

The Search for Truth:
A History of the Restoration Movement
“Higher Education in the Pursuit of Truth”
December 24, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

In our history of the pursuit of truth that culminates in what has come to be called the “Restoration Movement,” we are almost 100 years from the point we started this study six weeks ago. We started with James O’Kelly in the Methodist church, in the early 1790s. We have also alluded to John Glas in Scotland who dates from the mid-1720s. Now, we are in the mid-1860s and last week we spent much time talking about the American Christian Missionary Society and how it was discussed and debated in pulpits and magazines for a couple of decades. But happens during that period of time is that churches start lining up on each side of the “missionary society” aisle. Some are against it and some are for it. But, I’m taking leave of discussing that issue for the time being and backing up to discuss a few other matters. The emphasis on establishing institutions of higher learning within the restoration effort as well as the impact of the Civil War on the thinking of the brotherhood and their pursuit of truth.

HIGHER LEARNING:

God’s followers have always been motivated to educate their children, whether we are talking about Jews or Christians. If man needs to know God’s word, then man needs to be able to read, at a minimum. Yet, mankind has also been motivated to study nature, to learn more about God. The concept of the university itself was created by the Catholic Church for that very purpose. The restorers were no exception to this general rule.

We have already mentioned in 1818 Alexander Campbell tried starting the “Buffalo Seminary” in PA. It did not last long but he also started Bethany College which still exists today. I have also mentioned Bacon College that was started in 1836 in Georgetown, KY with Walter Scott as its first president, although he doesn’t seem to have served for any length of time. Bacon College would be the first well-established college, although it exists today in a form quite foreign to its founders - the Lexington Theological Seminary. And, North Western Christian University, now known as Butler University, in Indianapolis, IN.

Philip Slater Fall, better known as P. S. Fall, was born in England in 1798. His parents were Episcopalian. Fall emigrated to the US in 1817 and was immersed into the Baptist Church. He became a preacher for a Baptist Church in Frankfort, KY. Influenced by Campbell’s debate with John Walker as well as Campbell’s “Sermon the Law” of Moses, Fall began leading his Baptist Church down the path of restoration principles. He moved to a Baptist Church in Nashville which he led to the restoration movement and he taught in the Nashville Female Academy. Eventually he ended up back in Louisville, KY where he preached for 30 years. In Louisville, Fall established the Female Eclectic Institute. He conducted that school for 26 years.

Tolbert Fanning was born in TN and grew up in Lauderdale County, AL. He was converted to NT Christianity and was baptized by James Matthews, an associate of Barton W. Stone. He studied at the University of Nashville and preached in and around Nashville for most of his life. He was a preaching companion of Alexander Campbell. In 1845, he established Franklin College whose most illustrious graduate will be David Lipscomb. Fanning was an innovative farmer as well. He began a magazine, *The Christian Review* in 1844 and eventually turned it over to Jesse Ferguson, whom we’ll talk more about in just a moment.

But, in 1855, he will establish *The Gospel Advocate* which is now the longest existing journal in the churches of Christ. One reason why Fanning established the GA was to debate the nature of the American Christian Missionary Society. Fanning was personally opposed to it

but he wanted to debate its nature in the pages of the *Advocate*. Yet, when the Convention in 1861 and 1863 passed resolutions encouraging support for the Union against the Confederates and calling southerners “armed traitors,” Fanning said no Christian should support the society until it repented of calling for shedding the blood of fellow Christians. That illustrates the pacifist nature of Fanning and, later, Lipscomb, which we’ll talk more about in just a moment.

Theological seminaries were taboo in the restoration movement, partly because they were all under the auspices of some denominational board with their allegiance to their respective creeds and partly because reformers saw theological seminaries as breeding preachers with a “clergy” mentality, which they strongly rejected. But, the reformers were very much in agreement with the idea of giving young people a general education and including the Bible as a part of that education.

There were many other institutions that were started by Christians in pursuit of truth which did not leave strong, lasting repercussions. The Western Reserve Institute began in 1850 in OH. In MO, there was the Christian University and the Female Academy. Along with Franklin College in TN, there was Minerva College, Burritt College, and Hope Institute. In KY, Poplar Hill Academy and Indiana Fairview Academy.

Second to Bethany College in influence was the College of the Bible in Lexington, KY started in 1865. I will speak in just a moment about James W. (or J. W.) McGarvey since he is as closely tied to the College of the Bible as Alexander Campbell was to Bethany College. But, let me review some history. Bacon College moved from Georgetown, KY for financial reasons to Harrodsburg, KY and its name was changed to Kentucky University. Transylvania University in Lexington, the oldest higher institution west of the Alleghenies, was also having financial trouble. When the Morrill Land Act was passed in 1862, financing the establishment of state universities, the state of KY contracted with the reformers to unite Kentucky University with Transylvania University and, at that point, a College of the Bible was thrown in as well as an agricultural and mechanical university.

Robert Milligan was first named president of the College of the Bible. Milligan was born in Ireland in 1814. His father was an elder in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. His family emigrated when he was one year old and Milligan would go on to become a school teacher with his first school in Bourbon County, KY the home community of Barton W. Stone. In fact, Milligan was immersed at the Cane Ridge meeting place (or a creek nearby).

So, Milligan was named the first president of the College of the Bible in 1865. Now let me tell you about JW McGarvey. McGarvey was born in Hopkinsville, KY in 1829. His father was Irish. His dad died and his mom remarried and the family moved to IL in 1839 because IL was an anti-slavery state. At some point, McGarvey’s step-father had converted to the restoration plea and became a supporter of Bethany College so that’s where McGarvey got his education. Three years later, McGarvey graduated and moved to MO to preach and continued his studies of the Scriptures. There in MO, he opened a school for boys.

In 1862, McGarvey moved to Lexington, KY to preach and it was there, three years later that Robert Milligan invited McGarvey to teach Bible at the College of the Bible. McGarvey would be associated with the College of the Bible until he died in 1911. It was especially when Alexander Campbell died in 1866 that the “scepter” of academic leadership (West, I:305) passed in the brotherhood to the College of the Bible and JW McGarvey.

We will talk more later about conflicts that happen at the College of the Bible. McGarvey was a strong supporter of missionary societies but an ardent critic of instrumental

music in worship. But, it was in the field of higher criticism that McGarvey will make himself most well known in defending traditional views of the Scriptures, mainly through the pages of *The Christian Standard*.

In 1877, the College of the Bible would be separated from the state-supported schools. At that same time, the agricultural and mechanical school would be spun-off and become the University of Kentucky. What had been the liberal arts school of Bacon College, then Kentucky University, would also become a separate institution and retake the name of Transylvania University. The College of the Bible used facilities on the campus of Kentucky University; in fact, you can go to the chapel at Transylvania University today where JW McGarvey used to teach.

Let us take our leave of institutions of higher learning for the time being...

SOME OTHER PROBLEMS IN THE EFFORTS TO RESTORE THE CHURCH:

J. B. Ferguson - Jesse Babcock Ferguson, makes his name in restoration history as being the first “heretic” in the movement at restoration. He became a member of the restoration effort early in his life and very quickly made a name for himself as an eloquent preacher. Ferguson was born in Philadelphia in 1819. Earl West writes of Ferguson: “He was both eloquent and brilliant, and he knew it. Flattery fell abundantly upon his head, and he grew vain and proud, losing at the same time, his spirituality” (I: 261).

Ferguson was preaching in Nashville and making a name for himself when Tolbert Fanning turned over editing his paper, *The Christian Review*, in 1847. Ferguson accepted and changed the name to *Christian Magazine*. In 1852, Ferguson preached a sermon, at his congregation in Nashville, on 1 Peter 3:18-20. Ferguson suggested that Jesus preached to spirits in the invisible world. That position led Ferguson to believe in spiritualism, that one could communicate with the dead, to the idea that there was a chance at repentance after one died, and that eventually, everyone would be saved. He soon let it be known that he did not believe in punishment after death. Heaven and hell were states and not places.

Ferguson had a tremendous impact on churches in the Nashville area. Bitter division was created. Eventually, Ferguson would leave the church and join a denominational group. Trying to make amends for the damage done to the Nashville churches by Ferguson, is another motivation for Tolbert Fanning to start the *Gospel Advocate* which he did, again, in 1855 with William Lipscomb. Ferguson would die in 1870, making plans for some type of utopian community in the TN countryside.

The church was also dealing with other issues that prompted studies in the Scriptures. Was it biblical to have full-time, salaried ministers? Early on, few churches could support a full-time preacher. Many of the early preachers worked secular jobs and preached on the weekends. Or, elders did the preaching in the absence of preachers. Some would criticize full-time preachers as being too much like denominations and their “pastor” system. Eventually, Isaac Errett would be the first to call himself, or allow himself to be called “reverend.” Tolbert Fanning did not support the idea of a full-time preacher. There are some churches of Christ today who do not have full-time preachers and they are usually called “mutual edification” congregations.

According to the most recent *Directory of the Churches of Christ* (2015), ME congregations number only 99 and are concentrated in MO (29). There is only one, a black congregation, in Michigan, in Muskegon.

Next week, we'll talk about instrumental music in worship. Its introduction happened before the Civil War but it did not lead to a split in the church until after the Civil War. So, let's conclude our study today talking about the impact of the Civil War on the restoration movement.

THE CIVIL WAR:

I mentioned before that the church of Christ did not split over slavery as some denominations did. Alexander Campbell, as well as other magazine editors pointed out that slavery existed in the Scriptures without a word of rebuke. Through that, Christians did not split, at least officially in the church, over slavery.

Yet, many Christians were emancipationists, wanting slaves to be freed. Many wanted slave owners to turn their slaves free but slave owners should be compensated for their financial loss. James Shannon was a vocal supporter of slavery. Shannon was an educator, having served as president of four institutions, in LA, Bacon College, the University of MO at Columbia, and Culver-Stockton College, also in MO.

There were also abolitionists among the churches of Christ and Ovid Butler was a well known one at that time. He's the one who started the Northwestern Christian University which is today Butler University.

The most popular view, I think understandably so considering the nature of the Civil War, was pacifism. Barton W. Stone, Benjamin Franklin, J. W. McGarvey, and another popular writer and preacher and journal editor of the day, Moses Lard, were all pacifists. Yet, there were also combatants on both sides of the aisle. Some sons of the famous preachers we have mentioned took up arms either for the Union or the Confederacy.

The most famous soldier in the Civil War from the churches of Christ would be James Garfield. Garfield was from the Western Reserve of Ohio and was heavily influenced by the gospel preachers in that area, being baptized at the age of 18. He attended and was later principal of the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute in Hiram, OH and resigned to become colonel in an Ohio infantry. He rose to the rank of major-general, was elected to the House of Representatives and eventually would become President of the United States when he was assassinated in 1881 by Charles Guitou, after only four months in office.

Garfield would be a silent but strong voice behind the "progressives" within the movement, referred to as "digressives" by the conservative brethren. He helped start *The Christian Standard* magazine in 1866, with the help of Isaac Errett, its editor, whom I have mentioned as the first preacher in the movement to allow himself to be called "reverend." *The Christian Standard* would promote the missionary society and instrumental music in worship.

The American Christian Missionary Society contributed to the division between the churches in the north and the south over the Civil War by passing resolutions at their convention that favored the north. In 1861, they said, "We...ask our brethren everywhere to do all in their power to sustain the proper constitutional authorities of the Union" (North, 233).

At the next year's convention, J. W. McGarvey castigated the attendees for supporting and participating in war. State societies across the north started passing pro-Union resolutions and churches in KY, a border state, as well as Christians across the south became disgusted with the missionary society.

One sad account relates to a preacher named B. F. Hall. He was from Nicholas County, KY and did pretty much everything relative to making a living while he preached: dentist,

lawyer, teacher, farmer, real estate broker. He baptized Tolbert Fanning but he was a fanatical supporter of the Confederacy, serving for nine months under Barton W. Stone, Jr. A conversation is related between Hall and some other preachers with whom he came into contact during the war. It is reported that Hall said not one word about the church or the gospel or anything else that you would expect a preacher to talk about. He spoke, however, about his rifle and how many yankees he hoped to kill. He said that he had no brethren in the north; they were all rebels. I think of people like that when I hear Christians today get so excited about politics that they are willing to break fellowship with other Christians because of the political party they align themselves with.

You can not ever give an “official” position of the churches of Christ since there is no hierarchy and no official “mouthpiece” for the movement. Yet, if there was an “official” position on the war, it would have been pacifism. *The Gospel Advocate* and Tolbert Fanning and William and David Lipscomb were staunch pacifists. *American Christian Review* and Benjamin Franklin and J. W. McGarvey were also strong pacifists. Both these magazines urged their subscribers to stay out of the war and not to kill their fellow Christians. This position would be prominent in the church until World War I softened the position and by World War II, it would be a decidedly minority opinion.

At this particular point in our history, now, we see that the missionary society was causing a division in the church. Not slavery itself but the missionary society encouraging Christians to support the Union against the south also contributed to that division. Next week, we'll consider the introduction of mechanical instruments of music in worship which happened *before* the war but the effort at introduction picked up steam after the war and eventually, by the end of the century, within thirty years of the Civil War, there be a definite division between the churches of Christ, strong in the south, and the Christian Church, strong in the north.