
Thomas Campbell Alexander Campbell

1763-1854

1788-1866

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Thomas and Alexander Campbell were father and son. Both were originally Presbyterians, both became convinced that the religion was incomplete, and both collaborated on founding one of the most powerful movements in American religious history.

Thomas Alexander was a Presbyterian minister, educated in Scotland, and migrated from Ireland to the United States in 1807. In America he split with the Presbyterians over Calvinist doctrine and the Eucharist. He lost his ministerial credentials after publishing a tract in 1809 critical of the faith. In response he organized the Christian Association of Washington, a congregationally governed church.

Thomas Alexander wanted to completely restore apostolic Christianity and believed Christian Creeds were unnecessary and divisive. The Bible was clear enough that Creeds were unnecessary. His motto was, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." His son, Alexander, observed, "It requires but little reflection to discover that the fiercest disputes about religion, are about what the Bible does not say, rather than about what it does say." For all other Christian denominations, Catholic and Protestant, however, it was the Creeds of Historic Christianity that defined them as "Christian." Rejection of the Creeds was revolutionary and unwelcomed. This desire to return to the original apostolic Christianity was "Restorationist" and a move beyond Protestantism.

Alexander Campbell intended to follow his father into the Presbyterian ministry, and studied to preach at the University of Glasgow, but became disillusioned with what he regarded as theological pettiness in the religion. By the time he joined his father in America, both father and son had

diverged from traditional Christianity and both welcomed the Restoration concept.

Both Campbells sought to return to the original, Primitive form of Christianity. Their movement was nicknamed by critics as “Campbellites” and later their ministries resulted in congregations today identified as the Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, Evangelical Christian Church in Canada, and Disciples of Christ. They practiced baptism by immersion, and adopted the name of “Christian” as their only proper name.

Alexander Campbell converted and trained Sidney Rigdon, who would later convert to the Mormon movement led by Joseph Smith. In response to the loss of congregants to Mormonism, he authored the earliest anti-Mormon book, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon*, in 1832, only two years after the Book of Mormon was published.

Alexander Campbell regularly debated clergy from other faiths on such topics as baptism, infant baptism, socialism and Christianity, Roman Catholicism and the Restoration movement. Some of these were transcribed and received international attention.

Alexander Campbell longed for Christian unity under a “Restored” original. He explained, "I have no idea of adding to the catalogue of new sects. I labor to see sectarianism abolished and all Christians of every name united upon the one foundation upon which the apostolic church was founded."