbyteries to assign each candidate a subject for a trial sermon. Stone was given the topic of the Trinity. This was a real task for him, since he was not a student of theology, and the only religious book he had ever read was the Bible. The idea of the three-in-one seemed inconsistent to him, but he preached to his examiners. Even though his sermon was accepted, his mind remained in a state of

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[2] W. E. Garrison, An American Movement, 47.

[3] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 93.

[4] Stone, loc. cit., 120.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 126.

confusion in regard to the Trinity; this confusion pointed Stone further away from orthodoxy.

Stone could not receive his license until the next meeting of the Orange Presbytery. Meanwhile he decided to visit his brother in Georgia. During his stay there he taught at Succoth Academy, a Methodist school. This trip to Georgia proved valuable because he was associated directly or indirectly with two men having liberal views, James O'Kelly and John Springer. James O'Kelly, a Methodist minister, had in 1792 opposed the powers exercised by the Bishop.[7] Associated with him in this campaign against Bishop Asbury had been Hope Hull, the principal of Succoth Academy. Hull did not leave the Methodist Episcopal Church but continued to favor less centralized government and more individual freedom. During the time Stone was teaching at Succoth Academy, he became a close companion of Hull and was no doubt influenced somewhat by the principal's views on church government.[8]

Stone also became a friend of John Springer, a "New Light" Presbyterian who, living near by, had the sympathetic views toward evangelistic preaching usual to one of his type. "The atmosphere in which Stone lived during that year was one in which denominational distinctions seemed unimportant, the niceties of traditional theology were forgotten, and the emphasis was upon the common core of the Gospel."[9]

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[7] O'Kelly had introduced in the Methodists' general conference a resolution which provided that preachers who felt they had been injured by the appointment assigned by the bishop might appeal to the conference. The motion lost, causing O'Kelly and most of his followers to withdraw from the conference in 1793 to form the Republican Methodists. W. W. Sweet, The Methodists 1783-1840 (Religion on the American Frontier, IV, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press [c1946]), 39, 86.

[8] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 95.

[9] Ibid.

In the spring of 1796, Stone decided to return to North Carolina, determined to receive his license to preach.[10] A very unusual thing happened at the meeting of the Orange Presbytery; instead of being asked to accept the Confession of Faith, the candidates were simply given the Bible and were told, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."[11] Barton Stone thus received his first license without accepting the Confession of Faith.

Stone's first assignment was a missionary journey to North Carolina. After three months of fruitless work he became discouraged and returned to Virginia. Stone was still determined to preach, and he decided to make his second attempt in the West. He drifted through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. After staying a short time in Danville and Lexington, he moved on to Cane Ridge. In that community in 1790 Robert W. Finley had founded two churches, one at Cane Ridge proper and the other at Concord. Stone worked with Finley as his assistant. When in 1798 Finley decided to move to Ohio, Stone was immediately chosen to take his place.[12]

But in order to fill Finley's vacancy, Stone had to be ordained by the Transylvania Presbytery. Again he began to study the confession, but he was still unable to agree with the theory of the Trinity. Once more Stone was lucky; when he was ordained he was asked how far he was willing to receive the confession. He answered: as far as he saw it was consistent with the word of God.[13] No objections were made to his answer.

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[10] Stone, "Autobiography," 130.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 147.

[13] Ibid., 148.

Stone had been at Cane Ridge a few years when the religious camp-meetings had their real beginning. The most outstanding meetings were being held in southwestern Kentucky and Tennessee, under the leadership of James McGready and other Presbyterian ministers. Stone had by this time grown unhappy with the formalistic church services of his congregation; and, having heard the reports about these camp-meetings, he decided in 1801 to go to Logan County and investigate the excitement.[14]

The camp-meeting he visited was a typical one. It was held out-of-doors, several preachers were preaching at once, and people were singing at the same time. Some became so emotional as to believe the Holy Spirit was having direct action upon them. This action caused various exercises, the most common being the "falling exercise." Stone took no part in the physical demonstrations, but he was favorably impressed by some of them.[15] He returned to Cane Ridge with plans to hold a similar camp-meeting.

In the middle of his plans Stone married Elizabeth Campbell of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky. Preparations were then continued for a camp-meeting to be held in August, 1801. A large area was cleared of trees to accommodate the expected throng. Temporary pulpits were made in the center and logs were hewn for the seats.[16]

Considering the purpose of the meeting, it was a great success. People came from miles away, some from as far as Ohio. The crowd was estimated to have been between 20,000 to 25,000;[17] of this number about 3,000 were

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[14] Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 14; Stone, loc. cit., 153.

[15] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 100.

[16] Stone, loc. cit., 55.

[17] W. E. Garrison, An American Religious Movement, 51; Hiram Van Kirk, The Rise of the Current Reformation (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1907), 104.

converted.[18]

The lack of organization and the emotional reactions which had existed in the Logan County meetings were prevalent also in the Cane Ridge meeting. The Rev. James B. Finley, a Methodist minister, gave the following description of the latter meeting.

> The noise was like the roar of Niagara....I counted seven ministers all preaching at one time; some on stumps, others in wagons....At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down in a moment, as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rents [sic] the very heavens.[19]

Although Stone was responsible for the meeting, it seems that he was not prominent among the preachers and exhorters.[20] He was pleased with the results because, regardless of what methods were used, ministers of different denominations were speaking at the same time with one objective -- that of saving souls.[21]

The meeting came to a close August 12, after a session of six days. Stone said it would have been physically impossible for it to continue.[22]

Cane Ridge was the last of the great camp-meetings, although they continued on a smaller scale for some years among groups of Presbyterians and among members of other denominations. Referring to the meeting in later years Stone said,

> Though the revival was checked, it was not destroyed; still the spirit of truth lingered in our assemblies, and

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[18] Stone, "Autobiography," 59.

[19] Stone, loc. cit., 60.

[20] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 101.

[21] Stone, loc. cit., 157.

[22] Ibid., 338.

> evidenced its presence with us. One thing is certain, that from that revival a fountain of light has sprung by which the eyes of thousands are opened to just and proper views of the gospel....[23]

The Cane Ridge meeting was scarcely over when another event happened which played an even more important part in Stone's life. He was by this time classified as a "New Light" Presbyterian along with other Kentucky ministers, Richard McNemar, John Thompson, John Dunlavy, and Robert Marshall.[24] Their preaching of God's love for the "whole world" was criticised by the orthodox Presbyterians, with their notions of the elect few.[25] The "New Lights" also differed from the orthodox Presbyterians in that they believed there was sufficient evidence in God's word to produce faith: that sinners were able to understand the Word and to act upon it if they would accept Christ. Faith in the Word, not the Holy Spirit, caused one to seek salvation; one received the Holy Spirit upon conversion.[26]

Criticism was brought first against McNemar, the most conspicuous of the "New Light" Presbyterian ministers, in 1801. McNemar was associated with the Washington Presbytery, which included churches along the Ohio River. The Washington Presbytery took little note of these first charges; in fact they apparently soon forgot them and McNemar was given a new assignment at Turtle-Creek. In 1802 the Presbytery, meeting at Cincinnati, again heard complaints against McNemar's allegedly false doctrines. A form of an examination was held. The matter was not regarded as too serious, since the minutes scarcely mentioned it. It had been reported, began the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] W. W. Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, 337.

[25] Ibid., 338.

[26] Stone, loc. cit., 165-166.

minutes, that McNemar "held tenets hostile to the standards of the Presbyterian church, and subversive of the fundamental doctrines contained in the sacred scriptures...." The Presbytery concluded that he held to doctrines different from those which Calvinists generally believed, but said that the examination was not a judicial censure; it was just their expressed opinion of him.[27] Garrison and DeGroot believe that the reason no definite action was taken at this time was the presence of so many "revival men"; thus the accusers had not wanted the matter to come to a formal vote.[28]

In 1803 the Synod of Kentucky met at Lexington. When it reviewed the minutes of the various presbyteries, it found the Washington Presbytery's minutes confusing, and decided to investigate them. Furthermore, petitions had been presented asking the Synod to re-examine McNemar and also to include Thompson's name among those to be investigated. The Synod censured the Washington Presbytery for letting McNemar continue to preach while these charges were being held against him. It then turned to an examination of McNemar and Thompson.

While the Synod was discussing these individuals, five "New Lights" (Messrs. Marshall, Stone, McNemar, Thompson, and Dunlavy) left the meeting in protest against the procedure. They felt the decision about McNemar and Thompson would be so worded as to make it just a matter of time before the Synod would expel the other three. When they returned they presented a paper stating they were withdrawing from the jurisdiction of the Synod.

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[27] Robert Marshall and others, "An Abstract of an Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky, Being a Compendious View of the Gospel and a Few Remarks on the Confession of Faith," in Barton W. Stone, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone (John Rogers, ed., Cincinnati: J. A. and U. P. James, 1847), 148-156. This document will hereafter be referred to as the "Apology."

[28] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 103.

The paper gave their grievances: McNemar's views had been misrepresented; the Synod had not given them the privilege of interpreting the Scriptures by themselves in accordance with Section 9, Chapter i, of the Confession of Faith; when they differed from the Confession of Faith they were charged with disturbing the peace of the church. The paper concluded by saying they did not want to separate from communion with the Presbyterians, but that they were withdrawing from the Synod of Kentucky until it adopted more liberal views.[29]

The Synod appointed five of its members to confer with Marshall, Dunlavy, McNemar, Stone, and Thompson and ask them if they would return to the Synod to answer questions. The two parties could not agree upon the method of questioning. The "New Lights" then constituted themselves into a separate independent organization to be known as the Springfield Presbytery. On learning of this radical step, the Synod resolved to suspend them.[30]

The independent presbytery which the "New Lights" had established was defective in several ways. Most damaging was the lack of the complete organization found in most presbyteries. Documents fail to mention any officers, lay members, or member churches. It was, then, largely an unorganized group of independent Presbyterian ministers with a common purpose, that of reform.[31]

In January, 1804, a hundred-page pamphlet was published to show the position of the Springfield Presbytery; its full title was "An Abstract of

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[29] Sweet, The Presbyterians, 315-318, citing "Minutes of the Synod of Kentucky 1802-1811"; Marshall and others, "Apology," 159-170.

[30] Sweet, op. cit., 315-318; Marshall and others, loc. cit., 159-170.

[31] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 106.

an Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky, Being a Compendious View of the Gospel and a Few Remarks on the Confession of Faith." The first part, written by Robert Marshall, gave an account of the events leading to the separation. The second part, "Compendious Views," written by Barton W. Stone, was confined chiefly to five doctrinal points: man is by nature sinful, but "he possesses rational faculties capable of knowing and enjoying God"; regeneration is needed before a man can enter heaven; the gospel is for all men; faith is "admitting testimony on the authority of the testifier"; faith is based on the word of God.

The third part of the "Apology," entitled "Remarks," was written by John Thompson and was designed to prove that creeds and confessions were harmful and useless. It was his opinion that "people have the privilege of reading the Scriptures to prove the standard to be right"; but, he went on, they have "no privilege to examine that standard by the Scripture and attempt to prove it to be wrong." He believed as well that standards once adopted too often usurp the place of the Bible; it would be better, therefore, to build a church based on the Bible, not on human opinions.[32]

On June 28, 1804, less than ten months after their formation, the Springfield Presbytery met at Cane Ridge and dissolved. At this time the "Last Will and Testament" was written and published, and signed by the same five "New Light" ministers and by a sixth member, David Purviance, who had joined them shortly after the publication of the "Apology." In announcing the end of the Springfield Presbytery, the writers included many points which were later basic characteristics of the Disciples of Christ. The brief document stated: the churches shall "sink into union with the Body of

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[32] Marshall and others, "Apology," 223-234.

Christ"; church government shall be in the hands of the congregations; the Bible alone shall be their guide and standard; candidates shall receive their licenses to preach from God, although the church might try them as to their soundness in the faith, acquaintance with experimental religion, gravity, and aptness to teach; each church will choose its own preacher and support him by free will offerings; titles of distinction such as "Reverend" shall be forgotten.[33]

There were in the "Last Will and Testament" and the "Apology" no general proposals for the restoration of the Primitive Church. However, many of the ideas developed by the signers indicate they had beliefs about the restoration similar to those later announced by Alexander Campbell.[34]

After the Springfield Presbytery was dissolved, there remained the question as to what the "New Lights" should call themselves, since they were no longer Presbyterians. Before the 1804 Cane Ridge meeting disbanded they adopted the name "Christian" for their followers and the "Christian Church" for the organized membership. These names had been used by the first century disciples.[35]

The six witnesses went forth with new fervor to advance their cause. Most of the churches where they had been preaching followed them and new ones were added, as well as individual Presbyterian preachers of the "New Light." By the end of 1804 there were at least eight Christian Churches in Kentucky.[36]

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[33] Stone, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, 51-53, citing Marshall and others, "Last Will and Testament."

[34] See below, pages 30, 41, 42.

[35] Stone, "Autobiography," 67.

[36] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 112.

At the time the Christian Church was organized, baptism had not been considered an important question by the leaders of the movement. By 1807, however, various members became convinced that immersion was the only Scriptural form of baptism. A meeting of deacons, elders, and brethren was held to discuss the problem; but, instead of decreeing a universal rule, the group decided that everyone should act according to his own faith. Stone and many other members were thereupon immersed, and the practice soon became wide spread.[37] At this same meeting it had been determined by some, including Stone, that baptism was ordained for the remission of sins, and ought to be administered in the name of Jesus.[38] This doctrine was not fully expounded at the time, however, although it was later revived by Campbell.[39]

About the same time Stone took a different view from that of many of his colleagues on the topic of the atonement. He had been teaching that "Christ died as a substitute or surety in our stead, and that he died to make satisfaction to law and justice for our sins...." This was close to Universalism, with its views that Christ died for all. Yet Stone did not believe that Christ died for all, neither did he believe that Christ died for the elect few as the regular Presbyterians continued to do. Stone's new doctrine was

> atonement according to the spelling and pronunciation of the word, 'at-one-ment.' Sin had separated between God and man, before at-one, when man was holy. Jesus was sent to

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[37] Stone, loc. cit., 183; Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 114, citing Christian Messenger, I, 267, Oct. 1827.

[38] Stone, loc. cit., 183-184.

[39] See below, pages 40,42, for Campbell's views.

restore that union, or to make the at-one-ment between God and men.[40]

By 1809 Stone was the only one who remained in the Christian Church of the original five men who had broken from the Presbyterians. McNemar and Dunlavy had joined the Shakers, while Marshall and Thompson had returned to the Presbyterian fold. In May of the same year Stone's wife died; he then broke up housekeeping and traveled throughout Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee carrying on evangelistic work. In 1811 Stone married Celia Wilson Bowen, cousin to his first wife, and moved to Georgetown, Kentucky.

At Georgetown Stone continued with his evangelistic preaching; he devoted time also to training young preachers and to writing. Stone's writing consisted of letters and pamphlets; and later he edited a monthly magazine. His first pamphlet, "Address to the Christian Churches of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio," was written in 1814 while he still lived in Tennessee. Stone's works stressed the need for unity of Christians. He gave further explanations of the atonement, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. The importance of his writings on the Holy Spirit and on the meaning of the atonement has been previously explained. The Trinity was a topic which had given him trouble since 1793 when he had preached his trial sermon. It does not appear that the nature of the Trinity was ever clearly defined in his own mind; the reason was the lack of Scriptural evidence. As far as he expressed himself, he was neither a strict Trinitarian nor a Unitarian. Moreover, it should be pointed out that in his discussions on this issue he spoke only for himself and not for the Christians in general.[41]

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[40] Stone, loc. cit., 178-182.

[41] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 119-123.

In 1826 Stone began to publish the Christian Messenger, no doubt the most outstanding of his publications. Through this magazine Stone continued to advance his theology by means of essays and by replies to letters written by men of other denominations who questioned him. The Christian Messenger also served as an instrument of unity, as there was at the time an absence of any general organization among the churches.

John T. Johnson became co-editor of this magazine in 1826, continuing in that capacity for two years. Johnson, who had already met Alexander Campbell and become one of his devoted followers, was impressed by the likenesses of the two groups. He was later one of the outstanding men in bringing about the union which took place at Lexington, Kentucky, in 1832.

Stone moved to Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1834. He continued to edit the Christian Messenger and carried on evangelistic work throughout Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, and occasionally in Ohio. In August, 1841, Stone was stricken with paralysis; although he was left crippled, he continued to preach. He died three years later while returning home from Columbia, Missouri, where he had attended a district meeting of Missouri Christians. Stone was buried, fittingly enough, at Cane Ridge, Kentucky.

III

THE CAMPBELLS AND THE DISCIPLES

Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander were the outstanding personalities in the history of the "Disciples of Christ." The Campbells, born in Ireland of Scottish descent, received their education in Scotland. Thomas Campbell came to America in 1807 and his son arrived two years later. By 1809 both men had broken with their church, the Seceder Presbyterian Church. But, as they did so at different times and for different reasons, one must note the special circumstances which led each to come to the new line of reasoning.

Thomas Campbell was born in County Down, Ireland, in 1763. After teaching school for a few years he decided to enter the ministry, going to Scotland to further his education. He attended the University of Glasgow for three years, studying classical courses; and then he received his ministerial training at the theological seminary of the Anti-burgher division of the Seceder branch of the Presbyterian Church. Later he returned to Ireland where he preached at the Ahorey Church and taught at the Rich Hill Academy. He married Jane Corneigle and in 1788 their first son, Alexander, was born.

Thomas Campbell began to develop his ideas of Christian unity while he was preaching in Ireland. Before this time the Scottish Presbyterian Church had divided and subdivided over various issues; when Campbell became active there were the Secederes, the Burghers and the Anti-burghers, and the Old Lights and the New Lights. Thomas Campbell was trained to be an

Old Light Anti-burgher Seceder, but he soon lost interest in the various arguments and attempted to bring about a union among all Seceders. Though his efforts failed, his mind was permanently set toward promoting Christian union.[1]

In 1807 Thomas Campbell resigned from his church, left Rich Hill Academy in the hands of Alexander, and sailed for America. This move was made in order to find a place which would afford more opportunities for himself and his family of seven children, and because of his poor health. When he arrived in Philadelphia the Associate Synod of North America, representing all the Seceder Presbyterians in America, was in session. He was immediately given an appointment to the Presbytery of Chartiers in southwest Pennsylvania. The Presbytery in turn located him at Pittsburgh and gave him preaching places between there and Washington, Pennsylvania.[2] The region contained a number of Scotch-Irish who a few years earlier had left northern Ireland; thus Campbell was not entirely among strangers.

Within his first year in western Pennsylvania complaints were brought against Campbell, first in the presbytery and later in the synod. The cause for the strained relations, as Campbell relates in his Memoirs, lay in the fact that he invited all Christians to join in the communion service,[3] a practice which was offensive in the eyes of Presbyterians. On the other hand, however, from the Minutes of the Presbytery of Chartiers, it seems that there were additional complaints; in fact the presbytery filed seven charges against him. They were: he denies "that any persuasion, assurance or confidence that we in particular through the grace of

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[1] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 127.

[2] Ibid., 129.

[3] Robert Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1868-1872, I, 224.

our Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved belongs to the nature of saving faith"; he says that accepting the Confession of Faith should not be the "terms of communion"; he says that ruling elders might preach in cases where there were no ministers available; he says the people might safely listen to ministers with views different from their own; he "assents 'that our Lord Jesus Christ was not subject to the precepts as well as the penalty of the law in the stead of his people or as their surety'"; he "asserts that man 'is able in this life to live without sin in thought, word, and deed'"; he had preached in another parish, that of Mr. Ramsey, without an appointment.

Campbell was allowed to answer these charges, after the fifth and sixth were dropped. To the first charge Campbell replied that mystical experiences or emotional uplifts were not an essential element of saving faith. He believed that faith was evident by intelligent response of the mind rather than by an emotional experience; this later became a significant point in Campbell's theology. In answering the second charge he did not condemn the Confession of Faith, but said it should not be used, in his opinion, as the "terms of Communion." Campbell accepted the third charge, for he believed it proper that elders could preach in public when there were no ministers. He explained his views as to the fourth charge by stating that when one cannot hear ministers of his own party he should be allowed to hear other men of the gospel. To the last charge Campbell admitted he had preached in Mr. Ramsay's parish, but only after he had been invited by some of the people because they had no local minister.

The presbytery adjourned with a vote of suspension against Campbell. After Campbell and others left, the meeting was called to order again and action was taken to vote a permanent suspension.[4]

Thomas Campbell appealed his case to the high court of the Seceder Presbyterians, the Associate Synod of North America. All seven charges were revived by the appeal, but the Synod dropped the last three. The Synod was displeased with his answer to the first four charges and believed there was sufficient ground to infer censure. The Synod therefore suspended Campbell for a short time, but after two months he was sent back to the Presbytery of Chartiers with the suspension lifted.[5]

When Campbell returned to the presbytery he found the hostility of his opponents had been intensified by the issue of the trial. He felt that the time had come for him to separate from

> all connections with a people who seemed utterly unwilling to tolerate any overtures for healing the religious dissensions of the time, and who seemed to regard their own particular 'Testimony' as practically a more important rule of action than the Bible.[6]

In September, 1808, Campbell accordingly withdrew from the authority of both the Presbytery of Chartiers and the Synod of North America.

For the next year Campbell continued to preach in the Washington, Pennsylvania, vicinity. He met with his friends in private homes, barns, and other available buildings. Garrison and DeGroot believe that in these

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[4] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 132-135, citing W. H. Hanna, Thomas Campbell, Seceder and Christian Union Advocate (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1935). Garrison and DeGroot have summarized the manuscript Minutes of the Presbytery of Chartiers as reprinted by Hanna.

[5] Ibid., 136-138.

[6] Richardson, op. cit., I, 230.

meetings he continued to lay emphasis upon these points: the unity of Christians; the right of direct appeal to the Scriptures instead of to a Confession; rejection of all creeds as tests of fellowship; equality for ministers and laymen in church government.[7] Campbell was moving perceptibly towards a new ecclesiastical organization.

The next step took place in August, 1809, when Campbell and a group of his followers decided to form a society known as "The Christian Association of Washington." The purpose was to give them a more formal organization. However, they were to be an independent society working for reform through existing churches. The association chose as its motto: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where they are silent, we are silent."[8]

Campbell prepared a brief declaration and a more extensive address in order to express the objectives of the society. To these writings were added two other sections, and the complete document was called the "Declaration and Address." It was presented to the association as the report of a committee of twenty-one.[9] On September 7, 1809, the association approved the document and ordered it printed. The "Declaration and Address" became one of the basic historical documents of the "Disciples of Christ."

The "Declaration and Address" consisted of fifty-six pages containing

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[7] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 139-140.

[8] Sweet, op. cit., 340-342; Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 139-140; Richardson, op. cit., I, 231-336.

[9] It is uncertain what men should receive credit for the writing of the entire "Declaration and Address." However, it is known that Campbell wrote the first two parts, "The Declaration" and "The Address." Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, I, 241, states that twenty-one men were appointed to meet with Campbell to determine methods to be used in carrying out the functions of the organization. Campbell or the committee as a whole could have written the "Appendix." The "Postscript" was no doubt proposed by the committee.

four parts: "The Declaration," "The Address," an "Appendix," and a "Postscript." "The Declaration" was written for the purpose of stating briefly the reason for the organization, its ideas, and its purposes. They had organized, they said, in order to "restore unity, peace and purity," which could be found only "in Christ and his simple word" and without "human opinions and the inventions of men...." With these sentiments in mind, they had resolved to form a society for the above-mentioned purpose; the Association would meet twice a year for sermons, discussions, and the transacting of necessary business; the society would be financed by contributions from its members; it would support and invite only those ministers who believed as they did; it was not to be considered an independent church, but rather an organization of "voluntary advocates for church reformation."[10]

The second part, "The Address," which was the main text, was signed by Campbell as secretary and by Thomas Acheson, treasurer. It gave arguments for the unity of Christians and means by which this could be achieved. "The Address" included the following ideas: The Church of Christ is one, "consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures...;" the Church of Christ will be scattered in various communities, people continuing membership in their own denominations; the New Testament is to be the "constitution for the worship, discipline and government of the New Testament Church"; where the Scriptures fail to express time or manner of a performance, "no human authority has power to interfere in order to supply

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[10] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, I, 242-245. A "reformation became one of the goals of Campbell's son Alexander, in whose writings the term usually appears capitalized, viz, "Reformation."

the supposed deficiency by making laws for the Church...;" it was these human inventions which caused divisions in the Church of God; finally

> anyone having due measure of the Scriptures, recognizing that the way to salvation is through Jesus Christ, accompanied by a profession of his faith and promise of obedience to Him, shall be qualified for church membership.[11]

"The Appendix," the third division, was written to explain further some points previously made in "The Address" and to answer actual or anticipated criticisms. Once again it was clearly stated that they had no intention of becoming a new denomination. They repeated their opposition to creeds, but

> only in so far as they oppose the unity of the Church by containing sentiments not expressly revealed in the Word of God.... It is the abuse and not the lawful use of such compilations that we oppose.

In defending their free interpretation of the Bible against accusations that this would bring forth many sects, they reiterated their belief that human rules, not individual interpretation, lead to division.[12]

"The Postscript," written three months later, suggested immediate steps to be taken for promoting the enterprise. The first proposal was that instructions be prepared showing the fullness of the Scriptures -- its system of faith and duty, and its references respecting the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Christian Church. This suggestion, however, had been rejected by the committee because it was similar to church creeds. The second proposal, that of publishing a monthly magazine for the purpose of detecting and exposing corruption, was never developed.[13]

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[11] Ibid., 258-261.

[12] Ibid., 263-271.

[13] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 152.

It was while the "Declaration and Address" was being published that the other members of the Campbell family arrived in America. Thomas was confronted with the problem of trying to explain to his family his new theology. When he had left Ireland two and a half years before, both he and his son, Alexander, were good Seceder Presbyterians. Thomas did not know that his son had also formed new ideas differing from those of the Presbyterians.

Alexander, it will be remembered, had been left in charge of Rich Hill Academy. He was only nineteen at the time, but he was very mature in mind and in character. Though most of his education had been received at home, it had been very thorough. He had mastered, among other subjects, Greek classics, French, English literature, and philosophy.

The Campbell family had planned to come to America in 1808, but their ship was wrecked early in the voyage and they were forced to return to Glasgow, Scotland. This proved to be an important year for Alexander, in that he was able to carry on his general education at the University of Glasgow and was brought in contact with men who were interested in religious reforms. These men were Greville Ewing and his associates, who were in the Haldanes' training school for lay preachers in Glasgow. The Haldanes and Ewing had for some time been interested in returning to the pure and simple gospel and in restoring exact practices of the primitive churches. Alexander Campbell and Ewing, through discussions and after reading books of Glas and Sandeman,[14] concluded that restoring the primitive pattern would bring about more independence in local congregations, that laymen

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[14] Glas' and Sandemans' books emphasized the restoring of Primitive Christianity. These men had left the church of Scotland in 1728, because they believed it was wrong for synods to fix and to enforce standards of doctrine.

would have a part in church government, and that emotional experiences are not necessary, as man is capable of understanding evidence supplied by the Scriptures.[15]

These new conceptions began to strain Alexander's relations with the Anti-burgher Seceder Presbyterians. It was during the communion season that the strain reached the breaking point. He had done all the things necessary to receive the token which certified one's fitness to commune, but when the time for the service came he deposited his token, without partaking, and walked out. This amounted to leaving the Presbyterian Church.

Thus, when the father and son met in 1809, each soon found no need to worry about explaining to the other his new conceptions. They were together on new ground, though each had reached his conclusions independently and by different means. Thus, when Alexander read the "Declaration and Address," he readily gave his approval, as it embodied his own thoughts.

Thomas Campbell still desired affiliation with a regular denomination, and wished to do so preferably with a Calvinist branch. In 1810 he applied for admission to the Presbyterian Synod of Pittsburgh. This was not the Seceder synod to which they had formerly belonged, but a unit of the regular Presbyterians. The synod rejected his application on the interesting ground that such an association would promote division instead of union.[16]

At the regular semi-annual meeting of the Christian Association, May 4, 1811, those in attendance concluded that they had no choice but to constitute themselves into a separate congregation. No longer would they try to reform churches from within; now they must do it from without. The New

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[15] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 142.

[16] Ibid., 154.

Testament was to be their sole guidebook. Campbell expressed its importance by saying, "The New Testament, as respects Christian faith and practice, is our only creed, form of discipline, and the avowal of the One Foundation, our only bond of union."[17]

The new church was called Brush Run Church. Its name was due to the location of their first meeting-house in the Valley of Brush Run, about two miles above the junction of the streams of Buffalo Creek and Brush Run and two miles southwest of West Middletown, Pennsylvania.

At this first meeting Thomas Campbell was chosen elder, four deacons were elected, and Alexander was licensed to preach. Seven months later, Alexander felt it was necessary for him to be ordained; he was therefore ordained into the ministry on New Year's Day, 1812.

Alexander soon took the leadership of the Christian Association, as his father moved from the Brush Run community in 1812. Thomas Campbell lived in Cambridge, Ohio, for awhile and then moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There he conducted a private school and preached to a small group which gathered for worship in his classroom. This group later formed an independent church.

The Brush Run Church departed almost at once from earlier practices. Weekly observation of the Lord's Supper was begun at the first Sunday service. Although this usage had not yet caused a controversy between the Campbells and the Seceder Presbyterians, certain members of the Brush Run Church had by this time decided that weekly Communion was a primitive custom and therefore must be practiced.

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17 Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," Christian Baptist, II (August 2, 1824), 93. Campbell regularly spelled "Christian" with a small letter.

Another departure was the adoption of immersion as the sole form of baptism. The practice, which today is an important item in the platform of the Disciples of Christ, came about by common consent. Sprinkling had been questioned by some members of the group for some time; however, the Campbells had remained indifferent. When the Association took the motto, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent," one member believed that it would exclude infant baptism.[18] Richardson said that at the time the Christian Association applied for admission into the Presbyterian Synod of Pittsburgh "a few members doubted, and others denied, the validity of infant baptism, though they all seemed willing to make this a matter of forbearance."[19] At the first service in the Brush Run Church three members who had not been baptized asked to be immersed; this Thomas Campbell did. He did not, however, see a need for rebaptizing those who had previously been sprinkled; the matter of infant baptism was still unsettled. In a sermon on baptism, delivered June 11, 1811, Alexander said, "As I am sure it is unscriptural to make this matter a term of communion, I let it slip. I wish to think and let think on these matters."[20]

The subject reappeared when Alexander's first child was born, March 13, 1812. After giving more time to the studying of the Bible, Alexander decided that adult immersion was the only Scriptural form of baptism. Thereupon Thomas and Alexander Campbell, their wives, and one of Thomas Campbell's daughters, after a simple confession of faith in Christ, were immersed by a

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[18] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, I, 238-239.

[19] Ibid., 325.

[20] Ibid., 392.

Baptist preacher, Elder Luce, in Buffalo Creek. Other members soon requested immersion. Thus, it will be noted, it had taken some time for the members of Brush Run to conclude that immersion was the proper form of baptism. Even so, the purpose of baptism in the Disciples' theology had not been fully developed.

This adoption of immersion quickly brought this reforming group at Brush Run closer to the Baptists. There were few Baptists in this region, but just east of them, along the Monongahela River and in the valleys at the western base of the Allegheny mountains, there were many Baptists. Their churches had formed themselves into the Redstone Association. Alexander Campbell had visited and preached in many of these Baptist churches, being well received; and they were eager for the Brush Run Church to join their association. After discussing the matter, the Brush Run Church agreed, in 1813, to unite with the Redstone Association, but only upon certain conditions. These conditions were presented in a document which stated their views in full, stressing their opposition to creeds and their intention to continue to preach and teach those things which they found in the Scriptures.[21]

Their admission was certainly an exceptional case in the history of the Baptists. The Redstone Association had formally adopted the Philadelphia Confession of 1742, to which the members of Brush Run would never subscribe, as they were opposed to creeds. Had the members of Brush Run been admitted individually instead of as a whole church, the process would no doubt have been different.

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[21] We have only Campbell's account, as the document has been lost. Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, II, 441.

It was only natural that such an arrangement would not work. The Reformers remained reformers; their thoughts and practices would not harmonize with the Baptists' ideas and customs. The chief points of difference at the time of the union in 1813 were:[22]

> (1) Baptism upon a confession of faith in Christ automatically entitled the candidate to admission into the reformer's church, without any examination as to his conversion experience and without a vote by the church.
>
> (2) The Lord's Supper was observed weekly by the Reformers, while the Baptists generally had communion quarterly.[23]
>
> (3) The Reformers stressed a separation between the Christian dispensation and the Mosaic, while the Baptists held to both.
>
> (4) The Baptists believed the Reformers failed to make enough distinction between clergy and church members. (The Baptists, themselves, were regarded by other denominations as having a loose arrangement in this respect.)

Alexander was at this time developing two ideas which were soon to be added to the list of differences, that of the nature of faith, and the purpose and meaning of baptism.[24]

During the year following the union of the Reformers and the Redstone Association, Alexander devoted his time to his farm and to visiting and preaching in churches of the association. He became a popular preacher among the Baptists, being careful, however, not to press the unusual ideas of the Reformers in his sermons.

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[22] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 162-163; Errett Gates, Early Relation and Separation of the Baptists and Disciples (Chicago: The Christian Century Company, 1904), 21-24.

[23] Campbell favored open communion, but the people of Brush Run, at this time, did not agree with him; however, communion was not withheld from any Christian who wanted to partake. Richardson, op. cit., I, 453-454.

[24] See below, pages 40, 42.

The Cross Creek (Baptist) Church became irritated in 1815 when members of the reformer group built a second church at Wellsburg, western Virginia, near their territory. This church at Wellsburg consisted of former Brush Run members who had moved to the community. Since it was to be a Baptist church, Alexander made a tour of the East to solicit money from well-to-do Baptists for the purpose of building the edifice.[25]

It soon became apparent that the Redstone Association repented of their agreement. When in 1816 Thomas Campbell asked the Association for admission of his church in Pittsburgh, this application was rejected; this was due to the fact that the Pittsburgh church would not accept the Philadelphia Confession. By this time the Redstone Association had no desire to have another reforming group within their organization. They did, however, give Thomas Campbell a seat as an individual.[26]

In the following year, 1817, Thomas Campbell moved to Kentucky and from then on his life became more obscure, so far as Disciples' history is concerned. Not so Alexander. At the same meeting of the Redstone Association which had rejected Thomas Campbell's church, Alexander had delivered his celebrated "Sermon on the Law." There had been a general demand for him to speak; yet his name was not listed on the program. At the last minute one of the chosen speakers failed to appear, and he was called upon to fill the vacancy. He was well prepared for such an opportunity, his speech thus being by no means impromptu. This sermon contained Scriptural teaching in reference to the Law and the Gospel and was a bold assault upon the theology and the style of preaching used by the Baptists.[27] Although

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[25] Richardson, op. cit., I, 469; Van Kirk, op. cit., 98.

[26] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 164.

[27] Richardson, op. cit., I, 471.

his address was approved by some, the majority of those who heard Alexander were annoyed and left the meeting suspicious of him.

The argument presented in the "Sermon on the Law" was that the Christian covenant was not a continuation of the Jewish regime; while the Old Testament had prepared for and prophesied the new covenant, it was an entirely new thing. When Christ came the old laws were done away with, their principles being still in force and existing independent of the new laws. Therefore, the nature of Christian institutions cannot be based on the Old Testament.

> The law of the Sabbath has [sic] nothing to do with the observance of the first day of the week; baptism cannot be understood by considering it as taking the place of circumcision; paying tithes and keeping fasts are no part of a Christian's duty; and any alliance between church and state, as in the old covenant of God with the Hebrews, is alien to the spirit and the nature of Christianity.[28]

This was a direct attack upon the Baptists, who taught equal authority in both Old and New Covenants.

During the next few years Alexander Campbell devoted most of his time to preaching in churches whose members were advocates of the Reformation: Brush Run and Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, Cambridge in Ohio, and Wheeling in western Virginia. Occasionally he toured the territory of the Redstone Association and preached among other Baptists. In 1818 he established Buffalo Seminary, a school for training boys for the ministry, and located it upon his farm.

While Alexander had for some years been noted as a forceful speaker, in 1820 he won distinction also as a debater. His first debate was with John Walker, a Seceder Presbyterian minister of Mount Pleasant, Ohio. A

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[28] W. E. Garrison, An American Religious Movement, 76-77.

year preceding this debate, John Birch, a Baptist minister of the Redstone Association, had baptized a large number of adult converts, which prompted Walker to deliver a series of sermons defending infant baptism. A dispute arose between the two men and Walker challenged Birch, or anyone he might select, to a debate on the issue of baptism. On looking over their number Birch and other Baptists realized that the younger Campbell should be their candidate to meet the Presbyterian's challenge.

The Baptists, as far as winning the debate was concerned, could have chosen no better man; but they did not foresee that Campbell would go beyond the question for discussion and would present his ideas as to the origin of baptism. Here, of course, he would make clear his disagreement with the Baptists.

In Walker's opening speech his main point of argument was that, "baptism came in the room of circumcision; that the covenant on which the Jewish Church was built, and to which circumcision is the seal, is the same with the covenant on which the Christian Church is built, and to which baptism is the seal...." Campbell replied that "they did not put baptism in the room of circumcision, as they did not confine it to males only but extended it to servants as well as children." He repeated his principal point of the "Sermon on the Law"; baptism is a new covenant found in the New Testament law. Campbell cited from Greek lexicons to show that the word "baptizein" meant "to dip." Later in the debate, when Walker tried to show that infant baptism was a practice of the early church, Campbell reviewed historical writers to show that there was no mention of infant baptism until 150 years after the beginning of the Christian era. In Campbell's closing remarks he said, "Go home and read your Bible; examine the testimonies of those holy oracles; judge for yourselves, and do not [be] implicit

followers of the clergy."[29]

Most of the Baptists believed Campbell had won the debate, but they were unhappy in the way he had handled the argument. His stressing of baptism as a New Testament covenant served to antagonize them even more. This debate and its publication only carried his reputation further.

Relations between the Reformers and the Baptists had become so strained that Campbell and several other members of the Brush Run Church expected expulsion from the Redstone Association.[30] They therefore withdrew from Brush Run in August, 1823, and became a part of the Wellsburg Church. The Wellsburg Church was immediately invited to join the newly organized Mahoning Baptist Association, which probably would be less strict than the Redstone group had become. This new association included churches in northeastern Ohio. Adamson Bentley and Sidney Rigdon,[31] prominent ministers within the organization, had previously visited Campbell and were impressed with him and his views. It was their influence which had caused the association to favor the idea of restoring Primitive Christianity. The church at Wellsburg promptly accepted the invitation to join the Mahoning Association.

In October of the same year, Campbell took part in a second debate. The published version of the contest with Walker had included a challenge to anyone who would like to continue the argument. The Reverend W. L. McCalla, a Presbyterian of Augusta, Kentucky, answered the challenge. This new debate was held at Lexington, Kentucky.

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[29] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, II, 15-27; Garrison, op. cit., 77.

[30] Brush Run was not expelled in 1823, because the Redstone Association felt the most disturbing elements had left the church. In 1827, however, it was excluded along with twelve other churches because they refused to adhere to the Philadelphia Confession.

[31] Sidney Rigdon joined the Mormon Church seven years later.

In the McCalla debate Campbell gave consideration to the design of baptism. Baptism, as he saw it, was for the removal of sin, not the original sin but one's personal sins of which he had repented. So why should an infant who had not sinned be baptized? He repeated his belief that baptism was a New Testament covenant by saying, "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ." During the debate he gave the purpose of baptism as being for the "remission of sin"; however, he did not elaborate on this phrase.[32]

McCalla's argument was basically the same as Walker's had been. To him baptism was a continuance of the Jewish covenant; "a command of God by Moses and a command of God by Paul are equally commands of God and equally entitled to obedience." Later in the debate he used some irrelevant points which did not concern the question being debated, such as the danger to health which immersion might involve, especially in the winter.

When after the debate Elder Vardeman, one of the moderators for the occasion, and other outstanding men of Lexington wanted to hear more about Campbell's beliefs, he stayed a short time to discuss his views with them. Campbell afterwards said, in regard to this experience, that a week's debate was worth a year of preaching.[33]

In spite of experiences with associations and debaters, Alexander was beginning to feel that things were moving too slowly. He therefore decided to publish a monthly magazine, to be called the Christian Baptist. The first issue appeared August 3, 1823, at Bethany, western Virginia. The

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[32] Baptism for the remission of sin received greater notice when Walter Scott included it as part of the plan of salvation. See below, page 46.

[33] Richardson, op. cit., II, 51, 77-90.

Christian Baptist

> was immensely important in disseminating Mr. Campbell's views, furnishing a rallying point for those who accepted his ideas of [the] reformation, precipitating the separation from the Baptists, and setting the pattern of thought among his followers for many years thereafter.[34]

His ultimate goal was to bring about the unity of all Christians. He believed this could be achieved by returning to the "Ancient Order of Things," which meant that denominational practices which had no scriptural authority must be discarded.

Accordingly, many pages of the Christian Baptist were devoted to exposing errors of doctrines and practices and elaborating further on certain portions of Campbell's beliefs.[35] He launched an attack upon such institutions as associations, synods, and presbyteries; he denounced creeds, confessions, and church constitutions; and he criticized the clergy and missionary societies.[36] Campbell was in favor of mission work, but he disliked the methods used by missionaries in carrying it on; they were more interested in promoting their own denominations than in what, to him, should be their primary purpose, that of bringing the simple gospel to the heathen. He thought missionaries should go among them, dressing and working as the natives did, and then let their work and example speak for their religion.[37]

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[34] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 175.

[35] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, II, 50.

[36] In a letter to M. J. Willas, 1837, concerning missionaries, Campbell showed a change of mind. He now said that, if they "are good works, they belong to the church," and that all Christians should co-operate in raising funds for them. Millennial Harbinger, n.s. I (June, 1837), 271-273. In his later years he became active in the Christian Missionary Society and donated a considerable portion of his income to its cause. Richardson, op. cit., II, 658.

[37] "Remarks on Missionaries," volume II (September 1, 1823), 13-17.

Church institutions and the clergy came in for the bulk of his criticism. Too many ministers were interested in obtaining fixed salaries and worked for higher offices in order to have greater power. They used titles such as "Reverend," "Doctor," or "Bishop" in order to set themselves above their brethren.[38] The clergy had established dominion over the Bible by forming themselves into associated bodies such as councils, synods, general assemblies, associations, and conferences.[39] For their improper authority the modern clergy were indebted to those who had laid the foundation by formulating creeds; these creeds were but human opinions and caused division.[40]

The essays, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order," "Ancient Gospel," and "Essays on the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Salvation of Men," embodied most of his fundamental beliefs: immersion was the only Scriptural form of Baptism, and its purpose was for the remission of sin;[41] church discipline should follow New Testament teaching, and creeds of any form should be excluded;[42] faith comes from believing in the Word, and the Holy Spirit is a gift bestowed upon accepting Christ[43] (these beliefs, it will

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[38] See, for example, articles entitled "The Clergy," of which the first appeared in volume I (October 6, 1823), 18.

[39] Ibid.

[40] See, for example, articles entitled "Essays on Ecclesiastical character, Councils, Creeds, and Sects," of which the first appears in volume I (April 5, 1824), 54-59.

[41] See, for example, articles entitled "The Ancient Gospel," of which the first appears in volume V (August 6, 1827), 401.

[42] Ibid.

[43] See, for example, articles entitled "Essays on the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Salvation of Men," of which the first appears in volume II (August 2, 1824), 82.

be noted, were similar to those of Stone and the "Christians"); communion should be observed weekly, because this had been a practice of the early disciples.[44]

Campbell wrote but a few times in the Christian Baptist on the topic of the Trinity. In his essays he did not accept the detailed beliefs of the orthodox Trinitarians; yet he held in general to the idea of the three-in-one. Campbell did not believe it was profitable to go on reasoning about it, fearing further division if people continued their speculations. It must be noted, however, that he definitely rejected the Arian and the Unitarian ideas.[45] Thus had Alexander Campbell arrived at a concept of the Trinity which was strikingly similar to that of Stone.

During these years Campbell became widely known in Kentucky. He was first noticed there in 1823 when he went to Lexington for the McCalla debate. Campbell returned to the state for a three months' tour in 1824. He visited many communities, covered a large part of Kentucky, and preached to great audiences; as a result, he extended his influence among the Baptists. "Raccoon" John Smith, a powerful Baptist minister, was so inspired by Campbell's ideas that he not only put them into practice in his own church, but he also carried on evangelistic activities in other communities. At Georgetown, Campbell became acquainted with Barton W. Stone. They formed a warm friendship, and from that time until the union of the Reformers and the Christians they corresponded. The circulation of the Christian Baptist carried Campbell's reputation even farther.

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[44] See, for example, articles entitled "A Restoration of Order of Things," of which the first appears in Volume III (August 1, 1825), 174.

[45] See his "The Trinitarian System," Volume IV (May 7, 1827), 333.

In the years following 1827, the Baptists became more disturbed by the increasing gains made by the reforming element within their church. The gains were due not only to the widely read Christian Baptist, but also to the zealous work of men who had adopted the idea of the "Ancient Gospel." This group included three men who were outstanding in Kentucky, Elder Vardeman, P. S. Fall, and the aforementioned John Smith. Various Baptist churches in Nashville, Tennessee, and in the eastern part of Virginia introduced the "Ancient Order." For all these reasons the Baptists became wary of the Reformers, an attitude which led to later trouble.

In 1827 the churches in the Mahoning Association felt the need to increase their membership; they therefore decided to send an evangelist to work in the various localities. A certain Walter Scott was selected for this evangelistic work. He proved so successful that he is ranked by some as a Founding Father of the Disciples of Christ.

Scott was born and educated in Scotland. In 1818 he came to the United States and became an assistant instructor to George Forrester, who conducted a private school at Pittsburgh, Ohio. Forrester was a leader of a small church whose members had adopted "Primitive Christianity" as they found it in the teachings of Sandeman and the Haldanes, mentioned earlier in connection with Alexander Campbell's training. Alexander had met Scott in the winter of 1821 and 1822 and was much impressed with him. While Scott had in 1827 given little thought to the union of Christians, an important Campbell objective, he was by this time deeply interested in promoting the exact restoration of the primitive church, and he thus saw no need for church creeds.[46] It was, moreover, Scott who had suggested the name

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[46] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 182.

Christian Baptist for Campbell's publication. Scott had also contributed a series of articles to the Christian Baptist.

In 1826, having moved to Steubenville, Ohio, Scott was invited to visit and preach at the annual meeting of the Mahoning Association. He was urged to attend again in 1827 and at this meeting was asked by the association to be their evangelist. Scott accepted the appointment, even though he was not at that time a member of the association, not a Baptist, not a resident of the district in which the Mahoning Church was located, and not an ordained minister.[47]

The association gave Scott no definite instructions; he could proclaim the gospel in the way which would be most effective for the conversion of sinners.[48] The force of his evangelistic appeal brought overwhelming response. Hundreds were converted and new churches were organized. The total membership of the churches in the Mahoning Association more than doubled during the first year of his preaching. Scott's preaching was different from that which had stirred the people of Kentucky and Tennessee in the first years of the century. He made no play upon emotions, but depended rather on a rational appeal to common sense and to the Scriptures.[49] Due to Scott's great success, the Mahoning Association not only returned him to the field the next year but employed others to aid him. He continued evangelistic work for some years after the union of the Reformers and the Christians.

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[47] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, II, 174, 206; Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 186-187.

[48] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 187.

[49] Ibid., 188.

Scott's most enduring contribution to the movement which led to the Disciples of Christ was to systematize their formula for salvation. The points within the formula had been previously developed by Campbell and the Reformers, but no clear-cut arrangement had been made. According to the formula: one must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; one must repent of his sins and resolve to sin no more and, after being baptized for the remission of sin, he shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and be granted eternal life.[50]

Within three years after Scott's appointment, the Mahoning Baptist Association had lost every Baptist characteristic except its name.[51] It therefore resolved in a meeting held at Austintown, Ohio, to dissolve. Although Campbell had said he had no desire to form an independent sect, he did not stop the resolution. The group of churches which had composed the Mahoning Association would continue to meet at stated intervals for the purpose of worship and to report the progress which had been made.

The three years following the disbanding of the Mahoning Association were a period in which the Reformers and the Baptists gradually separated. The separation took place within the organization, not simultaneously, but over a period of months. In some cases the Reformers withdrew, but in most incidents the associations excluded them.

The first example of the Reformers being expelled had come prior to the breaking up of the Mahoning Association. In 1827 the Redstone Association in Pennsylvania had dismissed thirteen churches, including Brush Run. These churches formed the new Washington Association, but were Baptist in

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[50] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 187-188; Richardson, op. cit., 206.

[51] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 191-192.

name only. They were thus prepared to be among the first churches of the new denomination. The Stillwater Association of Ohio promptly followed the example of the Mahoning Association by dissolving itself. The Baptists within the North District Association of Kentucky, in order to get away from the Smith-influenced reforming elements, withdrew and formed a new purely Baptist association.

Reforming churches within the following associations, the Franklin, the Boone's Creek, the Tate's Creek, the Elkhorn, the Bracken, the Union, and the Campbell County Association (all of Kentucky), and the Appomattox and the Dover Associations of Virginia, were expelled in 1830.[52] Separation within other associations continued after this date.

Increasingly these groups of reformers found themselves recognized as a new denomination. Campbell, making clear that he did not want to be looked upon as the founder of a new religion, agreed with Scott in believing they should call themselves "Disciples." Yet his many activities in the cause gave outsiders the excuse to claim the very thing he wished to avoid, that he was founding a new sect.

Thus in 1830 Campbell found himself an influential figure in an unorganized movement embracing many churches of several states. He was kept busy making long tours for preaching, lecturing, and visiting the churches and with handling extensive correspondence, editing a monthly magazine, managing a publishing business, operating a large farm, and receiving visitors. With all of this he continued his campaign for the restoration of the primitive pattern. He had ceased to denounce the societies and

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[52] Gates, Early Relations and Separation of Baptists and Disciples, 101.

organizations through which denominations worked. His interest had imperceptibly turned toward finding a policy which would bind the reforming churches into a brotherhood to promote an effective operation.[53]

To help in carrying out their plan, Campbell in 1830 replaced the Christian Baptist with a new publication, the Millennial Harbinger. The aim of this new magazine was "to restore the faith, ordinances, organization, and terms of admission of the apostolic church."[54] This could only be done, according to Campbell, by looking directly to the teachings of the Scriptures. In time questions arose concerning selections of church officials and the order of church service, for which no instructions could be found in the Scriptures. Campbell's answers to these questions were that church officers should be elected and ordained by the local congregation,[55] and that the order of church worship and the hour for worship were to be left to the discretion of the congregation.[56] He began to encourage co-operation among the churches, which would give them a bond of union.[57] The Millennial Harbinger proved to be the backbone of periodical literature for the Disciples until weekly journalism gained favor, a generation later.

Just two years after the virtually complete separation of the Disciples and Baptists, one of the most important events in the Disciples' history took place, their union with the Christians. This movement was brought about by members of each group who, realizing their similarities, desired

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53 Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 205-206.

54 Ibid., 206-207. Like the Christian Baptist, the Millennial Harbinger was published at Bethany, western Virginia.

55 "'Order' in Church Government," VI, extra issue (October, 1835), 498.

56 "On Church Government," II (June 6, 1831), 272-274.

57 "Co-operation of Churches," II (October 3, 1831), 436-447.

to unite. Though Campbell did not attend either of the two conferences which resulted in the merger, he gave his approval to the action which was taken. The succeeding issues of the Millennial Harbinger supported the union. In 1834 and 1836 he toured the eastern states endeavoring to persuade those who had ideas tending toward reformation to unite with the newly organized church. Campbell was able to strengthen the cause in Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and in some sections of New York state, although he had little or no success in New England.

From this time until Campbell's death thirty years later he continued his campaign for the restoration of the ancient order, partly through his publications, but in greater part by his extensive tours. He preached and lectured during these years in many parts of the United States and in the British Isles. In this course of time and for an unfathomed reason, Campbell seems to have been more interested in those phases of the movement which he called "the Reformation" than in the development of the new church itself. At least, such an emphasis enabled him to resume an unsectarian pose.

However, Campbell varied his pattern somewhat when he took part in a debate with the Roman Catholic Bishop Purcell in 1837. It was upon the request of students and citizens of Cincinnati that Campbell consented to a debate on his objections to points within the Catholic Church. Once again Campbell met the situation; not only were Protestant clergy in Cincinnati greatly satisfied, but they were afterwards less prejudiced against him.[58]

Campbell, seeing the need for training ministers to preach the

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[58] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, II, 422-433.

"primitive gospel," was responsible for securing a charter for Bethany College in 1840. He not only furnished the land, but selected the faculty and served as its first president. When the college opened, it had one building and an enrollment of a hundred students. By 1845 ministers were being sent forth to give a new impulse to the primitive gospel.[59]

After W. K. Pendleton became associate editor of the Millennial Harbinger in 1835, Campbell spent a great deal of time away from Bethany. In 1839 he toured some of the southern states, going to South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi. He found few Disciples at this time in these states.[60] Early in 1842 Campbell visited in Kentucky and Ohio, where he found church membership increasing.[61] Later that year he visited Baltimore, Philadelphia, sections of New York, and Lexington, Kentucky; in these places he found the cause of the Reformation making progress.[62]

In 1847 Campbell toured the British Isles, making speeches in various cities. He was best received in Scotland, and two ministers in Edinburgh joined the Reformation movement.[63] After this voyage Campbell's health began to weaken, but in spite of his condition he continued to travel and lecture after his return. In 1850 Campbell was invited to speak before the national House of Representatives, and in the same year he visited Ohio and Indiana. In these two states he found that the Reformation was well established.[64]

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[59] Ibid., 469, 485, 536.

[60] Ibid., 450-457.

[61] Ibid., 492-493.

[62] Ibid., 497-498.

[63] Ibid., 545-569.

[64] Ibid., 515.

When slavery became a controversial issue, Campbell was careful in the manner of expressing his anti-slavery beliefs; he feared division within the church such as had taken place in other denominations. In 1845 he stated, "I have always been anti-slavery, but never an abolitionist.... Christians can never be reformers in any system which uses violence, or recommends or expects it."[65] During the Civil War he stayed at Bethany, making only short trips in which he addressed the public on religious topics. Campbell became ill in February, 1866, and died in March of the same year, having reached the age of seventy-eight. He had lived an extremely active life and had been the salient figure in the organization of the Disciples.

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[65] Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, II, 533.

IV

THE UNION OF THE DISCIPLES AND THE CHRISTIANS

The Christians and Reformers had been aware of their many similarities, even before the separation of the latter group from the Baptists. While Alexander Campbell was touring Kentucky in 1824, he met Stone for the first time. They then held in common two basic ideas, the need of returning to the simple gospel found in the Bible, and the desire to unite all followers of Christ. But Stone was at this moment busy in his controversy with the Presbyterians about the topics of the Trinity and the atonement. Naturally this diverted his attention from possible union.

By the year 1828 there were those who openly asked why the Christians and Disciples did not unite. Some time later Stone, speaking for the former, made his answer in the columns of the Christian Messenger. While stating a definite desire for such a movement, he pointed out the differences between the two groups. The Disciples, he said, objected to allowing the unimmersed to commune and to have fellowship with them; furthermore, the fact that each group would be reluctant to relinquish its name would make a union difficult. Campbell replied to Stone's remarks by saying that Stone was in advance placing the blame for the failure of a union on the Disciples. As to the name "Christian," he believed it was a fine one; still, he said, it is easy to assume a good name, but hard to deserve it.[1] This retort, of course, did not make combination any easier.

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[1] Alexander Campbell, "Reply on Union Communion, and the Name Christian," Millennial Harbinger, II (September 5, 1831), 385-393. In this article Campbell cites a previous article written by Stone, "Union," Christian Messenger.

When one analyzes the likenesses and differences of the Christians and the Disciples, it is obvious that they were agreed in many respects, but that their differences were greater than those Stone mentioned. They were alike in the following ways:[2]

(1) "Both held the union of all Christians as one of their definite objectives."

(2) "Both held that Christ alone was the object of faith, rejected creeds, as tests of fellowship, and insisted upon liberty of opinion on all matters of doctrine that were not unmistakably revealed.

(3) Both "agreed that Christ died for all...all who might believe on him and be saved." Thus they rejected the Calvinistic doctrine of a "limited atonement."[3]

(4) Both agreed, with some reservations, "upon the nature of faith and the ability of sinful man to believe the evidence about Christ without personal assistance from the Holy Spirit." However, Stone's early evangelistic work had led him to take exception to this belief.

(5) Both believed that immersion was the proper form of baptism and held that baptism was for the remission of sins.

(6) Both opposed an unscriptural and sectarian name for the church. Stone and his party preferred the name "Christians" and argued that the name was given to the Disciples at Antioch by divine appointment. Campbell and the Reformers preferred the name "Disciples" because it was more distinctive.

Their differences were:

(1) The Christians had not made immersion a condition for church membership as had the Disciples. While it was considered a matter of individual opinion, most of the Christians had been immersed. By 1830 Stone was beginning to feel that his group was inconsistent when they preached baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and then admitted persons into the church without it.

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[2] This analysis is based upon that of Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 208-212.

[3] I have been unable to discover the process by which Campbell came to accept this idea.

(2) The Christians believed in a more careful selection of ministers. They favored some sort of conference to consist of bishops and elders for examining the candidates to make sure doctrines contrary to the gospel would not be preached. There is no evidence that such a system was ever put into practice, but it shows that the Christians held a higher conception of the office of the ministry than did the Disciples, and had less fear of clerical domination. These ideas were of course contrary to those of the Disciples, indeed were almost abhorrent to them.

(3) The Christians and the Disciples differed in their method of winning converts. The Disciples had made little effort to evangelize until Scott was selected by the Mahoning Association in 1827 to be their evangelist. Scott appealed not to the emotions but rather to the rational intellect in winning sinners to accept Christ. The Christians had used the Methodist type of revival from their beginning. Though their revivals had become more refined, they still placed stress on evangelism of an emotional type.

(4) The Disciples observed the Lord's Supper weekly, while the Christians observed it less frequently. By 1830, however, Stone had decided that weekly communion had been a practice of the early church. The Christians practiced open communion, while the Disciples still held to close communion. However, Campbell had for some time by 1830 believed in the desirability of open communion.

Many of the Christians and the Disciples thus began to feel that their likenesses outweighed their differences. There was a growing desire, especially in Kentucky, for the two groups to unite. This feeling resulted in two four-day conferences, held at Georgetown and Lexington, respectively, in which both groups were represented. At the first meeting, beginning Christmas Day, 1831, the central figures were John Smith, representing the Disciples, and John T. Johnson, representing the Christians. The second meeting, which began January 1, 1832, found Stone the chief spokesman for the Christians, while the Disciples were again represented by Smith.

Since the sentiments of the conferences favored union, the second meeting resulted in a merger of the Christians and Disciples. There were no central authorities through which this union might be made, because both groups believed in a local government. It was decided, therefore, that

the congregations of each community must themselves unite. No official name was adopted; therefore the two names Christian and Disciples have since been used interchangeably.[4]

The Lexington conference decided upon various methods for promoting the union. There was to be a free exchange of ministers and a collaboration in evangelistic work, while the publications of each group would be taken over in the interest of all. Two men were selected to work among the churches, John Smith, a former Disciple, and John Rogers, formerly a Christian. These two men were to work as a team to hold joint meetings of the Disciples and Christians urging them to unite. Religious journals supported the union, Stone's Christian Messenger, Campbell's Millennial Harbinger, and Walter Scott's Evangelist being the strongest voices. The differences between the Christians and the Disciples gradually faded. The Christians ceased to admit the unimmersed membership to the church and adopted the Disciples' method of evangelism. The Disciples eventually accepted the practice of open communion.

The process of confirming the union went on steadily. Nearly all the former "Christian" churches in southwestern Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee joined the movement immediately. In fact, the "Christian" group as a separate religious body soon ceased to exist; some of the followers of the Disciples were more hesitant, however, a few eventually withdrawing entirely.[5]

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[4] The "Disciples of Christ" had become the usual name by 1910, largely as a matter of custom and usage, however; in a letter to me dated November 22, 1950, W. E. Garrison wrote, "I think one would search in vain for the time and place when and where the Disciples of Christ ever chose that name or any other as their 'official name'."

[5] Garrison and DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, 215.

By the end of their first decade, the new denomination, whether called Disciples or Christians, had grown in church membership and had expanded geographically.

The ten years of initial growth within the original area was the result of an intensive campaign made to win new converts. At the same time, the expansion into new areas was due chiefly to the actions of individuals who on their own initiative moved into new territory and established churches. By 1900 the Disciples numbered 1,120,000 in the United States,[6] with churches also in Great Britain and her Dominions.

Thus has been traced the origin and early history of the denomination known as the Disciples of Christ. Beginning in the western United States during the first of the nineteenth century, it had two places of origin, since it included two religious groups.

The first of these groups, the Christians, began in Kentucky about 1801. The frontier environment of that time encouraged churches of various denominations to meet together in large revivals. It was these events which first influenced Barton W. Stone to develop his idea of Christian unity. Later the preaching of Stone and his associates conflicted with the doctrines of the Presbyterian church. Their differences led to a separation, and the new group took the name Christians. They, then, began to advocate the belief that doctrines prevented Christian unity and that the Bible alone should be their guide. Stone's ministerial associates left the movement, but he continued steadfast and the Christians grew in number.

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[6] Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 402.

A few years later there developed in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and western Virginia a group who were first known as Reformers and later as Disciples. The Campbells, Thomas and Alexander, were the central figures. Thomas Campbell came into this semi-frontier region in 1807 and Alexander followed in 1809. By the time of Alexander's arrival each had developed the idea of the unity of all Christians and had left the Seceder Presbyterian Church. Their theological speculation led them first into a Baptist association, and a few years later caused their departure.

By the time the Reformers left the Baptists the two groups, Christians and Disciples, had realized their similarities and the desirability of union. The union which came in 1832 climaxed these two anti-denominational movements, and resulted in the establishment of a new denomination.

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THESIS TITLE: EARLY HISTORY OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST
1801 - 1832

NAME OF AUTHOR: ADA LEA HUMPHREYS

THESIS ADVISER: THEODORE L. AGNEW

The content and form have been checked and approved by the author and thesis adviser. "Instructions for Typing and Arranging the Thesis" are available in the Graduate School office. Changes or corrections in the thesis are not made by the Graduate school office or by any committee. The copies are sent to the bindery just as they are approved by the author and faculty adviser.

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