



Bicentennial of the Brush Run Church 1811-2011



Echoes of Scripture and Its Meaning

By Samuel W. Huxford

Vice President for Student Development and Dean of the Chapel, Atlanta Christian College

Executive Director, European Evangelistic Society



Having grown up in the context of “where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent,” it seems as though my entire life has at least been exposed to the idea of Scripture in the cultural milieu of the Stone-Campbell movement. The old *People’s New Testament*¹ by B.W. Johnson was the go-to resource for many in my family as they prepared adult Sunday School lessons and Wednesday night Bible studies. The newly released *People’s New Testament*² by Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock is no doubt becoming a similarly important resource for students of the New Testament as they continue to lead in the myriad Bible study opportunities commonly found in churches across the three streams of the Stone-Campbell movement and beyond.

Despite the rather well-educated influence of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, as Fred Craddock notes elsewhere in these essays, our movement thrived in a cultural context that did *not* demand an educated clergy. In fact, it seems fair to suggest that the idea of clergy was not particularly popular in the early days.³ The fact that both of the Campbells insisted that laymen should be allowed “to exhort, to teach, and on occasion to preach”⁴ makes it nearly automatic that any effort to describe the approach to interpretation in the tradition of a movement that developed out of Brush Run borders on the impossible!

Such a wide-opened approach to Scripture and its interpretation is fraught with the potential for misinterpretation and inadequate interpretation of Scripture. Stanley Hauerwas, in his book *Unleashing the Scriptures*, must have been thinking about such an approach when he wrote, “no task is more important than for the Church to take the Bible out of the hands of

¹ B.W. Johnson. *The People’s New Testament*. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1891.

² Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock. *The People’s New Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

³ See for example, Garrison and DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History*, page 158. “It was implicit in the position of these reformers that the distinction between clergy and laity was artificial, that it had no scriptural warrant, and that it tended toward the domination of the church by a clerical caste.”

⁴ Garrison and DeGroot, pages 157, 158.

individual Christians in North America.”⁵ While Hauerwas is not in the Stone-Campbell tradition in his own religious journey, his ideas certainly stand in stark contrast to the early Campbell idea that “laymen” should be allowed to exhort, teach and preach – all activities that would require some effort at interpreting Scripture. It is at least possible that his idea about taking the Bible out of the hands of individuals, laymen, and giving it to an educated, ordained clergy helps put in context some of the hermeneutical divides among us as a people.

In significant fashion, the contrast between the insistence that anyone can read and interpret Scripture and allowing only the well-educated clergy to interpret Scripture is a reasonable paradigm by which our divergent approaches to Scripture can be viewed. Our movement, in its broadest sense, has viewed Scripture from a very fundamentalist, literalistic point of view on the one hand; and we have viewed Scripture from a very critical, scientific point of view on the other hand. Anyone who has read our commentaries, listened to our sermons, employed our Sunday School literature, or used or read our theology books knows that we have landed at all points between those two extremes.

Our heritage as a movement among the people of God has historically viewed Scripture and its interpretation as crucial. It is probably reasonable to suggest that our unfortunate divisions as a movement to promote unity have, at least to some degree, developed out of varying views of both the nature of Scripture and the process by which it is to be interpreted. For some of us, “the silence of Scripture” has occupied a place of importance not shared by all of us. For others, a very literalistic view of Scripture that has little room for acceptance of the modern, scientific worldview has been at the heart of how we view Scripture. Still others have allowed the modern, scientific worldview to exercise authority over Scripture that makes others uncomfortable.

Those ideas, which only begin to identify some of our differences in terms of how we approach Scripture, make it all but impossible for an essay to adequately cover the subject of how Stone-Campbell church members and scholars have interpreted Scripture. Rather than attempting a review of varying approaches, this essay will attempt to examine how some of our movement’s early leaders viewed Scripture and its interpretation. Perhaps from that vantage point, those reading these words can examine the process by which we all have arrived at such different points.

In Alexander Campbell’s *The Christian System*, fairly described as among the first of our movement’s theology books, the author expresses a view of Scripture that sets the stage for subsequent generations of believers whose desires would revolve around the idea of Christian unity. Campbell wrote the preface to this theology book in January, 1835. In a remarkable fashion, the preface provides much to think about in terms of how our movement’s early leaders felt about the importance of Scripture and its authority in the church.

In the second paragraph Campbell, while speaking about the national privileges and civil liberties of citizens of the United States, declares, “we begin to appreciate how much we are

⁵ Stanley Hauerwas. *Unleashing the Scripture*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1993. Page 15.

indebted to the intelligence, faith, and courage of Martin Luther and his heroic associates in that glorious reformation.”⁶ But Campbell did not believe that the leaders subsequent to Luther took full advantage of the potential that would come to those who “rallied under the banners of the Bible.”⁷ His appreciation, however, for Luther included the accolade that it was Luther who “restored the Bible to the world in A.D. 1534, and boldly defended its claims against the impious and arrogant pretensions of the haughty and tyrannical See of Rome.”⁸

When one begins to think about the “lay nature” of our early history, it seems important to remember that Campbell, and no doubt other leaders, were reacting against what they viewed as the improper (at times heretical) place given to the experts of the church, while depriving the everyday believers of the blessing of reading and interpreting Scripture for themselves.⁹ Campbell marvels at the unfortunate reality that the Protestant reformers ultimately arrived at such levels of strife and disunity that “they lost all brotherly affection, and would as soon have ‘communed in the sacrament’ with the Catholics as with one another.”¹⁰

From his vantage point in history, Campbell believed that the problem was not the Bible, but the failure of Protestant reformers to live by its message. He suggested that it was “not the acknowledgment of a good rule, but the walking by it”¹¹ that had the potential of ending the strife, sectarianism, and divisiveness that characterized so much of Christendom in his day.

Just over four years later, when *The Christian System* entered its second edition, Campbell writes in a way that models the idea that one’s understanding of Scripture is to constantly grow, develop, and become more mature. He clearly suggests that “the Christian system is undergoing an examination in the present day, both as to its evidences and signification.”¹² But in characteristic form and demonstrating his extraordinarily high view of Scripture, he says “we take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as the foundation of all Christian union and communion.”¹³

In his discussion of the nature of Scripture, Campbell begins by suggesting that there is “one God, one moral system, one Bible.”¹⁴ In that context, he says that “the Bible contemplates

⁶ Alexander Campbell. *The Christian System*. (1835) Reprinted by Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1970. Page vii.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Similar sentiment can be found in *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, where the signers, including Barton W. Stone, declare “We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” See Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker. *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, page 78

¹⁰ *Ibid.* page viii.

¹¹ *Ibid.* page ix.

¹² *Ibid.* page xvi.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 2.

man primarily in his spiritual and eternal relationships.”¹⁵ In a subtle, but nevertheless obvious manner, he addresses one of the issues that has, at least in the years since Charles Darwin’s suggestions about creation, more often than not separated us as a people. The Bible is not, Campbell argues, intended to be a book read as a science primer. The Bible does not ignore the reality of nature, but is interested only to the extent that it relates to man’s “body, soul, and spirit.”¹⁶

Earlier in the 19th Century, when Thomas Campbell penned the words of the *Declaration and Address*, the proposition that addressed the appropriate manner in which inferences of Scripture could be handled would prove to be helpful at the point, and when ignored, the hint of division.¹⁷ The Campbells seem to have a remarkable understanding of Scripture and its authority, but an equally remarkable understanding of the difference in what Scripture implicitly teaches as compared to what it simply infers. Our movement seems to be markedly impacted by our unwillingness to allow that approach to interpreting Scripture to guide our thinking.

None of this is to suggest some weak and incipient view of the nature of Scripture. Campbell declared “the Bible is to the intellectual and moral world of man what the sun is to the planets in our system – the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal.”¹⁸ But it is important for him, and for those who still dream of one body for the church, that it be interpreted in ways that are consistent with the intent of its divine author.

When thinking about hermeneutics proper, Campbell is adamant that Scripture has come to the people of God in the language of humankind and must be interpreted that way. “The words of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted, and understood according to the same code of laws and principles of interpretation by which other ancient writings are translated and understood.”¹⁹ This idea is, in fact, a part of his concern about a special clerical class that occupies a place of authority and power when it comes to interpreting Scripture. To ignore this, Campbell argues, would “require a class of inspired men to unfold and reveal its true sense to mankind.”²⁰

If Campbell’s view of Scripture and how it is to be interpreted is reflective of the core ideas that gave impetus to the development of the Stone-Campbell movement, then one can clearly see two vital aspects to our approach to hermeneutics in the days that shaped us as a movement.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, page 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See, for example, Garrison and DeGroot’s summary of the thirteen propositions in *The Disciples: A History*, page 150-151. In particular, Proposition 6 which is summarized as follows: “Inferences and deductions from Scripture may be true doctrine, but they are not binding upon the consciences of Christians further than they perceive them to be so. Hence ‘no such deduction or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church’s confession.’” (page 151)

¹⁸ Campbell, *Christian System.*, page 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

One of those vital aspects is the idea that the Bible is a unique, authoritative book from God. The nature of Scripture is such that it truly becomes “the rule of faith and practice” for those who seek to bring the church to the kind of unity reflective of our Lord’s prayer that we be One, as He and the Father are One.²¹ For early Stone-Campbell preachers and teachers, the only way such unity was possible was through the Word of God.

But the other vital aspect is equally important. Campbell refuses to think that there is some sort of special Spirit language that makes up Scripture and that the same approaches to interpreting any ancient literature should be employed in the interpretation of Scripture. He clearly recognizes that the words of Scripture are both *ancient* and *literature*. That requires an approach to interpretation that respects both the ancient nature of Scripture and the fact that it was written in human language – albeit inspired by the Holy Spirit.

It is not surprising that Campbell would attempt to identify the principles by which “ancient literature, including the Bible” should be interpreted. Again, relying upon *The Christian System*, one can see the guiding principles that he believed were essential to a movement professing to place great authority in the words of Scripture, coupled with an intense desire to bring the church together as one body. Campbell’s rules of interpretation were, in some ways, “ahead of his time.” Not every approach to Scripture and its interpretation in his day would have agreed, for example, about the importance he gives the historical setting of a book.

Because of the influence Alexander Campbell exercised in the early days of our movement, and because of his continuing influence, perhaps a brief review of his rules of interpretation would be instructive to each of us. In our efforts to better understand how we moved from those early events like Brush Run, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, and on to our early efforts at educating ministry leaders for our churches, Campbell’s approach to interpreting Scripture is a crucial matter to understand.

- Rule 1. On opening any book in the sacred Scriptures, *consider first the historical circumstances of the book. These are the order, the title, the author, the date, the place, and the occasion of it.*
- Rule 2. In examining the contents of any book, as respects precepts, promises, exhortations, etc., *observe who it is that speaks and under what dispensation he officiates.*
- Rule 3. To understand the meaning of what is commanded, promised, taught, etc., *the same philological principles, deduced from the nature of language, or the same laws of interpretation which are applied to the language of other books, are to be applied to the language of the Bible.*
- Rule 4. *Common usage, which can only be ascertained by testimony, must always decide the meaning of any word which has but one signification; but when words have, according to testimony, (i.e. the Dictionary,) more meanings than one, whether literal or*

²¹ See, for example, John 17:20-26.

figurative, *the scope, the context, or parallel passages must decide the meaning*, for if common usage, the design of the writer, the context, and parallel passages fail, there can be no certainty in the interpretation of language.

- Rule 5. *In all tropical language ascertain the point of resemblance, and judge the nature of the trope, and its kind, from the point of resemblance.*
- Rule 6. In the interpretation of symbols, types, allegories and parables, this rule is supreme: - *Ascertain the point to be illustrated; for comparison is never to be extended beyond that point – to all the attributes, qualities, or circumstances of the symbol, type, allegory, or parable.*
- Rule 7. For the salutary and sanctifying intelligence of the Oracles of God, the following rule is indispensable: *We must come within the understanding distance.*²²

For any biblical scholar engaged in the practice of interpreting Scripture, Rules 1-6 sound remarkable familiar, even now nearly 150 years after Campbell first penned them. The idea that “usage determines meaning” (Rule 4) is fundamental to the process of language these days. Who hasn’t spent hours reading introductions to biblical books that address issues like authorship, destination, date, etc. (Rule 1) If one were to compare the conclusions of the old *The People’s New Testament* to those of the modern version of *The People’s New Testament*, he or she would see not only the importance of more modern theories of origin, for example in the Synoptic Gospels, but perhaps even more importantly see a paradigm for the kinds of approaches to interpretation that have tended to divide us as separatist groups within a unity movement – an oxymoron if there ever was one! Paradoxically, most of the conclusions about historical setting are extra-biblical at best and typically merely educated guesses.

Yet, if one reads the literature of our movement, we have tended towards being dismissive of one another’s faith over these very issues. For the more fundamentalist among us, thinking that Mark wrote first and Matthew and Luke relied upon Mark and an otherwise unknown document identified simply as *Q* is tantamount to heresy. For the more progressive among us, thinking that Matthew, Mark, and Luke might actually have written the three gospel accounts that bear their names borders on being a simpleton. Rather than discussing what both Thomas and Alexander Campbell would have viewed as the essential testimony of Scripture, we often end up being dismissive of one another over extra-biblical ideas about how Scripture came to us.

Campbell’s insistence on being within “the understanding distance” would suggest that the character of an interpreter matters. In the simple analogy of the physics of hearing, he simply affirms that unless one is within “the hearing distance,” he or she cannot hear God. “God himself is the center of that circle, and humility is its circumference.”²³ If character matters, and Campbell believes that it does, then issues of interpretation become more and more rooted in questions like who we are and whose we are.

²² *Ibid.*, pages 3,4.

²³ *Ibid.*, page 5.

Perhaps of equal importance in understanding the approach to Scripture adopted by the early leaders of the Stone-Campbell movement was Alexander Campbell's *Sermon on the Law*. Many historians will agree with the assessment of McAlister and Tucker in *Journey of Faith* when they suggest that this sermon created great tension between the reformers and their Redstone Baptist Association friends.²⁴ The general consensus of many religious leaders of the day seems to have been that the Bible – Old and New Testaments – was “level,” that is, each covenant had equal authority in a believer's life. The sermon used Romans 8:3 as its text and at the heart of what Campbell attempted to say was that the two covenants were not of equal authority for followers of Jesus. That was in stark contrast, opposition might be a better word, to the prevailing attitude of the Redstone group. As McAlister and Tucker note, “Baptists had tended to accept all Scripture without this distinction.”²⁵

What was it about the sermon that drew such ire on the part of those with whom the Campbells had been in fellowship? Few have summarized the *Sermon on the Law* as well as Garrison and DeGroot. Their summary aptly answers this question.

The Christian system, for the individual believer and for the church, is based on a new covenant which, though historically connected with the Hebrew regime and prophesied in it, is radically different in principle and content. With the coming of Christ, the whole law was done away; not merely the ceremonial law, but the whole law. The immutable principles of morality which had been embodied in the law are still in force, not because they were in the law, but because they existed before it and independent of it. The law had declared them, not created them.²⁶

The sermon was preached at a meeting of the Redstone Association in 1816, but could have been preached in some form as early as 1813.²⁷ After a wide-ranging section in which Campbell attempts to define the phrase, “the law,” he notes three crucial matters the law could not accomplish: (1) it could not give righteousness and life; (2) it could not adequately exhibit the malignity or demerit of sin; and (3) it could not be a suitable rule of life to mankind in this imperfect state, noting that it was not even given to “all mankind, but only a part.”

Campbell's conclusions, which must have been much of the source of the “humming criticism,” included important matters like: (1) there is an essential difference between law and gospel; (2) there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; and (3) there is no necessity for preaching the law in order to prepare men for receiving the gospel. He immediately reminds his listeners that Jesus commissioned His apostles “to preach the gospel unto every creature.” That is followed by a reminder that the “substance of eight or ten

²⁴ Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker. *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975. See pages 122ff and 138ff for their discussion of the sermon and the climate into which it was preached.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, page 122. Garrison and DeGroot confirm this idea as well, suggesting “The churches of the association hummed with criticism of the sermon.” (page 167)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, page 165.

²⁷ McAlister and Tucker, footnote on page 122.

sermons delivered by Paul and Peter to Jews and Gentiles, in the Acts of the Apostles, and not one precedent of preaching the law to prepare their hearers, whether Jews or Gentiles, for the reception of the gospel.”

But he was not yet finished! A fourth conclusion included a reminder that common practices, such as infant baptism (based on circumcision rites in the Hebrew Bible), paying tithes, celebrating holy days, sanctifying the seventh day, and national covenants that established civil religion were not a part of the Christian gospel. His final point in the sermon included “we are taught from all that has been said, to venerate in the highest degree the Lord Jesus Christ; to receive Him as the Great Prophet, of whom Moses in the law, and all the prophets did write.”²⁸

What is of great importance to realize is that in the early days that echoed out of Brush Run, Campbell’s sermon created a new and different way of viewing Scripture. Fundamental to Stone-Campbell approaches to Scripture has been to recognize what Campbell saw when most of his associates could not or would not see. Believers simply do not have the same relationship to the Hebrew Bible that was true for ancient Jews.

Too many echoes end up reverberating into a noisy gong and clanging symbol, to borrow imagery from the apostle Paul. So perhaps it is best that a summary of sorts be offered that describes the kind of information presented thus far.

Four important items seem to rise to the surface of how our early leaders viewed the interpretation of Scripture:

First, they believed that the Bible should be made available for all believers. That idea included a great sensitivity to the tendency of an educated clergy to assume rights over Scripture and its interpretation that could not be supported by the Bible itself. The idea that all believers are priests and ministers was taken seriously enough to demand a kind of freedom when it comes to interpreting Scripture that eliminates a ruling class of biblical experts.

Second, they believed that the Bible should be interpreted by the normal rules of language. While affirming at every turn the idea that the Bible was a special book, it was special because of its divine author, not the language in which it was written. Principles such as setting the historical stage upon which the words were first written; allowing usage to determine meaning; and care in not pushing figurative language beyond its intended point established an approach to interpreting Scripture that reflects the ancient nature of Scripture and the need for accepting the idea that language can communicate the mind of God in a reliable manner – but only when interpreted as language should be.

²⁸The above paragraphs describing the *Sermon on the Law*, including comments in quotations, are taken from an electronic version of the sermon, which was first published in *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 3, No. 9, September 1846. This particular copy was taken from the reprint of *The Millennial Harbinger* by College Press in 1976. The electronic address is: www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/mh1846/SOTL.HTM

Thirdly, our early leaders recognized the distinction between direct commands of God as found in Scripture and inferences one might draw from biblical texts. Affirming a person's privilege to hold such inferences as doctrine, they insisted that such inferences could not be made tests of fellowship in the lives of those who did not see them the same. Few ideas could be more important for a movement focused on Christian unity than Thomas Campbell's understanding of this issue.

Fourthly, our early leaders were respectful of the idea of covenant, and insisted that our covenant in Christ has replaced the covenant God made with the Hebrew wanderers in the wilderness of Sinai. While in a biblical sense the phrase "New Testament Christian" seems a bit redundant, the reality of early 19th century religious culture suggests that such a term had value. Even today, for those whose religious experience has been in the tradition of the Stone-Campbell movement, it can be shocking to hear believers of other traditions, especially the more conservative groups, treat the Hebrew Covenant with the same sense of authority as the New Covenant.

If these four items are a reasonably fair reflection of our roots, then the question that ultimately becomes important is this: Where are we in terms of following the direction established by those whose efforts gave birth to this new reformation? The answer is probably best given in but one word: *everywhere*.

While our unity efforts are often talked about in terms of "three streams,"²⁹ even within those identifiable streams are varying and divergent approaches to Scripture and its interpretation. At a meeting of the Stone-Campbell Dialogue group in Nashville, Tennessee several years ago, those in attendance were asked to write down words that would reflect attitudes about the two groups other than the group each person represented. When those responses were shared, most present seemed to be surprised to know that others would have viewed them as they did. While such a survey is obviously less than scientific, the results demonstrate just how impossible it is to say how this divergent, sometimes bordering on hostile, unity group actually is. Disciples of Christ were mostly viewed as liberal and interested in social justice issues at the expense of evangelism. Christian Church/Churches of Christ were viewed as anti-intellectual and often rigid. Churches of Christ were viewed as legalistic and often judgmental.³⁰

For those reading this essay who have made the effort to cross streams and fellowship with other Stone-Campbell fellowships, attempts to label always fail and such pejorative attitudes are less than helpful if our efforts to bring about the unity of the body of Christ are ever to be fruitful. That exercise at the Stone-Campbell Dialogue was not intended to increase our lack of trust in one another, but rather was intended to point to the challenge of unity and

²⁹ Those "three streams" are most often described as (a) Christian Church, Disciples of Christ; (b) Christian Church/Churches of Christ; and (c) churches of Christ.

³⁰ This information reflects the memory of the author of this essay, who was present for this meeting in 2008. He was shocked at being viewed as "anti-intellectual and often rigid!" In fact, it seemed that each member of the dialogue was living testimony that the general view of each group was non-applicable to those attending this dialogue.

make those attending more aware of at least some of the barriers in our way towards that godly goal.

Such an exercise certainly points to the impossibility of describing where our movement is in terms of how we interpret Scripture. What might prove to be helpful is to examine anew the four primary ideas noted above and determine whether or not such issues are both biblical and relevant for our witness to the modern world of the 21st century. Should they be viewed as both biblical and relevant, then the next challenge will be to determine where we are in relationship to where they most likely, if practiced, would lead us.

It is hard to imagine, for example, how one could identify the Campbells as models for leadership in the church and end up with a very fundamentalist, literalistic view of Scripture. But it is equally hard to think that Campbell's rules of interpretation would lead one to be dismissive of Scripture as mere literature that has little or no value to "doing church" in the modern age. For the vast majority of all of us – all three streams – who are somewhere between those two extremes, the challenge is how we discover a way to make unity among brothers and sisters in Christ the very thing that other faith groups think when they hear about us. Whatever else may be said, it cannot be argued that we have yet reached that point in our journey towards Christian unity.

The Christians in Galatia were rigid, law-keeping believers. They saw little room for differences among believers and seemed to think that adherence to their rigid view of the Christian gospel – it was about law, not faith – was more important than faith in Christ. When writing those believers, Paul omits his normal "I thank God for you" paragraph, and describes them as foolish.

The Christians in Corinth had every sort of theological, moral, and sociological problem imaginable. They were divisive, had serious issues with sexual morality, sued one another in pagan courts, were confused about marriage, about the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, and were not sure the preacher should be paid a salary. The Lord's Supper was being abused and the role of women in the church was a problem. Confusion about the Holy Spirit appears to have been rampant, and they had questions about the resurrection of Jesus. Yet 1 Corinthians begins with a wonderful statement of thanksgiving and Paul describes them as "brothers and sisters" over 20 times in the epistles.

Apparently, if the model of these two epistles is indicative, it is possible to be rigidly moral and hold doctrine so soundly that it is no longer sound. It is also possible to have a long laundry list of issues and be worthy of Paul's thanksgiving. While the differences in those two epistles would take hours to fully discuss, a summary might simply suggest that the Galatians had placed faith in a system while the Corinthians are holding on to faith in Christ. Our movement's hope for restoring the unity of the body of Christ rests in making sure that our approach to interpreting Scripture leads us to faith in Christ and not faith in a system we create.

In commenting on Thomas Campbell's vision of unity expressed in his *Declaration and Address*, Robert O. Fife writes, "Here Christian unity is defined as a present, essential Reality. It

is personal rather than institutional; confessional rather than theological; sacramental rather than merely subjective; and ethical rather than simply formal.”³¹ Fife concludes this lecture, given at Pepperdine University in 1991, by noting, “The shattering of man’s fondest dreams in the Twentieth Century makes it abundantly evident that within itself the modern age can find no ground of hope. Only through the primitive witness of a prophetic, united Church will the ground of hope be rediscovered. Then, ‘modernity’ may hear once again the ancient witness of Christian ‘primitivism,’ and itself ‘come to terms’ with the age to come.”³²

Where are we? Everywhere and beyond. But by renewing a commitment to the nature of Scripture and interpreting it as modeled by our ancestors in faith, the Stone-Campbell movement can become the witness to Christ that the world about us so desperately needs to hear.

What began in 1809 in Brush Run, Pennsylvania was the first step on a long journey towards Christian unity. Little could those ancient disciples of Christ have realized where that journey would take them. As we listen anew to the echoes of those now stilled voices, we 21st century disciples have an ever new opportunity to speak with one voice that Jesus is Lord.

Bibliography

Boring, Eugene and Fred Craddock. *The People’s New Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Campbell, Alexander. *The Christian System*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1970.

_____. *The Sermon on the Law*. Published in *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 3, No. 9, September 1846.

Available electronically at:

www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/mh1846/SOTL.HTM

Campbell, Thomas. *Declaration and Address*. 1809. Electronic copy available at:

³¹ Robert O. Fife. *Celebration of Heritage*. Los Angeles: The Westwood Christian Foundation, 1992. Page 447.

³² *Ibid.* pages 453,454.

www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/tcampbell/da/DA-1ST.HTM.

Fife, Robert O. *Celebration of Heritage*. Los Angeles: The Westwood Christian Foundation, 1992.

Garrison, W.E. and A.T. DeGroot. *The Disciples of Christ: A History*. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *Unleashing the Scripture*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1993.

Johnson, B.W. *The People's New Testament*. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1891.

McAllister, Lester G. and William E. Tucker. *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975.

Stone, Barton, et.al. *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. 1804. (See Douglas Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, D. Newell Williams. *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. Pages 453-455.