

RESTORATION APPRECIATION
WEEK 2024

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Preface

Great Lakes Christian College proudly embraces our heritage in the Restoration Movement and celebrates that heritage with our constituent churches. To foster greater appreciation for our rich heritage among our students, staff, and affiliated churches we launched GLCC's first annual "Restoration Appreciation Week" back in 2016.

We were pleased to host our ninth annual Restoration Appreciation Week, October 22-25, 2024. GLCC English Professor Charlie Starr led off with a spirited comparison between C. S. Lewis and key ideas that animated the fathers of the Restoration Movement. Dr. Starr is a renown Lewis scholar whose expertise in Lewis's handwriting gives him uncommon access to numerous unpublished pieces that enrich our understanding. His presentation, "C. S. Lewis and the Restoration Movement" focuses on the themes of truth, unity, and evangelism. On Friday, James L. Gorman, a church historian who has taught at both Johnson University and Abilene Christian University, invites us to discover "The Hidden Origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement." More than many realize, the movement's founders were deeply influenced by the ecumenical, missionary, revivalistic, and abolitionist impulses of early evangelicalism. His Friday session was followed by a robust discussion between our two speakers and those who came to hear them. We seek to keep these important conversations going by making both presentations available in this pamphlet.

Preface

Both sessions were also live streamed, recorded, and made available to watch online. For the most up-to-date information and congregational resources for past and future events, frequent our website at <https://glcc.edu/about-us/restoration-appreciation-week>.

C.S. Lewis and the Restoration Movement

Charlie Starr

Restoration History

Great Lakes Christian College is part of an American born church movement that began around the opening of the 1800s. Credit for the origins of this movement goes primarily to three men: Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, and his father Thomas Campbell. While America had deep Christian roots, it saw periods of what we might call revival. There was a “Great Awakening” during the 1730s that lasted till the 1770s. I suppose we got busy with revolution at that point—trying to make a country of ourselves. There was then a “Second Great Awakening” in America that occurred from around 1795 to 1835. Among the most famous moments of this period, especially important to the Restoration Movement, was the Cane Ridge Revival, a large camp meeting that took place in Cane Ridge, Kentucky from August 6–12 or so in 1801. It was the largest and most famous camp meeting of the Second Great Awakening and was led by Barton W. Stone.

If you’ve never heard of Restoration Churches, or the Stone-Campbell Movement as it’s sometimes called, that may be because the signs outside the churches usually don’t use those phrases. Instead, they are usually called,

Christian Church, Church of Christ, or Christian Church—Disciples of Christ. In last summer's issue of a Restoration magazine called *Christian Standard*, Jerry Harris summarized some of the most important ideas in Christian Church/Church of Christ thinking.¹ Focusing on John 17, Harris identified three key emphases in the movement.

1. An emphasis on Truth. Harris writes, "This means we seek to use God's Word as our only rule of faith and practice...that we do Bible things in Bible ways and call them by Bible names...that we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where it is silent...no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the Divine."
2. An emphasis on Christian Unity. Barton Stone called on us to "Let Christian unity be our polar star." The Christian churches wanted to see an end to the constant splits that were occurring in the 18th and 19th centuries among churches. The Restoration fathers preached unity in all things essential but freedom in all things non-essential. An example of essential: Jesus rose from the dead. If you don't believe that, you're not Christian. Example of non-essential: are we going to sing three hymns or four on Sunday morning? Doesn't matter.
3. Evangelism. Preaching the gospel to people who weren't church, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and discipling them in the Christian way of life.

¹ Jerry Harris, "Foundation Stones of the Restoration Movement," *Christian Standard and the Lookout* (July/August 2024): 37-39.

Other emphases in the Restoration Movement included the importance of baptism and communion and a desire to *do* church the way it was done way back in the first century—again building on the importance of following the Bible in patterning our actions, beliefs, and even church governance.

C. S. Lewis

My task in this essay is to talk about the movement in relation to a man who is almost certainly the most important Christian writer of the 20th century (that is the 1900s). In fact, if you do an internet search for the most important Christian writer of the 20th century, the name C. S. Lewis will come up as the consensus of numerous surveys and polls. If you haven't heard of C. S. Lewis, you have probably have heard of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe* (book one of that series). But Lewis didn't only write fantasy stories for children; he also wrote books about Christian theology and the defense of Christianity—what is called apologetics. He also wrote devotional books. You may have heard of *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Abolition of Man* or *The Weight of Glory*. Lewis wrote about forty books in his lifetime about all sorts of things. He is still a very influential writer in the 21st century. So it's worth spending some time on ideas that the Restoration churches share with Lewis. Through Lewis, we can see how many of the great ideas of the Stone-Campbell forefathers continue to be important today.

Reason and Truth

The first similarity between Lewis and our churches is his emphasis on the importance of truth and reason. The

Restoration Movement was born at the end of an age often referred to as the Enlightenment, an era that emphasized the importance of thinking clearly and a belief that humanity was capable of doing so. C. S. Lewis lived in a time when the intellectual people of his day were doubting reason and truth. The irony is they used reason to try to prove that reason wasn't valid. Says Lewis, "The forces discrediting reason, themselves depend on reasoning."² You can't reason your way into saying reason is false. Anytime someone says to you, "I don't think there's any truth?" Answer back to them, "Is that true?"

Lewis defined truth as "an external correspondence of statement and reality."³ Here's an example: if I say dogs have six legs, I have made a statement about something in reality (dogs). Does that statement agree with reality? Do dogs have six legs? If the statement agrees with reality, it is true. If it disagrees with reality, it is false. "Fact" or "Reality" is what *is*. "Truth" is a statement one makes *about* reality that corresponds to it. As Lewis says in his important essay, "Myth Became Fact," "truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is."⁴ Truth claims, then, are made by people, but verification is made by matching their statements to reality. But this is not all that truth is.

There is also such a thing as moral truth, and Lewis believed morals were just as real as any physical thing. In Lewis's mind, to say that murder is wrong is just as true

² C. S. Lewis, "Bulverism" in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology*, ed. Walter Hooper (Harper Collins, 1979), 274.

³ Quoted in Walter Hooper, "Oxford's Bonny Fighter," in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table, and other reminiscences*, ed. James T. Como (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 153.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock*, 66.

as to say that people kill people. But notice that these are two different kinds of statements:

1. To say that people kill people is true. It happens in reality, so the statement corresponds with the facts. It is an *is* statement.
2. To say that people should not murder people is an *ought* statement. People *do* commit murder. But people *shouldn't* commit murder.

For Lewis, an *ought* statement is just as true as an *is* statement. And he believes that the existence of *ought*—of moral reality—is proof of the existence of God.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis notices two strange things about morals. The first is that every culture all over the world has them. But think about how strange that is. Animals don't care about what they *ought* to do. They care about food. No moral dilemma for the lion chasing the warthog—the lion just wants to eat. But here's this animal called human beings who doesn't just think about what *is*, he also thinks about what *ought* to be? Now where did that come from? Lewis argues it came from God. The second strange thing Lewis notices about morals is an even better proof for the existence of God: in every culture, all over the world, people have morals that they can't live up to. People constantly disappoint each other, and we even disappoint ourselves by our inability to be good. If we were just making up our own morals, wouldn't we invent morals that we can easily live up to? But if the morals come from outside the human race—from God—it makes sense that we couldn't live up to them without his grace, help, and the blood of Jesus Christ.

But truth about reality and moral truth are, again, not the only kind of truth. Because there is a capital T, Truth who is “the way, the truth and the life.” One of the great

mistakes in the search for truth is the mistake of saying that the journey is more important than the goal, that searching for truth matters more than finding it. So says an intellectual ghost in *The Great Divorce*, Lewis's novel about a trip to heaven: "to travel hopefully is better than to arrive."⁵ But his glorified counterpart replies, "If that were true, and known to be true, how could anyone travel hopefully? There would be nothing to hope for." The heavenly being is very clear: "Thirst was made for water; inquiry for truth."⁶ But the ghost replies that there is something "stagnant" about final answers, saying that "free inquiry" matters more. To this the man in heaven says, "You believe that because heretofore you have only experienced truth in the abstract. I'll take you to a place where you can drink it like water and be embraced by it as by a lover." In other words, on earth truth is a correspondence between reality and our thoughts. But in heaven truth is a person. And his name is Jesus Christ. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" Why didn't Jesus answer? Because he *was* the answer. Pilate stared Truth in the face and missed it—missed Him—completely.

When Christianity was coming under attack in the 20th century, C. S. Lewis and Restoration ministers and theologians stood firm against the anti-Christian, intellectual winds blowing bad ideas around, passing off lies as truth. When some in the movement rejected biblical truth and even colleges like Texas Christian University strayed from classical Christianity, others in the movement formed colleges all over the nation to combat the lies of mainstream thought.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Collier Books, 1946), 43.

⁶ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 44.

Unity

The second thing that Lewis has in common with Restoration churches is an emphasis on Christian unity. The Stone Campbell churches believe in pursuing a Christianity that ignores denominational boundaries and emphasizes the unity of all Christians. C. S. Lewis believed the same thing and practiced what he called “mere” Christianity.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, a book in which an elder demon named Screwtape is teaching a younger demon named Wormwood how to tempt people, Lewis has Screwtape say:

If your patient can't be kept out of the Church, he ought at least to be violently attached to some party within it. I don't mean on really doctrinal issues; about those, the more lukewarm he is the better. And it isn't the doctrines on which we chiefly depend for producing malice. The real fun is working up hatred between those who say “mass” and those who say “holy communion.” . . . And all the purely indifferent things—candles and clothes and what not—are an admirable ground for our activities. We have quite removed from men's minds what that pestilent fellow Paul used to teach about food and other unessentials.”⁷

But Lewis's finest statement on unity in the church is to be found in his introduction to *Mere Christianity*:

The reader should be warned that I offer no help to anyone who is hesitating between two Christian “denominations.” You will not learn from me whether you ought to become an Anglican, a Methodist, a

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (MacMillan, 1942), letter 16.

Presbyterian, or a Roman Catholic. This omission is intentional (even in the list I have just given the order is alphabetical). . . . [I]n this book I am not trying to convert anyone to my own position. Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times. . . .

I hope no reader will suppose that “mere” Christianity is here put forward as an alternative to the creeds of the existing communions. . . . It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals.⁸

Lewis then urges the readers to find the room—the church group—which God wants them in. He says:

The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose the worst of the rooms (whichever that may be) is, I think, preferable. It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. . . . But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light: and, of course, even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: “Do I like that

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper One, 2001), preface.

kind of service?” but “Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?” When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house.”⁹

I once asked a colleague in the Bible department of my old Restoration college what he thought was the most important theological work of our time. He said it was Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*. The truth of unity that Lewis championed resonates today among Restoration churches that want to keep their Christianity as “mere”—that is, as true to its origins, its Savior and Lord Jesus Christ—as Lewis wrote of doing.

Evangelism

Finally, Evangelism. Lewis believed in doing the work of bringing others to Christ. His method of doing so was to write and speak about it and then to answer letters from people who had questions about Christianity—many of whom he would even meet personally to talk about the faith. Of the some 40 books Lewis wrote, ten were apologetical defenses of Christianity, twelve were fictional books written to envision the power of the Christian worldview, and four were devotional books written for Christians. In addition, Lewis wrote around 150 essays, some 90 of which were written in defense of

⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, preface.

Christian truth. In his lifetime Lewis wrote over 450 poems. Many of them are explicitly Christian in thought. It is estimated that Lewis wrote around thirty thousand letters during his life of which we have only about ten thousand. After Lewis became famous as a defender of the Christian faith, he determined that he would answer every letter written to him by people asking about Christianity. In his hey day in the 40s and 50s, he often woke up at four in the morning to spend three hours answering correspondence from people who had questions about or even wrote to attack the faith. I personally believe Lewis developed carpal tunnel in his right wrist because he wrote every one of these letters by hand.

Lewis was occasionally asked to preach. He did. During World War II, he volunteered to travel around England, visiting Royal Airforce bases to speak about Christian faith to the pilots and ground crews. He also gave 33 talks on BBC radio about Christianity—these eventually became the most important Christian book of apologetics and theology in the 20th century: *Mere Christianity*. Some have said that, during the war, Lewis's was the second most recognized voice on the radio in the UK—the first being that of Winston Churchill. Also in the 40s, Lewis helped found and was president of the Oxford Socratic Club. This club was dedicated to debating Christian truth. At each session, a Christian and an atheist were asked to discuss a particular topic. One would read a paper and the other would respond. Then the debate would begin. Lewis was present at most of these meetings. He contributed several of the papers, but usually acted as the opponent of the atheist in debate—debates he usually won. Lewis presided over the Socratic Club for more than a decade. About Lewis, Pope John

Paul II said, "He knew what his apostolate [or mission] was, and he did it!"

One tender example of Lewis's work in spreading the gospel comes through *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the last chapter of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lucy and Edmund are told they will never return to Narnia. But Aslan also tells them that in *their* world he has "another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there." An eleven-year-old girl from New York named Hila Newman didn't understand the mystery of Aslan's "other name," so she wrote to C.S. Lewis and asked what it was. He replied in a 1953 letter,

As to Aslan's other name, well I want you to guess. Has there never been anyone in this world who (1.) Arrived at the same time as Father Christmas. (2.) Said he was the son of the great Emperor. (3.) Gave himself up for someone else's fault to be jeered at and killed by wicked people. (4.) Came to life again. (5.) Is sometimes spoken of as a Lamb.... Don't you really know His name in this world. Think it over and let me know your answer!¹⁰

I think we can all guess the answer to the question. "This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there." Many of us, in our reading of these wonderful books, were brought to Narnia too, weren't we? And for that same reason: that by knowing him for a little while there, we might be able to know him better here.

What C. S. Lewis shares most with the fathers of the Restoration Movement is what we might call "Kairos"

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, "Unpublished Letter to Hila Newman," (June 3, 1953).

moments. The New Testament has two words for the concept of “time.” One of those, *kairos*, suggests the fullness of time—when the time is ripe for something significant to happen. I think that, after the first century era of Christ and his apostles, God raised leaders and thinkers at the moment they were needed most. They were all devoted to truth, Scripture and the gospel. They were men like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and Ignatius of Loyola. Early in the 1800s, God raised men in America who were deeply intellectual and deeply committed to spreading the truth of Christ. They were men like Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, and Barton W. Stone, the fathers of the Restoration Movement. In the 1900s, God raised one of the oddest, least likely faith defenders in all of church history: a former atheist, an English professor (not a theologian), and a man most known for his Narnian fantasy novels for children. C. S. Lewis came along at the next great moment someone was needed. Our churches share the same legacy. Just when the time is ripe, God raises the intellects, speakers, writers, and leaders he needs to carry the church forward until his return. That’s what C. S. Lewis and the Restoration Movement have in common.

The Hidden Origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement

Evangelical Influence in the Past and for the Future

James L. Gorman

Origin stories deeply shape our identity, theology, and practice. The stories we tell ourselves about where we came from and who we have been wield enormous influence on how we perceive ourselves, what we believe, and how we practice. In other words, a key function of origin stories is identity formation. For Christians, our origin stories deeply shape our identity, theology, and practice.

Many adherents of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement have never heard their full origin story. For a long time, the basic narrative of the movement's origins went something like this.

Around 1800, Thomas and Alexander Campbell as well as Barton Stone escaped the sectarian vision of the Presbyterian Church and started a nondenominational movement in the United States.

That nondenominational movement sought to unite Christians by rejecting divisive things. They believed creeds, confessions, and denominations were the major causes of Christian division, so they rejected them. On the constructive side, they said Christians could achieve unity by restoring the New Testament church. All Christians, they argued, could agree on the New Testament as the ultimate authority. These leaders and their colleagues were inspired by several forces: democratic ideals focusing on individualism and sovereignty of the people, the rugged frontier context, Enlightenment ideals about Christian unity illustrated especially in John Locke, and primitivism from diverse sources.

Some historians have added a dose of exceptionalism: that is, the leaders of this movement were unique at that time in their desire for unity and their emphasis on restoring the NT church as a means of unity.

Large parts of this origin story are true, so don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that we should throw out that story in whole. Instead, I want to locate those seemingly different influences in their religious, cultural, and historical context. I seek to offer a more capacious origin story that contextualizes the leaders of the movement—their ideas and their practices—within the transatlantic evangelical movement of the 1790s and early 1800s. That was a mouthful! So let me say it again. I propose a broader origin story that helps us better understand the early leaders of this movement. Which theological voices influenced them? What Christian practices inspired them? What I have found in my research over the last decade is that Stone-Campbell leaders were part of a broader movement that captivated

English-speaking evangelicals across the transatlantic region.

Although I can't tell you that whole story in this essay, I can tell you a part of it. After clarifying what I mean by evangelicalism, I will work through four areas central to both evangelicalism and early Stone-Campbell leaders: (1) unity efforts, (2) the missionary movement, (3) revivalism, and (4) antislavery. For each of these areas, I will describe the evangelical position and then explore Stone-Campbell connections. Finally, I conclude by exploring how this evangelical origin story might shape our future life.

Evangelical: History, Theology, and Practice

"Evangelical" has meant a lot of different things since its origin as a label in the Protestant Reformation.¹ But it is a technical term that historians use to describe a particular group of Christians who emerged in the 18th century. Historians have come up with at least three ways to define evangelical: historical, theological, and cultural.² In a

¹ For these meanings, see *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Clarendon, 1989), 5:447-50. A current analysis of the debate is found in Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-25.

² It should be noted that late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Christians used the term "evangelical" to describe themselves, their theologies, and their institutions. In my use of "evangelical," I follow David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1989), 1-19; Hutchinson and Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*, 1-25; Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-14; Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (Liveright, 2020), 6-7.

historical sense, four major Protestant tributaries fed into the river of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century.³ First and most influential was English Puritanism, including Baptists, Independents, and English Presbyterians. Second, Scottish Presbyterianism was a transatlantic evangelical force as the Scottish diaspora from the early seventeenth century created evangelical hubs in places like Ulster (where the Campbells lived in the 1790s) and Pennsylvania (where Thomas Campbell moved in 1807).⁴ Third, Anglicanism provided the form of the voluntary religious societies that became the key structure for cooperation across denominational lines. Further, George Whitefield and John Wesley also emphasized holiness, revivalism, and new birth. Fourth, continental Pietism contributed what became central characteristics of evangelicals: new birth experiential theology, small gatherings for Bible reading and lay participation, social activism, and a commitment to missions. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the confluence of these tributaries had created a distinctive transatlantic evangelical community that grew to dominate the social life of some areas.⁵ The revivals of

³ Much of this relies on James L. Gorman, *Among the Early Evangelicals: Transatlantic Origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Abilene Christian University Press, 2017), 17–18.

⁴ The Campbells lived in both Ulster and Pennsylvania, following the enormous Scotch-Irish migrations to Pennsylvania in the colonial and early national periods. See P. Gilmore, “Rebels and Revivals: Ulster Immigrants, Western Pennsylvania Presbyterianism and the Formation of Scotch-Irish Identity, 1780-1830” (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2009).

⁵ The confluence of Protestant tributaries does not necessitate continuity with those tributaries. In fact, discontinuity was an important factor in the intensity of the religious awakenings and crucial for evangelical identity. See Hutchinson and Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*, 26–32; Thomas S. Kidd,

the mid-eighteenth century—often called the Great Awakening—were the crucible of evangelical identity formation.

This historical sense of “evangelical” is complemented by a theological description based on a pattern of convictions and attitudes, which include, according to historian David Bebbington, “biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on the new birth), activism (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity).”⁶ Some scholars add an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. These theological commitments stood at the heart of evangelicalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Finally, historians like Kristin Kobes Du Mez insist that evangelicalism is best understood as a culture produced and consumed (e.g., songs, books, magazines, gatherings, rituals, institutions, political norms, gender norms, racial identity, sentimentality, etc.).⁷ Cultural evangelicalism easily breached denominational boundaries and wielded influence even on those who did

The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America (Yale University Press, 2007), xiv.

⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 1–19; Mark A. Noll, D. W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, “Introduction,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, D. W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

⁷ Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 6–7; Todd M. Brenneman, *Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

not formally affiliate with its institutions. In all three senses (historical, theological, and cultural), evangelicalism deeply influenced Stone-Campbell origins, identity, theology, and practice.

Unity and Cooperation

Evangelicals sought Christian unity from the beginning. They cooperated across denominational lines in revivals, in prayer, and in missionary work. One of the foundations for evangelical cooperation was new birth conversion as the true marker of Christian identity. A Christian's denomination mattered much less than their conversion experience. For example, George Whitefield, a leading evangelical during the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, expressed such non-denominationalism in a popular sermon anecdote:

“Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven? Any Episcopalians?” “No.” “Any Presbyterians?” “No.” “Have you any Independents or Seceders?” “No.” “Have you any Methodists there?” “No, no, no.” “Whom have you there?” “We don't know those names here. All who are here are Christians—believers in Christ—men who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony.” “O, is this the case?” said Whitefield; “then God help me, God help us all, to forget party names, and to become Christians in deed and in truth!”⁸

⁸ Cited in Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *The Accidental Revolutionary: George Whitefield and the Creation of America* (Baylor University Press, 2011), 186; Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *Preaching Politics: The Religious Rhetoric of George Whitefield and the Founding of a New Nation*, Studies in Rhetoric and Religion 3 (Baylor University Press, 2007), 75–76; Joseph Beaumont Wakeley, *Anecdotes of the Rev. George Whitefield*,

Whitefield's de-emphasis on denominations was common among evangelicals.⁹

In fact, one of the Great Awakening leaders, Samuel Davies, who was president of the College of New Jersey until his untimely death in 1761, argued that Jesus followers were "Christians" more than they were members of any party (i.e., denomination). He made this case in a sermon titled "The Sacred Import of the Christian Name." Davies held up the name "Christian," first used at Antioch (Acts 11:26), as "a catholic name, intended to bury all party denominations."¹⁰

This idea became a prominent feature of the "Christians" of the SCM in all parts of the United States. Rice Haggard presented the case first in 1794, and he eventually published a pamphlet that used Davies's sermon as a blueprint.¹¹ Haggard called it *An Address to*

M.A., with Biographical Sketch (Hodder and Stoughton, 1872), 134–35. I have been unable to identify the primary source.

⁹ It is true that this mark of true Christians caused division between pro-revivalists and anti-revivalists, but it also led to an evangelical movement committed to cooperating with Christians across denominational lines. Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (Scarecrow Press, 1983), 4–14; Norman Sykes, "Ecumenical Movements in Great Britain in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 3rd ed. (World Council of Churches, 1986), 165; Stephen Orchard, "Evangelical Eschatology and the Missionary Awakening," *Journal of Religious History* 22, no. 2 (1998): 139; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys*, *A History of Evangelicalism* 1 (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 119–32.

¹⁰ Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects* (Lincoln & Edmands, 1811), 251.

¹¹ Max Ward Randall, *The Great Awakenings and the Restoration Movement* (College Press, 1983), 87–91.

the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name (1804). He wrote that denominational names have a “tendency to disunite *the* body of Christ, scatter *its* sacred *members*, and cause *them* to bite, devour, and be consumed one of another.” “Christian,” Haggard reasoned, was both a scriptural name (Acts 11:26) and “a *catholic name*, intended to bury all party denominations.”¹² Haggard convinced James O’Kelly of this in 1794 and persuaded Barton Stone in 1804.¹³

When the Stone Christians dissolved their Springfield Presbytery in 1804, it was because they believed their Presbyterianism contributed to division and “party spirit among professing Christians.” Instead of embracing a party, they resolved that their Presbytery “die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large, for there is but one body, and one Spirit.” They would be Christians only. And there were missionary implications to all this as well. Since “dying sinners...are kept from the Lord by the existence of sects and parties in the church,” to reject parties and unite with other Christians was part of the “glorious work [the Lord] is carrying on in our Western country, which we hope will terminate in the universal spread of the gospel, and the

¹² Rice Haggard, *An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name* (Printed by Joseph Charles, 1804), 4, 6,
https://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/rhaggard/haggard.html.

¹³ W. Dennis Helsabeck, Jr., “Haggard, Rice (1769-1819),” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Eerdmans, 2004), 377–78; James B. North, “O’Kelly, James (1735-1826),” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Eerdmans, 2004), 574; Barton Warren Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself; with Additions and Reflections*, ed. John Rogers (J. A. & U. P. James, 1847), 42, 50.

unity of the church.”¹⁴ Elias Smith in New Hampshire claimed that he also had discovered this idea and preached a sermon in 1802 on using the name “Christian” based on Acts 11:26.¹⁵ In sum, Stone-Campbell leaders carried to completion the evangelical idea that Christians should reject partyism and instead use the name “Christians.”

The cooperative posture also emerged in the “concert of prayer” movement, which Scottish evangelicals started in the 1740s. The title of a Jonathan Edwards’s pamphlet reveals the key goals of the prayer movement: *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union Among God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth* (1747).¹⁶ For evangelicals, the movement for unity was tied directly to revivalism and to missions. In fact, the emphases of unity, revivalism, and missions were inextricably bound together for evangelicals in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In sum, evangelicals argued that what mattered most was not one’s denomination but one’s commitment to Jesus as taught in the Bible *and* one’s new-birth conversion. Evangelicals viewed the New Testament as

¹⁴ *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (1804), in James Richard Rogers, *The Cane Ridge Meeting-House*, 2nd ed. (Standard Publishing, 1910), 172–77.

¹⁵ Elias Smith, *Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Beck & Foster, 1816), 298, <http://archive.org/details/lifecon00smit>.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time* (Printed for D. Henchman in Cornhil, 1747).

an authority more ancient and accurate than the denominational authorities that arose later in history—they said this implicitly and sometimes explicitly. Based on the common ground of New Testament authority and conversion experience, evangelicals called for unity so Christians could cooperate across denominational lines for two ministries in particular: missions and revivals.¹⁷

Protestant Missionary Movement

Evangelicals started the Protestant missionary movement in the early eighteenth century and propelled its takeoff in the 1790s. Historian Ruth Rouse claimed, “No outburst of missionary zeal, unless it be the Jesuit Mission of the 16th century, has ever paralleled the missionary developments resulting from the Evangelical Awakening between 1790 and 1820.”¹⁸ Christians from many denominations joined the evangelical missionary errand with great energy in the 1790s.

The key institution for interdenominational cooperation in missions was the voluntary society. Voluntary societies allowed individual Christians of different denominations to pay annual member fees to a society they wanted to support. The societies then used these fees and other donations to fund the society’s work—missions, Bible printing, education, and so on. Missionary societies became the most influential of the voluntary societies, and the London Missionary Society (LMS), founded in 1795, immediately became the leading

¹⁷ For a fuller treatment of these themes, see Gorman, *Among the Early Evangelicals*, chaps. 2–3.

¹⁸ Ruth Rouse, “Voluntary Movement and the Changing Ecumenical Climate,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 3rd ed. (World Council of Churches, 1986), 310.

interdenominational missionary society. For that reason, and because the LMS inspired Thomas Campbell, it's worth taking a moment to explore its foundational meeting.

Religious excitement was palpable among the thousands who gathered in September 1795 to experience the founding of the LMS. Religious leaders from various denominations participated in an act of unity that seemed unbelievable—Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans co-founded the interdenominational society that, for many present, signaled a new era in Christian history. One of the leaders of LMS, David Bogue, preached a sermon at one of the foundation meetings that captured the sentiment:

We have now before us a pleasing spectacle, Christians of different denominations, although differing in points of church government, united in forming a society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen. This is a new thing in the Christian church.... Behold us here assembled with one accord to attend the funeral of *bigotry*: And may she be buried so deep that not a particle of her dust may ever be thrown up on the face of the earth.¹⁹

¹⁹ Thomas Haweis et al., *Sermons, Preached in London, at the Formation of the Missionary Society, September 22, 23, 24, 1795; To Which Are Prefixed, Memorials, Respecting the Establishment and First Attempts of That Society* (Printed and Sold by T. Chapman, 1795), 130. The sermons were by George Burder (on Jonah to Nineveh), Samuel Greatheed (on the Great Commission as moral law, based on Lk 10:29), John Hey (on the fullness of the times, based on Eph 1:10), Rowland Hill (on Mt 24:14), David Bogue (on objections against missions to the heathen), and Thomas Haweis.

Thomas Haweis, who was a leading minister and key constructor of the missions culture, explained in another founding sermon,

The petty distinctions among us, of names, and forms; the diversities of administrations, and modes of church order, we agree, shall this day all be merged in the greater, nobler, and characteristic name of CHRISTIANS; and our one ambition be, to promote no partial interests, since Christ is not divided, but with united efforts to make known abroad, the glory of his person... where his adorable name hath never yet been heard.²⁰

The great work of converting the world to Jesus demanded that Christians rise above their denominational bickering and cooperate in the burial of denominational tribalism. Another leader of the movement, Rowland Hill, summed it all up with a Wesleyan hymn that had become a mantra for these evangelical missionary advocates: “Let names and sects and parties fall, And Jesus Christ be all in all.”²¹

In *Among the Early Evangelicals*, I argue that the transatlantic interdenominational missions culture is the best context for understanding the origins of the Campbell movement. Thomas Campbell was a founding member of the Evangelical Society of Ulster (ESU) in 1798. The ESU was a sister missionary society to the London Missionary Society (LMS). The LMS sent missionaries to Ireland for the ESU. Many of the leading architects of the interdenominational missionary movement were connected to the LMS and to the ESU. The ESU was aggressively interdenominational, calling on Christians from different denominations to unite based on an ancient

²⁰ Haweis et al., 3–6.

²¹ Haweis et al., 114–15.

primitive authority in the New Testament so they could send itinerant preachers to Ireland and beyond to convert people to evangelical Christianity. But Thomas Campbell's Presbyterian Church took issue with the ESU's anti-sectarianism and non-denominationalism. Campbell had to defend the ESU to his denominational leaders in 1799. He did not win them over.²²

Alexander Campbell also experienced formation by the leaders of the missionary movement both in Ireland and in Scotland. For example, Greville Ewing and the Haldane brothers were among the most important leaders of the evangelical missionary movement in Scotland in the 1790s—these Scottish leaders were also connected to the LMS and ESU. Historians have long noted the influence of Ewing and the Haldanes on Alexander, but they have highlighted only the primitivism of the Scottish influences. In the book, I argue that their primitivism made no sense outside their desire to unite with other Christians to convert the world to Jesus through missionary efforts. That is, their primitivism—the idea that the NT could be a primitive authority higher than later denominational authorities like confessions—emerged among evangelicals to justify cooperation with people from other denominations to complete the most urgent work before them, which was converting the world to Jesus.²³

Therefore, it should be no surprise to learn that when Thomas Campbell separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1809 for being too tolerant in his Christianity, he and others founded a society using the ESU's constitution, plan, and ideals. Thomas called the new organization the Christian Association of

²² Gorman, *Among the Early Evangelicals*, chap. 4.

²³ Gorman, chap. 5.

Washington (CAW). The CAW's theology and its plan followed the ESU, the LMS, and dozens of similar evangelical missionary societies. Thomas said that the group organized the CAW "for the sole purpose of promoting simple evangelical Christianity, free from all mixture of human opinions and inventions of men." The CAW would use membership fees from people of various denominations—a voluntary society—to support itinerant preachers who would advocate for "a pure evangelical reformation, by the simple preaching of the everlasting gospel."²⁴ The plan argued that it was the "duty" of the CAW to cooperate with other evangelical societies, and there were many of those societies in the United States by 1809.²⁵

Like the evangelicals he had associated with in Ireland, Campbell expressed a vehement opposition to religious division, urging Christians toward unity instead. Campbell laid it bare, saying he was "tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit." He said the "rancour of party contentions" had destroyed the primitive unity of the church. Not only was unity the original intention of Christ for his church, but Campbell believed the evangelical efforts to cooperate in a worldwide missionary errand would cause the church to

²⁴ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Printed by Brown & Sample, 1809), 4–5.

²⁵ Gorman, *Among the Early Evangelicals*, chap. 6; Charles L. Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America* (William Carey Library, 1976), chaps. 4–6; Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 121–24, 275–80; James A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions, 1640-1810*, 2006 Reprint (J. H. Kok, 1970), chap. 6.

“be exalted to the enjoyment of her promised prosperity—that the Jews may be speedily converted and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.” Indeed, Campbell concluded his “Address” by citing John 17, urging Christian to unite because he believed Jesus’s prayer was true: Christian unity would be a testimony to the world that Jesus loved them and would, therefore, lead to the world’s conversion to Christianity.²⁶

Although the Campbell movement would develop over the next decades, it is impossible to understand the origin of the Campbell movement outside of the transatlantic interdenominational evangelical missions culture. The Campbells experienced this culture in Ireland and in Scotland, and when they broke from the Presbyterian Church in the United States, they used the ideas and practices of the evangelical missionary movement to start their own reform.

Revivalism

Evangelicalism’s call to interdenominational cooperation was inextricably tied both to the missionary movement and to revivalism. The leaders of the Christians made this clear in their *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (1804), quoted above: rejecting parties and embracing unity were part of the driving force of the revivalism that foreshadowed the universal spread of the gospel. Some historians have argued that the revivals in the 1790s to 1820s in the U.S. known as the Second Great Awakening catalyzed the missionary explosion.²⁷ So it is difficult to take any one of these themes on their own, as

²⁶ Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 20–23.

²⁷ De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea*, chap. 6; Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America*, 148, 190.

they are all part of a broader evangelical culture that permeated the English-speaking transatlantic.

Nonetheless, let's isolate revivalism for a moment. Historians of Christianity have long identified revivals as a key religious ritual that evangelicals institutionalized beginning in earnest in the 1730s Great Awakening. Those revivals never fully stopped in the U.S., even during the Revolutionary War. But in the early national era of the U.S., from the 1780s on, evangelicals began praying that God would again pour out his Spirit like he did back in the 1730s and 1740s.

Barton Stone emerged as a key leader of the Great Revival in the West in 1801, but no one would have guessed this for his future when he first attended a "log college" in North Carolina in 1790. He had grown up nominally Anglican before attending David Caldwell's log college to earn a law degree. At that time, he was determined to ignore the revivals taking place among his fellow students under the preaching of revivalist James McGready. But Stone eventually attended one of McGready's meetings and recalled that McGready's "concluding remarks were addressed to the sinner to flee the wrath to come without delay. Never before had I comparatively felt the force of truth. Such was my excitement, that had I been standing, I should have probably sunk to the floor under the impression."²⁸ Under the preaching of other revivalists, Stone experienced new birth conversion in 1791. Several years later, he was ordained and called to minister at two congregations in Kentucky.

Stone's conversion to evangelical Christianity happened right before the Second Great Awakening

²⁸ Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, 8.

broke out, and he had learned all the tools of revivalism that would make him one of its leaders in the early 1800s. Stone's teacher, David Caldwell, was one of many Presbyterian revivalists who, after receiving education at the College of New Jersey, passed on the revivalist toolbox to students all over the frontier via "log colleges." The toolbox, which perpetuated evangelical revivalism and catalyzed the Second Great Awakening, included the sacramental occasion—a multi-day celebration of the Lord's Supper. Sacramental occasions typically included a fast day on Wednesday or Thursday, preparation sermons on Friday and Saturday, communion sermons on Sunday, and thanksgiving sermons on Sunday night and Monday.²⁹ Sacramental occasions became the sites for camp meetings and rowdy revivals.

James McGready nurtured the sacramental occasions into full-blown revivals in southwestern Kentucky during the last years of the eighteenth century, and Stone visited McGready's revivals in early 1801. Stone observed what he called religious exercises and became convinced that the exercises were a legitimate manifestation of God's overflowing Spirit in a time of revival.³⁰ When Stone returned to his congregations further north in Kentucky, they immediately began experiencing the same exercises, which Stone described in his autobiography—falling, the jerks, dancing, barking, laughing, running, and singing.³¹ The awakening spread "like fire in dry stubble driven by a strong wind."³² Stone planned a sacramental occasion at

²⁹ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 11–68.

³⁰ Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, chap. 5.

³¹ Stone, chap. 6.

³² Stone, 37.

his Cane Ridge congregation for August 1801, and it became such an enormous revival that some historians call it America's Pentecost.³³ The meeting continued for a week. Between 10,000 and 30,000 people attended, including Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Stone said, "many things transpired there which were so much like miracles that, if they were not, they had the same effect as miracles on infidels and unbelievers."³⁴ Stone said they had prayed for revival, and God "answered by fire."³⁵ The Spirit had descended on the people to wake them from their religious slumber. For the rest of his life, he believed those exercises were an extraordinary work of God at a unique moment in history. Of course, Stone wasn't alone. Many evangelicals believed the same thing.³⁶

What evangelicals could not agree about was free will, and Stone's view of free will along with his willingness to reject confessions as an ultimate religious authority, led to his break from the Presbyterian Church. But we should not view this as a break from evangelicalism—not yet. When the Christian Churches published their defense for leaving the Presbyterian Church, Stone maintained a typical view of evangelical new birth—he simply made it Arminian rather than Calvinist. As he argued in his *Compendious View of the Gospel* in 1804, the Bible's testimony is sufficient for a person to believe or not believe. When a person believes in the gospel, then God gives that person a new birth

³³ Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

³⁴ Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, 38.

³⁵ Barton W. Stone, "History of the Christian Church. No. I," *Christian Messenger* 1, no. 4 (February 24, 1827): 74.

³⁶ Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, chap. 5.

conversion. Condemnation comes only to those who choose not to believe. Although he did not like the label of Arminian, Stone was an evangelical Arminian at this point in his life.³⁷

Elias Smith in New England also embraced evangelical revivalism and new birth conversion. Throughout his autobiography, Smith described many revivals of religion at which scores converted. He even recounted times when revival preachers he associated with preached sermons against unconverted ministers, some of which sounds like Gilbert Tennent's well-known Great Awakening sermon, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" (1740).³⁸

In 1805, Smith began publishing a religious periodical titled *The Christian's Magazine*, and he planned to concentrate on revivals of religion and conversion stories.³⁹ The first article was a reprint account of a revival from the 1740s in his own Portsmouth, N.H., followed by his own description of the 1803 revival that he had led in the same place—he called it a "glorious work of God." Smith wrote that the converted received baptism, which he "administered according to the New Testament." And he preached the name "Christians,

³⁷ Barton W. Stone, "A Compendious View of the Gospel," in *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: With Additions and Reflections by John Rogers* (Published for the Author by J. A. & U. P. James, 1847), 191–221.

³⁸ Smith, *Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith*, 228–29; Gilbert Tennent, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry (1740)," in *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*, ed. Richard L. Bushman (University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 87–93.

³⁹ Elias Smith, "Introduction," *The Christian's Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer* 1, no.1 (1805): 2.

leaving all unscriptural names behind.”⁴⁰ His magazine told stories about conversions in Africa, conversions of black people, and conversion of the Jews.⁴¹ And when he began a new periodical in 1808 titled *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, he praised the revivals in Kentucky and reprinted the Christians’ *Last Will and Testament*.⁴² In other words, “Christians” in the West and in the North embraced evangelical revivalism—it was the central context for their beginnings and for their religious identity.⁴³

Anti-Slavery

Finally, anti-slavery among evangelicals was part of a contextual package in which unity, missions, and

⁴⁰ Elias Smith, “Revival of Religion there [Portsmouth, N.H.] in 1803,” *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer* 1, no.1 (1805): 11.

⁴¹ See *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer*, 1, numbers 2 through 8.

⁴² Elias Smith, “Revival of Religion—and Reformation in Kentucky,” *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 1, no.1 (September 1, 1808): 2-3.

⁴³ It is worth noting here that, based upon my cursory research, Smith did not embrace the missionary societies by 1805 because he was convinced, “the whole of missionary business is, a party matter.” He critiqued the interdenominational missionary society in Piscataqua for being sectarian and demeaning religious leaders like himself. Although more research needs completed, we can say that Smith rejected the missionary movement in his area because the people orchestrating it were his religious enemies. His comments make clear that his problems were both theological and personal. See “The Piscataqua Evangelical Magazine,” *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer* 1, no.1 (1805; reprinted in 1808): 26-27; “Review of Mr. Collier’s Missionary Sermon,” *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer* 1, no.6 (Sept. 1806): 205-210. Alexander Campbell’s 1820s critique took up similar critiques, especially the idea that missionary societies had become the engines of perpetuating denominationalism.

revivalism were all interrelated. Although evangelicals were always divided on the issue of slavery, some of them led the abolitionist movement in the 1780s and 1790s. To be sure, classical liberalism, with its assertion that all individuals had inalienable rights, drove many people to the conclusion that slavery was immoral because it robbed people of natural rights. But evangelicals added religious reasons for rejecting slavery. For example, John Wesley argued in a pamphlet, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, in 1774 that slavery could not be reconciled with justice, mercy, or Christianity. He said that God would atone for the blood of the slaves with the blood of traders and owners.⁴⁴ Other evangelical leaders from the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians joined the fight against slavery at the end of the nineteenth century, calling it anti-Christian and a massive obstacle to the conversion of the world.⁴⁵

Again, some Stone-Campbell leaders joined evangelicals in the abolitionist movement. When James O’Kelly was still with the Methodists, he published a book in 1789 titled, *Essay on Negro-Slavery*. After commending Wesley’s pamphlet against slavery, O’Kelly condemned slavery for numerous reasons. First, he highlighted the horrible treatment of enslaved people, from the repugnant conditions on slave ships to the breaking up of families. Second, he argued that slavery was satanic, the whole system a trick Satan had played on Christians. Slave overseers were “devils incarnate.”

⁴⁴ John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1774), 55–57.

⁴⁵ James L. Gorman, “Evangelical Revivalism and Race Relations in the Early National Era,” in *Slavery’s Long Shadow: Race and Reconciliation in American Christianity*, ed. James L. Gorman, Jeff W. Childers, and Mark Hamilton (Eerdmans, 2019), 23–28.

Third, O’Kelly said slavery destroyed missions efforts, as Africans ran from Christians because they were terrified of being enslaved. Finally, he said slavery violated natural rights. For all these reasons, he believed God would judge the United States for its iniquity.⁴⁶ And because he said all this in writing, some of his fellow Virginians despised him and threatened to kill him.⁴⁷

Like O’Kelly in Virginia, Christians in the West opposed slavery—they joined fellow Presbyterians who had published their abolitionist case as early as 1792.⁴⁸ Stone said an experience in South Carolina in 1797 was the “exciting cause of my abandonment of slavery.” “My soul sickened,” he recounted forty years later, “at the sight of slavery in more horrid forms than I had ever seen it before; poor negroes! some chained to their work—some wearing iron collars—all half naked, and followed and driven by the merciless lash of a gentleman overseer—distress appeared scowling in every face.” A few years after that experience, Stone freed Ned and Lucy, two enslaved people he had inherited from his mother at her death. Stone later recalled, “I had emancipated my slaves from a sense of right, choosing poverty with a good conscience, in preference to all the treasures of the world.”⁴⁹

For Stone, abolition of slavery was one part of the larger work God was doing in the world through the

⁴⁶ James O’Kelly, *Essay on Negro-Slavery* (Prichard Hall, 1789), quoted from 11, http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books/77.

⁴⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989), 103.

⁴⁸ David Rice, *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy* (Parry Hall, 1792).

⁴⁹ Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, 27–28, 44.

evangelical revivals. Stone declared, “this revival cut the bonds of many poor slaves.”⁵⁰ Other members of Stone’s Cane Ridge congregation joined the fight. An elder at Cane Ridge, David Purviance, was elected to the Kentucky legislature as an antislavery representative in the late 1790s. In 1800, Stone presented a resolution on behalf of his congregations to the West Lexington Presbytery stating that slavery was a moral evil, and those who continued the practice should be removed from the church. And the Cane Ridge congregation led the charge to make emancipations in Bourbon County increase during the Great Revival in the West. Some revivalists believed that the goal of Christian unity in the revivals and the renunciation of slavery were signs of the imminent millennium.⁵¹ Historian Paul Conkin wrote that “antislavery sentiment became almost synonymous with the revival.”⁵² One of the things we learn here is that, if we hope to understand Stone and these evangelicals, we must take the missionary movement, revivalism, unity, abolitionism, and millennialism all together as part of the same religious culture. All these topics and movements related to one another. For evangelicals like Stone, the revivals were a sign of the last days that made urgent the abolition of slavery and conversion of the world.

Conclusion

The origin story of the Stone-Campbell movement is complex to be sure. Although the leaders were influenced by diverse sources of thought and practice, I have tried to show that they were all influenced by an evangelical

⁵⁰ Stone, 44.

⁵¹ D. Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (Chalice, 2000), 76–77.

⁵² Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 118.

culture that emphasized unity and cooperation for revivalism and missions. Stone-Campbell leaders did eventually build a new movement in the decades following the stories I have told, but their beginnings were among likeminded evangelicals. The Campbells used the ideas and practices of the evangelical missionary movement to launch their reform in 1809. The Christians embraced revivalism and a free will theology that led them to reject parts of their Calvinist heritage, even as they borrowed evangelical ideas about “Christian” being a better name than denominational names. The end product of the broader evangelical inclination to relate unity with revivalism and with missions was a postmillennial hope in the conversion of all people. God had broken into the world: Christians cooperated, sinners converted, missionaries preached, and God broke the chains of slavery.

The stories we tell ourselves about who we are and who we have been deeply shape our identity, theology, and our practices. For this reason and my commitment to the discipline of history, I am very interested in telling full and accurate stories. I don’t find a story of exceptionalism in the origins of the movement. Indeed, I have argued for the opposite. The early leaders looked a lot like the evangelicals around them. But that makes these stories no less important for understanding who we have been, who we are, and who we want to become.

Different Stone-Campbell groups today will no doubt take different lessons from this origin story. The stories here might encourage some folks to reject an exclusivism that inhibits love and cooperation with Christians of different denominations. Ironically, several types of exclusivism among Stone-Campbell adherents today reflect what the early leaders denounced—a party spirit

that fosters the idea that “we are the only ones.” Certainly, such exclusivism is out of step with the origins of the movement.

For others, these stories may be a challenge to be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit. In the decades following the origin story I have told, Alexander Campbell’s rationalism came to dominate most of the movement. But the Christians provide another story about who we were and who we might become. Is there room for the third person of the Trinity in Stone-Campbell churches today? Barton Stone and Elias Smith thought there should be.

And still others will find in this origin story a willingness to speak truth about injustices in our own time—even when it’s costly. Many of the early leaders believed that condemnation of slavery and working for justice in the world was a central aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Working for justice was not a hobby or something unrelated to the gospel. The very work of God in the revivals, they believed, was bringing about shalom in the world, restoring right relationships not only between people and God through new birth but also between people and people by breaking the chains of slavery.

We’ve been thinking about who we have been. The question for us as we reflect upon our origin story is, who will we become?