

THE PLEA OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

By
George Mansfield

Presented to the
Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society
Cedar Park Church of Christ, Oshawa, Ontario
Saturday, August 20, 2011

1 THE PLEA OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

Greetings. It is an honor to me to be the speaker this hour. I am a student of The Restoration Movement, though a poor one. My time today will be spent on THE PLEA OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT.

I feel that this has become a topic that should be on the “*endangered species*” list. The Gospel Advocate for August, 2008 had splashed across its cover, “*What happened to the Restoration Movement?*” The Spiritual Sword for last month, echoed the same concern, but placed it in the positive voice, “*A Handy Guide To The Restoration.*” A brother well known to all of us dropped me a line that included, “*My perception is that the Restoration perception is rapidly fading from our fellowship.*”

I confess I have been remiss about making sure this is before the good church people I am privileged to speak to and be with. Sadly, I am not alone in this negligence. I wonder how many of you speak or hear about this from your pulpits?

I begin with an assumption: that many of you have heard some of the same names I know of, like Campbell, Smith, Jones, O’Kelly, Stone, Black and Ash. We will not be undertaking the rehearsing of all the biographical details, but will refer to some of them as it fits into the flow of the PLEA.

One thing we do not know: when, where and by whom the Restoration Movement got started. Just when we think we know, a new person in a different place and at a different time spouts up.

One thing we do know: the Restoration Movement was never intended to start a new and better church. Jesus took care of that once and for all.

Another preliminary observation to pass on is this: those involved in the earliest stages were not seeking new things. Conversely they sought old things—things already written

by God's finger and practiced by the first Christians. Our beloved brother Monroe Hawley has written a book, the title of which sends us packing back to the Bible, to Genesis 26. He calls it REDIGGING THE WELLS. When we get to the twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis we find Isaac and his servants attempting to re-open the wells that had been originally dug in the days of Abraham which wells were intentionally stopped up with debris by the Philistines.

BACK TO THE BIBLE

The plea of the restoration movement is to find spiritual wells, make prayerful, careful efforts to open them, and let the pure water of God flow to all. This single statement—Back to the Bible—has many parts, all of which lead back to Scripture. But can we appreciate the variety of man-invented traditions that had to come out of the wells?

Division By Church Creed. The first creeds were short positive statements about what its proponents believe. Creed, from *credo*, means, “*I believe.*” It protected the believer, with this short statement, from all kinds of heresy and unbelief. Then, creeds became longer and more authoritative, even taking over from or being equal to the Scripture, much like Procrustes' Bed.

Disunity Promoted By Church Name. Martin Luther, the brave man that he was, protested against the Roman Catholic Church, of which he was a part. A new church arose and he begged them not to call themselves by his name. They did anyway. Hence we have Lutherans, which is a safe way to separate from believers who differ or hold to another creedal statement.

At a unity meeting on January 2, 1832, Racoon John Smith arose and uttered:

“While for the sake of peace and Christian union, I have long since waived the public maintenance of any speculation I may hold, yet not one Gospel fact, commandment, or promise, will I surrender for the world!”

Let us, then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us all come to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the Light we need.”

Impotence Caused By Calvinism. John Calvin is a great name in church history. He believed that God has a plan for every individual. His system is called **T.U.L.I.P.**

Total hereditary depravity

Unconditional election

Limited atonement

Irresistible grace

Perseverance of saints

Calvinism holds sincere seekers at bay waiting for a nudge from the Holy Spirit. We'll speak more on this momentarily.

Lostness Through Faith Only. This really refers to the Bible doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, but will not allow the sinner to be immersed in order to receive salvation as the Bible says he must do. This was and continues to be a bone of contention.

When the re-digging of spiritual wells is undertaken it is not an easy task, and it automatically carries with it an element of danger. That danger may take the form of ostracization, physical or mental harm, marital and family difficulties, or a life of debate.

Returning to the original is difficult in other ways. One must be willing to dedicate time and effort to prayer and study in order to find out what God's will is, before he or she can start to move backward.

One of the most oft-quoted statements is “*Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.*” That's wonderful, but it suggests knowing the Bible. So, for us to be representatives of God's Word, we must give time and effort to Bible study.

But more, we are obligated not only to speak “*where*” the Bible speaks but “*as*” the Bible speaks, using the language of the written word, saying what God said and meaning what He meant.

We are so blessed to have some of the most marvelous minds of the 18th and 19th century at the earliest stages of this Movement. Some possessed a high degree of intelligence and education while others were simply desirous of finding their way back to the beginning. Collectively, though geographically removed from one another, they wanted to know, “*What does the Bible say about this?*”

From the beginning restoration has been both a reaction and a solution to division. It pained sincere, religious men and women to see the throngs caught up in warring factions called denominations, and sometimes the war was taking place *within the particular denomination itself*.

One of the best known names in our past is Thomas Campbell. He was a Presbyterian Minister. He looked around and observed the division just in his own fellowship. There were Seceders and Non-Seceders. Seceders were able to select their own ministers, Non-Seceders felt this was wrong, so ministers were selected by a high-church counsel. Thomas also knew of Burghers and Anti-Burghers. The burghess, a magistrate or official of a burgh or borough, was able to swear to support the established churches by a local congregation in his borough. Anti-Burghers, of course, refused to do this. But, there was more, one could be an Old Light or a New Light. If one took the Westminster Confession of Faith at face value and was content with that he or she was an Old Light. New Lights were looking for more.

Thomas Campbell was a minister with the Dissenter Division of the Anti Burgher Sect of the Old Line Branch of the Presbyterian Party of Christianity. But he had reached the conclusion that this was in opposition to the high priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17).

Another fitting illustration of the murky mess that clogged up the original wells is found in the same family. Thomas' son, Alexander, was a young man of twenty-one, a student at the University of Glasgow in May, 1809. He faced a most important decision. As was the practice of the Presbyterian Church of that day, Alexander was examined by the elders to see if he would be allowed to take the emblems of the Lord's body and blood at the semi-annual communion service of the Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian Church. Young Alexander passed the examination and was given a communion token. The distress in his mind now was, *"If I do this will I be adding to the disunity of Christianity because I allowed myself to be judged by a board as to my worthiness?"*

When the day came, Alexander waited as long as possible, token in his clenched hand, indecisive. At the last moment, he threw the piece in and departed making his break with Presbyterianism and any other denomination.

Later, as Alexander recalled his year in, he reminisced, *"My faith in creeds and confessions of human device was considerably shaken while in Scotland, and I commenced my career under the conviction that nothing that was not as old as the New Testament should be made an article of faith....or a term of communion amongst Christians."*

NOT AN INSTANT REVOLUTION

The Restoration Movement did not snap into place overnight. The restorers laboured to see through the fog of accumulated teachings and church practices. Bent on returning to the Bible and it alone they worked, patiently and independently for the most part, toward finding out what the Bible said and then seeking to make application.

A good example of this happened in 1808 with a group of like minded individuals at the home of Abraham Altars in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. Thomas Campbell said, *"Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent."* Andrew Munro then said, *"Mr. Campbell, if we adopt that as a basis, then there is an*

end of infant baptism.” To which Campbell replied, “*Of course, if infant baptism be not found in the scriptures, we can have nothing to do with it.*” (Earl West, Search for the Ancient Order, Vol. I, pp. 47-48). From these remarks, it is seen that the motto of speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent means to engage in activities authorized by the scriptures and refuse to participate in activities unauthorized by the scriptures. If this is followed, wherever it goes, real New Testament Christianity can be practiced today as it was in the apostolic age. That makes the point well: it was here a little, there a little. But another truth needs to be recognized at this juncture: when we adopt a “*back to the Bible*” stance some of the former beliefs must be left behind.

Little by little, in different circumstances, and often separated from one another, people began looking backward. They began to believe that the Bible was a sufficient guide for their salvation and life, that they didn’t need a higher authority, under Jesus to give them the right to be the church on earth.

Eventually, many of the Bible truths we now know, love and practice were dug out from the debris of post-Bible teachings. Some of these were:

- **The New Covenant has replaced the old.** When there is not clarity here confusion reigns and arguments ensue.
- **Man is free to respond to the gospel.** Barton Stone was so entangled in Calvinism that he was convinced that he could not believe in Jesus without being elected (Calvinism). One night after Mr. McGready has preached on God’s love, Mr. Stone, took his Bible and retired to the woods. There, he say: “*I sunk at his feet a willing subject, I loved him—I adored him—I praised him aloud in the silent night, in the echoing grove around, I confessed to the Lord my sin in disbelieving his word so long in following the devices of men. I now saw that a poor, sinner, was as much authorized to believe in Jesus at first, as at last— that now was the accepted time and the day of salvation.*” Calvinism had controlled his thinking.

- **Baptism is by immersion of adults and in order to secure forgiveness of sins.**
- **The Lord's Supper was to be observed each Lord's Day.**
- **The New Testament Church was a priesthood of all believers**

In his "Memoirs of Alexander Campbell," Robert Richardson wrote, "*The pleas of the 'current Reformation' were (1) To restore primitive Christianity. This necessitated a complete bypass of the Protestant Reformation and Catholicism; (2) union of all professed believers; (3) no creed but the Bible, (4) no name but Christ's (Christian); (5) not to establish another denomination; (6) 'we neither advocate Calvinism, Arminianism, Arianism, Socinianism, Unitarianism, Deism, or Sectarianism, but New Testamentism.'*" (Richardson, Vol. II, p. 158)

THE *WHOLE* WAY BACK TO THE BIBLE

It is quite amusing though sad to hear people speak of "*back to the Bible*" while they are really referring to "*doing things the same old way we have always done them,*" not necessarily things found in the Bible. This is a kind word of caution to me and all who are here. Bear with me in one short personal illustration of this point.

One Sunday morning after I had completed my sermon and the hour was ended with a prayer by a brother, a good, godly brother came up to me with these words, "Bro. Mansfield, may I see you in your office?" I complied, and he told me I needed to "*ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein...*" (Jeremiah 6:16). My first response was to ask him in which area. What had I done? He informed me anyone who stands in the pulpit to bring a message needs to offer an invitation and incorporate an appropriate invitation hymn. My next reply was that when I preach the gospel I invite people to respond; when I am teaching some Bible lesson I feel no obligation to keep our long-held tradition.

The very fact that we do a thing repetitively seems to cement it in the mind of practitioners that it is the right way. For example we sang the hymn “*I Know That My Redeemer Lives*” incorrectly for so many years that the latest versions have changed meet our mistake. We thought wrong was right!

Our ten year old granddaughter spoke to me, while driving, about “*normal cows*,” and the others, “*not so good*.” When asked what she meant she said the real cows are black and white. In her limited experience genuine “*normal*” cows were Holsteins!

On our way back to the Bible make sure we get to the source, not someone’s well-intentioned doctrine belief.

This is simply a precautionary word for all of us to find out what we are standing up for is actually in the Bible or did it begin some time since the first century?

“Loyalty to the restoration principle does not necessarily involve being loyal to the teachings of Stone, the Campbells, Walter Scott, John Smith or to any other man or group of men who have lived since their day. It involves only being loyal to the New Testament.” (Raymond Kelly, “The Restoration Principle,” Abilene Christian College Lectures, 1954, p. 119.)

In 1982 I was privileged to be at the GLCC Lectureship and hear our brother Jerry Rushford do his usual masterful job on a theme he is at home with—Restoration History. He related a true story that actually took place in 1966. The Uffizi Museum was at that time located near the Arno River that flooded and dumped a half-million ton of silt on the city, damaging many of the beautiful masterpieces of art. Most were fear damaged or lost forever.

Sixty restorers and artisans were brought in and began to work with different chemicals to try to find a way to reduce the damage of the beautiful paintings. They experimented with chemical after chemical, till one was found—a pill for ailing stomachs. They were

able to make it soluble and spray it on the artwork, and slowly the damage began to peel off. This took an average of two years per painting. Slowly the residue and silt began to fall away, the eyes began to shine, faces took on those earthy tones again.

Here's the clincher: They used this on an 18th century Madonna; it peeled off to reveal a 17th century Madonna underneath; applying the liquid again and again they discovered a 13th century Madonna underneath all that. That was the original!

On a lighter note but still keeping our thrust, I was involved in a wedding last month that was held in a denominational building in another town. The terribly difficult time that we all faced—bride, groom, parents, priest, preacher—was centered in the lack of communication as well as some tradition issues that the hierarchy overseeing that parish confused with things of the Bible and felt compelled to bind them on us. Preparation for that wedding was as close to a nightmare as I want to experience.

I heard somewhere of a spring whose waters had certain medicinal properties so that those who drank from it were helped in the case of various infirmities. In the course of time, homes sprung up around the spring, then a hotel, stores and eventually, a town that grew into a city. But there came a day when visitors would ask, "*By the way, where is the spring from which this grew?*" Dwellers in the city would rub their hands together in embarrassment and say, "*I am sorry that I cannot tell you where the spring is, but, somehow, in the midst of all our progress and improvement we lost the spring and no one knows where it is.*"

THE ONGOING RESTORATION MOVEMENT

In 1982, Tom Harpur, then controversial editor of the Religious editor for the Toronto Star, wrote "*I am convinced that Christianity has to be radically 'born again' if it is to survive as a faith for the future as well as one of the past.*"

He continued, *“As a former priest with seven years in charge of a parish before teaching Greek and New Testament at a Toronto seminary for an equal period—followed by 11 years of covering religion around the world for The Star—I believe this will mean particularly a new and rigorous scrutiny of the origins of the faith and of the teachings of the Originator Himself, Jesus from Nazareth.”*

Many people, tired of man-made rules, denominational control, and churches without names, are voicing their concern for something better.

It would be worthwhile exercise for all to picture a board with some nails pounded in it with one nail still mostly exposed. A man’s left hand is holding the nail and the other holds the hammer. There is still work to be done.

While we recognize many things have changed, some for the better, some for the worse, the need to continue with the Restoration Plea is as vital today as it was in 1800. We face things today that the early restorationists could not imagine.

Declining Reverence For God And Organized Religion. Time was when even the unchurched believed in God to the extent that there was a holy fear. Now, even young people have no difficulty acting as disrespectful toward God as they do to adults, even their own parents.

Postmodernism. The most obvious postmodern belief is that there are no absolutes, even in religion from the Bible. Advocates tell us to *“lighten up your strict belief system”* and *“shorten up those boring sermons from the Bible.”* Postmodernism is now driven by those born after 1980. They more or less promise us that if we do not change our ways our church buildings will be empty. Some churches have made attempts to comply by putting in donut shops, gyms, spas, a special room for those who want to listen at a distance without being seen and without the possibility of any involvement, and by keeping the sermons and lessons as low on expected commitment as possible.

Postmodernists point out that mainline Christians today are *“antihomosexual, judgmental*

and hypocritical, and therefore unchristian.” These churches, they say, are “old fashioned, too involved with politics, out of touch with reality, insensitive to others, boring, not accepting of other faiths, and confusing.”

David Kinnaman, in his recent book entitled Unchristian, points out the seeming paradoxical nature of the postmodern demands: while there is a measurable heightened interest in spirituality, there is an observable disinterest in organized religion.

WHAT TO DO?

- Live Godly lives every day, everywhere. There is no substitute for this.
- Be bold in standing up for Bible truth, even in the fact of postmodernism.
- Keep priorities straight. Is your church better known for love or acappella music?
- Strive to present and practice Christianity as a counter-culture—a sect every spoken against and not the Constantinian model that we see on every corner.
- Begin a renewed interest in our brotherhood.
- Take in brotherhood functions
- Subscribe to brotherhood papers, like Gospel Herald
- Attend and support our camps like Omagh
- Mark you calendar for GLBC Lectureship
- Become a member of CCCHS
- Plan to attend next year’s Annual Meeting of CCCHS
- Start your historical searches.

George Mansfield, August 2011