

# We Are Not Campbellites!

## by Maurice Barnett

Shortly after I was baptized, I was working alongside a man who was a Pentecostal. He asked me what church I belonged to. When I told him, he remarked, “Oh, the Campbellites.” I didn’t know what he was talking about. I thought maybe it referred to the brand of cigarettes that the men smoked between class and assembly, Camels. It wasn’t until College classes in Restoration History under Earl West that I fully understood what he was referring to. Being called “Campbellites” goes all the way back to the first part of the 1800s after Alexander Campbell had developed a widespread reputation as a reformer. It was a name used out of ridicule or mockery by the enemies of brethren; it still is. In many people’s mind, ignorant as they are, it is the title of a cult. The facts are far different.

What critics conveniently overlook is that there were churches of Christ in the eighteenth century before Alexander Campbell ever came to America. Reform movements have sprinkled the pages of history going back centuries. Martin Luther, as a Roman Catholic monk, wanted only to reform the church. He wound up with a new religious movement that was still too close to the Catholics in doctrines and practice to be a restoration of the first century church. Merle D’Aubigne said in his *History of the Reformation*, pp. 401-402—

“Luther desired to maintain in the Church all that was not expressly contrary to the Scriptures, and Zwingli (a Swiss reformer) to abolish all that could not be proved by them. The German reformer wished to remain united to the Church of the preceding ages, and was content to purify it of all that was opposed to the Word of God. The Zurich reformer passed over these ages, returned to the apostolic times, and, carrying out an entire transformation of the Church, endeavored to restore it to its primitive condition. Zwingli’s reformation was therefore the more complete.”

The Church of England, was hardly a reformation or restoration attempt. There had been centuries of difficulties with Rome and when the Protestant Reformation came, the Church authorities considered they were the medium between the Reformation and Catholicism. Henry VIII was the open cause of the break with Rome. He wanted to divorce one of his six wives and marry another woman and the Pope would not allow it. The change was made through laws forced by Henry and not from public outcry. By that means, Henry justified his own lust and cared not for religion itself. John Wesley, an Anglican prelate, wanted to do for the Church what Luther tried for Catholicism, reform it. Like Luther and the Lutheran Church, Wesley’s followers gave us the Methodist Episcopal Church in this country.

Calvin, like Luther, was first of all a reformer. This is why the whole period is called the Protestant Reformation, those who protested to established religion and wanted to reform it. Many had no thought of a *restoration* but many others did. Some of the “reformation” attempts became just as dictatorial and closed minded as

what they had protested against, such as Calvinism. The Armenians were more successful at restoration than the rest as far as being the closest to the truth; the “five points” of Armenianism were the opposite counterparts to the five points of Calvinism but there were other things they missed. Many of its leaders suffered persecution and even death at the hands of entrenched Calvinist governments. So, we must take into account the Lutherans, Calvinists (Presbyterians), Armenians, Puritans, Anabaptists, Baptists, Methodists, Hutterites and others who jumped onto the stage of reform some way or other. And, there were individuals such as Zwingli, Bacon, Locke, Glas, Sandeman, Ewing, the Haldane brothers, James O’Kelly and others who had both major and minor roles and successes. All were involved, in varying degrees, in an attempt to get back to the first century church long before the Campbells.

John Glas (1695-1773) in Scotland, had been a Presbyterian minister. In 1727, Glas published a book attacking established churches as being out of harmony with the Bible. For this, he was deposed by the Presbyterian General Assembly. Glas insisted on a return to the New Testament alone for doctrine and practice. In this, he was fairly successful. Glas rejected all human creeds and confessions of faith, synods and councils and insisted on independent local churches overseen by elders. They practiced the Lord’s Supper and monetary contributions every Sunday during the weekly assembly. However, they did practice the “holy kiss,” “mutual ministry” and “love feasts” between morning and evening meetings on Sunday. Glas also still held on to sprinkling for baptism, millennial theories and other positions that were wrong. Glas appealed to “apostolic precedent” as authority and *sought* to restore the first century church with the Bible alone.

Some of the familiar phrases and slogans that have been attached to Campbell and other brethren of his time were actually said by others before him. Speak where the Bible speaks, remain silent where the Bible is silent, approach Scripture by commands and statements, necessary inferences and approved examples, no instrumental music, baptism by immersion had all been around long before the Campbells were even alive. In volume 1 of his collected works, noting it for the year 1731, page 471, Glas says this—

“We do not read of any other evangelist or officer left there but Titus alone; and where the scripture is silent, so must we...Be you silent where the Scripture-history is silent; let what it says not be nothing to you...”

John Glas was joined in his quest by Robert Sandeman (1718-1771). Sandeman married a daughter of John Glas and was an energetic convert to his father-in-law’s views. He became an elder in the church they established in Edinburgh. In 1760, he moved to London, where he gained much notoriety, establishing a congregation there in 1762. In 1764, he came to the American colonies where he continued his teaching and several small churches were established.

One problem for Sandeman in the colonies was that things were rapidly moving toward the Revolutionary War and Sandeman was very pro-British, which did not set well with the colonists who wanted freedom from Britain. This greatly retarded his progress. Sandeman died in Danbury, Conn. at 53 years of age in 1771. Most of the churches he established soon died out as well, due to a combination of the death of

their energetic leader and the result of the war. Three small groups of what still existed, joined with Barton Stone and the brethren after the turn of the century. The last congregation joined with those influenced by the Campbells in 1845. By 1851, in England, only six small congregations could be found, all that was left of the work of Glas and Sandeman.

All of this was before the Campbells had left the Presbyterian Church and had come to America. What we will see even more clearly is that there were *churches of Christ* on our shores before the Campbells were here, just as there were restoration attempts before they were even born. The desire to be only what one can read in the New Testament was overpowering after centuries of Roman Catholic domination.

The planting of many of these ideas in the American colonies came with the Puritans, Presbyterians, Baptists and other like groups. As we have seen, “churches of Christ” came with the efforts of Robert Sandeman but had a marginal effect due to the Revolutionary War that shortly followed Sandeman’s death.

In 1791, Scotch Presbyterians built a log meeting house on the frontier, territory of Kentucky, called Cane Ridge. It is located six miles from Paris, KY, not far from Lexington. The name originated with Daniel Boone. While passing that way, Boone observed a stand of a kind of bamboo on the ridge and so named it Cane Ridge. The building remains to this day the largest single room log structure in the United States. It can comfortably seat 250 people and as many as 300. It was destined to be occupied as a place of worship for 130 years and is preserved today as a shrine. Here are some views of the building both inside and out. First, an early photo of the building before it was completely encased in a blue limestone structure for preservation. Second, a picture from the raised pulpit that gives a view of the gallery (balcony). Originally, the large gallery was just for the slaves of the members, that is, until 1795 when the congregation took a stand against slavery. The gallery was removed in the 1820s and for over a century was used as a hayloft in a nearby barn until a restoration project returned it to the Cane Ridge building. The third picture is of the pulpit area as seen through a window from the outside. The elders sat on chairs below the pulpit facing the audience. The fourth picture is of an upper entrance to the gallery that could only be reached by a ladder from the outside.





The people originally sat on plain, slat-plank benches with no backs. The building was lighted by lamps and candles, heated with a wood stove and cooled in summer with all windows and doors open. Later, better seating was added along with other comforts that were at least better than what they had.

The Cane Ridge church building is famous because of its age among churches of Christ and also due to Barton W. Stone (1772-1844). Stone was drawn to religion early in life and was influenced toward the Presbyterian Church, finally being ordained as a Presbyterian Minister. However, he did insist to the Presbyterian authorities that he would subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith “insofar as it was consistent with the word of God.” In spite of that qualified endorsement, he was ordained and became the second minister at Cane Ridge Presbyterian Church..

Stone studied diligently, more and more finding inconsistencies between the Bible and Calvinism. This constantly bothered him through the years. In 1801, the famous Cane Ridge revival meeting was held from Friday to Wednesday, August 7-12. It drew between 20,000 and 30,000 people to all day preaching and singing. Several preachers from various denominations were involved. It was at this revival that Stone revealed his change of convictions. The Kentucky Synod of the Presbyterian Church ejected him. Likewise, the Cane Ridge Presbyterian Church was no more. It was changed to the Cane Ridge church of Christ and the members were just Christians.

Historians, especially of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), those who adopted instrumental music and the missionary societies, have revised history to claim that churches of Christ split off from the Christian Church; we are just a splinter group. The facts show otherwise.

First, the Cane Ridge church of Christ, from its beginning at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was widely known by that name; they had neither instrumental music nor missionary societies. The monument that sits atop Barton Stone’s grave in the Cane Ridge cemetery has the following inscription—

“The church of Christ at Cane Ridge and other generous friends in Kentucky have caused this monument to be erected as a tribute of affection and gratitude to Barton W. Stone, minister of the gospel of Christ and the distinguished reformer of the nineteenth century. Born December 24, 1772; died November 9, 1844. His remains lie here. This monument erected in 1847.”

Also buried in the Cane Ridge cemetery is William Rogers. Rogers was a leader in the Cane Ridge church of Christ in the early 1800s. He served in various functions and was at one time the treasurer for the church. Below is a photo of the marker over his grave. The inscription on it clearly identifies brother Rogers as having been “united with the church of Christ in 1807.”



Second, Thomas Campbell, father of Alexander, came to America for his health in 1807, the year William Rogers and his father became members of the Cane Ridge church of Christ. Campbell had been a member of the most conservative of Presbyterians but had been exposed to restoration ideas. Alexander, having been born in 1788, was but thirteen years old and still in Ireland when Barton Stone made his break with the Presbyterians and the Cane Ridge church of Christ was established. Alexander did not come to America until August of 1809 when he was 21. He had never preached a sermon and would not until 1811. From 1813 to 1830, the Campbells were associated with the Baptists, though with some disagreements.

Third, the marker on Stone’s grave, erected in 1847, says he was an elder in the church of Christ but this is also said in Stone’s periodical, *The Christian Messenger*, beginning in 1826. Every issue till his death identified him as an elder in the church of Christ. The same was said of pioneer preacher, “Raccoon” John Smith (1784-1868). His memorial stone in the Lexington, Kentucky Cemetery reads that he was an elder in the church of Christ.

Fourth, the first missionary society did not appear until 1849, though the seeds had been planted beginning about 1830. The first instrument of music was injected into the church of Christ in Midway, Kentucky. Though there had been many who wanted to have instruments, this was the first. It caused a great stir. Many were disturbed by it but Adam Hibler, one of the elders, was so upset that he, along with a servant, removed the melodeon one night through a window and broke it to pieces on the front lawn. The opposition promptly purchased another one which Hibler just as promptly removed and stored in his barn. A third melodeon replaced it and remained there until the church building burned after the turn of the century, which included the melodeon. Some years later, in cleaning out Hibler’s barn, that second melodeon was discovered. It is now on display at Midway College in a glass case. Here is a photo of the melodeon.



The Midway church of Christ was the first in the nation to introduce an instrument into local church worship even though it divided the church, and that was in 1860. By forcing instrumental music and the Missionary Society into churches of Christ, just who would you say caused the division? The churches of Christ remained the same. It looks to me like those who became the Christian Church were the ones who split away from churches of Christ and became the splinter group.

It was the influence of Alexander Campbell that spurred the move to form the *American Christian Missionary Society*. It was the argument structure he made for the Society that later furnished the justification for instrumental music in worship. Strangely, the church at Bethany that Campbell established and where he had his home, carried the name “church of Christ” on its structure and his family refused to allow instrumental music in the building, all after his death.

It must be acknowledge, however, that even Stone held to some ideas he brought with him from the Presbyterians and in some things he reflected the times in which he lived. It took some time and study to work through Bible teaching and make changes when necessary. It was not all accomplished overnight while the necessary major changes took place immediately. Essentially, Churches of Christ have been what they were from the time before Campbell came along.

We believe and obey the gospel you can read about in the Bible. Congregations are organized according to the New Testament pattern. Work is done as the Bible teaches. We are directed by the Bible alone. In fact, no one has ever quoted Alexander Campbell, nor Barton W. Stone, as authority for anything. They were just preachers who attempted to restore to practice the church of the New Testament. There is in no way, shape or form that we are either “Campbellites” or “Stoneites.” We totally reject any such thing.