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RESTORATION MOVEMENT

The Restoration Movement (RM), also known as the Stone-Campbell Movement, aimed to restore the church to apostolic purity by shedding all post-apostolic creedal, dogmatic, and institutional forms. Its goal was unity through a return to the essentials of Christianity, understood as that which is expressly taught in the Bible. RM churches characteristically refused all denominational labels, preferring to be known simply as Christians or Disciples. They also emphasized baptism by immersion as the objective basis for the assurance of salvation, in contrast to the focus on the conversion experience in the mainstream revivalist tradition.

The RM traces its roots to the leadership of Barton W. Stone (1772–1844) and Thomas (1763–1854) and Alexander Campbell (1788–1866). All began their ministries in Presbyterian churches. In 1801 Stone hosted the “Great Sacramental Observance” at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Subsequently, he and a group of disaffected Presbyterians who had been moved by the spiritual unity of the camp-meeting experience organized the “Springfield Presbytery,” a body that espoused some RM ideals. In 1804, its leaders wrote the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, dramatically declaring their intent “that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large.” Stone continued as the leader of this movement for the next couple of decades, resisting “partyism” and promoting reliance on the Bible alone. Meanwhile, the Campbells were espousing similar ideas and pressing for reform in Baptist circles through the 1810s and 1820s. Thomas Campbell had arrived in the US from Ireland in 1807, and was soon censured by his presbytery for his interdenominational activities. His *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (1809) is considered a foundational document for the RM. It condemns divisions on the basis of doctrines not expressly taught in the Bible, calls for return to a simple

confession of Christ as the basis for Christian unity, and pleads for love, understanding, and unity among Christians. In 1830, the Mahoning Baptist Association, in which Alexander Campbell was active, dissolved itself in the midst of a dispute about Campbell's views, marking the beginning of the Disciples as a truly independent movement. Alexander Campbell had met Stone in Kentucky in 1824, and the two men found that they shared many goals and ideals. On January 1, 1832, Stone's "Christians" and Campbell's "Disciples" united, forming a movement which became a powerful force in mid nineteenth-century American religion, growing from about 25,000 in 1832 to nearly 200,000 members in 1861.

The Stone-Campbell Movement was, however, marked by internal social, cultural, and theological tensions. These came to a head in the early twentieth century, when the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ became two separate streams of the Restoration tradition. Continuing ferment over doctrine and polity led to a further division of the Disciples stream, with 3500 congregations withdrawing in the late 1960s and early 1970s to form the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

The RM was an important part of nineteenth-century American religious history, and gave rise to a family of Christian churches with membership now numbering approximately 7 million, stretching across the spectrum of Protestant theological perspectives. While the movement's original quest for unity has been marred by internal strife, the Restorationist impulse remains alive, as evidenced in the Stone-Campbell Dialogue, begun in 1999. This initiative has fostered cooperation among the three streams, bearing fruit in joint scholarly publications, as well as a "Great Communion" in 2009 to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of Campbell's *Declaration and Address*.

References and Resources

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