CAMPBELL AND CONTROVERSY

The Story Of Alexander Campbell's Great Debates With Skepticism, Catholicism, And Presbyterianism

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DEDICATED

to my wife,

GERALDINE C. HUMBLE

"Her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband trusteth in her."

INTRODUCTION

Controversy is as old as man. Noah stood as the foe of wickedness among the antediluvians, Abraham among one nomads of his day, and Moses faced and repelled the magicians of Pharaoh's court. Elijah put to flight the prophets of Baal by appeal to the Eternal God, and Jehovah confirmed the strength of a righteous life by vindicating Job's defense of his cause. John the Baptist was a controversialist and Stephen a disputer. Paul expounded, testified, persuaded, disputed, and urged young Timothy to reprove, rebuke, exhort, and fight. Jude admonished, "Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered."

The greatest debater of them all was the Son of God himself. His opposition to error, his exposure of religious bigotry and hypocrisy, and his refutation of human traditions by an appeal to the scriptures so enraged his opponents that they determined and executed his destruction.

The idea that Jesus of Nazareth was so retiring that he opposed nothing is a concept not found in the Bible. Many overlook the righteous indignation which stirred his heart and caused him to denounce the show and emptiness of his religious contemporaries with a fervor and sincerity found in no other character in Biblical or secular history.

True enough, our Lord was passive, meek and nonretaliatory when reproached and reviled by his personal enemies. Under these conditions he was a lamb led to the slaughter and dumb before his shearers. But the Lion of Judah displayed fierce and terrible anger when the law of his heavenly Father was abused and when hypocrisy made merchandise of holy things. He gave no quarter to his polemic enemies and asked none of them. He was master of every situation, supreme over sophistry and fatal to fallacies. He detected men's motives, for he knew their hearts. Dilemmas, ridicule and apparent absurdities offered by

his opponents received the same treatment — unmerciful exposure and scathing rebuke. "Hypocrites," "blind guides," "fools," "serpents," and "generation of vipers," (Matt. 23) are not the words which seek peace at the price of principle; yet they focus attention on a principle which alone can bring and retain peace. This principle deals with an attitude of uncompromising loyalty to God's word. In an earlier conflict with his nation, the Lord had set forth its essence when he said to the Jews who believed on him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32).

In his debates not once did Jesus lose his temper, take unfair advantage of or misrepresent his antagonists, or resort to trickery or deceit. He met them openly, fairly, squarely. He was not unkind nor was he vacillating. He knew the issue, kept it before his opponents and drove his points home. He did not ridicule but he did expose error. He hated evil whatever its form and condemned it whereever found.

The case of Stephen, the first martyr for Christ, is worthy of special attention. This debater's militant stand for the gospel and his disputation with the Jews were directly responsible for his death. He is introduced in Acts as one "of good report, full of the Spirit and wisdom," "full of faith," "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:3, 5, 7) and who "wrought great wonders and signs among the people." Certain of the Jews arose, "disputing with Stephen," but "they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10).

The angered Jews stirred up a mob to oppose him and brought him before the Jewish council. His defense (Acts 7) is a recital of sacred history emphasizing the Hebrews' rejection of God. This speech of Stephen so enraged the Jews that "they gnashed on him with their teeth," took the

law into their own hands, cast him out of the city and stoned him. As he died he prayed for his enemies saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

In this closing scene of the life of this first disciple to seal his faith with his blood, are to be seen various attitudes. These are: (1) the attitude of the audience toward the message, (2) the attitude of the audience toward the messenger, (3) the attitude of the preacher toward his message, and (4) the attitude of the preacher toward his audience.

The Jews rebelled at the truth spoken, and because they hated the message, they turned in anger upon him who delivered it. This is always the response of those who reject the truth in madness. They seek to destroy him who speaks it. This was the attitude of the ancient Jews. It was the attitude of the religious world when Alexander Campbell and his co-laborers were carrying the attack against the forces of religious ignorance, superstition and sectarianism in the nineteenth century. It is exactly the same attitude enemies of the gospel have toward those who preach it now, whether such adversaries be within or without the church. Their purpose is to destroy rather than embrace when their doctrines cannot be defended and their hearts are dishonest.

When Stephen saw the first stones flying toward him, it would have been an opportune time for him to apologize for what he had preached had he been an opportunist. Many otherwise good men would have shrunk back upon seeing such instruments of death. But Stephen did not apologize. He had preached the truth, confounded his critics, and pleased his Lord. The truth needed no apology then; it needs none now. His was an attitude of unqualified and uncompromising loyalty to the message delivered and to Him who had commanded its delivery.

Stephen was not angry when he preached or when he

died. He had preached with a view to saving the enemies of Christ. Now he dies praying for their salvation. As Jesus had prayed in his dying moments, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," so his servant imitated his Master's example and cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." With malice toward none and love toward all he came to the end of a brief but fruitful life as a great defender of the faith.

Not an inch of the territory taken from Satan by the early church was conquered without battle. None of the citadels of sin and doctrinal deception fell before the pioneers of the Restoration Movement without struggle and conflict. Debating was the order of the day and was soon found to be one of the most effective means of exposing error and implanting the truth. When truth and error are presented in bold contrast before an open and inquiring mind, there need be no fear as to the decision of the good and honest heart. Truth will reign triumphant and be embraced; error will fall prostrate and be condemned.

Those who now enjoy freedom from religious bondage owe a debt of gratitude to those who, because of their love for the truth of the gospel, fought their way out of the meshes of denominational dogma. Blessings are ours today because of the toil and sacrifices they made in yesteryears.

Bill J. Humble has given us an insight into some of the struggles which have made the plea for a return to the ancient order impregnably secure in the light of divine revelation. He has presented an insight into the militancy and zeal which brought the ideal of the oneness of God's people across the centuries. God forbid that those who have enjoyed its benefits should surrender its principles around the table of compromise or on the altar of neglect.

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PREFACE

Dr. Colin B. Goodykoontz, Professor of American history at the University of Colorado, is an outstanding teacher, the best under whom I have ever had the privilege of studying. When I approached Dr. Goodykoontz about the selection of a thesis subject, he ascertained my interests and then suggested that I make a study of Alexander Campbell's debates in relation to the Restoration Movement. I was surprised and delighted. Dr. Goodykoontz, well known among American historians, is also a careful student of church history and even Restoration history, and he directed my work though on vacation. Under his experienced guidance my study became far more than the fulfillment of degree requirements; it was a "labor of love." This study of Campbell's debates has been revised, enlarged, and partially rewritten for publication.

This volume does not purport to give an outline or even summary of all of Alexander Campbell's arguments in each debate, for such an undertaking would require a much larger book. Neither does it consider Campbell from the technical speech viewpoint, his speaking ability, platform mannerisms, and debating techniques. Rather it is a historical study designed to acquaint the reader with "the story of Alexander Campbell's debates with skepticism, Catholicism, and Presbyterianism." Why did each debate occur when and where it did? Who were Campbell's opponents? What actually happened in each case? What was the result of each debate? Did all of the debates have any lasting influence on the general course of Restoration history? These are some of the questions answered by this book.

The Campbell-Jennings debate is so relatively unimportant that it was not even considered in the original thesis, but a chapter is devoted to it in this volume. The reason for its being discussed so fully is the fact that, though less important, it is also less well known than Campbell's other

debates. Many readers who already know something of the Campbell-Owen or Campbell-Purcell debates will probably find themselves walking through an entirely new chapter in Campbell's life when they read of his discussion with Obadiah Jennings.

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Bill J. Humble

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The Restoration Movement: Born of Controversy

South of towering snow-capped Mt. Hermon in northern Palestine is situated the ancient city of Caesarea Philippi from whence flows a tiny stream. Small and seemingly unimportant, this stream finds its juncture with another, and yet a third, thus becoming that river so familiar to every student of the Bible, the Jordan. **Converging streams** — how adequately they suggest those converging currents of thought which, rising independently and with little apparent significance, swelled and united to form a mighty movement seeking **the restoration of primitive Christianity!** It was somewhere near the source of the Jordan that Christ declared to his disciples, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it." It was that declaration, plus many other statements of the New Testament, which led men eighteen centuries removed from the Master to recognize that he had established one church, all-sufficient for all centuries. As sincere men began to work toward the restoration of that church in the early 1800's, their tiny streams of thought began to merge into a great current flowing relentlessly toward Zion. This current is the Restoration Movement.

The significance of the term "Restoration Movement" is most clearly seen when it is contrasted with the great Re-

[1] The first few pages of this chapter have appeared as an article in the **Preceptor,** December, 1951.

formation of the sixteenth century. Such men as Martin Luther, John Calvin and others turned away from the Roman Catholic Church in disgust and attempted diligently to reform her excesses; but they progressed no further. It remained for others to realize that the world's needs would be satisfied only when the New Testament, rather than the existing religious structure, was recognized as the starting point and when the complete re-establishment of the New Testament church, rather than a remodeling of existing denominations, became the goal. This distinction was clearly seen by the early leaders of the restoration movement. For example, Alexander Campbell wrote:

> Since the great **apostasy**, foretold and depicted by the holy apostles, attained prime, or rather reached the awful climacteric, many reformations in religion have been attempted; some on a large and others on a more restricted scale. The page of history and the experience of the present generation concur in evincing that, **if any of those reformations began in the spirit, they have ended in the flesh . . .**
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> A restoration of the ancient order of things is all that is necessary to the happiness and usefulness of Christians. No attempt "to reform the doctrine, discipline and government of the church," (a phrase too long in use,) can promise a better result than those which have been attempted and languished to death. . . . This is what we contend for . . . to bring the societies of Christians up to the New Testament, is just to bring the disciples individually and collectively, to walk in the faith, and in the commandments of the Lord and Saviour, as presented in that blessed volume; and this is to restore the ancient order of things.[2]

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[2] **Christian Baptist,** February 7, 1825, 127f.

The ultimate goal of the Restoration Movement was once summarized by Thomas Campbell in the following proposition: "The restoration of primitive apostolic Christianity in letter, and spirit—in principle and practice."[3] Since this ideal boldly envisioned the re-establishment of a first century institution, the church, in a nineteenth century world, it was necessarily based upon certain fundamental concepts. These were: (1) **The verbal inspiration of the Bible.** The modernists of our day have little interest in restoring anything Biblical; for they feel that belief in a vicarious suffering, salvation from sin, or apostolic precedents is outmoded and should be replaced by faith in the universal brotherhood of man. The very idea of restoring the church presupposes a conviction that the Bible is divine in origin, trustworthy in its records. (2) **The New Testament presents an adequate God-given blueprint for the church.** This is a corollary to verbal inspiration, though not a necessary one; for men can and do believe in the inspiration of the Bible while rejecting the idea that the characteristics of the New Testament church must be respected today. But not so with the restorers. They believed that divine favor was bestowed only upon Christ's church, the one which he established and whose history furnishes the theme of the New Testament. Human substitutes called denominations could not satisfy men's need for this true church. (3) **The re-establishment of this first century church is possible and desirable.** Some might argue that changing social and intellectual standards make impossible the acceptance of a church unchanged in 1900 years, but in the providence and wisdom of God a gospel both universal and eternal has been provided. Modes of life may change, but the attitude of the human heart does not; hence a saving gospel and blood-washed church are just as essential now as when that kingdom was inaugurated on Pentecost. (4) **An unbroken chain back to the apostolic**

[3] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1836, 214.

age is both unnecessary and impossible. It is unnecessary because the seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). When planted, it can produce a harvest of New Testament Christians. When utilized as a guide in seeking Christ's church, it identifies all the essential characteristics of the true church and leaves the inquirer dissatisfied with anything else. An unbroken chain is impossible; for the historical records are inadequate to prove that the true church existed in every century. The middle ages were dark indeed, so dark that the light of New Testament Christianity did not pierce through that we might identify it.

The names of a number of men are significant in Restoration history as early and influential advocates of restoring Christ's church, but a search for the real founder of this movement must lead inevitably to one answer: God. It was he who provided the New Testament, without which a Restoration Movement would have been impossible. It was God who warned first century Christians of the fearful consequences of an apostasy, and who pointed to his word as a means for escaping apostasy or for overcoming its baneful influences, once the tragedy had occurred. After Paul had labored three years in Ephesus, he returned to the nearby town of Miletus, called the Ephesian elders, and delivered the touching address of Acts 20. Prominent in his statements are those warning of the dangers of apostasy: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." But not only does Paul warn, he also suggests the one power which can save them and the Ephesian flock: "And now I commend you to

God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified."

Very similar teachings are found in 1 Timothy 4 where Paul warns against the great falling away. "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in latter times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons..." How faithfully this passage portrays the Roman Catholic Church, the great apostasy which developed following the apostolic era. It was this "falling away" predicted by Paul which made restoration of the true church essential; yet in this same passage Paul points to that which was the basis of the Restoration Movement, the word of God, as the remedy for apostasy. After warning Timothy of the falling away, Paul admonished, "If thou put the brethren in mind of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine which thou hast followed until now." "Take heed to thyself, and to **thy teaching.** Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:6,16). Amid the threatening clouds of spiritual danger and decay, Timothy's only hope for himself and those within the scope of his influence was soundness in doctrine and teaching.

The New Testament, then, points clearly to the danger of the church's departing from its apostolic purity and to the remedy in such a case. Apostasy would come when the church should have fallen away from the faith; the only solution would lie in a complete return to that same faith. This is the teaching of God through an inspired ambassador, and without this teaching a Restoration Movement would have been impossible. Without a knowledge of the identifying characteristics of the true New Testament church, or lacking the divine means for restoring that church, men could never have launched the Restoration Movement.

Hence their names are of no real importance, save in a historical way, for God was the true founder of the Restoration Movement, As we now enjoy the fulness of divine favor as members of Christ's kingdom, we can only say, "Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion forever and ever."

CONVERGING STREAMS BRING CONTROVERSY

As the Jordan River is formed by a number of converging streams of water, so the Restoration Movement originated as a number of groups, independently seeking the old paths, converged in their search for a common goal. As observed above, the preeminence in this movement belongs to God and not to men. Therefore, the names of those men who gave life and talent to this movement are of no importance except from a historical standpoint. They are not to be honored as the founders of a new religious denomination, for they were not. They did not make possible the Restoration Movement. God did that and they simply employed God's revelation for the purpose the Lord intended. Their word is not to be venerated as that of a pope or prelate, for they condemned all such human authority and usurped preeminence. Nevertheless, they are to be respected for what they were: pious men seeking the way of the Lord.

That stream of thought which contributed more than any other to the Restoration Movement was the latest in point of origin and revolved around Thomas Campbell (1763-1854 and his son, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). It is of interest to note that even father and son began the work of restoration independently after each had broken with the Presbyterian Church without knowing that the other had taken a similar fateful step. Thomas Campbell, a well educated Presbyterian minister, came to America in 1807, found his synod in session, and was assigned to the Chartiers Pres-

bytery in western Pennsylvania. Within little more than a year, however, as a result of a controversy over the nature of faith and the binding authority of human confessions, Campbell renounced the authority of the Presbyterian Church. In 1809 Alexander and the remainder of the family joined the father in America, arriving just after the famous **Declaration And Address** came from the press. The younger Campbell immediately pledged his life to a defense of the principles announced in this document, for he too had broken with Presbyterianism as a result of contacts with the Haldane Movement during a year at the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

As the Campbells began to plead for a return to the ancient order, they little realized that there were similar groups in the United States who, even before the turn of the nineteenth century, had begun to plead for the Bible as the sole authority in the Christian religion and to condemn confessions of faith, ecclesiastical organizations and human names. Of these streams in Restoration history which preceded the Campbells the first came from the Methodist Church and centered in a prominent Virginia preacher, James O'Kelly. O'Kelly became dissatisfied with the dictatorial methods employed by Francis Asbury, the first bishop of American Methodism, and led a number of preachers in a secession from Methodism. In 1793 the ex-Methodists organized the Republican Methodist Church, but they soon recognized the want of authority for this name, adopted the name "Christian," and agreed that the Bible should be their only creed.

A similar division occurred among the Baptists in New England when, about 1801, Elias Smith and Abner Jones began organizing churches which wore the name "Christian," and which protested against the Calvinism and creeds of the Baptist denomination. On the American frontier, in Kentucky, it was the same story, though here it was the

Presbyterian Church which suffered. The importance of this movement in Kentucky is surpassed only by that of the Campbells in Restoration history. Its great leader was Barton W. Stone, whose work will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

It was inconceivable that these independent streams of thought could all honor the New Testament as the sole authority in their quest for ancient Zion, act consistently upon that principle, and remain permanently separated. Rather the various groups found their principles in ever closer accord, and by 1832 the major streams of Restoration history had merged into one, with Alexander Campbell its universally recognized champion.

This Restoration plea was a powerful appeal to all those dissatisfied in any way with contemporary religious conditions; and responding to its invitation, thousands rallied to the banner of the ancient order. Those denominations from which Campbell drew most heavily for these followers regarded the new religious movement with increasing alarm, and their leaders resolved that its pretentious claims should not remain unchallenged. These leaders representing a number of churches saw a twofold danger arising from the work of Alexander Campbell. They believed, first, that his distinctive doctrines did not represent apostolic truth, but were rank heresy and dangerous to the souls of true children of God. The second danger lay in Campbell's success in winning converts to his cause, a success which was threatening to undermine the foundation of those churches which had long been influential on the frontier. Consequently, Alexander Campbell and the Restoration Movement encountered bitter and determined opposition. For decades the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians had struggled for supremacy in the West and had no intention of yielding their hard earned positions to a young upstart in the sedate family of American religious institutions. Campbell's endeavors

began as an effort to unite American Christianity; and though he failed in this goal, he did succeed in uniting the principal western churches in at least one respect — their opposition to him. Some of the attacks on Campbell and the doctrines he preached were grossly unfair and misrepresented his position; but it must be stated, to the credit of the western clergy, that many of the anti-Campbell essayists, though highly critical of everything he stood for, wrote honestly and fairly of his beliefs.

The great religious debates in which Campbell met the Goliaths of atheism, Catholicism and Presbyterianism portray vividly this controversial background of the Restoration Movement. Wherever Campbell and his colleagues went in preaching the ancient gospel, they became controversialists, occasionally by choice, but more often by necessity. The choice was between defending their cherished convictions or surrendering them by default. These clashes with sectarianism sometimes occurred on the public platform as formal debates and were attended by hundreds or even thousands; often they were private encounters between those of opposite persuasion. Hundreds of articles in religious journals were dedicated to Campbell's defamation or defense, and entire books were devoted to the examination of "Campbellism."

A complete outline of the history of the Restoration Movement would be both impossible and undesirable in this specialized work; however a brief outline of the salient features of the Campbell movement, with particular emphasis on its controversial aspects, should prove the following proposition: **the entire Restoration Movement was born of controversy and had to defend itself to survive. Campbell's debates are, therefore, but a reflection of this fundamental spirit which characterized the Restoration Movement.**

A NEW IDEAL IN THE NEW WORLD

The early history of the Restoration Movement is the epic of father and son, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, the former the inaugurating genius of the movement, the latter its greatest leader and advocate. Thomas Campbell was bom in County Down, Ireland, February 1, 1763 of Scotch-Irish ancestry. Quite early in life the young man evidenced religious inclinations and desired to enter the ministry of the Secession Church; and, after winning the permission of his reluctant father, he entered the University of Glasgow. Here Thomas completed a three year course in the classics, after which he enrolled for the necessary ministerial training at the Anti-Burgher Theological Seminary, being subsequently licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Ireland.

While still in Ireland, Thomas Campbell assumed his role as an advocate of Christian unity and learned how party bitterness can stubbornly prevent unity. The Seceder Presbyterians of Ireland were then divided into four rival factions, Thomas Campbell being affiliated with the Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterians. He became convinced that such divisions were exceedingly harmful as they erected barriers among believers in Christ, producing hatred and bitterness. Acting upon his convictions, Campbell took an active lead in attempting to unite some of the rival Irish churches, and a conference toward this end convened at Belfast in 1804. The following year his proposal for unity came before the General Assembly of the Anti-Burghers which met in Glasgow, and though Campbell appeared personally and pleaded for unity, the proposal was rejected.

Thomas Campbell emigrated to the United States in 1807, was impressed by the new world, and bade his family join him in the land of opportunity; but they, embarking in the autumn of 1808, were promptly shipwrecked on the coast of Scotland and forced to postpone their departure another year. In some respects the year in Scotland was a blessing

in disguise; for it enabled Alexander Campbell to attend the University of Glasgow, where his year's study had a powerful influence in broadening the young man's general education and, more important, in bringing him in contact with contemporary reformatory thought in religion. This contact "was destined to work an entire revolution in his views and feeling in respect to the existing denominations, and to disengage his sympathies entirely from the Seceder denomination and every other form of Presbyterianism."[4]

Robert and James Alexander Haldane, wealthy members of the Church of Scotland, had been the originators of this reformatory movement. They became dissatisfied with the Church of Scotland and proposed to spend their fortune in efforts to awaken the church and its clergy; they built great tabernacles and hired outstanding evangelists to preach in revival meetings. Such a course made a separation from the Presbyterians inevitable; and when it came in 1799, the Haldanes organized their followers as a Congregational church in Edinburgh, adopting this form of church government because they regarded it as the only one authorized by the Scriptures. For the same reason they adopted the weekly observance of the communion, a practice which later became one of the peculiar characteristics of the Campbell movement. The Haldanes were convinced that the only true reformation was a return to the apostolic teaching, and their efforts were directed toward the realization of this supreme goal. Another leader in the Haldane movement was Greville Ewing, who superintended a seminary which the Haldanes had established, and it is through Ewing that Alexander Campbell came in contact with the movement. While attending the University of Glasgow, Campbell often heard the Sunday evening lectures which were delivered by

[4] Robert Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1897), I, 148.

Ewing and attended by thousands, spent many pleasant evenings in Ewing's home conversing upon religious topics of mutual interest, and counted Ewing as his closest friend in Glasgow.[5]

That his contact with Greville Ewing and the Haldanes was a powerful influence in molding his thought cannot be doubted, for Alexander Campbell renounced the Presbyterian Church while still a student at the University. When the semi-annual communion of the Seceder Presbyterians was observed, the young student had anticipated the event by reflecting seriously on his course; and finally, not being able conscientiously to recognize the Presbyterians as the true church of Christ, he refused to commune with them. In assuming this attitude, Alexander Campbell renounced the Presbyterian Church, never to return to its fold. After spending almost a year in Scotland, the Campbell family embarked for America a second time on August 4, 1809. As he left Scotland the meditations of Alexander Campbell spanned the broad Atlantic and dwelt upon the coming reunion with his father, but at the thought of that meeting mixed emotions welled up in the young man's heart. His esteemed father would be delighted to see Alexander again; he would rejoice at his son's decision to devote his life to the ministry. But how could he ever make his father understand why he had left the Presbyterian Church, the institution in which the father was a faithful minister?

Meanwhile in America, Thomas Campbell had experienced difficulties in maintaining his relationship with the Seceder Presbyterians. When he landed in the new world in May, 1807, the Seceder Synod of North America was then in

[5] Excellent accounts of the Haldane movement are found in: Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, I, 176-194;** Garrison, Religion Follows The Frontier, 80-84... and Alexander Haldane, **Memoirs Of The Lives Of Robert Haldane Of Airthrey, And Of His Brother, James Alexander Haldane** (New York, 1858).

session in Philadelphia; and upon presentation of his credentials, the elder Campbell was cordially received by the group and assigned at once to the Presbytery of Chartiers in western Pennsylvania. Within a short time Mr. Campbell's piety, ability and zeal in visiting the small Seceder churches in his circuit had established him as one of the most talented preachers in the area, but his friendly relations with the Presbyterians were not destined to continue. Campbell was distressed at the religious conditions in the outlying frontier communities where people rarely had the privilege of observing the Lord's Supper; and condemning the barriers which had been erected by creed and confession of faith, he invited believers of all parties to enjoy the privilege of communion. For this action he was charged and censured at the next meeting of the Presbytery, but unwilling to accept its decision, Campbell appealed to the Synod. In defending his practices, he appealed to the Bible as the only authority in religion:

> I dare not venture to trust my own understanding so far as to take upon me to teach anything as a matter of faith or duty but what is already expressly taught and enjoined by Divine authority; and I hope it is no presumption to believe that saying and doing the very same things that are said and done before our eyes on the sacred page, is infallibly right, as well as all-sufficient for the edification of the Church, whose duty and perfection it is to be in all things conformed to the original standard.[6]

The decision of the Synod was a mild censure which was accepted by the elder Campbell, but within his own presbytery the incidents had aroused such hatred and bitterness that on September 13, 1808, Thomas Campbell re-

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[6] Richardson, Op. cit. I, 226.

luctently renounced the authority of the Seceder Presbyterians. [7]

Campbell's withdrawal from the Presbyterians did not end his activities as a gospel minister. Religious meetings continued for a number of months during which Campbell continued to advocate his views of Christian union and condemn sectarianism as being destructive of the spirit of Christ. At one of these services it was suggested that a meeting be held to consider their future course. A meeting was held, and Thomas Campbell delivered an address in which he emphasized once again the numerous evils which had resulted from religious divisions and pointed to the Bible as the infallible, God-given, all-sufficient basis of co-operation and unity. At the conclusion of this powerful address, Mr. Campbell announced in simple, but majestic terms the rule which has since been accepted as the guiding principle of the Restoration Movement: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." [8]

This rule was accepted unanimously, but some organization was needed to carry out their purposes; as a result on August 17, 1809, "The Christian Association of Washington" was formed. This association was never intended to be a church, for virtually all of its adherents were members of various religious bodies; it was simply an organization of believers in Christ who desired to promote Christian unity.

Soon after the establishment of the Christian Association, Campbell began writing his Declaration and Address which was intended to announce to the general public, clearly and positively, the religious aims of the Association. When this document was completed it was presented to the

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[7] Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, **The Disciples Of Christ A History** (St. Louis, 1948), 138.

[8] Richardson, Op. cit., I, 236.

members of the Association for their consideration, unanimously approved, and ordered printed, September 7, 1809.

Less than two weeks later the Campbell family landed in New York, and legend says that as Thomas Campbell rode rapidly toward the reunion with his family, he carried in his saddle-bags the proof sheets of the Declaration and Address, which had just come from the press. [9] Be that as it may, when Alexander Campbell read the document, his amazement knew no bounds; for he discovered, written in powerful terms and by the pen of his own father, a lucid statement of those sentiments toward which he had been groping in Scotland. Father and son had separated as faithful members of the Presbyterian Church, and by separate circuitous routes they had come to renounce Presbyterianism, denouncing its narrowness and devotion to an authoritative human creed, and now both advocated a return to the Bible as the only basis of true Christianity.

THE QUESTION OF BAPTISM

One of America's foremost church historians has paid the following tribute to the Declaration and Address, "A thorough consideration of Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address will convince any unprejudiced student that it is a great document; one of the greatest indeed that American Christianity has produced." [10] There are two particular themes emphasized in this unique document: (1) the sinfulness of religious division and (2) a restoration of the New Testament church as the practical means of attaining Christian unity. In pleading for such a return to the apostolic church, Campbell wrote that the New Testament is a

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[9] Garrison and DeGroot, Op. cit., 144.

[10] William Warren Sweet, "Campbell's Position in Church History," **The Christian-Evangelist**, **LXXVI** (September 8, 1938), 969.

perfect constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament church. Therefore, nothing should be required of Christians as articles of faith or terms of communion but "what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them, in the word of God, either in expressed terms, or by approved precedent."

The **Declaration and Address** does not contribute to the controversial spirit of the Restoration Movement, for its very tenor was intended to forestall controversy. It was certainly an argumentative document; but instead of being written in the typically partisan spirit of that period, it was remarkable for its positive yet kindly style. Campbell attempted to answer anticipated objections before they could be lodged; and he was so successful, according to Richardson, that no enemy of the ancient order was ever able to controvert directly a single proposition which the **Declaration and Address** contained.

As the Christian Association of Washington maintained its existence, the natural tendency was for its members to drift further from the churches in which they claimed membership and inevitably toward the formation of an independent body. This trend was quite distressing to Thomas Campbell who had conceived the movement as an effort to unite all churches and not to create a new church. Desiring to avoid the necessity of becoming the founder of another religious body, the elder Campbell, on October 4, 1810, made application for the admission of the Christian Association of Washington to membership in the Presbyterian Synod of Pittsburgh.[11] In his application Campbell explained candidly the purposes of the Association, and, as Alexander had anticipated, the Synod refused to grant membership. It would have been unreasonable for a sectarian body to accept within its fellowship a group of reformers calling for the destruc-

[11] Richardson, Op. cit. I, 327.

tion of sectarianism and advocating- the independence of each local church.

One of the reasons given by the Synod for refusing membership to the Association was that Thomas Campbell had encouraged his son, Alexander, to preach without regular authority. For several months preceding Alexander had been preaching regularly, and when the Synod rebuffed his father, the young man resolved not to accept its decision in silence as Thomas Campbell would have done. At the next meeting of the Christian Association, the younger Campbell delivered a powerful address in which he attacked certain misrepresentations of the Synod and renewed the plea for a restoration of primitive New Testament Christianity. Such a vigorous championship of the Association's ideals was soon to win for the younger man recognition as the most competent and energetic advocate of the movement which his father had inaugurated.

With their rejection by the Presbyterians it was inevitable that the Campbells and their followers should organize an independent church, and this momentous step was taken at the next semi-annual meeting of the Christian Association, May 4, 1811.[12] Organization of the Brush Run Church is a significant step in the history of the Restoration Movement, for in this action the Campbells severed the last bonds tying them to Presbyterianism.

The new church immediately adopted the practice of observing the Lord's Supper weekly, but three members refused to partake of the communion, explaining that they had never been baptized. Already there had been some discussion of the action of baptism, whether sprinkling or immersion, and though Thomas Campbell now accepted immersion as the primitive practice, he regarded sprinkling

[12] Garrison and DeGroot, Op. cit., 155.

as a matter of forebearance. However, the three who had refused the communion had never been sprinkled or immersed, and on July 4, 1811, they were immersed in a deep pool of the Buffalo Creek near the site of the Brush Run Church. It is significant to note that even while accepting immersion as the apostolic practice, Thomas and Alexander Campbell regarded themselves as baptized individuals, though having been sprinkled in infancy. Another year was to elapse before they completely renounced infant sprinkling as baptism.

Soon after accepting the principles of the **Declaration and Address,** Alexander Campbell chanced to discuss them with a Doctor Riddle of the Presbyterian Union Church. The Presbyterian warned the young preacher that however plausible the propositions might sound, anyone who followed them to their logical conclusion would become a Baptist. The youthful Campbell inquired whether there was not in the Scripture either a precept or precedent for infant baptism, and receiving a negative answer, he was shocked and mortified at not being able to produce one.[13] In an effort to support his prejudices which were in favor of infant baptism, Alexander Campbell acquired all the treatises available in support of the practice, but ignored Baptists' writings, regarding them as "ignorant and uneducated." It was his earnest desire to find scriptural authority for the Presbyterian practice, and during an entire year he read extensively in attempting to satisfy his own conscience. Of the results of this study Campbell says:

> But despite of my prejudices, partialities and prospects, the conviction deepened and strengthened that it was all a grand Papal imposition. I threw away the Pedobaptist volumes with indignation at their assumptions and fallacious reasonings, and fled, with some

[13] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1848, 281.

> faint hope of finding- something more convincing, to my Greek New Testament. But still worse. I found no resting place there; and entering into conversation with my father on the subject, he admitted there was neither express terms nor express precedent. But, strange to tell, he took the ground that once in the church, and a participant of the Lord's supper, we could not 'unchurch or paganize ourselves', put off Christ, and then make a new profession and commence again as would a heathen man and a publican.[14]

The questions relating to infant baptism assumed a practical aspect when Alexander Campbell's first child, a daughter, was born, March 13, 1812. He determined to re-examine the entire issue and arrived at the same conclusion: infant sprinkling was not authorized by the New Testament. If infant baptism was without scriptural authority, then it was invalid, and those upon whom it had been administered were still unbaptized! Concluding that he himself had never been baptized, and resolving to be immersed, Campbell hastened to inform his father of his decision and to obtain the services of the only Baptist preacher in the area, Elder Matthias Luse. The Baptist was somewhat reluctant to administer baptism upon a simple confession of faith in Christ, as Campbell believed that it should be done; for Baptist usage required the narration of a Christian experience, but at the insistence of Campbell he agreed to follow the apostolic practice. On June 12, 1812, much to the satisfaction of Alexander Campbell, a number of others including his father, mother, and wife followed him into the water of Buffalo Creek. He later wrote of the scene, "This company, as far as I am yet informed, was the first community in the country that was immersed into that primitive, simple, and most significant confession of

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[14] Idem.

faith in the divine person and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ."[15] Others were quick to follow the precedent which had been established by the Campbells, and within a short time the number of those who had been immersed according to the primitive formula had grown to almost one hundred.

The acceptance of immersion as the only scriptural baptism marks an important milestone in the development of the Restoration Movement, not only because of its immediate consequences, but likewise because it signalizes a change in the positions occupied by father and son. "From the moment that Thomas Campbell concluded to follow the example of his son in relation to baptism, he conceded to him in effect the guidance of the whole religious movement."[16] Thomas Campbell had been the inaugurating genius of the movement, first conceiving a return to the Bible as the basis of Christian unity, and penning these sentiments so eloquently in the **Declaration and Address.** With this the elder man's work was largely accomplished, his gentle kindly spirit being ill suited for the controversy which was certain to follow. With their baptism the guiding light of the movement passed into the eager hands of his son and successor who soon became the guiding genius and eloquent defender of those principles which his father had first announced.

A PRECARIOUS UNION

When it became known that the Brush Run Church had been converted into a body of immersed believers, the schism between the reformers and Presbyterian groups was widened, while the action was highly approved by the Bap-

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[15] Ibid., 1848, 283.

[16] Richardson, Op. cit., I, 401.

tist churches. Though accepting immersion Campbell had no intention of joining these Baptists; for commenting on the period, he wrote, "I had unfortunately formed a very unfavorable opinion of the Baptist preachers as then introduced to my acquaintance, as narrow, contracted, illiberal, and uneducated men."[17] Campbell had a high regard for the Baptist people generally, but not for their preachers, whom he regarded as "little men in a big office." After adopting immersion, Campbell began to itinerate among some of the Baptist churches; the result was that he liked the Baptist people more and their preachers less. In an effort to prove this a baseless prejudice he attended the meeting of the Redstone Association in the autumn of 1812, but returned home "more disgusted" than before.[18]

By this time Campbell had acquired a reputation as a speaker of great ability, and, though not a Baptist, his services were in demand among their churches. As the Brush Run Church was constantly urged to unite with the Redstone Association, the question of union was finally laid before the small congregation in the fall, of 1813; and after considerable discussion it was agreed that an effort should be made to join forces with the Baptists. In the overture which was presented to the Redstone Association the reformers explained their sentiments fully and remonstrated against all human creeds as bonds of communion among churches, but expressed a willingness to cooperate with the Association, provided always that they be allowed to preach anything contained in the Bible, regardless of any creed in Christendom.[19] A considerable majority of the

[17] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1848, 345.

[18] Ibid., 1848, 346.

[19] Idem. Unfortunately this document of great historical significance has been lost. Campbell failed to keep a copy, and when asked the Clerk of the Association for one, he was refused.

Baptists voted to accept the reformers on this basis, and the Brush Run Church became a member of the Redstone Association.

This union between the forces of Campbell and the Baptists was destined to continue for seventeen years, though often precariously. It proved to be eminently beneficial to the Restoration Movement, because Campbell and his friends never lost sight of their distinctive plea, and the union gave them great influence within the Baptist community. By the time the Restoration Movement resumed its independent course, Campbell had succeeded in widely disseminating his views; the Baptist Church lost thousands of members and even entire associations as a result of his work.

From the beginning there was opposition among Baptist preachers to Campbell and his teachings. When the proposal for admission of the Brush Run Church was debated by the Redstone Association in 1813, there was a small though determined minority of four preachers who opposed the union and worked continuously to undermine Campbell's influence. Opposition to the reformers was increased with Campbell's delivery of the now famous "Sermon of the Law" to the annual meeting of the Redstone Association in 1816. Campbell had not prepared a discourse for the occasion, and he later stated, "At the impulse of the occasion, I was induced to draw a clear line between the Law and Gospel, the Old Dispensation and the New, Moses and Christ. This was my theme." The principle thesis of this sermon was that Christians are under the New Testament and not the Old, but such teaching constituted something of an assault upon orthodox Baptist theology. Charges of heresy began to smoulder; opposition was voiced even during an interruption in the sermon's delivery. Campbell later described the occasion:

> The result was, during the interval (as I learned

> long afterwards) the over-jealous Elder called a council of the preachers and proposed to them to have me forthwith condemned before the people by a formal declaration from the stand—repudiating my discourse as "not BAPTIST DOCTRINE." One of the Elders, still living and still a Baptist, said: "Elder Pritchard, I am not yet prepared to say whether it be or be not Bible doctrine; but one thing I can say, were we to make such an annunciation, we would sacrifice ourselves, and not Mr. Campbell."[20]

The cry raised against the sermon of the Law became so vehement that Campbell was forced to have the discourse published to protect himself against misrepresentations.[21] It is now regarded as one of the most brilliant discourses Campbell ever delivered.

For seven years Campbell's enemies made every effort to have him condemned by the Redstone Association, and in 1823 Campbell strategically withdrew from the Redstone group and became a member of the Mahoning Association of Ohio, much to the chagrin of his enemies. Campbell learned that his enemies had influenced a. number of churches to appoint messengers antagonistic to him as their representatives at the next meeting of the Redstone Association which was to convene in Pittsburgh during September, 1823, and that he was to be excommunicated at this meeting. Campbell, the object of these plans, later wrote, "The terror of excommunication was to me, indeed, not very formidable." However, he was soon to represent the Baptists in a debate with W. L. Maccalla, a Presbyterian, and should he suffer "ecclesiastic martyrdom" at the hands of his Baptist associates, the debate would probably be

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[20] Ibid., 1848, 348f.

[21] It was republished in the Millennial Harbinger, 1846, 493ff.

cancelled and an opportunity lost for propagating the aims of the Restoration Movement.

Campbell and a number of friends constituted a church at Wellsburg, Virginia, and obtained membership in the Mahoning Association of Ohio, where his principles had been more widely accepted than in the Redstone Association. This was accomplished so quietly that none of the preachers of the Redstone Association learned of the change in his status, and when the Association, dominated by his enemies who gleefully anticipated his excommunication, met in Pittsburgh in September, Campbell who had attended as a spectator informed them that he was now a member of the Mahoning Association; and he wrote of his strategic victory as follows, "Never did hunters, on seeing the game unexpectedly escape from their toils at the moment when its capture was sure, glare upon each other a more mortifying disappointment than that indicated by my pursuers at that instant on learning that I was beyond their jurisdiction."[22] For another seven years Campbell retained his nominal identity as a Baptist, preaching widely in their churches and leading many to accept his views as to the identity of the primitive church.

Any consideration of Campbell's years within the Baptist fold, 1813-1830, would be incomplete without some attention's being given the Christian Baptist, Campbell's first periodical which appeared in August, 1823, and continued for seven years, to be superseded by the **Millennial Harbinger** in 1830. A small paper, it wielded monumental influence in disseminating the author's religious views, furnishing a means of communication among all those who had joined the Restoration Movement, and precipitating the final separation from the Baptists. To those churches which

[22] **Millennial Harbinger**, 1848, 556.

felt the force of Campbell's logic and satire, it was an "unmitigated pest, and it gave special annoyance to the Baptists because it criticized them from the inside and won so much support among them."[23] Campbell's goal in publishing the paper was that expressed in the **Declaration and Address,** the unity of all Christians and the restoration of first century Christianity. Pursuing this goal, he published a long series of articles on the restoration of the ancient order of things, including essays on such themes as creeds, the Lord's Supper, the office of the bishop, singing, worship, and church discipline, attempting to ascertain in each essay what constituted the apostolic practice.

However, rather than a constructive builder, Campbell became an iconoclast in the **Christian Baptist.** His aim was "... to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). Nothing was to be accepted in religion which did not have scriptural authority, and he proceeded to examine contemporary religious practice without mercy. The clergy especially felt his wrath, for they were "scrap doctors or text expositors" who had obscured the simplicity of the gospel.[24] His "Third Epistle of Peter" was directed especially against them, in which he exhorted:

> "In all your gettings" get money! Now, therefore, when you go forth on your ministerial journey, go where there are silver and gold....
>
> And when you shall hear of a church that is vacant and has no one to preach therein, then be that a **call** to you, and be you mindful of the call, and take you charge of the flock thereof, even of the **golden** fleece.

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[23] Garrison and DeGroot, Op. cit., 175.

[24] **Christian Baptist**, December 5, 1825, 203.

> And when you shall have fleeced your flock, and shall know of another **call,** and if the flock be greater, or rather if the fleece be greater, then greater be also to you the call.[25]

Religious titles were wrong; "Reverend Simon Peter" would be ridiculous. Also condemned in the pages of the Christian Baptist were creeds, confessions of faith, and human organizations such as the missionary society. Because of his stand on the missionary groups, Campbell has been accused of being partially responsible for the rise of anti-missionary sentiment among the Baptists on the American frontier.[26] Even though this is true, it must be said in defense of the reformer that his opposition was not to missionary work as such, but to the unscriptural methods of accomplishing it.

The sectarian clergy, which received the heaviest of Campbell's barrages, was quick to reply, usually in the same highly critical spirit in which Campbell's charges were hurled. One of the most famous works ever penned in opposition to the Restoration Movement was Jeter's **Campbellism Examined,** in which Jeter charged that the missiles employed in the **Christian Baptist's** warfare were "criticism, logic, eloquence, sarcasm, ridicule, and especially caricature and sophistry." Jeter attacked the spirit of the Christian Baptist, writing:

> The war was as general as it was fierce and relentless. Nothing was so venerable, so sacred, and so important, in the estimation of others, or so strongly entrenched in popular favor, as to shield it from his attacks. Objects, in themselves confessedly good, were denounced because they were pursued with sectarian

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[25] Ibid., July 4, 1825, 168.

[26] William Warren Sweet, **Religion On The American Frontier The Baptists 1783-1830** (New York, 1931), 67.

zeal, and for sectarian purposes. In all the pages of the **Christian Baptist** it will be difficult to find a sentence commendatory of any institution, plan, custom, labor, or interest of Christendom, apart from his own cherished reformation.[27]

AN INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT

Alexander Campbell's ablest lieutenant in the Restoration Movement and the individual who did more than any other to precipitate a final separation from the Baptists was Walter Scott. After Campbell's views had begun permeating the Mahoning Baptist Association, they decided to select an evangelist to itinerate regularly among the churches, and Scott was chosen in 1827. Here he made his greatest contribution to the search for the ancient order; for it was he who first reduced the Restoration plea to a simple formula, expressive of the gospel plan of salvation. The formula was simple and understandable; if a man would have faith in Christ, repent, and be baptized, God would grant him the remission of sins.

The response to this simple plea was immediate and unprecedented. A great revival spread throughout the Mahoning Association, and within a single year the total membership of its churches had doubled. This revival was completely different from the Great Revival which had swept Kentucky and Ohio a generation earlier and which will be discussed in the next chapter. Scott's preaching produced no frenzied emotionalism and no physical manifestations, but rather a heartfelt acceptance of the gospel plan of salvation. Within three years the preaching of Walter Scott had transformed the Mahoning Association radically; the last vestige of its Baptist character was the fact of

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[27] Jeremiah B. Jeter, **Campbellism Examined** (New York, 1855), 75.

its existence, which came to an end in 1830. The annual meeting was conducted that year at Austintown, Ohio; and it was unanimously agreed that the Mahoning Association lacked scriptural authority and should, therefore, cease to exist.

The dissolution of the Mahoning Association was the most decisive event in the process of separation which led Alexander Campbell and his friends out of the Baptist Church and into an independent movement. Yet, it must be emphasized that the separation was a process which required years of consummation and which produced some of the bitterest attacks ever launched against those searching for the old paths.

During his latter years as a Baptist, Campbell was successful in circulating his views widely among the Baptists and in winning many to accept them. Particularly after Walter Scott began preaching the new evangelism, Baptist preachers in Ohio, Kentucky, and elsewhere accepted his methods and viewed with increasing sympathy Campbell's Restoration plea. A typical note in Christian Baptist stated, "Several Baptist congregations in the western part of Pennsylvania, and in the state of Ohio, have voted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith out of doors.... They are determined on being free to be guided by that old fashioned book that exhibits the faith once for all delivered to the saints."[28] Baptist churches everywhere were beginning to accept the Restoration plea and search for the apostolic precedents in religion. Campbell quoted the following bitter tribute to his influence among the Baptists from the **Vermont Chronicle:**

> Of its progress in the West, a correspondent of the New York Baptist Register, says, "Mr. Campbell's

[28] **Christian Baptist,** July 4, 1825, 169.

> paper, and their vigorous missionary efforts, are making great achievements. It is said that one half of the Baptist churches in Ohio have embraced this sentiment and become what they call 'Christian Baptists.' It is spreading like a mighty (contagion) through the Western States, wasting Zion in its progress. In Kentucky, its desolations are said to be even greater than in Ohio." Other accounts confirm this statement.[29]

In spite of Campbell's growing influence among the Baptists a separation seemed inevitable since the followers of Campbell differed from the regular Baptists on a number of points. The reformers taught that baptism was for the remission of sins and was preceded by a simple confession of faith in Christ, while the Baptists demanded the narration of a Christian experience prior to baptism and denied its connection with salvation. The reformers observed the Lord's Supper weekly, the Baptists less frequently. Reformers denied the authority of any human creed; the Baptists were inclined to accept them. Other points of difference centered in Alexander Campbell's denial of any special call for the ministry, his distinction between the old and new covenants, and his conviction that the Holy Spirit operated only through the Word in conversion.

Beginning as early as 1825 in some isolated cases, regular Baptists began to act against the reformers, these excommunications being carried on at two levels, the church and association. Some of the bitterest attacks upon the Restoration Movement ever published appeared during this period (1825-1832), as many Baptist churches and associations published resolutions explaining their rejection of Campbell's teachings.

One of the most famous of these documents was the "Semple and Broaddus Decrees," prepared by two prominent

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[29] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1830, 117.

Baptist preachers of Virginia who, though personal friends of Campbell, were never persuaded to join in the search for the ancient order. These decrees were adopted by the Dover Baptist Association, December 31, 1830. The association's official report first explained their necessity, stating, "The system of religion known by the name of 'Campbellism' has spread of late among our churches to a distressing extent, and seems to call loudly for remedial measures."[30] Specific errors which the Baptists found in Campbell's teachings were listed as follows:

> The errors of this system are various; some of them comparatively unimportant, while others appear to be of the most serious and dangerous tendency. Passing by those of inferior magnitude, we will notice such only as strike at the vitals of godliness, and will endeavor to recommend suitable correctives.
>
> In **principles,** the errors alluded to may be classed under four heads, viz: the denial of the influence of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of man—the substitution of reformation for repentance—the substitution of baptism for conversion, regeneration, or the new birth —and the Pelagian doctrine of the sufficiency of man's natural powers to effect his own salvation.
>
> In **practice,** this party goes on [sic] to administer baptism in a way radically different from what has been usual among Baptists, and from what we conceive to be the New Testament usage—making no inquiry into the experience or the moral standing of the subjects, and going from church to church with, or without, pastors—urging persons to be immersed, and immersing them—in a manner contrary to good order and propriety.[31]

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[30] Quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1831, 78.

[31] Quoted in **Millennial Harbinger**, 1831, 78f.

The Bracken Association of Kentucky adopted a similar resolution in June, 1830. This Baptist group published a circular letter, enumerating the following charges against Campbell's followers:

> The manner in which they speak concerning the divine influence of the Spirit on the human heart; the making baptism the regenerating act, and the actual remission of sins to the believer in baptism; concerning experimental religion; the church being in Babylon, &c. is such that we confess, if it be the gospel of Christ, and the way the Lord brings sinners to the knowledge of the truth, we have it yet to learn. This system being extensively propagated by the Bethany Editor, and by many active and able advocates, tending to produce a revolution in our churches, called forth the efforts that our preachers and brethren have been compelled to use, to maintain, not mere matters of opinion indifferent in themselves, but the grand fundamental truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to resist the inroads making against us.[32]

These aggressive statements by strong Baptist associations indicate clearly the fundamental antagonism between the Calvinistic theology of Baptists and Presbyterians and the universal gospel invitation extended by Campbell. Baptism for the remission of sins and the Christians' failure to demand the narration of a religious experience prior to baptism were contrary to all Calvinistic concepts of religion. The Calvinists believed that it was essential, before accepting an individual for church membership, to have some evidence that he was among the elect, who had been foreordained from eternity. The narration of a Christian experience before baptism was the only way in which this evidence could be obtained, and Calvinists were adamant in

[32] Quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1830, 478.

their refusal to accept a candidate for baptism who could not relate such an experience. They reasoned, therefore, that the reformers had no assurance of the sincerity of those whom thy accepted and that their churches would soon be filled with individuals whom God had ordained to be reprobates.

By 1830 this process of separation which was being carried on simultaneously in many areas had reached its climax; by 1833 it had reached its completion. Thus the reformers who had carried on their work within the fold of the Baptist Church for seventeen years had now become an independent movement, leaving the Baptist communion and carrying with them thousands of its members and preachers.

Shortly after the final break with the Baptists, the streams of Restoration history converged in the union of Campbell's followers and several thousand "Christians" in the state of Kentucky. Barton W. Stone, prominent among these Kentucky Christians, and Alexander Campbell first met in 1824, and their acquaintance ripened into a deep friendship. Quite late in life Stone wrote of Campbell, "I am constrained . . . to acknowledge him the greatest promoter of this Reformation of any man living. The Lord reward him."[33] As preachers of the two groups associated with one another in Kentucky and elsewhere, it became evident that their views were almost identical and that a merger of the two groups would be mutually advantageous.

In December, 1831, a unity meeting was conducted at Georgetown, Kentucky, which resulted in a merger of the two churches there. Barton Stone reported in the **Christian Messenger,** "The reforming Baptists . . . and the Christians,

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[33] James R. Rogers, **The Cane Ridge Meeting House To Which Is Appended The Autobiography of B. W. Stone** (Cincinnati, 1910), 201. (Cited hereafter as Stone, Autobiography).

in Georgetown and the neighborhood, agreed to meet and worship together. We soon found that we were indeed in the same spirit, on the same foundation, the New Testament, and bore the same name, **Christian."**[34] The Georgetown meeting was such a success that a larger meeting was planned for January 1, 1832, at Lexington, Kentucky. Two speakers were designated to address the meeting, Barton W. Stone and "Raccoon" John Smith, representing the Campbell forces. It was Smith who occupied the platform first, and realizing the importance of the occasion, he pleaded eloquently for unity, "Let us, then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites, or Stoneites, New Lights, or Old Lights or any kind of lights, but let us all come to the Bible and to the Bible alone, as the only Book in the world that can give us all the Light we need."[35] To which Barton Stone responded, "I have not one objection to the ground laid down by him as the true scriptural basis of union among the people of God; and I am willing to give him now and here my hand."[36] Whereupon Stone offered Smith a trembling hand; it was seized gladly, and the union became a reality.

It is to be emphasized that the dramatic events in Lexington did not and could not form any organic union between the two bodies; for their very principles forbade it. The autonomy of the local congregation was an inviolate principle and the Lexington meeting cemented the union only as it pointed the way for congregations elsewhere. Throughout Kentucky and Ohio it was necessary that the union proceed on the individual and congregational basis; and upon this basis the union was completed, gradually yet rapidly.

After the streams of Restoration history had thus converged, individual members were called both "Christians"

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[34] Quoted in **Millennial Harbinger**, 1832, 137f.

[35] Quoted in Alonzo Willard Fortune, Op. cit. (Convention of Christian Churches In Kentucky, 1932), 121.

[36] Quoted in Fortune, Op. cit., 122.

and "Disciples," while congregations wore either the name "Christian Church" or "Church of Christ." Those associated with the Restoration Movement have often been referred to as "Campbellites," but only by their enemies and never by themselves. When asked what Campbellism was, Alexander Campbell replied:

> It is a nickname of reproach invented and adopted by those whose views, feelings, and desires are all sectarian; who cannot conceive of Christianity in any other light than an ism . . . If Christians were wholly cast into the mould of the Apostle's doctrine, they would feel themselves as much aggrieved and slandered in being called by any man's name, as they would in being called a thief, a fornicator, or a drunkard.[37]

By the mid 1830's the work of such men as Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott had resulted in the formation of a new religious group, especially strong in the West, and boasting thousands of enthusiastic and devoted followers. However, Campbell did not regard the Restoration Movement as having established a new denomination; rather he regarded it as a restoration of Christianity as it had been taught and practiced in the first century. The difference was all-important! When a New Orleans newspaper referred to Campbell as the founder of a denomination, he immediately protested to its editor: "I have always repudiated all human heads and human names for the people of the Lord, and shall feel very thankful if you will correct the erroneous impression which your article may have made in thus representing me as the founder of a religious denomination."[38]

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[37] **Christian Baptist,** June 2, 1828, 451.

[38] Richardson, Op. cit., **II,** 441.

UNITY WITHOUT PEACE

As the streams of Restoration history converged, unity was realized among those searching for the ancient order; but this internal unity did not signal the cessation of external attacks. It seemed rather to intensify the zeal of some critics; for enemies recognized that as in unity there is strength, so the united Restoration Movement now presented a strengthened and more formidable adversary. Therefore the decades following 1832 abound with highly controversial literature, attacking and defending the churches of Christ.

The spectacle of "Campbellism" attracted wide interest, and though much of the controversial literature was produced in those areas where Campbell commanded the greatest following, it was by no means confined to those areas. The eastern seaboard had hardly been penetrated with the Restoration ideal; nevertheless, dignified theological journals published in eastern cities carried critiques of "Campbellism."

For example, an interesting portrayal of the Campbell movement from the viewpoint of Episcopalianism was written by an important western dignitary in that church and published in The **Protestant Churchman** late in 1843. This author was particularly incensed at Campbell's attacks on ecclesiastical church government. "One of his followers, and quite an intelligent man too, on being introduced to a Bishop of the Episcopal Church, stood before him," he wrote in relating a humorous incident, "and lifted up his hands in undisguised amazement that a man of sense could be found in this country, in the nineteenth century, capable of avowing himself a believer in the absurdities of Episcopacy!"[39]

This Episcopal writer likewise asserted his disgust at

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[39] **Protestant Churchman,** December 16, 1843.

Campbell's opposition to authoritative human creeds. In expressing his own reaction to this aspect of the Campbell movement, the churchman wrote:

> Mr. Campbell and his followers are the most inveterate foes of all human creeds. The New Testament, say they, is the sole rule of faith, the only articles of belief, and the exclusive rule of church government. If my judgment on this subject be not prejudiced, they are stark mad on this point. But here they do not so much stand opposed to their grand adversaries, the Baptists, as to the Methodists and Presbyterians. On this score, however, they seem to me to be perfect Ishmaelites. Their war against creeds and sects is blind, ferocious, and exterminating.[40]

In considering their opposition to creeds the Episcopalian regarded the followers of Campbell as occupying an incongruous position. He explained:

> In one point of view nothing seems more absurd or contradictory than that the last split from the last split in church dissensions, should be the loudest in denouncing division, and the most clamorous for union. A lover of antiquity can hardly retain his gravity, whilst those who are guilty of the very widest departures from old landmarks, soberly proposed that their narrowest of all platforms should be adopted as the basis of the one true church. But so it is.[41]

The writer then charged that in reality Campbell's faith constituted the creed of his followers, a "colossal protestant papal power" being vested in his hands. "In all other things variant," the essayist informed his eastern

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[40] Ibid., December 23, 1843.

[41] Idem.

leaders, "in this. I believe that all his admirers are consistent—Mr. Campbell's books untold the ancient Gospel. I have no creed, but I believe as Mr. Campbell believes,'"[42]

Enemies of the Restoration Movement were not content with occasional articles in religious journals; entire books were published controverting both principles and personalities. The most famous of these, appearing in 1855, was **Campbellism Examined** by Jeremiah B. Jeter, a prominent Baptist preacher of Richmond, Virginia. This volume was couched in a courteous candid style and purported to be an examination of the origin and doctrines of "Campbellism." Admitting that the Baptist denomination had needed reformation, and that Campbell's attacks had corrected many of these faults, he nevertheless charged that "Campbellism" had fallen into many extreme errors and that Campbell's writings were often untrustworthy. Jeter wrote, "Scarcely a page of his writings is free from false logic, false philosophy, or false theology, to say nothing of philological, grammatical and rhetorical blemishes."

Campbell's claim to have restored the ancient order seemed incredible to Jeter, who charged that vanity had replaced sanity:

> That any man should imagine, after so many gifted minds had carefully, laboriously, and with much prayer, studied the Bible, that **he** should be the **first,** in many generations, to discern its hidden import, and open it, in all its beauty, fulness and glory, to the admiring gaze of mankind, savors more of vanity than of a sound judgment — resembles more the hallucination of a distempered mind, than the dictate of sound Christian philosophy.[43]

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[42] Ibid., December 30, 1843.

[43] Jeter, Op. cit., 356.

The Baptist writer seemed particularly interested in the state of the Restoration Movement in his day; and after asserting that it was becoming less aggressive and more orthodox with each passing year, he concluded that its final results were negligible. He believed that the great doctrines of total depravity, the miraculous influence of the Spirit, and justification by faith only had weathered the storm of scrutiny and wrote of them:

> Like some tall and hoary cliff, against which the mighty waves of the ocean have dashed, and foamed, and raged for a time, and to whose strength they have at last rendered homage, by subsiding into a comparative calm at its base, the evangelical faith... has received and resisted the threatening surges of the "current Reformation," until their force is spent, and their receding fury proclaims its stability. Commencing its assaults on all Christian denominations with dauntless intrepidity, and giving strong assurances of their early overthrow, and the speedy dawn of the Millennium, the Reformation has been frittered away to nothing, or has ended in a huge mass of inconsistencies and contradictions.[44]

When Jeter described Campbell as a controversialist, he was forced to pay tribute to the reformer's ability, commenting, "He was a skillful and popular debator—handled a ready pen—was desirous to gain notoriety, and promote the circulation of his paper—and controversy was the pabulum on which he lived and thrived." Explaining why many potential opponents declined opportunities for debating Campbell, he stated, "Few theologians were qualified to enter the lists with a disputant so ready, adroit and sarcastic as he was."[45]

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[44] Ibid., 358f.

[45] Ibid., 20, 21.

In summary, these highlights of Restoration history indicate clearly that the pioneer western churches did not permit the Restoration Movement to undermine their strength without challenging the truthfulness of its essential principles. For many years the western pulpits rang with denunciations of the new movement, criticisms of its prominent leaders, and denials of the accuracy of its conception of apostolic Christianity. Quite naturally preachers laboring in the movement did not accept these criticisms in silence, but from pulpit and press they defended their convictions with a crusading zeal. Throughout the first decades of its existence the Restoration Movement was the storm center of western religious controversy, and in this clash of conviction there is seen the background of Alexander Campbell's debates.

CHAPTER II

The Religious Background

All of Alexander Campbell's debates were conducted within a relatively small area in the upper Ohio Valley, and the significance of this fact must be analyzed. By 1830 the flood of immigration had swept the frontier beyond Cincinnati and Lexington, but it had not been able to obliterate the frontier influences. The prevailing religious thought and practice which Campbell encountered in the Ohio Valley, and which was largely responsible for the wide popular interest in the discussions, had been fashioned by the preceding decades during which the area had emerged from the frontier.

FRONTIER INFLUENCES

Since 1893 American historians have recognized that the frontier has played a vital part in shaping our national traditions. The thirteen small colonies nestled along the Atlantic seaboard were to grow and overrun a continent before the national United States of the twentieth century could become a reality, and much of our history is the story of that transcontinental expansion. Generally speaking, the establishment and disappearance of the frontier throughout the early West followed a familiar pattern. The first who penetrated the wilderness was the fur-trader who sought the Indian, bartering for furs which the redman had trapped. The fur-trader was soon followed by the frontiersman, who brought small herds of livestock to exploit the natural grasses, and for whom civilization held no attractions. As the population began to increase in any frontier

area, the frontiersmen moved on to more remote homes, to be replaced by those devoting their time to primitive agriculture. This first stage of permanent settlement was followed by more intensive farming, the establishment of town and city, and the growth of local culture.[1]

By the year 1800 the upper Ohio Valley still constituted a genuine frontier area. The era of the fur-trader and frontiersman had already passed, permanent settlers were entering the Valley in ever increasing numbers from the older states, and permanent centers of population had already appeared. By the turn of the century Cincinnati could boast 750 inhabitants and Lexington, 1,797, though 439 of these were slaves.[2] Some social refinements had begun to make their appearance in the western country, and already the basis was being laid for a permanent culture.[3] Most parts of the area were still quite sparsely settled, however; and though rude log cabins could occasionally be seen dotting the fertile valleys, it was only rarely that this cabin had given way to the more pretentious frame house. New settlers were arriving constantly, some of whom were men of education and means, but many were compelled by financial distress to seek new homes on the fringes of civilization. When a new settler arrived, it was the western custom for those in the vicinity to build the stranger a cabin. Within a single day the logs would be cut, notched, and raised, the cabin roofed, windows and a door cut, and the family moved in.[4]

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[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, **Rise Of The New West** (New York, 1906), 89f.

[2] **Garrison, Religion Follows The Frontier,** 55. It is interesting to note that in this same year the population of the entire Northwest Territory was but 51,000.

[3] James M. Miller, **The Genesis of Western Culture: The Upper Ohio Valley 1800-1825** (Columbus, Ohio, 1938), ix.

[4] John Bach McMaster, **A History Of The People Of The United States** (8 vols., New York, 1914), II, 577.

These early western pioneers present an interesting social type. Perhaps their outstanding characteristics were self-reliance, independence, and freedom of action. Life on the frontier was not altogether pleasant, and without courage and initiative existence would have been impossible. The necessity of relying upon his own abilities, of meeting and solving new problems almost daily, made the pioneer a rugged individualist. Often he was an individual whose economic failure or social maladjustment had rendered an old environment undesirable, and a fresh start on the frontier had become a practical necessity. The pioneer felt that the most fundamental institutions, even church and state, should serve his needs; and failing to accomplish this end, they should be changed accordingly. The spirit of the **Declaration of Independence was extended to all areas of life.** In any revolt against established traditions, the pioneers usually appealed to an older standard of authority in which they trusted implicitly. In government, this standard was found in the Constitution; but if the authority of the church or established clergy was to be challenged, the pioneer appealed to an infallible Scripture. "He was an individualist—up to a certain point—and then he became a thorough authoritarian."[5]

By the period of Alexander Campbell's important work, many areas east of the Mississippi River were still typically frontier, but this cannot be said of the upper Ohio Valley. As early as 1812 many parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio "had been settled so many years that they no longer presented typical western conditions."[6] In such centers of population as Lexington and Cincinnati the number of inhabitants was growing rapidly, schools and even colleges had made their appearance, and a cultured society was beginning to be established. Between Lexington and Cincinnati

[5] Garrison, Op. cit., 56.

[6] Turner, Op. cit., 72.

there existed a keen rivalry, each striving to be the cultural center of the Ohio Valley, the "Athens of the West." Even before Campbell's first debate in Cincinnati (1829), one writer, visiting the city, had reported that "if its only rival, Lexington, be, as she contends, the Athens of the West, this place is struggling to become its Corinth."[7] The religious atmosphere amid which Campbell conducted his debates was hardly a frontier atmosphere, but it was the outgrowth of earlier frontier conditions. Many important characteristics of religion in the upper Ohio Valley in 1830 can be understood only as developments emanating from the earlier frontier era; consequently it is essential that some study be given to the early religious history of this area.

As the first permanent settlers began to venture over the barrier imposed by the Allegheny Mountains and into the vast wildernesses of the West, among their most important possessions were the family Bible and the denominational allegiance which they had known in the East. The latter was of vital importance in shaping the religious character of the West, for those churches represented by the largest numbers of emigrants were the churches destined to become, later, the great churches of the West. In the immigration to the upper Ohio Valley the Presbyterians commanded an advantageous position; for they were well entrenched among the Scotch-Irish population of western Pennsylvania, many of whom migrated further westward, carrying their religion with them. Also among the western immigrants were to be found some Episcopalians, Congregationalists and Roman Catholics, but these groups were

[7] Timothy Flint, **Recollections Of The Last Ten Years** (New York, 1932), 48.

greatly outnumbered by the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists.[8] The vast majority of trans-Allegheny pioneers were not of the social class to be found in the eastern churches commanding wealth and social prestige, but rather from the churches which had their greatest strength in the frontier areas of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York.[9]

In spite of their initial advantages, the Presbyterians were not so successful in the West as other denominations and were soon eclipsed by the Baptists and Methodists. Presbyterian doctrine was thoroughly Calvinistic, and its principles of predestination and limited atonement did not appeal to the independence of the frontiersmen. In addition, Presbyterian Church organization was strict and rigid, not fitted to effective work in the sparsely settled West. Of all denominations the Methodists were the most successful in propagating their faith among western settlers, for they were well suited both in doctrine and organization to satisfy the frontier religious needs. Methodist evangelists preached eloquently a gospel of free will and free grace, quite in contrast with the Calvinism of both Presbyterians and Baptists, a gospel which appealed strongly to independent western thought and initiative. From the standpoint of organization, Methodists employed the circuit rider, itinerant preacher, and lay preacher to carry their system of religion with great success into areas sparsely settled, isolated by surging river and dense forest, and into which no other preachers ventured.[10] Even before the beginning of

[8] By 1800 there had been organized two presbyteries in the Lexington-Cincinnati area, Washington and West Lexington, and at least three Baptist Associations, Miami in Ohio, and Bracken and Elkhorn in Kentucky.

[9] Catherine C. Cleveland, **The Great Revival In The West 1797-1805** (Chicago, 1916), 15f.

[10] William Warren Sweet, **The Story Of Religions In America** (New York, 1930), 316f.

the nineteenth century there were between 6,000 and 7,000 Methodists scattered through the Ohio Valley."

Though he did not wield so powerful a cultural influence as the located minister,[12] in the popular estimation of his contemporaries and in romantic interest to the religious or social historian, the itinerant preacher represents one of the most interesting fields of study in early western history. With little education other than the Bible and Catechism, possessing only a horse and pair of saddlebags, this preacher toured the West, bringing spiritual comfort to those who otherwise would have been destitute. No mountains were too steep or formidable, no rivers too deep or dangerous, no forest too impenetrable to block his progress. As late as 1830 nine-tenths of the religious instruction carried on throughout the entire western country was furnished by these itinerant preachers.[13]

> Over frontiersmen his influence was boundless. We read in the accounts of camp-meetings of great crowds of the plainest and roughest of men held spellbound by his rude oratory, or thrown prostrate with an excitement which did not by any means pass away with the occasion. It is not too much to say that the religious life of the middle West to-day bears distinct traces of the efforts of the Methodist itinerants in the early years of the century.[14]

Most of these itinerant preachers were ardent controversialists, always willing to engage an opposing preacher in verbal combat. The popularity of these preachers and the respect which they commanded tended to endorse contro-

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[11] Miller, **Genesis of Western Culture,** 125.

[12] Ibid., 49.

[13] Ibid., 48.

[14] McMaster, Op. cit., V. 160.

versy as a legitimate and popular means of propagating one's convictions.

THE GREAT REVIVAL

The years immediately following the Revolutionary War (1781-1800) were a period of marked spiritual decline throughout the United States. This decline was characterized not only by passive indifference to spiritual influences but even by positive antagonism to religion. One church historian states that "there was probably never a time when there was as large a percentage... of active hostility to religion, as during the last two decades of the eighteenth century."[18] If this condition prevailed in the East, its baneful influence was doubly evident in the West. Kentucky was characterized by drinking, gambling, and brawling; the Kentucky boatman, commonly known as a "Kentuc," was more feared than the Indians, the "most reckless, fearless, law-despising of men."[16] One preacher wrote later of conditions as he had seen them in Bourbon County, Kentucky, "Apathy in religious societies appeared everywhere to an alarming degree. Not only the power of religion had disappeared, but also the very form of it was waning fast away."[17]

A number of conditions were responsible for this general and serious decline in religion. First, the decline was a natural reaction to the enthusiasm and emotionalism of the Great Awakening which had occurred a half century earlier. Second, there was the war itself and the demoralizing uncertainty which follows any such conflict. Church buildings had been swallowed in the conflict as cannons boomed their destruction; preachers and members had

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[15] Garrison, Op. cit., 53.

[16] McMaster, Op. cit., II, 578.

[17] Stone, **Autobiography,** 153.

often been lost to the war or to the migrations westward. The Episcopal Church was especially hard hit, weakened by a Tory clergy and by the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church as a separate denomination soon after the end of the war.[18]

Third, the period was one of deism and unbelief, adopted from British and French philosophers. The young American nation, having found in French social philosophy a justification for its revolution, was strongly influenced by the contempt for religion likewise found in that philosophy.[19] Thomas Paine, whose Age of Reason had ridiculed the principles of revealed religion, was highly popular, especially among the younger generation.

As this religious decline was especially pronounced west of the Alleghenies, so the reaction against it and return to religion originated and was concentrated in Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. Beginning about 1797 and reaching its climax in 1801, a great religious awakening, known as the Great Revival, occurred in the upper Ohio Valley, which has been described by McMaster as "a moral awakening such as this world had never beheld."[20] The Great Revival centered around the camp meeting with services being conducted continuously, day and night; for there were many preachers participating and thousands were in attendance. As the campfires burned at night and light from hundreds of torches danced eerily upon the dense forests surrounding the camp ground, several preachers might be heard addressing groups in various parts of the encamp-

[18] James O'Kelly, prominent elsewhere in Restoration history, was an influential Methodist preacher in Virginia and attended the famous Christmas Conference (Dec. 25, 1784) at which this separation became a reality.

[19] Garrison, Op. cit., 52f.

[20] McMaster, Op. cit., II, 578.

merit; elsewhere clusters of people were singing, praying, or screaming. The preaching of the Great Revival was of a highly emotional, Arminian strain, calculated to lead the most hardened sinner to repentance. Accompanying this Great Revival were highly unusual physical exercises which assumed a variety of forms. Hundreds of people fell to the ground unconscious, lay unnoticed for hours, and arose to preach and pray.

Many descriptions of these camp meetings have been preserved, but one of the most picturesque was written by Timothy Flint, a prominent pioneer preacher who devoted ten years (1815-1825) to western travels. Vividly picturing the encampment and the preaching itself, he wrote:

> The line of tents is pitched; and the religious city grows up in a few hours under the trees, beside the stream. Lamps are hung in lines among the branches; and the effect of their glare upon the surrounding forest is, as of magic. The scenery of the most brilliant theatre in the world is a painting only for children, compared with this....
>
> There is no need for the studied trick of oratory to produce in such a place the deepest movements of the heart. No wonder, as the speaker pauses to dash the gathering moisture from his own eye, that his audience are dissolved in tears, or uttering the exclamations of penitence.[21]

The central figure of the Great Revival was James McGready of the Presbyterian Church, licensed by the Redstone Presbytery, August 13, 1788. Beginning his ministry in North Carolina, McGready was saddened by the exceedingly low ebb at which he found religion; and fired by an evangelistic fervor, his preaching soon produced a re-

[21] Flint, Op. cit., 145f.

vival of religion in Orange County. Among those who came under the influence of his preaching was Barton W. Stone, later to become prominent in the great Cane Ridge revival. Stone's description of McGready's preaching marks it as being typical of that which was soon to become highly popular in the Great Revival. Stone wrote:

> Everything appeared by him forgotten but the salvation of souls. Such earnestness, such zeal, such powerful persuasion, enforced by the joys of heaven and miseries of hell, I had never witnessed before. My mind was chained by him, and followed him closely in his rounds of heaven, earth, and hell with feelings indescribable. His concluding remarks were addressed to the sinner to flee the wrath to come without delay.[22]

The revival methods utilized by McGready aroused serious opposition in North Carolina, and after his enemies had burned his pulpit and sent him a threatening letter, written in blood,[23] he moved to the West, finally settling in Logan County, Kentucky, in 1796. Here McGready became pastor of three Presbyterian churches, Gasper River, Muddy River, and Red River. Within a year his diligent labor and evangelistic zeal had produced a spiritual awakening, the first in Kentucky; and by 1799 the excitement was spreading like wildfire through the West and South.

The scene now turns to Cane Ridge, Kentucky, for here the greatest camp meeting of the entire Great Revival was conducted, one of the participants being Barton W. Stone. In 1798 Stone was ordained as pastor of the Presbyterian Churches at Cane Ridge and Concord, Kentucky, by the Transylvania Presbytery.[24] Distressed at the general apathy

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[22] Stone, Op. cit., 121.

[23] Charles Crossfield Ware, **Barton Warren Stone** (St. Louis, 1932), 78.

[24] Ibid., 72.

toward religion, and hearing of the revivals being conducted by James McGready in southern Kentucky, Stone visited the area early in the spring of 1801. The scenes which transpired before his eyes were new, strange, and baffling On the edge of a prairie in Logan County multitudes had come together and were worshiping incessantly, day and night. The physical exercises were present for "many, very many, fell down, as men slain in battle."[25] Some of Stone's acquaintances were among those struck down, and beside one, whom he had known to be a "careless sinner," Stone sat, observing critically "the momentary revivings as from death, the humble confessions of sins, the fervent prayer, and the ultimate deliverance."[26] Such observations were sufficent to convince Stone that the revival was a work of God, a conviction which he retained throughout his life.[27]

Stone returned to his work in Bourbon County, and under the influence of his evangelistic preaching the emotionalism of the Great Revival began to be felt at Cane Ridge and Concord, along with the physical exercises. At one such service, Stone relates, scores had fallen unconscious to the ground, when he was approached by an "intelligent deist" of the neighborhood who questioned Stone's honesty and accused him of deceiving the people. Stone was not angered, but "mildly spoke a few words to him; immediately he fell down as a dead man, and rose no more till he confessed the Saviour."[28]

Throughout the spring and summer of 1801 the religious tension of Bourbon County was mounting continuously, and the climax of the entire Great Revival was reached in

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[25] Stone, Op. cit., 154.

[26] Idem.

[27] Ibid., 155.

[28] Ibid., 156.

the Cane Ridge meeting of August, 1801.[29] Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian preachers shared in the preaching and exhorting. Various estimates of the number in attendance have been given, but all are sufficiently high to indicate the vast multitude which participated in this religious enthusiasm. Stone reports that "it was judged, by military men on the ground, that there were between twenty and thirty thousand present,[30] and virtually all estimates exceed 10,000.[31]" The falling and jerking which had accompanied the Great Revival elsewhere were seen at Cane Ridge, with hundreds falling prostrate simultaneously. One of the oldest ministers who attended the meeting, James Crawford, attempted to keep an accurate record of the number who fell and reported the total to be about 3,000.[32] There is little evidence that Barton Stone played a prominent role in the drama enacted at Cane Ridge, though his work had prepared the stage for the meeting. However, Stone was present and commended that which he saw as productive of such good that the results would be known only in eternity. "Many things transpired there Which were so much like miracles," Stone wrote, "that, if they were not, they had the same effect as miracles on infidels and unbelievers; for many of them by these were convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and bowed in submission to Him."[33]

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[29] There is some question as to the exact date of this meeting. Stone's leading biographer argues for August 7-12, 1801. Ware, Op. cit., 105ff.

[30] Stone, Op. cit., 157.

[31] Ware, Op. cit., 110; Cleveland, Op. cit., 75, 79. Both give varying accounts of the number in attendance.

[32] William Warren Sweet, **Religion On The American Frontier; The Presbyterians 1783-1840** (New York, 1936) 87f. (Cited hereafter as Sweet, **Presbyterians.)** This figure is also acknowledged by McMaster, Op. cit., I I , 580.

[33] Stone, Op. cit., 158.

After its climax in the Cane Ridge meeting, the Great Revival spread so rapidly that to trace its progress is difficult. Infecting other areas with its contagious enthusiasm, the excitement crossed into Ohio, carried there by Kentucky preachers and those who had attended the great Kentucky meetings of 1801. The report of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church for 1803 reports that throughout the northern and eastern presbyteries of that denomination revivals had occurred quite generally. However, the physical exercises which had characterized the camp-meetings of the West and South did not accompany the Great Revival in other areas. By 1803 revival movements had influenced religious life in virtually every part of the United States, and it was not until 1805 that the Great Revival showed unmistakable signs of decline. Even after that date revivals continued in some areas, though the general scope of the movement had disappeared.[34]

In any study of the Great Revival some attention must be given to the unusual exercises which accompanied it. The most common was the falling exercise in which the subject with a terrifying scream would fall unconscious to the ground, lying lifeless for hours. The jerks were thus designated because the victim's body would be jerked backward and forward with rapidity. Stone reported that he had seen "some wicked people thus affected, and all the time cursing the jerks, while they were thrown to the earth with violence."[35] Under the influence of the barking exercise, men supposed themselves dogs, and it was a common sight to witness a number of men "gathered about a tree, barking, yelping, 'treeing the devil'."[36] There were many who attended the camp-meetings to scoff at these extravagances,

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[34] Cleveland, Op. cit., 85f.

[35] Stone, Op. cit., 160.

[36] McMaster, Op. cit., II, 582.

and it was grim satisfaction for the revivalists to see such skeptics fall victim to the exercises and to hear those who came to scoff remain to pray.[37]

The immediate results of the Great Revival included a general rise in the moral standards of many areas and an important increase in church membership. Upon many the scenes of the camp-meeting had stamped an indelible impression; religion was now recognized as an essential part of life. Though nearly all the camp-meetings were Presbyterian in origin, all denominations enjoyed sizeable increases in total membership; but it was the Baptists and Methodists rather than the Presbyterians who reaped the most bounteous harvest of souls. Within three years the Kentucky Baptists were able to report the addition of more than 10,000 members.[38] Though the Great Revival had begun to decline by 1805, the revival spirit was kept alive in many localities. Timothy Flint reports that numerous revivals were being conducted in Kentucky and Tennessee during the 1820's and 1830's, the influences of which were "salutary" and "good"[39]; and extensive revivals were reported in Kentucky, 1826-1829.[40]

The influence of the Great Revival was felt most strongly in the upper Ohio Valley, and it was in this area that the Campbell debates were conducted. Though more than two decades had elapsed between the decline of the revival fervor and Campbell's debate with Robert Owen, the general interest in religious themes, which had been generated by the revival, was still being felt. Timothy Flint re-

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[37] Cleveland, Op. cit., 112.

[38] Sweet, **Story of Religions In America,** 334.

[39] Timothy Flint, **The History and Geography of The Mississippi Valley** (2 vols., Second Edition, Cincinnati, 1832), I, 146.

[40] W. H. Venable, **Beginnings of Literary Culture In The Ohio Valley** (Cincinnati, 1891), 207.

ported after visiting Cincinnati that its citizens evinced a "laudable desire to belong to some religious society," and that its morals, in spite of frontier influences were "astonishingly regular and correct."[41] Of Kentucky he said, "Religious excitements are common, and carried to the highest point of emotion. Religion, in some form, seems to be generally respected."[42] The religious enthusiasm and fervor so characteristic of the Great Revival was not the type of intellectual activity which would appreciate a religious discussion which was being conducted by men of immense erudition. The religious enthusiasm cultivated by the camp-meeting was entirely different from the popular interest aroused by Campbell's debates; yet the emotionalism was at least partially responsible for the intellectual interest in religion. A scholarly discussion of vital religious issues would naturally arouse more popular interest within a community where the cultural background was strongly religious and controversial than in one whose religious tradition was one of cold, though intellectual, formalism.

PRESBYTERIANISM DIVIDED

Another obvious result of the Great Revival was the divisions which it produced in the Presbyterian Church and the bitter religious controversies occasioned by these schisms. The leading evangelists of the Great Revival were largely Presbyterian, but their methods met almost immediate opposition from their Presbyterian colleagues, the anti-revivalists. The Westminster Confession of Faith with its doctrines of reprobation and election was not appropriate for revival preaching and exhortation, and in its place the strict ears of a Calvinist could detect Methodist doctrines of free grace and individual responsibility. Most Presby-

[41] Flint, **Last Ten Years,** 46f.

[42] Flint, **History and Geography,** I, 366.

terians frowned upon night meetings, the admission of preachers of other sects to Presbyterian pulpits, itinerant preachers, fervent exhortations, and weeping in the pulpit; but all of these were essential features of the camp meeting.

Much to the disgust of revivalists, orthodox Presbyterian ministers began to oppose their work publicly, condemning it as heresy. Stone lamented, "The gauntlet was now thrown, and a fire was now kindled that threatened ruin to the great excitement; it revived the dying spirit of partyism, and gave life and strength to trembling infidels and lifeless professors."[43] The schism between the two parties was likewise made clear in divisions over the question of education for the ministry. The revival had aroused such interest in religion that the demand for ministers in frontier areas was unprecedented, and no trained preachers were available. Efforts to solve this problem widened the breach between the two parties; for the revival group advocated sending poorly trained men into frontier areas, while their opponents insisted that strict educational standards be maintained.

The first schism in the Presbyterian Church resulting from the Great Revival, and the most important to this study, was that led by Barton Stone which resulted in the formation of the "New Lights," "Stonites," or "Christians," as his followers were variously called. By 1801 the revivalists among Presbyterian preachers in northern Kentucky numbered five: Barton W. Stone, Robert Marshall, Richard McNemar, John Dunlavy and John Thompson.[44] The first of this group to arouse active opposition within a presbytery was Richard McNemar, who was charged by the Washington Presbytery in 1802 with holding doctrines contrary to the Confession and with preaching Arminianism.

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[43] Stone, Op. cit., 167.

[44] Ware, Op. cit., 126.

The case of McNemar came before the Synod of Kentucky for review in its second annual meeting, which convened in Lexington, September 6, 1803. Among those in attendance were all five of the revival preachers, for each realized that the decision of the Synod in McNemar's case would determine his fate in the Presbyterian Church. When a motion was offered that the Synod "approbate the proceedings of the Presbytery of Washington" relative to McNemar, the vote was seventeen to six in favor of such action. The trial of two of the revival preachers, McNemar and Thompson, was set for September 10, 1803; but when the momentous hour arrived the five revival preachers were conspicuous by their absence. As the Synod debated procedure, the five made their appearance and presented to the Synod a paper protesting the action taken by the ecclesiastical body and declaring their independence from its jurisdiction. This important document presented as their reasons the right of each individual to interpret the scriptures for himself and doubts as to certain expressions in the confession of faith, concluding with a plea that the Synod adopt a "more liberal plan respecting human creeds and confessions."[48]

This action was wholly unexpected by the Synod, and that body immediately acted to reclaim the five preachers, sending a committee of three to attempt a reconciliation. According to Stone, the only result of this conversation was to convince one member of the committee, Matthew Houston, of their doctrines,[46] and the Synod voted on September 13 to suspend the five revival preachers from the ministry.[47] Stone and his associates immediately formed the Springfield Presbytery and published An Apology for the action which they had taken in renouncing the Synod's jurisdic-

[45] Sweet, **Presbyterians,** 318f.

[46] Stone, Ob. cit., 168.

[47] Sweet, **Presbyterians,** 322.

tion. In this pamphlet the preachers voiced again their objections to the Confession and advocated that men, abandoning all human creeds, should accept the Bible alone as their only rule of faith and practice in religion.[48]

Stone and his colleagues came to view their movement as more than a protest against the Presbyterian Church; they regarded it as an effort to unite all Christians upon the basis of the Bible. Seeing their own Springfield Presbytery as a party organization, they resolved that it be disbanded and published their reasons for this latest action as **The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery**, June 28, 1804.[49] Having accepted the Bible as their only guide, Stone and others began to become dissatisfied with sprinkling as a mode of baptism, and beginning in 1807 the Christians[50] adopted the practice of immersion. Thus in its essential aspects the Stone movement was almost identical to that which Thomas and Alexander Campbell were soon to launch in western Virginia and Pennsylvania.

The infant movement advocating Christian unity was destined to face a number of important difficulties before gaining great strength as a body in Kentucky. When the Shakers made their appearance in Kentucky, two of the preachers, Dunlavy and McNemar, joined their ranks, the latter to become one of their most prominent writers and preachers in the West. Two other preachers, Marshall and Thompson, returned to the Presbyterian Church in 1811,[51]

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[48] Stone, Op. cit., 170.

[49] Fortune, **The Disciples In Kentucky,** 47ff.

[50] Stone and his followers had decided to wear the name Christian and that alone. In 1794 a similar group in Virginia, the Republican Methodists under the leadership of James O'Kelly, had renounced every other religious designation, and between the two movements there is found a connecting link in Rice Haggard. Ware, Op. cit., 147.

[51] Fortune, Op. cit., 54.

leaving Stone as the only one of the five who had renounced the Synod of Kentucky in 1803 to remain faithful to the cause which they had embraced. As the movement under the leadership of Stone pursued its independent course, it became increasingly apparent that Stone and Alexander Campbell had independently arrived at the same conclusions regarding the Christian religion, and that a union of the two movements would facilitate the work of both. Such a union was finally achieved in 1832. It has been estimated that at the time of this union Stone and Campbell each had about 8,000 followers in Kentucky, and the amalgamation of these groups made the Christians the third largest religious body in the state.[52]

Through Barton W. Stone it is possible to see a direct connection between the Great Revival and Alexander Campbell's final debate, that with N. L. Rice in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1843. As a direct result of the Great Revival Stone renounced the Presbyterian Church, organized an independent group calling themselves Christians, and finally joined forces with Alexander Campbell in 1832. It was this union which gave Campbell his greatest strength in the Lexington area of Kentucky, and it was in Lexington that he met the champion of Presbyterianism in 1843.

Another division which occurred within the Presbyterian Church as a result of the Great Revival culminated in the formation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church as an independent denomination. The Great Revival had created such an unprecedented demand for ministers that the Transylvania Presbytery of Kentucky began to license men as preachers who did not meet the educational standards of the church, and in 1804 it addressed an inquiry to the General Assembly requesting approval of its action.

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[52] ibid., 102.

In its reply the Assembly objected to the licensing of any unqualified ministers regardless of the frontier needs.[53] This same year the Synod of Kentucky divided the Presbytery of Transylvania, erecting the Cumberland Presbytery in the southern part of the bluegrass state. The new organization, dominated by pro-revival ministers, immediately licensed a number of evangelists who had been prominent in the camp meetings but who did not have the education required by church standards. This action aroused bitterness among Kentucky Presbyterians which was reflected in the actions of the Synod of Kentucky. This body suspended some of the irregularly licensed ministers, and failing to obtain compliance, ordered the dissolution of the Cumberland Presbytery. When the General Assembly upheld this action, the Presbytery declared its independence and organized the Cumberland Presbyterian Church with its own Confession of Faith, churches, and schools.[54]

As a result of the Great Revival the Shakers made their appearance in the upper Ohio Valley, and the controversies which their work aroused is indicative of the religious bitterness which characterized the first decades of the nineteenth century. So called because of their rhythmic dancing which was a part of their worship, the Shakers had originated as a communistic sect in England and had migrated to the United States in 1774, settling near Albany, New York. Originator of the sect was Ann Lee, whom her followers regarded as Christ incarnate in female form.

Hearing of the emotional excesses which had become associated with the Great Revival, the Shakers sent three missionaries to the West in January, 1805, Issachar Bates, Benjamin Seth Youngs, and John Meacham. These men toured the Ohio Valley, attending camp meetings and

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[53] Miller, Ob. cit., 122.

[54] Ibid, 123.

preaching at every possible opportunity. They have been described as being "eminently qualified" for their work, "grave and unassuming at first in their manners, very intelligent and ready in the Scriptures, and of great boldness in their faith."[88] Profiting from the extravagances of the Great Revival the Shakers enjoyed a phenomenal success, winning many converts to their strange beliefs. Particularly severe were their inroads into the followers of Stone[88] and among those of every denomination to whom the emotionalism of the Great Revival had appealed.

As early as 1805 the Shakers succeeded in establishing one communistic village in the Ohio Valley, and by 1822, two others had been added.[57] Among the doctrines of this group was celibacy, their religion demanding that any convert must renounce all family ties. Such principles aroused bitter opposition, and very often the Shakers became victims of religious persecution and various outrages. In 1811 the Ohio legislature passed a statute, directing that if a woman petitioned that her husband had deserted her to join the Shakers, any court would award her a fair share of the family property.[88] Some of the most bitterly controversy literature of the entire period was directed against the Shakers.

WESTERN RELIGION

The irreligion of the early 1800's had vanished in the West by the 1830's; religious influences were now among

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[55] Stone, Op. cit., 184.

[56] These losses were probably a blessing in disguise, though Stone did not realize it at the moment. It removed from his ranks those of an unstable emotional nature.

[57] Miller, Op. cit., 134.

[58] Beverly W. Bond, Jr., **The Civilization Of The Old Northwest** (New York, 1934), 489.

the strongest in molding western character. Some western states, such as Ohio, boasted a higher proportion of church membership than most states along the Atlantic seaboard, perhaps even the highest in the entire nation. Religion was now vitally important to the individual; for it satisfied a social as well as spiritual need. Accustomed to isolation and pensive loneliness in the clearing which was "his world," the frontiersman found that his religion satisfied this social drive. However, his religious attitudes had been shaped by the emotionalism, independence, and roughness of frontier life.

Probably the outstanding characteristic of this frontier-fashioned religion was its controversial aspect. Even prior to the Great Revival a number of churches had penetrated the area, the number being so large that even the strongest numerically found itself a minority group. The Great Revival with its disruptive and schismatic influence aggravated this situation, adding prolifically to the religious groups which abounded throughout the area. Those divisions marshalled by Barton W. Stone, the Cumberland Presbyterians, and the Shakers are but typical of that which occurred within many of the older churches throughout the period. The spirit of religious dissatisfaction was voiced in open rebellions which culminated in the establishment of new churches and the proselyting of members from the older ones, the new churches sometimes rising to places of prominence and respect, but often facing extinction after the initial enthusiasm began to wane.

The understandable result of these divisions was the bitterness and the controversial aspect of nearly all religious literature which became so characteristic of the period. The clash of creeds and the struggle to gain new adherents produced a voluminous amount of literature, books, pamphlets, periodicals, sermons, and debates, as each defended his own sectarian system as being the perfect replica of divinely

revealed religion or condemned dogmatically the errors into which his religious neighbors had fallen. Each religious body had its leading periodicals, and often prominent newspapers devoted considerable space to news of religious controversies. Much of this literature was intended for popular consumption and became extreme, dogmatic, and bitter, ignoring issues and appealing to prejudice. One writer reports that the battle precipitated by hostility toward the Shakers in the West continued for twenty years. He wrote, "All the force of acrimony, invective, anathema, florid figures, and thundering chop-logic were employed by the controversialists, until truth became obscure in a cloud of angry denunciation."[93] An editorial which appeared in Niles' Register in 1833 condemned the controversial nature of most religious periodicals in the flowing style:

> Indeed it would almost seem that a return to the "days of fire and faggot" might be speedily looked for—if the secular power could be rendered subservient to the propagation and "glorious progress" of some of the leading Christian sects. Concerning such quarrels... Franklin about sixty years ago, said in a private letter to a friend:
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> "When theologians or religious people quarrel about religion, each party abuses the other; the profane and the infidel believe both sides, and enjoy the fray; the reputation of religion in general suffers, and its enemies are ready to say, not what was said in primitive times, **behold how these Christians love one another, but, mark how these Christians HATE one another."**
>
> And when we refer to certain newspapers in which "the drum ecclesiastic" is most loudly and wickedly beaten... it may well be said—**"mark how these Christians hate one another...**

[93] Miller, Op. cit., 135.

> We have been disgusted with the foul and malicious things which we have seen published in too many of the religious newspapers, and would enter a humble, but earnest protest against them all, saying, "Let there be peace between you."[60]

Religious controversies became so bitter and widespread that, according to one historian of the upper Ohio Valley, "the culture of the whole period was colored by a religious enthusiasm that was eclipsed only when the dark shadow of the slavery dispute assumed ominous proportions in the 1850's."[61]

In the work of Alexander Campbell the religious controversies of the era reached their climax.[62] Campbell viewed the unity of all believers in Christ upon a Biblical basis as the paramount need of American religion and condemned all church creeds and human names as being antagonistic to the accomplishment of that ultimate good. No creed was too hoary with age, no name too sacred to its followers to escape his scathing attack and satire. His debates with men who were prominent figures in the Presbyterian and Catholic churches epitomize the spirit of the age; such discussions were attended by multitudes of prominent and interested figures.

Too, the wide popular interest aroused by the Campbell debates must be evaluated in terms of the intellectual freedom which characterized the area. The upper Ohio Valley had but recently emerged from typically frontier conditions when Alexander Campbell first made his appearance in the area, and though the frontier had already passed beyond Cincinnati and Lexington, those communities were basking in the intellectual freedom produced everywhere by frontier

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[60] Ibid, 121.

[61] ibid., 128.

experiences. During the Great Revival evangelists had insisted upon the right of each individual to interpret the Bible for himself, and in the Ohio Valley the passage of two decades had not obviated this right. Campbell recognized the intellectual freedom of the West and commended it, saying, "The western people believe in giving every man liberty of speech; they gave Owen a fair chance."[83]

One other influence which is of vital importance in understanding the Campbell debates is the implicit confidence which his contemporaries had in the Bible. The twentieth century has forsaken many of the most sacred truths of Christianity, accepted almost universally in the early nineteenth century. Influenced by German rationalism and higher criticism, many of the religious leaders of this century no longer accept the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth, atonement, and resurrection of Christ. This is an era of modernism; the early nineteenth century was an age of fundamentalism. When Alexander Campbell met contemporary religious leaders in public debate, there was one fact upon which they could agree: a Biblical statement must be regarded as the very essence of truth. This acceptance of the inspiration of the Bible cultivated a public curiosity to learn which of the popularly taught doctrines could pass through the fiery ordeal of public debate and stand triumphant as the truth revealed in the Bible.

The religious background of the upper Ohio Valley was, therefore, one which had been molded by frontier influences and western churches. The area had witnessed the Great Revival with its camp meetings, emotionalism, and physical exercises. It was still enjoying the popular interest which had been cultivated in religion, but in a divided, controversial, and often bitter religion. The westerners believed confidently in intellectual freedom, in the inspiration and

[62] Venable, Op. cit., 222.

integrity of the Bible, and in the right of each individual to read and interpret the Scripture for himself. The upper Ohio Valley was, by 1820, an area well prepared for the appearance of Alexander Campbell and religious polemics on a grand scale.

CHAPTER III

Campbell Versus Skepticism: The Owen Debate

Few events in the long public career of Alexander Campbell brought him the universal public acclaim and popularity which he attained in 1829 through his defense of Christianity against the assaults of Robert Owen. The skeptical Owen had gained an international reputation as a socialistic reformer, wealthy philanthropist, and opponent of Christianity; and when he established a "city of mental independence" at New Harmony, Indiana, he contributed materially to the growth of general skepticism throughout the United States. In undertaking to uphold the divine origin of Christianity against the attacks of Owen, Alexander Campbell became immediately, though temporarily, the champion of all American churches; and at the conclusion of the discussion, American Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, owed its erstwhile critic a debt of gratitude.

The debate between Campbell and Owen, conducted in Cincinnati, Ohio, April 13-21,1829, is the first of Campbell's major discussions; however, it did not find him a complete novice in the field of religious polemics. Earlier he had represented the Baptist Church in two discussions with Presbyterian ministers, John Walker in 1820, and W. L. Maccalla in 1823. These discussions are not so important as Mr. Campbell's three major debates in which he met skepticism, Catholicism and Presbyterianism; and though they

merit consideration, they may be studied more logically as a background for the Campbell-Rice debate of 1843.

ROBERT OWEN

By 1829 Robert Owen was a public figure in two hemispheres, appealing to the popular imagination by his schemes for the betterment of humanity, and arousing the ire of a united clergy by his denunciations of all religion. This international figure was born in Newton, Montgomeryshire, North Wales, on May 14, 1771.[1] At an early age the boy was enrolled in a day school where he evidenced a precocious mental development; for at seven he had mastered all the information which his instructor could impart and was himself teaching. The intellectual growth of the young man was so rapid that before attaining his tenth birthday, he had investigated a number of theological works and examined their contents so critically as to lead himself to doubt the fundamental nature of all religion. Three Methodist women had become intimate with the Owen family and had taken a fancy to young Robert. Noting his religious inclinations, they desired to win the young man to the Methodist faith and presented him with a number of volumes on religion. Already an ardent reader he studied these carefully and afterward turned to works written in defense of other religious faiths besides Methodism. Here he was surprised and shocked; for instead of finding an assumed unity in all religion, he read of opposition between the various groups professing Christianity, and of deadly hatred among Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, and Hindoos. The study of these contending systems of religion led the young man to question the truth of any single religion. In his auto-

[1] Owen died in 1858, nearly three decades following his debate with Campbell. These years were spent in promoting socialism throughout the world, attending fourteen "socialistic congresses" (1835-1846), and in promoting his various schemes and ideas.

biography Owen stated, "But certain it is that my reading religious works, combined with my other readings, compelled me to feel strongly at ten years of age that there must be something fundamentally wrong in all religions, as they had been taught up to that period."[2]

The young man, anxious to see the world, was sent by his father to London and placed under a man named McGuffog, who had established a successful business in women's clothing. Here Robert Owen, though still a young man, learned the clothing business and became a good judge of fabrics. He continued his studies of religion, also, and though attending the services of the Churches of England and Scotland, he became increasingly dissatisfied and finally abandoned all religion. Owen has described this decision as follows:

> Before my investigations were concluded, I was satisfied that one and all had emanated from the same source, and their varieties from the same false imaginations of our early ancestors; imaginations formed when men were ignorant of their own nature, were devoid of experience, and were governed by their random conjectures, which were almost always, at first, like their notions of the fixedness of the earth, far from the truth. It was with greatest reluctance, and after long contests in my mind, that I was compelled to abandon my first and deep-rooted impressions in favour of Christianity—but being obligated to give up my faith in this sect, I was at the same time compelled to reject all others.[3]

Leaving the McGuffogs, Owen soon became manager of a large textile mill in Manchester, England, which em-

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[2] Owen, Robert, **The Life of Robert Owen** (London, 1920),5.

[3] Ibid., 22.

ployed 500 persons, the complete operations of which he mastered in six weeks. He became a member of the "Literary And Philosophical Society of Manchester" and was privileged to meet some of the foremost intellectuals of Europe. A partnership which Owen obtained from the owner of the Manchester mill was later dissolved, and in 1794-95 Owen established the Chorlton Twist Company and managed a mill at Chorlton. Business carried the young businessman on frequent trips to Glasgow where he met Anne Caroline Dale, daughter of the famous David Dale, who had opened a mill at Lanark in 1795. After a courtship the two planned marriage; but Robert Owen feared to ask the consent of David Dale, whom he had never met, lest he refuse because of Owen's religious convictions. Owen concluded that he might make a favorable impression upon the prospective father-in-law by offering to purchase his holdings at Lanark, which he did with the assistance of partners. Dale consented to his daughter's marriage, and in spite of numerous religious discussions between the two men, Dale and Owen remained close friends until the former's death in 1806. It is interesting to note in connection with Robert Owen's skepticism that his wife retained her religious convictions throughout life and that they were tenderly respected by the great skeptic.

Owen assumed control of the New Lanark mills on January 1, 1800, and immediately inaugurated reforms for the betterment of working conditions. Infant schools were established for which Owen, quite justly, became famous. Prominent visitors from throughout the world flocked to New Lanark to study and commend the experiment which Owen had inaugurated. It was during this period that Owen became conscious of the principle which was to become the focal point of his socialist philosophy and to the propagation of which he was to devote the remainder of his life. Stated briefly, Owen believed that character is molded by circumstances over which men have no control; they are

therefore not responsible for their actions and not justly subject to punishment. In his debate with Alexander Campbell, Owen relied upon an expanded version of this principle in attempting to prove his ruthless attack upon Christianity.

Owen gradually broadened his social philosophy to include villages of unity and cooperation, a system of socialism; and he planned a series of public meetings at which he would explain his revolutionary social principles. Realizing his public popularity, and knowing that his speech would be circulated widely, Owen resolved that in his address he would strike a "death blow" at all the "false religions of the world."[4] Owen stated in describing this meeting at which he publicly denounced religion:

> When I went to this meeting I was on the morning of that day by far the most popular individual in the civilized world, and possessed the most influence with a majority of the leading members of the British Cabinet and Government. I went to the meeting with the determination by one sentence to destroy that popularity, but by its destruction to lay the axe to the root of all false religions, and thus to prepare the population of the world for the reign of charity in accordance with the natural laws of humanity.[5]

Even his intimate personal friends knew nothing of Owen's daring plans, and in a most dramatic fashion the reformer announced that all religion was false, founded in ignorance, and inimical to the best interests of humanity. Owen had feared that such an announcement might mean his death, but instead he was greeted with a tremendous ovation. Thereafter, Owen regarded this day, August 21, 1817, as the most important day of his life, the "day on which bigo-

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[4] Ibid., 220.

[5] Ibid., 222.

try, superstition, and all false religions, received their death blow."[6]

Gradually Owen withdrew from the project at New Lanark, the principal cause being his partners' opposition to Owen's anti-religious convictions. By 1829 his connection with New Lanark had been severed completely, and in the meantime Owen had turned his attentions to the United States. In 1824 he heard of the Rappite Colony, an estate of 30,000 acres on the Wabash River in the states of Illinois and Indiana. This colony had been established by a group of German emigrants under the leadership of a Lutheran teacher named Rapp in 1804. Sailing to America in 1824, Owen visited the colony and purchased the village and 20,000 acres in April of the following year. It was Owen's conviction that in the United States where disestablishment of the church was complete, the seeds of his social system would find a more fertile soil for development and his skeptical philosophy a more receptive public. Within a short time Owen had gathered a colony of several hundred at New Harmony, including a number of European intellectuals. A constitution was framed based upon communistic principles, all public religious exercises were outlawed, and the goddess of reason was enthroned in this city of mental independence, as she had been during the French Revolution. A library, said to be the finest in North America, was assembled for the use of these skeptics, and a publication was inaugurated, **The New Harmony Gazette,** dedicated to free thought and anti-religious propaganda from the pens of this host of well-educated and Owen-supported skeptics. The bitter antagonism voiced by these New Harmony philosophers against religion was patterned after that of their master, Robert Owen. In summarizing his own convictions Owen states, "The religions of the world are and

[6] Ibid., 224

ever have been the real cause of all falsehood, disunion, and crime, and of all the miseries of the human race."[7] This proceeds from the fact that they are based upon ignorance of the fundamental, undeviating, perpetual laws of humanity. Styling religion an idol supported by political authorities and public opinion, Owen affirmed:

> I would now, if I possessed ten thousand lives and could suffer a painful death for each, willingly thus sacrifice them, to destroy this Moloch, which in every generation destroys the rationality and happiness of about a thousand millions of my poor suffering fellow men and women.[8]

SKEPTICISM ENCOUNTERS THE SAGE OF BETHANY

When in 1827 the New Harmony Gazette inaugurated a series of essays directed against the Bible, it found one highly interested and intelligent reader in Alexander Campbell. Noting the appearance of these essays, he wrote in the Christian Baptist of his gratitude that the Christian world would now have an opportunity to weigh the best evidence against religion which could be produced by a group of skeptical philosophers, and announced that such essays would not remain unanswered. Campbell wrote, "If no abler hand will appear on the side of the Bible, I shall be compelled to volunteer in the service, for I am indebted more to the light which it contains than to all the circumstances else which surrounded me from infancy to man."[9]

For such a defense of the Christian faith Alexander Campbell was well qualified in faith, ability, and experience. Caring little for current systems of theology with

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[7] Ibid., 283

[8] Ibid, 285f.

[9] **Christian Baptist,** April 2, 1827, 328.

their speculations and dogmatic opinions, he could easily dismiss any skeptical objections which were based upon these as being irrelevant. He regarded the simplicity of the Christian system which he had found in the New Testament as an impregnable fortress of truth, from whose walls he could successfully pierce the armor of logic protecting any skeptic. Campbell had investigated all possible systems of skeptical thought, and the mastery of these, combined with his unexcelled ability as a logician especially in handling with adeptness broad and comprehensive propositions, made him a formidable opponent for Owen's followers.

As editor of the **Christian Baptist** Campbell had been quite liberal in opening its columns to friend and critic alike, and in September, 1826, he had published a letter from a young Methodist who had been unable to reconcile his ideas of God with certain principles found in the Bible, and questioned its character as a divinely inspired volume.[10] The editor replied in a series of replications in which he attempted to cover the entire field of skepticism and consider its major objections to revealed religion. The attributes of God, his love and mercy, which the young man could not reconcile with the concept of eternal punishment, had been taken from the Bible; for apart from revelation, Campbell contended, man could not conceive the idea of God. Where was the logic then, in accepting a Biblical concept of God, and subsequently rejecting the volume because of alleged inconsistencies with the character of God? In publishing these articles Campbell served notice to skeptics generally that their publications would be considered with ability and logical precision, not in bitterness or dogmatism.

Campbell did not criticize the social aspects of the experiment being conducted at New Harmony by Robert Owen, but he believed that real social progress was im-

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[10] Ibid., September 7, 1826, 270.

possible apart from some system of religion. In an essay considering these ideas he argued that "a social system of co-operation may be grafted on any system of religion, true or false; but that a social system of co-operation can at all exist without religious obligations has never yet been proved."[11] This was the experiment which Robert Owen was attempting, and Campbell expressed regret that any one born in the eighteenth century and educated in Scotland could have profited so little by experience as to believe that mankind could be happy under any circumstances which robbed them of the hope of immortality. Owen's basic error, according to Campbell, was his conviction that the force of circumstance precluded a personal power over belief. Such an assertion ignored the universal experience of mankind. Campbell wrote, "It is, indeed, almost a proverb, 'that what men wish or will to believe, they do believe; and what they do not like or will to believe, they disbelieve'."[12] It appeared somewhat inconsistent that Owen denied the free moral agency of men; yet he posed as a social reformer.

Campbell was not the only believer who attacked the views of Owen through the religious press. Barton W. Stone carried an article in his paper, the **Christian Messenger,** which was highly critical of the New Harmony experiment. Specifically, Stone attacked the peculiar views of Robert Owen, charging first, that Owen's position denied the existence, and therefore, the moral government of God. Second, Owen was charged with proclaiming that religion, marriage, and ownership of property were the greatest evils. Finally, Stone believed that there was nothing original in the skepticism of Owen, for his views were nothing but a revival of eighteenth century French skepticism in a refined but unrepentant form.'[13]

[11] Ibid., April 2, 1827, 327.

[12] Ibid, September 3, 1827, 365.

[13] Christian Messenger, January, 1827, 44ff.

Alexander Campbell received his first invitation to meet a prominent skeptic in public debate in a letter from a correspondent in Canton, Ohio, dated February 22, 1828. A co-operative colony had been established at Kendall, Ohio, a year or two previously and had accepted the principles of the master skeptic, Robert Owen. The letter explained:

> To this society an emissary of infidelity, of considerable talents, Doctor Underhill, has been sent, and for two months or more, he has been indefatigably engaged in preaching that sort of moral philosophy, which the "New Harmony Gazette" contains. He is going from place to place, and great numbers, I understand, are converted to his new doctrine.[14]

Such activity alarmed the clergy of the area, but only a Catholic priest had dared contradict the man, and that with little effect. Deism and free thought were growing alarmingly, and even young boys on the street had learned to rail at religion. The correspondent confessed:

> I am ashamed for my brethren, the English preachers, who stand back when that man speaks, and only talk when he is not within hearing. Does not this show as if Christianity could not be defended against its enemies, or that its priests were too lukewarm to undertake its defense? It grieves me the more since Doctor Underhill has challenged, boldly, every one who would be willing to question his views, and has publicly called for opposition to his sentiments.[15]

The letter concluded with an invitation that Campbell come to the defense of Christianity against the brazen attacks of Dr. Underhill.

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[14] **Christian Baptist,** April 7, 1828, 433.

[15] Ibid., 434.

In a reply published in the **Christian Baptist** Campbell declined to meet Dr. Underhill, considering him too obscure an individual to merit his attention. Were his home in Canton, Ohio, instead of Bethany, he would have been happy to undertake the defense of Christianity, but to go out of his way to meet the gentleman would not be compatible with his views of propriety. Campbell indicated, however, that he would be quite willing to meet the leading skeptic, Robert Owen himself. He wrote:

> If his great master, Mr. Robert Owen, will engage to debate the whole system of his moral and religious philosophy with me, if he will pledge himself to prove any position affirmative of his atheistical sentiments as they lie scattered over the pages of the New Harmony Gazette—if he will engage to do this coolly and dispassionately in a regular and systematic debate, to be moderated by a competent tribunal, I will engage to take the negative and disprove all his affirmative positions, in a public debate to be holden any place equidistant from him and me.'[15]

The editor concluded that such a discussion was needed; and until it could be arranged, the Sage of Bethany refused to "draw a bow, save against the king of the skeptics of the city of Mental Independence."[16]

Such an opportunity was not long in presenting itself, for even before Campbell published his willingness to meet Owen, the latter had hurled a public challenge to the clergy through the New Orleans press. During January, 1828, Owen had delivered a series of public lectures antagonistic to religion in the southern city. On January 28 several of the New Orleans papers carried a notice from Owen to the clergymen of the city, suggesting a discussion to consider

[16] Idem.

the momentous issues which he had raised before the Christian world in his lectures. The challenge read:

> I propose to prove, as I have already attempted to do in my lectures, that all the religions of the world have been founded on the ignorance of mankind; that they are directly opposed to the never changing laws of our nature; that they have been and are the real source of vice, disunion and misery of every description; that they are now the only real bar to the formation of a society of virtue, of intelligence, of charity in its most extended sense, and of sincerity and kindness among the whole human family; and that they can be no longer maintained except through the ignorance of the mass of the people, and the tyranny of the few over that mass.[17]

When news of this challenge came before the eyes of Campbell he immediately published his acceptance in the **Christian Baptist,** May 5, 1928, first giving reasons which made such a debate imperative. Campbell charged that Owen's views were predicated upon absolute deism or atheism and that the proper soil for these "libertine and lawless" sentiments was the skeptical age through which the United States was then passing, and especially the youth of the nation. Though he regarded Owen personally as a gentleman of high respectability, a scholar, and benevolent capitalist, Campbell believed that the sentiments which he was disseminating with the fervor of an apostle were destroying faith in Christianity and, therefore, must be checked. His acceptance of Owen's challenge read:

> Now, be it known to Mr. Owen, and all whom it may concern, that I, relying on the author, the reasonableness, and the excellency of the Christian religion, will engage to meet Mr. Owen at any place equidistant

[17] Ibid., May 5, 1828, 443.

> from New Harmony and Bethany, such as Cincinnati, Ohio; or Lexington, Kentucky; and will then and there undertake to show that Mr. Owen is utterly incompetent to prove that position he has assumed, in a public debate before all who may please to attend; to be moderated or controlled by a proper tribunal, and to be conducted in perfect good order from day to day, until the parties, or the moderators, or the congregation, or a majority of them are satisfied, as may afterwards be agreed upon.[18]

In the **New Harmony Gazette,** May 14, Owen, not having heard of Campbell's acceptance of his New Orleans challenge, replied to the letter which Campbell had written to his correspondent in Canton, Ohio. He suggested a meeting of prominent western ministers and those conscientiously opposed to religion, at which they could exchange views on the questions at issue. Campbell replied that such a gathering was no part of the New Orleans challenge which he had accepted and that he remained willing to meet Owen upon an individual basis. All that remained necessary was the arrangement of preliminary details.

A few weeks later these arrangements were concluded at a personal meeting between Campbell and Owen at Bethany. Owen was on his way to Europe, planning to spend the winter of 1828-29 there; and passing within a short distance of Bethany enroute to the East coast, he stopped to meet the religious leader. Owen desired particularly to learn through an acquaintance with Campbell whether his acceptance of the proposal for a debate "emanated from a conscientious desire to discover valuable truths for the benefit of the human race, or from a wish to attain a useless

[18] Ibid., May 5, 1828, 443f.

notoriety" through a meaningless discussion.[19] Meeting Campbell, Owen found him a conscientious truth seeker and a man of superior talents. Campbell in turn found Owen an affable gentleman, whose extensive travels, numerous acquaintances, and diligent study qualified him as the world's most capable defender of skepticism. Reflecting on Owen's vast attainments and the skeptic's lifelong devotion to his cause, Campbell confided to readers of the **Christian Baptist** that "we should fear the result of such a discussion, were it not for the assurance we have and feel of the invincible, irrefragable, and triumphant evidences of that religion from which we derive all our high enjoyments on earth, and to which we look for everything that disarms death of its terrors, and the grave of its victory over the human race."[20]

Owen was especially impressed by the natural beauty of the area around Bethany; and as the two men, Christian and skeptic, walked amiably over the picturesque undulating hills of the Campbell estate, a conversation occurred which has become famous as a bit of Campbell lore. As the two passed by the Campbell family's small cemetery, Owen stopped, and turning to Mr. Campbell, said, "There is one advantage I have over the Christian—**I am not afraid to die.** Most Christians have fear in death, but if some few items of my business were settled, I should be perfectly willing to die at any moment." Campbell queried immediately, "You say you have no fear in death; have you any **hope** in death?" After an expressive pause the philosopher replied in the negative. Pointing to an ox standing contentedly in a nearby field, the Christian answered, "Then you are on a level with

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[19] Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell, **Debate On The Evidences of Christianity; Containing An Examination of the "Social System," and of All the Systems of Scepticism of Ancient and Modern Times** (2 Vols., Bethany, Va., 1829), I, 12. (Cited hereafter as **Campbell-Owen Debate.)**

[20] Christian Baptist, August 4, 1828, 470.

that brute. He has fed till he is satisfied, and stands in the shade whisking off the flies, and has **neither hope nor fear in death."** [21]

On August 4, Mr. Campbell announced to the readers of the Christian Baptist that formal arrangements for the discussion had been concluded; the debate would be conducted in Cincinnati during April of 1829. The delay of almost a year was necessitated by Owen's earlier plans to spend the winter in Great Britain and not to visit the United States again until the following spring. April was selected by the disputants who hoped that adequate travel facilities on steam boats plying the Ohio River and a mildness of weather in the spring would encourage a large attendance. [22]

CHRISTIANITY VERSUS "THE SOCIAL SYSTEM"

During the months preceding April, 1829, both Alexander Campbell and Robert Owen were busily engaged in their chosen fields, shouldering respectively the responsibilities of ministerial work and social reform. Owen's plans for spending the winter in the British Isles were doomed to failure, for shortly after arriving in England, Owen was approached by a group of individuals who had received a land grant from the Mexican government in Texas and desired his assistance in a colonization project. On November 22, 1828, Owen set sail for Mexico, dreamily envisioning a great state erected upon the principles of his social system. Difficulties so plagued the project, however, that by the following spring Owen had almost forgotten about the debate with Campbell and arrived in Cincinnati on time only through the assistance of Admiral Fleming, British naval commander in the West Indies and close friend of Owen,

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[21] Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell**, II, 242f.

[22] **Christian Baptist,** August 4, 1828, 470.

who conveyed him from Mexico to New Orleans on a British warship.[23] Campbell, in the meantime, was busily engaged in editing the **Christian Baptist** and was concerned with the affairs of the churches, their dissolution from the Baptists rapidly becoming a reality during the period.

It had been hoped that a Presbyterian church, the largest in Cincinnati, might be obtained for the debate, but its minister, Dr. Wilson, refused his permission. This action was greatly regretted since no other edifice offered such accomodations, Mr. Campbell remarking that Dr. Wilson with his customary liberality had refused the citizens of Cincinnati the use of a building which they had helped erect.[24] Cincinnati Methodists readily granted the use of their largest building with a seating capacity of about 1,200.

The widespread publicity which had been given the debate and reputations of the disputants fanned public enthusiasm in the proceedings; visitors arrived from New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi. Interest was so great that the building was overflowing at each session, and many of the visitors who travelled long distances to Cincinnati to attend the discussion were forced to return to their homes because of the difficulty in obtaining seats.[25] Rules of the discussion stipulated that the propositions to be discussed were those contained in Owen's challenge to the clergy of New Orleans, with Owen opening the discussion and Campbell closing it.[26]

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[23] G. D. H. Cole, **Robert Owen** (Boston, 1925), 188.

[24] **Christian Baptist,** June 1, 1829, 552.

[25] Idem.

[26] Moderators chosen by Owen were Timothy Flint, Col. Francis Carr, and Henry Starr; by Campbell, Judge Burnett, Col. Samuel W. Davis, and Major Daniel Gano. These selected a seventh, Oliver M. Spencer. Richardson, Op. cit., II, 268.

On April thirteenth the debate began and continued, excluding the intervening Lord's day, through the twenty-first.

Owen opened the discussion, and his appearance and attitude have been described by Timothy Flint, a prominent western minister whom Owen had chosen as one of his moderators.

> Every one has seen the face or the print of the benevolent "social" cosmopolite, the Welch philosopher, whose strange taste it is, to wander over the world, bestowing vast sums in charity, and to obtain in return, an ample harvest of vilification and abuse. He was dressed in quaker plainness; wearing his customary, undaunted, self possessed, good natured face, surmounted, as most people know, with an intellectual rudder of almost portentous amplitude, that might well have been deemed an acquisition in a pilgrimage to the promontory of noses. From each side of this prominent index of mental power, beamed such an incessant efflux of cheerfulness, as might well shame, in comparison, the sour and tristful visage of many an heir of the hope of immortality.[27]

The speaker devoted his opening address largely to the background of the debate, adding that he had discovered certain principles of human nature which would abolish religion, marriage, and unnecessary private property when understood and applied.

The appearance of Campbell as he opened his portion of the debate is likewise described by Flint.

> The chivalrous champion of the covenant is a citizen of Bethany, near Wheeling, in Virginia; a

[27] **Western Monthly Review,** April, 1829; quoted in **Free Enquirer,** 1829, 250.

> gentleman, we should think between thirty and forty, with a long face, a rather small head, of a sparkling, bright and cheerful countenance, and finely arched forehead; in the earnest vigor of youth, and with the very first sprinkling of white on his crown. He wore an aspect, as of one who had words both ready and inexhaustible, and as possessed of the excellent grace of perseverance . . .[28]

Campbell's first address, the only one which he prepared prior to the debate and read from manuscript, was an eloquent plea for the Christian religion. Asserting that there were sufficient evidences to convince any rational being of the divine origin of Christianity, he eulogized the Christian virtues of love, mercy, humility, and purity and contrasted the indescribable joy produced by the promises of the Bible with the gloom of an eternal death, the only future of the unbeliever.

In his second speech Owen began the reading of a long manuscript which was destined to occupy his attention throughout the remainder of the discussion. Within a short time he had presented his -twelve fundamental laws of human nature, which constituted the entirety of his argumentative material. The remainder of his time was spent repeating, emphasizing and explaining these laws. He repeated them no less than twelve times during the course of the discussion, so frequently that each repetition produced a wave of laughter through the audience. To outline these twelve laws is to summarize every argument made by Owen during the course of the entire debate! Abridged, they are as follows:

> 1. That man, at his birth, is ignorant of every thing relative to his own organization . . .

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[28] Idem.

2. That no two infants, at birth, have yet been known to possess precisely the same organization...

3. That each individual is placed, at birth, without his knowledge or consent, within circumstances, which, acting upon his peculiar organization, impress the general character of those circumstances upon the infant, child, and man ...

4. That no infant has the power of deciding at what period of time or in what part of the world he shall come into existence; of whom he shall be born, in what distinct religion he shall be trained to believe, or by what other circumstances he shall be surrounded from birth to death ...

5. That each individual is so created, that when young, he may be made to receive impressions, to produce either true ideas or false notions, and beneficial or injurious habits, and to retain them with great tenacity...

6. That each individual is so created that he must believe according to the strongest impressions that are made on his feelings and other faculties, while his belief in no case depends upon his will...

7. That each individual is so created that he must like that which is pleasant to him, or that which produces agreeable sensations on his individual organization, and he must dislike that which creates in him unpleasant and disagreeable sensations ...

8. That each individual is so created that, the sensations made upon his organization, although pleasant and delightful at their commencement and for some duration, generally become, when continued beyond a certain period, without change, disagreeable and painful...

> 9. That the highest health, the greatest progressive improvements, and the most permanent happiness of each individual depend upon the proper cultivation of all his physical, intellectual, and moral faculties and powers from infancy to maturity....[29]

The last three of the laws state that an individual's character, whether superior, medium, or inferior, is determined by the particular combination of his natural faculties and the circumstances amid which he is placed.

The truth of many of these propositions, admitted by Campbell, was so universally recognized that their continued repetition was of no constructive value. The heart of Owen's philosophy lay in the sixth proposition and involved the influence of circumstances, which were affirmed to mold the character of man, and over which man has no more control than the tree exercises over the wind which sways its boughs in the thunderstorm. Consequently, men are not morally responsible for their actions and are not subjects of praise or criticism, reward or punishment. Guided by the remorseless force of circumstances, an individual cannot think, act, love, hate, or do anything other than that he does. Why did a child reared in the United States become a Christian? Owen asserted that it was only because of his environment, and that if the same child were placed in some cannibal tribe or given to a Hindoo family, he would become a cannibal or Hindoo.

Both Alexander Campbell and the moderators suggested to Owen that he confine himself to one of the specific propositions which he had agreed to defend; for the twelve fundamental laws had no logical connection whatever with those propositions. The moderators insisted that before Owen outline the principles of a new social system, he sustain his charges that the old was wholly bad, but in vain.

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[29] **Campbell-Owen Debate, I,** 22f.

The skeptic insisted that he had discovered laws which were opposed to religion and that in expounding these laws, he was sounding the death-knell of Christianity. Said he:

> Were we now, in detail, to apply this divine standard of truth, the twelve laws, to all the past and present civil and religious codes, it would soon become manifest that they have, one and all, originated in times of great darkness, when men were too ignorant of their own nature, and of the most simple laws of nature, generally, to detect imposition or error, however incongruous or contradictory one part of it might be to another.[30]

One of the most interesting events in the first half of the debate occurred when Campbell, attempting to bring the skeptic into a clash of issues, asked Owen how the concept of God had originated. This question involved Campbell's belief, which he had expressed as early as 1826 in his letters to the young skeptic, that man could not originate the concept of God by any faculties of the intellect, but once that concept had been revealed by the divinity, it could be confirmed by many evidences in nature. In taking this position Campbell was actually admitting one of the stock arguments of skeptics; for the natural theology of the period taught that nature revealed the existence of God.[31] Skeptics denied this, and Campbell was convinced that they were right. This position furnished him with one of the most effective and original arguments which he could utilize against skepticism, and the unbelievers found one of their most powerful weapons turned against them. Campbell had utilized this argument against the philosophers of New Harmony through a query in the Christian Baptist, in which he addressed the skeptics:

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[30] **Campbell-Owen Debate,** I, 27.

[31] Richardson, Op Cit., II, 230.

> You think that reason cannot originate the idea of an eternal first cause, or that no man could acquire such an idea by the employment of his senses and reason—and you think correctly. You think also, that the Bible is not a supernatural revelation—not a revelation from a Deity in any sense. These things premised, gentlemen, I present my **problem** for ATHEISTS in the form of a query again.
>
> The Christian idea of an eternal first cause uncaused, or of a God, is now in the world, and has been for ages immemorial. You say it **could not** enter into the world by reason, and it **did not** enter by revelation. Now, as you are philosophers and historians, and have all the means of knowledge, **how did it enter into the world?**[32]

The infidel philosophers had enjoyed almost two years in which to ponder this question, and when Campbell read the query to Owen in their debate, he immediately answered, "By imagination."[33] Campbell then asserted that according to the philosophy of Locke and Hume, the mind could not originate any new idea but only combine and arrange old concepts in new forms. How then could man have imagined the concept of God? To clinch the point more solidly Campbell suggested that Owen and the entire audience attempt to imagine a sixth sense, for one unlike those already possessed is impossible.[34]

Owen's only reply was his twelve fundamental laws. When he had finally concluded reading all of the material which he had prepared on these principles, and without any effort to answer the objections against the social system

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[32] **Christian Baptist,** October 1, 1827, 376f.

[33] **Campbell-Owen Debate, I**, 116.

[34] Ibid., 117.

which had been lodged by Campbell, Owen suggested that his opponent continue to occupy the platform until he had completed all of his arguments in favor of Christianity. The address which followed occupied a total of twelve hours, though delivered in two hour sections, and still must be regarded as an outstanding example of extemporaneous eloquence and organization. Richardson states that this defense of the Christian religion "has never been surpassed, if ever equalled."[38] Mr. Campbell's approach to Christian evidences is presented in the following outline of the extended address:

> 1. I shall call your attention to the historic evidence of the Christian religion.
>
> 2. I shall then give a brief outline of the prophetic evidences, or rather the evidence arising from the prophecies, found in the inspired volume.
>
> 3. We shall then draw some arguments from the genius and tendency of the Christian religion.
>
> 4. We shall then pay some attention to **"the social system."**[36]

In beginning his exposition of the historical evidence which confirms Christianity, Campbell presented this proposition for study: the volume called the New Testament was written by those men whose names it bears and at the period at which it purports to have been written.[37] When one studies the testimony of the second century, he learns that the books of the New Testament were then in existence and ascribed to those whom we credit with their production. Celsus, the first philosophic enemy of Christianity, refers

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[35] Richardson, Op. Cit., II, 274.

[36] **Campbell-Owen Debate, II,** 4.

[37] Ibid., II, 6.

to the affairs of Jesus as written by his disciples. To this unbeliever we must add the testimony of those who did embrace the faith: Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Ireneus, Justin, and Papias. Considering such unimpeachable evidence, Campbell concluded that the Annals of Tacitus "cannot afford half the proofs that they are the genuine works of the persons whose names they bear, as can be adduced to prove the authorship of the Memoirs of Jesus Christ, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."[38]

Campbell then turned to that which he viewed as the most momentous event in all history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and declared this "the shortest and best, because the most irrefragable way, to prove the whole truth and absolute certainty of the Christian Religion." Once proved, all atheism, deism, and skepticism must "fall prostrate to the ground."[39] The evidence of Christ's resurrection is predicated upon the testimony of eye witnesses, said by Paul to be more than five hundred on one single occasion, who carried their message throughout the world, and who died rather than be silent. Men who became martyrs must be sincere! Those who are martyred for an opinion could be wrong; but when many die for a single fact which all claim to have witnessed, who can doubt their testimony! The observance of Sunday throughout all the Christian world, said by history to have been continuous since the day of the Lord's resurrection, is a remarkable tribute to the faith of the first and all subsequent centuries in that one whose resurrection they honor.

What has one such as Flavius Josephus to say of Christ and Christianity? Nothing! His silence and that of contemporary unbelieving Jews and pagans is a magnificent tribute to the historicity of the New Testament. As the apostles

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[38] Ibid., II, 10.

[39] Ibid., II, 32.

of the Christ journeyed throughout the world, preaching, and producing a number of independent written records of Christianity, had their enemies been able to deny a single fact, a single miracle, contained in those accounts, all the power of the first century could not have prevented their doing so. Their silence is a most remarkable tribute to those eyewitnesses whose testimony could not be subverted. Christianity was denounced; its facts were never denied!

The advocate of Christianity then turned to the fulfillment of prophecy as an evidence of the divine origin of that religion which he defended. All the prophecies of the Old Testament have a single end in view, the coming of the Messiah; Christ's appearance, his life, and his death constitute a remarkable literal fulfillment of these prophetic utterances. Even great empires were secondary to the coming world Saviour; the terrible dream of Nebuchadnezzar with its golden head, silver arms, brazen body, and iron legs foretold the rise and fall of world empires, the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Alexandrian, and Roman, with the final establishment of a greater kingdom, that of Christ. The Old Testament paints a vivid picture of the coming Messiah, his lineage through Abraham and David, his virgin birth, the work of John, his entry into Egypt, his wonderful miracles and triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the betrayal, mock trials, crucifixion, and resurrection. The story of Christ's life was written centuries before he lived!

The entire tendency of the Christian religion, Campbell argued, was directed toward the betterment and happiness of mankind.

> Pure Christianity is predicated upon the most philosophic view of human nature. It aims not at reforming or happifying the world by a system of legal restraints, however excellent; but its immediate object is to implant in the human heart, through the discovery of the divine philanthropy, a principle of love, which ful-

> fills every moral precept ever promulgated on earth. Here is the grand secret. The religion of Jesus Christ melts the hearts of men into pure philanthropy.[40]

Materialists admit that their system cannot make men good, and all the systems of skepticism from Celsus to the present have not been able to convert a single wicked man and produce a reformation of character. Their influence is only negative. Contrast with this the tendency of Christianity which has transformed millions of the world's most infamous characters into the very best. "Yes, the religion of Jesus sheds abroad in the human heart the love of God; and that love, purifying the heart, overflows in all good actions—kind, humane, benevolent; not only to the good, but to the evil."[41]

Contrasted with the remarkable evidences of Christianity, what may be said for Owen's social system? Even an admission that the twelve laws of human nature were correct, involving as they did a denial of individual volition, would not prove that all religion is founded in ignorance. Did not a large body of Christians, the Calvinists, believe that all things were irrevocably foreordained, and yet find this no barrier to faith in Christianity? Owen's assertion that man is not a responsible being ignores all the experience of centuries of human existence. Campbell argued:

> No social compact has as yet existed without the doctrine of responsibility, obligation, or accountability. Mr. Owen's scheme is the most Utopian project in the annals of society. He lays the axe at the root of all obligations and accountability, and yet would have society to hang together without a single attraction save animal magnetism, if such a thing exists. The doctrine

[40] Ibid., II, 105.

[41] Idem.

> of **no praise, no blame,** is to be taught from the cradle to the grave; and yet all are to live in accordance with the most virtuous principles. They are to have no principle of responsibility suggested; and yet, under the charm of social feeling alone, they are to be more firmly bound than any wedded pair! Among the visions of the wildest enthusiasms, this one appears to be a rarity.[42]

Campbell attacked the social system because of its proposed abolition of marriage. The Christian declared, "On the altar of matrimony are woven all the cords of affection, all the ligaments and bands that cement society.... Destroy this institution, and not only the happiness of man, as a social being, but the safety of the race would be endangered."[43]

Campbell's final and strongest charge against the social system was that it ignored the spiritual nature of man and his innermost longings for immortality. He stated:

> No unrestrained freedom to explore the penetralia of voluptuousness, to revel in all the luxury of worms, to bask in the ephemeral glories of a sunbeam, can compensate for the immense robbery of the idea of God and the hope of deathless bliss. Dreadful adventure! hazardous experiment! most ruinous project, to blast the idea of God! The worst thing in such a scheme which could happen, or even appear to happen, would be success. But as well might Mr. Owen attempt to fetter the sea, to lock up the winds, to prevent the rising of the sun, as to exile this idea from the human race. For although man has not, circumstanced as he now is, unaided by revelation, the power to originate such an idea; yet when it is once suggested to a child, it never can be forgotten. As soon could a child an-

[42] Ibid., II, 130.

[43] Ibid., II, 135.

> nihilate the earth, as to annihilate the idea of God once suggested. The proofs of his existence become as numerous as the drops of dew from the womb of the morning—as innumerable as the blades of grass produced by the renovating influences of spring—every thing within us and every thing without, from the nails upon the ends of our fingers, to the sun, moon, and stars, confirm the idea of his existence and adorable excellencies.[44]

After Campbell had concluded his unprecedented twelve hour speech with a stirring and eloquent tribute to Christianity, Owen replied with a reversion to his twelve laws. He declared first, that the evidences of Christianity presented so masterfully by Campbell, had not convinced him of the truth of Christianity. He stated, "My impressions are, that Christianity is **not** of divine origin: that it is **not** true; and that its doctrines are now anything but beneficial to mankind."[45] Declaring that miracles were but impostures, contrived to deceive the masses, Owen asserted that real truth lay in his laws. They were twelve jewels of inconceivable value in a casket of silver, jewels which he had discovered and presented to civilization for its redemption.

Throughout the course of the discussion, though 1,200 attended each session, splendid order prevailed. Writing later of the audience conduct, Campbell stated, "For good order, patient attention, and earnest solicitude to understand the subjects discussed, we presume no congregation ever excelled them since the publication of the gospel in Caesarea."[46] At the end of the debate's final session Campbell took occasion to compliment the audience on its behavior but observed that such conduct would present some-

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[44] Ibid., II, 139f.

[45] Ibid., II, 142.

[46] **Christian Baptist,** June 1, 1829, 552.

thing of a problem to the thousands who would read the discussion. A question would be raised as to why the audience had accepted the indignities which Owen heaped upon the Christian religion without any visible expression of resentment. Was it because they were apathetic to religion and sympathized with the fatalism of the skeptic, or was it because of the meekness and forebearance taught by Christianity? Campbell desired that this question be answered. Therefore, he suggested that all persons who believed in Christianity and desired to see it pervade the world should stand, at which there was "an almost universal rising up."[47] He then requested that those in the audience who doubted the truth of the Christian religion, disbelieved its truth, or were not friendly to its spread throughout the world stand. Only three arose. And as candles were being lighted that the assembly might find its way out of the auditorium, the historic Campbell-Owen debate came to a close.

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

One of the most commendable aspects of the discussion between Alexander Campbell and Robert Owen was the courteous respect which each man entertained for the other. The bitterness and invective which so often characterizes religious discussions was conspicuous by its complete absence from the Owen debate. Each man contended strongly for his convictions but treated the other with respect. Instead of referring to one another as "my opponent," both men used such terms as "the gentleman" or "my worthy friend." Such sterling conduct upon the part of the disputants had its effect upon the audience. An account of the debate in the **Cincinnati Chronicle** admitted that few beneficial accomplishments had been anticipated from the discussion for such debates sink too often into bitterness and

[47] **Campbell-Owen Debate, II,** 200.

acrimony, but the editor admitted his error. "Such, however, has not, we believe, been the case in the present instance—the Christian forebearance of the one, and the philosophic complacency of the other, having, throughout the controversy, elicited from each, marked courtesy of deportment."[48] **The Free Enquirer** commented:

> Each party, as is usual on such occasions, claims the victory. The disputants appeared on the best terms during the debate, and dined frequently together. This is as it should be, for if men cannot agree in opinion; they should not feel hostility to each other: nor will they when all are sufficiently intelligent to know that our opinions are not controlled by our will.[49]

Within a few months following the debate, Owen was a guest for three days at the home of Campbell and his hospitable family in Bethany and was greatly pleased with the visit.

In many respects it is hardly possible to style the Campbell-Owen encounter a debate. There was almost no clash between the two disputants on the challenge which Owen had flung to the clergy in New Orleans; instead each man pursued his train of argument almost independent of the other. Owen chose to read a long manuscript relative to his twelve fundamental laws and ignore any objections which Campbell offered against them; Campbell, finding Owen unwilling to debate, spent most of his time in developing the evidences of the Christian religion. One of Owen's biographers has described the course of the debate as follows:

> Campbell's discourse consisted in the main of a learned and occasionally eloquent apology for Christianity. But he took occasion to assail Owen's position,

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[48] Quoted in **Christian Baptist,** June 1, 1829, 553.

[49] **Free Enquirer,** 1829, 320.

> and to point out difficulties and inconsistencies in his argument. Owen was unapt in defence; and Campbell's attacks remained for the most part unanswered.[80]

When Owen attempted to analyze the debate, he realized that he and Campbell had made no impression upon one another's mind. He later wrote: "We pursued each his own chain or association of ideas, as it were in parallel lines, without the slightest approximation." Owen then charged:

> He . . . ultimately admitted the truth of the twelve fundamental laws of human nature, on which I rely to disprove the possibility of any religion in the world being true. And admitting these, if his mind had not been formed on the irrational notions of free will, and its endless contradictions to itself and all nature, he would have perceived the inutility of any further discussion on this subject. For any one of the first seven fundamental laws being admitted and understood, all notions of any free agency of man must forever cease.[51]

Owen continued his opposition to religion for many years following the Cincinnati debate and engaged in three public debates in England. His opponents were Rev. J. H. Roebuck in 1837, Rev. W. Legg in 1839, and J. Brindley in 1841. His avowed course in these discussions helps to explain the inability of the two men to clash at Cincinnati; for in a naive comment at the close of the Brindley debate, Owen stated, "It would have been the loss of most precious moments for me to have attended to anything Mr. Brindley might say, instead of using them to tell the world what I wished it to learn from myself."[82] The course taken by the

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[50] Frank Podmore, **Robert Owen A Biography** (New York, 1924), 344.

[51] **Campbell-Owen Debate, II,** 229.

[52] Cole, Op. Cit., 225.

Cincinnati debate is largely accounted for by the fact that Owen, though an excellent lecturer, had little ability as a debater, did not understand the necessity of orderly and logical proof, and was utterly "incapable of seeing a point of view differing from his own, or even of conceiving the possibility of such a different view, except as the result of ignorance or blindness."[53] Alexander Campbell was a man guided by logical conviction; Owen an individual who followed blind unbending conviction.

Some excellent information relative to the Campbell-Owen debate has been preserved in those accounts of the proceedings written by those who attended the discussion for the enlightenment of their contemporaries. One of the most interesting of these accounts is found in the **Western Monthly Review** from the pen of its editor, Timothy Flint, a prominent western preacher who served as an Owen moderator in the discussion. Both Campbell and Owen were acquainted with the report, and both objected to the style in which it was written. The article was reprinted in **The Free Enquirer,** and in commenting on Flint's production, Owen wrote, "Our literary giant of the West, in the last number of his Review, has amused some of his readers with a fanciful report of the recent discussion, in this city, between Mr. Campbell and myself."[54] Owen's major objection, however, seems to have been that Flint failed to give an accurate description of the twelve fundamental laws and permit the people to judge for themselves, Flint like Campbell being oblivious to the real meaning of these twelve jewels which, according to Owen, would render all arguments for all religion as "chaff before the wind." Campbell, in turn, wrote:

The Rev. Editor of the Western Monthly Review,

[53] Podmore, Op. Cit., 343.

[54] **Free Enquirer,** 1829, 252.

> being rather a facetious gentleman, and possessing a very fine romantic imagination, better adapted to writing novels and romances, than history or geography, by mingling facts and fable, has, upon the whole, written a burlesque, rather than a sketch of the debate. This is his besetting sin, which he has hitherto combatted in vain.... Upon the whole, I must thank him for the justice he has done me. I object to the manner rather than to the matter of his critique.[55]

In spite of these criticisms parts of the article by Timothy Flint merit quotation in this study as indicating that which the public read concerning the events at Cincinnati.

In describing the circumstances which led to the Campbell-Owen discussion, Flint's verbose pen produced the following.

> The glove was first thrown down by Mr. Owen last year, in New Orleans. None of the ministers there saw fit to take it up. But it was circulated extensively in the papers, that the ministers were challenged, the world over, to a logomachic tilt with Mr. Owen. Mr. Campbell, who had gained extensive reputation by dealing hard and dexterous blows, as a polemic theological disputant, at Lexington, Kentucky, in a set disputation with the Reverend Mr. Maccalla, on some points between Presbyterians and Baptists—took up the glove, and publicly advertised, that his courage was up to the point of doing battle in this grand tournament, in the face of all Christians, and more especially before all the gentlemen and ladies, that might assemble at any given place, which should be central and convenient for the said disputation. Mr. Owen, on his way from New Harmony to Europe, took Bethany in his route, called on the Rev. Mr. Campbell, and ascertained

[55] **Christian Baptist,** June 1, 1829, 552.

> satisfactorily, not only the extent of his calibre, but the keenness of his metal, his disposition for fairness of fight, and the honest zeal for the truth, which he was compelled to believe, filled the bosom of this gentleman. Having measured with his eye the proud dimensions, the brawny intellectual muscle and sinew, of this offering opponent; having ascertained to his satisfaction, that there was a happy mixture of Scotch shrewdness with Kentucky hard fight in the premises, he deemed it not unworthy a logomachic fame, won extensively in both hemispheres, to engage with Mr. Campbell, to do wordy battle in the city of Cincinnati, in the month of April, and the year commonly called that of our Lord 1829.[55]

Flint reports that during the interval before the debate both men went their separate ways. Owen journeyed over the "resounding sea,' his fertile brain hatching intellectual eggs to present to a dismayed clergy, while Campbell prepared studiously for the debate. Of the actual course of the discussion, Flint gave his readers the following account.

> The historian related with grief, that during the eight long days of this logical tournament, these two coursers were riding up and down the field of controversy, constantly menacing fight, but never coming to close quarters in the actual tug of battle; for lo! instead of an effectual 'closing in' of quiddities and meta-physical cuts and thrusts, which we expected would make "the lint fly," at once Mr. Owen "fought shy," reserving his fire, and entrenching himself impregnably behind "the twelve divine fundamental laws of human nature," precisely as our soldiers did on the

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[55] **Western Monthly Review,** April, 1829; quoted in **Free Enquirer,** 1829, 249.

glorious eighth, behind the cotton bales below New Orleans. On the contrary, our western friend of the covenant showed manful fight, on the open field, to the end of the joust . . . "The twelve fundamental laws," or the twelve laws of the social system, are predicated on the following asserted doctrines. We are the "effects of our circumstances," as strictly as inanimate matter obeys its laws . . . Owen came over these laws with a frequency of development and repetition, which elicited a frequent laugh at his expense from all who perceived not, that his sole purpose, in this tournament, was to make the reputation of his antagonist a kite, to take his social system into full view of the community, and, by constant repetition, to imprint a few of his leading axioms on the memory of the multitude, that could in no other way have been collected to hear.

The positions, which he thus fixed on the memory of his hearers, with an untiring perseverance, were that a Christian infant educated in Hindostan, would be a Gentoo, in Turkey a Mahometan, in a cannibal tribe a cannibal, in a Quaker family a Quaker; and so of the rest . . . He believed some historical statements, when they ran not counter to the twelve laws; but held all history of a contrary character wonderfully cheap. It may be, therefore, imagined, how he disposed of the external and internal evidences, the miracles and prophecies, of our religion.[57]

Of the defender of Christianity, Flint had the following to say.

Mr. Campbell possesses a fine voice, a little inclining to the nasal; and first rate attributes and en-

[57] Quoted in **Free Enquirer,** 1829, 250.

> dowments for a lawyer in the interior; perfect self possession, quickness of apprehension, and readiness of retort, all disciplined to effect by long controversial training . . . His proofs of Christianity were of the common character, and arranged in the common way. We cannot say that the arguments were stronger or better arranged than Paley's; but they were able; and we were, at once, pleased and surprised to find that his views of Christianity were decidedly of the liberal cast. In his contrast between the tendencies of the two systems, and the hopes of a Christian, departing in the joyful triumph of faith in his eternal home, and the desolate sullenness of the epicurean — laying himself down under the omnipotent pressure of hostile nature to the eternal sleep of the grave — impressive and happy. Very often, during the debate, he manifested those resources which belong only to an endowed and disciplined mind.[58]

The press seems to have been almost universal in commending Campbell as the victor. When Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, challenged the editor of the **Washington City Chronicle** to a debate, he replied by suggesting that the three editors of **The Free Enquirer** reserve 'their ammunition for the formidable enemy who has so signally triumphed over the founder of their system, if they wish that system to be rescued from utter destruction."[59] The **Cincinnati Chronicle** was emphatic in its praise of Campbell, "He is undoubtedly a man of fine talents, and equally fine attainments. With an acute, vigorous mind, quick perceptions, and rapid powers of combination, he has sorely puzzled his antagonist, and at the same time both delighted and instructed his audience by his masterly defense of the

[58] Quoted in **Free Enquirer**, 1829, 251.

[59] An editorial in the **Washington City Chronicle;** quoted in **Free Enquirer,** 1829, 261.

truth, divine origin, and inestimable importance of Christianity." The Chronicle then turned to the general results of the debate:

> We believe we are speaking the opinions of nine-tenths of his audience, when we say that a greater failure has seldom been witnessed on any occasion. All admit that the talent, the skill in debate, and the weight of proof were on the side of Mr. Campbell . . . Those who believed this philosopher of "circumstances" and "parallelograms," Owen to be a great man, appeared to be sadly disappointed, many of those inclined to his theory of "social compacts" have relapsed into a 6tate of sanity; while the disciples of infidelity have either been shaken in their faith, or provoked that their cause should have been so seriously injured by mismanagement and feebleness. [60]

An English writer, Mrs. Frances Trollope, was living in Cincinnati in 1829 and in her famous volume, **Domestic Manners of the Americans,** has described her impressions of the debate between Campbell and Owen.

> It was in the early summer of this year (1829) that Cincinnati offered a spectacle unprecedented, I believe, in any age or country. Mr. Owen, of Lanark, of New Harmony, of Texas, well known to the world by all or either of these additions, had challenged the whole religious public of the United States to discuss with him publicly the truth or falsehood of all the religions that had ever been propagated on the face of the earth; stating further that he undertook to prove that they were all equally false, and nearly equally mischievous. This most appalling challenge was conveyed to the world through the medium of New

[60] Quoted in **Christian Baptist,** June 1, 1829, 554.

Orleans newspapers, and for some time it remained unanswered; at length the Reverend Alexander Campbell, from Bethany (not of Judaea, but of Kentucky) Virginia, proclaimed, through the same medium, that he was ready to take up the gauntlet. The place fixed for this extraordinary discussion was Cincinnati; the time, the second Monday in May, 1829, being about a year from the time the challenge was accepted; thus giving the disputants time to prepare themselves . . .

But whatever confidence the learning and piety of Mr. Campbell might have inspired in his friends, or in the Cincinnati Christians in general, it was not, as it appeared, sufficient to induce Mr. Wilson, the Presbyterian minister of the largest church in the town, to permit the display of them within its walls. This refusal was greatly reprobated, and much regretted, as the curiosity to hear the discussion was very general, and no other edifice offered so much accommodation.

A Methodist meeting-house, large enough to contain a thousand persons, was at last chosen; a small stage was arranged round the pulpit, large enough to accommodate the disputants and their stenographers; the pulpit itself was, throughout the whole time, occupied by the aged father of Mr. Campbell, whose flowing white hair, and venerable countenance, constantly expressive of the deepest attention, and the most profound interest, made him a very striking figure in the group. Another platform was raised in a conspicuous part of the building, on which were seated seven gentlemen of the city, selected as moderators.

The chapel was equally divided, one half being appropriated to ladies, the other to gentlemen; and the door of entrance for ladies was carefully guarded by persons appointed to prevent any crowding or difficulty

> from impeding their approach. I suspect that the ladies were indebted to Mr. Owen for this attention; the arrangements were by no means American.[61]

Mrs. Trollope is especially vivid in her description of Owen's opening address in the discussion.

> It was in the profoundest silence, and apparently with the deepest attention, that Mr. Owen's opening address was received; and surely it was the most singular one that ever Christian men and women sat to listen to.
>
> When I recollect its object, and the uncompromising manner in which the orator stated his mature conviction that the whole history of the Christian mission was a fraud, and its sacred origin a fable, I cannot but wonder that it was so listened to; yet at the time I felt no such wonder. Never did any one practice the suaviter in modo with more powerful effect than Mr. Owen. The gentle tone of his voice; his mild, sometimes playful, but never ironical manner; the absence of every vehement or harsh expression; the affectionate interest expressed for "the whole human family;" the air of candour with which he expressed his wish to be convinced he was wrong, if he indeed were so — his kind smile — the mild expression of his eyes — in short, his whole manner, disarmed zeal, and produced a degree of tolerance that those who did not hear him would hardly believe possible.[62]

Campbell's first speech is next described by Mrs. Trollope:

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[61] Frances Trollope, **Domestic Manners of the Americans** (New York, 1927), 121ff.

[62] Ibid., 123.

> Mr. Campbell then arose; his person, voice, and manner all greatly in his favour. In his first attack he used the arms which in general have been considered as belonging to the other side of the question. He quizzed Mr. Owen most unmercifully; pinched him here for his parallelograms; hit him there for his human perfectibility, and kept the whole audience in a roar of laughter. Mr. Owen joined in it most heartily himself, and listened to him throughout with the air of a man who is delighted at the good things he is hearing, and exactly in the cue to enjoy all the other good things that he is sure will follow. Mr. Campbell's watch was the only one which reminded us that we had listened to him for half an hour; and having continued speaking for a few minutes after he had looked at it, he sat down with, I should think, the universal admiration of his auditory.[63]

At the conclusion of the debate Mrs. Trollope was convinced that such a contest could not have been conducted anywhere but in America, and she was not certain that it would have been desirable elsewhere.

Amid such commendations, it seems that Alexander Campbell was quite satisfied with the work which he had done in meeting Owen. There were some criticisms, especially from those who considered it dangerous for a Christian to risk a discussion with such a champion of skepticism. Campbell did not sympathize with these critics and wrote, "A handsome compliment, truly, they present to the Christian community, who insinuate that they believe without reason, and cannot tell why! From such Christians Christianity has more to fear than from infidels."[64] With pride

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[63] Ibid., 124.

[64] **Christian Baptist,** June 11, 1829, 561.

Campbell pointed to the Owen debate as having established one great fact: to believe in the divine origin of Christianity is reasonable!

CHAPTER IV

Campbell Versus Catholicism: The Purcell Debate

During the first half of the nineteenth century an explosive question in American politics was the relationship which was to exist between the Roman Catholic Church and the American government. After 1820 a tidal wave of Catholic immigrants had begun flowing into the United States from Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere; native American Protestants cast apprehensive glances toward Rome, fearing that these immigrants were servants of an autocratic papal power which would overwhelm and destroy America's democratic institutions. As signs of the times a Native American Party was formed with a one-plank platform: the abridgment of papal power in the United States. Occasional mob violence flared against Catholic churches and schools along the Atlantic seaboard. This period was likewise the most determinative in the formation of the American school system, and often the Catholic question and the issues involving public schools merged in public thinking. The distinction between public and private schools was not yet clearly outlined, and in some areas public funds were still supporting private institutions, both Catholic and Protestant, but chiefly the latter because of their predominance. Everywhere Catholics were clamoring for an equitable division of public funds for the support of parochial schools, and failing in this, insisted that the Bible should not be a textbook in the public school.[1]

[1] Garrison, **Religion Follows The Frontier,** 170f.

In January, 1837, the eyes of the nation were focused on Cincinnati, Ohio, the scene of one of the most unusual religious debates in the annals of American Christianity, a discussion which reflected national agitation concerning the Catholic and related questions. As an outgrowth of differences regarding the place of the Bible in public education and the influence of the Protestant Reformation on freedom, two outstanding religious leaders, Bishop John B. Purcell of the Roman Catholic Church and Alexander Campbell, clashed in a monumental debate, significant in political as well as religious annals.

COLLEGE OF TEACHERS

In addition to his character as a great religious leader, Alexander Campbell was an outstanding friend of liberal education and throughout his life made significant contributions to this cause. As a youth in Ireland he had assisted his father in the supervision of a private academy, and when the elder Campbell's failing health had necessitated his emigration to America, Alexander had been entrusted with the sole care of the institution. After his own immigration to the United States in 1809, religious consideration had been so paramount in Campbell's mind as to demand the entirety of his time; but in 1818 he established a private academy called Buffalo Seminary, in which he was assisted by his father. This school flourished for a number of years and emphasized a religious instruction for those who planned to become ministers of the gospel. In 1840 Campbell established a college at Bethany, Virginia, solicited funds for its maintenance, and served as its president for many years.

It was his interest in education which led Campbell to Cincinnati in October, 1836, to attend the annual meeting of "The Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers." Popularly known as the College of Teachers, this organization had been formed in 1831; and its

annual meetings attracted members from several states who assembled to hear a number of lectures and to discuss in informal sessions the major problems confronting educators. Campbell's prominence in this organization is indicated by the fact that in 1836 he was one of its vice-presidents, opened the session which began October 3, 1836, in the First Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati[2] with prayer, delivered one of the formal lectures, participated in a number of discussions, and delivered an extemporaneous address to conclude the meeting.

Another important religious leader who participated regularly in the activities of the College of Teachers was Bishop John Baptist Purcell of the Roman Catholic Church. Purcell was an individual of outstanding ability, having risen from a humble birth in Ireland to become one of America's most influential Catholic leaders and Bishop of the See of Cincinnati. Born in Mallow, Ireland, February 26, 1800, Purcell had begun his college education at Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, Maryland, and had completed his training in Paris where he was ordained at the Cathedral of Notre Dame by Archbishop Quelon on May 21, 1826. After traveling extensively in Europe, Purcell returned to the United States to become a professor of moral philosophy at Mount St. Mary's and later its president. Here he had become interested in the problems of education, and after becoming Bishop of Cincinnati, the Catholic leader had maintained this interest. By 1836 Purcell was one of the most influential members of the American hierarchy, second only to Bishop John Hughes. As the College of Teachers convened in 1836, Bishop Purcell sat quietly in the audience, little realizing that a chain of events

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2 D. L. Talbott, ed., **Transactions Of The Sixth Annual Meeting Of The Western Literary Institute, College Of Professional Teachers,** Held In Cincinnati, October, *1836* (Cincinnati, *1837),* 9. (Cited hereafter as Talbott, **Transactions).**

would soon bring him into public controversy with Alexander Campbell on the pretensions of the Catholic Church.

The sixth annual meeting of the College of Teachers began its first session with an address by Dr. J. L. Wilson, the theme of which was the necessity and practicality of a system of universal education. The speaker found occasion, however, to salute the Bible as the world's outstanding book, containing "the most certain chronology, the most authentic history, the most edifying biography, the most sublime poetry, and the soundest philosophy." Such a volume demanded the attention of humanity; it must be made the textbook of universal education![3] At the close of an evening lecture delivered by Bishop Purcell, he and other Catholics attacked the sentiments which had been expressed by Dr. Wilson, opposing the introduction of the Bible into the public schools. The official minutes of the College designated the clash as an 'animated discussion' in which Dr. Wilson, Alexander Campbell, Bishop Purcell, and Alexander Kinmont took part.[4] Campbell was greatly surprised at this Catholic outburst, later writing of his "astonishment at the bold and pertinacious manner in which those learned Catholics, even in a Presbyterian meeting-house, sought to exclude the inspired volume from the common schools of our country."[5]

On Wednesday, October 5, Campbell delivered his lecture to the College, the subject of which was "On the importance of uniting the moral with the intellectual culture of the mind." Campbell emphasized that regardless of the scholastic standards which might be attained in education, any course of study which neglected the spiritual nature

[3] Talbott, **Transactions,** 63.

[4] Ibid., 10.

[5] A letter to citizens of Cincinnati, October 14, 1836; quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1836, 552.

of the individual was overlooking that which was all important. His introduction was a tribute to the freedom of thought of the English speaking world and to the importance of the Protestant Reformation in making such intellectual freedom possible. Campbell stated:

> If, in accordance with the philosophy of things, we could trace effects from their immediate to their remote causes, it is presumed that we would find the momentous changes, already accomplished in English society, whether in the old world or the new, to be the legitimate consequences of a single maxim, consecrated into a rule of action, both by the precept and the example of the master spirit of the Protestant Reformation. That maxim says:—man by nature is, and of right ought to be, a **thinking** being. Hence it is decreed, that as a matter of policy, of morality, and of religion, he ought not only to think, but **to think for himself.** This, as the paramount duty, was most successfully inculcated by that illustrious Saxon, to whom more than to any other mortal being, the sons of Japhet, in Europe and America, owe their best literary, moral, and political institutions. To the inculcation of this obligation, more than to any other precept in the religious or moral code, was Martin Luther indebted for that eminent success, which elevated him to the highest niche in the temple consecrated to the memory of European and American benefactors. [6]

Campbell believed that it was greatly beneficial to all phases of society when men learned to think for themselves. After Luther had unleashed the mind from the stupor of centuries, no power on earth could prevent that intellectual freedom's permeating the home and college as it had the church.

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[6] Talbott, Op. Cit., 89.

> Hence, the impetus given to the human mind by the Protestant Reformation, extends into every science, into every art, into all the business of life, and continues with increased and increasing energy, to consume and waste the influence of every existing institution, law and custom, not founded upon eternal truth, and the immutable and invincible nature of things.[7]

Such sentiments had been occupying the mind of Alexander Campbell for many years. As a boy in Ireland, he had pitied the people of that land, whom he regarded as ignorant, priest-ridden, and crushed by their submission to a spiritual and intellectual despotism.[8] The young man in contemplating the condition of Irish Catholicism had loathed the ecclesiastical authority of Romanism in every aspect, an abhorrence which he retained throughout life. The same thought with which Campbell introduced his lecture to the College of Teachers had been expressed in his debate with Robert Owen, seven years earlier. He affirmed:

> The Reformation from Popery gave the first shock to the despotism of Europe. The labors of the Reformers—and the more recent labors of Milton the poet, and Locke the philosopher, have done more to issue in the free institutions of Europe and America, than the labors of all the sceptics from Celsus to my friend Mr. Owen.[9]

In a series of articles in the **Millennial Harbinger** a few years prior to the Purcell debate Campbell had asserted quite eloquently that political freedom was a direct result of intellectual freedom, and the latter a result of Luther's work. He wrote:

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[7] Talbott, Ibid, 91.

[8] Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, I,** 50.

[9] **Campbell-Owen Debate, II,** 5.

> All was silent and peaceful as the grave under the gloomy sceptre of Roman Pontiffs under the despotic sway of the Roman hierarchy until Luther opened the war . . . The fire then kindled, though oft suppressed, yet burns. The controversy begun by Luther, not only maimed the power of the Roman hierarchy, but also impaired the arm of political despotism. The **crown** as well as the **mitre,** was jeopardized and desecrated by his herculean pen. From the controversy about the **rights of Christians** arose the controversy about the **rights of men.** Every blow inflicted upon ecclesiastical despotism was felt by the political tyrants.[10]

On the afternoon following the delivery of Campbell's lecture, its discussion was made the order of business, and Campbell's statements were immediately attacked by Bishop Purcell and another Catholic, President Montgomery. The Bishop was so vehement in his opposition as to affirm that "the Protestant Reformation had been the cause of all the contention and infidelity in the world."" One of Campbell's friends who was a member of the College, D. S. Burnett, reported that the discussion produced by Bishop Purcell's allegations against Protestantism was not "the least interesting" of those which occurred.[12] Campbell reminded the Bishop that religious questions were not to be discussed in the College, and that he would defend his statements only as they affected education; he assured Purcell, however, that should the Catholic desire to continue a discussion of the question later, he would be quite happy to consider all of the issues involved. The Bishop asserted his friendship for free discussion but did not accept Campbell's invitation.

As a result of the clash which had occurred, Campbell

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[10] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1830, 41f.

[11] Richardson, Op. Cit., II, 422.

[12] **Christian Preacher,** 1836, 164.

announced publicly that he would defend his position in an address at the Sycamore Street Church on Monday evening, October 10. When the hour arrived Bishop Purcell was among those in the audience, and at the close of Campbell's address, he was invited to reply but requested an adjournment until the following evening. Cincinnati became highly interested in the controversy, and on Tuesday evening a large audience had assembled to hear the Catholic Bishop defend his faith. Purcell's long address was largely an attack on the sixteenth century Reformation, and was delivered in such a manner as to elicit later the following criticism from Campbell.

> On Tuesday evening, after expressing a concurrence in the necessity of persons examining the Scriptures, and of being enlightened by that good book, affirming that he would acknowledge no man as a worthy member of his community, who was not so enlightened, he went on to prove "that the right of private judgment was annihilated by the church and the Bible; and that to the exercise of this feigned right was owing all the divisions in the world."
>
> He spent the evening, however, for the most part, in pouring forth a torrent of the most unqualified abuse on Martin Luther and his associates in the Reformation; representing him as a devil incarnate, the slave of the most brutal lusts and passions, to the extreme mortification, not only of every lady in the house, but to make even gentlemen themselves blush for his indelicacy and want of respect for public opinion.[13]

A Baptist paper reported that Bishop Purcell's effort seemed a "total failure;"[14] however, Catholics were prob-

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[13] A letter to citizens of Cincinnati, October 14, 1836; quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1936, 553.

[14] **Cross and Baptist Journal;** quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1836, 551.

ably quite differently influenced by its presentation. At the close of the Bishop's address, Campbell suggested a formal debate on the important questions involved in the controversy, but Purcell declined the overture.

On Wednesday evening Campbell addressed a large group in the Wesley Chapel, but indicated at the close of this lecture that he intended to pursue the controversy no further at that time. He did submit to the audience a list of six propositions which he declared himself ready at any time to uphold, should any reputable Catholic choose to assail them. These propositions questioned the very fundamentals of Catholic faith, and became the issue in the Campbell-Purcell debate early the following year. Cincinnati Protestants immediately manifested an enthusiastic interest in these proposals, and before Campbell left the city, he received the following letter, dated October 13, 1836.

> Dear Sir—The undersigned, citizens of Cincinnati, having listened with much pleasure to your exposure and illustrations of the absurd claims and usages of the Roman Catholic Church, would respectfully and earnestly request you to proceed immediately to establish before this community the six propositions announced at the close of your lecture, last evening. This request is made under the conviction that the state of the country, with reference to Romanism, demands this and will fully justify such a course, and also with the expectation that it may result in much good to the cause of Protestantism in the West.[15]

The letter was signed by fifty-seven individuals, many of whom were outstanding citizens of Cincinnati; and a postscript assured Campbell that "one half of the city could be obtained, would time permit. Fearing your hasty depar-

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[15] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1836, 551f

ture, induces the above persons to hand it in without delay."[16]

Campbell appreciated the confidence in his ability, implied by this letter, and the following day, October 14, he replied to this group of Cincinnati Protestants. After reviewing the chain of events which had culminated in their request, he readily consented to deliver a series of lectures or to meet any prominent Catholic in defense of the propositions which he had outlined. However, there were certain matters which made it essential that he return to Bethany immediately; and asking their indulgence, he promised to return about the beginning of the new year to sustain his charges against Catholicism. There was no way in which Campbell could determine whether this promised engagement would involve him in a public debate with one of the nation's most influential Catholics or require only a series of lectures; for Bishop Purcell had given no indication of the course he might pursue. Campbell returned to Bethany, and on November 24, 1836, the **Western Christian Advocate** carried the following letter from his pen.

> We have made our arrangements, all things concurring, to be at Cincinnati in the beginning of the second week in January next. We hope that our Roman Catholic friends, who have avowed their regard for free discussion, and who have so boldly and wantonly impugned protestant principles, will then and there be in readiness to sustain their allegations, or to dispute the propositions we have submitted to their consideration. In case of a failure on their part, we shall, on Tuesday the 10th of January, either by day or night, as the friends of the discussion may decide, commence an investigation of the claims and pretensions of popery in defense of our propositions already offered.

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[16] Ibid., 552.

Bishop Purcell continued to maintain a dignified silence, and it was not until December 22, less than a month before his return to Cincinnati, that Campbell learned of the Catholic prelate's public announcement that he would meet the Bethany debater.

"THE GRAND DEBATE"

In many respects John B. Purcell must be acclaimed the greatest of Alexander Campbell's polemic opponents. In personality, culture, training, scholarship, and argumentative ability he was admirably prepared to meet the Sage of Bethany. As a rhetorician Purcell was especially powerful, and he excelled in his knowledge of Catholic Church history. For a number of days he was the equal of Robert Owen in polite conduct, but after Campbell had begun to press him especially hard on certain points, much of the prelate's courtesy and poise disappeared. Of the two men, it is likely that Purcell entered the important debate with a greater reluctance than did Campbell, public opinion being a powerful factor in compelling him to arrange the discussion. In spite of his outstanding ability the Catholic Bishop was not a seasoned debater, though not wholly inexperienced. The preceding autumn he had engaged in a brief discussion with a Methodist clergyman.[17] Campbell, on the other hand, had already gained a national reputation as a debater, and he must have been pleased, as any expert must, at the opportunity to do that in which he excelled. For a number of years Campbell periodically had written articles in the **Millennial Harbinger** exposing what he regarded as the absurd fallacies of Catholic doctrine; not only was he well prepared for the Cincinnati encounter, but he believed

[17] **Western Christian Advocate,** January 27, 1837. It is interesting to note that in later years Bishop Purcell engaged in a number of other debates. In 1850 he met N. L. Rice, the Presbyterian minister whom Campbell debated in 1843.

implicitly in the righteousness of the cause which he was to plead. Too, a successful defense of Protestantism would add immeasurably to the prestige of the Restoration Movement, which was always the supreme concern of his life.

As the Campbell-Purcell debate approached, both participants basked in the unwavering confidence of their respective followers. Christians fully anticipated that Campbell would win a resounding victory and wrote enthusiastically of the coming battle. A typical, though somewhat radical, example of this attitude comes from the pen of Arthur Crihfield, editor of **The Heretic Detector**, a paper which gained considerable notoriety among the churches because of its highly critical editorial policy. This editor boasted:

> Brother A. Campbell is now, in the city of Cincinnati, about to unmask Romanism. The Mother of Sects, we believe, will now be sent naked through the streets—And may all men see her **as she is!** Brother Campbell's course as a disputant, has always been successful because always directed by meekness and wisdom from above. First, Walker; then McCalla; then Owen; and afterwards many names of smaller note, encountered him, but in the majesty of truth, we have uniformly seen him rising superior to the combined forces of scepticism and sectarianism. We are not at all disposed to prejudge the discussion now about to take place: but if Romanism does not receive a wound in her vitals, which she will long groan beneath in these United States, we shall be much disappointed in our anticipations.'[13]

As Campbell entered the Cincinnati discussion he stood as the able defender of Protestantism, but he disclaimed

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[18] **Heretic Detector,** 1837, 95.

any responsibility toward all the particular Protestant sects and creeds. It was his conviction that only upon the basis of pure New Testament Christianity, that represented by the Restoration Movement, could one defeat the claims of the Roman hierarchy; and he stated emphatically throughout the discussion that he defended the Bible and was bound by no other creed of Christendom. In his earlier anti-Catholic essays in the **Millennial Harbinger,** Campbell had occupied this position, arguing that any Protestant must forsake his creed to meet Catholicism successfully. "A successful assailant against the arrogant pretensions of the Romanists, must begin at Jerusalem, and neither at Rome nor Geneva," he wrote. After abandoning the title of Reverend Ambassador of Christ and proving himself a sacrificing servant of the church, not its head or master, "he must give up all the traditions of the Mother of Abominations, and make **the Bible alone** the religion of Protestants."[19] Campbell regarded creeds as an encumbering but impotent armor in any controversy with the Catholics, and believed his rejection of them a real advantage in the Purcell encounter.

On January 11, 1837, Campbell arrived in Cincinnati after a journey from Bethany which had been dangerous and tiring to the minister, now forty-eight. He had begun the trip on the Ohio River, but winter ice halted navigation on the great stream, and he was forced to take the more difficult overland route, completing the journey "on foot, sometimes on a sleigh, and finally by the mail stage." It had required ten days to cover the 240 miles.[20] Immediately after his arrival in the queen city of the West, Campbell dispatched a note to Bishop Purcell, suggesting a meet-

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[19] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1834, 266.

[20] Alexander Campbell, and John B. Purcell, **A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion** (Nashville, 1914), v. (Cited hereafter as **Campbell-Purcell Debate).**

ing to arrange the final necessary details. That afternoon the two religious leaders met for the first time since their clash the preceding October. Purcell demanded that as an essential to his entering the debate, he be the respondent, and after considerable discussion, Campbell was forced to agree. Campbell's capitulation placed him in the unenviable position of affirming a series of negative propositions, but otherwise the Cincinnati public would have waited in vain for the important debate. Other rules were easily arranged; the debate was to be conducted in the Sycamore Street Church, January 13-21, 1837, with five hours being consumed each day in the proceedings. The speeches were to be reported for subsequent publication.

Cincinnati with its 30,000 citizens was a city of optimism as the long awaited day arrived; the Sycamore Street meetinghouse[21] was a scene of activity, and by nine-thirty its seats were completely filled with some 500 persons standing in the aisles and at the rear of the building. Other hundreds had already returned to their homes, unable to find a place inside. This popular interest continued throughout the sessions, and attendance was so great that Charles Hammond, editor of the **Daily Gazette,** expressed fear lest the galleries collapse under the heavy pressure.[22] Evidently the press did not receive the favored treatment which it enjoys in the twentieth century, for the editor of the **Western Christian Advocate** complained of the crowded conditions. He had intended to bring his readers a complete report of the discussion, but unable to arrive an hour before each session began, he had seldom found a place from which to hear, and more seldom where note taking was possible.[43]

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[21] **The Western Christian Advocate** referred to it as a "Campbellite Baptist church." Campbell would never have approved such designation!

[22] **Daily Gazette,** January 17, 1837.

[23] **Western Christian Advocate,** January 27, 1837.

In almost every respect the Campbell-Purcell debate is far superior to Campbell's discussion with Robert Owen. Both the Catholic prelate and his opponent were polished scholars, both were logicians, realizing the necessity of logical proof, and both demonstrated an unshakable confidence in their respective faiths. To attempt a presentation of all the arguments adduced in the debate is far beyond the scope of this study; instead a number of typical clashes will be presented, illustrative of the argumentative style employed by each speaker in attempting to sustain his position.

The propositions for the discussion had been prepared by Campbell the preceding October and were discussed in the following order.

> 1. The Roman Catholic Institution, sometimes called the "Holy, Apostolic, Catholic, Church," is not now, nor was she ever, catholic, apostolic, or holy; but is a sect in the fair import of that word, older than any other sect now existing, not the "Mother and Mistress of all Churches," but an apostacy from the only true, holy, apostolic, and catholic church of Christ.
>
> 2. Her notion of apostolic succession is without any foundation in the Bible, in reason, or in fact; an imposition of the most injurious consequences, built upon unscriptural and anti-scriptural traditions, resting wholly upon the opinions of interested and fallible men.
>
> 3. She is not uniform in her faith, or united in her members; but mutable and fallible, as any other sect of philosophy or religion—Jewish, Turkish, or Christian—**a confederation of sects** with a politico-ecclesiastical head.
>
> 4. She is the "Babylon" of John, the "Man of

Sin" of Paul, and the Empire of the "Youngest Horn" of Daniel's Sea Monster.

5. Her notion of purgatory, indulgences, auricular confession, remission of sins, transubstantiation, supererogation, &c, essential elements of her system, are immoral in their tendency, and injurious to the well-being of society, religious and political.

6. Notwithstanding her pretensions to have given us the Bible, and faith in it, we are perfectly independent of her for our knowledge of that book, and its evidences of a divine original.

7. The Roman Catholic religion, if infallible and unsusceptible of reformation, as alleged, is essentially anti-American, being opposed to the genius of all free institutions, and positively subversive of them, opposing the general reading of the scriptures, and the diffusion of useful knowledge among the whole community, so essential to liberty and the permanency of good government.

Campbell's first proposition affirmed that the Roman Catholic Church was a sect, and in analyzing this issue, the reformer was covering familiar ground. For many years he had been studying sectarianism in its various aspects and pleading for its abolition in the Protestant world. In attempting to prove the Catholic Church a sect, he began with its name, a contradiction of terms and unscriptural title. The word catholic means universal, while 'Roman signifies something local or particular; hence a local universal church! "To say the Roman Catholic church of America, is just as absurd as to say the Philadelphia church of Cincinnati — the London church of Pittsburgh — the church of France of the United States."[24] Next, Camp-

[24] **Campbell-Purcell Debate,** 11.

bell turned to the organization of the Catholic Church with her popes, cardinals, patriarchs, primates, metropolitans, archbishops, monks, and friars, and to her doctrines of priestly absolution, auricular confession, purgatory, and transubstantiation, charging that any institution which had departed so far from the New Testament standard could never be the apostolic church of Christ. He then turned to the Douay catechism, which lists the essential elements of the church as "a pope, or supreme head, bishops, pastors and laity."[25] Without a pope the Catholic Church could not exist, and if evidence could be produced to demonstrate that no pope existed during the first centuries, it would likewise prove that the Catholic Church did not exist and was, therefore, a sect! Campbell began his quest through the first centuries, and paused first at the sixth canon of the first ecumenical council, convened at Nice in 325. This canon recognized, not a papacy, but four patriarchal sees: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria. Du Pin, a Catholic historian, states that this canon "does not establish the supremacy of the church of Rome."[26] The next stop was at the council of Chalcedon, 451, which recognized the equality of Constantinople and Rome. Campbell then reminded his Catholic opponent that of the 1,486 bishops attending the first seven ecumenical councils, only twenty-six were Roman. When did the pope make his appearance? Campbell answered that in 606 Phocas, a murderous emperor, conferred upon Boniface III the title, universal patriarch, after Boniface's predecessor, Gregory the Great, had rejected such a title as arrogant and blasphemous.[27] After thus proving that the Catholic Church was neither catholic nor apostolic, Campbell quoted a single statement from Cardinal Bellarmine, "Wicked men, infidels and repro-

[25] Ibid., 14.

[26] Ibid., 18.

[27] Ibid., 35.

bates remaining in the public profession of the Romanish church are true members of the body of Christ," to prove her not holy.[28] The date given by the defender of Protestantism as marking the final appearance of the Roman Catholic Church as a sect was July 16, 1054, the day of her final separation from the Greek communion.

In the second proposition Campbell affirmed that the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, upon which the papacy rests, was foreign to the Bible. Four evidences were presented to sustain this charge. First, the office of pope or supreme head of the church has no scriptural authority; second, it cannot be proved that Peter was ever bishop of Rome, for such would be incompatible with the apostolic office; third, Christ gave no law of succession; and fourth, if such a law had been given, the succession had long since been destroyed by ruthless and evil men who occupied the papal throne.[29] Confronted with the charge that many of the popes had been sinful men, Purcell made the famous admission, "I should not be surprised if these bad popes were at this moment expiating their crimes in the penal fires of hell."[30] Vicars of Christ, successors of Peter, in hell!

On this second proposition, to which was devoted more time than any other, some of the most vigorous battles of the entire debate were fought, especially emphasizing the exegesis of certain passages of Scripture. The first of these involved Christ's statement to Peter, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," which Bishop Purcell quoted as a proof of Peter's primacy. The word Peter means rock; therefore Christ declared that upon Peter the church would be built. Such an interpretation could not

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28 Ibid., 59.

29 Ibid., 173.

30 Ibid., 180.

remain unchallenged, and Campbell pointed to the difference in gender between the masculine word **petros,** and the feminine petra, rock. The Lord could not have erected his church upon Peter; for that rock was the sublime fact which Peter had just confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Another passage upon which a real battle developed involved Christ's question to Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these?" and his subsequent injunction, "Feed my lambs." (John 21:15.) Purcell contended that upon this occasion Peter confessed a greater love for the Master than that of the other apostles, a fact indicating his primacy. Campbell's explanation of the passage was quite different. Peter and some of the disciples had felt disconcerted, forsaken, at the events of the day, and had returned to fishing, their old occupation. Hence when Christ asked Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these," he was speaking of the fish and all which they represented. For Peter to have confessed a love for Christ greater than that of the other ten would have been impossible and unwise. Bishop Purcell was outraged; but for the momentous issues involved, he would have styled Campbell's exegesis a fish story![31] Some were quite unwilling to accept Campbell's interpretation, but the exegesis was sufficiently unusual to elicit a comment in the **Daily Gazette** the following morning. After accusing both parties of hair splitting and reviewing Campbell's "fish story" for his readers, Editor Hammond commented:

> Can the Christian world be edified by referring great scriptural doctrines to such gross interpretations?
>
> I will illustrate an answer to this interrogatory, by telling an anecdote I have somewhere read or heard.—A young master of an intelligent young slave

[31] Ibid., 108.

> read him the scriptures and explained them.—The scholar startled at many points, and especially at the account of Jonah in the whale's belly. He, however, assented to give that narrative credence. At length, the case of Shadrach. Meschech and Abednego, was read—**"Master must I believe that?"** said the slave. **"Yes,"** was the reply. After a pause, the slave observed, **"then master I tell you, I don't believe a word of that fish story."** Neither do I believe one word of the first interpretation of the Saviour's conversation in the case referred to.[32]

Oftentimes in debate, the most vigorous campaigns are fought at the least expected points. Such proved to be the case in the Cincinnati debate, and centered about an authority, the **Moral Theology of Alphonsus De Ligoric,** which Campbell quoted in upholding his third proposition. The questioned statement was:

> A bishop, however poor he may be, cannot appropriate to himself pecuniary fines without the license of the Apostolic See. But he ought to apply them to pious uses, which the **Council of Trent** has laid upon non-resident Clergymen, or upon those **clergymen who keep Concubines.**[33]

Campbell was arguing the fallibility of Catholic dogma and used this quotation to prove that among the Catholic hierarchy marriage was a greater sin than keeping a concubine; for marriage meant instant excommunication, while the latter was fined and winked at. Since St. Ligori was a standard work on Catholic morals, Bishop Purcell immediately denied the charge against the priesthood and declared that no such statement was ever written by Ligori. "I have examined these volumes, from cover to cover, and

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[32] **Daily Gazette,** January 17, 1837.

[33] **Campbell-Purcell Debate,** 454.

in none of them can so much as a shadow be found for the infamous charge," Purcell affirmed, pointing to a nine volume set of St. Ligori lying upon the stand. "The original tells the truth. The translation lies."[34] Near the close of the debate Bishop Purcell brought to the platform a Cincinnati classical scholar, Alexander Kinmont, who had been examining the works of St. Ligori and who testified that he had been unable to find the passage quoted by Campbell. The clash between the two disputants on St. Ligori was clearly defined, and the Bishop seemed to be having the better of the controversy; some of the issues had been incomprehensible to many in the audience, but here was one which all could understand, and great excitement pervaded the assembly.

Unfortunately, Campbell had not studied the original volumes of St. Ligori, but had used a translation from the original Latin made by Samuel Smith of New York, a converted priest. In reply to Purcell's charges against the translation, Campbell could but present commendations of Smith's work and promise to write Smith concerning the disputed passage and publish his reply in Cincinnati. Soon after the close of the debate Campbell received a reply from Smith in which the translator gave the exact location of the questioned passage. Borrowing Bishop Purcell's set of St. Ligori, Campbell found the exact passage as quoted in the debate and immediately took the volume to the Mr. Kinmont who had testified during the debate that he had examined the volumes and could not find the passage in question. The classical scholar examined it carefully, after which he published a statement verifying Smith's work as a "faithful translation" of the disputed passage from St. Ligori.[35]

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[34] Ibid., 318.

[35] Ibid., 455.

Campbell's greatest speech of the debate and one of the greatest of his entire career was an hour's discourse in support of the fourth proposition, and proving the Catholic Church to be the fulfillment of prophecies, found in both the Old and New Testaments. Skillfully, Campbell referred to a number of important prophecies including the Babylon of Revelation and Paul's man of sin, drew the outstanding similar characteristics from each, and designated the Roman Catholic as the fulfillment of these prophetic utterances. Campbell's broad generalizations, his convincing logic and graphic delineations made the address remarkably effective. In his rebuttal Bishop Purcell made no effort to meet the specific arguments presented by his opponent but spent an entire hour discoursing upon the difficulties of prophetic interpretations. Campbell referred to this reply as an illustrious "proof of the invincible force of the argument from prophecy."[36] A prominent churchman in the audience remarked that in the discussion of this proposition "intelligent Catholics began to tremble for their champion. Mr. Campbell constantly saw his advantage, and improved it with a promptness and skill, not often equalled, and perhaps never surpassed."[37]

The final proposition submitted by Campbell for discussion reflected the fear, voiced by Protestants throughout the nation, that the principles of Roman Catholic faith were diametrically opposed to the free institutions of our nation. Campbell shared this widespread sentiment that the Catholic hierarchy made intellectual slaves of its subjects and opposed freedom of thought and action, whether in religion, literature, or politics. "Such are the laws of the mind—such the intellectual and moral constitution of man, that if in religion the mind be enslaved to any superstition, especially in youth, it rarely or ever can be emancipated

[36] Ibid., 310.

[37] Asa Shinn, quoted in **Christian Preacher,** 1837, 68.

and invigorated," Campbell declared. "The benumbing and paralyzing influence of Romanism is such, as to disqualify a person from the relish and enjoyment of political liberty." The seventh proposition embodied these sentiments.

In his effort to prove the un-American tendency of Catholicism Campbell relied principally upon a number of oaths required of Catholic officials and quoted the following as being required of all Jesuits:

> By virtue of the keys given him [the pope] by my Saviour, Jesus Christ, he hath power to depose heretical kings, princes, states, commonwealths, and governments: all being illegal, without his sacred confirmation; and that they may safely be destroyed. Therefore I, to the utmost of my power, shall and will defend his doctrine, and his holiness' rights and customs against all usurpers___
>
> I do renounce and disown any allegiance as due to any heretical king, prince, state, named Protestants, or obedience to any of their inferior magistrates, or officers.[38]

Such oaths agree perfectly with the orthodox doctrine of the Catholic Church regarding the temporal power of the pope, for this doctrine teaches, according to Cardinal Bellarmine, "By reason of the spiritual power, the pope, at least, indirectly, hath a supreme power even in temporal matters."[39] Campbell likewise quoted the oath required of all Catholic bishops throughout the world:

> The rules of the holy Fathers, the apostolic decrees, ordinances, or disposals, reservations, provisions, and mandates, I will observe with all my might, and

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[38] **Campbell-Purcell Debate,** 369.

[39] Ibid., 393.

> cause to be observed by others. Heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our said lord, or his foresaid successors, I will to my utmost power persecute and oppose.[40]

To prove the binding authority of this oath Campbell cited the fact that according to historians and martyrologists more than fifty million human beings have been destroyed by the holy inquisitions of the Catholic Church. How could any bishop, even of the See of Cincinnati, remain loyal to such an oath and still conscientiously embrace the principles of a democratic America?

Bishop Purcell replied by calling attention to the loyal Catholics who had served the United States during the Revolution and reminded his audience that the first colony in the entire western hemisphere to allow freedom of conscience and worship, Maryland, was a Catholic settlement. In discussing the bishop's oath, Purcell passionately repudiated all of its opprobrious implications, and pointed to his oath of allegiance to the United States, taken in becoming an American citizen, as preceding his bishop's oath. He then continued:

> The oath that the bishops take, is not a recognition of any temporal power of the pope, out of his own territory, called the States of the Church, in Italy. We would never take the oath in the odious sense, which my opponent would force upon it. This solemn and authentic abjuration should, alone, be sufficient to settle this account....
>
> The arms of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. He that takes the sword, we believe with Jesus Christ, will die by the sword. Hence, we assume no obligations by that oath, but such as God imposes; and those to be discharged in his own divine spirit of meek-

[40] Ibid., 353.

ness, charity, and good will. It is cruel to impute to us crimes, and to insist that we hold doctrines, which we disavow.[41]

As the curtain closed on "the grand debate" in Cincinnati, no attempt was made to ascertain the sentiments of the audience as had been done at the conclusion of the Owen debate, eight years earlier in the same city. Had such a vote been taken, it would undoubtedly have been more equally divided; neither disputant would have received the nearly unanimous acclaim accorded to Alexander Campbell as the conqueror of Robert Owen. The decision of such a vote would probably have depended upon the relative number of Catholics and Protestants who made up the final audience!

VERDICTS OF THE PRESS

Even before the Campbell-Purcell debate ended, the Catholic press of Cincinnati began to hail Purcell's defense of the Catholic faith as successful and a resounding victory. Led by Bishop Purcell's brother who was editor of the **Catholic Telegraph,** and to a lesser extent by Charles Hammond of the **Daily Gazette,** whose attitude was probably more of disgust at the entire affair than commendatory of Purcell, Catholic writers characterized the debate as an overwhelming defeat for the Sage of Bethany. Campbell attributed these articles to party bitterness and wrote that the Catholic writers had been "determined from the beginning" that Purcell should have the victory.[42] Protestant indignation was so aroused by the course pursued by the Catholic press that on January 24 a number of men who had attended the debate met in the Sycamore Street Church to express their attitude toward the merits of the

[41] Ibid., 400.

[42] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1837, 322.

controversy. A series of resolutions was adopted which, after reviewing the incidents which led to the debate and accusing the political press of making such resolutions necessary, commended Campbell's conduct of the controversy.

> 1st. **Resolved,** That it is the unanimous opinion of this meeting that the cause of Protestantism has been fully sustained throughout this Discussion.
>
> 2nd. **Resolved,** That in our opinion the arguments in favor of Protestantism, and the objections to the errors of Popery, have not been fairly met.
>
> 3rd. **Resolved,** That we look forward to the publication of this Discussion as a powerful antidote to the sophistry and arrogance of all the advocates of Romanism, and that we have the fullest confidence in submitting it to the impartial decision of the American people.
>
> 4th. **Resolved,** That we approve of the spirit and temper and were pleased with the power of arguments and authorities by which Mr. Campbell sustained his position, and concur with him in possessing "no unkind feelings or prejudices towards individuals, but believe the principles of Romanism inconsistent with our free institutions."[43]

These resolutions were signed by eighty names and published in all of the city papers which would receive them.

The Methodist editor, who had lamented that the crowded conditions at the debate prevented his taking notes, could, without the aid of notes, proclaim Mr. Campbell the victor. It was his conviction that he had "never witnessed a more successful exposure of error" than Campbell's. As to the complete results of the discussion the

[43] **Philanthropist,** February 3, 1837.

writer had said from the beginning that some would be converted to the Catholic Church regardless of the arguments presented, and this he continued to believe. "The very weakness, **viciousness** of the system, will, like a carrion stench, call around it, now exposed, some of strong and craving appetites." The editor added, viewing the other side of the ledger, "Thousands in this city, who thought Roman Catholicism a tolerable thing, now abhor it as they never did, and will not dream hereafter that there is in it any thing but elements of disorder, and vice, and destruction."[44] The immediate effect of the debate is indicated by a note in the **Millennial Harbinger** for March, 1837, reporting that fifty had recently been added to the Sycamore Street Church in Cincinnati, forty of them having been immersed before Campbell left the city.

The debate between Campbell and the Catholic prelate was sufficiently important to attract prominent religious leaders to its sessions, and one of these who had left an account of the discussion was Asa Shinn. Shinn had been born of Quaker parents but was converted to the Methodist faith in 1789, and three years later began preaching. He attained a position of considerable influence in the Methodist Episcopal Church, became dissatisfied and began advocating reforms, and on November 2, 1830, became one of the co-founders of the Methodist Protestant Church. In his estimation the debate was a victory for the Protestant cause.

> Mr. Campbell, I think, sustained the cause of Protestantism, with candor, and with great ability; his documentary proofs were abundant and decisive; and his arguments were incontrovertible; and it is difficult to conceive how any impartial mind can hesitate to admit, that he deserves to be respected by

[44] **Western Christian Advocate,** February 10, 1837.

> Protestant Christians of all denominations for this magnanimous effort to diffuse light upon a subject which we believe essential to the best interests of all mankind.[45]

Detracting in no way from his tribute to Campbell, Mr. Shinn was complimentary of Bishop Purcell who "defended his cause with considerable ingenuity, and sometimes with striking displays of eloquence." Describing the prelate's procedure, Shinn wrote, "Such of Mr. Campbell's positions as could be encountered with apparent plausibility, were promptly met by the Bishop; others, more formidable were passed by in silence."[46] Shinn expressed real pleasure in some of Purcell's arguments; the Bishop's efforts to abandon the dark foundation of preceding ages indicated that even infallible Catholicism was susceptible of improvement under the influence of American democracy.

One of the most capable editors in Cincinnati during this period was Charles Hammond of the Daily Gazette; and though Campbell accuses him of being strongly pro-Catholic, his articles demonstrate an almost contemptible disgust with the entire affair. After attending the first two days of the discussion, the editor regarded his time as having been wasted, and wrote:

> It served to remind me of a record preserved in the Archives of Virginia. The Governor was on trial before the Council, and the business of each day is briefly noticed. One day the lawyers were engaged in argument —and it was thus noted, **"spent in vain jangling."** Another day was consumed in some discussion, which was thus characterized, **"spent in unprofitable disputa-**

[45] Asa Shinn, quoted in **Christian Preacher,** 1837, 67.

[46] Quoted in **Christian Preacher,** 1837, 68.

tion." Even thus was Friday and Saturday passed away, by those who attended the debate.[47]

Regardless of Hammond's attitude toward the discussion as a whole, he had nothing but criticism to heap upon Campbell for his conduct of the Protestant cause. Reporting the first day's session, he surmised that each party was satisfied with its champion, but doubted that the ranks of either had been increased by the day's activities. The editor then confided, "I rather think, however, that the champion of Protestantism does not himself feel that he gathered any new laurels."[48] It will be remembered that Campbell defended only his convictions as to what constituted New Testament Christianity, not the multiplicity of Protestant sects; and Editor Hammond was particularly incensed at Campbell's opposition to all ecclesiasticism, a fundamental part of many Protestant creeds. After Campbell had argued the absence of any religious authority higher than the local congregation, Hammond complained, "Very well this, for the selected champion of **Protestantism** against Catholicism, giving the first Protestant Church, to the demons of error, great as those against which she protested."[49] On his first proposition Campbell insisted that all ministers were equal in the New Testament, and as Hammond listened, he could not help wondering what many of the Protestants in the audience thought of their champion's heterodoxy. Thus he wrote:

> After his own manner he made a thorough scatterment of the Pope, and of papal and protestant Episcopacy, so that the dogs might turn away from the whole with loathing and disgust. — **"Thinks I to myself,"**

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[47] **Daily Gazette,** January 16, 1837.

[48] Ibid., January 14, 1837.

[49] Ibid., January 18, 1837.

> what a champion of Protestantism! The constable's injunction to keep quiet, tied me to my seat, so that I could not get a peep at the phiz of my Methodist Episcopalian friend, Samuel Lewis, Moderator, neither could I explore whether any one of the Episcopalian communities, who united in calling Mr. Campbell to this championing of Protestantism, was present. I should have been pleased to have said to them, **what think you of all this?** [50]

The supreme inconsistency of it all, thought Hammond, was that Cincinnati Protestantism, boasting numerous beautiful edifices and eloquent talented clergymen, should be forced to call upon this innovator to defend her from Catholic error![51]

One Cincinnati periodical, the **Journal and Luminary,** was as enthusiastic in its commendation of Campbell as Charles Hammond was vigorous in his criticisms. This paper first compared the two men as to their educational accomplishments; and concluded that both were eminent scholars, Purcell being the most learned champion of Catholicism in the entire Ohio Valley. Both disputants were well versed in history, able in argument, and if unopposed, capable of winning the approval of a large majority of an audience. In spite of these similarities Campbell and Purcell were entirely different; the paper then proceeded with an interesting and typically Protestant contrast.

> But yet I have never known two persons meet in **wordy strife,** whose habits of mind, and modes of thinking were in such perfect contrast.
>
> One, calm and composed, seemed to have the most entire command of every nerve; the other, showed himself violent, stormy, and even abusive at times.

[50] Ibid., January 14, 1837.

[51] Idem.

One, powerful in reasoning, regarding speech merely as a convenient medium of thought; the other, abundant in words, a fine flow of language—ideas coming only as secondary, yet what was wanting in thought, was supplied in profuse action. One, maugre the filth with which the subject abounds, continued chaste in thought, and delicate in allusions; the other needlessly outraging every feeling of delicacy, by gross vulgarisms and most unseemly expressions . . .

One, conscious of the strength of his arguments, exults in the conviction which must attend them;—on the other, they fall harmless, as the lightning of Heaven leaves the flitting insect bird unscathed.

One, appears a man of mature age and acute discrimination; the other, a smart, sprightly youth, playing around, and confusing the philosopher by his wild vagaries and uncouth gambols.

One, displays a mind thoroughly trained to sound, logical reasoning; the other, yields himself to the unquestioned control of a set of traditions replete with the superstitious notions of the dark ages.

One, having connected himself with society by the ties of husband and father, believes "marriage honorable in all"—that it is the purest, holiest, happiest tie which ever bound human beings together; the other, a sworn solitary, pronounces conjugal life, a state of unhallowed impurity, and affects to despise it as such.

One, having been habituated from his youth to think and decide for himself, asserts his right to scan the evidence of every proposition closely; the other, looks at the evidence on one side only, and deems it daring impiety for a layman to question the views of his party, or the authority of his priest.

> One would have every man responsible for himself; the other throws the whole responsibility on the mother Church.[82]

One gentleman who attended the Campbell-Purcell debate regularly was three years later a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. He was James G. Birney (1792-1857), a prominent abolitionist leader, editor of the **Philanthropist,** and Liberty Party candidate for the nation's highest office in 1840 and again in 1844. Birney was highly interested in the discussion because it involved the whole issue of free discussion so honored by the abolitionists, and he has left an extensive description of his impressions. His account of Bishop Purcell's position in the debate is as follows:

> He is evidently a well read man, especially in the history of the Roman church, and his mind is handsomely enriched with the current literature of the day. His mental laboratory is abundantly replenished with facts. They seem however to have been provided rather for its garniture, than for any more profitable use. In the employment of them for the purposes of manly and dignified argumentation, he seems to our judgment exceedingly unskilled and inexperienced. This deficiency arises, we apprehend, not so much from any feebleness of natural powers, as from an erroneous mental training, which receives everything that is Roman Catholic as true, and every thing that is not Roman Catholic as false. The debate of the first day satisfied us, that in the mere struggle between the disputants, there could be but little of interest. Their strength was altogether too disproportioned-—and had it not been for the various unworthy appeals made by the Bishop to the prejudices of the audience; for his

[82] Quoted in **Christian Preacher,** 1837, 65f.

attempts continued throughout, and aggravated as the end drew nigh, to win favor by casting odium on Mr. Campbell personally, we should have felt for him the same kind of commiseration that we do for a man of diminutive bodily size and feeble powers, who, although he is the aggressor, is receiving from his overgrown, two fisted adversary, good-humored, though long continued and painful castigation.[83]

Birney was especially impressed by the strange scene which he had witnessed at the debate; a man of high intelligence had advocated to an American audience that they surrender their right of judgment in religious matters to a church, fifty of whose heads, according to the Bishop's own admission, were then suffering for their crimes in the penal fires. Yet in all sincerity, Bishop Purcell had made such a plea. Birney then commented on Campbell's part of the debate:

So far as Mr. Campbell was concerned, we can speak with unalloyed pleasure. His facts were judiciously selected—his historical land-marks well chosen, presenting, without the confusion that often occurs from introducing too many things, his case with great plainness and simplicity. Every point on which we heard him fully, we thought he fully sustained. And then it was all done, with such unaffected calmness, such dispassionateness, and such an evident desire to arrive at the truth for the truth's sake; with such Christian forebearance in the midst of provoking assaults from his adversary, (although he had multiplied opportunities for impaling him), and the most ungenerous treatment received daily from a part of the political press of the city, that had we ever before entertained any prejudice against Mr. C, he would, by his conduct

[83] **Philanthropist,** February 3, 1837.

amidst so many and such long continued trails, have well nigh dissipated it.[54]

Birney concluded that Catholicism, like slavery, demanded all and nothing less. "Its mode of warfare is, to imprison, to cramp, to crush the mind, knowing that when this is accomplished, every other triumph is easily won." The solution to the problem of slavery—or Roman Catholicism—in America was free, unfettered discussion!

AN INTERVIEW WITH PURCELL

During the decades following the debate in Cincinnati, Bishop Purcell entertained a spirit of highest respect and admiration for his former opponent, Alexander Campbell. This feeling is well evidenced by an interview which the Catholic prelate granted to a Christian preacher some years after Campbell's death, but which was never published until 1898, five years following the Catholic leader's death. The interview was reported in **The Christian-Evangelist,** December 1, 1898, and was signed " I . C," probably Governor Ira D. Chase of Indiana, a Christian minister.[55] At the time the writer met Archbishop Purcell, his elevation having taken place July 19, 1850, the prelate was the greatest Catholic leader in America; yet he received the minister in kindness and courtesy. Soon the conversation turned to the work of Campbell, and when Purcell was asked to express his opinion of the reformer and his place in church history, he gladly consented, saying:

> I will gladly talk with you about my worthy friend, Mr. Campbell. From the very first day of our acquaintance to the day of his death, I always entertained the kindliest feelings toward that gentleman. Oh! he was

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[54] **Philanthropist,** February 3, 1837.

[55] Haley, **Debates That Made History,** 245.

a most lovable character, indeed, and treated me in every way and on all occasions like a brother . . .

Was he not my brother in the Lord? Was he not like me a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus? Did he not believe in the resurrection of the dead and of the life beyond the grave where we shall meet to part no more? Did he not kneel before the same cross in spirit and regard with reverence the Mother of Jesus and that poor woman who bathed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and of those other sweet and pious women who followed the great Master in his journeyings over the classic hills of Judea and knelt beside his body when taken down from the cross and placed in his narrow tomb?

It is true, we differed in some matters—for instance, on the church government, prayers for the departed, confessions of sin to the priest, the celibacy of the clergy—what of that? These were all minor matters. In the essentials of Christianity we entirely agreed[56]

In speaking of the religious organization which resulted from Campbell's labors, Archbishop Purcell made the following comments.

In Mr. Campbell's church the form of worship is very simple, as in the days of the apostles. He hoped always to keep it so. Here is where he was mistaken. It cannot be kept so. As the church becomes great in numbers, and rich and strong, it will lose its original simplicity. This is inevitable. We begin to see the change already in some of the richer congregations in the cities. Are not the advanced congregations already discarding congregational singing, and procuring fine

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[56] **Christian-Evangelist,** 1898, 680.

> organs and hired choirs? Are they not placing soft and luxurious cushions in their seats, and placing flowers in the pulpits and in the altars? Has not the fine stained glass found its way into the lofty windows of their truly Gothic cathedrals? Surely, all these things have taken place, and very shortly they'll have representations of the apostles and the saints in the same windows, and the fine frescoed ceilings, with scenes from sacred Scriptures represented thereon, as we have in the Sistine Chapel at Rome.[57]

Controversy is an excellent instructor, and during his acquaintance with Alexander Campbell, Purcell had so learned the spirit of the great reformer as to realize that these innovations would never have met his approval. Archbishop Purcell realized, too, that after Campbell's death the churches of Christ had begun to divide over this issue. One section, styled by Purcell the "backwoods church," was opposed to the organs, choirs, and elaborate buildings; the other, a "church of progress and of high moral and aesthetic culture" was rapidly introducing the innovations. "I contend that the church is drifting," stated the Archbishop, remembering that Campbell's conception of New Testament Christianity would have necessitated his remaining loyal to the primitive pattern, "drifting away from the apostolic simplicity of which its founder dreamed, and has joined in the race which all Protestant churches are making toward something grander and more majestic."[58]

Referring to his discussion with Alexander Campbell the Catholic leader had only praise for the conduct of his opponent.

> Everything was conducted in decency and order,

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[57] Idem,

[58] Idem.

as St. Paul would say. Campbell was decidedly the very fairest man in debate I ever saw, as fair as you can possibly conceive. He never fought for victory, like Dr. Johnson. He seemed to be always fighting for the truth, or what he believed to be the truth. In this he differed from the other men. He never misrepresented his case nor that of his opponent; never tried to hide a weak point; never quibbled. He would have made a very poor lawyer, in the ordinary understanding of the term lawyer. Like his great friend, Henry Clay, he excelled in the clear statement of the case at issue. No dodging with him. He came right out fairly and squarely. He was what used to be called, in good old times, "flat-footed." Rather than force a victory by underhand or ignoble means, he preferred to encounter defeat. But whenever he fell, he fell like the Cavalier Bayard, with honor and a clear conscience.

In our debate not a particle of ill-feeling or bitterness was mixed up. After the discussions were over we would meet and be just as friendly as if we both belonged to one and the same church.[89]

Had Alexander Campbell been an unseen guest as Archbishop Purcell discussed the work of the reformer, he would probably have been somewhat disappointed as the old prelate after a hearty laugh answered a query about the name "Campbellite." The Catholic considered the resentment which Christians felt at being designated "Campbellites" a strange and foolish extreme to which the movement had gone. Did not Germany glory in the name of Luther, Presbyterians in being called Calvinists, and Methodists in the name of John Wesley? "I do not know how others feel," declared the Archbishop, "but as for me, if I were a member of this persuasion, I should do myself the honor

[89] Ibid., 681.

of calling myself a 'Campbellite,' and I should be proud of the name."

The most significant part of this interview came when Purcell ascribed to Campbell a prominent place among all those religious leaders whose brilliance has flashed momentarily through the centuries. The following tribute, from the lips of one whom he faced in public debate, is unprecedented testimony of the character, ability, and importance of Alexander Campbell.

> Now as for Mr. Campbell's standing in future ages, I think it is quite within the bounds of truth to say that not ecclesiastical history alone, but profane history, will place him on the same pedestal with Luther and Calvin and Wesley, the peer of either of them. Had he lived in the early ages of Christendom and accomplished the wonderful amount of good with which he is justly credited he would after death have been sanctified and canonized and "enrolled in the capitol" along with St. Chrysostom and St. Jerome as a father in the church, his name forever embalmed in its annals as a worthy successor of St. Peter and St. Paul.[60]

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[60] Idem.

CHAPTER V

Campbell Versus Presbyterianism: The Walker and Maccalla Debates

Few of the religious groups whose memberships were depleted by the work of the Restoration Movement were harder hit than the Kentucky Presbyterians. It was in the blue grass state that Barton W. Stone renounced the authority of Presbyterianism and initiated his work of restoration, carrying thousands of their members with him in the search for New Testament Christianity. Though Thomas and Alexander Campbell had originally professed the Presbyterian faith, their influence had been felt most strongly among the Kentucky Baptists; however, the zeal for the Restoration ideals which the Campbells had implanted in the hearts of these Baptists had resulted directly in the proselyting of untold numbers from the Presbyterian church. In Kentucky, too, the union of the followers of Stone and Campbell was accomplished (1832), and the impetus which unity gave to the entire movement persuaded others to desert the ranks of Presbyterianism for ancient Christianity.

The grand climax of this fundamental clash between the Presbyterians and the Kentucky Christians came in 1843, and it took the form of one of the greatest religious debates in all the annals of American history. The participants were N. L. Rice and Alexander Campbell; the place was Lexington, Kentucky.

Any effort to consider the background of this Campbell-Rice debate, however, must revolve around two earlier

discussions which Alexander Campbell conducted with Presbyterian preachers, John Walker in 1820 and W. L. Maccalla in 1823. These encounters were the first in which Campbell engaged and had an important influence in molding his own thought concerning the utility of religious debates and the particular issues involved. They are also important in providing a background of preliminary skirmishes preparatory to Campbell's final campaign against Presbyterianism in 1843. In many respects these earlier debates were prophetic of that which was to transpire on a grander scale in Lexington.

THE WALKER DEBATE

During the autumn of 1819 a Baptist preacher named John Birch, who was the elder of a Baptist church which met at Flat Rock, a few miles from Mount Pleasant, Ohio, zealously baptized an unusually large number of converts into the Baptist church. His success, in turn, aroused the denominational energy of John Walker, the minister of the Seceder Presbyterian Church in Mount Pleasant who, in an effort to undermine the Baptist accomplishments, delivered a series of sermons defending infant baptism and in opposition to Baptist principles. John Birch heard one of these sermons and thought that Walker had misrepresented a certain theological writer, Dr. Baldwin. When he attempted to question Walker about the quotation from Dr. Baldwin, a short dispute resulted and was followed by further interviews and correspondence between the two preachers. The disagreement finally resulted in Walker's issuing a challenge to Birch, or any other Baptist preacher of good moral character whom Birch might choose, to meet him in a public discussion devoted to the question of infant baptism.[1]

[1] Alexander Campbell, **Debate On Christian Baptism, Between Mr. John Walker, A Minister Of The Secession, And Alexander Campbell . . .** (Pittsburg, 1822: republished by Religious Book Service, Indianapolis, Indiana), 1. (Cited hereafter as **Campbell-Walker Debate.)**

Birch immediately accepted the proposition and dispatched a message to Alexander Campbell, for whom he had the highest regard, asking him to undertake the defense of the Baptist cause. It will be remembered that at this time Campbell was recognized as a Baptist, since the Brush Run Church had joined the Redstone Association six years earlier. After this union with the Baptists, Campbell, though at liberty to preach whatever he believed the Bible taught regardless of any Baptist creed, had travelled rather extensively among their churches, gaining a reputation for his power and eloquence. There were some Baptist preachers who were already opposing Campbell vigorously for such heterodox doctrines as those contained in the Sermon on the Law, but these preachers still constituted a small minority, and Birch was as sympathetic with Campbell as they were opposed.

When Campbell received the proposal from Birch, he was somewhat reluctant to enter the discussion, especially since his honored father had always opposed religious debates as productive of bitterness and strife. Birch, insisting that he would "not be weary in well doing," continued to urge Campbell to accept the Presbyterian's challenge; and after Campbell had convinced his father that no harm could result from a defense of expressly revealed truth, he consented to enter the discussion. Later he explained his acceptance by writing, "I hesitated for a little; but my devotion to the cause of truth, and my being unwilling even to appear, much more to feel, afraid or ashamed to defend the cause of truth, overcame my natural aversion to controversy, and finally determined me to agree to meet Mr. Walker, at the time and place above specified."[2]

The time specified was June 19, 1820. The place was Mount Pleasant, Ohio, a village of less than 1000 inhabitants

[2] **Campbell-Walker Debate,** 1.

some twenty-three miles from Campbell's home. It was located in the southwest part of Jefferson County, a beautiful and fertile farming area. Most of the village's inhabitants were Quakers; and because of the Friends' violent opposition to slavery, Mount Pleasant became one of the most important stations on the underground railroad, which smuggled negro slaves out of the South, across the Ohio River, and on to northern cities or Canada. By 1820 this area was thickly populated; and since the discussion between Walker and Birch had already attracted considerable attention, large audiences attended the Campbell-Walker debate, attracted also by the novelty of religious polemics.

When Walker learned that Campbell had accepted his challenge, he selected Samuel Findley as his moderator and advised Campbell of his action. The Presbyterian cause undoubtedly would have fared better if Findley had been their debater and Walker the moderator, for Findley was an outstanding Presbyterian preacher who later gained considerable notoriety as an arch-enemy of "Campbellism." Findley began publication of a religious journal called the **Religious Examiner** in September, 1827. Campbell had already been publishing the **Christian Baptist** for four years and had directed some rather bitter criticisms at the Presbyterian clergy; but when Findley began his paper, he announced that he would ignore these attacks on the clergy. He wrote in the first issue of the **Examiner:**

> . . . Here, however, it is not to be expected, that he should undertake to reply formally to all the ridicule, and burlesque, hurled with a satanic malignity, upon that ordinance (the Christian clergy) by such pens as those of the Reformer and the Christian Baptist. On this the **cause** does not depend. The burlesque of a Voltaire, a Bolingbroke, a Rouseau, and their collegiate infidel declaimers, against the divine authenticity of

the Scriptures never was, and it is presumed never will be formally answered.[3]

Rules which were adopted to govern the discussion were:

1. Each speaker shall have the privilege of speaking 40 minutes without interruption, if he think proper to use them all, if not, he is not bound to speak so long.

2. Mr. Walker shall open the debate and Mr. Campbell shall close it.

3. The moderators are merely to keep order, not to pronounce judgment on the merits of the debate.

4. The proper subject of the ordinance of baptism, is first to be discussed—then the mode of baptism.

5. This debate must be conducted with decorum, and all improper allusions or passionate language guarded against.

6. The debate shall be continued from day to day, until the people are satisfied, or until the moderators think that enough has been said on each topic of debate.

In accordance with these rules Walker opened the debate; but his first speech was so brief, so lacking in both logic and evidence, as to indicate that the Presbyterian would be no match for the young and talented reformer. Walker's entire speech is quoted:

My friends—I don't intend to speak long at one time, perhaps not more than five or ten minutes, and will therefore come to the point at once: I maintain that Baptism came in the room of Circumcision—That the

[3] Samuel Findley, **"Preface," Religious Examiner,** September, 1827; quoted by Earl West, "Introduction," **Campbell-Walker Debate.**

> covenant on which the Jewish Church was built, and to which Circumcision is the seal, is the same with the covenant on which the Christian Church is built, and to which Baptism is the seal—That the Jews and the Christians are the same body politic, under the same lawgiver and husband; hence the Jews were called the congregation of the Lord—and the bridegroom of the Church says, "My love, my undefiled is one"—consequently the infants of believers have a right to Baptism.[4]

In reply to this amazingly brief address, Campbell stated that he stood on quite a different footing from his opponent since he had once believed as his opponent then believed. He had been a Presbyterian of Presbyterians, reared in the strictest sect of that religion and taught from childhood to have an implicit confidence in infant baptism. Comparing himself with Walker, Campbell stated, "My change of principles has not been conducive of my worldly fame nor worldly interest. If I err, my error is both unprofitable and dishonorable in the region of my operations. If my opponent errs, his error is profitable and honorable. On this ground, then, I conceive myself much more open to conviction than he can be."

Campbell's principal attack was directed against the identity of circumcision and baptism. If Pedo-baptists actually believed that baptism came in the room of circumcision, "they would baptize none but males, the Jews circumcised none but males; they would baptize precisely upon the eighth day; for the Jews circumcised on the eighth day." Campbell then enumerated seven specific respects in which baptism differed materially from circumcision. Circumcision: (1) was for males only (2) was performed the eighth day (3) required only fleshly descent from Abraham

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[4] **Campbell-Walker Debate,** 9.

(4) was administered by parents, relatives, or civil officers (5) was a sign of the separation of Jews from the rest of the human family (6) affected a specific area of the body and (7) brought the peculiar promises of Canaan and a numerous people. In each of these seven respects, infant sprinkling was distinctly different!

Walker's most important argument was that drawn from the identity of the covenants, and it may almost be said that this was his only argument. He insisted that the Old Covenant and New Covenant were essentially one, that the church or congregation of the Lord existed under either covenant, and that spiritual promises were enjoyed under either covenant. This identity of the covenants formed the keystone of the Presbyterian's argument; for since Campbell admitted infant membership under the Old Covenant, if Walker could prove that the New Covenant was identical with the Old, he would have established that infants were entitled to membership under the New Covenant. One of the passages which Walker cited in an effort to prove this identity of the covenants was Romans 11, from which he argued that the Gentiles were grafted into the root of the Jewish olive tree, the root representing the perpetuity of the Old Covenant. Campbell responded that Walker was making Paul's illustration teach that which Paul never intended. "The apostle's design was to show that God had not cast away and finally rejected his Jewish people; although a great majority of them were cast away. The apostle proves that there was a remnant, according to the election of grace, that God had not cast away," Campbell argued. "My opponent's design in summoning the evidence of the apostle, is to prove that the Jewish nation, the whole of it as such, was the same as the Christian church." An entirely different design!

On the identity of the covenants Campbell's strongest argument was made from Paul's contrast of the two coven-

ants (Heb. 8). The second covenant was new and better; the first was old and faulty. Campbell then specified four respects in which the covenant of Christ differed from and surpassed that of Moses. (1) The old law was written on stone; and as Moses broke the tables of stone, so the Jewish people broke this law. Under the new covenant the laws are written on the hearts of Christ's willing subjects. (2) "In the first, he was their God in a national and temporal sense —In the second, he is their God in a spiritual and eternal sense." (3) "The subjects of the old covenant required to be taught to know the Lord; many of them were infants and minors and at best a carnal people; but the subjects of the new all are taught of God—they know him from the least to the greatest; consequently **no infants are subjects of the new."** (4) No remission of sins was promised the subjects of the first covenant, whereas forgiveness is offered to those who obey the law of Christ.

Campbell then concluded:

> Who will not say this is a **better** covenant established upon **better** promises? The last verse of this chapter confirms all that I have said on the abrogation and total disannulment of the old covenant. Oh! that every Pedo-baptist would remember it; it should forever silence my opponent on these topics. It reads thus, "In that he saith a **new** covenant, he hath made the first **old**—Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away"... "Vanish away" — how strong the expression! How figurative and how striking! No word could more fully express its entire, its total, its perpetual abolition.[8]

As a corollary to his argument from the identity of the covenants, Walker maintained that the congregation of Israel and the church of the Lord were identical. Campbell

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[8] **Campbell-Walker Debate,** 39f.

admitted that the term "church" or "congregation" was used to designate the Israelites; (Acts 7), but he inquired where this Jewish congregation was ever called a **church of Christ.** Further, he argued that absurd conclusions would result from the hypothesis that the Jewish nation was the church of Christ. "The church of Christ put their own Saviour to death! Those Jews that were members of this hypothetical church, put the Messiah to death! Those Jews that made havoc of the church, were members of it! Nay, those that repented, and were, in consequence, 'added to it,' were members of it before they were added to it!"[6]

Campbell's argument that the Old and New Covenants were wholly distinct from one another was a unique contribution to Presbyterian-Baptist controversy, and it won a resounding victory over Walker. It also added fuel to the growing suspicion among Baptists that Campbell, though among the Baptists, was not of them. The Baptists could not have selected a more capable preacher than Campbell to defend their views against Walker, nor could they have made a worse selection of one to champion their orthodoxy. Campbell's argument on the covenants was the only logical manner in which Walker's position could be overthrown, but to the regular Baptists it was strange and heretical. It was the same view of Biblical interpretation which Campbell had outlined in his famous Sermon on the Law before the Redstone Association in 1816 and which had aroused a bitter minority opposition among the Redstone preachers. Now, Campbell had been given opportunity to re-emphasize and enlarge these ideas; and though Baptists were jubilant at Campbell's easy victory and praised his conduct of the discussion, there must have been concealed apprehension at the reappearance of this "new doctrine."

Walker appeared to feel the force of Campbell's argument, and on the second morning of the debate he deserted

[6] Ibid., 43.

the identity of the covenants for the usual Presbyterian argument drawn from the cases of household "baptism. Campbell replied with a careful exegetical study of each household baptism, proving in each case that the text forbids the presence of infants. Cornelius was a devout man, who feared God "with all his house"; hence there were none in his household who were not old enough to fear God. After the conversion of Lydia and her household, Paul comforted the brethren; hence these "infant" converts were capable of receiving comfort from the apostle's words. The Philippian jailer is said to have believed in God "with all his house;" hence all his household were old enough to become believers. After these careful studies of the text Walker found little comfort in the cases of household conversion.

In the course of his argument on the difference between the covenants Campbell asked Walker a series of nine questions, which were never successfully answered, and which still summarize well the difference between the law and the gospel. These questions were:

1. Are they the same in respect of the nature and extent of the privileges secured to the respective subjects?

2. Are they the same in respect of the interesting or entitling condition; that is, is the ground of interest and of claim the same in both?

3. Is the condition of the continued enjoyment of the covenant blessings the same in both coverings?

4. If both covenants are the same, in what respect is the new said to be **"better"** than the old?

5. Are the duties enjoined upon the covenantees the same in both?

6. Are the penalties threatened the same in both?

7. Was not Abraham by covenant the father of a two-fold seed, a natural and a spiritual?

8. Did not Abraham's spiritual seed consist, first of Christ, and all that in him inherit the faith of the father of the faithful, whether Jews or Gentiles, and of them only?

9. Did not the covenant of circumcision exclusively belong- to the natural seed of Abraham as such, and to them only, as specified in Gen. 17?

These questions were asked in different speeches; and after the second set of three questions had been propounded, Samuel Findley, the Presbyterian moderator, appeared to be apprehensive that Walker could not survive the questioning- and formally objected that such questions were not "conducive to the edification" of the audience. Campbell's reply to Findley provided one of the humorous notes of the debate. "Mr. Findley, you are doubtless an advocate of the Westminster creed and catechism, and I presume, as such, must agree with your brethren, that the catechetical mode of instruction is the best," Campbell responded. "As we are now proceeding as the Westminster Divines direct, I think you cannot, without a dereliction of principle, object." After which, Campbell proceeded with his questioning.

The rules of the discussion had stipulated that it should continue daily until the public was satisfied or until the moderators decided that enough had been said on either side. On the afternoon of the second day they were scheduled to begin discussing the action of baptism; but Findley suggested, at the insistence of Walker, that the debate be terminated with one more speech by either party. Campbell was greatly surprised at this action as Walker had proposed in one of his speeches that morning that they adjourn from day to day until everything was fully discussed. However, Campbell consented to conclude the affair with two more

speeches on either side, explaining that if it was sufficient for the Presbyterians, it was amply sufficient for him.

Campbell was well prepared for a discussion of the action of baptism. He had examined the entire subject thoroughly before renouncing sprinkling and joining the Baptists, and he had brought a number of lexicons and Pedo-baptist works to Mount Pleasant. When Walker began his first speech on the action of baptism, he remarked, "Mr. C. has brought a whole 'bundle of Greek' with him; I suppose he intends to use it to prove immersion to be the only mode. He may require all this Greek to prove this point; but I will stick to my Bible—I find in it that evidence which is sufficient to justify my conduct." Walker did stick to his Bible, plunging immediately into the Pentateuch to prove that sprinkling is Christian baptism. As Walker had feared, Campbell used his Greek to build a powerful and scholarly argument from the root meaning of the word "baptize."

Campbell presented several important facts about sprinkling in his first speech on the action of baptism. (1) King James ordered his translators to anglicize the word "baptize" rather than translate it. (2) The Presbyterian divines who formulated the Westminster Confession were greatly perplexed regarding the action of baptism; and when the vote was finally taken after long debate, the assembly was equally divided with twenty-five favoring sprinkling and an equal number for immersion. The tie was broken by the moderator who favored sprinkling, and Campbell charged that "the practice of all Episcopalians, Independents, and Presbyterians, rests upon the casting vote of this august moderator." Whereas, the poor Baptists had nothing but the unanimous vote of all the apostles for their practice! (3) The Greek church always practiced immersion. (4) The ancient Latin Fathers regarded sprinkling, even

when applied to those whose death was impending, as unworthy of the name baptism.

There can be little doubt that Campbell won an overwhelming victory in the Walker debate. The community sensed this, interpreting Walker's demand that the discussion be abruptly terminated as a virtual surrender. Walker certainly had many colleagues in the Presbyterian church who were far superior in ability, and as the weakest of Campbell's opponents, he allowed the Presbyterian cause to suffer a crushing defeat. Campbell realized that victory was his and spoke of it in his final speech:

> It would be culpable in me, if, from a false modesty, I should hesitate to avow my feelings on the close of this debate. The triumph of truth and argument over error and sophistry, is, to every upright mind, a source of present joy, and a pleasant prelude of that complete and universal victory, which truth shall ultimately achieve over all error and deceit: I have very little to ascribe to myself on this occasion. I ascribe the victory, this day obtained, to the goodness of my cause, and neither to my ingenuity nor dexterity. My opponent manifested considerable ingenuity on certain occasions, and his complete failure is to be ascribed to the badness of his cause, not to his want of genius or expression.[7]

The debate's abrupt termination denied Campbell an opportunity to present his distinctive principles to the congregation. He was somewhat disappointed at this turn of events, because he had hoped to find occasion during the discussion to plead for the ideal of restoring New Testament Christianity. However, without attempting to defend or develop the theme, Campbell did point his audience to a return to the Bible in his final speech. He stated:

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[7] Ibid., 138f.

> What are you now to do? I will answer this question for you; go home and read your Bibles—examine the testimonies of these holy oracles—judge for yourselves, and be not implicit followers of the clergy—amongst the clergy of different denominations I charitably think there are a few good men: but as a body of men—"they have taken away the key of knowledge from the people."[8]

Campbell then referred to his own experience in attempting to follow this ideal of returning to the Bible:

> Because I have taken this course which I recommend to you, I have been stigmatized with many opprobious epithets. Sometimes as being very changeable. Although, I have to this day undeviatingly pursued the same course, which I commenced nearly as soon as I was of age, and have now prosecuted it for almost ten years, viz. to teach, to believe, to practice nothing in religion, for which I cannot produce positive precept, or approved precedent, from the word of God.[9]

Though Campbell had entered the Walker debate with genuine reluctance, he was thoroughly convinced by the two days at Mount Pleasant that religious debates were an invaluable means of disseminating religious truth. Ten years later he wrote that it was not until after the Walker debate that he had begun to hope that his generation might be aroused from its spiritual lethargy. Campbell was thoroughly satisfied with his work at Mount Pleasant and was so completely convinced of the value of such debates that in concluding his final speech, he issued a challenge to all Pedo-baptist ministers. The challenge stated, "I this day publish to all present, that I feel disposed to meet any

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[8] Ibid., 140.

[9] Idem.

Pedo-baptist minister of any denomination, of good standing in his party, and I engage to prove in a debate with him, either viva vove, or with the pen, that Infant Sprinkling is a human tradition and injurious to the well being of society, religious and political."

Campbell published his debate with Walker, writing all of the speeches from his own notes and from notes which were taken down during the debate by an impartial clerk, Salathiel Curtis. Campbell intended the volume to be a rather complete study of the subject of infant baptism and added a large appendix to the actual speeches. When he invited Walker to include a lengthy essay in the appendix, adding whatever material he desired to his side of the proposition, Walker did not even reply to Campbell's letter.

The first edition of the debate was published at Steubenville, Ohio; and when the entire 1000 copies were sold within a few months, a second edition appeared in 1822, this one from Pittsburgh, Penn. In the interim between the two editions, a Presbyterian preacher named Samuel Ralston had published a series of three essays, purporting to be a review of the events at Mount Pleasant. This review appeared in the **Presbyterian Magazine,** published at Philadelphia, and was an evident effort to redeem the Presbyterian cause from its defeat at the hands of Campbell. The Presbyterians apparently regarded this as a badly needed and important work, for they rewarded Ralston with a Doctor of Divinity degree from Washington College.

When Campbell issued the second edition of the debate, he included about seventy pages of new material in answer to Ralston. It is apparent from these "Strictures" that even the Presbyterians had few kind words for their erstwhile champion. Campbell reported that before the debate Walker had been one of the "brightest ornaments" among the Seceders. "But, alas," Campbell wrote, "such is the caprice of mankind, such the instability of popular opinion; that it

is now agreed on all hands, that Mr. W. is even below mediocrity; and, what is still worse, it is reported that he came to the stage of debate 'totally unprepared'."[10] Campbell regarded this appraisal of Walker's work as "ungrateful and cruel," especially since no Presbyterian preacher had yet attempted to present a more adequate defense of their views.

In concluding these "Strictures" Campbell stated an attitude toward controversy which indicates how radically his views had changed since he was first invited to debate Walker. "We ardently wish for, we court discussion," he wrote. "Great is the truth, and mighty above all things, and shall prevail. We constantly pray for its progress, and desire to be valiant for it. **Truth is our riches."**

THE MACCALLA DEBATE

The challenge which Campbell issued at the close of the Walker debate remained unnoticed for almost three years, but in May, 1823, he received a letter from another Seceder Presbyterian minister, W. L. Maccalla of Augusta, Kentucky, who indicated his willingness to accept the challenge. Immediately after the publication of the Walker debate a number of the volumes made their appearance in the village of Augusta, and since the question of infant baptism was then being agitated, Campbell's followers talked of a debate, but the plans did not materialize. A short time before Maccalla addressed Campbell, the reformer's friends in Augusta had suggested to Maccalla that he write Campbell and offer to defend publicly the practice of infant baptism. The Presbyterian minister complied with their wishes, including with his letter a list of twenty-one questions which he suggested as the basis for the debate.[11] Maccalla believed

[10] Ibid.

[11] Rev. W. L. Maccalla, and Alexander Campbell, **A Public Debate On Christian Baptism** (Kansas City, 1948), 9, 10. (Cited hereafter as **Campbell-Maccalla Debate.)**

that these questions were logical and precise statements of the important issues which had been debated by Campbell and Walker.

Before replying to this letter, Campbell first ascertained that Maccalla was in good standing among the Presbyterians, then gladly consented to meet him in debate. Campbell suggested that Maccalla affirm "that infant affusion or baptism is a divine institution;" in which case Campbell, upholding the negative, would have the privilege of closing the discussion. Maccalla objected vehemently to such an arrangement considering it grossly unfair for Campbell, the challenger, to demand the final speech of the debate. Throughout the extended exchange of letters Macalla manifested an unkind spirit, referring to Campbell as an adversary. In his final reply Campbell noted with irony the bitterness with which Macalla had conducted the correspondence:

> But you have told me that you are to meet me as "an adversary," as **ho Satanas.** Well, I hope you will remember, that when Michael the archangel disputed with the **adversary** about the body of Moses, he durst not bring against him a railing accusation. As you are celebrated for piety and orthodoxy, and I for want of them, a **great** deal will be expected from you, and very little from your humble servant, A. Campbell.[12]

Early in October Campbell journeyed to Washington, Kentucky, where the debate was to be conducted, accompanied by Sidney Rigdon, who later gained considerable notoriety by renouncing the Restoration Movement for Mormonism. On October 15, 1823, the discussion began before a large audience representing all local religious faiths. It had been planned that the debate would be staged in the Baptist meeting house in Washington, but since that Oc-

[12] **Campbell-Maccalla Debate,** 30.

tober in the blue grass state was warm and pleasant, the first sessions were conducted in a neighboring grove, where a Methodist camp-meeting had recently been concluded, and where larger audiences could hear the discussion. Campbell appeared as the defender of the Baptist faith in the debate, for Maccalla had gained a wide reputation for his attacks against Baptist doctrine. "The counties of Northern Kentucky echoed with his praises as a learned, shrewd, and able debater," Campbell later wrote, "one who had long practiced various ways of assailing the distinctive tenets of the Baptist community, much to the mortification of that denomination and much to the glorification of his own society and the Methodists."[13]

The five rules which were drawn up to regulate the discussion but which proved to be entirely too brief to be effective were:

> 1. That each of the parties choose a moderator, and that these two moderators shall appoint a third person, who belongs to neither party, for the purpose of merely keeping order.
>
> 2. That A. Campbell open the debate.
>
> 3. That each disputant shall have the privilege of speaking thirty minutes, without interruption, unless he is pleased to waive his right.
>
> 4. That whatever books are produced upon the occasion, shall be open to the perusal of each disputant.
>
> 5. That the debate shall be adjourned from day to day, until the parties are satisfied.

The arguments advanced by Maccalla were very similar to those utilized by Walker three years earlier, though presented more fully and more capably. He argued that the

[13] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1848, 613.

Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church were identical and that each had its own particular seal, circumcision for the Jewish nation and infant baptism for Christianity. Unfortunately, Maccalla had prepared extensive manuscripts prior to the debate and continued to read these throughout the sessions without any effort to meet the arguments presented by Campbell. This procedure exasperated Campbell, especially since Maccalla had insisted on having the negative and was now "responding" to Campbell by reading a manuscript prepared before the debate began. Campbell complained continuously that much of Maccalla's material was wholly irrelevant to the issues involved, but his objections were ignored as Maccalla insisted on completing his manuscript, thus prolonging the debate to eight days. Any direct refutation of Campbell's arguments was conspicuously absent from Maccalla's speeches.

Campbell became so irritated at Maccalla's persistent refusal to consider his arguments that he finally appealed to the moderators, asking them to call Maccalla to order. They had been empowered to "keep order" in the discussion, and he maintained that Maccalla, the respondent, was out of order when introducing affirmative propositions. Bishop Vardeman, Campbell's moderator, agreed with Campbell, but the Presbyterian moderator thought that Maccalla's course was perfectly correct. The third moderator, Major Roper, stated that in deliberative bodies etiquette required the respondent to speak on the question at issue; but since he knew of no rule which required this, he did not feel authorized to rule Maccalla out of order.[14]

Campbell believed that Maccalla's procedure was a "decisive evidence of his conscious incompetency," and in his final speech he charged that Maccalla had feared a fair discussion. "His marked-out course required, in the nature of

[14] **Campbell-Maccalla Debate,** 123.

things, that he should open and I respond; but he wished to have the **place** of the respondent, and at the same time to **introduce** the material to be discussed," Campbell stated. "This was good policy, but bad logic." Many years after the Maccalla debate, Campbell concluded, in retrospect, that however exasperating at the time, Maccalla's method had given him a decided advantage. He wrote in the **Harbinger:**

> The congregation and the interest so much and so rapidly increased, that I became still more engaged in the discussion, possessing one decided advantage over my opponent—that, while he had his side of the question all in a brief before him, "cut and dry," I had nothing but my general knowledge of the subject and the inspiration of the occasion, excepting what pertained to proofs and authorities.[18]

Maccalla believed that the Scriptures commanded infant baptism, and to sustain this belief he offered five propositions, dealing with the identity of the covenants and their respective "seals." His fundamental position was, therefore, the one which Walker had attempted to prove; but Maccalla's arguments were more copious and thorough, as he devoted a large part of his long manuscript to these five propositions. They were:

> 1. That Abraham and his seed were divinely constituted a true, visible church of God.
>
> 2. That the Jewish society before Christ, and the Christian society after Christ, are one and the same church in different dispensations.
>
> 3. That Jewish circumcision before Christ, and Christian baptism after Christ, are one and the same seal, though in different forms.

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[18] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1848, 614.

4. That the administration of this seal to infants was once enjoined by divine authority.

5. That the administration of this seal to infants was never prohibited by divine authority.

Campbell spent considerable time in refuting these propositions, even though, logically, he was not required to do so. Most of his replies were expanded forms of arguments which had been used earlier in the Walker debate. For example, when Maccalla argued that the Jewish and Christian churches were the same, Campbell commented on the meaning of the term "church" and challenged Maccalla to show how any called out body before Christ could have been a "church of Christ." When Maccalla stated that Abraham and his seed had everything essential to a church, including oracles, ordinances, officers, members and an inspired name, Campbell argued:

> . . . The first fact is, that Nicodemus, an honoured member of the Jewish society, yea, a teacher of Israel, AN OFFICER of the Jewish church, could not be admitted unto the Christian church, though a LAWFUL MEMBER of the Jewish and a REGULAR OFFICER of the church of Israel, unless born again, of water and of the spirit. If the two churches are one and the same, Mr. Maccalla, how could this be!
>
> A second fact is, that NOT ONE . . . of the members of the church of Israel was admitted into the Christian church, after its exhibition on the day of Pentecost, until born again, of water and of the Spirit, until repentance and a new faith was professed.[16]

When Maccalla attempted to prove that infant baptism came in the room of circumcision, Campbell replied, as he had in the Walker debate, that there were fundamental dif-

[16] **Campbell-Maccalla Debate,** 114.

ferences between infant sprinkling and circumcision which nullified the Pedo-baptist argument on their analogy. In the Walker debate Campbell had listed seven fundamental differences; against Maccalla he expanded the list to fourteen.

In his second speech Campbell laid the basis of his argument by suggesting two principles upon which both men could agree, since they were stated in the Westminster Confession. First, all things necessary to salvation are so clearly taught in the Scripture that the unlearned as well as the learned may understand them. Second, "the infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and, therefore, when there is a question about the **true** and **full** sense of any scripture **which is not manifold, but ONE,** it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." These principles, stressing the all-sufficiency and intelligibility of the Scripture, were essentials in the Restoration Movement; but in taking them from the Westminster Confession Campbell was turning Maccalla's own creed against him. After affirming that he would appeal to the New Testament and not the Old to ascertain the nature, design, and subjects of baptism, Campbell proceeded to state a number of propositions by which he intended to prove that infant baptism was a human tradition, to be rejected by God's people.

First, he showed that believers were the only subjects of scriptural baptism, thus eliminating infants. In support of this Campbell argued:

> 1. That the law of baptism authorizes the baptism of believers only, and, in fact, virtually forbids the baptism of any others.
>
> 2. That the apostles in the execution of their commission in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, never baptized any other than a professed believer or a disciple.

3. That the nature and design of baptism is suited to believers only.

4. That the promises, connected with baptism, are addressed to believers only.

5. That the actions of the baptized at the time, and immediately subsequent to their baptism, mentioned in all the New Testament, were such as infants could not perform.

Second, Campbell affirmed that immersion is the only baptism, supporting this proposition with the following arguments:

1. That the Greek verbs and verbal nouns employed by the Founder of Christianity, to express the action he designed to have performed, were of precise and definite import, and that they naturally or literally denoted the act of **immersion...**

2. That the prepositions used in construction with these terms necessarily required them to be translated literally to immerse or dip.

3. That the doctrinal references to the action of baptism imply immersion, and represent the person as immersed.

4. That the places where this ordinance was administered, and the circumstances connected therewith, shew it to have been immersion.

5. That all ecclesiastical historians, ancient writers, and the most learned Pedo-baptists, declare that immersion was the primitive practice.

Third, Campbell declared that infant sprinkling was injurious to the well being of society. His arguments were:

1. From analogy that infant baptism was evil in

itself.

2. That it was an act of will-worship.

3. That it carnalized and secularized the church.

3. It deceived the child.

5. It encourages superstition in the parents.

6. It is an effectual means of introducing an ungodly priesthood into the church.

7. That it has generally produced persecution, and thus brought curses upon the state.

8. That of all human traditions it is the most schismatical, and presents the greatest obstacle to the union of Christians.[17]

One of Campbell's arguments against infant sprinkling was drawn from the design of baptism; for since its purpose is the remission of sins, it was never intended for the infant. This emphasis on the scriptural design of baptism was undoubtedly the most significant contribution of the Campbell-Maccalla debate, and it sounded as heretical to Baptist ears as Campbell's distinction between the covenants had sounded during the Walker debate. Campbell had stated in the Walker debate that baptism was "connected with the promise of the remission of sins, and the gift of the holy spirit;" but he made no effort to expand this brief statement into an argument and apparently did not grasp its monumental import. During the three years between the Walker and Maccalla debates, Campbell, his father, and Walter Scott had often discussed this theme, pondering, meditating, and praying until they were firmly convinced that salvation was inseparably connected with immersion. Thus by 1823 Campbell was prepared to declare publicly:

[17] Ibid., 349f.

> Its great significance may be seen from the following testimonies:—The Lord saith, "He that believeth and is BAPTIZED shall be saved." He does not say, he that believeth, and keeps my commands, shall be saved; but he saith "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." He placeth baptism on the right hand of faith. Again, he tells Nicodemus, that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Peter, on the day of Pentecost, places baptism in the same exalted place: "Repent," says he, "and **be baptized** every one of you, FOR **the remission of sin."** Ananias saith to Paul, "Arise, and **be baptized,** and WASH AWAY your sins, calling upon the name of the Lord."[18]

It is significant to observe how closely Campbell's arguments parallel those being made in public debate today on the design of baptism.

When Campbell defeated Walker by showing that the New Covenant is wholly different from the Old, Baptists rejoiced in the victory but quietly questioned the unorthodox arguments which resulted in the victory. Following the Maccalla debate they were confronted with what was considered another new and more dangerous heresy—baptism for the remission of sins. As Campbell made the argument he realized that it was inimical to both Baptist and Presbyterian doctrine, frankly admitting that his Baptist brethren needed to be "admonished on this point." Some Baptists had been too reluctant to assert the grand design of baptism for fear they would be accused of making it essential to salvation. "Tell them that you make nothing essential to salvation but the blood of Christ, but that God has made baptism essential to their **formal** forgiveness in this life, to their admission into his kingdom on earth," Campbell

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[18] Ibid., 100.

admonished. "Tell the disciples to rise in haste and be baptized and wash away their sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Little did Baptists realize that in Campbell's triumph over his Presbyterian opponents, they were winning a battle but losing the war!

Every debate has its amusing episodes, and the most famous and humorous incident in the Campbell-Maccalla occurred on the last day. In an effort to prove immersion nonessential, Maccalla had spoken of the injurious results which might follow both to the subjects and to the administrators. He argued that the health of the administrators of baptism would be jeopardized if they plunged into cold water at all seasons of the year and were forced to remain in the water for extended periods. In reply Campbell recalled an incident from the career of Benjamin Franklin. When the old philosopher had been American minister to France, he attended a dinner of French and American gentlemen in Paris. A learned French Abbe entertained the group, speaking of "the deteriorating influence of the American climate on the bodies of all animals." He maintained that the human body was diminished in size and energy and that even the mind was impaired by the severe American climate. Listening quietly Franklin made no reply, but after dinner he suggested that the only fair way of testing the gentleman's theory was to divide the company, placing all the Americans on one side and all the Frenchmen on the other. It was done and the Frenchmen were amazed to find themselves dwarfed by the row of young American giants.

Campbell then made his application, pointing to the two moderators, Vardeman and Birch:

> Now let us take the philosopher's way of testing the correctness of the theory of my opponent. There sits on the bench a Baptist and a Pedo-baptist teacher, both well advanced in years; the former has, we are told, immersed more persons than any other person

> of the same age in the State, or perhaps in the United States; the other from his venerable age, may be supposed to have sprinkled a great many infants. Now see the pernicious tendency of immersion on the Baptist, and the happy influence of sprinkling on the Pedobaptist.[19]

The audience roared in laughter, for Campbell's moderator was Bishop Jeremiah Vardeman,[20] a man of splendid physical appearance, tall and weighing some 300 pounds. Maccalla's moderator on the other hand was a small man, none too healthful in appearance.

Unfortunately the Campbell-Maccalla debate was marred by party bitterness, in much the same fashion as the Rice debate twenty years later. The same spirit which motivated Maccalla in his correspondence with Campbell was evident in the debate, as he charged Campbell with being an enemy of morality, the observance of the Sabbath, and missionary work. Throughout the debate Maccalla took evident delight in referring to his opponent by offensive titles, and finally the moderators, interrupting the discussion, requested him to use more gentlemanly terms in speaking of Campbell. Campbell was so exasperated with Maccalla's method of discussion that he occasionally dealt in personalities and utilized the familiar weapons of partizan controversy. Campbell announced at the close of the debate that he would never again discuss the issue of infant baptism or any other question with any opponent who would not agree to be governed in his conduct by a board of moderators' decisions and who had not received the official blessing of his church.

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[19] Ibid., 341.

[20] Kentucky Baptists of this period regularly used the title "bishop" to designate their preachers, a term equivalent in the New-Testament to "elder."

Throughout the discussion Campbell took copious notes on the speeches, and utilizing- these along with notes which had been made by Sidney Rigdon and others, he published a report of the debate. Since the speeches on both sides of the question had been written by Campbell, Macalla was quite indignant at the appearance of this volume and attempted vigorously to discredit its accuracy. In 1828 the Presbyterian published **A Discussion of Christian Baptism,** attacking Campbell's "spurious" report of the Washington debate and attempting to answer the arguments which Campbell had outlined in 1823. The introduction to this volume portrays vividly the bitterness which Maccalla felt at Campbell personally and at the widely circulated claims of an overwhelming Baptist victory. In the following caustic statement, Maccalla indicates his malevolence:

> It is amusing to observe the time and labour which Mr. Campbell and his testifying satellites have spent, in assigning to him and his Antagonist, their respective grades in the scale of talents; without being able to come to any certain estimate, at last. If I were in his place, it seems to me, that I could settle this darling question, upon a firm basis in a few words. I would sit down and write a certificate declaring that Alexander Campbell was a Solomon, and that his Antagonist was a Simpleton. This certificate should be signed by Alexander Campbell himself, and by a competent number of NEUTRAL Unitarians and Baptists, and **Non-professing** sons and brothers of Baptist and Baptist preachers.[21]

Campbell regretted the appearance of this party bitterness, for he realized that such a spirit, wherever it might appear, was incompatible with intellectual honesty.

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[21] W. L. Maccalla, **A Discussion of Christian Baptism As To Its Subject, Its Mode, Its History, And Its Effects Upon Civil And Religious Society** (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1828), I. v.

CHAPTER VI

Campbell Versus Presbyterianism: The Rice Debate

It was twenty years after the Maccalla encounter before Alexander Campbell met another representative of the Presbyterian Church in a formal public debate, and during those intervening years momentous changes in the Restoration Movement transformed a small group of energetic reformers within the Baptist fold into an independent religious body which was militant, aggressive, and growing. Those two decades witnessed the phenomenal growth of Campbell's personal prestige among the Baptist churches, the widening breach which finally separated him and even entire associations from their communion, the union of Campbell's followers with the older movement of Barton W. Stone in 1832, Campbell's great defenses of Christianity against Owen and Protestantism, against Purcell, and the rapidly increasing power of the Restoration Movement throughout the West. By the 1840's many areas in the Ohio Valley had seen the Christians overtake and eclipse the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists in their race for the greatest membership; and in Kentucky especially, the Presbyterians had been hard hit by the Restoration Movement.

Consequently Kentucky Presbyterians had learned to regard the Restoration Movement as more than a troublesome innovation; it was rapidly becoming a disastrous revolution which threatened to obliterate the last strongholds of Presbyterian faith in the state. Judging by their practi-

cal accomplishments, the attacks made by "back to the Bible" preachers on the eternal decrees of John Calvin, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Presbyterian church government, and infant sprinkling carried a popular appeal to the masses. Presbyterian preachers had come to realize that unless some sudden devastating attack was launched against this new movement, and launched quickly, Presbyterianism in the blue grass state would suffer irreparable damage.

The campaign most likely to accomplish lasting results would be a highly successful debate of major importance in which the doctrines defended by Alexander Campbell would suffer stunning defeat. To meet lesser figures in the Restoration movement would not accomplish this goal, for this course had been tried and had failed. The only possible hope was that the guiding genius of the movement, Alexander Campbell himself, should be induced to visit Kentucky for a religious debate of historic importance and there meet his Waterloo. These Presbyterians were determined to regain their former glory by administering a crushing defeat to the acknowledged leader of the new faith, and after long and tedious negotiations such an historic debate was actually arranged. Thus, as the Calvinistic champion, N. L. Rice, met Alexander Campbell in Lexington, Kentucky (Nov. 15-Dec. 2, 1843), Kentucky Presbyterianism had come to a significant milestone.

PRESBYTERIAN OVERTURES

The Presbyterians took the initiative in opening the negotiations which ultimately led to the Campbell-Rice debate. In August, 1842, Campbell was spending a few days in Richmond, Kentucky, when he was approached by a Presbyterian minister, John H. Brown, who suggested to Campbell a friendly discussion between his brethren and the Presbyterians of the main points at issue between the

two groups, including baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit. At first Campbell was somewhat reluctant to give his consent, believing that the Christians of Kentucky were fully capable of maintaining their convictions without his assistance. Brown was quite insistent that, should a conference be held, Campbell attend, explaining that his presence would contribute much to the authority and prestige of such a meeting. Campbell then replied that if the Presbyterian denomination would "select prominent persons of of acknowledged literary and ecclesiastic eminence," he would attend the conference in spite of his heavy responsibilities elsewhere. The reformer further proposed that should such a conference meet and fail to attain agreement, he would enter a public discussion with one outstanding Presbyterian which would be published and regarded as a consummation of the controversy between Christians and Presbyterians.[1]

After Campbell had returned to Bethany he received a letter from Brown, assuring him that at the coming meeting of the Synod of Kentucky a committee would be selected to arrange details for such a conference. When the Synod convened at Maysville, Kentucky, October 13, 1842, they designated a committee consisting of John C. Young, R. J. Breckinridge, N. L. Rice, J. F. Price, and J. H. Brown, with Rice and Brown to have authority to negotiate the final arrangements. Subsequently the Presbyterian moderator in the Maccalla debate, J. K. Burch, was substituted for Breckinridge. Campbell soon selected his committee: James Shannon, Dr. J. Fishback, A. Raines, and John Smith.[2] The correspondence between Campbell and Brown was quite extended and it was not until August, 1843, that final de-

[1] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1843, 199f.

[2] Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell,** II, 501.

tails of the meeting had been arranged.[3] By this time it had been decided that instead of a conference in which several would speak on either side of the question, the meeting would be a personal debate between Campbell and the Presbyterian champion, N. L. Rice. Campbell had hoped that his opponent would be President John C. Young of Centre College, located at Danville, Kentucky, for whose literary and theological attainments Campbell had the highest respect, and whose presence would insure the debate's being conducted on a high gentlemanly plane; but much to the regret of all concerned President Young's failing health prevented his participating in the debate.[4] The Presbyterians then requested another of their distinguished ministers, J. R. Breckenridge, to represent their faith, and though he too had Campbell's highest respect, he declined. "No, sir, I will never be Alexander Campbell's opponent," was his reply. "A man who has done what he has to defend Christianity against infidelity, to defend Protestantism against the delusions and usurpations of Catholicism, I will never oppose in public debate. I esteem him too highly." At this refusal the Presbyterians selected N. L. Rice to champion their cause.

It will be remembered that at the close of the Maccalla debate Campbell had stated that before he would debate with another Presbyterian minister in the future, his opponent must have been appointed by his presbytery or synod. When Campbell learned that his opponent was to be Rice instead of President Young, he demanded that the Presbyterian Synod should officially recognize Rice as their champion. They objected to this request, alleging that Camp-

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[3] For this correspondence see Rev. A. Campbell, and Rev. N. L. Rice, **A Debate Between Rev. A. Campbell and N. L. Rice, On The Action, Subject, Design and Administrator of Christian Baptism . . .** (Lexington, 1844), 11-46. (Cited hereafter as **Campbell-Rice Debate.)**

[4] Richardson, Op. Cit, II, 501f.

bell had never been officially appointed, thus ignoring the fact that Campbell was the universally acclaimed champion of the Christians. This controversy, the formulation of propositions to be debated, and methods of procedure were the principal points of disagreement in the extended correspondence between Campbell and Brown.

It must be noted that Campbell was not pleased with the selection of Rice as his opponent. In previous discussions with preachers adhering to the Restoration Movement, Rice had often displayed a spirit of prejudiced hostility, and Campbell considered such an attitude wholly inimical to any discussion which was dedicated to a search for truth. Campbell would have preferred a man of President Young's reputation and personality, because he feared that a discussion with Rice might produce more bitterness than truth.

Early in 1843 while the correspondence with Brown was still in progress, rumors began to circulate through Kentucky that Campbell was attempting to back out of the proposed debate. When friends in Kentucky wrote the religious leader of these reports, he emphatically denied them in the following picturesque language:

> "Back Out"! What an uncourteous imputation! There is no "backing out" on the part of the ministers selected at the meeting of Synod, except that one of them cannot attend. And as for my "backing out," he who **can** believe it **may** believe it. If when Infidelity and Romanism boldly defied the Armies of Faith, confident of the power of truth, I presumed to meet those haughty, self-confident, boastful, and well disciplined assailants of our faith in single combat, what have I to fear in meeting the advocates of Paidobaptist Presbyterianism? If in the depth of a dreary winter, and after having been frozen up in the river, I went out into the wilderness of Ohio, and after some 250 miles combatting with forests, bad roads, the severest frosts,

> and innumerable difficulties, I went into the very bosom of Roman Catholicism, and bearded the Pope's lion in his own den; and if when thus fatigued and broken down with ill health and the debilitating influence of the daily use of medicine, I was induced to do what all the Protestants there said I ought not to have done—gave "the Bishop and Pope of Ohio" all his own terms—and, as the ancient boxers would have said, tied up my right arm by affirming seven propositions and proving them to his face—supported as he was by a phalanx of learned Priests, in the midst of a large ecclesiastic library too, collated to his hand—while I had not a solitary Protestant furnishing a single document, nor efficiently aiding by his counsels. I say, if in these circumstances I encountered Papalism and sustained Protestantism to the satisfaction of the thousands that heard and the tens of thousands that read, why should I **"back out"** of a discussion on any question between us Protestants involving, faith, piety, or humanity![8]

When the correspondence between Brown and Campbell came to its close, it had been decided that the great debate would begin in Lexington, Kentucky, November 15, 1843. Lexington was an ideal site for the discussion, for central Kentucky had become one of the strongholds of Christian strength; Main Street Church, where the sessions of the debate were conducted, was one of the leading congregations of the Restoration Movement. Presbyterianism, too, was strong in this blue grass area; their leading western educational institution, Centre College, was located at Danville not far away. Lexington was now a recognized intellectual center, the "Athens of the West," and was producing an unusual number of scholars, statesmen, and literary figures. Nowhere else in the entire Ohio Valley could

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[8] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1843, 200f.

such an atmosphere of aristocratic culture and learning have been found for one of the greatest religious debates in the annals of American Christianity.

NATHAN L. RICE

The man whom the Presbyterians finally selected to represent their cause, Nathan Lewis Rice, had already gained a reputation as a religious debater, though it was overshadowed by the popular acclaim which Campbell had received through his previous encounters. Rice, a native Kentuckyian, was much younger than Campbell, having been born in Garrard County, December 19, 1807. The son of poor parents, Rice became a member of the Presbyterian Church at the age of eighteen; and a year later (1826) he entered Centre College at Danville, Kentucky, where he remained for two years. Licensed to preach by the Transylvania Presbytery, October 4, 1828, he continued his education at Princeton Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1833.

Rice first preached at Bardstown, Kentucky, and while there he edited a paper called the **Western Herald.** There also, he encountered difficulties with the local Roman Catholics. After Rice had charged the Catholics with intrigue in the disappearance of a nun from a convent, a trial was conducted; but Rice was acquitted.[6]

In 1840 Rice moved to Paris, Kentucky, and it was while he was preaching there that he met two prominent leaders of the Restoration Movement in public debate, Tolbert Fanning in 1842 and Alexander Campbell a year later. Fanning later regretted that he had debated Rice, fearing that Rice had used him to prepare for the much more important encounter with Campbell.

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[6] O. A. Carr, "Death of N. L. Rice, A. D.," **The Christian.** July 12, 1877, 2.

Rice left Kentucky in 1844, moving to Cincinnati where he preached for the Central Presbyterian Church, taught in a theological seminary, and edited the **Presbyterian.** In later years Rice lived in St. Louis, Chicago, and New York, preaching in each of these cities, and editing another paper, the **Expositor,** while residing in Chicago. Rice was made president of Westminister College, Fulton, Missouri, in 1869; but in 1874 he returned to his native Kentucky to teach in Centre College, the school which he had entered nearly fifty years earlier. Rice's death came July 12, 1877.

Before meeting Campbell, Rice had debated a number of Christian preachers, figures of less prominence than Campbell in the Restoration Movement. Nor did the great Lexington debate end Rice's career as a disputant. In 1845 Rice, then a Doctor of Divinity, met a "brilliant Universalist divine," E. M. Pingree, in a huge Millerite tabernacle in Cincinnati. This was an eight day discussion; and interest was so great that when the large building would not accommodate the audiences, numbers climbed upon the roof of the building to hear the speakers from this vantage point. Five years later Rice debated Bishop Purcell of the Catholic Church.

CONTRASTING PERSONALITIES CLASH

On the morning of November 15, 1843, the Main Street Church in Lexington, Kentucky, was filled to overflowing an hour before Campbell and Rice were scheduled to begin their important discussion. The building in which the audience waited expectantly was massive and new, having been erected by the Christians a year earlier. The congregation itself had been established by Barton W. Stone in 1816, but after the union between the Campbell and Stone forces the old building had rapidly been outgrown; and the structure in which the debate was to occur, seating some two thousand persons, had been completed in 1842.[7]

[7] Fortune, **The Disciples In Kentucky,** 141.

The numerical strength of both the Christians and Presbyterians around Lexington and the recognized ability of the two disputants combined to arouse great public interest in the discussion, which continued for sixteen days. At almost every session the large building was completely filled long before the discussions began; visitors flocked into Lexington from a wide area for the sole purpose of hearing the historic controversy. Campbell reported that the large and intelligent audience, which included some one hundred fifty preachers, a majority of whom represented the Restoration Movement, had assembled from various states "from New York to Louisiana, and from Philadelphia to Little Rock."[8] The official Presbyterian organ in Kentucky, the **Protestant** and **Herald,** reported that people had come for the debate from Philadelphia, Nashville, Vicksburg, Cincinnati, Indiana, Texas, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, and all parts of Kentucky.[9] When one considers the limited public transportation facilities available more than a century ago, and the increased difficulties and hardships which accompanied travel in the cold months of November and December, such attendance at a religious discussion is hardly less than amazing. It can be explained only in terms of the interest popularly demonstrated in religious debates during that period, consideration for the momentous issues involved, and a high regard for the intellectual stature of the two opposing participants.

Added dignity and importance was lent to the proceedings by the presence of Henry Clay, the monarch of the American forum, who acted as chairman throughout the entire debate. Moderators selected were Judge Robertson by Rice and Colonel Speed Smith by Campbell; these two men requested the great Kentuckian and warm personal

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[8] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 5.

[9] **Protestant And Herald,** November 23, 1843; quoted in **Protestant Churchman**, December 16, 1843.

friend of Campbell to act as chairman, and Clay kindly consented.

The list of six propositions, each of which was to be discussed for a maximum of three days, are as follows:

> I. The immersion in water of a proper subject, into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is the one, only apostolic or Christian baptism. Mr. Campbell affirms—Mr. Rice denies.
>
> II. The infant of a believing parent is a scriptural subject of baptism. Mr. Rice affirms—Mr. Campbell denies.
>
> III. Christian baptism is for the remission of past sins. Mr. Campbell affirms—Mr. Rice denies.
>
> IV. Baptism is to be administered only by a bishop or ordained presbyter. Mr. Rice affirms—Mr. Campbell denies.
>
> V. In conversion and sanctification, the Spirit of God operates on persons only through the word of truth. Mr. Campbell affirms—Mr. Rice denies.
>
> VI. Human creeds, as bonds of union and communion, are necessarily heretical and schismatical. Mr. Campbell affirms—Mr. Rice denies.[10]

In the great Lexington debate N. L. Rice proved to be the most difficult opponent whom Campbell ever encountered in public discussion, largely because the two men were entirely different in personality and mode of thought. Few minds have ever been so gifted with the ability to think in comprehensive principles and to reason in great generalized propositions as the mind of Alexander Campbell. Throughout his life he had exercised this power in the

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[10] **Campbell-Rice Debate,** 47.

field of religion, studying the Christian system in all its vast comprehensiveness, fitting each component truth into the overall picture of God's revelation, yet viewing all with one great sweep of his mind. This mode of thought was always utilized by Campbell in his teaching, preaching, and debating; and in the clash with Rice the Sage of Bethany undertook to prove each of his propositions in terms of broad comprehensive, sweeping arguments, caring almost nothing for the minutia in fact and detail.

From the very beginning of the debate it was evident that Rice's mind operated on an entirely different plane from that of Campbell. Instead of being concerned with general propositions, his objective was to ferret out exceptions in the laws enunciated by his opponent. It must be admitted that Rice was a debater of unusual skill and ability; and for his encounter with Campbell he had studied all the works of his opponent carefully, collecting passages which appeared inconsistent or which might contradict statements which he believed Campbell likely to make in the debate. Throughout the years Campbell, searching always for truth, had changed his views on certain issues, and Rice's careful study of the reformer's many published volumes was not without great value to his cause. During the discussion he read almost constantly from Campbell's writings, making it appear that conviction was unknown to his opponent. The use which Rice made of his opponent's publications is well illustrated by an event which occurred in the balcony as two ladies sat discussing the relative merits of the opposing champions. The table of Rice was piled high with books, and that of Campbell almost bare; one of the ladies thereupon pointed to the large number of books as an evidence of Rice's superior intelligence. "But you don't appear to know," retorted the other, "that the books on Mr. Rice's table were written by Mr. Campbell.""

[11] Richardson, Op. Cit., II, 511.

Rice's attitude throughout the debate was wholly negative, and whereas his opponent was laboring to establish broad comprehensive views of truth, the Presbyterian seemed intent only upon the destruction of laws by concentrating upon their exceptions.

All historians who have written of the Campbell-Rice debate emphasize their clashing personalities and habits of thought, regarding this as a factor of primary importance in explaining the final results at Lexington.

One of the great historians of the Restoration Movement, W. T. Moore, writes:

> Mr. Campbell was a comprehensive general, marshalling his forces in regular military order, and conducting the battle according to the most approved rules of military tactics; while Mr. Rice was practically a guerilla captain, always on the lookout for a special opportunity to strike a blow at some unguarded point, and whose victories were always won, if won at all, by suddenly entering the lines of his opponent at these apparently weak places. He never gave battle where the terms were equal, nor were his tactics generally in harmony with the accepted rules of honourable discussion. Mr. Rice's method in this respect seemed to be actually constitutional. He seemed to have no conception of Christianity as a great whole, but saw only certain parts of it at a time, and these he tried to coordinate with his specific system of theology, without any regard to the consequences that might accrue to the harmony which exists in God's revelation to man.[12]

"Mr. Rice had a pleasant manner and voice and was able to use sarcasm and witticism in a way that appealed

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[12] William Thomas Moore, **A Comprehensive History Of The Disciples Of Christ** (New York, 1909), 404.

to his audience," writes the historian of the Kentucky Disciples. "His fluency of speech and his ability to use minute details with the true appearance of argument caught his audience. He had Mr. Campbell's writings on the table and used these very effectively in making it appear that he was inconsistent."[13] A correspondent for The Protestant Churchman, an eastern Episcopal paper, included the following comparison in his report of the Lexington debate.

> As I heard it described figuratively in a very animated manner, Mr. Campbell was like a heavy Dutch-built man-of-war, carrying many guns, and of a very large calibre; whilst Mr. Rice resembled a daring and active Yankee privateer, who contrived by the liveliness of his movements and the ease with which he could take up his position for a raking fire, to leave his more cumbrous adversary in a very crippled condition at the close of the fight.[14]

One reference to the method of constant attack used by Rice comes from an unexpected source, the Lincoln papers in the Library of Congress. During the spring of 1858 attempts were being made to plan a series of political debates across Illinois between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Even before the arrangements had been completed a friend wrote Lincoln suggesting the course which he should pursue in any encounter with Douglas. He was John Mathers of Jacksonville, Illinois, the former home of Douglas, and in his letter of July 19, 1858, he urged Lincoln to take the offensive against Douglas. "Occupy the side of the assailant and keep the position until the close of the fight. Don't let Douglas by any strategy drive you from it." The friend of Lincoln then referred to the Camp-

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[13] Fortune,, Op. Cit., 145.

[14] **Protestant Churchman**; quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 326.

bell-Rice debate, "Rice kept Campbell always on the defensive ... Campbell defending had little time to attack Rice," and advised the future president to undertake a similar attack against Douglas.[15]

In the discussion of the very first proposition, that concerning the necessity of immersion, Campbell presented an argument which illustrates well his grasp of sweeping comprehensive truths and Rice's method of attacking laws through exceptions. This important argument was concerned with the specific meaning of words, and Campbell stated:

> **Baptizo,** confessedly a derivative from **bapto,** derives its specific meaning, as well as its radical and immutable form, from that word. According to the usage of all languages, ancient and modern, derivative words legally inherit the specific, though not necessarily the figurative meaning of their natural progenitors; and never can so far alienate from themselves that peculiar significance as to indicate an action specifically different from that intimated in the parent stock.[16]

He then applied this law to the Greek **bapto** and affirmed that through its more than 2,000 modifications it retains the specific idea of dipping or immersion, and never that of sprinkling. In an effort to make this idea clear to his entire audience Campbell used the following illustration:

> A great majority of our citizens are better read in forests, fields and gardens, than in the schools of philology or ancient languages. Agriculturists, horticulturists, botanists, will fully comprehend me when I say, in all the dominions of vegetable nature, untouched by human art, as the root, so is the stem, and

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[15] **Lincoln Lore,** December 6, 1948.

[16] Campbell-Rice Debate, 55f.

so are all the branches. If the root be oak, the stem cannot be ash, nor the branches cedar. What would you think, Mr. President, of the sanity or veracity of the backswoodsman, who would affirm that he found in a state of nature, a tree whose root was oak, whose stem was cherry, whose boughs were pear, and whose leaves were chestnut? If these grammarians and philologists have been happy in their analogies drawn from the root and branches of trees, to illustrate the derivation of words, how singularly fantastic the genius that creates a philological tree, whose root is **bapto,** whose stem is **cheo,** whose branches are **rantizo,** and whose fruit is Katharizo! Or, if not too ludicrous and preposterous for English ears, whose root is **dip,** whose trunk is **pour,** whose branches are **sprinkle,** and whose fruit is **purification!**

My first argument, then, is founded on the root, **bapto,** whose proper signification, all learned men say, is **dip**, and whose main derivative is **baptizo**—which, by all the laws of philology, and all the laws of nature, never can, never did, and never will signify "to pour" or "to sprinkle."[17]

To support this argument further Campbell affirmed that no translator, either ancient or modern, had ever rendered any derivative of **bapto,** to sprinkle. Throughout all Biblical translations it has always been rendered by some word meaning to dip or immerse. Rice immediately denied this general proposition and sought to disprove it through an exception. He turned to the Peshito Syriac, one of the world's oldest translations, and read from Rev. 19:13, "And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood." The original Greek, here rendered "sprinkled," is bebammenon, from the root **bapto.** An exception to Campbell's rule! Rice

[17] Ibid., 57f.

continued his study of this verse, proving that the Vulgate of Jerome and likewise Origen, the most learned of the Greek fathers, rendered this Greek participle with a verb meaning to sprinkle.[18]

Campbell was so confident of the accuracy of his proposition and that **bapto** could never mean sprinkle that he postulated the existence of an older manuscript, no longer extant, but used by the translators of the Peshito Syriac, Jerome, and Origen, and which contained a reading of **errantismenon** instead of **bebammenon** in the disputed passage, Rev. 19:13. Such an unknown manuscript with a variant reading would explain fully why the rendering, sprinkle, had been found in the three authorities quoted by Rice.[19] Rice immediately charged that this supposed manuscript was a figment of Campbell's imagination and that his opponent was distorting evidence in the interest of a partisan victory. He could not conceive the possibility that Campbell was seeking truth, and boasted of his finding exceptions to Campbell's universal law.

> How does the gentleman attempt to escape this difficulty? Why, he supposes there must have been a different reading—some copy of the book of Revelation having the word **rantizo** instead of **bapto;** and he would have us believe that Origen gives a different reading. But where is the evidence that there was any such reading? He may guess that there was; but there is no evidence of it whatever. And if he may be permitted to alter the Bible by mere conjecture, there is no difficulty from which he may not escape.[20]

The providence of history proved to be more charitable

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[18] Ibid., 115.

[19] Ibid., 119. Such a possibility had been conjectured by Dr. Gale before Mr. Campbell.

[20] Ibid., 124

to Campbell on this particular argument than was his Presbyterian opponent in 1843. The clash over a possible missing manuscript was soon forgotten except by those who studied the debate with care, forgotten, that is, until 1865 when Tischendorf published the famous **Codex Siniaticus.** On February 4,1859, the great Greek scholar had been visiting the monastery of St. Catherine atop Mt. Sinai when he discovered a basket of ancient manuscripts, which proved to be one of the most valuable and authentic manuscripts of the Bible in existence, rivaling even the **Codex Vaticanus.** This famous manuscript in Rev. 19:13 contained a variant reading, submitting a participial form of **rantizo** for the derivative of **bapto** found in all other manuscripts.[21] Rice had challenged, but history had vindicated Campbell's comprehensive proposition!

PROPOSITIONS ON BAPTISM

The importance which baptism assumed in the Campbell-Rice debate is clearly indicated by the fact that four of the six propositions and nearly 600 pages of the published debate were devoted to this theme. The first proposition involved the action of baptism and required more time than any other, as each disputant spoke eighteen times on this proposition. Campbell's ability to think and reason in comprehensive generalizations is graphically illustrated by the nature of the arguments to which he appealed in support of this proposition. Instead of appealing to each passage of Scripture or each lexicographer as an argument to prove that immersion alone constitutes baptism, he appealed to great classes of evidence, often listing many authorities under each classification.

At the end of each proposition on baptism Campbell devoted his final speech to a summary of all the arguments

[21] Richardson, Op. Cit., II, 508f.

which he had made, and his own summary illustrates the sweep of his arguments on the first proposition. He stated:

> I. I argued from the law of specific words, to which class **bapto** and **baptizo** belongs—showing from the philosophy of words indicative of **specific** action and from usage, that while such words retain their radical form, they retain the radical idea . . .
>
> II. **Baptizo,** according to **all the lexicons** of eighteen hundred years, signifies to dip, immerse, plunge, as its literal, proper original meaning; and is **never found** translated by **sprinkle** or **pour** in any dictionary from the Christian era down to the present century . . .
>
> III. The classic were copiously alluded to in proof of all that argued from the lexicons . . .
>
> IV. All the translations, ancient and modern, were appealed to in confirmation of the above facts. From a very liberal induction of the ancient and modern versions, it did not appear that in any one case any translator had ever translated **baptizo** by the words sprinkle or pour . . .
>
> V. My fifth class of evidence offered, consisted of the testimonies of reformers, annotators, paraphrasts, and critics, respecting the meaning of **baptizo;** selected, too, as under every branch of evidence, from the ranks of those whose practice was contrary to ours. This whole class, amongst whom were Luther, Calvin . . . declare that in the New Testament use of the word, it means to immerse, and some of them say, in so many words, **"never to sprinkle."**
>
> VI. Our sixth argument consisted of the testimony of English lexicographers, encyclopedias and reviews, whose testimony sustains that of the reformers, annotators, and critics.

VII. Our seventh argument was an exhibit of the words in construction with **baptizo—raino** and **cheo** —showing a very peculiar uniformity never lost sight of in a single instance; showing that to sprinkle and pour have necessarily **upon** and never in after them: while **baptizo** has **in** or **into** after it, and never **upon;** an argument to which Mr. Rice made no reply whatever, and indeed, no response to it could be given. It is, indeed, as I conceive, the clearest and most convincing argument in the department of philology, because it groups in one view the whole controversy on all the propositions and verbs in debate. I believe it to be unanswerable.

VIII. Our eighth argument was deduced from the places mentioned in the Bible, intimating that much water was necessary . . .

IX. The ninth argument was deduced from the first law of the decalogue of philology—which makes all true definitions and translations of terms convertible. Which, when applied to **baptizo**, clearly proves that in the New Testament it cannot possibly signify to sprinkle, pour, wash, or purify.

X. Our tenth argument was drawn from the principal objections of Pedo-baptists, showing that in these very objections there is further evidence in demonstration of immersion.

XI. The eleventh argument asserted the overwhelming fact, that sprinkling common water, or pouring it on any person or thing, was never commanded by God under any dispensation of religion, for any purpose whatever . . .

XII. Our twelfth evidence consisted of the allusions used by inspired men in reference to baptism; their comparing it to a burial and resurrection, to a planting

> of seed, and in making it a sort of antitype of water and the ark during the deluge . . .
>
> XIII. My thirteenth, or last argument, the history of baptism and of sprinkling . . .[22]

When Campbell affirmed, as the third proposition in the debate, that "Christian baptism is for remission of past sins," he was affirming that baptism's grand design was to save the alien sinner from his transgressions. Campbell had believed for twenty years that this was the purpose of baptism and had written numerous articles in support of his conviction, but he had never before defended his belief as a formal debate proposition. In his third address on this proposition Campbell explained how he had been led to the conviction that baptism was essential to salvation. Prior to the Maccalla debate he had placed himself under the special instruction of "four Evangelists, and one Paul, of distinguished apostolic rank and dignity," determined that from the testimony of these inspired writers, he would arrive at the true design of baptism. The result of this intensive study was:

> . . . Upon the simple testimony of the Book itself, I came to a conclusion alleged in that debate, and proved only by the Bible, which now appears, from a thousand sources, to have been the catholic and truly ancient and primitive faith of the whole church. It was in this commonwealth that this doctrine was first publicly promulgated in modern times; and, sir, it has now spread over this continent, and with singular success, is now returning to Europe, and the land of our fathers. My faith in it, sir, rests, however, neither upon the traditions of the church, nor upon any merely inferential reasonings of my own, nor those of any other man; but upon the explicit and often repeated declarations

[22] **Campbell-Rice Debate,** 260ff.

and explanations of the prophets and the apostles.[23]

The most interesting aspect of Campbell's work on this proposition is the similarity between his arguments and those still used by gospel preachers in affirming that baptism is for the remission of sins. For example, Campbell's first argument was Acts 2:38, and after studying the passage with emphasis on the expression "for the remission of sins," Campbell illustrated the meaning of Peter's statement with a parallel sentence. A rheumatic invalid asked a physician how he might be healed, and the doctor replied, "Go to the Virginia White Sulphur Springs, drink of the waters and bathe in them, for the removal of your pains, and you shall enjoy a renovated constitution." Such a patient would rationally conclude that two things were necessary to his healing, drinking the water and bathing in it. The physician gave no promise that the invalid would be healed by obeying the first instruction and ignoring the second!

"Some of our ardent opponents, indeed, in the blindness of their zeal, have said, that it ought to be read, because your sins are remitted," Campbell continued. 'But, in the case before us, would not the people laugh the doctor to scorn, who should say to the aforesaid invalid, Go to the White Sulphur Springs and drink the water, and bathe in it, because your pains are remitted?"" This statement proves that Campbell was already familiar with the argument that the preposition **eis** in the expression "for the remission of sins" meant "because of" and implied that one should be baptized because his sins had already been forgiven.

Ignoring the fact that Campbell had already anticipated the argument, Rice replied to Acts 2:38 by arguing

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[23] Ibid., 472.

[24] Ibid., 435.

that **eis** meant "because of" rather than "in order to;" and he used Matt. 3:11 to sustain his point. In this passage, which is still being used by those who oppose baptism for the remission of sins, John the Baptist said, " I , indeed, baptize you with water unto (eis) repentance." "The preposition eis is employed in both passages, precisely in the same manner," Rice argued. "Peter said, 'Repent and be baptized (eis) for the remission of sins;' and John said, 'I baptize you (eis) for or unto repentance.' Will my friend maintain, that John baptized the Jews, in order that they might repent—to cause them to repent of their sins! If he will not, how can he maintain that Peter commanded baptism, **in order** to the remission of sins?"[25] But that is exactly what Campbell argued, and it is what gospel preachers are still affirming! Campbell contended, that John "immersed men on profession of penitence, or while confessing their sins, that they might reform. Hence he baptized men in order to, or for the sake of, reformation."

Campbell's other arguments in support of the necessity of baptism centered in many passages of Scripture which are still used regularly by gospel preachers in discussing this question. These arguments were: (2) "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). (3) John's baptism was for the remission of sins, for "he came into the country bordering on the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:2). (4) When Peter concluded the second gospel sermon, he exhorted his audience, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that seasons of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). This exhortation is "precisely equivalent" to that on Pentecost. (Acts 2:38.) (5) "Whatever baptism was to the three thousand Pentecostan converts, to Saul of Tarsus, to Cornelius, or to any believing penitent in the age of the

[25] Ibid., 451.

apostles, it is to every human being at the present time." (6) Ananias' statement to Saul was, "Be baptized and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). (7) This argument involved the conversion of Cornelius. This pious Gentile was told that when Peter came, he would tell him words whereby he and his household might be saved. These words included a commandment to be baptized. (8) The great commission commanded the apostles to baptize the taught "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Campbell reasoned, **"Into** always denotes change of position; a transition from one state to another. It marks boundaries." He then concluded:

> Baptism, my fellow-citizens, is no mere rite, no unmeaning ceremony, I assure you. It is a most intellectual, spiritual and sublime transition out of a sinful and condemned state, into a spiritual and holy state. It is a change of relation, not as respects the flesh, but the spirit. It is an introduction into the mystical body of Christ, by which he necessarily obtains the remission of his sins.
>
> No one can understand or enjoy the sublime and awful import of a burial with Christ; or a baptism into death, who does not feel that he is passing through a most solemn initiation into a new family; high and holy relations to the Father, as his Father and his God—to the Son, as his Lord and his Messiah—to the Holy Spirit, as his sanctifier and comforter. He puts off his old relations to the world, the flesh, and Satan. Consequently, that moment he is adopted into the family of God, and is personally invested with all the rights of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.[26]

These eight arguments were all presented in Campbell's first address, and after both men had spent three

[26] Ibid., 442.

speeches in discussing them, Campbell continued with further constructive arguments. (9) John 3:5,6. Campbell quoted noted theologians to strengthen his contention that the new birth referred to baptism, without which one could not enter the kingdom. Among these was Timothy Dwight, president of Yale, who stated, "To be born of water here means baptism..." (10) This argument consisted of a rapid survey of all the cases of conversion recorded in Acts, proving that it is logically necessary to assume that what is demanded as a condition of salvation in one conversion, is implied in all others. (11) "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he may sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:25, 26). (12) Col. 2:12-15. "Paul says: 'We put off the body of the sins of the flesh.' Now this is the most beautiful allusion to circumcision imaginable. Here were those who still hankered after circumcision," Campbell reasoned. "To them the apostle says, 'Ye are complete in Christ; you need not to be circumcised with a circumcision made with hand.' The old fleshly circumcision only took off a mere atom of flesh; but the spiritual circumcision, which we have in being crucified with Christ, in being buried with him in baptism, cuts off, without a knife, without a hand, the whole body of the sins of the flesh." This argument that the Christian's circumcision consists in the putting off of the entire body of sin, and that baptism is the instrument of the circumcision and not the circumcision itself, is particularly interesting since Rice had argued in discussing the second proposition that infant baptism came in the room of circumcision. Campbell had replied to Rice's argument with a list of sixteen differences between circumcision and baptism, two more than Maccalla had faced. (13) We are saved by the "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). (14) "Baptism doth now save us" (I Pet. 3:21).

As Rice had repeatedly contended that Campbell's views were narrow minded and bigoted, Campbell concluded his

final speech on the design of baptism with a plea for the catholicity of his views. Arguing that he was far more catholic than the Presbyterians, he stated:

> Suppose now, one great convention of the Christian world had met to fix upon some basis of union and communion, and that they had agreed upon one single point, viz:—that whatever views were most generally believed, and first those that were universally believed, should be accepted and incorporated, instead of those believed by a minority.
>
> Baptism comes before the convention: the question is first upon the action; a part vote for sprinkling, as valid baptism, a part for pouring, but all agree that immersion is right baptism. It is, therefore, put down as catholic, and the other two as sectarian.
>
> Next comes the subject of baptism: a part admit that an infant, without faith, is a proper subject, but only a part. But when the question is put, is a professed, penitent believer, a proper subject, all the world says, Yes. This, then, is catholic; while an infant, as a subject, is sectarian.
>
> Finally, the design of baptism is canvassed.
>
> Some say it is a door into the church; others, a recognition that one is a member of the church; a third, that it is for the sake of christening, or giving a name. In none of these is there any approach to catholicity. But when it's being for a "pledge of remission of sins, and of our ingrafting into Christ," is offered, the whole world, Greek, Roman, and all. unite in that view of it. This, then, is catholic, and the others sectarian.
>
> Are we not, then, most catholic on this subject? Why not, then sacrifice that which is so sectarian,

and unite in one Lord, one faith, and one immersion?[27]

A CLASH ON CREEDS

Certainly the most unique, and possibly the most important proposition discussed in the Campbell-Rice debate was the last, in which Campbell affirmed that all human creeds were heretical and schismatical. This discussion was of paramount importance because it involved the very foundation upon which the Campbells had begun their work of restoration; their rejection of human creeds had preceded and resulted in their acceptance of immersion as the only scriptural baptism and many other distinctive practices of the movement. Too, the discussion of this proposition revealed vividly the contrasting argumentative styles of the two men, and Campbell found himself harder pressed than on any other proposition which he ever affirmed in debate.

In his accustomed manner Campbell proceeded to prove his charges against human creeds through a series of thirteen comprehensive propositions. These are so important, reflecting a vast depth of thought and epitomizing the genius of the Restoration Movement, that an abridged form of Campbell's summary of these propositions is here presented.

> I. My first argument was, that they are without any Divine authority whatever. God commanded no one to make them, no one to write them, and no church to receive them.
>
> II. Creeds have often operated, and their tendency in time of defection is, to cast out the good, the intelligent, the pure, and to retain those of a contrary opinion.... They killed our Savior, the apostles, and

[27] ibid., 560.

prophets, the saints and the non-conformists of all the ages, since the days of Daniel the prophet.

III. They have generally been proscriptive and overbearing....

IV. They are treasonable attempts to dethrone the liege king, lawgiver and prophet of the church . . . .

V. Creeds are divinely prohibited by several precepts, such as—"Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard from me," says Paul to Timothy. . . .

VI. We desire to lay much emphasis upon this important fact, that the interval from the death of the apostles to the year two hundred, the purest, and most harmonious, united, prosperous and happy period of the church, had no creed whatever but the apostolic writings. It is admitted that there were plain declarations of faith made at baptism, but nothing formal . . . for two hundred years....

VII. They necessarily become constitutions of churches, and as such, embody and perpetuate the elements of schism, from generation to generation....

VIII. As constitutions of churches, they are unfriendly to that growth in Christian knowledge, and the development of the social excellencies of our profession, which, in the apostolic age, were presented by the voice of inspiration, as the paramount objects of Christian attainment. By attaching the mind to the party shibboleths, they detach it from a free and unrestrained consecration of itself to the whole truth of God's book....

IX. They are unfavorable to spirituality——They are the mere mummies of the life-inspiring truths of

the Bible, which breathe with living efficacy and the warmth of Divine love upon the soul. No one ever fell in love with a skeleton, however just its proportions, or however perfect its organization; and no one ever will fall in love with the anatomical abstractions of a creed....

X. They falsely assumed to be a proper exponent of Scripture doctrine; and to be plainer and more intelligible than the Bible....

XI. They have been peculiarly hostile to reformation, by ejecting godly and intelligent ministers of religion. This has ever marked their progress, from the days of the apostles till now. **All the great reformers of the world have been excommunicated persons . . . .**

XII. They are wholly superfluous and redundant, so far as the detection of either error or errorists is implicated....

XIII. They are obstacles, great obstacles, in the way of uniting Christians. No man thinks that the world will ever be converted to Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism or Methodism, &c. &c. All these denominations are the creatures of the apostasy. Christianity was before them all, and it will survive them all. They must all perish.[28]

In attempting to answer these imposing arguments, Rice began with an explanation of the nature and purposes of creeds. A creed he defined as, not a substitution for or addition to the Bible, but "a public declaration of the great doctrines and truths which we, as a body, understand the Bible to teach."[29] Understanding the creed as a declara-

[28] Ibid., 900ff.

[29] Ibid., 733.

tion of beliefs, Rice suggested four uses which it enjoys as an educational standard. First, persons desiring membership in some church can by examining its creed determine whether they can conscientiously unite with that particular body; second, other Christian communities can determine whether they will recognize a church as a part of the family of God by a study of its creed; third, the creed is an important means for the instruction of church members; and finally, a creed constitutes "an important means of correcting misrepresentations and slanders concerning the faith of the church."[30] Rice argued also that a creed established a standard of ministerial qualifications to which all the church's ministers must attain.

Rice's greatest strength on the final proposition, however, lay not in these constructive arguments, which he did not emphasize, but in his attack upon the church of Christ and in his charge that the Restoration Movement furnished abundant evidence for the necessity of some written creed, a charge which he attempted to sustain by copious quotations from the publications of his opponent. Campbell had affirmed that creeds were schismatic in tendency; Rice replied with the charge that the Christians' unwritten creed was the most divisive in Christendom, a reference to their demand for immersion. The Presbyterian quoted Barton W. Stone, who had once written of Campbell and his friends:

> Should they make their own peculiar views of immersion a term of fellowship, it will be impossible for them to repel, successfully, the imputation of being sectarians, and of having an authoritative creed (though not written) of one article at least, which is formed of their opinions of truth; and this short creed would exclude more Christians from union, than any creed with which T am acquainted.[31]

[30] Ibid., 774ff.

[31] Ibid., 771.

Rice followed this with a statement from Dr. Fishback, a friend of Campbell who was then sitting- in the audience, and who had criticised Campbell's belief in baptism for the remission of sins as being "sectarian, and uncharitable; and, if fostered, cannot fail to drive from the affections and fellowship of those who entertain it all who differ from them, as being in their sins, however otherwise pious and godly."[32] "It is true," Rice then concluded emphatically, "his own brethren being witnesses, that he has a creed, though not written, more exclusive and sectarian than any sect in Christendom!"[33]

Rice charged, too, that Campbell's recent publication, **The Christian System,** constituted the creed of the churches of Christ, and the volume's author promptly denied this indictment. "Does not the gentleman comprehend the difference between writing a book on any religious question, and making that book a creed," asked Mr. Campbell, "a test by which to try the principles of men, in order to church or ministerial fellowship? If Mr. Rice comprehends the difference, to what influence, then, are we to assign his attempt to place this book before you in such an attitude?"

When the entire discussion on creeds is viewed as a whole, Rice's most skillful attack on the Restoration Movement was his charge of latitudinarianism, made possible by the diversity of opinion among the reformers. The Presbyterian champion alleged that to learn what the members of the movement believed was impossible, for there were as many variant faiths as there were members, since Campbell willingly fellowshiped anyone who would accept immersion. Rice's broad reading in the literature of the Res-

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[32] **Millennial Harbinger, II,** 509; quoted in Campbell-Rice Debate, 771.

[33] **Campbell-Rice Debate,** 771.

toration Movement enabled him to ferret out many diversities of opinion among the Christians, and these he used to excellent advantage. Pointing to Campbell's committee of ministers, sitting as a body at the debate, he contrasted their beliefs:

> But in the gentleman's committee, selected to aid him in this debate, we have an illustration of the unity in faith of his church. Mr. Campbell holds, and has labored faithfully to prove, the doctrine of baptism, in order to the remission of sins. Dr. Fishback denies it. Dr. F. holds the doctrine of **total heredity depravity.** Mr. Campbell and Mr. Shannon deny it; and Mr. Raines says, "it is a libel on human nature of the grossest kind." Mr. Shannon believes, that the Scriptures are adequate to the conversion of men, without any superadded spiritual influence. Mr. Raines says he does not believe it! So they go. Here we have a most edifying illustration of what the gentleman calls Christian union.[34]

From the closet of the Restoration Movement Rice dragged all persons who even resembled skeletons. He recounted in an unfavorable light the incidents surrounding Alyette Raines,[35] then sitting in the audience, a case which had tested the principle of Christian union; and he related with evident glee the infamous teachings of a certain Dr. Thomas, a materialist who had been associated with the movement.[36] Many of these charges were grossly unfair, but they were not without influence among the audience.

One attack of Rice which was particularly unfair was his charge, repeated throughout the debate on creeds, that

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[34] Ibid., 857.

[35] Ibid., 831.

[36] Ibid., 793, 856.

Barton W. Stone was a Unitarian, a charge calculated to place upon Campbell the opprobrium of fellowshiping those who denied the divinity of Christ.[37] The venerable Stone was not in Lexington to defend himself against the charge, but when he heard of Rice's assertions he immediately wrote:

> Brother Campbell has to suffer on my account what I have had long to suffer for him. He is malevolently assailed for holding me in fellowship ... as I have been with equal malevolence assailed for holding fellowship, because of his supposed errors....
>
> Now I reply for the last time (so now I think) that at no time in my long life did I ever believe these doctrines—I never taught them either publicly or privately, from the pulpit or press. I am bold to say, no man ever heard them from me, or read them in any of the essays I have written and published on the doctrine of Christ....
>
> I do not expect to change the mind of Mr. Rice by anything I have said or can say; for he boasted, I am informed, that he was dyed in the wool and therefore unchangeable.[38]

As Campbell pursued his argument that creeds were antagonistic to New Testament Christianity, he referred to the many personalities who had been injected into the debate by Rice as briefly as possible and continued to argue from his thirteen propositions. In his concluding speech he summarized these principles quite logically and pleaded eloquently, yet extemporaneously, for their acceptance.

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[37] Ibid., 845, 853f.

[38] Ware, **Barton Warren Stone,** 314.

Protestant England and Protestant America have, at their disposal, all the means necessary to send the gospel from pole to pole, and from the Thames or the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. They have men enough; genius, learning, talent, ships, books, money, enterprise, zeal, adequate to such a splendid scheme; if they would, in Christian faith and purity, unite in one holy effort, on the book of God, to humanize, civilize, and evangelize all the brotherhood of man. The unholy warfare of this age is international, intersectional and inter-partizan. All the artillery—intellectual, moral, physical, is expended upon the little citadels, fortifications, and towers of partyism. It is barbarous, uncivil, savage warfare against our own religion, against ourselves, against the common Savior, against the whole family of man.

For all these reasons, I pray for the annihilation of partyism, and of every thing that, directly or indirectly, tends to keep it up; and instead of these human devices, of which I have so often spoken, these ordinances and traditions of men, I plead for the Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as the standard and rule of all our personal and social duties; our bond of union, our terms of communion, the directory and formulary of our whole church relations—faith, discipline, and government.[39]

CONFLICTING CLAIMS OF VICTORY

Whatever may have been the judgment of neutral auditors at the debate, the Presbyterians confidently believed that N. L. Rice emerged triumphant from his encounter with Alexander Campbell. This was the victory for which they had been waiting through long and discouraging years, and

[39] **Campbell-Rice Debate,** 903.

they were determined to make the most of their opportunity. The Presbyterian press immediately began proclaiming an overwhelming victory over the Sage of Bethany, attempting to recover some of the prestige which they had lost at his hands. Quite naturally, those papers favorable to Campbell accepted this challenge, and within a short time all merits of the controversy were being ignored in the conflicting partisan claims of victory. One of the immediate, yet lasting, results of the Rice debate was to divide the religious community even further and to incite a spirit of party hatred and bitterness which was destined to continue for many years.

Campbell had hoped that the printed report of the debate would be read by the religious public critically and with as little partisan prejudice as possible, and he greatly lamented the bitterness which was produced within both parties. Campbell regarded the Presbyterians' claims of victory as a calculated effort to manufacture favorable public opinion prior to the volume's publication and to prevent an impartial study of its contents, and he accused the Presbyterian clergy of fearing to let the public decide the merits of the controversy for themselves. As evidence of this accusation he pointed to an incident which had occurred in Lexington soon after the debate's close. The pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Dr. Nathan Hall, invited Rice to occupy his pulpit, and at the close of the debater's sermon Dr. Hall demanded that the entire church extend a vote of thanks to Rice for his defense of their faith. The church willingly complied, and a great majority of those present, including negroes and those who had not attended the debate, raised their hands in acclaim of their conquering champion.[40] "I have never witnessed nor read of such a continued concerted effort to gain the fame of a triumph by any ministers of religion," said Campbell of the Presby-

[40] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 7f.

terian claims. "I never knew a ministry so much afraid of giving to the community the opportunity of judging for themselves."[41]

When the first Presbyterian victory claims had begun to rise from Lexington, Campbell suggested that their partisans could manufacture public opinion easier than they could convince thinking citizens of the truth of their position. To illustrate his confidence in the face of Presbyterian boasting, he related the following incident:

> An occurence in Nashville sets this argument in a fair light. I once had a public talk there with the late Obadiah Jennings, D.D., which Presbyterians manufactured into a great debate—in which, of course, I was, as usual, gloriously defeated. The city rang with Presbyterian acclamations for some ten days; when an aged citizen accosted one of the boasters in the following style:—"You, Presbyterians, have gained, you say, a glorious victory. How do you know when you gain a victory? I do not understand how you ascertain a victory. Do tell me how you know when you beat. I will tell you how in old times we counted victories when I was engaged in the Indian wars. After the battle was over we counted scalps. Those were said to have conquered who could count the largest number of scalps taken from the enemy. Now since Mr. Campbell has been here, he has immersed some thirty, amongst whom were many of the most intelligent citizens of Nashville. How many have you added to your church by this debate?" "I have not heard of any," said the Presbyterian friend. "Pray, then, my dear sir, tell me how you know when you have gained a great victory?"[42]

Campbell received many reports of conversions which had

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[41] Ibid., 1844, 181.

[42] Ibid., 1844, 9.

resulted from hearing or reading the debate and felt that in any "scalp counting" his cause would not suffer.

Presbyterian confidence in their victory is evidenced by the eagerness with which the Presbyterian preacher who had made the first overtures to Campbell, John H. Brown, purchased the copyright of the debate for $2,000, published a large edition, and made enthusiastic efforts to circulate it. After the volume began to be perused carefully, it was manifest that it contributed far more to the Christian cause than to the Presbyterian; and a follower of Campbell purchased the copyright from Brown for a small amount, and the debate enjoyed a wide circulation among the Christians. Influenced by Rice's superb control of the audiences at Lexington, Presbyterians failed to realize that his confident and arrogant manner, his humorous attacks upon the movement headed by Campbell, and the audience's encouraging laughter could not be transferred into the printed version of the debate. Campbell had carefully planned his arguments in anticipation of the debate's being published, and when the reading public began to contrast Campbell's logical comprehensive arguments with Rice's trifling objections, Presbyterians began to realize that what had been hailed as a victory at Lexington would be judged a defeat by posterity. Presbyterian partisans soon ceased buying the debate, much to the regret of Campbell, who wrote, "I am only sorry to learn from so many quarters that comparatively few of the Presbyterians have subscribed for the debate. I learn this fact with the greater surprise after all the vauntings of the Presbyterian press." Explaining their reluctance, he continued, "They seem to regard it as the Trojans did the Grecian wooden horse. It appears to be an image sent down from heaven, but yet it is filled with armed men."[43]

[43] Ibid., 1844, 184.

Unfortunately Campbell and Rice were unable to keep themselves aloof from the bitterness which characterized their followers. During the months following the debate's close both men published articles of self vindication, ridiculing the claims of the other.

Campbell was particularly incensed at Rice's superficial attitude at Lexington, writing:

> In all the annals of the most swaggering braggadocios and vaunting knight-errants, I have met with no one superior to my late opponent in the science of egotism, in the rare endowment of unblushing self-gratulation, and in the art of making the worse appear the better reason.[44]

Surveying the encounter in retrospect, Campbell wished that he might have had a different opponent. "I am truly sorry that I had not a more argumentative and magnanimous opponent," he explained, "one more profoundly read in sacred learning, as well as more eminently worthy of an occasion so full of interest to the whole community."[45] To Campbell's regrets at not having a more worthy opponent Rice responded, "Men do not always give the true cause of their griefs—whether Mr. C. has, I leave those who read the debate to judge."[46] Reading the Presbyterian reports of victory, one might assume that the Christian leader was thoroughly crushed at Lexington, but Campbell was completely satisfied with his conduct of the debate, and wrote:

> My consciousness and conscientiousness both justify me in affirming that of all my opponents I never felt one weaker in argument nor stronger in assertion

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[44] Ibid., 1844, 442f.

[45] Ibid., 1844, 184.

[46] **Protestant And Herald,** July 25, 1844; quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 434.

> than Mr. Rice; and that I sincerely regard my arguments in the late debate as wholly unanswered and unanswerable by Mr. Rice; and that upon the most impartial review of the whole, I consider it as the very best of all my public debates, in all the prominent characteristics of a rational and religious discussion.[47]

The following selection represents a typical Presbyterian approach to Campbell's conduct of the discussion. It appeared in the **Protestant And Herald,** the organ of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky.

> Mr. C. is, however, a fine belle lettres scholar. He writes and speaks with a great fluency and elegance. But he is by no means a good logician, nor is he powerful in debate. He is an adept in the art of public fencing, and parries, with admirable dexterity, the blows of his antagonist. If he wore and handled heavier arms, he would be almost invulnerable. But an antagonist, with any strength, can cut him down through all his defenses, with the sword of the Spirit, keen and heavy and of heavenly temper, despite of his dexterity. He never makes bold and manly aggressive movements upon his enemy. This, however, may be owing to the lightness of his armor. He can talk more beautifully, and elegantly, and longer about any thing but his subject than any man I ever heard. He has almost unlimited influence over the mass of his followers. He can make them see as he sees, and feel as he feels, without any effort.[48]

Probably the best impartial account of the Lexington debate was written by a western dignitary of the Episcopal Church and published in **The Protestant Churchman,** signed

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[47] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 443.

[48] **Protestant And Herald,** February 8, 1844, quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 182.

only "A Western Man." This man did not attend the debate but visited Lexington soon after its close to attempt to ascertain its outcome. Nothing could be gained by consulting the two parties involved, and the writer reported that "all thorough-going Presbyterians were as fully persuaded that Mr. Rice had gained a great victory, as all thorough-going Campbellites were that Mr. Rice was utterly vanquished."[49] The writer had attempted to learn the reaction of the moderators to the debate's outcome and was informed that Henry Clay, though maintaining a scrupulous impartiality during the proceedings, had been highly impressed by the mental power and eloquence of Campbell.[80] Though the Episcopal writer does not mention this fact, only once during the debate did Henry Clay indicate his being influenced by either speaker. As Campbell began his address on the operation of the Holy Spirit, the great statesman was so captivated by its eloquence as to forget himself completely and waved his hand in a graceful approval, a mannerism peculiar to him. Then recovering himself, he looked about in embarrassment to see whether any in the audience had observed his action. A close friend of Clay had and remarked that except for a single occasion, he had never seen the Kentuckian so captivated by a speaker.[51]

The Episcopal writer had carefully read the Campbell-Rice debate and concluded that both parties were extreme in their faith. The writer was impressed by Campbell's eloquence and wrote:

> With the exception of a few unguarded expressions, and that he affirms a universal where only a

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[49] **Protestant Churchman;** quoted in **Millennial Harbinger**, 1844, 326.

[50] Idem.

[51] Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, II,** 513f.

> general can be proved, Mr. Campbell's affirmative argument on the point, "that the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification operates only through the word," is one of the most splendid specimens of eloquent reasoning I ever remember to have read. So also, apply to over-expanded creeds, the Westminster Confession, for example, what he recklessly charges upon all creeds, and more thrilling or magnificent declamation can hardly any where be found than that interwoven in the closing debate; in which, nevertheless, as a whole, Mr. Campbell appears to the greatest disadvantage.[52]

Such commendation did not extend to the debate on baptism, and when Campbell presented sixteen reasons for denying that baptism replaced circumcision in the divine plan, the writer charged that the world never witnessed such a "distortion of reason, and perversion of every thing worthy the name of argument."[53] After referring to the comprehensive grasp of Campbell's mind, the Episcopal minister refers to Rice:

> Mr. Rice is wholly incapable of this sort of thing. His imagination is as barren as a surface of granite. He is as cold as an icicle. He is as calm, under the most passionate rejoinders, as Diogenes in his tub. It gives him a great advantage: Accordingly some of his affirmatives rise into high respectability. Such, for example, as his argument for infant baptism.[84]

The only man to enjoy the distinction of having debated both Campbell and Rice was Bishop John B. Purcell, and

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52 **Protestant Churchman:** quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1844, 327.

53 Idem.

54 Idem.

when he was interviewed by Governor Ira Chase after Campbell's death, a part of the conversation concerned the Campbell-Rice debate. The Catholic prelate regarded Rice's use of Campbell's prolific writing as the Presbyterian's strongest point, and said:

> Of all the men that Campbell encountered in his long career Rice was by many odds the best equipped. In this discussion Campbell seemed to have forgotten the wise saying of Solomon: "Oh, that mine enemy would write a book!" He had written and published largely. Rice had debated often and published almost nothing. Of course he had made a diligent study of all that the great Reformer had ever published and had all of his multifarious writings at his fingers' ends. Here was Rice's advantage. In traveling along the great high road of investigation Campbell had occasionally changed his views, as all wise men must do, and will do. To make his adversary contradict himself—to show where at one epoch he repudiated what he advocated at another—this was Rice's strongest point.[55]

Throughout the Lexington debate, Bishop Purcell's sympathies rested wholly with Mr. Campbell. "Pending the long debate between these two really great men my prayers were daily lifted up for Mr. Campbell," the Catholic affirmed. "In his discussions with our clergy he had always been kind, affable, courteous; Rice quite the reverse. One was a gentleman; as to the other, what shall I say of him?"

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[55] **Christian-Evangelist,** 1898, 682.

[56] Ibid. 1898. 681.

CHAPTER VII

Campbell Versus Presbyterianism: The Jennings Debate

MORAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

In Campbell's address before the Cincinnati College of teachers which ultimately led to the Purcell debate, he stated his firm conviction that the political liberty of the western world was a direct result of the religious freedom emanating from the Protestant Reformation. He always believed that political freedom was not the cause but rather the result of religious freedom, and that where liberty of conscience in the religious realm is surrendered, political thraldom cannot long be stayed.

Nearly twenty years before the Purcell debate Campbell found an opportunity to contend for these principles in his opposition to the "moral societies" of Washington County, Pennsylvania. These societies were established by the Presbyterians, beginning in 1815, for the avowed purpose of "suppressing vice and immorality." They were an attempt to legislate Presbyterian standards of conduct On the entire population, just as the Puritans had done in colonial New England nearly 200 years earlier; and they were possible because the Presbyterians were the dominant religious party in western Pennsylvania during the early 1800's.

The records of one of the earliest of these societies have been preserved. The constitution centered around

certain rules of conduct which were expected to govern the non-Presbyterian as well as the Presbyterian. It was the duty of every member of the society "actively to promote the objects of the Association by giving information against any one known to be guilty of profane swearing, Sabbath-breaking, intoxication, unlawful gaming, keeping a disorderly public house, or any other active immorality punished by the Commonwealth."[1] Local laws were passed imposing fines for the vices mentioned in the "moral society" constitution, and violations were punished with regularity. To encourage citizens to report violations of these standards, it was provided that half the fine in each case should go to the informer. The entire population, therefore, was forced to comply with the religious code of Presbyterianism; for every neighbor was a potential informer, and conviction under these laws brought the odium of being immoral and irreligious.[2]

Following the establishment of this miniature inquisition in western Pennsylvania, there were many who complained and condemned the societies privately; but there was none who dared to oppose them publicly since open opposition would arouse the anger of the Presbyterian clergy. There was none, that is, until Alexander Campbell determined to attack the societies. Though he was not at this time living in the immediate area being coerced by the societies, Campbell visited the area often and was well acquainted with the operations of these societies. After ignoring them for quite some time, and finally deciding that Washington County would produce no opponents for the societies, he determined to attack them and began with an anonymous article in a local newspaper on April 27, 1820. Articles continued for several months, during which

[1] Quoted in Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, I** ,517.

[2] For humorous illustrations of the operations of these moral societies, consult Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, I,** 519f.

several rather feeble replies were made, devoted more to personal attacks upon anyone who would dare to oppose the societies than to a discussion of the basic questions involved. Later, however, a more worthy apologist for the societies appeared; who, though also writing anonymously, was soon known to be Dr. Andrew Wylie, President of Washington College. For nearly a year he and Campbell exchanged essays, discussing the merits of the societies; but by February, 1822, Dr. Wylie was willing to quit, and Campbell was generally conceded to be the victor over the moral societies.

The following arguments were among those employed by Campbell in attacking the societies. (1) The principle upon which they were founded was faulty; for it assumed that when men are fined for their vices, they are made moral. True reformation must come from the heart, not from fines imposed for petty vices. Campbell wrote, "And what becomes of the fines? Oh! they are given to some pious clergyman to be applied to the education of young men for the ministry. Go on, therefore, in your misdeeds, ye profane, for the more you sin the more preachers we shall have."[3] (2) The societies were anti-evangelical; for they were without authority in the New Testament. Christians are not at liberty to impose their standards of conduct upon men of the world; yet this was the express purpose of the societies. If, on the other hand, the society applied only to Christian people, it was bound by the New Testament laws of discipline, which it certainly was not respecting. (3) The society violated true principles of morality; for it valued each sin at a different price. Violating the Sabbath cost an individual four dollars, but he could take the Lord's name in vain for less than a dollar. (4) The responsibilities of the gospel must be performed through faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. However, any law which

[3] Quoted in Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, I,** 523.

compels the non-Christian to respect the Lord's day demands that he do it though destitute of faith. Hence, the puritanical laws of the moral societies violated the very spirit underlying the Christian religion.

These moral societies are important in a study of Campbell as a controversialist because of his leadership in the opposition to them and because the first secretary of the Washington Society and one of its most enthusiastic supporters was Obadiah Jennings, a Presbyterian preacher whom Campbell later met in an informal debate at Nashville, Tennessee during December, 1830. However, in his two-year opposition to the societies, Campbell never met Jennings personally and did not meet him until their debate in Nashville. Actually the two men had resided in the same general area for twenty years; but prior to their Nashville debate, according to Jennings, "we had not the slightest personal acquaintance, nor had I, before his arrival in Nashville, ever heard one of his public harangues."[4]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Prior to his becoming a Presbyterian clergyman, Obadiah Jennings had been an outstanding and respected lawyer in western Pennsylvania. Born near Baskingridge, New Jersey, December 13,1778, he was the son of a Presbyterian minister. As the young boy evidenced unusual mental ability, his father determined to provide him with the best education possible, sending him to Canonsburg to a flourishing academy (the usual "high school" of that period) which afterwards, in 1802, became Jefferson College. After completing his work here, Jennings began the study of law under John Simonson of Washington, Pennsylvania and was admitted to the bar in the fall of 1800. He began

[4] Obadiah Jennings, D. D. **Debate on Campbellism** (Pittsburgh, 1832), 30.

his practice at Steubenville, Ohio, but returned to Washington in 1811.

Jennings rapidly rose to prominence in the legal profession. His biographer reports that he possessed "that happy combination of talents which rendered him an able and popular lawyer. With strong intellectual powers for discrimination and argument, were united a peculiar promptitude in discovering the strong points of a case, a facility and clearness of illustration, a sprightliness of wit, and a keenness of satire, which he could employ with great effect, for the entertainment of his audience and the annoyance of his antagonist."[8]

Apparently the religious background and early education which Jennings must have received from his Presbyterian parents made an impression upon his life, but not sufficiently strong to influence him to become a member of the Presbyterian Church while still a youth. His earlier years were a period of "half-way resolution;" and it was not until 1809, after he had become a successful lawyer, that he underwent the religious experience believed in that day to be essential to salvation. This "experience" is of interest because it reflects the typical Presbyterian concept of conversion. Presbyterian doctrine was Calvinistic to the core, teaching that man was born totally depraved and could never find the Lord until enabled by the irresistible grace of God. This Calvinistic attitude toward the gospel and salvation is reflected by Jenning's own account of his conversion.

Jennings' first real interest in his salvation was awakened when he heard a sermon graphically portraying eternity, and before this impression had been lost, the lawyer under whom he had studied, Mr. Simonson, died suddenly.

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[8] M. Brown, "Memoir," in Jennings, **Debate on Campbellism** vi.f.

All of this alarmed Jennings sufficiently that he was led to inquire seriously, "What must I do to be saved?" He began to read and study the Bible, to meditate, to pray; but according to his own account, all this served only to demonstrate his complete inability to do anything for himself. He wrote, "I found the Bible to be a sealed book. I could not understand it. I found I was grossly ignorant, stupid, blind, hard hearted, and unbelieving." He found that he could no more believe in Christ for salvation than he could lift a mountain. Hence:

> What hard thoughts did I entertain of that Being who is infinite in goodness? What risings of heart against his sovereignty, and what enmity of heart against himself. I could not see the justice and propriety of casting me off forever, provided I did all I could. I had no proper conviction of my guilt for my past horrid crimes, nor had I any proper knowledge, of the spirituality, the holy nature and inflexibility of that law of God which is immutable in its nature, and by which I was justly condemned. However, after many painful struggles, vain efforts, and ineffectual attempts to make myself fit to come to Christ,—after passing many dark days and sorrowful nights, I was at length, as I hope, convinced of my sin and misery, —that if I ever received any help, it must be from God; that if ever I was cured, it must be by the great Physician of souls. I was not long in this situation, before God, who is love, "revealed (as I trust) his son in me."[6]

This emphasis upon the inherent depravity of the human heart and the absolute inability of the sinner to do anything for his own salvation reflects Calvinism clearly and became the core of Jennings' preaching. He taught

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[6] Jennings, **Debate on Campbellism,** ix.

that powerful irresistible grace is the only power which could transform the sinner's heart, and it was this particular tenet of Calvinism which became one of the major issues in his debate with Alexander Campbell. He taught that faith was a miraculous gift of God bestowed upon the sinner, whereas Campbell rejected this supernatural concept of faith.

For some time after joining the Presbyterian Church, Jennings considered the possibility of renouncing his law practice in favor of the ministry. The counsel of friends was divided; for some thought he might render greater service to the Presbyterian Church by continuing his law practice. His decision was made in the shadow of death; for when striken with a serious illness and after hope had been abandoned for his recovery, he resolved that if his life were spared, it would be devoted to the ministry. Following his recovery he began the study of theology and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Ohio in the autumn of 1816. Following his licensing he received a call from the Presbyterian Church in Steubenville, where he had formerly practiced law, and another from Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania. He accepted the call from Steubenville and was ordained as pastor of the Presbyterian Church there in the spring of 1817. Six years later he returned to Washington, the city which had been the scene of his transformation from lawyer to preacher. After several years here (1823-1828) he accepted a call from the First Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee, where he remained until his death.

Though Jennings' ministry was comparatively short, he rose rapidly in Presbyterian ranks. Three times he was presiding officer of synods and once he was selected as Moderator of the General Assembly. Shortly before his death the college of New Jersey honored him with the degree, Doctor of Divinity.

Jennings' biographer admits that as a public speaker "his popularity in the pulpit was not equal to that which he had acquired at the bar." The reason for this is simple; for as a lawyer he had always spoken extemporaneously and with great ability, but as a minister he believed that the importance of his discourses necessitated their being written and read from manuscript. Speaking with ability and fluency at the bar, he found it difficult to read with equal force. On one occasion a sermon which he had prepared was destroyed in a minor fire the day prior to its delivery. He reluctantly delivered an extemporaneous sermon, which proved to be far superior to his usual manuscript sermons. An old elder in the congregation, learning the reason for such an unusual sermon, offered a prayer that all Mr. Jennings' notes might suffer a similar fate. This particular habit of reading his discourses played its part in the Campbell-Jennings debate and without doubt hampered the Presbyterian's efforts on some occasions.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER: NATURE OF FAITH

Alexander Campbell's debate with Jennings is unique among his debates; for it was conducted informally, without prior planning and without mutually accepted propositions. When Campbell visited Nashville in December, 1830, some of his views were challenged by Jennings, the result being an informal discussion between the two men. After visiting other cities in Tennessee, Campbell returned to Nashville and discussed other pertinent questions with Jennings in other public but informal sessions. The five major issues which, though never phrased as formal propositions, were discussed were:

1. The nature of faith.
2. Is Alexander Campbell a sectarian and a factionist?
3. A supernatural call to the ministry.

4. Campbell's new version of the New Testament, **Living Oracles.**

5. Immersion and the new birth.

On December 10, 1830, Campbell visited the city of Nashville and delivered an address that evening on the identity of the great apostasy, comparing the essential characteristics of the Catholicism and Protestantism of his day with the Biblical prophecies relating to the Man of Sin and Babylon the great, as revealed by Daniel, Paul, and John. Campbell also attacked all mystical systems of Biblical interpretation and presented several propositions respecting the nature of primitive Christianity. At the close of the address he proposed a meeting the following evening which would afford an opportunity for anyone to speak who desired to question or oppose the principles announced in this introductory address.

Among those hearing this speech of Campbell's were nearly all the clergymen of Nashville, including Obadiah Jennings, then pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Jennings, according to his own statement, attended the meeting more out of curiosity than from any desire to controvert Campbell's positions. After hearing that Campbell was to visit Nashville, Jennings had been induced to pray "that when the enemy should come in as a flood, the Spirit of the Lord would lift up a standard against his dangerous and destructive errors." Campbell's principles were repugnant to all loyal Presbyterians; and though Jennings knew him only through his reputation, that reputation was such as to cause alarm in the Presbyterian's mind. As he prayed that the Lord would provide a standard, Jennings had not entertained the least expectation, according to his own statement, that the Lord's providence would use him to oppose the leader of the Restoration Movement. [7] Jennings had never before heard Campbell speak,

[7] Ibid., 30.

and he was thoroughly disgusted with Campbell's denunciations of Protestant denominationalism. The Presbyterian determined not to hear Campbell again.

On the following evening, though Campbell had proposed the meeting to hear any objections to his principles, Jennings went to a public lyceum, following his resolution not to hear Campbell further. After arriving at the lyceum, he was informed that a Methodist preacher was planning to discuss an important theological question that evening with Campbell. He desired to hear the discussion and left the lyceum, going to the Baptist church where Campbell was just completing an address. After inviting questions and receiving none, Campbell spoke further on the nature of faith. Jennings then arose and spoke for nearly an hour; for he realized that the Methodist preacher was not present and that if he did not oppose Campbell, his convictions would suffer for want of a champion. His theme likewise was the nature of faith; he presented the Calvinistic position that it is a supernatural work on the human heart. Campbell then replied, after which Jennings spoke for another hour, discoursing on the work of the Holy Spirit and attempting to contrast saving faith with historic faith. After this address Jennings retired, though Campbell delivered one more speech.

This discussion relative to the nature of faith struck at one of the fundamental differences between the reformers and Presbyterians. It was a cardinal dogma of Calvinism that men could not exercise saving faith without supernatural aid, while those pleading for the restoration of New Testament Christianity insisted that saving faith is simply historical faith in action. When Thomas Campbell had been forced to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church in 1809, the first charge against him had been that he denied the emotional nature of faith.[8]

[8] Garrison and DeGroot, **The Disciples of Christ,** 132f.

In attempting to illustrate the true nature of faith, Campbell compared the Christian's faith which saves with that faith in America which had induced him to leave his native Ireland for the new world. As a youth he had read histories of Asia, Africa, and the United States; and though he believed them all to be true, they did not have the same effect upon his mind as did the history of this country. When he read of the opportunities and freedoms of the United States, he was so impressed that ultimately he left Ireland for this new country. Similarly the sinner who believes the truth of the gospel testimony is so impressed with the blessings offered that he renounces the world of sin and becomes a Christian. Hence a supernatural operation of the Spirit is no more necessary to produce saving faith than it is to produce confidence in any other historical record.

While Campbell argued that simple historical belief of testimony constitutes saving faith, he nevertheless contended that this belief must be operative to constitute saving faith and that to become operative it must lead the sinner to obey the Lord in baptism. Baptism is the test of faith; for without it, faith will not save. Jennings represented Campbell's arguments quite fairly on these points, and countered by pointing to the case of the Pharisees who believed in the Lord but refused to confess him. (Jno. 12:42) Jennings affirmed that here was historic faith, belief in Christ, but without obedience; hence historic faith could not be saving faith. One wonders how he would have endeavored to prove that the Pharisees' faith was a mere historic faith and not the supernatural faith for which he was pleading.

In his efforts to sustain the supernatural character of faith, Jennings cited a number of passages of scripture. "To one is given faith by the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:9). "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of

yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8,9). "That the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14). In reporting his reply to Jennings' argument from Eph. 2:8,9 Campbell wrote that salvation rather than faith was the antecedent of the pronoun "it" in the expression "it is the gift of God." The evidence presented in support of this exegesis was the gender of "it" and "faith," the former neuter while faith is feminine in Greek. Hence Paul could not have called faith the gift of God; rather salvation is the gift. Commenting on the natural man Campbell replied that Paul in comparing the natural man with the spiritual referred to a pagan with only his five senses to guide him. That such an individual, destitute of revelation from God, could have spiritual ideas was admitted by Campbell; but he denied that the natural man of Presbyterian doctrine was the natural man of Paul.

This discussion of faith was conducted on Saturday evening, and on the following day Campbell spoke to the Christians in Nashville on the seven unities of Eph. 4, contrasting them with the many bodies, faiths and baptisms of a divided Christendom. At the conclusion of the service ten persons were baptized by Campbell in the Cumberland River.

THE SECOND ENCOUNTER: THREE ISSUES

Following this discussion concerning the nature of faith, Campbell left Nashville on Tuesday for a brief tour of other Tennessee communities and did not return to Nashville for about ten days. Apparently some of his experiences on this tour were rather exasperating; for he writes humorously of them in a **Harbinger** report. At Franklin he found himself "among the icebergs of Calvinism." To make matters worse the weather without became as frigid as the

Calvinism within, the temperature dropping to zero. When Campbell attempted to speak in the Baptist meeting-house, the stove which had no pipe filled the room with smoke, emblematic, thought Campbell, of the condition of things "ecclesiastic in that diocese."[8]

By Tuesday, Dec. 21, Campbell had returned to Nashville, and on Friday evening he preached again. His sermon was an effort to answer two questions: first, how was the Christian religion established in the world by our Lord; and second, through what means did the Lord determine to perpetuate it until his second coming? Jennings was in the audience for this sermon, at the end of which Campbell repeated his previous invitation to hear and consider objections to his views and proposed that the next day, Christmas, be devoted to this purpose.

Jennings reports that during the interval between Campbell's visits to Nashville the public evidenced considerable interest in the discussion which had taken place, and that many people were genuinely desirous that a more complete discussion take place if opportunity presented itself. Several suggested to Jennings that Campbell would return to Nashville and extend an invitation for further objections to his principles. Accordingly Jennings had determined to accept such an invitation if it were extended and had spent several days in study and in preparing manuscript speeches, condemning Campbell's teachings. As Campbell spoke on Friday evening, Jennings was busily engaged in taking notes; and when Campbell suggested that an opportunity would be given for objections the following day, Jennings was prepared.

On Christmas morning at ten o'clock, Campbell and Jennings were among those present at the Baptist church; all were intent upon the objections which might be proposed

[8] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1831, 111.

to the principles announced by Campbell. Preliminary to the beginning of the debate, Campbell took the precaution of calling an impartial moderator, Dr. Felix Robinson, to preside over the sessions and to prevent the undue appropriation of time by any one speaker. It was stipulated that no speaker should occupy more than twenty minutes at one time. With these preliminaries attended to, the discussions began and continued throughout the day and until about ten o'clock that night.

The first important issue discussed was the nature and scripturalness of sectarianism. Jennings defended the denominations of Nashville from the charge of sectarianism which Campbell had hurled at them during his previous visit to Nashville, and in turn Jennings charged that Campbell himself was a factionist and sectarian. As it was Jennings' avowed and confessed purpose in renewing the discussion to expose the "trickery and presumption" to public view, it was he who began the day's discussions by charging that Campbell was a factionist. Jennings was particularly incensed at Campbell's use of the term "the Reformation" to designate the work in which he and his colleagues were engaged. According to Jennings, the term Reformation was justly applied to that great movement which was begun in 1517 by Martin Luther for the purpose of purging Catholicism of its doctrinal and practical corruptions. Campbell, while admitting that Luther had begun a great work, believed that the Protestant churches had lost sight of the principles of the Reformation and was attacking Protestant as well as Catholic popery. Jennings charged:

> He designates the Protestant churches, without exception, as the mystical Babylon, spoken of in the apocalypse, and calls upon all that would save themselves from the pollution of the evangelical churches, to come out from their fellowship and communion.

> While he alleges the whole evangelical Protestant church, of every denomination, not only to be in a condition similar to that of the Jewish church, when God by his prophet declared there was "no soundness in it," but also as enveloped in gross darkness, he does not hesitate to assert there is nothing in the Christian world that is good, praiseworthy, or deserving regard or imitation, except what is found among his few followers....[10]

After charging that Campbell claimed to be doing for his generation what Luther did through the Protestant Reformation, Jennings attempted to contrast the views of the two men. Luther, he argued, had attempted not only to expose the corruptions of Catholicism but also to recover the fundamental doctrines of Christianity which had been lost during the centuries of Catholic supremacy. Jennings wrote, "This great reformer, no doubt, well knew, that however the public indignation might, for a time, be excited by the exposure of the frauds, and imposition, and corrupt practices of the Romish church and clergy, there would be no genuine and lasting reformation produced among the people, unless they could be brought to know, and obey from the heart, that form of doctrine which God has delivered to mankind in his word." Luther predicted this form of doctrine on one grand and fundamental theme: justification by faith only. And what did Campbell teach respecting faith only? He rejected it and taught the necessity of baptism! Hence, concluded Jennings, Campbell could not be following in the tradition of the true Reformation but had broken with it completely.

Jennings proceeded from this indictment of Campbell to a defense of the evangelical sects of Nashville. Whereas Campbell had charged in his previous visit to Nashville that

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[10] Jennings, Ibid., 81.

sectarianism was at basic variance with the Lord's plan for his people, Jennings believed that God had allowed religious division. He believed that all true Christians everywhere constituted the one great house or church of God but that the Father had "permitted this one house to be divided into several and separate apartments by walls of separation, which his people have erected." Without attempting to explain why God had allowed sectarianism, Jennings defended it as a logical result of the intellectual freedom which men enjoyed. When men were allowed to investigate the religion contained in the Bible, divisions could not have been prevented save through the miraculous intervention of God. And why should not divisions exist in Christendom, asked Jennings, when they exist in other fields of study? There have always been sects among philosophers or among scientists. Why not among Christians?

In his review of the discussion Campbell wrote that Jennings spoke "with much charity and apparent feeling on this subject, and appeared the very benevolent apologist for his good Methodist, Episcopalian, Quaker, and Regular Baptist brethren. He appeared to be all love and tenderness, bowels of compassion for these necessary, useful, and **good evils."** Campbell replied by referring to the earlier history of the United States when the New England Puritans had persecuted Quakers and Baptists. His principal reply, however, was Biblical, 1 Cor. 1:10-13. He argued that Paul represented divisions in Christendom as equivalent to a literal dividing of the body of Christ and that wearing the name of a factionist was equivalent to asserting that the factionist had been crucified for his followers and that his followers had been immersed into his name. Divisions, then, were not to be regarded as a necessary and tolerated evil but rather as a positive violation of the apostolic commandment for unity. Paul had condemned sectarianism, listing it with other works of the flesh such as murder and adultery. Campbell discussed the result? of sectarianism, charg-

ing that most of the war, poverty, and tragedy which had befallen Europe resulted directly from the very religious divisions which Jennings defended as mere partitions in the house of God. Campbell, in characteristic language, believed that "the anathemas of Heaven were denounced, not only upon the Mother of Harlots, but upon all her daughters; and that the plagues of God were threatened to them who would not come out of this Sectarian Babylon.""

Jennings' next charge was that in spite of all his discourses condemning denominationalism, Campbell was himself a sectarian, a factionist, responsible personally for the appearance of a new sect, the "Campbellites." His evidence in support of this charge was the division which was contemporarily occurring within the Baptist denomination as a result of Campbell's influence. Jennings regarded it as accepted fact that prior to that "unauspicious hour" when Campbell joined their ranks, the Baptists were a united people, but that since they had been "afflicted" by his visits and the circulation of his published works, contentions and divisions had resulted.

It is of interest to observe that 1830, the year of the Campbell-Jennings debate, is the date usually assigned to the final division between advocates of the ancient order and the Baptists, though for several years earlier Baptist associations had been excluding the reformers and issuing anathemas against them. Jennings's charge, then, came at a period in the history of the Reformation Movement when the general public would be most receptive; for they had seen the Baptist Church divided.

Moreover, Jennings charged that it had been the express purpose of Campbell in affiliating with the Baptist denomination to create a faction with a view to promoting his own personal interest. His evidence here was the fact that

[11] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1831, 113.

Campbell had publicly denounced sectarianism and confessions of faith for several years prior to his joining the Baptists. Jennings' conclusion was that Campbell's union with the Baptists tacitly implied that he had changed his views respecting denominations and that he subscribed to the creed of the Baptist sect; otherwise he would not have acted in good faith in joining them. The evidence, however, indicates that this charge is completely false. It is true that Campbell had protested against sectarianism prior to 1813 when he joined the Baptists, but it is not true that his union with them implied a disavowal of his earlier convictions. Rather, Campbell joined the Baptists at their invitation and with the specific understanding that he did not accept their creed or any other confession of faith inconsistent with the Scripture. In writing of the event, Campbell stated that when the Brush Run Church was invited to join the Redstone Association (1813), they submitted a written reply to the invitation, remonstrating against all human creeds as terms of communion, but "expressing a willingness, upon certain conditions, to co-operate or to unite with that Association, provided always that we should be allowed to teach and preach whatever we learned from the Holy Scriptures, regardless of any creed or formula in Christendom."[12]

Campbell refuted Jennings' charge that he was a factionist by pointing to the fundamental aim of the Restoration Movement. This aim was to return to the Bible and to bind upon men only those things which are specifically authorized by the constitution of the kingdom of Christ, the New Testament. Consistently followed, this aim renders sectarianism impossible. Campbell admitted that in one sense, but only one, could the kingdom of Christ be termed a denomination or sect, and this was as Christ's church was contrasted with Judaism, Mohammedanism, or pagan-

[12] Ibid., 1848, 344.

ism; but this use of the term "sect" was not that condemned by Scripture. Campbell concluded, "So long as we excluded from the kingdom of Jesus only those who would not acknowledge him to be Lord by doing the things which he commanded; so long as we made our own opinions private property, and required no person on pain of excommunication to adopt them, we might be calumniated by a classification with other sects, but could not be shewn to be a sectarian."[13]

The second principal issue discussed in this Christmas debate involved whether men received a special supernatural call to the ministry. Jennings believed that they do and regarded his defense of such a call as a defense of the Protestant ministers of Nashville. Campbell spoke often in his discourses on the "clergy;" and as they had received his denunciations in Nashville, Jennings believed that one of Campbell's purposes in visiting Nashville had been to drag the ministry into disrepute and contempt. Jennings made no distinction between the evangelist, pastor, and teacher, concluding that all received the divine call and cited several New Testament cases of ordination as evidence. In commenting on Rom. 10:15, "How shall they preach except they be sent?" Jennings asserted that this passage "amounts to a most positive declaration, that none can preach with God's approbation, unless they be sent by him, or in other words, are made teachers by the Holy Spirit." Referring to Campbell's addresses, he continued, "Declaim, or proclaim, or harangue the people, as does Mr. C, they may; but preach Christ Jesus the Lord, as do those laborers whom he has sent forth into the harvest, it is declared upon apostolic authority, they cannot."[14]

In denying this special call to the ministry, Campbell emphasized its incredibility, pointing to the contradictory

[13] Ibid., 1831, 114.

[14] Jennings, Op. Cit., 114.

messages announced by men who are equally vehement in claiming a special call to preach. Campbell wrote in his review of the debate, "The more ignorant the preacher the greater the pretense to the call." All the world's great Christian teachers such as Calvin and Wesley had claimed such a supernatural call; yet the world was still attempting to decide who heard the Spirit's call most clearly. That all could not have been miraculously called was evident; for their messages were mutually contradictory. The only alternative to denying their call was to admit that God was the author of confusion by commissioning men to preach different systems of doctrine. Campbell argued that the only call which any man could reasonably and scripturally anticipate was the call based upon his competency to teach and the occasion for such teaching. The wealthy Christian receives a call to minister to the poor when he discovers a destitute family, and the Christian wealthy in knowledge receives the same call when opportunity is afforded to teach those who are ignorant of the gospel's commandments.

In answering Jennings' proof texts, Campbell pointed to the fact that no person was ever ordained by the apostles to preside at the observance of the Lord's Supper or to baptize; yet these are duties which Presbyterians assign to their ordained clergy. Finally Jennings asserted that a man's desire for the office of the bishop was his special call. Campbell replied that this assertion proved entirely too much; for it included myriads who were enthusiastic but unqualified to assume the responsibilities of the bishop's office. Had these all received the special call of the ministry? Campbell reports that with this point "ended anything like a discussion on Saturday."

Two other subjects were reverted to occasionally in these discussions which continued until about ten o'clock Christmas night. One of these, the relation between immersion and conversion, was discussed more fully the following Monday in the "third encounter" between the two men.

The second involved Campbell's new version of the New Testament, Living Oracles, which was attacked by Jennings; but since both men devoted considerable space and further arguments to this subject in their published reports of the debate, this issue will be considered in connection with those reports.

Campbell had already made appointments in Kentucky for the following week, but with the close of the discussion on Saturday night Campbell suggested that he would hazard the meeting of those appointments and remain in Nashville until Monday to continue the discussion another day, provided Jennings would meet one condition. This condition demanded that the Presbyterian agree to select one proposition from the wide variety of subjects which had been discussed and agree to discuss it according to the recognized rules of debate, the discussion to be presided over by a competent tribunal. This condition was accepted, and Jennings submitted the question, "To be born again—What is it? and the effects thereof?" Campbell supposed that he would convert this question into a logical proposition to be affirmed in the Monday debate and agreed to remain in Nashville for two additional days.

THE THIRD ENCOUNTER: BAPTISM

Whenever Campbell engaged Presbyterian clergymen in debate, baptism was an inevitable issue; and the Jennings debate was no exception. Monday morning having arrived, Campbell informed the assembly that Jennings still had submitted no formal proposition for debate. Jennings seemed surprised and perturbed; for he had supposed that the question propounded on Saturday, "To be born again—What is it?" would satisfy Campbell's demand for a proposition. However, Campbell was not satisfied, insisting that there is a great difference between a question and a proposition. Jennings had submitted only a general question, whereas he had promised a formal proposition, in proof of

which formal arguments could be made. Since Jennings was unable to formulate a proposition on the spur of the moment, the meeting was convened until afternoon.

The proposition which Jennings finally presented read, "To be born again and to be immersed is not the same thing." Any student of logic or debating will immediately perceive that it was an awkwardly worded negative proposition, but its inadequacy is even more astonishing when one remembers that its framer had been a highly successful lawyer. However, Campbell was constrained to accept it, fearing that his refusal to do so would immediately terminate the discussion. The debate then proceeded through the afternoon and evening, Jennings delivering the first address. In his attack upon the necessity of immersion, Jennings referred first to the uncharitableness of Campbell's position. He charged that it would condemn all who had never been immersed regardless of how pious they were, regardless of how devoted they were to their responsibilities to God as they understood them. In his reply to this particular charge Campbell resorted to a favorite trick, used often in his debates; he turned the argument against his opponent. Charging that Jennings was attempting to prejudice the audience against an impartial examination of the true point at issue, Campbell observed how silly it became a Presbyterian to charge anyone's system with uncharitableness. Jennings was a Calvinist, believing that God had predestined a large proportion of humanity to eternal reprobation without providing them any means of salvation. Yet he who believed such a doctrine as that was now charging Campbell with uncharitableness for believing that God had commanded baptism and would hold men responsible for ignoring it!

Much of the discussion centered around the meaning of Christ's statement to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Jno. 3:5). Jennings urged that the water referred figuratively to an act of divine grace and represented

the washing of the heart. Passages adduced to prove that a divine agency miraculously works in the new birth included 2 Cor. 5:17, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature," and Eph. 2:10, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...." Campbell responded with an expository discussion of Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, emphasizing the literal import of the term water. He also emphasized the historical argument that all antiquity for 400 years used the term regeneration as synonymous with immersion and the new birth. Even in his published report of the debate, Jennings did not deny the accuracy of this assertion, thus indicating the impregnable stronghold which Campbell occupied at this point in the discussion.

As a Presbyterian Jennings was committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith; and realizing this, Campbell attempted to show that the Presbyterian creed contradicted the position which Jennings was attempting to uphold. This was done by pointing to the creed's use of Jno. 3:5 as a scripture stressing the importance of baptism; hence the creed taught that the new birth was baptism. Yet the defender of Presbyterianism was affirming that "to be born again and to be immersed is not the same thing." It was a very strong argument, and continues to be a stumblingblock to those who admit that Jno. 3:5 refers to baptism but deny its essentiality. Jennings must have felt the full force of this blow; for in reporting the argument, Jennings denied that the scriptural references constitute a part of the Westminster Confession itself, representing rather the opinions of those responsible for the publication of the Confession. This answer, of course, amounted to a complete repudiation of their accuracy in selecting the proper passages.

Jennings made the usual argument that salvation comes through the efficacy of Christ's blood and not through the waters of baptism. Campbell's reply to this point, published in the **Harbinger,** was characteristically to the point:

As to the possibility of water washing away sin by its own intrinsic influence, we had as little faith as our opponent. We regarded the imputation as a calumny. We regarded faith, the name of the Lord, the blood of Christ, and water, as all necessary; and shewed that this was a foul slander. What God had joined together, we presumed not to separate—Jesus had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and, "Unless a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."[15]

FROM PULPIT TO PEN

Following the Monday session on baptism, Campbell left Nashville; but the encounter with the First Presbyterian preacher of that city was not yet concluded. A few barrages were yet to be hurled. Other avenues of expression were available; and each man turned from pulpit to pen, claiming victory and reviewing many of the arguments presented orally in Nashville for the benefit of the reading public.

The first to publish a report of the encounter was Campbell, who returned to Bethany and carried an article in the Harbinger entitled "Incidents On A Tour To Nashville, Tennessee." The thirteen page article was devoted primarily to a discussion of circumstances precipitating the debate and to a brief review of the most important questions discussed. Concluding his report, Campbell commended his opponent as deserving "Some credit for his tact in managing his resources;" for he had managed to keep something other than arguments before the audience during most of the sessions. Campbell wrote, "He was always combatting some deadly heresy, and guarding his audience against contamination of error. He has a considerable talent for relating anecdotes,

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[15] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1831, 120.

and his long practice as a lawyer has left yet upon him the scars of the professions."[16] Jennings had compared himself with David and Campbell with the giant who had defied the armies of—John Calvin; Campbell retorted that Jennings had been far more adroit in slinging stones than in the art of logic and argument.

It was Campbell's firm conviction that Jennings had entered the discussion with ulterior motives. Campbell invited objections to his discourses in the interest of eliciting truth; he had intended that questioners be sincere in their quest for truth. Jennings was not. It was his aim "to prejudice the community against the Reformation, to secure his own flock from defection, to discuss nothing, but to create doubts and difficulties where there were none, and to bewilder the public mind with the mysteries of human invention," Campbell charged.[17] Some of these charges, at least, are sustained by Jennings' own frank admission. He wrote, "To expose to the view of an enlightened community the deception of his pretended reformation, I admit was my leading objective in thus availing myself of the opportunity afforded for a further public discussion."[18] The "pretended reformer" doubted, however, whether Jennings' effort to expose the Restoration Movement had been as highly successful as anticipated. The reason for his doubt was the fact that during the Nashville debate more than thirty persons have braved Tennessee's December cold to be immersed into Christ in the Cumberland River.

Jennings died approximately a year following the debate with Campbell, the last year of his life having been spent preparing his volume, **Debate On Campbellism.** Campbell noticed his death in the **Harbinger** and commented that

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[16] Idem.

[17] Ibid., 1831, 121.

[18] Jennings, Op. Cit., 79.

in the Nashville debate Jennings had exhibited tact, ingenuity, and adroitness as a disputant, sincerely believing and well versed in the doctrines of Presbyterianism. But Campbell might never have spread this mantle of charity had he known then the contents of the book which Jennings had nearly completed at his death and which was published posthumously by his nephew, S. C. Jennings. Purporting to be an accurate report of the Nashville encounter, Jennings' volume was in reality a violent attack on "Campbellism," dripping with invective and impugning the motives of Campbell and his followers. The arguments which Jennings made in the oral debate were reviewed and enlarged; Campbell's were virtually ignored.

Illustrative of the general spirit characterizing the entire volume is Jennings' statement that many were recovering "out of the snare—if not of the devil—at least, of Mr. Alexander Campbell."[19] Campbell was charged with giving his "rotten system of disguised infidelity, the title of **'The Reformation'."**[20] Worse still, in listing several American sects Jennings included a group "called Mormonites, part of whom, it would seem lately sprung from the hot bed of Campbellism, as the mushroom from the dunghill."[21] Jennings' spirit indicated no desire to search for truth; rather it was one of bitterness and party rancor. After Campbell renounced sectarianism in his quest for the ancient order, the persecution which he anticipated came and continued for twenty years prior to the Nashville debate; but no abuse ever maligned Campbell more than Jennings' reference to his life's work as a dunghill!

When the **Debate On Campbellism** found its way into Campbell's hands, he was quick to reply with an "Extra"

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[19] Ibid., 46.

[20] Ibid., 80.

[21] Ibid., 88.

in the **Millennial Harbinger.** In Campbell's estimation the book was falsely titled and filled with the "spirit of slander, detraction, and false accusations." He reasoned that if such a volume represented the proper fruits of the metaphysical regeneration which Presbyterian Doctors of Divinity pleaded for, the Lord could deliver him from such a regeneration! Perhaps there is no statement in Campbell's entire review which expressed his feeling more pointedly than this: "If I had an enemy, and could wish for him an affliction, it would not be more grievous than to have the last months of his life doomed to making such a book as that before me."[22]

Campbell's first point of attack was the title of the book, **Debate On Campbellism.** Instead of being what it purported to be, a debate, the volume in reality was a vicious personal attack on Campbell and his principles. The entire volume contained no adequate accounts of anything Campbell had said in Nashville, only allusions to his arguments. How, then, could it conceivably be called a debate? The scholarly world would smile at anyone who claimed to be a historian and proposed to present a "true account" of the Revolutionary War, but included only an account of the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Yet that is exactly what Jennings had done; for he had proposed to present a "true account" of the Nashville discussion, but instead of a true account, the public was treated to no account at all, rather an attack on "Campbellism." Campbell thought the title was a false label designed to sell a spurious product.

After observing that Jennings had described him with such terms as "ungrateful to Presbyterians, sinister in design, a false accuser, a disguised infidel, a false teacher, a mere natural man, unregenerate, unitarian, and deceitful,"[23]

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[22] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1832, 432.

[23] Ibid., 1832, 424.

Campbell singled out three specific charges to answer. First, Jennings had charged Campbell with ingratitude to Presbyterians. Yet, Campbell had not even been a member of the Presbyterian Church since leaving Glasgow, Scotland, more than twenty years earlier. His father had served Presbyterianism faithfully in Ireland, sacrificing in behalf of that body. Since Presbyterianism had never bestowed any favors upon him, how could Campbell be guilty of ingratitude? True, the congregation where Thomas Campbell had preached in Ireland assisted the family when they were shipwrecked as they attempted to join their father in America; and if that incident was the basis for the charge of ingratitude, Campbell offered to make restitution. If the Presbyterians would calculate how much he owed them, he would gladly preach two-hour sermons in their buildings until the full amount was settled at the rate of six dollars per sermon. And why was the rate six dollars? That was the average sum Thomas Campbell had received for each sermon he had preached as a Presbyterian minister in Ireland!

Second, Jennings accused Campbell of being sinister in his designs. Specifically, he had left the Presbyterian Church and launched the Restoration Movement for financial motives. Refutation of this charge was simple. For nineteen years (1811-1830) prior to the Nashville debate Campbell had preached regularly; yet, though he spent considerable sums in connection with his preaching, he had received absolutely no earthly remuneration for his work! Throughout his life Campbell followed a youthful resolution never to accept pay for his preaching. Campbell's disgust with the clergy of his day prompted publication of several articles in the **Christian Baptist** attacking their mercenary spirit; and they retaliated by accusing him of preaching for the money involved, when there was none. This second charge was, therefore, absolutely without foundation.

Third, Jennings charged Campbell with being a false

accuser and making reckless untrue statements throughout the debate. Strangely, though the plaintiff was a lawyer, the charge did not include a single specific illustration. Campbell replied that the charge could never be proved and proceeded with a brief review of the whole course of events in Nashville.

Only one attack made by Jennings' book was considered by Campbell to be worthy of serious and lengthy refutation. This was the attack on **Living Oracles,** a version of the New Testament which Campbell had published in the spring of 1827. The new version was actually a compilation of earlier work done by three famous British scholars, Doddridge, Macknight, and Campbell, to which Alexander Campbell added critical notes and helps for students of the Bible. This work holds the distinction of being the first English version completely rendered in the common vernacular, hence antedating our modern speech translations by more than a century. Publication of this work brought criticisms from all sides, even though many outstanding scholars commended Campbell's work. Most Presbyterians were piqued because Campbell had rendered baptize by the term "immerse," thus eliminating the possibility of sprinkling; and Baptists, though rejoicing in immersion, were irritated at finding themselves translated out of the New Testament when John the Baptist became "John the immerser."

Jennings had criticized **Living Oracles** severely in his book, and Campbell devoted three essays in the **Harbinger** to an examination of these charges. These essays were of necessity technical studies, devoted to such themes as the antecedent of "it is the gift of God" in Eph. 2:8, the rendering "assembly" for the Greek term **"ekklesia"** (church), and the rendering of "immersion" for **"baptizo."**

What opposition Campbell's effort to give Americans a vernacular version had aroused! As the curtain closed on

the Campbell-Jennings debate, the Harbinger's editor wrote, "If we were to be covered in parchment, scrolled over in the finest hand, the mantle would not contain the opprobrious epithets, hard speeches, and slanderous imputations which have been uttered against us for this our daring contempt of the authority of the Long Parliament, and the Court of St. James I. "[24]

[24] Ibid., 535.

CHAPTER VIII

Influence of the Debates

Whether a religious debate is productive of permanent good or whether it degenerates into a pious brawl is determined, to a large extent, by the spirit in which it is conducted and the character of the men who represent the opposing parties. Any religious discussion which is the outgrowth of denominational bitterness, and in which the participants are struggling for the glory of a personal triumph over an avowed enemy and not for a truth which transcends party lines, magnifies party bitterness and results in more harm than good to the community. To produce real and lasting good, debates must be conducted on a higher plane; they must be regarded as investigations in which divergent opinions strive mutually for the common goal of truth. Participants in such a debate must be more than personalities striving for the laurel crown of victory; they must consider the attainment of truth as a greater good than personal triumph and must be sufficiently influential leaders to infuse this philosophic attitude through the ranks of devoted partisan followers.

Alexander Campbell was an ideal controversialist; and though some of the bitterest criticism during a critical dogmatic period in American religious history was hurled at the movement with which Campbell was associated, he refused to permit his utterances to be dragged down to a plane of party bitterness. Consequently, his eminence in the field of religious controversy has been acknowledged by all, friend and foe alike. A disciple of his, C. E. Lemmon,

regards Campbell as supreme in the field of public debate, which was an accepted means of discussion during his age and one which the great Reformer used advantageously in promoting the views of the Restoration. Campbell's debates "brought him fame that was nation-wide. He was probably the most gifted debater which our American religious life has produced."[1] The great Baptist historian, A. H. Newman has paid the following tribute to Campbell's ability as a debater:

> Alexander Campbell was a man of fair education and of unbounded confidence in his resources and tenets. He was possessed of a powerful personality and was one of the ablest debaters of his age. In the use of caricature and sarcasm he has rarely been surpassed. Throughout the regions that he chose for the propagation of his views, the number of Baptist ministers who could in any way approach him in argumentative power or in ability to sway the masses of the people, was very small.[2]

One of the most outspoken opponents of the Restoration Movement was Jeremiah Jeter, famous for his controversy with Moses Lard, but even he acknowledged that Campbell's debates obtained more prestige for the leader of the movement than any other single factor. "By his fearless and forcible defense of the distinctive sentiments of the Baptists, in his debates with Messrs. Walker and Maccalla, he secured extensively the confidence and esteem of the denomination."[3]

Campbell's superiority as a public defender of his tenets

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[1] C. E. Lemmon, "An Estimate of Alexander Campbell," **The Christian-Evangelist,** LXXVI (September 8, 1938), 970f.

[2] Quoted in Gates, **Early Relation And Separation of Baptists And Disciples;** 85.

[3] Idem.

may be explained partly in terms of the natural speaking abilities with which he was gifted. Campbell's mind was richly endowed for the public platform; he was able to think in terms of broad generalizations and comprehensive propositions, to reason with an amazing nimbleness and accuracy, to perceive readily the fundamentals of a proposition and to confine his arguments to these fundamentals, ignoring the irrelevant. As a public speaker Campbell was highly regarded; his was an eloquence produced by a broad vocabulary, vast reading in all the best literature from the ancient classics to that of his own day, an apparent sincerity, and striking personality.

Among the many prominent individuals who have described the impression which Campbell's sermons made upon them is Jeremiah S. Black, one time Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Black particularly suggests the basis of Campbell's ability as a speaker:

> The interest which he excited in a large congregation can hardly be explained. The first sentence of his discourse "drew audience still as death," and every word was heard with rapt attention to the close. It did not appear to be eloquence; it was not the enticing words of man's wisdom; the arts of the orator seemed to be inconsistent with the simplicity of his character. It was logic, explanation and argument so clear that everybody followed without an effort, and all felt that it was raising them to the level of a superior mind. Persuasion sat upon his lips. Prejudice melted away under the easy flow of his elocution. The clinching fact was always in its proper place, and the fine poetic illustration was ever at hand to shed its light on the theme. But all this does not account for the impressiveness of his speeches, and no analysis of them can give any idea of their power.[4]

[4] Quoted in Archibald McLean, Alexander **Campbell as a Preacher** (St. Louis, 1908), 10f.

James Madison, famous president of the United States, wrote, "It was my pleasure to hear him very often as a preacher of the Gospel, and I regarded him as the ablest and most original expounder of the Scriptures I have ever heard."

A recognition of Campbell's native abilities is not sufficient, however, to explain fully his eminence as a debater; for in addition to these faculties, an asset of equal importance was his practical realization of the true nature of religious controversy. To him a religious debate was entirely different from a fight; it was a quest for truth in which the participants were mutual searchers. Truth to him was more important than personal triumph. After the Campbell-Purcell debate the Catholic prelate considered his opponent the fairest man in debate of whom he could possibly conceive, one who fought always for truth and never for victory. According to Purcell, Campbell never misrepresented his case or attempted to hide its weaknesses through subterfuge, but rather stated the issues clearly and preferred to encounter defeat rather than obtain victory through infamous means. Campbell attempted to keep his mind open always to the possibility of new truths, and admitted in his discussion with Robert Owen, "More than once, even when in debate, I have been convicted of the truth and force of the argument of an opponent." For many years Campbell had pursued an independent course in religion, rejecting his most honored traditions if unable to satisfy himself of their apostolic origin; and it was his willingness to carry this intellectual freedom of inquiry to the public platform, along with his natural abilities, which raised the Sage of Bethany to a high pinnacle in the realm of religious controversy.

When religious debates are conducted in the manner which Campbell believed should characterize them, such discussions are productive of good. An effort will be made

in this chapter to outline some of the important results of the Campbell debates.

GROWTH OF THE MOVEMENT

Campbell's great success as a debater added immeasurably to his personal prestige and to that of the movement which he was leading. Such prestige was sorely needed by the newly-born Restoration Movement, and Campbell's debates influenced the public toward a more favorable consideration of the Restoration plea. In studying Campbell's overall influence, one of America's greatest church historians has written:

> No estimate of Alexander Campbell's influence is complete without some mention of his great debates, especially those with Robert Owen and the Catholic Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati. The debates with the Presbyterian champions over the questions of immersion may be passed over as simply typical of the time, and of no great lasting significance, but his defense of Christianity in his debate with Owen and of the Protestant position in his debates with Bishop Purcell marked him as the great champion of Protestantism in the West. They gave him a significance far outside his own denominational followers, as the frequent references to them in the periodicals of other religious bodies clearly indicate.[5]

The popular prestige which Campbell enjoyed as a result of his debates is well exemplified by a Vermont newspaper editor, who wrote, attempting to explain "Campbellism" to his readers, "This term is used to designate the doctrines of Alexander Campbell, well known for his dispute with Mr. Owen, on the evidences of Christianity."[6]

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[5] William Warren Sweet, "Campbell's Position in Church History," **The Christian-Evangelist,** LXXVI (September 3, 1938), 970.

[6] **Vermont Chronicle;** quoted in **Millennial Harbinger,** 1830, 117.

These churches which felt the sting of Campbell's polemic power added to his prestige when they methodically honored his opponents. When his last opponent, N. L. Rice, was granted an honorary D. D., Campbell reported the event in the **Millennial Harbinger,** suggesting that the doctorate was conferred to cover the scars which Rice had received at Lexington. "We are always pleased and feel ourselves honored by the theological promotion of our opponents." Campbell wrote, "The Rev. Maccalla was dubbed D. D. after his debate with me, and even Dr. Purcell is a Bishop much nearer the Papal throne since than before his victory at Cincinnati."[7]

The prestige which Campbell won for the Restoration Movement through his debates was greatly beneficial in obtaining a more sympathetic study of its plea, but a more direct manner in which the discussions added to the strength of the movement was in the number of converts which they made to Campbell's views. In each case the debates were attended by thousands of interested auditors, and when published the arguments were weighed by thousands more. Campbell's speeches in print were especially strong, and it can hardly be doubted that when given a wide circulation they converted many to the Restoration plea. Campbell had foreseen this possibility, preparing and presenting his arguments in each debate with the reading public as clearly in view as the listening audience. This practice was occasionally a handicap in the oral debates as Campbell's long arguments and copious proofs often appeared pedantic and lost the interest of part of his audience; however, Campbell's forethought is completely vindicated when one considers the influence of the published debates. Throughout his speeches Campbell seized every possible opportunity to advocate a return to apostolic Christianity, and as these pleas were circulated throughout the nation in book form,

[7] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1849, 650.

they were a powerful stimulus in the growth of the Restoration Movement. Campbell's concern for the vast reading public though occasionally a handicap, more often did not detract from the power of his speeches as they were delivered orally, and after each debate Campbell claimed that a number had been converted by his arguments. Periodicals throughout the Christian brotherhood delighted in publishing accounts of those who had been convinced by the debates of their leader, and in most cases the conversions reported were those of prominent individuals or even ministers.

The first two of Campbell's five debates, those with John Walker and W. L. Maccalla, are the least important when one considers the character of his opposition and their local interest, as contrasted with the nation-wide publicity which he received as a result of his later debates; but from the standpoint of their contribution to the growth of the Restoration Movement, the Walker and Maccalla debates are vitally important. In 1820 and 1823 the movement was still in its formative stages, Campbell was still recognized as a Baptist champion, and the influence which he obtained among Baptist churches through his powerful defense of their principles was not equalled by his later more prominent discussions. After the schism between the Christians and Baptists had become final, Campbell lost the opportunity to disseminate his views among the Baptist churches, an opportunity which had been created by their gratitude for his success in the Walker and Maccalla debates. The Owen debate came as the division between Christians and Baptists was becoming a reality, and those with Purcell and Rice occurred after the churches had become an independent religious body. Consequently the three later debates, though attracting nationwide attention, presented Campbell with no such opportunity to spread his views through a large and receptive Protestant denomination, as the first two discussions had done.

The Walker debate in 1820 was a very brief affair, but in this discussion Campbell had been particularly intent upon "sowing broadcast the seeds of truth in the minds of the serious and inquisitive portion of the auditory."[8] His success is indicated by the public response to the debate, for after a first edition of 1,000 copies had come from the press, a second was soon demanded. Almost immediately Campbell began receiving numerous invitations to visit Baptist churches in eastern Ohio, where the discussion had been conducted.

The distinction which Campbell drew in this debate between the covenants was considered by some Baptists as heresy in their champion, but there were many others who received it gladly and began pleading for the Restoration. Among these were two Baptist preachers of Warren, Ohio, Adamson Bentley and Sidney Rigdon, the former becoming an outstanding figure in the movement's progress in Ohio, the latter deserting it a few years later for Mormonism. During the summer of 1821 these two preachers, having read the Campbell-Walker debate visited Campbell as they travelled near his home on business for the recently formed Mahoning Baptist Association. When he learned of their interest in the views which he had advanced in the debate with Walker, he gladly consented to discuss any matters of mutual interest, and all three became so engrossed in the discussion that it continued throughout the night. Campbell has described the results of this conversation as follows:

> Beginning with the baptism that John preached, we went back to Adam and forward to the final judgment. The dispensations—Adamic, Abrahamic, Jewish and Christian—passed and repassed before us. Mount Sinai in Arabia, Mount Zion, Mount Tabor, the Red Sea and the Jordan, the Passovers and the Pentecosts,

[8] Ibid, 1848, 552.

the Law and the Gospel, but especially the ancient order of things and the modern, occasionally engaged our attention.

On parting the next day, Sidney Rigdon, with all apparent candor, said, if he had within the last year taught and promulgated from the pulpit one error, he had a thousand. At that time he was the great orator of the Mahoning Association, though in authority with the people second always to Adamson Bentley. I found it expedient to caution them not to begin to pull down anything they had builded until they reviewed again and again what they had heard; nor even then rashly and without much consideration. Fearing they might undo their influence with the people, I felt constrained to restrain rather than to urge them on in the work of Reformation.

With many an invitation to visit the Western Reserve, and with many an assurance of a full and candid hearing on the part of the uncommitted community, and an immediate access to the ears of the Baptist churches within the sphere of their influence, we took the parting hand. They went on their way rejoicing, and in the course of a single year prepared their whole Association to hear us with earnestness and candor.[9]

When the separation from the Baptists became final in 1830 the Mahoning Association was dissolved as an unscriptural organization and all the churches took their stand for the restoration of primitive Christianity. Many men and numerous events contributed to this final end, but a first cause may be traced to the acceptance by prominent leaders of the Association of the views which Campbell had announced in his debate with John Walker.

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[9] Ibid., 1848, 523.

Even greater results were attained by the Campbell-Maccalla debate three years later, for the beginning of the Restoration Movement in Kentucky, a state in which it was destined to gain such pronounced strength, may be dated from 1823. When Campbell arrived in Washington, Kentucky, for the discussion, he was a complete stranger to most of the Baptist preachers of the state; he had purposely withheld the **Christian Baptist,** which had appeared earlier that year, from the state until after the discussion with Maccalla.

After the fourth day of the debate he had secured the complete confidence of all the Baptist preachers in attendance, and that evening, when all the prominent Baptist ministers of the state chanced to be visiting in Campbell's room, their champion thought it expedient to inform them of his sentiments concerning apostolic Christianity. "Brethren, I fear that if you knew me better, you would esteem and love me less. For, let me tell you, in all candor, that I have almost as much against you Baptists as I have against the Presbyterians," he announced seriously. "They err in one thing, and you in another; and probably you are each nearly equidistant from the original apostolic Christianity."[10] After an ensuing silence Elder Vardeman, Campbell's moderator and a prominent Kentucky Baptist, requested Campbell to outline his objections to Baptist faith, holding back nothing. Instead Campbell produced a number of copies of the Christian Baptist and read two essays, one criticizing the miraculous call to the ministry and another on the mistakes of missionaries. After the second had been completed, Elder Vardeman spoke, "I am not so great a missionary man as to fall out with you on that subject. I must hear more before I condemn or approve."" Campbell then distributed

[10] Ibid., 1848, 614.

[11] Ibid., 1848, 615.

copies of his paper among the ten most distinguished ministers present, requesting them to read it carefully and freely raise their objections. Thus was the Restoration Movement born in Kentucky!

These Baptist leaders were so elated at the manner in which Campbell had silenced their arch-critic Maccalla that he received their unanimous approbation and a pressing invitation to undertake an immediate tour of the Baptist churches throughout the state. Other responsibilities made such a tour impossible in 1823, and after visiting a few communities in central Kentucky, including Lexington where he made a profound impression, Campbell promised to attempt a more pretentious tour the following autumn. During the extended visit of 1824 he preached in many Kentucky Baptist churches and was enthusiastically received everywhere. The newly acclaimed champion of the Baptists had invited objections to the Christian Baptist, but these were so few and superficial that within a year following the Maccalla debate Kentucky had furnished a thousand subscribers to Campbell's periodical and five times that many interested readers.[12] The published debate too had a permanent influence, sowing everywhere the seeds of reformation among Baptist churches. It was not until 1843 that Alexander Campbell entered his second public debate in Kentucky, but during the two intervening decades Christian preachers had reaped a bounteous harvest from the seeds which Campbell had planted during the Maccalla debate and through his dynamic essays in the Christian Baptist.

POPULARITY OF CONTROVERSY

In addition to their influence in promoting the growth of the Restoration Movement, the debates of Alexander

[12] Idem.

Campbell resulted in the permanent establishment of public controversy as a popularly accepted medium of finding and disseminating truth among his followers. Campbell's recognized leadership was the solidifying force in the movement, and when he fully accepted public debates, lesser figures in the movement were quick to follow. For more than a century the true intellectual heirs of Campbell have followed in this course which he outlined and have always been ready to contend earnestly and honestly for their faith.

It will be remembered that when Campbell was asked in 1819 to defend the Baptist principles against John Walker, he was quite reluctant to enter the field of religious controversy, and for six months he continued to ignore the invitation. "I declined having any thing to do with it, in the opinion that it was not the proper method of proceeding in contending for 'the faith once delivered to the saints,'" Campbell wrote in explaining his early attitude. "It then seemed to me to be rather carnal than spiritual, and better calculated to excite passions than to allay them."[13] Elder John Birch who had become involved in the controversy with Walker was persistent in his efforts to obtain Campbell as the Baptist representative, and after two letters had gone unanswered, he addressed a third request to the young minister, writing:

> I once more undertake to address you by letter; as we are commanded not to weary in well-doing, I am disposed to persevere. I am coming this third time unto you. I cannot persuade myself that you will refuse to attend to the dispute with Mr. Walker; therefore I do not feel disposed to complain because you have sent me no answer. True, I have expected an answer, signifying your acceptance of the same. I am as yet disappointed, but am not offended nor dis-

[13] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1848, 522.

couraged. I can truly say it is the unanimous wish of all the church to which I belong that you should be the disputant.[14]

In this reluctance to enter a religious debate Campbell was probably influenced by the convictions of his father, who believed that no practical good could result from such public controversy. At length friends convinced Alexander Campbell that a debate with Walker would provide an unsurpassed opportunity for spreading the Restoration plea, and after he had persuaded his father that regardless of how controversies over human opinions were to be reprobated, no valid objection could be raised against a public vindication of revealed truth, he consented to enter the discussion with Walker. This debate had a powerful influence upon Campbell as well as upon his hearers, for any lingering doubts as to the utility of controversy were quickly dissipated. Finding for the first time in public debate a sphere in which his full mental powers could be exercised in the discovery of new truth and in the overthrow of imposture and error, he was so delighted with the experience that at the close of the short debate he issued a challenge, offering to discuss the same propositions with any other advocate of infant sprinkling. The most important convert in the Walker debate was Alexander Campbell, his conversion being to a realization of the unprecedented opportunities offered by public debate for the propagation of the Restoration plea. Several years after the debate with John Walker, Campbell wrote, "It was not until after I discovered the effects of that discussion that I began to hope that something might be done to rouse this generation from its supineness and spiritual lethargy."[15]

After 1820 Campbell always wrote enthusiastically of

[14] Quoted in Richardson, **Memoirs of Campbell, II,** 15f.

[15] **Christian Baptist,** July 5, 1830, 661.

the good which could be accomplished through public debates, properly conducted. In November, 1824, he delivered an address in the Chamber of the Representatives of Kentucky to which a Presbyterian clergyman of Louisville, Dr. Blackburn, took exception, declaring publicly that in a sermon he had destroyed the principles Campbell had advocated. Campbell in turn suggested that the two men debate the controverted issue, adding that "public discussion, conducted with moderation and good temper, is of all means the best adapted to elicit inquiry and exhibit truth."[16] In his preface to the Maccalla debate Campbell published a vindication of public discussion, maintaining that all who deprecated controversy were either poorly informed or conscious that their beliefs would not bear a critical investigation.[17] Controversy was inevitable, and the only problem was how it should be conducted to attain the greatest possible good. His solution embodies the ideal in Christian discussion:

> To the controversies recorded in the New Testament we must appeal, as furnishing an answer to this question. They were in general public, open, plain, and sometimes sharp and severe. But the disputants who embrace the truth in those controversies, never lost the spirit of truth in the heat of conflict; but with all calmness, moderation, firmness, and benevolence, they wielded the sword of the spirit; and their controversies when recorded by impartial hands, breathe a heavenly sweetness, that so refreshes the intelligent reader, that he often forgets the controversy, in admiration of the majesty of truth, the benevolence and purity of their hearts.[18]

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[16] Ibid., August 1, 1825, 176.

[17] **Campbell-Maccalla Debate,** iii.

[18] **Campbell-Maccalla Debate,** iv.

When Campbell began publication of the **Millennial Harbinger,** he included an essay in the first volume, arguing that controversy is the basis of improvement. "Improvement requires and presupposes change; change in innovation, and innovation always has elicited opposition, and that is what constitutes the essentials of controversy."[19] In reminding his readers of the inconsistency of opposition to religious controversy, Campbell wrote:

> Many good men whose whole lives have been one continued struggle with themselves, one continued warfare against error and iniquity, have reprobated religious controversy as a great and manifold evil to the combatants and to society. Although engaged in a real controversy, they know it not; but supposed that they only were controversialists who were in debates and discussions often. Had they reflected but a moment, they would have discovered that no man can be a good man who does not oppose error and immorality in himself, his family, his neighborhood, and in society as far as he can reach, and that he cannot oppose it successfully only by argument, or as some would say by word and deed—by precept and by example.[20]

Were religious controversy wrong as many contended, this fact "would unchristianize every distinguished Patriarch, Jew and Christian enrolled in the sacred annals of the world. For who of the Bible's great and good men was not engaged in religious controversy!"[21] The defender of Christianity against Robert Owen then concluded, "Let the opponents of controversy, or those who **controvert controversy,** remember, that had there been no controversy,

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[19] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1830, 40.

[20] Idem.

[21] Ibid., 1830, 41.

neither the Jewish nor the Christian religion could have ever been achieved." [22]

As a result of his publication of such essays, it has sometimes been represented that after Campbell had realized his vast natural abilities in the sphere of public debate, he became the victim of a consuming desire for the glory of public triumph over an intellectual foe, seizing every opportunity to add new laurels to his record. Such an assumption finds no support in the historical evidence. After his first two debates in 1820 and 1823 Mr. Campbell was engaged for almost forty years in publicly advocating the necessity of restoring apostolic Christianity; he was the outstanding leader of a zealous and aggressive religious movement; yet he participated in but three important religious discussions. Certainly if he had been seeking hypocritically the personal glory of triumphs on the public platform, he could have found many willing but foolish adversaries over whom an easy victory could have been won.

While it is true that Campbell engaged in some minor debates which are not discussed in this volume,[23] it is also true that he declined many opportunities for public debate where an easy triumph might have been gained at the expense of an incompetent but arrogant opponent. Campbell believed that unless a polemical opponent was a qualified scholar, and one who had received the endorsement of his particular denomination, no good results would accrue to the Restoration Movement through debate.

An excellent illustration of this attitude is Campbell's reply to a public challenge which he received from John

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[22] Ibid., 1830, 42.

[23] These include a number of written debates which appeared in the **Millennial Harbinger** and other religious journals and an oral debate with a skeptic, Doctor Underhill, in Cleveland, Ohio during June, 1836. This is the same Doctor Underhill whom Campbell refused to debate before his discussion with Robert Owen.

Bryce of Georgetown, Kentucky, dated March 31, 1831. Bryce introduced the challenge, which was republished in the Harbinger, by stating that it had been rumored that he was unwilling to debate Campbell, fearing that the tetter's arguments would prove too strong. He then wrote,

> Now, to convince you, and the religious world, that this is a mistake, I propose to Bishop Alexander Campbell, to meet him at any city on the Ohio River between Louisville and Cincinnati, or at either of those places, and publicly discuss with him the doctrine of the Remission of Sins in Baptism—Him and myself mutually agreeing on the time.[24]

Campbell replied with four reasons explaining why he would not consent to meet Bryce. (1) He had never consented to meet any man in debate simply to allow him an opportunity to escape the charge of cowardice; yet Bryce's desire to disprove the rumor that he feared to debate Campbell was the only reason which he assigned for issuing the challenge. (2) Campbell wrote, "I cannot consent to contend with any man who writes English which I cannot parse; and I must confess that all the rules of the English syntax will not enable me to parse even the words of the challenge.' (3) Campbell feared that a victory over Bryce would achieve nothing, since his own brethren had little confidence in hh ability. (4) Bryce could present his criticisms through th(press, and Campbell could reply if he deemed them worthy of attention.

The other great leader of the Restoration Movement Barton W. Stone, occupied quite a different position in regard to public debates, viewing them with as much criticise as Alexander Campbell did with commendation. In its es sence the movement had emphasized two great principles the union of all believers in Christ and the restoration o

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[24] **Millennial Harbinger,** 1831, 189.

apostolic Christianity, principles which were found in actual practice to be mutually antagonistic. Throughout his career Stone remained a great spiritual leader and continued to emphasize the union of all believers as the great goal of the Restoration Movement, caring little for the discussion of doctrinal differences.[25]

Stone's opposition to public debates was voiced in a controversy with John Moreland, a preacher who attempted to force him into such a discussion. Moreland wrote a tract in which he charged that Stone had agreed to debate him and then had refused through intellectual cowardice. Stone replied with a tract, **A Letter to Mr. John Moreland in Reply to His Pamphlet,** in which he stated, "I ever stood opposed to such debates, considering them as a species of ecclesiastical duelling, degrading to the character of a gospel minister."[26] This is not to say that Barton Stone was unwilling to defend his convictions, for he suggested that ministers holding divergent views speak before the same congregation and give the audience an opportunity to weigh both sides of the question at issue, or discuss their differences through the religious press. It was the public debate specifically which received Stone's criticism as being antagonistic to the Christian spirit and productive of partisan bitterness. It is probably fortunate for Barton Stone personally and for the Restoration Movement as a whole that he did not participate in public debates. Stone had not been blessed with the natural abilities in public debate with which Alexander Campbell was endowed; he had neither the logical mind nor the educational background to enable him to meet successfully a skilled antagonist. Barton W. Stone contributed far more to the Restoration Movement as a great spiritual leader than would have been possible

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[25] Moore, **Comprehensive History Of The Disciples Of Chris!,** 401f.

[26] Quoted in Fortune, **The Disciples In Kentucky,** 135.

had he chosen to appear as a public defender of the movement.[27]

Whereas Barton Stone emphasized the unity of all believers in Christ, Alexander Campbell's stress was upon the other aspect of the Restoration plea, the re-establishment of first century Christianity. Following' this goal to its logical conclusion, he condemned all practices which he believed without scriptural authority and found himself in conflict with the religious world generally. After being convinced of their utility, he gladly engaged in public debates in defense of his convictions, and it is this precedent which has been followed throughout the Restoration Movement rather than the opposition to debates voiced by Barton Stone. For more than a century gospel preachers have regarded the Campbell debates as sterling examples of what may be accomplished through controversy and have participated in thousands of debates in defense of their convictions. Many of these discussions have been productive of good in eliciting truth and clarifying issues; others have degenerated into bitter wrangles, fought in the name of Christianity. This controversial spirit has permeated throughout the ranks of Christians, and few religious groups have been characterized by a greater willingness to discuss and defend their views of religion. From the rural frontier area to the thriving metropolis Christians have gloried in their appeal to an open Bible. For better or for worse, the Campbell debates furnished a strong precedent for more than a century of religious controversy.

RESTORATION OF A METHOD

Since the Restoration Movement was a search for both the spirit and letter of New Testament Christianity, it could never have achieved its purpose without some consideration of the methods employed by the Master Teacher

[27] Fortune, **The Disciples In Kentucky,** 135.

and his disciples in spreading" the truth in the first century. Public controversy was certainly one of these methods, for Christ and the apostles often engaged in such controversies. The emphasis which the Restoration Movement has placed upon controversy might, therefore, be termed the "restoration of a method;" for the controversial spirit which has characterized churches of Christ from Campbell's day to the present is certainly in complete harmony with the spirit of apostolic Christianity.

This modernistic twentieth century attitude which refuses and reprobates controversy stands in sharp contrast with the spirit of Him who is ever our example and guide. True, Christ often displayed a spirit of compassion and love which transcends description; yet on other occasions he demonstrated the fire of argumentative ability and zeal which routed critics, leaving him the Master of every encounter. When the Herodians proposed a discussion of Jews' responsibilities toward the Roman government, Christ replied, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The Herodians marvelled and departed in silence to be followed by the Sadducees, who attempted to present dilemma which would make the resurrection an impossibility. The Lord replied, "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but the living."

Finally, the Pharisees, when they learned that Christ had silenced the Saducees, came with the question, "What is the great commandment in the law?" The answer was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two

commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets." This reply silenced the Pharisees, and from that day forward, Christ's enemies dared ask him no further questions. The Master Teacher had met all of the major Jewish sects of his day, the Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees, had skillfully answered their favorite arguments, and remained the complete master, having transformed them from vocal controversialists into silent impotent critics! (Matt. 22:15-45) This is our example, that we should follow in his steps!

The apostolic history abounds with illustrations of controversy. Stephen disputed with the Jews so successfully that they were unable to withstand his wisdom and furiously turned to violence when argument had failed, stoning their antagonist. Controversy had produced the church's first martyr! Paul confounded the Jews of Damascus, proving that Jesus was the Christ. In Antioch he "spoke out boldly" when the Jews attacked the truth of Christianity and was driven from the city for his efforts. His reputation was such that in Thessalonica it was shouted of the early preachers, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." Yet, these early preachers are supposed to furnish the inspiration for the compromising, soothing, doctrine-denouncing preaching which now masquerades under the guise of Christianity.

Alexander Campbell, convinced that true Christians had always been under obligation to contend earnestly for their faith, recognized that such contending would produce violent opposition. When he began the **Millennial Harbinger,** critics in one city subscribed funds to form an organization for opposing the paper. Campbell learned of their efforts and wrote,

> No man ever achieved any great good to mankind who did not wrest it with violence through ranks of opponents—who did not fight for it with courage and perseverance, and who did not, in the conflict, sacrifice

> either his good name or his life. John, the harbinger of the Messiah, lost his head. The Apostles were slaughtered. The Savior was crucified. The ancient confessors were slain. The reformers all have been excommunicated. I know that we shall do little good if we are not persecuted. If I am not traduced, slandered, and misrepresented, I shall be a most unworthy advocate of that cause which has always provoked the resentment of those who have fattened upon the ignorance and superstition of the mass, and have been honored by the stupidity and sottishness of those who cannot think and will not learn.[28]

The pioneers of the Restoration Movement, therefore, considered themselves honored when they were attacked and persecuted for their faith in the ancient gospel; for enemies of Christianity had attacked multitudes before them. The opportunity to contend for their faith against such attacks was more than an opportunity; it was a responsibility. This attitude toward controversy, though diametrically opposed to twentieth century attitudes, is the only attitude which reflects an appreciation for the true spirit of apostolic Christianity. And it is this attitude which restores the spirit and soul of New Testament Christianity!

CRYSTALLIZATION OF ATTITUDES

One of the most important results of Alexander Campbell's debating, and to a lesser extent that of other leaders, was the clear definition of the principles for which the Christians stood and the crystallization of their religious convictions. Public debate is the fiery crucible from which ideas emerge with the certification of truth or with the brand of falsehood. Few ideas not based upon a foundation of truth can long survive the critical examinations of op-

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[28] **Millennial Harbinger**, 1830, 8.

ponents unless defended by clever and sophistical adherents. Throughout his life Campbell had been accustomed to examining his beliefs with the greatest possible impartiality, willing to reject any tradition which investigation revealed devoid of scriptural authority, regardless of how ancient or honored. Entering public controversy with this background of critical study, it is but natural that Campbell's religious convictions should be molded by his five great discussions; for any public figure's mind must be more critical, more logical on the public platform of controversy than at any other time. Campbell rejoiced in the truth of those positions which proved invulnerable to the formidable attacks of learned opponents, abandoned those ideas which proved difficult or impossible to defend, and in the intellectual test of public debate caught occasional glimpses of new beacons of truth. Thus the vigorous and scathing attacks of opponents played an important role in determining those ideas which the Christians regarded as true.

An excellent illustration of the manner in which, out of the ordeal of controversy, a new conviction was born and matured among Campbell and his followers is the doctrine of baptism for the remission of sins. The design of baptism, now of paramount importance among Christians, was first glimpsed by Campbell in the Walker debate, announced in the Maccalla debate, and publicly defended in the discussion with Rice. In June, 1812, Thomas and Alexander Campbell had been immersed, regarding this as the scriptural act of baptism, but without any clear conception of its purpose. It was not until his debate with John Walker, eight years later, that Alexander Campbell first suggested the idea that baptism was in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins. He stated to the audience at Mt. Pleasant, "Baptism is connected with the promise of the remissions of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit."[29]

[29] **Campbell-Walker Debate,** 13.

There was no elaboration of this novel position, probably because Campbell had not considered its consequences; yet here in public debate was the first statement of a doctrine which widened the schism between Campbell and the Baptists and is today one of the distinctive doctrines of those who still advocate a return to apostolic Christianity.

Three years later In his debate with W. L. Maccalla, Campbell further elaborated on the idea that baptism achieves the forgiveness of sins. This was still a novel idea, but Campbell announced it with a conviction which indicated that abundant study had been devoted to the topic during the intervening three years. He stated:

> I know it will be said that I have affirmed that baptism **"saves us,"** that it **"washes away sins."** Well, Peter and Paul have said so before me. If it was not criminal in them to say so, it cannot be criminal in me. When Ananias said unto Paul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord," I suppose Paul believed him, and arose, was baptized, and washed away his sins. When he was baptized he must have believed that his sins were now washed away in some sense that they were not before . . .
>
> To every believer, therefore, baptism is a **formal** and **personal remission,** or purgation of sins. The believer never has his sins formally washed away or remitted until he is baptized. The water has no efficacy but what God's appointment gives it, and he has made it sufficient for this purpose. The value and importance of baptism appears from this view of it. It also accounts for baptism being called the WASHING OF REGENERATION. It shows us a good, and valid reason for the dispatch with which this ordinance was administered in the primitive church.[30]

[30] **Campbell-Maccalla Debate,** 116f.

Five years after the Maccalla debate Campbell admitted in the Christian Baptist that a long hesitation had preceded his boldness in announcing this doctrine. He wrote:

> In my debate with Mr. Maccalla in Kentucky, 1823, on this topic, I contended that it was a divine institution designed for putting the legitimate subject of it in actual possession of the remission of his sins—That to every believing subject it did formally, and in fact, convey to him the forgiveness of sins. It was with much hesitation I presented this view of the subject at that time, because of its perfect novelty. I was then assured of its truth, and, I think, presented sufficient evidence of its certainty. But having thought still more closely upon the subject and having been necessarily called to consider it more fully as an essential part of the Christian religion. I am still better prepared to develop its import, and to establish its utility and value in the Christian religion.[31]

By 1843 when Campbell engaged in his final debate, that with Rice, the design of baptism had been generally accepted by his followers and was considered one of the distinctive tenets of the movement. This idea which had first appeared in the thinking of Campbell during the Walker debate was now sufficiently important to be listed as one of the six propositions for debate, Campbell affirming that "Christian baptism is for the remission of past sins." [32] The arguments which Campbell used to sustain this proposition were almost identical to those still being utilized today: the great commission; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21; and the design of John's baptism. Momentous changes had occurred in the thinking of Alexander Campbell between his youthful acceptance of infant

[31] **Christian Baptist,** January 7, 1828, 401.

[32] **Campbell-Rice Debate,** 47.

sprinkling and his statement to a Lexington audience:

> Baptism, my fellow-citizens, is no mere rite, no unmeaning ceremony, I assure you. It is a most intellectual, spiritual and sublime transition out of a sinful and condemned state, into a spiritual and holy state. It is a change of relation, not as respects the flesh, but the spirit. It is an introduction into the mystical body of Christ, by which he necessarily obtains the remission of his sins.[33]

As the period of Campbell's debates produced a crystallization of doctrines and faith among the Christians, so this general acceptance of certain fundamental doctrines tended in turn to separate the Christians further from other religious bodies. Thomas Campbell's original dream had been the unity of all believers in Christ, but his son's debates shattered this vision. The Restoration Movement had now become an independent religious body, still advocating a return to the Christianity of the first century, but presenting to the religious world for its acceptance a specific body of doctrines which had been tested in public debate and which the Christians sincerely believed was the embodiment of first century Christianity.

CRITICISMS OF DEBATING

Some prominent historians of the Restoration Movement, after a study of all the debates conducted by Campbell and many of his followers, have concluded that the evils produced during this controversial period outweigh the good which resulted from debating. The most prominent of these historians is W. T. Moore, and his enumeration of the evils of controversy is as follows:

(1) The debates were often about things that the

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[33] **Campbell-Rice Debate,** 442.

Disciples did not make conditions of fellowship . . .

(2) These debates tended to create a spirit of legalism by making the letter much and the spirit little. The constant appeal to the exact statements of Scripture, while right in itself, may be abused when transferred to the forum . . .

(3) Very generally these debates magnified the system of Christianity rather than the **author** of the system . . .

(4) While debates were intended to assist in bringing about Christian union, they frequently had the contrary effect by emphasizing a party spirit. Doubtless when they were conducted with an earnest desire on both sides to simply find out the truth, with respect to the matters discussed, then the result was in the interest of Christian union, because any union that is not based upon the truth cannot be regarded as of supreme value. But for the most part the debates of the period now under consideration were not conducted in the spirit of earnest inquiry, but rather with a view to partisan triumph . . .

(5) They often had a bad effect upon the unity and peace of the neighborhood . . .

(6) They were generally contests for party victory more than for the triumph of the truth. They stimulated a vicious method of studying the Scriptures by seeking to find those passages which seemed to sustain partyism . . .

(7) They generally ended with a victory proclaimed for each side, rather than a victory for the truth.[34]

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[34] Moore, **Comprehensive History Of The Disciples Of Christ,** 407ff.

However, if one is convinced of the truth of Campbell's plea that the greatest need of the religious world is the restoration of apostolic Christianity, these objections are minimized by the great accomplishments of Alexander Campbell's five debates. The Restoration Movement was born in controversy, flourished as supporter and critic discussed its relative merits, and was molded in the flaming crucible of public debate. His natural endowments and devotion to truth have elevated Alexander Campbell to a place of eminence among the religious disputants of American Christianity, and but for his ability and courage in controversy thousands of individuals during the past century might never have known the joy of pure New Testament Christianity!

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