

The Search Changes Directions: Missionary Society

I. Winds Of Change

Alexander Campbell

- Always unsettled on some issues.
- Others entered circle who were never fully converted.
 - D.S. Burnett – Baptist preacher; great eloquence, political acumen...
 - Floodgates of apostasy opened...
 - Opponents of unscriptural activities were largely ignored or scorned.

I. Winds Of Change

II. The Background

Alexander Campbell

- First issue of 'Christian Baptist' attacked organized missionary societies of the day.

¹ Unscriptural

² Robbed church of glory

- In later years, AC advocated Missionary Society...
- Jacob Creath, Jr.:

“If you were right in the *Christian Baptist*, you are wrong now. If you are right now, you were wrong then.”

Rapid growth of churches

- ‘They had a message; they believed their message to be the greatest discovery of the age and need of the world; hence, fired with the zeal of discoverers, they became propagandists of the first rank’ – Richardson
- Many churches cooperated in evangelistic campaigns ... Sectional and state meetings ... encouraged the spirit of ‘cooperation.’

Aylett Rains

- Vigorously opposed state meetings and the organization that was developing.
 - “He believed there were tendencies, which, unless checked, would lead to state organizations and to a ‘U.S. organization of the congregations’ which would be a dangerous consolidation of power.”
- Time proved his fears well-grounded

Apostasy begins with baby steps...

- Israel:

 - Complaining (Ex.15) . . .

 - Idols (Ex.32) . . .

 - Unbelief (Nu.13-14)

 - King like other nations (1 Sm.8)

- Clinic baptism

- Ignatius on elders

- State meetings . . .

Original plea:

Where the Bible speaks, we speak;
where the Bible is silent, we are silent.

- Many maintained the plea while practicing unscriptural activities.
 - Sound brothers: AC abandoned truth
 - Denominational preachers chimed in
 - Mr. Inglis
 - Mr. Jeter

2 Sm.12:14

Critical of Campbell

- 1831: 'I see by the last *Harbinger* an association in embryo. It was from exactly such a beginning that the many-headed monster grew.'
- **AC reply:** They so much fear that we will fall into some of the old sectarian tracks, that they would prefer idleness to the doing of anything.
 - Either-or fallacy – **either support M. Society or do nothing???**
 - Progress of NT churches without M. Society
 - Progress of US churches without M. Society

1843: Jacob Creath, Sr. – tears, prayers...

Church in Nashville began to study . . .

1. There is a positive scriptural authority for every religious work that is well pleasing to God. [Col.3:17; 2 Tim.3:16-17]
2. The church of Christ is the only divinely consecrated organization on earth for Christian labor. [1 Co.16:1-2]
3. All other organizations through which men propose to perform spiritual labor tend but to obscure, discredit, and subvert the reign of the Messiah. [Ep.3:10-11]

Campbell essays on church organization, 1841-1848

Tolbert Fanning asked for scriptural authority for a general convention.

- AC: 'In all things pertaining to public interest, not of Christian faith, piety or morality, the church of Jesus Christ in its aggregate character is left free and unshacked by any apostolic authority'
 - Argument from silence...as denominations
 - Great disappointment for many

Campbell essays on church organization, 1841-1848

- ‘You say our Savior and the apostles did not denounce conventions, as such. Did they denounce infant baptism, creed making or auricular confessions, as such. It is for you to show where they authorized conventions’
– Jacob Creath, Jr.

Other critics responded to AC's plan

1. Lord had a plan: through organization of local congregation... [Ac.11; 13; 1 Th.1:7-8.]
2. Church universal had only one set of officers: apostles (personal ambassadors of Christ).
3. Through apostles, divine Word was spoken...
4. At close of apostolic age...church was known only by individual congregations.
5. Work of Christ through church to evangelize world was carried on by local church...
6. Even in apostolic times...no need for organization devised by human planning...

Oct., 1849:

American Christian Missionary Society

AC elected president

Annual delegates, Life members, Life directors
for annual contribution of \$10

Officers: president, 20 VPs, treasurer,
secretaries, elected by members

25 managers took control of mission work out
of hands of local congregations

D.S. Burnet, 1867

“I consider the inauguration of our society system which I vowed to urge upon the brethren, if God raised me from my protracted illness of 1845, as one of the most important acts of my career.”

Sound brethren respond

1. M. Society is substitute for church. 1 T.3:15
2. The society caused division.
3. They believed the society would dictate to the congregations. It did.
4. Society was poor investment.

40% of money was funneled off for salaries...

60% of money was used to preach gospel.

Connelsville, PN church wrote AC

Answered his claim that church cannot send gospel without societies...

- 'If Jesus Christ has not qualified her for the work, can uninspired men institute anything better?
- If she did it in her infancy, can she not do it now?
- If other societies were unnecessary then, why are they necessary now?

AC's response

1. The only question is whether Christ's church is one community, or all the communities...
2. It is competent to 'the church of Christ' to consult and cooperate with all the individual communities called churches of Christ...
3. Where the task was too great for a local congregation, many congregations should go together to perform it... Since the NT offered no plan, any plan within the bounds of reason was permissible on the ground of expediency.

AC's response examined

1. Not one precept or example from Bible, yet goes ahead...
2. Expedient: be advantageous, profitable/useful.
 - a. No passage authorizes change to organization of churches. Ignatius: elders...
 - b. Expedients must first be lawful. 1 Co.6:12
 - 1) Font expedites sprinkling.
 - 2) Plane expedites support for ISIS.
 - 3) Dagger expedites murder.
3. Issue: attitude toward Scriptures (silence). Hb.1; 7.

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Do Scriptures furnish authority and a pattern for organization of societies?
Or should work be done through local congregations?

Loose attitude toward Scripture

Resulted in the great division of 19th Century.

1906 religious census recognized sound churches were distinct from the 'Christian Church' – today recognized as a full-fledged denomination (by their own leaders).

'Tall oaks from little acorns grow'

– J. Creath.

Benjamin Franklin

‘The history of the restoration movement shows that the less devotion men have to Christ the more they stand in need of human organizations’