

A Review Of The Search For The Ancient Order, Vol. 1

By Earl Irvin West

Beginning in the 16th century, men rebelled against the "established" religion of man, which was Roman Catholicism in its most corrupt state. This resistance began as the Reformation, however, it did not fully bloom until the 19th century when several restoration movements appeared. It was during this time that many began to thirst for New Testament Christianity and reject the doctrines and creeds of men. Earl Irvin West depicts this "restoration movement" in a four volume series of books entitled *The Search For The Ancient Order*.

In the first volume West examines the "back to the Bible" movement from 1800 through 1865. This time span covers the movement as it begins in earnest, the pioneering preachers and their progress, organization, and several other subjects. The book does a thorough job of bringing before the reader a detailed view of the struggle for Apostolic doctrine and practice by men who were fiercely independent in studying their way out of error. There were many turbulent times and much despair among the brotherhood, but a perseverance of the faithful preserved and promoted the hunger for the truth.

The groundwork that later aided in the return to the religion of Jesus Christ was laid partly in the early to late 1700's. In 1714 the first Baptists came to this country, settling in Virginia, and fifty years later, as they grew in number, they were persecuted by the Church of England. The "Established order" tried to silence preachers, but in at least one instance, failed. Two Baptist preachers were put on trial, and the famed Patrick Henry defended them. The account of the trial reads as follows,

"These men," he said [Henry, sfd], "are charged with--with--what?" In low, measured tones he continued, "preaching the gospel of the Son of God." He paused; waved the indictment above his head. The silence was painful. Then lifting his head and hands to the sky, he exclaimed, "Great God!!" The men were immediately dismissed [p. 2, emphasis mine, sfd].

Even though men were facing this type of persecution, the number of the "non-conformist" grew.

During the 1700's, the leaven was not only working among the Baptists,

but also within several other denominational groups including the Methodists. In December of 1784, there was a conference held by the Methodists in Baltimore. Their official creed and name, Methodist Episcopal Church, were adopted. Neither the government nor the name rested well with many preachers because they could see that the Bible pattern was not being followed. Men were realizing what the Bible taught and growing dissatisfied with what man had to offer.

The Cause of Christ progressed well through the mid-1800's. Congregations were being established in almost every state of the Union. By this time, in the east one can find a church in New York City with one hundred thirty members, and, out "west," twenty thousand Christians in the state of Ohio. Faithful preachers would rely upon their Bibles alone, with only a few knowing anything about philosophy, and almost exclusively delivering expository sermons. They were a brave and valiant breed which accepted no compromise. Hear the author,

The whole restoration movement soon took on the color of belligerency and aggressiveness. These pioneers believed in their cause, and they pressed on, wilting before no tribunal, but with the profound conviction they had the truth and that the truth, under God, would triumph (p. 127).

Shortly before the Civil War, the questions of slavery and carnal warfare arose among the brotherhood. There was discussion among the various papers, but no division. In fact, the Church of Christ was one of only a few religious bodies that did not divide over the issue of slavery. This is partly accredited to Alexander Campbell and others who observed that the Bible regulates the conduct of masters and slaves, but slavery itself is not condemned. It was noted that abuse of your fellow man is condemned, but that is another issue.

As with slavery, the majority of the prominent brethren stood together and condemned carnal warfare. They believed it to be against the religion of Jesus Christ, particularly "love thy neighbor as thyself." Though there were opposing views, the brotherhood remained in-tact.

There were several leading men who fought faithfully for many years to restore the ancient order. Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and Barton Stone were all very influential in establishing New Testament Christianity in the New World, but there are others we wish to notice. Walter Scott was a man of deep thought and had an analytical mind. As an evangelist on the Western Reserve for the Mahoning Baptist Association, Scott witnessed great response to the gospel of Christ. So

overwhelming was the response, Alexander Campbell doubted whether or not it was legitimate. This success did not go unnoticed by denominational people and other enemies of the Truth. Rather, much opposition was raised. "A woman requested baptism, but her son threatened to shoot Scott if he baptized her" (p. 84).

Along with his many good qualities, Walter Scott had some bad ones. He was a bit eccentric at times. He took great care of his voice, following different diets as he saw fit. This caused others to muse over his peculiarities. Hear James Challen, as quoted in the book,

Sometimes he would drink coffee, and then tea, and then water; and now and then milk. He was taking supper once with a good sister who had heard of his fondness for milk (he had just laid aside the lacteal diet and had gone back to coffee and tea), when she said, "Brother Scott, will you have a glass of milk?" "I thank you, sister. There is no music in a cow," said Walter, in his blindest way (p. 77).

Next, we wish to notice Jacob Creath, Jr., a man with a serious mind and blunt speech. On the third Lord's Day in June of 1817, Creath was asked to deliver his first sermon because the Baptist preacher who was scheduled was not present. "Nolly stood up and then spoke to Creath. 'Jacob, can't you preach for us today?'" "Jacob replied, 'No sir, I can not. What led you to ask me that question?'" (p. 119). Even when put on trial for heresy by the Great Crossings Baptist Church, Creath spoke plainly, using Paul's defense before Agrippa and Festus.

No one more bitterly opposed missionary societies and other human organizations to supplant the church than Jacob Creath, Jr. He was the first great opponent of human organizations....Likewise, he was an opponent to the use of instrumental music in the worship....Truly he was a mighty prince in Israel (p. 126).

Creath was a man of prayer. He would take a walk into the woods and pour out his soul to God. During the Civil War, Creath went out to pray in a place that had troops camped near the city of Palmyra, which they planned to overtake. The commander of the troops was near and listened to Creath's prayer in which he petitioned God for peace, his town, and his neighbors. The following day the troops retreated without an effort to besiege the town.

The last pioneer preacher we will look at, is Ben Franklin. He was a man of the Book. He did not feign to be a philosopher, story teller, or a

politician, but he was simply a gospel preacher, quoting profusely from the Word. Though preaching was his best quality, Franklin was also an able debater and editor.

Franklin was always in search of the ancient order, willing to give up anything that was not according to the pattern. When the Missionary Society was established in 1849, he supported it wholeheartedly. However, by 1866 he had changed his beliefs and stood squarely against it. And, like Creath, "Franklin was bitterly opposed to the use of instrumental music in the worship" (p. 107). His teaching influenced many to "ask for the old paths."

Problems arose in the restoration movement when the brethren began to organize their efforts, not on a local basis, but on a scale larger than the local church. The apostasy started out rather innocently in district cooperation meetings, which later developed into state meetings, and then brotherhood efforts in cooperation. From the beginning, these meetings had the ardent support of many preachers. J. Eichbaum, an editor of Christian Magazine, when trying to hold off the opposition in Tennessee, wrote in defense of the cooperation meeting. Hear him on a two points,

8. They are not designed to permanently concentrate power and money in the hands of a few. As a matter of fact they have never done so, nor is it possible that they ever can.

9. They are not intended to give a separate and independent existence to any body ecclesiastic (p. 154).

Despite his arguments, we can all look back and see that this is exactly what happened.

There were two main organizations established out of efforts to cooperate. The first was the American Christian Bible Society, which D.S. Burnet founded in Cincinnati, in January 1845. The second, and by far the largest, was the American Christian Missionary Society, established in October of 1849. Many men supported this effort and none with greater fervor than Alexander Campbell. When he put his endorsement upon that human organization, many "fell in line" with him and some of those who opposed it were leery of a battle.

However, where opposition existed to these efforts at organization, it was intense. When word of the Missionary Society's formation reached the church in Connelsville, Pennsylvania, they objected on several basis,

one of which was the means of becoming a member of the Society by payment. Listen to their protest,

That, conscientiously, we can neither aid nor sanction any society, for this or other purposes, apart from the church, much less one which would exclude from its membership many of our brethren, and all of the apostles, if now upon the earth, because silver and gold they had not (p. 198).

There were some who either supported or did not oppose the Society at first, but later saw the true sinful nature of such. Tolbert Fanning was one who moved slowly on the subject, as in all others, finally establishing the Gospel Advocate in 1855 in order to have an open discussion about cooperation. He wanted to put his views against the Missionary Society to the test. "In February 1857, he writes: We regard the church of Christ as the only divinely authorized Bible, Missionary, and Temperance Society...." (p. 206).

Moreover, Ben Franklin wavered in his support of societies, but finally and forcefully came down on the side of truth. During his time many were clamoring that the cause was deteriorating because of the lack of organization, but the author records the following,

If the cause was languishing, it was so only because the preachers were not as fervent as they once were.... Franklin adds, "Preaching is what is needed, fervent, soul-stirring preaching, exhortations, entreaties and impressive persuasions with the people to turn to God, and be saved." The history of the restoration movement shows that the less devotion men have to Christ the more they stand in need of human organizations (p. 212).

The next major issue, which arose in the 1850's, was that of instrumental music in the worship. J.W. McGarvey at one time took a leading roll against the instrument. He started out by giving the whole issue a thorough examination. "If instrumental music were in the Bible, and if God by His written word approved it then, let us have the scriptures, McGarvey would say" (p. 314). One man replied to McGarvey making it plain that he did not advocate the instrument in worship, "which meant, as such statements have always meant, that with him it was on the plain of expediency" (p. 314). As we now know, the majority of the brethren went with this apostasy, as in all apostasies, and the two distinct bodies of the Christian Church and the churches of Christ were officially recognized by 1906.

Much more could be written in this review, but time and space do not permit such. *The Search For The Ancient Order, Vol. 1*, does an outstanding job of detailing the restoration movement in the 1800's. One can see through looking back that the Church grows the most when controversy, contention, and combat are in full furor. Men were brave, valiant, and independent, not afraid to "take one on the chin."

During the last half of the previous century, men fought furiously for their ideals. They took no offense at criticism and expected no one else to. Men born of a more modern spirit have often found this hard to understand (p. 301).

Likewise, the preachers of yesteryear always made it clear where they stood. Their hearers did not have to guess. Be clear and forthright with your views, and do not whimper and whine if someone questions or criticizes your stand. Many today can learn a lesson from reading this book, and it is therefore commended to you.

Steven F. Deaton