

The Search for Truth:
A History of the Restoration Movement
November 12, 2017
The “Cognitive Environment”

INTRODUCTION:

According to the *Stone-Campbell Encyclopedia*, the Restoration Movement is an effort that seeks to correct faults or deficiencies by appealing to the primitive church as normative model (“Restoration, Historical Models”). I prefer to see the “Restoration Movement” as repentance on a large scale. That makes the movement much more biblical and it recalls biblical restoration movements, such as those led by Kings Josiah and Hezekiah. If you or your people are not doing what God said to do, you will not receive the blessings God attached to those instructions. So, stop doing wrong, stop following your own will and start following the will of God. *That’s* repentance as the Bible defines it and that, on a large scale, is the Restoration Movement.

Now, why are we interested in what we are defining as the Restoration Movement?

1. This is our history. We will ultimately begin during the Reformation Movement but we are largely interested in those men who left Protestant churches in order to *restore* the Gospel as it was preached in biblical times. In that sense, we would modify the *Encyclopedia’s* definition that we are not appealing to a primitive church as our norm. Rather, we are appealing to the primitive *Gospel* as our norm. We are not holding up the church of Christ in Corinth, for example, as our norm. We are holding up the *message* that Paul preached to the church of Christ at Corinth as our norm. What *Paul* told them to do and how they were to correct their false practices and false doctrines - *that* is our “norm” for which we appeal.

2. The men with whom we will spend a large amount of time - Campbell, Stone, Scott - were not the *first* to appeal to the biblical pattern and call on men to return to that pattern. In fact, in our first lesson, we will see what currents in thought led to and created the “cognitive environment” in which the Restoration Movement incubated.

3. The last two hundred years have produced controversies that have led men and women to re-search the Scriptures to find what that *primitive Gospel* was - what it *allowed* and what it did *not allow*. That will be what we focus on in our study. We will not examine all the men and women, places and dates, that we *could* study - that would be a study that would take a year or two and you would largely find it tedious.

4. But, these controversies have served to define who we are today and how we look at the religious world around us. Let me re-phrase that, we are not defined by the controversies but the controversies have helped us search the Scriptures to see how modern Christianity is supposed to look and behave *if* it is respecting the authority of Jesus Christ.

5. Finally, our study will not only enlighten us as to who we are and the path we’ve taken in the last two centuries but it will also bring to our attention the emergence of two denominations that started left the churches of Christ and the controversies that instigated those departures have helped us to search the Scriptures to see what it is we are supposed to do and believe in Christianity.

EFFORTS OF RESTORATION WITHIN CATHOLICISM:

We will not take the time to delve into church history, that would surely take a considerable amount of time. But, I do want to show that we are not the only ones who have wanted to go back to the Scriptures. This is a mind-set that *many* have had throughout the last several millennia.

In two sermons, one this year and one last year, I have told the stories of John Wyclif (1328-1384) in England and John Hus (1373-1415) in Bohemia who, while Catholics, wanted to put the Scriptures into the hands of the common people. For that, they and others were persecuted, even killed, by the church authorities.

Those men were born during the period of history which we call the "Renaissance," or "re-birth." A sense of individualism was at the core of the renaissance. This philosophy expressed itself as "faith in the natural reasoning ability and creativity of humankind. Art, literature, music, and scholarship" thrived within the renaissance environment (*Discovering our Roots*, 13).

One of the most important men during that time, someone else about whom I have spoken lately, was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536). His greatest achievement was to collate the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament into one large version to make it accessible, the scholarship accessible, to more people and he encouraged the translating of that Greek Testament into the language of the common people. He, along with Wycliffe, Hus, Tyndale, and others believed that the morality of the priesthood and the people would be considerably improved if people could read the Bible for themselves. Please note at this point that their "restoration" view dealt largely with spirituality and ethical behavior; it did not deal with the plan of salvation, with the forms and structures of the church itself. That would have to wait for the Protestant Reformation.

Listen to Erasmus: "Let us all, therefore, with our whole heart covet this literature [the Scriptures, p.h.], let us embrace it, let us continually occupy ourselves with it, let us fondly kiss it, at length let us die in its embrace, let us be transformed in it, since indeed studies are transmuted into morals" (*Discovering our Roots*, 16).

What these men were wanting was sincere and pious *Catholics*.

RESTORATION IDEALS LEAD TO REFORMATION:

The Protestant Reformation movement is dated from the time that Martin Luther nailed his 95-theses to the door of the university house in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517, which puts it right at 500 years since the birth of Protestantism.

However, Protestantism can trace three strands of growth throughout Europe - centered in Germany with Luther, Switzerland with Huldreich Zwingli, and England. The guiding force in these movements was a return to Scripture. Catholic scholars were rejecting church tradition that they saw had taken precedence over the Bible.

Let's mention Zwingli (1484-1531), a Catholic priest in Switzerland. Having studied Greek and read the church fathers of the first 3-4 centuries, Zwingli realized that much of his Catholic faith had no foundation in Scripture. He saw that Scripture was much more clear and simple than what he had been led to believe. Zwingli believed the Scriptures were the pattern in all matters relating to the church.

As a Catholic priest, Zwingli stripped his ornate cathedral bare of statues, relics, pictures, altar equipment, organ, priestly vestments. The Catholic mass was reduced to a simple memorial meal. Zwingli believed that everything not based on Scriptural precedent should be abolished. One thing Zwingli did not abandon was his position on infant baptism.

One follower of Zwingli was Conrad Grebel. Grebel saw the inconsistency in Zwingli's position on Scripture and his position on infant baptism. So, Grebel led a group of radicals (in Zwingli's eyes) to being practicing adult baptism (although they viewed sprinkling as a

“baptism”). These radicals, because they taught that those baptized as infants must be re-baptized, were called by their enemies “Ana (re-) baptists.” The Anabaptists were not so concerned about restoring the *forms* or *structures* of NT Christianity but they were very concerned about restoring the morality, the holy living, the radical commitment to Christ of the first-century Christians. They saw no difference between the way Christians were living and the way the world lived.

In 1536, a Dutch Catholic priest named Menno Simons, embraced the Anabaptist faith and became their leader. Because the Anabaptists did believe in rebaptizing practically *everyone*, they ran afoul of both Catholics and Protestants. Eventually, “Menno” Simons’ followers came to be called “Mennon-ites.” In the 1690s, many Mennonite groups had become liberal and a Swiss Mennonite, named Jakob Ammann, led a division as he tried to lead people back to primitive Christianity and a more moral way of life and “Ammann’s” followers came to be called “Amish” Mennonites. There’s a little bit of interesting history for you.

There were other theologians of this “reformed” persuasion: Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Zwingli’s successor in Zurich and Martin Bucer in Strassbourg.

Then John Calvin (1509-1564) comes along in Geneva and he is as influential as, if not more than, Martin Luther. Calvin wrote a book called *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* in which he sets out his systematic theology that has been very influential in mainline Protestant churches even today. That theology has been summarized in the so-called Calvinistic Tulip:

- T - Total Hereditary Depravity
- U - Unconditional election
- L - Limited atonement
- I - Irresistible Grace
- P - Perseverance of the Saints

Please keep these points in mind when we talk about the Restoration Movement in America because once these ideas get embedded into people’s thinking, it becomes very hard to get them out and you have to *restore* biblical teaching when it comes to the nature of God, the nature of man, and the plan of salvation.

I have also spoken considerably about Martin Luther, the Catholic priest who set off the Protestant firestorm in 1517 when he challenged his own church to debate some of their own practices. Now, Luther did not *intend* to break off from the Catholic Church. He thought there was great danger in looking to external forms and patterns. Luther believed the true church was hidden - the true church could not be set apart and discernible based on a pattern. He believed that wherever people worshipped in true faith, there was the true church.

EFFORTS OF RESTORATION WITHIN PROTESTANTISM:

As you might expect, just as surely as immorality and other vices eventually took control of Catholic priests, so immorality and a lack of piety eventually took over the control of Protestant preachers. Eventually, this led to efforts within Protestantism itself to go back further to the Scriptures to imitate the pattern found there for either Christian life or the church itself or both.

The Church of England broke off from the Catholic Church under King Henry VIII. But within the Church of England, there were efforts to get that church to go back to the NT standard. One group influential in that regard is the Puritans. Do they sound familiar? The Puritans believed that Scripture provided a complete pattern of faith and order that could and must be duplicated. Thomas Cartwright was a spokesman for the Puritans. Cartwright said that

Christians should duplicate the church discipline and organization that was found in the Scriptures and to emphasize the need to follow a pattern, he pointed to Noah's ark, the ark of the covenant, and the temple. For Cartwright, if there was no authority in Scripture for something, you could not do it.

The view of the Puritans led them into conflict with Queen Elizabeth and the Church of England. This conflict led them to flee England and seek refuge in America where they believed they could restore the true church and live and worship in peace.

John Cotton (1584-1652) was a Puritan preacher in America and wrote a pamphlet in 1642 titled: *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England*. He sought to follow the biblical pattern in life and worship. The Puritans believed that God's instructions in the Bible were full and complete. Interestingly, Cotton thought that instruments of music in worship was without NT authority.

The same mentality that motivated the Puritans also motivated men in Scotland, men like John Glas, Robert Sandeman, and James Haldane.

John Glas was a minister in the Church of Scotland. For Glas, Scripture alone was authoritative, especially the NT. He taught congregational autonomy under elders and served by deacons. He believed in separation of church and state and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Churches under his influence had weekly offerings also, agape feasts, and worship consisted of reading Scripture, a sermon, prayer, and a capella singing of psalms only.

Glas's daughter, Katherine, married a man named Robert Sandeman in 1737. Sandeman rejected Calvinism, that faith was a gift, and believed faith was central to the Christian walk from the very beginning of salvation. Sandeman's followers called themselves "church of Christ." They believed in the autonomy of the local church and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, with worship also involving Scripture reading, a capella singing of psalms, and an "exhortation." They also practiced foot washing, the holy kiss and refused to have a creed or religious titles. Their churches had a plurality of elders.

Also, from Scotland, we ought to mention Robert and James Haldane. They were in the Church of Scotland until they decided they needed to go their own way. First, they believed in a congregational form of government. They saw the NT was their authority in faith and worship. They had elders and deacons and celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly as a memorial. At first, they baptized babies but eventually studied themselves out of that. We will see a direct connection between Alexander Campbell as well as Walter Scott and the Haldanes.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE "COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENT:"

Not all the influences that contributed to a new, fresh return to the NT pattern were religious influences. Notably, the British philosopher John Locke, who was influential in the intellectual founding of the USA was also influential in religious matters. In one essay, *Essays on Toleration*, Locke suggested that Christianity could be reduced to a set of essentials on which all reasonable persons could agree. And, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke believed Christianity could be reduced to two essentials: the Messiahship of Jesus and obedience to His clear commands. Locke was very influential in Alexander Campbell's thinking.

CONCLUSION:

"Martin Luther, the first 500 years: Our own Restoration Movement was rendered possible because of what he started; it was rendered necessary because of what he did not finish." - Stan Mitchell