**Division: Theology, Doctrine, Morality, Politics, or Wealth?**

So, by 1835(ish), the Stone (churches of Christ) and Campbell (Disciples of Christ) movements are fully united. 1906 is the year that they were “officially” separated again. 2/3 of churches of Christ were in the South and 2/3 of Disciples of Christ were in the North. What happened? Was it differences in how each movement thinks about the unimmersed? Communion? Instrumental Music? Not really. Let’s take a walk through our movement’s first generation.

In 1849, the united movement decided to form the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS). It was a way of organizing around 2,000 congregations so that they could pool their resources for foreign mission work. Each year in the Fall the Society would meet and enjoy cooperation from church members in many states, KY, OH, MO, and VA held most of the congregations. Campbell was the President of the Society. He, Stone, and the other leaders were focused on unity and fellowship, even above doctrine. They believed that differences in theology were the cause of division amongst denominations. Even believer immersion for salvation was less important to them than Christian unity. They believed that there were Christian in other sects. “Otherwise”, Campbell argued, “there would have been no Christians in the world for centuries, and Jesus’ promise that the gates of Hell would not prevail against His Church would be false. This cannot be, therefore there are Christians among the sects.” When others argued that this weakened baptism he replied, “I think there are many in most Protestant parties, whose errors and mistakes I hope the Lord will forgive.” He strongly defended believer immersion for salvation and made it a requirement for membership in his congregations, and called those baptized as infants to be immersed as adults. However, when pressed to choose between one baptized as an infant and one immersed as an adult he preferred, “…the one who loved Christ the most. Did I act otherwise, I would be a pure sectarian, a Pharisee among Christians. Although baptism is important, it is not more important than Christian character…Paul talks of one who does not have outward circumcision, but has inward circumcision [Romans 2]. Can a person who simply, not perversely, mistakes outward baptism, have the inward?”

Campbell was educated in the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason. Therefore, he encouraged his followers to read the Bible scientifically, that is, grammatically and historically. But Campbell also regarded the heart as the seat of our deepest moral intentions, giving it preeminence even over reason. His hermeneutic, or, way of understanding Scripture, included but transcended the strict rationalism of his day by giving precedence to obedience from the heart and putting the Word into practice. Campbell’s theology was Christ-centered. One should use the best methods of Bible interpretation available to him, but always keep the focus on his relationship with Jesus. This prevented his hermeneutic from becoming legalistic. Later, others tried to bring in a narrower worship service focused hermeneutic of “which practices the Bible authorizes.” Stone and Campbell stressed the Bible’s portrait of Christ more than a specific interpretive strategy.

So, what happened between the 1850’s and 1906 to ruin this unity and change our movement’s focus? THE CIVIL WAR!!! Some would have us believe that the Restoration Movement didn’t experience division like the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians did, but this is simply untrue. Denominations split more clearly and completely than our movement because their national organizations made it easier to do so, but our movement certainly has seen clear evidence of a shift within the first fifty years after the war. Stone and Campbell took a “middle of the road” stance concerning slavery. They were both morally opposed to slavery but politically and doctrinally opposed to Abolition (freeing the slaves). Both men had owned slaves in their earlier lives. Stone had freed all his slaves in 1804, but later inherited slaves from his wife’s mother. The law prevented him from freeing these new slaves. He was a supporter of the American Colonization Society, which planned to end slavery over time by buying slaves and then “taking them back” to Liberia. Campbell politically opposed slavery as he thought it didn’t fit the spirit of the age and wouldn’t help society to advance. However, he also taught that biblically, the master-slave relationship was not unscriptural in itself, and so the Church should not divide over the issue. A gradual approach, according to Campbell, was the best way to end slavery, rather than to suddenly declare all slaves to be free. The movement’s attempt to stay “moderate” in order to remain unified only angered people on both sides.

Staying “out of the fight” became impossible with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. The ACMS, headquartered in Cincinnati, OH, held its meeting in October. Although all were invited, Southerners were unable to attend because of the war. Since all attendees were Northern, some wanted the movement to support the Union. The ACMS did not support this. However, during a ten-minute recess, these zealous members took an informal vote and approved the resolution. It didn’t matter that the ACMS did not pass the resolution. Southern reaction was swift. Tolbert Fanning, a southern Restoration leader had been urging members to stay out of the conflict, just like Stone and Campbell, but Fanning took this rogue resolution to mean that the ACMS was encouraging members to participate in the murder of their Southern brothers. Meanwhile, in the North, Abolitionists were criticizing the ACMS’s lack of a strong statement for Abolition. In 1863, the ACMS passed a stronger resolution, pledging its allegiance to the U.S. government, and stating that it was against “the attempts of armed traitors to overthrow our government.”

In 1866, David Lipscomb wrote that the ACMS had committed a great wrong against the Church and the cause of God, and it should not receive the confidence of the Christian brotherhood. That same year the *Gospel Advocate* resumed publication after shutting down during the war. Lipscomb and Fanning were the editors. They resumed it because they saw it as “the only publication Southerners could read without being constantly offended by political insinuations and slurs.” It clearly was a southern journal, for southern readers, by southern writers. Also that year, a group of northern church and business leaders formed a publishing company to publish the *Christian Standard*, a Christian publication in the North.

After the war, churches in northern cities built fancy buildings with stained glass windows and ornate organs, while churches in the decimated South struggled to survive, not affording organs. Northern Christians became accepted into “high society”, so much so that one member, James Garfield, became President of the United States. Southerners were appalled that northerners could purchase fancy buildings and organs while they starved. Southern opposition to organs was much less about hermeneutics concerning biblical silence than it was about what they saw as ungenerous economic arrogance on the part of northern congregations.