

The Search for Truth:
A History of the Restoration Movement
“A Denomination Forms Out of the Restoration Movement”
January 7, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

As we near the close of the 19th century, we see the movement for unity based on Scripture beginning to fracture. It will be officially recognized by the US Government in its census in 1906. But, long before then, congregations were lining up on each side of the two major issues of that time: the missionary society and the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship.

According to the historian in churches of Christ, Earle West, in 1847, the church had between 150,000 and 200,000. At the close of the Civil War, the numbers were estimated at a half million. In 1847, the restoration effort was just beginning to penetrate states like Iowa in the west and MI in the north. But following the Civil War, the restoration plea was reaching into KS, NE, CA, WS, MN, Jamaica, Australia, Wales, and NZ. In about a year, I will teach a class on mission work, missions in the local church, and I'll give just a brief history of some of the major missionary works done in the churches of Christ over the past 200 years. “Those who do not study the past are doomed to repeat it,” right? So, we'll take a class or two at that time to study the history of mission work in the churches of Christ. But, the restoration plea was spreading around the globe.

In 1847, the number of preachers within the movement numbered in the hundreds but after the establishment of schools like Bethany College, the College of the Bible, Franklin College, and North Western Christian University, by 1867, the preachers numbered in the thousands. And, in 1867, there were 25 regular magazines, monthly, weekly, or quarterly being published by Christians to spread the Truth of the Gospel message. In fact, post Civil War, the number of Christian colleges were ten with another 40 or 50 Christian high schools.

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY (1866-1870):

The missionary society, as we have seen, was first proposed and started back in 1849. It got off to a very rocky start, especially financially, and it was beginning to divide churches and set Christians against each other. In 1867, the society had missionaries only in NE, VA and Troy, NY. As if to illustrate that the society had not learned its lesson (that is, to stay out of politics and don't make prescriptions for the Lord's churches), at the close of the Civil War, the society passed another resolution: “That we have great reason for thanksgiving to the Ruler of Nations, not only in return of peace to our suffering country, but also in the emancipation of the slave and the triumphant vindication of our free and beneficial government.” That attitude was like pouring salt in the wounds of the Christians in the South.

One of the biggest hindrances to the success of the society, as I have mentioned, is that Benjamin Franklin and the *American Christian Review* turned against the society. In 1857, Franklin had been a secretary. Franklin had a large heart and he wanted the brotherhood to be united. But by December 1866, Franklin had changed his convictions relative to the society and came out full steam against it.

W. K. Pendleton, who had worked for years with Alexander Campbell in Bethany College, serving as president himself, argued that *expediency* is what allowed the society to exist: “there is not special express precept in the Scriptures commanding it. ...There is none; but what do you make of it? Is everything which is not scriptural therefore wrong? ...by what canon of interpretation does he make mere *silence* prohibitory?” (West, II:50-51). That view was argued strenuously by Isaac Errett of *The Christian Standard* and by J. H. Garrison and B. W.

Johnson in *The Christian Evangelist*. Incidentally, this is the *same* B. W. Johnson who wrote the one-volume commentary on the NT called *Johnson's Notes*, if anyone has that volume.

Pendleton would continue, and argue that if we have to have divine authority for everything in religion, this would mean that we could not have church buildings, blackboards, lights in the building, etc. On pages 55-56, West presents Pendleton's thinking:

1. He thought much of the church in its universal sense, the "brotherhood."
2. The church, in its universal sense, has the commission to evangelize the world.
3. But God did not give to the universal church any specific *plan* to evangelize the world.
4. Therefore, whatever plan man designs would be acceptable.

It will not be long, however, and we have already seen some hint of this developing through these anti-war and pro-Union resolutions, that the society, representing the church "universal" as it did, will soon start dictating to the churches and making laws for the churches of Christ, which will one day form its own denomination out of a movement intended to *leave* denominational laws and structures.

Men like Ben Franklin and Tolbert Fanning and David Lipscomb who stood opposed to the missionary society did not look at the *universal* church but rather, at the local church. From the time of the apostles, these men and others argued, within a generation, the Gospel had gone throughout the whole world, without a missionary society. To argue for the need of a society is to indict the religious zeal and fervor of the present generation, not the plan of Christ to evangelize the world. To go back to Pendleton's argument, these men would say that #3 is the local congregation. The body of people which is *God's* plan to evangelize the world is *God's* people embodied in the local congregations!

So, these men argued (West, II:57-):

1. The society was a substitute for the church and it had no authority for its existence.
2. When the society prospered, it motivated local churches to become inactive.
3. As it was designed, the society would exist and function without the control of Christ's churches. West writes (63): "A society without some power or control would have been a helpless thing. If it could not, for a time, control the churches which were the *source* of its income, there were yet other controls it could have essential to its existence. It had to have the control of the *use* of its funds. It also had to have control over its missionaries. It is idle to say that a Society could exist without controlling *where* its funds would be spent, and *who* would be its employees, its missionaries. The only one control the society lacked, and it did not lack this completely, was the power to control the source of its income. As time went on, these churches *where* the Society had spent its money, in turn, became the *source* for other revenue." Yes, the society would grow to dictate to those churches who were supporting it until it eventually grew to become the overseeing board of directors of the Disciples of Christ denomination.
4. The missionary society was causing division in the brotherhood.
5. There was also the argument that the society was a poor investment. If I provide a service and you pay me what you think my service is worth, then you and I can have an effective financial arrangement pleasing to both of us. But, the moment you grab someone to make decisions for our transactions or I grab someone to make decisions for our transactions, then *that* person has to be paid as well and our mutually-beneficial financial arrangement has now lost at least some of its financial effectiveness.

Some men would argue: “Where is your authority for church buildings?” “Where is your authority for Christian papers?” Each of those issues are separate issues but easily answered. Relative to the church building, Jeremiah Smith wrote in the GA (Dec, 1866): “Is building a meeting house any part of the Lord’s kingdom or of its institutions? Certainly it is not; for there is not a word said about it in the New Testament. ... Is the ‘sounding out of the word of the Lord,’ the conversion of sinners, the planting and building of Christian congregations, any part of the Lord’s kingdom, or of its institutions? Certainly they are...” (West, II:64).

I would clarify Smith’s argument in this one regard. No, Christ did not command the building of a church building. But He does require Christians to assemble and that assembly implicitly requires a place to assemble. We are required to assemble; we are free to decide where. That is the difference in prohibitive silence and permissive silence. When it comes to evangelism, Christ has explicitly given that obligation to churches that are overseen by elders and the missionary society hierarchy almost completely abrogates the authority of the eldership.

Relative to the Gospel papers, the same argument can be clearly seen. David Lipscomb answered that argument, again in the pages of the GA: “So far as the publishing of a paper is concerned, it is nothing more than teaching, exhorting, reproof by the written word, instead of the spoken. ...It has no organization about it, but is the work of an individual in the church, and responsible to the church” (Mar. 1867; West, II:65).

But, as I have said, one could worship at a congregation which supported the missionary society and it not affect his worship. *Yet*, the instrument of music in worship was not such an issue. It *did* affect people’s worship...

THE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC ISSUE:

The controversy got started in 1859 but really took off after the Civil War. The economy started growing and churches started getting wealthier and many Christians thought that the instrument was a sign of being relevant to their new society and culture. The instrument was a sign of culture.

In 1869, a new paper was started by a bevy of well-known writers and preachers in the brotherhood. These men behind the *Apostolic Times* were Moses Lard, JW McGarvey, L. B. Wilkes, W. H. Hopson, and Robert Graham. I’ve already introduced you to McGarvey. Let me say a word about Moses Lard.

Lard was born in TN in 1818 and would die in Lexington, KY in 1880. He was baptized in 1841 and entered Bethany College. He will preach in MO, KY, and Canada before settling in Lexington. He started a periodical called *Lard’s Quarterly* which ran from 1863 to 1868 and then started writing for the *Apostolic Times*. In 1875, he will publish a commentary on Romans, which I have in my library. In an article from 1863, Lard will declare that the reformation (S-C E, 451): “must (1) rest in the expressed will of Christ, (2) be both doctrinal and practical, and (3) constitute a complete return to primitive Christianity in doctrine, practice, and spirit.”

The *Apostolic Times* was a unique puppy among journals of that age in the sense that it was *against* the instrument in worship but *for* the missionary society. Isaac Errett and *The Christian Standard* saw the two as expedients, one in *worship* of the church, one in the *work* of the church and so accepted both. Franklin and Lipscomb rejected both as being outside of the authority of the Scriptures.

In 1867, a church in St. Louis purchased a building and then bought a \$3,000 organ. At first, the organ was not used in worship, but then a vote was taken in 1869. The vast majority

voted for the organ but for the sake of unity, the decision was put off. But, after a few years, the organ was brought into worship and those who were conscientiously opposed to it had to leave and worship elsewhere. That story could be multiplied over the next few decades.

The twin issues, of course, led to another question: "Can you have *fellowship* with those who support and make use of the missionary society and the instrument of music in worship?" During those early decades, that question was not discussed very much. Although, Benjamin Franklin did write in 1868 that he preferred brethren not invite him to hold a gospel meeting for them if they were going to insist on using the instrument during the meeting.

THE LOUISVILLE PLAN:

With all the controversy surrounding the society and the decidedly lack of support, primarily financial support, promoters of the society had to do something to salvage their baby. Robert Milligan, who at that time was president of the College of the Bible where McGarvey, of course, taught, proposed that the society be restructured in district, county, state and a national organization.

Milligan was another Irishman who emigrated to the US in 1818. In 1835, Milligan became a member of the Seceder Presbyterian Church. But, in 1837, he moved to Bourbon County, KY - you might remember this is the home of Barton W. Stone's Cane Ridge meeting house - and he established a school. Barton Stone was actually living in IL at that time but through his own search of the Scriptures as well as his students asking questions about the Greek text of the NT, Milligan was baptized by an elder of the church at Cane Ridge.

He enrolled in Washington College in PA, near Bethany College and received his bachelor's degree and then started teaching English, Greek, and Latin there. He earned his MA and then started teaching chemistry and biology. He spent a few years teaching at Indiana University before Campbell recalled him to Bethany College to teach Math. He was chosen as an elder of the church in Bethany and also helped edit the *Millennial Harbinger*.

But, in 1859, he accepted the position of president of Kentucky University and then head of the College of the Bible when the school moved to Lexington. He wrote a history of the plan of salvation, *Scheme of Redemption*, in 1868, which I have in my library and a commentary on Hebrews in 1875, which is now part of the GA commentary series. One of Milligan's students, Joseph Hopwood, would one day, in 1875, assume presidency of a college in Johnson City, TN and under his influence the school, still existing today, will be renamed Milligan College. It is the only liberal arts institute associated with the (independent) Christian Church.

It was while Milligan was president of College of the Bible that he recommended those changes to the society, primarily to get Benjamin Franklin back on board in support of the society. So a meeting was held in Louisville, KY in October of 1869 to reorganize the society, to "rebrand" it to make it more palatable to brethren. There were upwards of 600 Christians at that meeting.

The so-called "Louisville Plan" divided the church into national, state, and district organizations. The national organization had a general board and a corresponding secretary. A general convention, which this one was, appointed nine men as corresponding secretaries to the states. The General Board consisted of the national corresponding secretary as well as these state corresponding secretaries and the presidents of the respective state missions boards.

The states societies would be patterned after the national society with a general board and a corresponding secretary and the districts would have the same, a general board and a corresponding secretary. It would be the duty of the district secretary to visit all the churches in that district, to maintain correspondence and, obviously, to raise money to this mammoth organization. You easily see how inefficient this is going to be if the desire is to send money to missionaries to share the gospel. Of the money the district secretary collects, one-half was to go to the state board. From what the state board receives, it is to send one-half to the General Board.

At first Benjamin Franklin was satisfied but then turned his convictions once again against the society and for six years the "Louisville Plan" was put into place and widely debated. At the second anniversary of the convention, out of the \$48,123.33 that the districts collected, only \$2,600 had been sent on to the General Board, which was barely enough to pay the secretary's salary! The bottom line was - in keeping with the conservatives' criticism of the society - Christians and churches wanted a say-so in where and how the money was spent and that was evident when it was spent closer to home. Would you rather pay more taxes to the state of Michigan or to the federal government?

By the year 1873, \$186,700.91 had been collected by the local districts but the General Board had received only \$7,396.31. In 1874, a drastic decision was made to scrap the Louisville plan and form the Foreign Christian Missionary Society as well as the Women's Missions Board, the brainchild of a preacher's wife from Iowa City, IA, Mrs. Caroline Neville Pearre. Isaac Errett was the first president of the new missionary society and this segment of the brotherhood was headed full-steam forward with their missionary society as well as their instruments of music in worship because if a congregation accepted one of these innovations, they nearly always accepted the other.

For all intents and purposes, by the year 1875, the brotherhood was divided into two camps. On one side were those who were aligned against the innovations, with a stronghold in the south and allied with Lipscomb and the *Gospel Advocate* and the *American Christian Review* in Indianapolis and generally calling themselves *churches of Christ*. On the other side were the Christian Churches allied with Isaac Errett of *The Christian Standard* and J. H. Garrison of *The Christian Evangelist*.

Next week: "Reality of Division as the Century Turns"