

The Search for Truth
A History of the Restoration Movement
The Prophets of Liberalism

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, we introduced German higher criticism and how it began to impact the religious world and eventually would cause division between the Disciples of Christ and the (independent) Christian Church. But, it would also have an impact on churches of Christ. However, thankfully we had men who were better grounded in the Scriptures and could answer and refute the allegations made by those who were influenced by these so-called scholars. The end result of all this higher criticism is that the Bible is not completely and entirely the word of God. It might *contain* the word of God but it is not equivalent to the word of God. Doctrine is not so important, but loving your neighbor is what Christianity is all about.

In an article on the *Washington Post* website (September 24, 2015), Indian-born journalist Fareed Zakaria wrote:

“I am not a Christian. But growing up in India, I was immersed in Christianity. I attended Catholic and Anglican schools from ages 5 to 18, where we would sing hymns, recite prayers and study the Scriptures. The words and actions of Pope Francis have reminded me what I, as an outsider, have always admired deeply about Christianity, that its central message is simple and powerful: Be nice to the poor.”

Christianity is not about “being nice to the poor.” “Poor” is used 39 times in the New Testament. To be sure, being nice to the poor is an important aspect of New Testament teaching. But the central message of Christianity (dare we remind our Indian-born friend that “Christ” begins “Christianity?”), is the salvation of man *through* Jesus Christ to the glory of God. The word “save” is found 97 times in the New Testament; “salvation” is found 42 times; “Savior” is found 24 times. Why? Because the central message of Christianity is the *salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God*.

Poverty is not man’s biggest problem. Sin is. “Sin” is found 243 times in the New Testament. “Sinner,” 43 times. “Lawlessness” is found 20 times.

It would not take Mr. Zakaria (or any other leftist) very long to see what the New Testament is really all about: “She [Mary] will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus did not come to save people from poverty. He did not come to save people from having to do without (gasp!) cable, internet, or cell phones. He did not come to save people from having to eat tuna fish and crackers from time to time. He came to save people from their sins.

Editorializing on Zakaria’s statement, *The Weekly Standard* observes (October 12, 2015, pg. 3): “Now, if Fareed Zakaria went to Christian schools for 13 years and came away thinking the ‘central message’ of Christianity is ‘Be nice to the poor,’ as opposed to salvation and forgiveness in Christ himself, well, either he wasn’t much of a student or his teachers were deficient.” That’s putting it charitably.

A REVIEW OF GERMAN HIGHER CRITICISM:

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) wrote a book called *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. The emphasis of Schleiermacher was on feelings and intuition. In the broader religious world, Schleiermacher is considered the “father of modern theology.”

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) is the father of the social gospel, emphasizing ethics and responding to the social and economic needs of society.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), of whom we are fairly acquainted, presented his theory of evolution and this led to the theory of evolution infiltrating every aspect of learning, evolutionary development in society, political theory, and religion.

Finally, we have the field of biblical criticism. Biblical criticism is divided into two areas: higher criticism and lower criticism. Lower criticism deals with the differences in the Greek manuscripts, the differences between the textual foundation of the KJV versus the NIV, for example. Higher criticism looks at the text from a broad perspective, asking: Who wrote it, Why, to whom, when, and how does it coincide with other areas of knowledge from that historical time period? You can see that neither of these are inherently anti-biblical but when you pair this approach to the Scriptures, specifically higher criticism, with the prevailing views of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Darwin, you have the foundation for rejecting miracles, prophecy, inspiration of the Scriptures, and the divine nature of Jesus of Nazareth.

German higher criticism impacted denominational churches and theological schools, as you would well expect. Princeton University fell prey to liberal views and conservative scholars left and established the Westminster Theological Seminary, for example.

LIBERALISM HITS THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST / CHRISTIAN CHURCHES:

One author writes that L. L. Pinkerton, the preacher who introduced instrumental music into worship in Midway, KY, was the first “liberal” in the Restoration Movement (North, 258). In 1869, Pinkerton renounced the complete inspiration of the Scriptures. In 1873, he came out in favor of open membership. Early on, Pinkerton was a lone wolf but it would not be long that others would pick up the mantle and do their best to make the churches of Christ more palatable to the culture and to the academics.

W. T. Moore (1832-1926) was instrumental in founding the Foreign Christian Missionary Society and had been a minister with the Central Christian Church in Cincinnati. Before he moved to Cincinnati, he had been the preacher for the Central Church in Detroit. Eventually, he would become minister of the West London Tabernacle in Great Britain, practicing open membership. Isaac Errett, through the *Christian Standard*, defended Moore and argued that the brotherhood should allow him and the missionary society to work things out.

In 1889, a new wave of controversy hit the church. R. C. Cave (1843-1923) was an eloquent preacher in the Central Christian Church in St. Louis. He would promote the ideas of denying the virgin birth of Christ, the physical resurrection of Jesus, and said that there were no “conditions” to salvation. An elder in the same congregation was the man whom we have introduced before, J. H. Garrison, who was the editor of the *Christian Evangelist*. The brotherhood demanded that Garrison counter Cave’s teaching but Garrison refused. He said Cave was preaching his own opinion. W. T. Moore and J. H. Garrison shared a cottage at Pentwater, MI.

When it came to defending the integrity of the Bible, J. W. McGarvey, through the pages of the *Christian Standard*, was the chief spokesman with Lipscomb and the *Advocate* serving a secondary role.

In 1883, Isaac Errett gave a lecture in Independence, MO on the “inspiration” of the Scripture. Errett said he held to the inspiration of the Scriptures but would not affirm that the Scriptures were without error. He would not say that the Scriptures were “infallible.” In 1893, McGarvey began a weekly column in the *Christian Standard* called “Biblical Criticism” wherein he defended the inspiration, infallibility, and integrity of the Scriptures, which he wrote for the next 18 years.

But liberalism came into the church, dividing the Disciples of Christ from their brethren, through the classroom. Herbert Lockwood Willett (1864-1944) was from Michigan and studied at Bethany College. He had been minister of the Christian Church in Dayton, OH when he enrolled in Yale University and studied under William Harper, a supposedly conservative Protestant but liberal in his theology. Harper became president of the University of Chicago and Willett followed him there. Willett had also become the editor of the column in the *Christian Standard*, so we can see how McGarvey’s conservative influence in that magazine is beginning to be drowned out by the liberal voices on staff: Errett and Willett.

By the end of the 19th century, Christians could be divided into two camps when it came to this matter of German higher criticism. McGarvey continued to see the Scriptures as being inerrant and infallible. J. H. Garrison believed that the Scriptures were a revelation from God but fit the thinking and imagination of men of that day. Willett held that the Bible was a written record of men’s experiences in search of what is best in life (North, 269).

Incidentally, as a side note, in 1892, the first Bible chair at a state university was established by Christians at U of M.

As I have already commented, within a generation, students had been exposed to these liberal ideas and carried them back to their home churches, into colleges operated by Christians, and into the pulpits. The older Christians, who still held to the Truth, eventually died off and the younger generation took over and the Disciples split with the Christian Church. The *Christian Standard* became the magazine for the Christian Church while the *Christian Evangelist* became the magazine for the Disciples of Christ. Certainly, there were those in churches of Christ who were influenced by these academics but with a stronger grounding in the Scriptures, the impact was much less. I suggest there are more men *today* teaching these liberal ideas in so-called Christian colleges than there were then.

Once again, as churches started dividing up over these various issues, the question arose, “Which church are you?” “What do *you* support?” The Missouri State Convention met in 1882 and adopted a resolution assuming oversight of all the schools operated by the brethren in that state. The convention demanded that any school that wanted to be recognized by the state convention must allow its trustees to be nominated by the convention itself. The convention, as we see, is trying to take control of the schools. Through the schools, the convention would take control of the churches. In fact, the *Christian Evangelist* advocated some kind of centralized control over the brotherhood.

The same year, or early in 1883, the Northeastern Iowa Christian Convention proposed to put the churches and preachers under its oversight: to select preachers, to form circuits for small, weak congregations, and to establish churches which would belong to and be under the care of the convention.

ANTI-COLLEGE VIEWS:

The problems popping up within the Christian colleges motivated and led many brethren to be against colleges on theological grounds. The primary spokesman for this view, and it is still held today by those who also are against churches supporting orphan homes, was Daniel Sommer. Sommer was born in MD in 1850. His parents were German and had emigrated to America 15 years earlier. Daniel's dad died when Daniel was five years old and his mom worked tirelessly for the family but they were penniless. Frequently, the family ate wild rabbit and corn bread.

Sommer's parents, being German, were Lutheran, at least in name, and Sommer was sprinkled into the Lutheran Church. At 14 years old, Sommer attended a revival meeting among the Methodists, was admitted among them on the statement that he had already found religion, and started attending their Bible classes. But two years later, Sommer ran into some Christians and began working for a man, a Christian, named John Dallas Everitt. Three years later, Sommer will be baptized into Christ in Middletown, PA. Sommer enrolled in Bethany College. Bethany College, by this time, was firmly entrenched with the pro-missionary society group.

But Sommer saw that as being inconsistent with biblical Christianity. At the church in Bethany, the women of the congregation decided they wanted to raise funds to pay for new curtains, new carpet, and paint the building. They wanted the members to give a "mite." They called themselves the "Ladies Mite Society." Sommer disagreed with them and when he had the opportunity to give a sermon, he blasted the Mite Society in front of everyone and he was well pleased with himself for doing so. Sommer will grow into the brotherhood's chief critic.

He stayed at Bethany for three years and began preaching. He met Benjamin Franklin and came to love him deeply. He wrote his first article for Franklin in the *American Christian Review* at 22 years old. Preaching in OH, Sommer and a friend began a religious paper, which they called the "Octograph," to denote the "writings of the eight," men of the NT. At one congregation where Sommer moved, they were pro-society and using the instrument and the women were selling pies at church festivals to raise money and Sommer was against all of these and the church split.

Sommer eventually changed the name of his paper to the *Apostolic Review* and moved to Indianapolis, the home of Benjamin Franklin and the *American Christian Review*. At first the editorship of the *American Christian Review* passed to John Rowe, at Franklin's passing, as we mentioned last week, but then Sommer bought it out and took control of that magazine. Before we go further with Daniel Sommer, let me introduce you to...

JAMES A. HARDING:

This is the man for whom Harding University is named, although it was through his son-in-law, J. N. Armstrong. Harding's dad was an elder in the Court Street Church in Winchester, KY until instrumental music was brought in in 1887 when he, and others, left and began the Fairfax church of Christ. So, James A. Harding was, at least, a second generation Christian.

He attended Bethany College and graduated. He was preaching in Hopkinsville, KY when he came down with malaria. He went home to recuperate when a old brother, John Adams, told him to go hold a gospel meeting in Hopkinsville. That scarred Harding and he responded that he had never held a meeting and did not have "meeting sermons." The brother scolded Harding, saying that he had been brought up in the church, he had attended Bible school, and he was a graduate of Bethany College. Adams said if Harding could not preach such a meeting, he ought to be killed so he told him to "shut his mouth," get on his horse, and go hold that meeting. So Harding did! He would eventually hold as many as 300 Gospel meetings in his lifetime.

Harding worked with David Lipscomb with the *Gospel Advocate*. In 1887, Harding held a meeting at the Plum Street Church in Detroit. In 1889, Harding held a much-publicized debate in Nashville with J. N. Moody, a Baptist, over baptism. That debate, along with a great deal of evangelistic zeal allowed the churches of Christ to allow Nashville to have the highest per-capita concentration of Christians than any city in the world. By 1901, there were 18 churches of Christ in Nashville with nearly half-a-million members. Harding would conduct as many as 50 debates, most of them on baptism. In 1891, Harding and David Lipscomb began the Nashville Bible School, which, upon the death of Lipscomb will be renamed David Lipscomb College, which is today known as Lipscomb University.

After ten years, Harding would leave Lipscomb / Nashville Bible School and help start the Potter Bible School in Bowling Green, KY. C. C. Potter and his wife had a 140 acre farm in Bowling Green which they wanted to use for a school. In later years, the school failed to pay its bills and Potter did and closed the doors of the school. But it would eventually reopen as an orphan home.

Now let us go back to Daniel Sommer. Sommer, because of his experiences at Bethany College, decided that Christian colleges were unscriptural just as surely as missionary societies were. He wrote: "Collegism among disciples led to preacherism, and preacherism led to organism and societyism, and these led to worldliness in the church," (West, II: 385). At that time, there were a plethora of colleges popping up all over the place: Nashville Bible School, Potter Bible School, the Southwestern Bible and Literary College in Paragould, AR, Southwestern Christian College in Denton, TX, Gunter Bible College in Gunter, TX, Lockney Christian College in TX and A. B. Barrett established the Childers' Classical Institute in 1906 (now ACU).

But Daniel Sommer thought that this was all wrong and wrote extensively and debated that brethren did not have the right to establish schools in which the Bible was taught. Sommer taught that human institutions must be subservient to the church, not masters over the church and through their influence, they would become masters over the church. Remember, at this time, J. H. Garrison and the *Christian Evangelist* is calling for centralization of the churches.

The College of the Bible would be lost to the digressives. Bethany College was lost to the digressives. But Tolbert Fanning, who had been instrumental in several colleges and schools that were intended to educate both boys and girls, argued that the college was not taking the place of the church. It was not the role of the church to educate. The school was a worldly institution, not a religious institution but one in which the Bible was taught, indeed by Christians, along with every other subject. David Lipscomb would also be called out, in the

pages of the *Gospel Advocate*, to distinguish between the missionary society, which he was adamantly against, and Christian colleges, which he had helped establish.

“The business of sending out and overseeing missionaries,” Lipscomb taught, “was a work which God committed to the church,” the local congregation. No human organization can do that work without stealing authority from the church. But the work of teaching the Bible is the work of every Christian and the school was simply a means of educating children.

Daniel Sommer would spend decades arguing against the authority for schools, in which the Bible was taught, to exist. In the *Octographic Review*, Sommers laid out his opposition and, thereby, shows how he misunderstood (misrepresented?) the existence of Christian colleges: “But this journal is set in opposition to the New Testament Church establishing schools, or colleges, or universities, from either wholly or partly secular, as institutions separate from the church, and with money which should be placed in the treasury of the church” (West, II: 395). The whole problem with Sommer’s argument here is that it was not *the Church* that was establishing the schools; it was individual Christians.

Next week: “As the Century Turns”

I anticipate having four more lessons in this series, finishing by the end of February.