

ABSTRACT

Practicing Primitive Christianity in a Progressive World: A Historical Examination of Two Divisions within the Churches of Christ in America

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Since their birth in America, Churches of Christ have believed in and sought after the unity of all Christendom through the restoration of primitive, New Testament Christianity. Throughout its history, this group has divided over issues it believed were jeopardizing this objective of unity through restoration. These issues, often branded innovations by more traditionalist members, have led to several major wings within the Churches of Christ at large. This study examines two such issues effecting one of the most conservative of these wings: the break over the requisite number of cups in the communion service, and the still-recent split over the issue of divorce and remarriage. A close examination of these divisions brings to light much historical evidence indicating that these rifts had their genesis, not from any new biblical hermeneutic, but rather from the constant and graduated pressure placed on the church by an evolving and progressing society.

Practicing Primitive Christianity in a Progressive World:
A Historical Examination of Two Divisions within the Churches of Christ in America

by

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
CHAPTER	Page
1. Restoration Roots: An Introduction to the Churches of Christ	1
Ecumenical Beginnings	
Theological Tenets	
2. The Communion Cup Controversy	15
Breaking Bread before Bacteria	
The Germination of the Germ Theory	
Sanitizing the Communion Service	
3. What God Hath Joined: The Division over Divorce and Remarriage	50
Marriages Asunder in America	
Early Restoration Movement Reactions	
A Brotherhood Asunder over Divorce and Remarriage	
4. Conclusion: Holding Fast to Unchanging Doctrines in an Ever-changing Society	79
5. Selected Bibliography	83

PREFACE

Genealogical studies typically bore me. Despite this field's growing popularity among professional and lay historians, I have never found the prospect or practice of genealogical research interesting. Spending hours at the county courthouse poring over pages of faceless names in hopes of creating a biological chain from past to present holds little appeal to me when compared with the study of dynamic personalities, revolutionary ideas, or influential movements. These are what give history its stories, and stories make history great.

This being said, the work that follows is, for me, a spiritual genealogy of sorts. I grew up attending and am still a member of the Churches of Christ, and my affiliation with this group is responsible for my interest in researching and writing about its history. Throughout this process, I have become acquainted with my spiritual ancestors, and through their stories I have gained a better understanding of where I have come from and, consequently, who I am. This work however, is about far more than my personal spiritual roots. It deals with a group of people who now make up more than 3 million of the world's religious adherents, and it focuses on how the world around them has influenced their direction and growth—an issue that all denominations and world religions must address.

The Church of Christ has largely been shaped by the journals it has produced, and these journals, including the *Millennial Harbinger*, the *Christian Baptist*, the *Gospel Advocate*, and the *Old Paths Advocate*, make up a great deal of the primary source material from which this work is comprised. Aside from its journals, the preachers of the

Churches of Christ have indelibly left their mark on the churches for which they have spoken. Fortunately, I have had the pleasure of speaking with some of these men, itinerant ministers who have collectively preached thousands of sermons and spent countless hours in thought about the specific group within the Churches of Christ with which this study deals. These men have been reflective, candid, and earnest in sharing with me their recollections of the church's past and their hopes for the church's future, and their comments have been invaluable to the completion of this work.

One of the Church of Christ's early and most influential leaders, Alexander Campbell, noted, "The rarest talent in the world is that divine talent of narrating or stating an event just as it happened—the talent of representing a thing just as it is, or was, without a single alteration or variation." He went on to express that the difficulty of objective and accurate historical research and writing dramatically increases when the author is dealing with a group with which he is "most intimately acquainted."¹ I must echo Campbell's sentiment as a disclaimer. I have done my best to keep this work free of bias, but history is inevitably written from the perspective of its author, and this study is, of course, no exception. It is my hope that this work—both in spite and because of its author's vantage point—will display at once the professional objectivity of a scholar and the sincere concern of one "intimately acquainted" with this subject.

¹ Alexander Campbell, "Notes of Apostasy," *The Millennial Harbinger*, 1 no. 1 (February 1834) : 16-17.

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CHAPTER ONE

Restoration Roots: An Introduction to the Churches of Christ in America

Ecumenical Beginnings

In the afternoon hours of August 6, 1801, Presbyterian pastor Barton W. Stone watched the summer rain pound the dark Kentucky soil of the grounds surrounding the log meetinghouse at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. If he had been concerned earlier that morning about the damp weather discouraging travelers from attending the weekend's upcoming meeting, his worries were put to rest before the start of the first service. Stone saw the Cane Ridge meetinghouse packed with nearly four hundred eager listeners, all responding to the invitation to attend an ecumenical gathering of mostly Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, each prepared for four days of preaching and communion. The large crowds only grew larger from that first day. Thousands of people began to arrive as the weekend progressed, most choosing to camp on the grounds for the duration of the gathering. As the outdoor, Sunday evening service began, cries and shouts of repentant converts and penitent believers echoed across the soggy grounds, and scores of listeners among the crowd began falling to the earth in emotionally peaked prostration.

In his autobiography, Stone recalled the moving and charged tenor of this event:

The roads were literally crowded with wagons, carriages, horsemen, and footmen, moving to the solemn camp. The sight was affecting. . . . There were between twenty and thirty thousand collected. Four or five preachers were frequently speaking at the same time, in different parts of the encampment, without confusion. The Methodist and Baptist preachers aided in the work, and all appeared cordially united in it—of one mind and one soul, and the salvation of sinners seemed to be the great object of all. We all engaged in singing the same songs of praise—all united in prayer—all preached the same things—free

salvation urged upon all by faith and repentance. . . . The numbers converted will be known only in eternity. . . . This meeting continued six or seven days and nights, and would have continued longer but provisions for such a multitude failed in the neighborhood.¹

Stone noted that the “distinguishing doctrine preached” by himself and the other speakers at Cane Ridge was simple: “God loved the world—the whole world, and . . . he sent his Son to save” all in the world. Stone and his fellow preachers insisted “that the gospel was the means of salvation,” and that “that no previous qualification was required or necessary in order to believe” and receive one’s place among the saved.² This style of preaching bucked hard against the Calvinistic doctrines of orthodox Presbyterianism, and Stone quickly came under fire from his superiors in the Presbyterian Church.

When describing this theologically formative period, Stone’s autobiography reads like the memoirs of a spiritual revolutionary—a fact not entirely unexpected considering that the American Revolution was a very recent memory in the minds of Stone and his cohorts. Although they were young boys at the time (Stone was born in 1772), these men lived through the period of the American colonies throwing off what they had insisted was the yoke of British tyranny, and Stone had begun to see the ecclesiastical authorities above him in a similar light.

Stone’s hearing before the Synod of Kentucky and the resulting suspension of him and four other like-minded preachers was a decision he and his co-defendants firmly believed “was not produced by the Bible, but by human authoritative creeds, supported by sticklers for orthodoxy.” This suspension marked a turning point in Stone’s life, because in its aftermath he saw “great commotion and division in the churches” and

¹Barton W. Stone, *A Short History of the Life of Barton W. Stone: Written by Himself, Voices From Caneridge* edition, ed. Rhodes Thompson (St. Louis, MO: The Bethany Press, 1954), 68-9.

²*Ibid.*, 74-5.

among “families; those who before had lived in harmony and love, were now set in hostile array against each other.” Stone and those suspended with him were convinced that human creeds produced this discord among brethren and they “effectually turned against such creeds as nuisances of religious society and the very bane of Christian unity.”³

Shortly after their suspension, these preachers banded together and formed the Springfield Presbytery, but after only a year of operating under that heading, they discarded it, drawing up the their reasoning in a document titled, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. In this treatise, these men outlined a plea for Christian unity, noting their desire that the Springfield Presbytery “be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body.” This one body, they insisted, should be governed by the Bible only, and all manmade, ecclesiastical legislatures organized for “making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority” should “forever cease,” so that all “may have free course to the Bible” and “adopt the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”⁴ From this point on, Stone refused to be identified with any established denominations and maintained that he and his followers were simply Christians. For the next twenty years, this unaffiliated, renegade Christian group grew in number, and their ideas of religious freedom and spiritual unity took root throughout Kentucky.

³Ibid., 77-8.

⁴B. W. Stone, Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, and Richard McNemar, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (June 28, 1804), quoted in Barton W. Stone, *A Short History of the Life of Barton W. Stone: Written by Himself, Voices from Caneridge* edition, ed. Rhodes Thompson (St. Louis, MO: The Bethany Press, 1954), 81-3.

In 1809, while Stone's movement blossomed on the Kentucky frontier, another Presbyterian, Alexander Campbell, arrived in America from his native Ireland with his mother and siblings. The family came to the New World to join its patriarch, Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian pastor and school teacher who had migrated to America two years ahead of his family and had since been advocating for unity among Christians in the area of Washington County, Pennsylvania. Upon the family's reunion from a two-year separation, Alexander and Thomas became the unofficial leaders of "The Christian Association of Washington," an assembly that promoted cooperation between all Christian denominations. This group published a declaration of their own intentions that read much like Stone's *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* in its plea for an end to inter-denominational rankling and the genesis of a unified Christendom.

Like Stone, the Campbells were:

well aware, from sad experience, of the heinous nature, and pernicious tendency of religious controversy among Christians; tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit; we would desire to be at rest; and, were it possible, we would also desire to adopt and recommend such measures as would give rest to our brethren throughout all the churches;—as would restore unity, peace, and purity, to the whole church of God.⁵

The Christian Association of Washington also faced rejection similar to that of Stone's movement, and in 1810, when the Pittsburg Synod of the Presbyterian Church denied the group's plea for fellowship, the association took on the function of a religious congregation and named itself the Brush Run Church, after the valley in which it met.

From this point on, Alexander Campbell's gifts with the pen and in the pulpit made him the most recognizable leader in this movement for Christian unity, and his sermons and printed works greatly influenced the direction and scope of the movement.

⁵Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington*, (Washington, PA: Brown and Sample, 1809), 3.

In 1824, during his first of many visits to Kentucky, Alexander Campbell met Barton W. Stone, and their respective movements first learned of each other's existence and took note of their many similarities. Over the course of their correspondence, the two leaders accepted and endorsed the unification of their respective movements, and Stone would come to say of Campbell: "I am constrained, and willingly constrained to acknowledge him [as] the greatest promoter of this reformation of any man living."⁶ Historians now frequently refer to this nineteenth-century movement for Christian unity either by the names of its two most famous leaders—the "Stone-Campbell Movement"—or by its self-designated purpose: the "Restoration Movement," since its members, rather than trying to reform a perceivably lost Christendom, sought to *restore* primitive or New Testament Christianity apart from the modern religious milieu. The Restoration Movement sprang from the spiritually fertile soil of America's Second Great Awakening, and it was from this nineteenth-century campaign for the restoration of Christian unity that the Churches of Christ took root in America.

Theological Tenets

In order to better understand the history of the Churches of Christ, a basic comprehension of the theological ideas that have shaped their identity is necessary. These ideas were essential in this group's formation and they remain central in defining who the Churches of Christ are today.

⁶Barton W. Stone, *A Short History of the Life of Barton W. Stone: Written by Himself, Voices From Caneridge* edition, ed. Rhodes Thompson (St. Louis, MO: The Bethany Press, 1954), 106.

Sola Scriptura—By Scripture Alone

In his sweeping introduction to Christianity, *The Christian System*, Alexander Campbell wrote that the Bible is to the mind and soul of man “what the sun is to the planets in our system—the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race that is not drawn from the Bible,” he argued.⁷ The Bible then, and not a creed book of human authorship, should be the sole source of spiritual instruction in the life of a Christian. The phrase, “Where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent” quickly became a motto of the Churches of Christ, one often attributed to the elder of the two Campbells, Alexander’s father, Thomas. Whether or not Thomas Campbell coined this phrase, the principle of *sola scriptura* is one that the Churches of Christ would take very seriously throughout their history, and they continue to do so today. One present-day Church of Christ preacher, when asked what this slogan meant to him, affirmed:

Well, it means to me, that in view of the morass that’s out there in denominational thought and practice—a man can believe virtually anything he wants to believe, just pick and choose what he’s going to be religiously—if you cut yourself loose from the truth of that statement, you have lost bearings. You are “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.” The only sure way to guide one’s ship on this vast sea of controversy is to speak where the Bible speaks. That is a gem that’s encapsulated in those few words that shows great wisdom. So what that means to me is . . . to have something basic—why not the Bible? If we believe it’s the word of God, as it truly is, that’s the safety, and that will identify us as the church that you read about in the New Testament—if we adhere to it.⁸

The importance of this principle to the Churches of Christ becomes clearer when examining some of the divisions that have taken place among them. Throughout their history these splits have occurred because of a perceived disregard of this principle—of

⁷Ibid.,14.

⁸Clark Carlo, interview by author, digital recording (Cabool, MO, March 15, 2007).

speaking where the Bible speaks and remaining silent where it is silent—by one group of individuals against another within the church. Of all the theological ties that the various branches of the Restoration Movement have in common, this is probably the most widespread and indispensable.

Non-Denominational in Designation

Understanding the Church of Christ's place among the denominations of the world can be confusing—mostly because its members insist that they have no place among the denominations. They maintain that the Churches of Christ are not a denomination at all. In *The Christian System*, Campbell concluded by addressing all those outside the growing Restoration Movement:

Every sectarian in the land, how honest and pious so-ever, ought to bury his sectarianism, and all his other sins of omission and commission, in “the bath of regeneration.” It is a high crime and misdemeanor in any man, professing to have received the Messiah in his proper person, character, and office, to refuse allegiance to him in any thing; and to substitute human inventions and traditions in lieu of the ordinances and statutes of Prince Immanuel. Indeed, the keeping up of any dogma, practice, or custom, which directly or indirectly supplants the constitution, laws, and usages of the kingdom over which Jesus presides, is directly opposed to his government; and would ultimate in dethroning him in favor of a rival, and in placing upon his throne the author of that dogma, practice, or usage which supplants the institution of the Savior of the world.⁹

The pleas to abolish denominations (or sects as Campbell referred to them), ignore all human creeds, take the Bible as one's only source of religious instruction, and join together as non-denominational Christians remain some of the central tenets of the Churches of Christ today. Church of Christ members insist they do not belong to any

⁹Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and the Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Pleaded in the Current Reformation* (Pittsburg: Forrester and Campbell, 1839), 352-3.

denomination, but rather they make up the church that Christ founded in the New Testament, His church—the Church of Christ. Campbell believed that to accept a name like Lutheran or Baptist would be to supplant Christ as the head of the body in favor of a mere mortal, and, Restoration Movement members reasoned, however righteously a Martin Luther or John the Baptist may have lived, to wear their names in place of Christ’s would be a sin of the worst magnitude. Campbell and his followers shunned any manmade name, especially when other religious groups attempted to place one on the Churches of Christ. When one inquisitive Christian wrote Campbell, asking him to explain ““what Campbellism is,”” the editor quickly replied: “It is a nickname of reproach, invented and adopted by those whose views, feelings, and desires are all sectarian, who cannot conceive of Christianity in any other light than an *ism*.”¹⁰ Throughout his life, Campbell insisted that his like-minded, fellow-restorers followed him only as far as he followed Christ, for no man could take the Lord’s place as head of the church.

Churches of Christ uphold this theological principle to this day—many among their congregations objecting even to the capitalization of the word “Church” in their name, fearing that such a designation would provide a denominational connotation.¹¹ Rather than belonging to any modern and human-made denomination, members of the Churches of Christ insist that their membership is with the church that Jesus spoke of founding as he talked with his disciples along the coast of Caesarea Philippi in the 16th

¹⁰Alexander Campbell, “Campbellism,” the *Christian Baptist*, 5, no. 11 (1828) : 451-52.

¹¹For the sake of uniformity, “Church” in “Churches of Christ” will be capitalized throughout this paper regardless of the different usages in Church of Christ literature.

chapter of Matthew's gospel.¹² This church, Campbell and others have argued, should wear the name of its founder, and it is the only church spoken of in the Bible—reason enough, Church of Christ members contend, to advocate a single, non-denominational body bearing Christ's name.

Congregational Autonomy

There are no bodies of authority above the individual, local congregations of the Churches of Christ. From their earliest roots in America, this has been their only organizational structure. Campbell believed that it was the extra-congregational bodies presently existing in most denominations that perverted New Testament Christianity to begin with, and he insisted that the Christians mentioned in the Bible knew no such hierarchy. “In their church capacity alone they moved. They neither transformed themselves into any other kind of association, nor did they fracture and sever themselves into divers societies.”¹³ Since a biblical mandate for any group or body over the local congregation cannot be found in the scriptures, the Churches of Christ refrain from organizing them. This fierce adherence to congregational autonomy has produced both

¹²Church of Christ members often cite this passage to illustrate that Christ only founded one church—His own: “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, ‘Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?’ And they said, ‘Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.’ He saith unto them, ‘But whom say ye that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build *my church* [my emphasis]; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matt. 16:13-18 (KJV). Church of Christ member also frequently use the 16th chapter of Romans to illustrate the Biblical origins of their name. In this passage Paul writes, “The churches of Christ salute you.” Rom 16:16 (KJV). That they wore Christ's name and not the label of a denomination was important to early Restoration Movement leaders, and this concept remains equally vital to members of the Churches of Christ today.

¹³ Campbell, Alexander, “The Christian Religion,” *Christian Baptist*, 1, no. 1 (1823) : 5-8.

the positive result of liberating religious freedom within the group at large, as well as the troubles that would come from differing opinions and practices resulting from a lack of hierarchical structure, but the Churches of Christ maintain that this is the only biblically sanctioned organization of the church mentioned in the New Testament and therefore will not accept any other structural alternatives.

Restoring New Testament Christianity

Campbell believed that the best way to bring about Christian unity was to restore what he called “primitive Christianity,” the Christianity exhibited in the New Testament. If all denominations would turn from their creed books and toward the Bible, and all Christians replicated only what they found on the pages of the New Testament, then, Campbell reasoned, unity would surely follow. “The only bond of union” among the churches of the New Testament, Campbell wrote, was faith in Jesus as the Messiah and submission to His will—no other bond was necessary to hold together the earliest congregations peppered throughout the Mediterranean World. Nowhere in the New Testament was found “subscription[s] to abstract propositions framed by synods; no decrees of councils sanctioned by kings; no rules of practice commanded by ecclesiastical courts were imposed on [the first Christians] as terms of admission into, or of continuance” in the church that Jesus built.¹⁴

It was, Campbell maintained, because of their unified source of doctrine (divinely inspired epistles only) that the early churches were unified in fellowship and spirit. Conversely, because of general Christendom’s quick departure from using only Biblical

¹⁴Ibid.

sources by which to govern itself, it had become confused and divided. In accessing the state of Christianity in his times, Campbell lamented:

Instead of the apostles' doctrine, simply and plainly exhibited in the New Testament, we have got the sublime science of theology, subdivided into scholastic, polemic, dogmatic and practical divinity. Instead of the form of sound words given by the Spirit to be held fast, we have countless creeds, composed of terms and phrases, dogmas and speculations, invented by whimsical metaphysicians, Christian philosophers, rabbinical doctors, and enthusiastic preachers. Instead of the divinely established order of bishops and deacons, or as they are sometimes called, elders and deacons, which remained when the age of "spiritual gifts" and "spiritual men" passed away, we have popes, cardinals, archbishops, metropolitan bishops, diocesan bishops, rectors, prebendaries, deans, priests, arch deacons, presiding elders, ruling elders, circuit preachers, local preachers, licentiates, class leaders, abbots, monks, friars, &c. &c.¹⁵

Campbell believed that if denominations would turn from these mortal traditions to the divinely established patterns of the New Testament, unity among all Christians would result. As religious historian Michael Casey puts it, early Restoration Movement leaders "argued that a universal emulation of the primitive church would bring Christian unity" to the factious religious denominations.¹⁶ The Churches of Christ continue to contend that a return to New Testament precedents and examples regarding the form and functions of the church would provide a common foundation upon which all Christians could exist together in unity.

The Churches of Christ strive to accomplish this restoration in all facets of their operation, and it is because of this that they believe they are not a denomination and toward this end that they accept the Bible as their only source of divine instruction. Realizing the importance of this group's plea for a return to the Christianity of the New

¹⁵Ibid., 6.

¹⁶Michael Casey, "Restorationist Christianity," *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 126.

Testament is imperative to understanding the history of the Churches of Christ, because their attempt at this restorative process has brought them to their current station.

The Encyclopedia of American Religions lists eight major tributaries within the wellspring that makes up the Churches of Christ at large.¹⁷ Wading through these various branches can be confusing, even for members and students of the Churches of Christ, but the following brief narrative of events may help explain and identify to which group among the Churches of Christ this paper will pertain.

Once the two like-minded groups following Stone and Campbell combined, their unified members were identified as either Christians or Disciples of Christ, and their churches were called Christian Churches or Churches of Christ. While unity through restoration was the central plea of these churches, perfect unity throughout the brotherhood on various issues remained illusive and, indeed, proved to be unrealistic. As the first generation of restorers passed away, a new set of leaders preached in their churches, and published their journals. Somewhere between these first and second generations, the goal of unity *through* restoration gave way to the dichotomy of unity *versus* restoration, and as the twentieth century approached, different opinions among Restoration Movement churches led to a split in the movement.

In 1906, the United States Bureau of the Census, in its 103rd bulletin entitled *Religious Bodies*, contained the first official documentation of a division within the Restoration Movement, listing two groups, the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of

¹⁷*The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, ed. J. Gordon Melton, vol. 2 (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Triumph Books, 1991), 98-101.

Christ.¹⁸ These two groups could no longer maintain the fellowship they once enjoyed because of differing opinions that emerged on missionary societies and instrumental music in the worship services. Many of those in the Restoration Movement allowed for both developments, citing no Biblical condemnation of either idea and thus considering both expediencies that could not be authoritatively forbidden. This group—the Disciples of Christ—chose unity over restoration. However, a more conservative group maintained that since there was no Biblical example or pattern to follow for either of these practices, they were not divinely authorized and had no part in the attempt to restore New Testament Christianity, therefore choosing restoration over unity. Because of this, around 160,000 members claimed a separate identity as the Churches of Christ.¹⁹

Less than a century later, the Churches of Christ have grown to around 1.3 million members in the United States and enjoy a worldwide membership of over 3 million. Within the 13,000 Church of Christ congregations in the United States, around 2,055 of them classify themselves as a separate, non-institutional group. It is the history of this small and conservative branch of the Churches of Christ that this study will follow. Members of this group have over the years held tenaciously to what they claim is the Biblical pattern of New Testament Christianity, and they have emerged as a separate branch from their more progressive and better-known brothers and sisters in Christ because of their unwillingness to accept anything they believe is outside of the practices expressly enunciated or described in the New Testament. Because of their comparatively

¹⁸U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Bulletin 103, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, E. Dana Durand, director, 1906, 13.

¹⁹Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 181-2.

small size, and the fact that they are a branch within a larger movement, this group remains a rarely researched and scarcely studied segment of Christianity in America.

Within this branch of the Churches of Christ—one committed to practicing only the Biblically authorized, regardless of the direction of the majority of the religious world—the influences and pressures of social changes have still been felt, and the evolution of society has at times forced this group to deal with issues that would have otherwise lain dormant. At least two times, these socially imposed issues escalated into heated disagreements and eventual divisions within this branch of the Churches of Christ. Two of these divisions will be examined in the next two chapters: the division over the requisite number of cups in the communion service, and the still-recent split over the issue of divorce and remarriage. A close and critical examination of these divisions brings to light much historical evidence indicating that these rifts had their genesis, not from any new biblical hermeneutic, but rather from the constant and graduated pressure placed on the church by an evolving and progressing society.

CHAPTER TWO

The Communion Cup Controversy

The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.” After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

—The Apostle Paul, *I Corinthians 11:23-25* (KJV)

Breaking Bread Before Bacteria

The Church of Christ’s division over the use of the common communion cup had its roots in a discovery made by a Quaker—an English winemaker by the name of Joseph Jackson Lister. Although Lister’s wine business provided a lucrative income, it did little to satisfy the real passion of his life—the study of natural science. Lister’s sharp, analytical mind particularly turned to the microscopic world, though during his formative years any study in this field was severely hampered by the technology of the early nineteenth century. Refusing to allow his circumstances to limit his hobby, Lister worked on producing an improved, far more capable microscope, one through which the cellular building blocks of the world could be studied with clarity. He began his work in 1824, had commissioned an improved microscope stand to be made in 1826, and submitted a paper entitled “On Some Properties in Achromatic Object-Glasses Applicable to the Improvement of the Microscope” to the Royal Society by 1830. His paper outlined how the focusing clarity of a microscope is greatly improved by placing

the proper distance between the lenses, and this scientific breakthrough opened the doors for the observation of the natural world on an entirely new, truly microscopic level.¹

For nearly the same number of years it took Lister to develop his microscope, Alexander Campbell had been editing the *Christian Baptist*, a periodical that was, in the words of its editor, “pledged to no religious sect in Christendom, the express and avowed object of which is the eviction of truth and the exposure of error.”² This journal’s impact on the Churches of Christ—at the time an upstart religious movement in America—was both permanent and pervasive. One historian of the Restoration Movement went so far as to say that “in molding the enduring character of Churches of Christ, nothing compares with Alexander Campbell’s magazine the *Christian Baptist*.”³ In this journal, Campbell gave the Churches of Christ a regional and eventually national forum in which to discuss theological issues and formulate a common identity.

Campbell kept the scope of the *Christian Baptist* extensive and its subject matter diverse. Articles could be quite broad, as was the first essay of volume one, number one, entitled simply, “The Christian Religion,” but many of the pieces addressed very specific topics as well, like, “A Review of an ‘Extract of a Narrative of the State of Religion within the Bounds of the Synod of Kentucky,’” or “Extracts from Letters Addressed to Elder Henry Toller, by James Fishback, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lexington, KY.”⁴ But while readers of the *Christian Baptist* never knew from what sources many of

¹Sir Rickman Godlee, *Lord Lister* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1917), 11.

²“Preface to the First Edition,” Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 1, front matter (1823) : 1.

³Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: the Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willaim B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 21.

the articles they read would be pooled, they could count on most of the editorials focusing on specific biblical and theological ideas, and it was these editorials that helped give the amorphous Restoration Movement shape and direction.

One of the recurring themes throughout the tenure of the *Christian Baptist* dealt with the restoring aspect of the Restoration Movement, the idea that a return to what many were calling “primitive Christianity” held the key to saving a Christendom that had perceivably become misguided, wayward, and corrupt. Campbell wrote scores of essays with this idea as his central plea, and he included in the *Christian Baptist* what would become a familiar column entitled, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things,” which focused on returning various facets of Christianity to their New Testament origins.

Campbell strongly believed that Christian worship begged for restoration, and he included proposals for this in several installments of “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things.”⁵ The fifth installment of this column Campbell entitled, “Order of Worship,” and in this essay he made it clear that “by the phrase, ‘order of Christian worship,’ [I] do not mean the position of the bodies of the worshippers, nor the hour of the day in which certain things are to be done, nor whether one action shall be always performed first, another always second, and another always third.”⁶ What Campbell meant by “order” of worship was that worship must have structure and design, and he maintained that this design was both particular in its details and divine in its authorization.

⁴Alexander Campbell, “Preface to the First Edition,” *Christian Baptist*, 1, no. 1 (1823) : 5-8, Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 1, no. 5 (1823) : 30-31, and Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 2, no. 4 (1824) 106-7.

⁵“A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things,” Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*.

⁶“A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things—No. V: Order of Worship,” 2, no. 12 (1825) : 164.

His essay on “Order of Worship” however, provided only an introduction of more specific writings to come, and as he concluded the preparatory piece, he promised that the next several issues of the *Christian Baptist* would include studies on specific aspects of Christian worship, namely “the breaking of bread, the fellowship, and prayers of the primitive church.”⁷ In the paper’s next publication, readers found what may be the Restoration Movement’s first published essay devoted to the communion service—a three-page study entitled, “On the Breaking of Bread—No. I.”⁸

Four more articles with the same title and succeeding numbers followed, all addressing what Campbell saw as a fundamental and crucial aspect of Christian worship. He insisted that the New Testament illustrated the “primary intention of the meeting of the disciples on the first day of the week, was to break bread,” and therefore his readers and all Christians should follow this apostolic example.⁹ In his five-part treatise on the Lord’s Supper, Campbell did his best to make the points that he believed were not only the most important regarding this service, but also the most misunderstood and abused. At the conclusion of his third article on the subject, Campbell listed a few thoughts that he hoped were made clear in his writing:

1. That there is a divinely instituted order of Christian worship in Christian assemblies.
2. That this order of worship is uniformly the same.
3. That the nature and design of the breaking of bread are such as to make it an essential part of Christian worship in Christian assemblies.
4. That the first church set in order in Jerusalem continued as steadfastly in breaking of bread, as in any other act of social worship or edification.

⁷Ibid., 165.

⁸Alexander Campbell, “On the Breaking of Bread—No. I.” *Christian Baptist*, 3, no. 1 (1825) : 174-6.

⁹Alexander Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Thing—No. VIII.: On the Breaking of Bread—No. III,” *Christian Baptist*, 3, no. 3, (1889) : 188.

5. That the disciples statedly met on the first day of the week primarily and emphatically for this purpose.
6. That the apostle declared it was the design or the primary object of the church to assemble in one place for this purpose, and so commanded it to the churches he had set in order.
7. That there is no law, rule, reason, or authority for the present manner of observing this institute quarterly, semi-annually, or at any other time than weekly.¹⁰

Despite Campbell's firm conviction that the New Testament provided an unalterable example of the proper observance of the Lord's Supper, nowhere in this summary of his theses—or in the entirety of his essays on “The Breaking of Bread”—did the editor make a point or mention a word about the number of cups that should be present during the communion service. He instead chose to craft his writings around proving what he believed to be the proper frequency of communion observation—every first day of the week. In keeping with the Restoration Movement's central principle of carrying out all Christian practices as closely to New Testament examples as possible, Campbell plead for returning the communion service to its Biblical blueprint in frequency, form, administration, and participation. Yet, as he made his case for this back-to-the-Bible approach, he never mentioned the number of cups Jesus used the night he instituted the communion service.

The *Christian Baptist* printed its final issue on July 5, 1830, and in his closing remarks Campbell reflected on the journal that occupied so much of his time during those seven years. “I have found myself blessed in this undertaking,” he wrote, “and no reader of the *Christian Baptist*, I think, will ever derive more advantage from it than I have from the writing and conducting of it.” He closed also with a focus on the future, informing

¹⁰Ibid., 188-89.

his readers that he had “commenced a new work,” another journal that would far surpass the *Christian Baptist* its longevity—a journal Campbell named the *Millennial Harbinger*.

Alexander Campbell’s new periodical would run for the next forty years, from 1830-1870, and in that span it contained more than seventy-five different articles that mentioned the Lord’s Supper. In fact, in the very first year of the *Millennial Harbinger*, Campbell addressed the communion service and mentioned an issue regarding it upon which he never touched in the *Christian Baptist*. Barton W. Stone, another Restoration Movement leader, a man Campbell called both “zealous and intelligent,” had written in his paper the *Christian Messenger* that he could find “nothing in scripture to forbid me to commune with un-baptized persons at the Lord’s Table.” With this Campbell disagreed, and, as he so often did, felt the need publicly to respond. He did so in the October 1830 issue of his journal, limiting his writing exclusively to the topic of who should partake in the communion service—only those baptized into the church, as Campbell saw it. Despite his difference with Stone on this aspect of Christian worship, however, Campbell closed his response by calling Stone his “friend,” assuring his readers that he and Stone’s difference on this issue would not jeopardize their relationship.¹¹

Later that year, Campbell, with the Lord’s Supper apparently still dominating much of his thought, devoted an entire issue of the *Millennial Harbinger* to that subject.¹² The editor opened this essay by introducing the Lord’s church as a spiritual kingdom, one

¹¹Alexander Campbell, “The Christian Messenger,” *The Millennial Harbinger*, 1, no. 10, (October 1830) : 40.

¹²Alexander Campbell, “The Breaking of the Loaf,” *The Millennial Harbinger*, extra, no. 2 (December 1830).

that God created and suited, through his infinite wisdom, to the specific needs of mankind. He went on to explain:

To understand the Christian Religion, we must study it; and to enjoy it, we must practice it. To come into the kingdom of Jesus Christ is one thing, and to live as a wise, a good, and a happy citizen, is another. As every human kingdom has its constitution, laws, ordinances, manner, and customs; so has the kingdom of the Great King. He, then, who would be a good and a happy citizen of it, must understand and submit to its constitution, laws, ordinances, manners, and customs.¹³

With these prefatory remarks, Campbell reiterated his unwavering belief that people must worship God according their Maker's terms (outlined in the kingdom's constitution, the Bible), and that to deviate from these terms contaminates worship and displeases God. The editor then transitioned to the specific aspect of worship to which this particular issue of his journal was devoted, the communion service.

This treatise on the Lord's Supper remains Campbell's most in-depth, published study on the topic. Using nearly 18,000 words to uphold seven different propositions, Campbell made sure to lay out what he believed the Bible taught on every essential aspect of the communion service. He reiterated, as would be expected by readers of the *Christian Baptist*, the necessary frequency, again arguing that the apostles and the early churches assembled *every* first day of the week to break bread. He also elaborated on the spiritual implications of the emblems, explaining that each were "commemorative of the Lord's death."¹⁴ He even expressed his opinion on the number of loaves that should be present, insisting that "on the Lord's table there is of necessity but one loaf."¹⁵

¹³Ibid, 6.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

This meticulous specificity and scrupulous attention to detail notwithstanding, one thing Campbell did not mention was the requisite number of cups for proper, Biblical communion. This was not due to inattention on Campbell's part. He ensured that every facet of the Lord's Supper he had heard debated, questioned, or discussed was included in this study. Yet, he made no mention of how many cups were necessary. His language, though, certainly suggested a number.

His sixth proposition maintained that the emblems of and participation in the communion service memorialized the death of Christ, and in titling this proposition he describes this participation as "the breaking of *the loaf* and the drinking of *the cup* [my emphasis]." This singular language makes it clear that Campbell had one loaf and one cup in mind. Indeed, he devoted an entire proposition to elucidating the necessity of one loaf, but regarding the cup, it appears that he did not see the need.

As he closed his essay, Campbell included from his personal diaries an entry describing a communion service in which he participated and that he believed provided an ideal example for all churches to follow. At this particular service Campbell recalled that the leader arose and noted the significance of the service in which they were about to partake:

"In memory of his death, this monumental table," said he, "was instituted, and as the Lord ever lives in heaven, so he ever lives in the hearts of his people. As the first disciples, taught by the Apostles in person, came together into one place to eat the Lord's Supper, and as they selected the first day of the week in honor of his resurrection for this purpose, so we, having the same Lord, the same faith, the same hope with them, have vowed to do as they did. We owe as much to the Lord as they and ought to love, honor, and obey him as much as they." Thus having spoken, he took a small loaf from the table, and in one or two periods gave thanks for it. After thanksgiving, he raised it in his hand, and significantly brake it, and handed it to the disciples on each side of him, who passed the broken loaf from one to another, until they all partook of it. There was no stiffness, no formality, no pageantry, all was easy, familiar, solemn, [and] cheerful. He then took the cup

in a similar manner, and returned thanks for it, and handed it to the disciple sitting next him, who passed it round; each one waiting upon his brother, until all were served.¹⁶

Campbell included as many details of this service as his memory allowed, and he afforded his readers a thorough recollection. He included verbatim excerpts of the speaker's address, the order in which the service proceeded, and the overall mood of the setting. When recounting the mechanics of how this memorable service was carried out, Campbell mentions that only one cup was present and that all the members drank from it, but he pays no particular attention and gives no real emphasis to this fact. He simply notes it with a plain declarative statement. Campbell obviously approved of using one cup; it even seems that he thought it the proper and best way to observe the communion service, but nowhere in any of his writings did he specifically affirm or enunciate this belief.

This is an odd fact for a man like Campbell. His writings, if they were anything, were very opinionated, and yet absent from them were his beliefs on a facet of what he considered the most important item of Christian worship—the observance of which was the very reason Christians gathered on the first day of the week—the Lord's Supper. That Campbell did not mention the requisite number of cups does not mean that all Restoration Movement congregations during this period were in perfect unison of practice on this issue. It seems that most churches drank from a common cup, but others used a plurality of cups in their communion services—often utilizing one cup for each side of the church building. This divergence of practice however, did not cause any visible problems among the various congregations of the early Restoration Movement,

¹⁶Ibid, 8.

and no one seemed to give the disparate methods of practice any thought. Indeed, the reason for Campbell's silence on this issue in his "The Breaking of the Loaf" is simple: making a point regarding the requisite number of drinking vessels to carry out the communion give service never entered the assiduous editor's mind, for men and women of Campbell's day had no reservations about and gave no thought to drinking after one another.

Paul-Joseph Barthez, a physician who died when Campbell was eighteen, once admitted of himself and his colleagues, "We are blind men, hitting with a stick at disease or at the patient; so much the better for the patient if we strike the disease."¹⁷ Things had scarcely improved by the time Campbell began writing his treatise on "The Breaking of the Loaf." Physicians had yet to understand how disease spread, and this often resulted in their breaking an important clause of the Hippocratic Oath—many times they caused more harm than help.

Of course the poor and uneducated suffered greatly because of the medical profession's general ignorance of hygiene, but unfortunate and avoidable (by today's standards) deaths touched even the most wealthy and powerful families. That George Washington's end was hastened by the then-common practice of "blood-letting" has become a well-known fact, but he was not the only affluent and influential patient whose death could be charged more to a physician than anything else—he was not even the only U.S. president.

In 1881, President James Garfield's wounded body lay before Dr. Willard Bliss who attempted to remove the bullet of an assassin from the president's side. By inserting

¹⁷John S. Haller, *American Medicine in Transition: 1849-1910* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), viii.

his unwashed hands directly into the wound, Bliss introduced infection into Garfield's injured body, and over the next several weeks, sixteen different doctors compounded the problem by continually prodding Garfield's wound without reaching the bullet. Despite the president's strength—and the fact that the bullet was lodged in an area that was not life-threatening—Garfield could not survive the horribly un-hygienic practices of his physicians. He died on September 14, 1881, eighty days after being shot.¹⁸

The print-life of Campbell's journals fell between the unfortunate deaths of these two presidents, and with world leaders being killed by the best physicians of the day, the average American had virtually no concept of hygiene during this span. Because of their ignorance of how disease spread, most nineteenth-century Americans displayed little or no concern about close contact with family, friends, and even strangers. The common practices of most people during this time period would be considered appalling by today's standards of sanitation, but Americans during the 1800s gave no thought their unhygienic ways.

They shared beds, at home with relatives or in hotels with strangers, without inquiring deeply about their bed partner's health. They exchanged combs, hairbrushes, and even toothbrushes, and fed babies from their mouths and spoons, with no sense of hazard. They coughed, sneezed, and spit with blithe disregard for the health consequences to those around them. They stored and cooked their meals with scant concern for food-borne illness. They drank unfiltered water from wells and streams, often using a common dipper or drinking cup. Last but not least, they urinated and defecated in chamber pots and outdoor privies with little regard for where the contents ended up in relation to the community water supply.¹⁹

When put into the context many of the nineteenth century's common practices, it is little surprise that no one voiced objections to a large congregation all drinking from a

¹⁸Ira Rutkow, *James Garfield* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 115-129.

¹⁹Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

common communion cup. In fact, the communal aspect of the service paralleled many other areas of the lives of most people in the nineteenth century.

Campbell's readers, therefore, did not consider the unmentioned topic of the requisite number of communion cups in his journals an omission on the part of the meticulous editor. Campbell's publications found their way from the presses in Bethany, West Virginia to the homes of Christians in many areas of the United States, most of whom found the pleas and philosophy of the Restoration Movement refreshing and unique. Many of these people, like Nathan J. Mitchell, stayed away from established denominations and began independent congregations of their own, meeting wherever they could find an available building or even a vacant outdoor clearing.

In his memoir, *Reminiscences and Incidents: Life and Travels of a Pioneer Preacher*, Mitchell captured the fresh, almost innocent perspective with which so many of these people approached their worship services:

On the next Lord's day, five of us sat around the Lord's table, and broke the loaf of blessing. These five were my wife and I, the two who had recently obeyed the gospel, and Henry B. Yarnel, who came nine miles to see what had "broken loose" at Howard. This occurred under the shadow of three or four swamp oak trees, in a meadow. Brother Yarnel had been a subscriber to and reader of the *Christian Baptist* and was a member of the Baptist church at Milesburg. He had learned from the *Christian Baptist* something of the "ancient order of things," and at once untied with us to keep the ordinances as they had been delivered by the inspired apostles, whom we believed to be the only authoritative teachers of Christianity. We did not stop to inquire whether there "were any Christians among the sects;" nor did we inquire whether the un-baptized had a right to commune. These were to us questions of a too modern date for our discussion. We were too far back for this. We had gone back of Protestantism, back of the long, dark night of superstition and error super-induced by Roman Catholicism; we had, in short, gone beyond the apocryphal writings of Clement and Barnabas, and reached the days of hale, unmixed Christianity, as recorded on the pages of

the sacred writings of evangelists and apostles. The object was to restore primitive Christianity, in letter and in spirit, in faith and in obedience.²⁰

From this account, we learn many things about the early members of the Restoration Movement, perhaps most importantly that their main objective was to recreate the Christian practices outlined in the New Testament. But Mitchell's recollections are also helpful for the purpose of this chapter's topic. Mitchell specifically mentioned the communion service in his account of these Christians' worship and even included a few of the issues about which he and his fellow congregants did *not* inquire. Absent from this account however, is the question of the number of cups used in the communion service. Although Mitchell and his infant congregation did not address the communion-related issue of who could participate in this sacred part of the worship service, Mitchell himself when chronicling this event did not even think of the number of cups used as a possible topic for discussion. The particular service mentioned took place in 1832, decades before the common communion cup had become an issue among Protestant denominations and more than half a century before it grew into a point of contention among Churches of Christ. Even in 1877, when Mitchell published his memoirs, the issue of the number of cups permissible in the communion service had not yet surfaced, but social circumstances would soon change that.

The Germination of the Germ Theory

Across the Atlantic from Campbell, and just over the English Channel from microscope mechanic Joseph Jackson Lister, French chemist Louis Pasteur was working toward a discovery that would both harness the potential provided by Lister's previous

²⁰Nathan J. Mitchell, *Reminiscences and Incidents: Life and Travels of a Pioneer Preacher* (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall Publishers, 1877), 67, quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 5.

work and greatly affect Campbell's followers. During the decade of the 1860s, Louis Pasteur practically lived in his laboratories, a handful of tiny rooms variously spread—as space allowed—throughout the rue d'Ulm of Paris' esteemed school, Ecole Normale Superieure. The dedicated chemist forwent contact with the outside world in favor of studying a process the result of which he was sure would not only bring renown to himself, his employer, and his country, but would drastically and positively impact the human race. This process was fermentation.

Pasteur believed that the origin of the instigators of the fermentation process—what he called ferments—held the key to understanding much more than simply how to turn grape juice into a merlot. “Among the questions raised by my research on the ferments in the narrow sense,” Pasteur reflected, “none are more worthy of attention than those relating to the origin of the ferments.”

Where do they come from, these mysterious agents, so feeble in appearance yet so powerful in reality, which, with minimal weight and insignificant external chemical characteristics possess exceptional energy? This is the problem that led me to study the so-called spontaneous generations.²¹

Before Pasteur's work, most scientists believed that many microscopic organisms, including those that were disease-causing, often sprang to life within their unfortunate host without being acted on by an outside force. They simply generated spontaneously. Pasteur hoped to prove the majority of the scientific world wrong through his experiments on fermentation.

Pasteur's initial studies of the fermentation process led him to conclude that the ferments were indeed “living beings, that the germs of microscopic organisms abound in the surface of all objects, in the air and in water; [and] that the theory of spontaneous

²¹Louis Pasteur, “Fermentations et generations dites spontanees,” (Paris: Masson & Cie, 1922).

generation is chimerical.”²² Pasteur realized the controversial nature of this latter conclusion, and he sought to drive home his point by engaging in a scientific duel with Felix-Archimede Pouchet, the most prominent French advocate of spontaneous generation.

Pasteur and Pouchet examined flasks of nutritive broth, some of which were exposed to the air and others that were not. If the unexposed broth remained pure and clean, Pasteur’s theory would prevail. Each scientist orchestrated their own experiments in their own laboratories, and—predictably—each found different results. Pasteur could not be shaken however, and he maintained that the only way Pouchet’s unexposed broth could have given birth to life was if his rival’s methods were not precise enough to keep the flask absolutely air-tight.

Although his bout with Pouchet ended in a stalemate, Pasteur continued to work toward convincing his colleagues that he was right. He began his essay, “The Germ Theory and Its Applications to Medicine and Surgery,” by noting that, “the Sciences gain by mutual support,” and the more he worked and wrote, the more support his theory gained.²³ By the 1880s many scientists agreed with Pasteur that the natural world provided “absolute proof that there actually exist transmissible, contagious, infectious diseases of which the cause lies essentially and solely in the presence of microscopic

²²“The Germ Theory and Its Application to Medicine and Surgery,” Louis Pasteur, *Scientific Papers*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 7, The Harvard Classics (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909–14), accessed February 7, 2008; available from <http://www.bartleby.com/38/7/7.html>; Internet.

²³Ibid.

organisms, and that the conception of spontaneous [generation] must be forever abandoned.”²⁴

The impact of the discoveries and conclusions of Pasteur, as well as those of many of his like-minded contemporaries, did not remain confined to the small, professional circle of doctors and professors of science for long. News of this magnitude soon gained wide-spread public attention and social ramifications quickly followed. Many people were uncomfortable with the idea that unseen, microscopic agents floating in the very air they breathed could enter their bodies and bring about their end. Pasteur conceded that “it is a terrifying thought that life is at the mercy of the multiplication of these minute bodies,” but he reminded the public that “it is a consoling hope that Science will not always remain powerless before such enemies.”²⁵

Pasteur’s personification of these micro-organisms—branding them the “enemies” of mankind—was in keeping with much of the verbiage used by both scientists and laymen during this time period. Many scientific articles read as if humans and germs were part of an inter-species war—a battle for evolutionary supremacy. When speaking before the Social Science Association in 1878, Joseph Richardson explained that contagious diseases were caused by

the transplanting of microscopically visible spores, or seeds, which have a separate vitality of their own, each after its kind, and which are to be escaped, just as we would escape hordes of animals[s], or swarms of insect pests, by shutting them out or killing them before they can succeed in fastening upon our bodies.²⁶

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Joseph Richardson, *The Germ Theory of Disease, and Its Present Bearing upon Public and Personal Hygiene* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Social Science Association, 1878), 9, quoted in Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 43.

Henry Gradle, a professor at Chicago Medical College infused a Darwinian attitude into this martial mentality, insisting that the fittest species would survive. In 1883 in *Bacteria and the Germ Theory of Disease*, Gradle set the stage by explaining that “Diseases are to be considered as a struggle between the organism and the parasites invading it.” Human bodies were but battlegrounds on which would be determined the fate of a species.

Gradle concluded with an apocalyptic prediction:

We are again ignorant as to the weapons of the contending armies; we do not know yet how the warfare is carried on between the hostile vegetable and animal cells, but that the struggle exists is evident, and it must terminate in the victory of one or the other side.²⁷

When placed into such a graphic, martial framework, it is no surprise that many people saw their physical health as an internal war—a war in which bacteria assaulted their biological superiors through clandestine invasion. People read much of this literature as a call to arms and saw it as their responsibility to fight back in this Darwinian struggle to ensure that the fittest might indeed survive, and as the germ theory grew in popularity and legitimacy, people began to take steps that would make humanity the clear victor.

In 1874, the *New York Times* observed, “The thought itself is an impressive and natural one, that there may be a ‘cholera seed’ or ‘scarlet-fever germ’ or ‘typhoid sporule’ floating through the air.”²⁸ This thought was impressive because of its seriousness and natural because, as the writer noted, “there are floating seeds of thistles or dandelion, or germs of tulip-trees or limes, or scores of the nameless plants which sow themselves wherever there is the slightest bit of soil or moisture favoring.” Germs then, were the same as these pollinating plants, and the article concluded by arguing that

²⁷Henry Gradle, *Bacteria and the Germ Theory of Disease* (Chicago: W. T. Keener, 1883), 2.

²⁸*New York Times*, February 11, 1874, 2.

no doubt in this City there is an invisible cloud of “scarlet-fever germs,” “typhoid seeds,” and cholera or “diphtheria spores,” always drifting over from the densely crowded poor quarters into those of the wealthy, filling the houses and garments, and lying *perdu* until the favorable moment in the organism of some child or delicate person gives them the chance to spring up into vigorous growth.²⁹

People did not like the thought of these microscopic killers invading their homes, and many underwent and endured myriad lifestyle changes to reduce their risk of attack. Some of these changes were as simple as opening windows to provide better ventilation, as was recommended in an 1880 edition of *Popular Science Monthly*. In an article entitled “How Typhoid Fever Is Conveyed,” T.J. MacLagan explained simply: “Keep the windows shut, and you keep the germs in; open them, and they pass out with the changing air.”³⁰ Other situations called for more extreme action. When treating an infected family member, MacLagan insisted that, “It rests with those who have such ailments in their houses to carry into effect the measures calculated to destroy and get rid of the poison, before it has had time or opportunity to be a source of danger to those around.”³¹

The desire to rid a household of any contaminated objects often led to the burning of many of the personal effects of the recovering patient. Quite often the bed-sheets, curtains, carpet, and even toys of a sick child found their way to the furnace. This was a common practice urged by doctors and carried out by patients in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a practice mentioned and immortalized in a popular children’s story written in 1922—Margery Williams’s eventual classic, *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰T. J. MacLagan, “How Typhoid Fever Is Conveyed,” *Popular Science Monthly* 16 (1880) : 462-63, quoted in Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 58.

³¹Ibid, 465.

Williams's doctor exclaimed in reference to the story's main character, "*That? . . . Why, it's a mass of scarlet fever germs!—Burn it at once.*"³² Even in a piece of popular, children's fiction the germ's pervasive presence could be felt, and this 1922 popular culture reference to the germ theory of disease provides a telling example of how Western society had embraced the idea that germs spread disease and humans must fight them.

Without a doubt, the disease that played the largest roll in the introduction and widespread acceptance of individual communion cups was tuberculosis (TB), a disease responsible for one in seven deaths in the 1880s. In 1884, German scientist Robert Koch concluded a paper on the cause of anthrax by insisting that, "no other conclusion can be drawn than that the anthrax bacilli are the actual cause of the disease." His conclusions, Koch believed, were "so certain, that no one will dispute them, and the anthrax bacillus will be looked upon by the scientific world as the causal agent of ordinary, typical anthrax infection in both our domestic animals, and in man himself."³³

Shortly thereafter, Koch used similar methods to isolate the bacteria that cause tuberculosis, describing them as "rod-shaped" in structure and "beautiful[ly] blue" in color.³⁴ Koch continued, explaining that his studies led him to the inescapable "conclusion that the bacilli which are present in the tuberculous substances not only accompany the tuberculosis process, but are the cause of it. In the bacillus we have,

³²Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real* (Garden City: New York, 1922), accessed February 7, 2008; available from <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html>; Internet.

³³Robert Koch, "The Etymology of Tuberculosis," *Milestones in Microbiology: 1546-1940*, trans. and ed. Thomas D. Brock (Washington, D.C.: ASM Press, 1999) 117.

³⁴Robert Koch, "Die Aetiologie der Tuberkulose," *Berliner Klinischen Wochenschrift*, No. 15, (April 10, 1882) : 221-30.

therefore, the actual tubercle virus.”³⁵ This breakthrough proved to the world that tuberculosis was indeed a communicable disease and that its spread depended upon the transfer of the tubercle virus between host organisms through close contact.

Social ramifications were swift. In 1892, Lawrence Fick, a former sufferer of the disease, began an organized anti-TB movement by founding the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis (PSPT). The PSPT’s members dedicated themselves to informing and educating the public about the disease. Many similar groups sprouted up across the country, and in 1904, the National Tuberculosis Association (NTA) was formed to coordinate the activities of the local groups. TB crusaders spread knowledge about the cause, prevention, and treatment of the disease through whatever medium they found available, including pamphlets, lectures, newspaper articles, tracts, and various forms of more modern advertisement, complete with jingles, trademarks, advertising cards, and various other promotional gimmicks.³⁶

One point hammered home time after time by the NTA, was that the most common conduit through which tuberculosis spread was human saliva. Spitting tobacco, a common public act throughout the nineteenth century, now came into question. The NTA besought, exhorted, and cautioned the public against this and any practice that would result in the transfer of saliva. One NTA circular warned: “The germ, which is a microscopic rod, is found in millions in their spit from very early in the disease, and it is through this spit almost alone that it reaches others.”³⁷

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 114-34.

³⁷National Tuberculosis Association, *What You Should Know about Tuberculosis* (New York: NTA, 1916), 8, quoted in Louis Lehrfeld, M.D., *Short Talks on Personal and Community Health* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1920), 16.

Sanitizing the Communion Service

These cautionary advertisements did not go unheeded, and before long, many in the medical and religious sectors began to question the long-practiced tradition of using a common communion cup in Christian worship services. At the quarterly meeting of the Oneida County Homoeopathic Medical Society on January 17, 1887, M. O. Terry, M.D. presented a paper addressing the common communion cup and its danger as a transmitter of communicable diseases. Terry began by ensuring his audience of colleagues that he was “deeply impressed with the sacredness” of the communion service, but he insisted that despite this sanctity “the whole system is a wreck!”³⁸ To the church, he posed the question, “[I]s it just to humanity to administer a rite which is given as a symbol for purification, when . . . the process of giving it endangers or contaminates . . . ?” To his fellow doctors he gave the following exhortation: “The aim of the true physician is to prevent disease and whether it be necessary to criticize the saloon or the church, he should not hesitate to do his duty, even though millions scorn and ridicule him.”³⁹ Perhaps the good doctor engaged in a bit of hyperbole in his predictions; nevertheless, his colleagues agreed with his assessment of the current communion service practice, and when Dr. Terry resolved to have their assembled group “most emphatically” recommend that churches make changes and take “such precautionary measures [in their communion

³⁸M. O. Terry, M.D., “A Criticism on the Present Method of Administering Wine in Sacrament,” *Transactions of the Fifty-Seventh Session of the American Institute of Homoeopathy Held at Richfield Springs, N.Y. June 18, 1901* (New York: William N. Jennings, 1902), 435.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 436, 435.

services] as are deemed necessary” to avoid the spread of bacteria, the doctors “all voted in the affirmative.”⁴⁰

Many others were reluctant to making any changes whatsoever to the communion service. Even a good number of physicians—men well acquainted with communicable diseases—balked at suggesting changes to this sacred service. W. M. Parker, M.D., in “The Hygiene of the Holy Communion,” expressed his disappointment that any of his colleagues were intimating that changes be made in religious services, calling the whole matter “very unfortunate.”⁴¹ Parker informed his readers that he had been studying this issue for a number of years and had sent out questionnaires to many of his fellow-physicians across the globe, inquiring as to whether they had seen a case in which someone had contracted a disease from the common communion cup. Parker insisted that in “all this mass of professional experience and of carefully prepared opinions, not one case could be found either in this country or in Europe where any injury had resulted of any kind whatever.” He concluded with the sentiment of many a Christian: “We may safely believe that He who instituted the sacred feast will be equally strong to guard His children against such [a] dreadful danger [as communicable diseases]. This is certainly not very much to ask of a believer.”⁴² In 1895, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church first discussed the issue and agreed that the hygiene question did not provide

⁴⁰Ibid, 440.

⁴¹W. M. Parker, M.D., “The Hygiene of the Holy Communion,” *Medical Records: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, George F. Shrady, A.M., M.D., ed., 41, January 2, 1892-June 25, 1892 (New York: William Wood & Company, 1892), 265.

⁴²Ibid.

adequate grounds on which to alter “the primitive and historic method of administering the Lord’s Supper.”⁴³

The issue only became more contentious as science progressed and the germ theory solidified. Physicians, church leaders, and lay church goers across the country began to question the traditional method of administering the fruit of the vine in the communion service. At the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, a congregant who was both a physician and a member of the PSPT recommended that his congregation rethink the issue. The church board appointed a special committee to do just that, and the committee quickly came back with an initial ruling in favor of the common communion cup, arguing that

if the usages of the communion service, which have prevailed among Christians . . . have been attended with risk to life and health, it only seems fair to assume that experience and common observation would have long observed the danger.⁴⁴

This did not settle the issue however, and in 1898 two-thirds of the congregation voted to adopt the individual communion cup system.⁴⁵ This investigation, vote, and subsequent change of policy by the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church provides a typical blueprint of the course of action taken by many churches in most Protestant denominations around the turn of the twentieth century.

⁴³Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, n.s., vol. 18 (1895), 75, PC, quoted in Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 133-34.

⁴⁴“To the Session of the Walnut Street Church,” Walnut Street Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, included in the Minutes of Session, April 6, 1898, PC, quoted in Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 134.

⁴⁵Walnut Street Presbyterian Church, Minutes of Session, May 15, 1898, PC, quoted in Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 134.

In 1894, the *New York Times* featured an article titled, “Individual Communion Cups: A Methodist Church in Poughkeepsie Adopts Them,” in which the revamped service at a local church was described with the attention usually attributed to novelties:

The glasses are held in circular trays of mahogany, about fourteen inches in diameter. . . . The glasses are an inch and three-quarters high, by about three-quarters to an inch in diameter, are without ornamentation, and are designed to hold just enough for a single draught. Felt on the bottom of the tray prevents the glasses from tinkling. The holes are so arranged that they do not allow the sides of the glasses to touch. The minister holds the tray, taking out and replacing the glasses as he passes along the altar rail. One hundred and twenty-five communicants were served in their order and without confusion in this manner Sunday. The trays are made so that they can be set on top of one another and thus kept airtight and free from impurities, while they can be filled at any convenient time and the contents kept in good condition until needed. The whole outfit costs only about \$50.⁴⁶

The article concluded by noting that the Washington Street Church was one of the oldest in the area and that its decision to adopt individual communion cups would be influential in “breaking down old prejudices and replacing old methods.”⁴⁷ Time proved this prediction accurate, and by the turn of the century, most Protestant denominations had adopted this new method of administering the fruit of the vine in the communion service.

This social development was not lost on the Churches of Christ. Although the churches of the Restoration Movement sought to recreate primitive Christianity, their congregants lived in the modern world and were daily engaged in an evolving society, thus the individual communion cup movement found its way into certain groups within the Restoration Movement. In 1901, a journal published by the Disciples of Christ, the *Christian Standard*, ran an ad for an individual communion cup set offered by the

⁴⁶“Individual Communion Cups: A Methodist Church in Poughkeepsie Adopts Them,” *New York Times* December 9, 1894, 18.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Thomas Communion Service Company. This company's namesake, Rev. Dr. John G. Thomas, had invented a tray for holding individual communion cups and was granted a patent for it in March 1894. The *Christian Standard* communion cups ad asked readers, "Why do you permit a custom at the communion which you would not tolerate in your own home?"⁴⁸ It also included a brief testimonial from a satisfied pastor who had tried the set and an offer for a free book listing a number of churches already happily using the company's product. With certain branches of the Restoration Movement quickly embracing the individual cups method, it was only a matter of time before the question was raised among Churches of Christ.

As early as 1900, the individual communion cup topic (or "the cup" issue as it became known to many) was being discussed in Church of Christ literature. That year, John W. McGarvey—president of The College of the Bible at Lexington, Kentucky and probably the most well-known and venerated leader in the Churches of Christ during his later years—addressed the cup question with scathing criticism of the innovation, noting that this "fresh and verdant fad" was only accepted by "church members who care more for 'keeping up with the procession' than for following the example of our Lord."⁴⁹ McGarvey insisted that the hygiene argument—or any other extra-biblical reason—could never provide an adequate cause to "avoid that which the Lord enjoined in instituting the Supper; that is, the use of the same cup by a number of individuals."⁵⁰ McGarvey echoed the conclusions drawn by many physicians of his day, noting that although the common

⁴⁸Advertisement, the *Christian Standard*, 1901, quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 61-62.

⁴⁹John W. McGarvey, "Biblical Criticism," *Christian Standard*, (March 31, 1900), quoted in "Individual Cups: Comments by J. W. McGarvey," Jerry Johnson, ed. (Mullin, TX: Restoration Publications), 1.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

communion cup “has been practiced for nearly two thousand years, not a single instance has been produced of persons contracting contagious diseases from it.”⁵¹ McGarvey’s article encouraged his fellow Christians to have faith that Christ would not place His followers in harm’s way, insisting that “when the Lord instituted the Supper, he knew as much about microbes as does any modern medical alarmist.”⁵²

McGarvey’s influence was far-reaching, and this article made his stance on the cup issue clear. Still, the powerful and pervasive force of social change cast doubt in the minds of many Church of Christ members. One inquisitive member from Pensacola, FL wrote McGarvey with a series of questions about the issue, including the following observation:

I have been a member of the church for forty-three years, and it has been my good fortune to be acquainted with several of our most learned and influential ministers—Alexander Campbell among them—and it seems strange to me that they did not find a necessity for the individual cup.⁵³

McGarvey’s answer sheds light on how Restoration Movement leaders felt as they saw social forces impacting the churches’ worship services: “It is not strange at all,”

McGarvey replied, “for such a necessity has not even yet been discovered.”

The desire for it has originated in the squeamishness of certain women with weak stomachs, and it is supported by the new fad among physicians about bacteria, those little bugs which hang on the lips of people, stick to the communion cup, then cling to the lips of the next participant and thence descend into the stomach of the latter, seize upon his vital organs, and eat away on them till some fatal disease ensues.⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid, 2.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 64.

⁵⁴Ibid.

McGarvey closed this published reply by brazenly offering to pay for the funeral costs of any person whose cause of death could be attributed to drinking from a common communion cup. He could not accept that any reason outside of the scriptures could authorize a change in one of the church's divine ordinances. Churches of Christ across the nation knew where this well-respected leader stood, and his position no doubt helped to impede the growing trend of individual cups among their congregations, but McGarvey alone could not silence the increasing number of Christians interested in considering the use of individual cups.

On July 11, 1911, the leading journal in the Churches of Christ, the *Gospel Advocate*, carried an article in which a prominent preacher admitted having no problems with individual cups. C. E. Holt of Florence, AL, while admitting that individual cups were not "the only scriptural way of taking the Lord's Supper," insisted that they provided a way that "was as scriptural as any other . . . and besides [they] have the advantage of being clean." Holt continued, "We are aware that some brethren ridicule the idea that microbes can be transmitted from one to another by the common cup, yet the weight of authority is against them."⁵⁵

The *Gospel Advocate* during this period illustrates how this subject was quickly becoming divisive. In the same issue that contained C. E. Holt's defense of individual cups, a question concerning the same subject was posed to one of the brotherhood's most influential leaders, co-founder of the Nashville Bible School and *Gospel Advocate* editor, David Lipscomb. A reader asked Lipscomb to "kindly give [his] opinion as to the scripturalness of the use of individual communion sets in partaking of the Lord's

⁵⁵C. E. Holt, *The Gospel Advocate*, 11 July 1911., quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 65.

Supper.” The editor replied with a series of his own questions that clearly put him at odds with Holt:

Does anyone think that it was instituted by Jesus and observed by his disciples as an individual [cups] communion service? If not, why do it now? Did he institute it in conditions and circumstances that would spread disease and sickness among those who attended? If he did, why did he do it?⁵⁶

Lipscomb’s questions juxtaposed with Holt’s article in a single volume made it clear that the *Gospel Advocate* was a divided journal on the cup issue. The points made by both men showcase the contrasting logic that those initially advocating and those initially opposing individual cups used to bolster their respective stances. Lipscomb emphasized Christ’s example of using one cup and maintained that sanitation concerns were not reason enough to deviate from this divinely-laid pattern. Holt on the other hand, wanted his readers to consider the “weight of authority” that science provided regarding the spread of germs through a common cup. He admitted that individual cups were not the only correct way of administering the fruit of the vine, but claimed that they were as acceptable as any other, emphasizing their cleanliness as an attribute that made them superior to the common cup.

As time passed, Lipscomb eventually modified his views on this subject. While he still maintained that the sanitary argument was chimerical and no reason to break from Christ’s example, he tailored his interpretation of the Bible’s communion passages to fit the possibility of individual cups *into* that divinely approved example, concluding that “each individual person may have had his own cup that had previously been filled from a common vessel.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶Ibid.

Lipscomb now joined other influential preachers, like G. C. Brewer, in condoning individual cups. Brewer, in his autobiography, *Forty Years on the Firing Line*, admitted, “I think I was the first preacher to advocate the use of the individual communion cup” within the Churches of Christ, and he asserted that “the first church in the State of Tennessee that adopted it was the church for which I was preaching, the Central Church of Christ at Chattanooga” in 1915.⁵⁸ The fact that many congregations were already using a plurality of cups made the transition to individual cups relatively smooth at some of these locations. With influential men and frequent *Gospel Advocate* contributors like Brewer implementing change within specific congregations, and with editor-in-chief David Lipscomb’s concession of their adequacy eternally in print, many readers of the *Gospel Advocate* felt comfortable espousing individual cups, and this journal eventually became a mouth-piece for those Churches of Christ that accepted this method of administering the fruit of the vine in the communion service.

The *Gospel Advocate* was not the only journal experiencing internal strife over the cup issue. The *Apostolic Way*, established in 1913, also found members of its editorial staff on opposing sides of this increasingly volatile subject. One of its editors, Dr. George A. (G. A.) Trott, vehemently objected to using individual cups. He believed that the only points those advocating this innovative practice could provide to prove their stance were recent social and scientific ideas. To Trott, any change of worship based on this evidence alone amounted to a violation of Christ’s command for Christians to worship in spirit and in truth. Trott noted in the *Apostolic Way* that advocates of

⁵⁷G. C. Brewer, “Individual Cups,” *Gospel Advocate*, February 3, 1955, quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 65.

⁵⁸G. C. Brewer, *Forty Years on the Firing Line* (Hollywood, CA: Old Paths Books Club, 1948), xii.

individual cups had “marshaled the hosts of science, human wisdom, fashion, and esthetics against the common cup,” and facetiously asked, “In the face of these, what showing . . . has the man whose only resource is the threadbare and almost obsolete plea of ‘thus saith the Lord?’” He went on sarcastically to note that the evidence against the common cup was so strong, that the only Christians left endorsing it were “those old fogies who believe that the Scriptures thoroughly furnish the man of God unto every good work.” He concluded his satirical barrage by noting:

This is a progressive and scientific age, and it is not to be supposed that people of this enlightened time are going to take any chances by following too closely to the example of Jesus and the apostles, who were densely ignorant on the subject of germs.⁵⁹

Trott continued where Lipscomb had originally begun: those advocating the use of individual cups were not using the scriptures as their motivating reason for change. Conversely, according to Trott, they were twisting the Word of God and forcing the divinely inspired texts to uphold a doctrinal change brought about by exterior, social pressure. This line of reasoning became the standard verbal plan of attack by Trott and those who agreed with him against any who accepted individual communion cups.

Trott did not have to travel far to find an adverse opinion. N. L. Clark, a fellow-editor of the *Apostolic Way* insisted—like Brewer and (eventually) Lipscomb of the *Gospel Advocate*—that while one cup may be an accurate way of following Christ’s example, he could not “accept the contention that one cup only is scriptural.” Clark’s outspoken stance on this question placed him in congruence with his more reserved fellow-editor R. F. Duckworth and at odds with editors Trott and Harry Harper. After

⁵⁹G. A. Trott, the *Apostolic Way* (May 1, 1930), quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 68.

straddling the hermeneutical fence on the cup issue as long as possible, the *Apostolic Way* followed the lead of the larger *Gospel Advocate* and eventually landed on the side of accepting either method as scripturally sound.

Although the journal's chosen path had become clear, its editors remained deeply divided, a fact that eventually proved too difficult to ignore. As advocates of the individual cups were quick to point out, many congregations already used a plurality of cups, and if they could use two, why not as many as necessary for each congregant to have his own? This logic left most involved with the issue faced with two choices: advocate one cup as the only divinely authorized way to commune, or embrace any number of cups as scriptural.

Faced with this polemical dichotomy, Harry Harper resigned as editor of the *Apostolic Way* in 1928 and began a new journal entitled simply, *The Truth*, with the like-minded J. D. Phillips joining as co-editor. Harper had witnessed first hand the problems of a fiercely divided editorial staff, and he chose Phillips, and two years later, in 1930, Homer L. King, partly because of their unity of opinion on the cup issue. Harper also knew from experience that to only offer one side of any issue, like the *Apostolic Way* had eventually begun to do with the cup question, presented its own array of problems. Although many believed "that the contention over the 'one drinking vessel' [would] eventually fall of its own weight and come to naught," others were speaking of the opposing sides of this issue as a true "division" in the body of Christ.⁶⁰

Harper believed that this division would only deepen if no one dared address the issue. He therefore sought to publish a printed discussion of the cup issue with men of

⁶⁰J. N. Cowan, the *Apostolic Way*, (February 16, 1928) and G. A. Trott, the *Apostolic Way* (September 1, 1928), quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 77.

opposing opinions getting equal print space to offer their views. In March 1931, Harper managed to orchestrate such an occasion, and *The Truth* ran a published discussion between H. C. Harper and J. N. Cowan with the following propositions to be debated:

1. Proposition: The word “cup” as used by Christ in Mat.26:27 and “the fruit of the vine” are one and the same.
2. Proposition: The word “cup” as used by Christ in Mat. 26:27 is the name of a solid.⁶¹

Interestingly, as the propositions indicated, both of these men approached their respective positions solely from a standpoint of biblical interpretation, and nowhere in the debate is found a reference to a medical doctor or a bacteria-studying scientist. This strategy marked a sharp departure from the discussions of the past. Gone were the subjects of disease, germs, and contamination. They had been replaced with intricate grammatical studies of Greek words like *poterion* (a drinking vessel) and in-depth analyses of rhetorical devices like metaphor and metonymy. Thus, Harper would use the following argument:

You say, “If ‘the cup’ refers to the “fruit of the vine,” etc. Well, if it “refers” to “the fruit of the vine,” it is not “the fruit of the vine,” for the thing that “refers” to a thing is not the thing referred to. And even if “the cup” in Mt. 26:27 were used metonymically as you contend in, “He drank the poison cup and died,” that does not make the “cup” and what he drank the same. Here the “cup,” one thing, is named, and its contents, another thing, are suggested. The “cup” is not its contents. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an object is presented to the mind, not by naming it, but by naming something else that readily suggests it.”—Williams’ Rhetoric.⁶²

Cowan, in turn, would counter with:

⁶¹H. C. Harper and J. N. Cowan, “Harper-Cowan Discussion,” *The Truth* 1 March 1931, accessed March 15, 2008; available from <http://www.oldpathsadvocate.org/public/php-scripts/debates/debate3.php>; Internet.

⁶²Ibid.

The pronoun “This” is not the word which denotes the figure of speech, but the word “cup.” Cup is named to suggest the fruit of vine. “Metonymy is from a Greek word which means a change of name—that is, a thing is called or described by some other than its own name.” (The World Book, vol. 6 P. 3757) In the passage in dispute, the fruit of the vine is called by some[thing] other than its own name, viz: the cup. I showed that in “this (bread) is my body,” that “this” referred to the bread he took. That, “this (cup) is my blood,” referred to the cup he took. This was not noticed. No man can get away from the fact that pronouns stand for their antecedents (nouns), and “this” stands for its antecedent “cup” in verse 27.⁶³

Haggling over the meaning of the text replaced arguments about germs and bacteria, and both sides refrained from commenting on the social issue that had started and fostered the division in the first place—the rise and eventual acceptance of the germ theory of disease.

Harry Harper’s hope that an open discussion of the issue would bring about its resolution came to naught. Although the debate between himself and Cowan was widely circulated and frequently discussed, it did little to settle the issue among the Churches of Christ. Indeed, the division only deepened with time. Ronny Wade, in his history of this branch of the Churches of Christ—*The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*—mentioned a private, written exchange between two editors of *The Truth* that helps demonstrate how this division solidified.

In 1934, Harry Harper wrote to his co-editor Homer King regarding another communion-related issue on which some Churches of Christ were in disagreement: whether or not the fruit of the vine in the communion service should be fermented. King had recently preached at a Texas congregation at which fermented wine was used. Harper vocally and adamantly opposed this practice and therefore did not receive invitations to speak from this particular congregation. When he learned that his editorial understudy had recently worshiped there, Harper wrote King exclaiming, “I was wholly unaware that I should find a church . . . where I was not wanted and you were wanted

⁶³Ibid.

because of a difference in our faith and practice.” Harper went on to ask, “If we have no ground of unity where we can worship together, how can we expect to ‘keep the unity of the Spirit’ and induce others to do so?” He concluded with a recommendation: “I suggest that the editors of the paper get together on ground of unity where they can worship together, then have manhood enough to defend that ground and practice what they preach.”⁶⁴

Harper believed in and here recommended a policy that through the years would create and shape many unofficial enclaves within the Churches of Christ. First, he wanted the editors of *The Truth* to jointly decide on a unified position on various biblical issues. Then, once this consensus was formed, they were to preach and worship exclusively at congregations that held congruent beliefs. This call to “line up” on an issue as Harper (and subsequently others) referred to the practice, has become a repeated refrain throughout the history of the Churches of Christ, and as the lining up process took place on the cup issue, two distinct and separate groups were produced: those who sanctioned the use of individual cups as scriptural and those who did not.

These two tributaries within the Churches of Christ at large still exist today. A good number of church members, when faced with choosing between a single cup only or any number of cups, chose the one cup method as the only scriptural way to commune—most however, did not. Those who sided with the individual cups idea continue to make up the majority among Churches of Christ today. The two groups rarely cross paths like they used to. Debates have fallen out of fashion, and virtually no preachers speak to both

⁶⁴“H. C. Harper to Homer L. King,” November 15, 1934, quoted in Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 110.

groups anymore. Occasionally, the cup issue will be raised between the groups and gain enough attention to produce a written debate.

In March 1987 two preachers—Ronny Wade and Elmer Moore—met on paper and debated the cup issue, considering the proposition that “the Scriptures teach that a congregation may use a plurality of containers in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in partaking of the Lord’s Supper.”⁶⁵ Both men based their arguments solely on interpreting the Biblical passages that mention the Lord’s Supper, and neither wrote a word about sanitation or science to bolster their positions. This particular battle of penmanship, as well as all the debates on the cup issue in recent past, reflect the form and style of the Harper-Cowan discussion. The deliberations rarely touch the sanitation aspect of the cup issue, and they have done practically nothing to promote unity between the differing branches of the church. As time progressed, many people on both sides of this issue have ignored, forgotten, or become ignorant of the social instigator of the still-present division among the Churches of Christ over the scripturalness of individual communion cups: the fateful invention of an English wine merchant that prompted the germination of the germ theory and a medical and social revolution of Western culture.

⁶⁵ “Moore-Wade Debate on Communion Cups,” Ronny Wade and Elmer Moore, March 1987, accessed February 7, 2008; available from <http://www.oldpathsadvocate.org/public/php-scripts/debates%5Cdebate2.php>; Internet.

CHAPTER THREE

What God Hath Joined: The Division over Divorce and Remarriage

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” And he answered and said unto them, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?’ Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” They say unto him, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” He saith unto them, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

— *Matthew 19:3-9 (KJV)*

During the two decades that followed their division over the requisite number of cups for a scriptural communion service, the two resulting groups within this formerly unified wing of the Restoration Movement enjoyed a period of great prosperity and growth. While both groups no doubt have produced complex, interesting, and worthwhile histories, we shall at this point leave those who allowed for individual cups in the communion service and follow the narrative of the relatively smaller and more theologically conservative of these divergent branches within the Churches of Christ—the group that chose to accept only one communion cup in their worship services. Although this particular tributary of the Churches of Christ has garnered very little historical study to date, through its journals, the writings of its leaders, and the sermons of its preachers, it is possible to map its chronological trajectory and attempt to understand the how’s and why’s of its present state in the pantheon of American religious bodies.

H. C. Harper's newly established journal, *The Truth* (1928-1932), flourished under his guidance with the assistance of Doug Phillips and Homer King. This monthly, one-dollar periodical provided commonality and cohesiveness among the wide-spread and fiercely autonomous congregations that made up the one-cup group within the Churches of Christ.¹ As the 1930's began, Harper—reflecting upon his failing health, passed the responsibility of publishing the journal on to Phillips and King who decided to move the setting of publication from Sneads, FL (Harper's hometown) to Lebanon, MO (where King resided) and to change the paper's name from *The Truth* to the *Old Paths Advocate* (*OPA*). In the journal's first issue under its new name and leadership, Homer King admitted that he only very "reluctantly accepted the responsibility" of publishing the journal and that he did so with the expectation of ample assistance:

With Brethren Homer A. Gay, J. D. Phillips, and H. C. Harper on the editorial staff with me, with their influence and assistance, I feel that my burden is made lighter. I believe that these are true and tried friends, upon whom I can rely. And, too, Bro[ther] H. E. Robertson, a consecrated gospel preacher, of this community, has promised to assist me with mailing out the paper and otherwise as I may need his assistance. This will enable me to continue in the evangelistic work as I have in the past; otherwise I would not have undertaken the publication.²

King, and the men he enlisted to help him with the journal, enjoyed a relatively unified belief on most issues, and the topics over which they disagreed were either minor or rarely necessary to address. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, they consistently published articles in the *OPA* taking stances against things like the Christian's involvement in the military (especially relevant throughout the war years), individual

¹ Don King, "A Brief History of this Paper, *Old Paths Advocate* (January 1982), accessed February 14, 2008; available from <http://www.oldpathsadvocate.org/public/html/1982/January/A-Brief-History-Of-This-Paper.html>; Internet.

² Homer L. King, "From the Publisher of the *Old Paths Advocate*," *Old Paths Advocate*, (January 1932), accessed February 14, 2008; available from <http://www.oldpathsadvocate.org/public/html/1982/January/Fifty-Years.html>; Internet.

communion cups (over which division had recently taken place), what they referred to as the “pastor system” (one located, paid preacher for a congregation), and all types of church-sponsored institutions larger than the individual, local congregation. Although a problem arose over differing interpretations of Acts 2:42—a verse that some believed provided a mandated, procedural order in which to carry out the worship service—widespread and permanent division was avoided over this and all other issues that held divisive potential during the decades of the 1930s and 1940s. However, as the latter half of the 1950s approached, social forces brought an old, but heretofore largely unnoticed, subject to the forefront—a subject that came to touch the lives of nearly every American in a profoundly personal way: divorce and remarriage.

Marriages Asunder in America

The first recorded divorce in America occurred between Mr. and Mrs. James Luxford of Massachusetts. The year was 1639.³ Nearly five years passed before another couple divorced. The earliest American colonies based their culture—social and political—around their religion, and this caused them to view marriage as a spiritual institution that required civil protection. As a result, the leading cause for marital absolution, sexual misconduct, garnered severe penalties. To help keep physical relationships between married couples, one Massachusetts law declared that single men and women found to be physically involved outside of marriage “shall be punished either

³ Ralph Dean Clark, *James Luxford and Descendants*, (Los Angeles, CA, 2003), accessed February 26, 2008; available from <http://ralphinla.rootsweb.com/luxfordj.htm#LUXFORD>; Internet.

by enjoining to Marriage, or Fine, or corporal punishment, or all or any of these.”⁴ The initial of these three options of punishments was typically carried out, along with one of the latter two, depending on the couple’s financial status. The wealthy got by with paying fines; the poor suffered physical punishment for their physical crimes, but guilty couples from all economic classes usually found themselves ordered to marry their partner.

Court records from this period also reveal that divorce was granted very reluctantly and only when corroborated and conclusive evidence made such a decree necessary. The case of Samuel and Jane Hallowey provides a typical example of the law’s hesitancy toward providing the legal sanction for a marriage’s dissolution. On March 1, 1670, a Massachusetts Court of Magistrates heard Mr. Hallowey’s “earnest request” for a divorce because his wife had confessed to infidelity “with divers persons.” The husband’s assertion and the wife’s confession “notwithstanding,” the Court, insisted it was “not very clear” on how to rule on “such a proceeding at present.” The magistrate therefore decided to defer his decision until the court’s next June session, giving him ample time to take “mature advice and deliberation” deserving of “so weighty a matter.”⁵

Over three months later, the court made a further decision regarding the Halloweys. It affirmed that if two court-appointed witnesses confirmed the validity of John Hallowey’s accusations by directly interviewing his wife—who must “stand to and maintain her said assertion” of infidelity—then Mr. Hallowey could appear before the

⁴ Richard S. Dunn, ed., *The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachuset, 1648*, facsimile edition, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), accessed February 27, 2008; available from <http://www.law.du.edu/russell/lh/alh/docs/lawslibertyes.html>; Internet.

⁵ Lisa M. Lauria, ed., “Plymouth Colony Record Court of Magistrates, March 1 1670,” *Sexual Misconduct in Plymouth Colony, Appendices I and II*, The Plymouth Colony Archive Project, 1998, accessed February 27, 2008; available from, <http://www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/Lauria2.html>; Internet.

court again on “the last Tuesday in October” to petition for a divorce. If at that time he could “produce sufficient testimony, under the hand of the said William Harvey and James Walker, that [his wife] still affirms that she hath committed the said act, the Court will then see cause to grant him a bill of divorce.”⁶ To realize the degree of hesitancy displayed by the court in this case, one only needs to consider that it took a similar court a *single* hearing to sentence John and Joan Hews to time in the stocks for Joan becoming pregnant “before they were publicly married.”⁷ The stark contrast of the deliberations over these two cases makes clear that early colonial laws were arranged to preserve marriage and avoid divorce—even at the expense of the happiness of those involved.

Records of the Plymouth Separatists who first settled along the Massachusetts coast indicate a scant nine divorces were granted in the seventy-two years this group remained an autonomous colony. These nine were granted as reluctantly as was the Halloweys’, and all were finally issued because of major marital problems—four because of adultery, three because of desertion, one because of bigamy, and one because of incest.⁸ As a result of this type of legal atmosphere,—one closely tied to religion—very few marriages during the colonial period ended in divorce.

As the American Revolution approached, ideas on freedom and personal liberty were bandied about by everyone from the social elites to the most humble farmers, and these evolving concepts spilled over from politics into other facets of American life, including marriage and divorce. At some point between May 1771 and December 1772,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lisa M. Lauria, ed., “Plymouth Colony Record Court of Magistrates, April 1, 1633,” *Sexual Misconduct in Plymouth Colony, Appendices I and II* The Plymouth Colony Archive Project, 1998, accessed February 27, 2008; available from, <http://www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/Lauria2.html>; Internet.

⁸ Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12.

a friend of Thomas Jefferson approached the Virginia Assembly member and practicing attorney about divorcing his wife. Jefferson agreed to aid his fellow-Virginian and began preparing notes toward that end, which he titled, “Blair v. Blair. On a bill of Divorce to propose during the General Assembly.”⁹ In consenting to help Dr. Blair, Jefferson faced the difficult task of either convincing the Virginia Assembly to grant a legislative divorce—which it had never done—or of persuading the assembly to follow Parliament’s example of issuing divorces by Special Act. Without proof of adultery however, Jefferson would have to convince the assembly to grant this type of divorce on grounds Parliament had never recognized. He began his notes by insisting that to force an unhappy couple to remain married was “cruel,” and that a “union made at first by mutual love, but now dissolved by hatred” should be allowed to legally end. It was a pitiless government indeed, Jefferson argued, that legislated “to chain a man to misery till death.” The “liberty of divorce,” he wrote, “prevents and cures domestic quarrels,” and “preserves liberty of affection (which is [a] natural right).” Finally, he concluded that the “nature of covenants” makes obvious the fact that in an agreement “where both parties consent,” the compact “must be dissoluble” when neither party continues their consent.¹⁰ Due to Dr. Blair’s death, this case never made it to the floor of the Virginia Assembly, but Jefferson’s notes provide a glimpse into how one of America’s most progressive political thinkers viewed the evolving idea of divorce, namely, as an individual liberty that preserved the natural right of the pursuit of personal happiness.

⁹ Frank L. Dewey, “Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on divorce,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982) : 212.

¹⁰ Thomas Jefferson, “Blair v. Blair. On a bill of Divorce to propose during the General Assembly,” Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, entire primary source found in Frank L. Dewey, “Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on divorce,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982) : 212-223.

Although Jefferson may have been among colonial America's *avante garde* in his views on divorce, as the American Revolution commenced and concluded, the number of divorces in the new republic began steadily to rise. As historian Glenda Riley writes of this time period in her historical study, *Divorce: An American Tradition*, "divorce, and laws permitting it, proliferated, and many Americans began to believe that divorce was a citizen's right in a democratic country dedicated to principles of freedom and happiness."¹¹

Not everyone in the revolutionary period saw divorce in such a positive light. Many people, especially the country's religious leaders, viewed the rising numbers of divorce as an unfortunate and ugly side-effect of the new republic's appetite for freedom. Timothy Dwight, a Congregationalist minister and president of Yale University from 1795-1817, called the growing numbers of divorces around New Haven, Connecticut "alarming and terrible." He went on to note in one of his sermons that according to his calculations "one out of every hundred married pairs" in Connecticut ended their relationship in divorce. In addressing this statistic that one percent of Connecticut marriages resulted in divorce, Dwight lamented, "What a flaming proof is here of the baleful influence of this corruption on a people, otherwise remarkably distinguished for their intelligence, morals, and religion!"¹² The righteous tirades coming from the pulpits of many churches however, did little to affect the burgeoning number of divorced couples in America, and as the nineteenth century approached, those numbers continued to rise.

¹¹ Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34.

¹² Timothy Dwight, "Sermon CXXI. The Law of God. The Decalogue. The Seventh Commandment, Polygamy, Divorce," *Theology, Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons by Timothy Dwight, S.T.D., LL.D., with a Memoir of the Life of the Author*, vol. 4 (London: J. Hadden, 1824), 267.

On Wednesday, March 4, 1829, General Andrew Jackson stood on the east portico of the U.S. Capital Building and addressed a thronging crowd:

About to undertake the arduous duties that I have been appointed to perform by the choice of a free people, I avail myself of this customary and solemn occasion to express the gratitude which their confidence inspires and to acknowledge the accountability which my situation enjoins. While the magnitude of their interests convinces me that no thanks can be adequate to the honor they have conferred, it admonishes me that the best return I can make is the zealous dedication of my humble abilities to their service and their good.¹³

Jackson had just been elected president of the United States by a landslide, a fact that pronounced, as he indicated in a letter to his friend John Coffee, “a verdict of condemnation against” the opposing party “and their slanders, whilst it has justified my character and course.”¹⁴ No doubt Jackson took great pride in the justification of his character, for it had been called into question time and again by his opposition, and much of the mud slinging had been aimed at the questionable condition of the general’s marriage. Jackson was deeply in love with his wife Rachel, and the two were happily married, but she had been married before, and her original divorce had not yet been completed when Jackson first married her in the early part of the 1790s. This resulted in another quiet ceremony before a justice of the peace in 1794 to ensure their marriage’s legality, and in a horde of accusations from Jackson’s political opponents during his presidential campaign. The results, politically speaking, were overwhelmingly in Jackson’s favor. America had spoken, informing their president-elect that the touchy and personal issue of divorce and remarriage would not prevent him from being their leader.

¹³ Andrew Jackson, “First Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1829, *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States: from George Washington to George W. Bush*, Bicentennial ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), accessed February 29, 2008; available from <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres23.html>; Internet.

¹⁴ H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and His Times* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 402.

The country's views on divorce and remarriage had reached a point that voters could elect a president whose wife had to divorce and remarry to claim him—even under such questionable circumstances as those of Andrew and Rachel Jackson.

The laws of the land were changing as well. Divorce cases had always been tried as adversarial law suits—the “innocent” spouse proving grounds for divorce against the “guilty” spouse. While this remained the same, the grounds for divorce were beginning to broaden. A Rhode Island law in 1822 allowed for divorce for “impotency, adultery, extreme cruelty, willful desertion for five years, [and] . . . neglect or refusal . . . of the husband, being of sufficient ability, to provide necessaries for the subsistence of his wife.” This list concluded with the ambiguous and inclusive phrase “any other gross misbehavior and wickedness . . . repugnant to or in violation of the marriage covenant.”¹⁵ This final, open-ended reason left couples ample legal wiggle-room when looking for lawful ground upon which to receive a divorce, and these types of laws contributed to the country's rising divorce rate.

Early Restoration Movement Reactions

As Andrew Jackson was overcoming his divorce-laden past by winning the presidency, Alexander Campbell was editing the *Christian Baptist*, writing articles that greatly influenced the Restoration Movement and fielding religious questions from many of his dedicated readers. Very few of these were marriage-related queries. In fact, only three questions posed to Campbell in the pages of the *Christian Baptist* mentioned the subject of marriage, and all three came in 1829, the year of Jackson's presidential victory. In March, April, and September of that year, three different readers posed the following

¹⁵ Lawrence M. Friedman, “Rights of Passage: Divorce Law in Historical Perspective,” *Oregon Law Review* 63 (1984) : 654.

respective questions: “What should a church do with a member for marrying her deceased husband's brother?,” “Is it consistent with the New Testament for the bishops or elders of churches to apply to the civil courts for license to marry?,” and, “Is an unmarried person or a youth who has never been married, eligible to the office of bishop or overseer?”¹⁶

Although none of these questions dealt with divorce, Campbell's answer to the first query sheds light on an important point of this chapter's subject. Campbell replied to the first question on marriage ever posed to him in print by saying that the church should take no action against the woman mentioned therein, for her actions, “however repugnant [they] may be to our feelings or our customs,” are “not condemnable from either Testament.”¹⁷ Here Campbell established that regardless of the feelings, traditions, or trends of society on the subject of marriage (or any other subject), the Christian's sole moral compass must remain the inspired scriptures. Social custom, to Campbell and all those attempting to restore primitive Christianity, did not provide grounds for the Christian to forsake a Biblical command.

The year Campbell answered these three questions on marriage was the last of the *Christian Baptist's* print-life, and in 1830, the editor began his new journal, *The Millennial Harbinger*. At least nine times articles on the subject of divorce were included in this long-running Restoration Movement publication, the first appearing in 1834. A member of the New Hope congregation wrote to the editor and described two situations that were becoming increasingly typical throughout the Churches of Christ in

¹⁶ “Query XVIII,” Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 6, no. 8 (1829) : 530; “Query XXI,” Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 6, no. 9 (1829) : 539; and “Queries,” Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 7, no. 2 (1829) : 581.

¹⁷ “Query XVIII,” Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, 6, no. 8 (1829) : 530

America. Both cases had brought to light “a difference of opinion . . . between two of the prominent members of the church at New Hope, in regard to the effect and operation of the passages found in Matth[ew] xix and I Cor[inthians] vii.” The first instance involved a Christian husband who remarried after his unbelieving wife left him. In the second case, a woman who had become a Christian after her husband deserted her had obtained a divorce and married another man—a member of the church at New Hope. The author of this letter inquired of Campbell his “immediate attention to this matter . . . before it becomes unavoidable, under the circumstances, for the church to act.”¹⁸

In his reply, Campbell tackled for the first time the knotty problem of divorce and remarriage, and in so doing he raised particular features of the issue on which Church of Christ members have since periodically discussed, debated, and, disagreed. Campbell began by quoting the passages in which Christ gives his opinion on divorce and remarriage and in which he forbids the practice except for one cause, fornication—or in Campbell’s translation, “whoredom.” He then drew attention to the fact that Jesus, when verbally legislating this exceptive clause, was acting as “a minister of the circumcision” and was speaking “with a reference to the Jewish institution . . . while that institution was yet standing,” not to Christians under the New Law.¹⁹ He further emphasized this distinction between the testaments of the Bible by noting that Paul’s command in I Corinthians 7—“if any brother has an infidel wife, who is well pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away”—is “contradictory to the commandment of the Lord given to the Jews under the antecedent dispensation, for they were commanded to put away their

¹⁸ G. T., “Divorces,” *The Millennial Harbinger*, 5, no. 2 (February 1834) : 6.

¹⁹ Alexander Campbell, “Reply,” *The Millennial Harbinger*, 5, no. 2 (February 1834) : 6.

infidel wives, although they might be pleased to live with them.”²⁰ This distinction between the Old and New Testaments lies at the heart of the eventual, recent division over divorce and remarriage within the Churches of Christ, but the necessity of realizing the division of the covenants in respect to marriage and divorce is not a recent concept, as this reply from Campbell demonstrates.

Somewhat confusingly however, after emphasizing the two covenants under which the respective passages on divorce exist, Campbell added “that as it was in the kingdom of God among the Jews, so is it in the kingdom of God among the Christians,” and he concluded by saying that any Christian who divorces his spouse and marries another, except for the single reason given by Christ, is guilty of adultery. He finally expressed his belief that, regarding the two cases in question, both the believing man and woman were scripturally remarried because of Paul’s reasoning in I Corinthians 7, where the apostle notes that if an unbelieving spouse departs, “a brother or sister in such a case is not in bondage.”²¹ Although Campbell emphasized the distinction between Old and New Testament laws on marriage, he eventually drew his conclusions on the matter from both sources, fusing teachings that he himself wrote were of separate dispensations. While this may seem confusing and contradictory, it nonetheless demonstrates that an understanding of the plurality of covenants that have regulated marriage throughout biblical history is an issue that has been mentioned in Restoration Movement writings from the movement’s very first published article on divorce and remarriage. Campbell closed his reply by noting his happiness of having “the concurrence” of another of the movement’s most well-respected preachers, Walter Scott, who agreed with Campbell

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

“both on the case submitted and on the decision of such cases by our great Apostle Paul.”²² Campbell’s mention and apparent relief at Scott’s agreement with his reply further illustrates both Campbell’s hesitancy at and the difficulty of offering an opinion on such an emotionally charged issue as divorce and remarriage.

Despite the issue’s difficulty and divisive potential, the increasing frequency of divorce and remarriage cases in the United States refused to let the topic lay permanently dormant, but at this point, divorce in America had not yet become so socially acceptable as to produce any drastic action regarding it within the Churches of Christ. Nine essays on divorce are not many, considering the thousands of articles published in the *Millennial Harbinger* during its forty-year lifetime. The last three articles on divorce in the journal appeared in 1870—four years after Campbell’s death and what proved to be the final year of the *Millennial Harbinger*’s print-life.

The first of these final three articles on divorce provides a glimpse into the social context of divorce during this period. In the January 1870 edition of the *Harbinger*, an article referenced “a terrible case of assassination that occurred in the city of New York” that had captured the nation’s attention for a span because of its high profile cast and its sensational story. Daniel McFarland’s wife, Abby, who had fallen in love with *New York Tribune* editor Albert Richardson, fled New York and her current marriage and clandestinely moved to Indiana, a state that enforced comparatively lax divorce laws. There, unbeknownst to McFarland, Abby obtained a divorce from him with the intention of returning to New York and marrying Richardson. When McFarland finally learned of these events, he stormed into the *New York Tribune*’s office and shot Richardson, fatally wounding him. In the short time between the shooting and his death, Richardson

²² Ibid., 6-7.

arranged for Henry Ward Beecher, the well-known minister and brother of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* author Harriet Beecher Stowe, to marry Abby and the swiftly fading editor while on his deathbed. This melodramatic affair captured the attention of citizens across the country and drew severe criticism from religious leaders.²³

In the *Harbinger's* contribution to the growing number of opinions on this case, new co-editor C. L. Loos wrote:

We hope that the *dramatic interest* in this horrible event will not pass away from the public mind without working permanent good, and awakening the conscience and uniting the moral and religious power of the land to arrest and drive back a current of demoralization that is making its way through the social life of the nation.²⁴

It was not merely another murder that had the nation in such an uproar, Loos insisted, nor was it the reputations of the fairly well-known characters involved in the affair, but rather the national attention was due to “a great social question, and one of high moral and religious import, [which] is so prominently and essentially connected with” the incident. This great social question was divorce and remarriage. Loos hoped that the unfortunate event that became known as “The Richardson-McFarland Tragedy” might awaken the “moral sense of the people” and that this arousal might “stem the tide of licentious thought and licentious legislation, relative to the marital relations and obligations, . . . that is undermining the very foundations of the order, purity, and happiness of social life.”²⁵ After bemoaning the trend of American society in the area of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the article goes on to provide some Biblical principles by which to view

²³ *The Richardson-McFarland Tragedy: Containing all the Letters and Other Interesting Facts Not Before Published* (Philadelphia: Barclay and Co. Publishers, 1870).

²⁴ C. L. Loos, “A Tragedy and its Lesson,” *The Millennial Harbinger*, 40, no. 1, (January 1870) : 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

marriage and concludes by beseeching all Christians to live their lives and conduct their marriages by these principles:

It becomes the sacred and urgent duty of those who revere the Sacred Scriptures as the law of God, and who respect the sacred obligations of marriage as therein divinely established, to speak and act in defense of the laws of God and the laws of man in harmony with it, and against the licentious doctrine that would undermine these. The whole question of divorce demands a full examination from the Christian standpoint and in the light of history, to dissipate, if possible, the destructive delusions that are leading captive many minds,—delusions that are not the results of any ambiguity in the law of the New Testament on this subject, but rather the darkening and bewildering effects of misguided, unrestrained passions, that seek for indulgence and excuse, and find it, *because* they eagerly seek it. Whatever ‘liberal’ laws the State may make, the Church of God should maintain itself in doctrine and discipline in the matter, as in every other, strictly and unflinchingly on the Word of God.²⁶

However passionately Loos may have believed in the absence of any Biblical ambiguities on the subjects of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, sources indicate that many differences of opinion on these related issues existed within the Churches of Christ. His later explanations of I Corinthians 7 indicate that Loos himself disagreed with the recently deceased Alexander Campbell on the interpretation of Paul’s statement that “a brother or sister is not under bondage” should their unbelieving spouse desert them. The final two articles on divorce and remarriage in *The Millennial Harbinger*, published in the May and July issues of 1870, were penned in response to the essay from January of that year which referenced the fiasco surrounding Albert Richardson’s murder. These final articles—written alternately between Loos and an unnamed subscriber to the journal—only further highlight the fact that differences of opinions existed throughout the brotherhood on the thorny issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

A Brotherhood Asunder Over Divorce and Remarriage

According to a study by the U.S. Bureau of Commerce and Labor, between 1872 (two years after *The Millennial Harbinger's* final issue) and 1876, a total of 68,574 divorces were granted in America. This marked a 27.9 percent increase from the previous four-year span (1867-1871). In the next four years, from 1877-1881, these numbers again increased, this time by 30.3 percent.²⁷ While these numbers may have been alarming to many throughout the country's religious establishment, they may not have received as close attention from those in the Churches of Christ for two reasons. First, the numbers of divorces within their ranks were far below the national average. One Church of Christ evangelist, who began preaching in the late 1940s, remembered the absence of divorce cases within the church, noting,

When I first started to preach, you never heard of divorce. It was almost unheard of. I remember the first woman . . . who ever attended [my home] congregation who had had a divorce. Nobody else had a divorce. She did, and she attended. Of course there was no problem because she wasn't going to be called on [to take a leading part in the service] anyway, and she just came. But, as divorces began to multiply, then that's what intensified the problem.²⁸

With so few divorces taking place within their churches during these years, Church of Christ members did not give this matter the attention it would later require.

Secondly, other issues had taken center stage within Restoration Movement ranks and were causing problems. The long and heated debate over the scripturalness of missionary societies received a great deal of the movement's attention in the later part of the nineteenth century, and disagreements over this issue eventually led to division around the turn of the twentieth century. Also, as covered in the previous chapter, the

²⁷ Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79.

²⁸ Wade, Ronny F. interview by author. digital recording. Springfield, MO. March, 13 2007.

introduction of individual communion cups into most Protestant churches—including many in the Restoration Movement—kept the majority of Church of Christ preachers, editors, and debaters thoroughly occupied through the early 1930s. However, as these issues died down and the country's divorce statistics continued to rise, it was only a matter of time before the number of divorces in the Churches of Christ reached a point that demanded attention.

Clovis Cook, a ninety-four year-old native Texan and current resident of Springfield, MO, has been a preacher in the Church of Christ since 1933. He is one of the few living Church of Christ preachers who can still remember the many debates, articles, discussions, and divisions that took place over the communion cup issue—a subject whose lines of division were nearly completely drawn when he began preaching. After siding with those who insisted on one cup in their communion services, Cook began preaching for these churches in the area of Wichita Falls, Texas. After being engaged in this proximity for a few years, Cook was asked by *Old Paths Advocate* editor and Church of Christ evangelist Homer King to join King in his preaching exploits. Cook agreed to do this, and a close friendship quickly developed between the two men. As a result, Cook moved to Lebanon, MO, in 1934. Shortly thereafter, he married Homer King's daughter, Velma, and was eventually asked to join the editorial staff of the *Old Paths Advocate*—a group that then consisted of Homer King, Homer Gay, J. D. Phillips, and H. E. Robertson.²⁹

During the first decade of the *OPA*'s publication (the early 1930s to the early 1940s), the divorce rate in America continued to rise and was drawing the attention of

²⁹ Clovis Cook, interview by author. digital recording, Springfield, MO, February 16, 2008.

interested people across the country, many of whom gathered statistics in search of the key factors that were contributing to the rising numbers of divorce. These amateur and professional statisticians concluded that a wide variety of social changes were causing more American marriages to end in divorce than ever before, including “increased median income, industrialization, decline in economic functions of the family, weakening of religious tenets, and fading social stigma concerning divorce.”³⁰ Whatever the major contributing factors may have been, the divorce rate continued to rise dramatically.

Regardless of how the divorce rate was computed, its overall pattern was the same: upwards. Whether the number of divorces between 1910 and the mid-1940s was compared with total population, married population, or marriages in a given year, the resulting ratio showed an ascending curve that surpassed the divorce rate in all other nations.³¹

As the 1930s drew to a close, a situation arose within the one-cup Churches of Christ that ushered the issue of divorce and remarriage to the forefront of the minds of the *Old Paths Advocate*'s editors. Clovis Cook later recalled the situation this way:

Years ago, in 1939—I was married in '35—a black man by the name of Charles Waller came out of the Southern country. He saw the *Old Paths Advocate*, and he liked what he saw, and he said, “I want to go meet these brethren.” So he came up there to Lebanon and met Brother King and Brother Gay and me . . . and he liked what he found. He was printing a little old paper called, I forget what it was called—*Footprints of Time** or something like that—but he said, “I guess I’ll give that up and go in with the *Old Paths*.” Boy, he was a whale of a preacher! . . . So, that’s when this thing really started on the marriage question in our part of the country. . . . When [Waller] was a young man . . . he got to drinking, and one night, when he was under the influence of that inebriation, he married a girl. They got to kidding him and said, “Y’all ought to get married. You love each other.” He said, “Well, there ain’t nobody here to marry us.” And they said, “Yea, this man over here’s a preacher. He’ll marry you.” So, he married, and the next day woke up, and they told him that he’d got married that night, and he said, “To who?” And they told him and he said, “No, I didn’t know what I was doing. I didn’t marry that girl.” And they told him, “Well, it’s on paper.” So she divorced him, or he divorced her, I don’t know which, but he said the marriage

³⁰ Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145.

was never consummated. So, he came up there to us [the *OPA* editors in Missouri], and Brother Gay was of the “no exception” persuasion, and he didn’t like for Charles Waller to preach down there, but man, he could draw the biggest crowd you ever saw in your life. So, when he came up there, he revived that argument on the marriage.³²

This bizarre incident forced leading figures within the one-cup Churches of Christ for the first time to carefully consider and address the divorce and remarriage issue with an actual, specific situation in mind. Homer Gay, as Cook explains, “was of the no exception persuasion.” This label, “no exception,” became the common way to describe those who believe that death is the only thing that ends a marriage and allows the surviving member to scripturally remarry. The exact wording comes from the nineteenth chapter of Matthew in which Christ says, in verse nine, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication* [my emphasis], and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”³³ The Christians who believed that this exceptive clause was a part of the Old Testament era and only applied to the Jews were labeled “no exception” people. Those who believed this exception applied to the Christian era were therefore said to be of the exception persuasion, or “exception” people. Since Homer Gay was a “no exception” preacher, it bothered him that a man who had been divorced and remarried was being asked to preach and assume a leading role in the services of the church.

³² Alfred Cahen, *Statistical Analysis of American divorce* (New York, 1932), 21; and Hugh Carter and Paul C. Glick, *Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 17, 38, 57, quoted in Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 133.

* Waller’s paper was called *Mental Diet*.

³² Clovis Cook, interview by author, digital recording, Springfield, MO, February 16, 2008.

³³ Matt. 19:9 (KJV).

Homer Gay was not alone in taking issue with Charles Waller's invitation to preach in the one-cup churches. Fellow *OPA* editor H. E. Robertson agreed with Gay on the interpretation of Matthew 19:9 and shared Gay's hesitancy about accepting Waller as a leader in the church. Conversely, Waller enjoyed the endorsement of editors Homer King and Clovis Cook. Once again, the editors of a Church of Christ journal disagreed on a situation, and—similarly to inner-journal opposition over the individual communion cup issue—this problem had the potential for division.

As a result, the men at the helm of the *Old Paths Advocate* who lived in and around Lebanon, MO decided to meet and discuss their differences. Homer Gay and Homer King picked up Clovis Cook at his home, drove to H. E. Robertson's house, honked the horn, and invited Robertson to come out and offered him the passenger seat beside Homer Gay. Once all the men were in the car, Gay began by addressing his close friend Homer King:

He said, "Homer, I've been wanting to tell you this, and I think now is a good time," and he said, "I think you've been hypocritical on this marriage question." Homer said, "Say that again Brother Gay." So he said it again, and [Homer King] reached over and patted me [Cook] on the leg and said, "Are you going with me or are you staying with them?" What Brother King meant, was he was getting up and walking out, and that would have been a big division right then. And I said, "Wait a minute now Homer, wait a minute. I want to talk to Brother Gay a minute." And I told Brother Gay, I said, "Now, Brother Gay, I'm young, just staring out. I ain't been preaching long," and I said, "I've studied the marriage question, and I've been involved in it several times by other people who wanted me to come and tell them what to do." And I said, "Now, you've made an accusation tonight against Brother King. Either you have to prove that, or Brother King has to prove that you didn't tell it right. One of ya'll are wrong; you can't both be right." I said, "I do know that much. I don't know much, but I did go to school long enough to learn that." Well, Brother Gay sat there a little bit and he twiddled his chin. In a minute he turned around—he was sitting in the front seat behind the steering wheel—and he turned around and he said, "Homer, I used the wrong word. I want to apologize for that . . . I preach at the same places you do, and that wouldn't be right." And I told him, I said, "In other words, you're

apologizing, Brother Gay, for saying Brother King was hypocritical?” And he said, “Yes, I used the wrong word.”³⁴

The conversation in Homer Gay’s parked car among the editors of the *Old Paths Advocate* illustrates how large historical events often hinge on the smallest incidents. Had it not been for Gay’s apology to King, the division over divorce and remarriage may well have occurred that night in Lebanon. A permanent rift between these two men—at the time the two most influential leaders among the one-cup Churches of Christ—would have had devastating effects throughout the one-cup congregations across the country.

The next day, after reflecting on the events of the previous night, both men seemed to realize what had narrowly been avoided. Cook had gone to Gay’s home to help him cut some firewood for the coming winter, and they talked about the meeting the night before. Cook segued into the touchy topic with, “You know, I never slept much last night. That worried me about what happened.”³⁵ Gay admitted that his testy conversation with King had kept him awake through much of the night, too, and he vowed not to let another night pass without correcting any problems that might exist between him and Homer King. He met with King that night, and the two worked out their differences on the issue.

Shortly thereafter, a joint statement appeared in the February 1946 issue of the *Old Paths Advocate* from the pens of Homer King and Homer Gay addressing their views on the increasingly volatile issue of divorce and remarriage:

We, the undersigned editors of the *Old Paths Advocate*, desire to publish this joint statement relative to the marriage and divorce questions with a view to bring about unity and cooperation among all the faithful brethren, thus demonstrating

³⁴ Clovis Cook, interview by author. digital recording, Springfield, MO, February 16, 2008.

³⁵ Ibid.

that all can work together, we sincerely think: If a division ever comes over this matter, we will have no part in it. We have never suggested nor recommended division. We have never suggested a separation. We have never suggested withdrawal from one who is divorced and remarried, nor have we refused to worship with and cooperate with them. . . . We do not advocate divorce and remarriage, but if it occurs, then it is they and their God for it. So, why should there be division among us?³⁶

The statement went on to suggest that all Christians “work for unity, love, peace and kindness” on this and every issue and that preachers and teachers of God’s Word emphasize that marriage is a commitment for life and encourage all couples to resist “anything that might cause a break in their married happiness together.” The statement concluded with the editors emphasizing their commitment not to allow the divorce and remarriage issue to divide them and with a plea for others to make a similar resolution:

If others are determined to fuss and debate over these matters, it is theirs, not ours. We have worked together for the good of the cause too hard and too long to allow the contentions of others to come between us and thus tear down the good that we have accomplished together at so great a sacrifice over the years. Side by side we have struggled from boyhood days to the present time, even when we did not always see eye to eye on all questions, but we continued to love each other and work together for the up-building of the cause of our Lord. We are not trying to tell others what to do, but we pray that all may decide to pull together in love and unity, for which our Lord earnestly prayed.³⁷

It is difficult to judge if this statement helped to delay division, but it is clear that it did not have the complete effect its authors sought, for division eventually came.

Although the statement made clear the fact that these two men would not allow the divorce and remarriage issue to injure their personal relationship with each other or their spiritual relationship with anyone, Clovis Cook believed that the words spoken between the *OPA* editors on the issue in Homer Gay’s car were never fully forgotten. The matter

³⁶ Homer King and Homer Gay, “Joint Statement,” *Old Paths Advocate* (February 1946), quoted in Ronny F. Wade *Footprints in the Sands of Time: A Biographical and Anecdotal History of the non-class, one cup Churches of Christ*, (Cassville, MO: Litho Printers, 2006), 46-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

“never did get over that,” Cook recalled, “That kind of created a stigma, and it stuck with us on through the years.”³⁸

Those ill-chosen words were revived again in the late 1950s in Springfield, MO, at the Benton Street Church of Christ. There, *OPA* editors Homer King and Clovis Cook were preaching at a weeklong, outdoor gospel meeting. Their former co-editor, H. E. Robertson, lived in Springfield at the time and was a leader of Benton St. congregation. At this particular event, a man who had previously been divorced and remarried was baptized. Once again a specific case of this kind entered a congregation in the Churches of Christ, a situation that was becoming increasingly common due to the continually rising rate of divorce in America. One Church of Christ preacher, Don Pruitt, recalled that in the early days of the group’s existence, the preachers for one-cup Churches of Christ “talked about the ‘what if’ scenario . . . what do we do if someone divorces and remarries.” As divorces in America continued to mount, both in number and in social acceptability, the issue stopped being mentioned in hypothetical terms—“those situations [began to] have first and last names on them,” Pruitt remarked.³⁹ This case in Springfield now had specific names attached to it, and as the divorced and remarried gentleman began to show interest in assuming a leading role in the congregation, protests arose from several members, including H. E. Robertson, who had protested the Charles Waller incident in the 1940s.

Because of this situation, a split in the Benton St. congregation resulted. This division marked the first open rift in the Churches of Christ over the divorce and remarriage issue. H. E. Robertson, his two sons Larry and Luke, their families, and

³⁸ Clovis Cook, interview by author. digital recording, Springfield, MO, March , 13 2007.

³⁹ Don Pruitt, interview by author. digital recording, Cabool, MO, March , 15, 2007.

several other members left the congregation on Benton St., constructed a new building on South Campbell Ave., and started a new congregation—and, many have said, a new branch within the one-cup Churches of Christ. Much has been said about this event since it first happened among the resulting segments of the Churches of Christ, but very little has been preserved in print. One Church of Christ preacher who was directly involved in the resulting division over this issue, has done some research and writing on the topic. Ronny Wade wrote two histories of the one-cup Churches of Christ, one in 1986 and another 2006. Both books mention this division, and the initial one, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, devotes four and one-half pages to it. This comprises the total of book-length published material mentioning the divorce and remarriage division within the Churches of Christ.

Wade, a preacher who ended up on the “exception” side of the divorce and remarriage issue, not surprisingly in his book placed a great deal of the blame for the division on the side of those who were “no exception.” He pointed to H. E. Robertson’s removal from the editorial board of the *Old Paths Advocate* as a contributing factor in Robertson’s decision to break from the Benton St. congregation. This seems equally unfair and unfounded. Although Wade quotes Robertson in a private conversation in 1954 as saying, “I can’t say for sure there is no exception,” readers must remember that Wade was only thirteen years-old in 1954 and did not write his book until thirty-two years later.⁴⁰ These two details, coupled with the facts that Wade disagreed with Robertson on the marriage and divorce issue and lived through the unfortunate division that resulted from it—a division Wade called “foolish,”—must be taken into

⁴⁰ Ronny Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, (Springfield, MO: R. F. Wade, 1986), 173.

consideration when reading Wade's account of the events that led to this division. These facts are not here presented to cast doubt on the sincerity of Wade's intentions or to lessen the value of his important book. It is difficult enough to write unbiased history about happenings with which the author was not involved, but Wade's book deals with events that are inextricably tied to his emotions, and he interprets those events largely based on imperfect human memory.

The historical record also bears out that a large portion of blame belongs to each of the resulting sides of this division for allowing its occurrence. Two documents from this period have survived that indicate efforts and concessions were made by those who eventually left the congregation (the "no exception" group) to those who stayed (the "exception" group) in hopes of preventing division. One of these documents, given the caption, "To All Who Care to Know," was written and signed by multiple members of the Benton St. Church of Christ. The authors of this two-page statement assert that it was written because of the "many false reports, [multiple] charges that are wholly untrue, [and the general] lack of understanding in the brotherhood as to what the facts are [concerning] what really happened in the separation of the Benton St. Church of Christ in Springfield."⁴¹ The document went on to assert that none of the "no exception" members who eventually left ever claimed that they "couldn't worship there if those who were living in the remarried state continue to worship there." The "no exception" members limited their qualms to the allowance of those who were divorced and remarried to preach or hold a position of leadership in the congregation.

⁴¹ H. E Robertson., Luke Robertson, Larry Robertson, George Hogland, and David McCall, "To All Who Care to Know," Personal statement by members of the Benton St. Church of Christ, n.d., approximately 1960, Springfield, MO.

This being the case, potential existed for the two disagreeing groups in the congregation to work together despite their differences. In the other surviving document, titled “Personal Statement of H. E. Robertson,” the plan offered by the “no exception” members is outlined:

In order to try to find some means, grounds of agreement, by which we could work together for a time with the hope of coming to an understanding of what the truth is, I with others went to three of them [members of the “exception” group] who seemed to be taking the leading part and tried to work out an agreement with them. (In this we may have gone beyond what we should). What we proposed was this: that we would change leaders ever so often, say each month. First one side, then the other. With the understanding that when we had the lead, we couldn’t call on [the divorced and remarried man to preach or otherwise take a leading part in the worship service]. When they had the lead, if they felt like they had to call on him, we would raise no disturbance. This they refused.⁴²

Once this concession was refused, the situation soured. The former document, “To All Who Care to Know,” described the escalating situation with an adversarial tone that would better suit two opposing factions than a single, unified congregation:

Since contention continued to grow, and one of our number had been taking the lead for some time in arranging the worship, we decided that possibly we could lessen tension by turning the leadership over to one of them for a time, which was done. From then on, we had no part in the affairs of the church; we were consulted about nothing. . . . The final results of what we did in Springfield was that we were told that we would have to call on him or we needn’t to expect to be called on for anything. In a conversation with one of us, one of their leaders said, “We have been to see the trustees of the church (they were all men who were not members of the Benton Street Church) and they are all behind us, so it is either line up or get out.”⁴³

Clovis Cook, who was indirectly involved with the affair, both as a close friend to many at the Benton St. congregation and as one who preached there many times,

⁴² H. E. Robertson, “Personal Statement of H. E. Robertson,” n.d., approximately 1960, Springfield, MO.

⁴³ H. E. Robertson., Luke Robertson, Larry Robertson, George Hogland, and David McCall, “To All Who Care to Know,” Personal statement by members of the Benton St. Church of Christ, n.d., approximately 1960, Springfield, MO.

remembered the events differently than these two written statements describe. According to his recollections, the “no exception” group, after making the above described concession, changed their minds:

But then Hughlet [H. E. Robertson] and them [the “no exception” faction] reached a point to where they said, “Well, this is not good enough. We don’t believe he [the divorced and remarried individual] ought to be called on at all. We were letting ya’ll call on him . . . but we don’t think anybody ought to [any longer].” So that’s when the division came. They went over on South Campbell and bought that lot and built a church.⁴⁴

It is impossible to know exactly what happened within the Benton St. congregation and exactly what its members said to each other that eventually led to its division. The only certain fact is that the division eventually occurred, and, consequently, as the decade of the 1960s began, there were two one-cup Churches of Christ in Springfield, MO.

In 1962, a meeting took place in Springfield between leading preachers on both sides of this issue from across the country. Some have called this a watershed event in the history of this division, partly because the meeting failed in its purpose of finding common ground upon which the two groups could work together and partly because shortly after this meeting, most of the lines of division were drawn in one-cup congregations around the country on this issue. Whatever concessions or plans of how to work together were proposed by both groups at this meeting, they did not come to fruition. Clark Carlo, a preacher who was not in attendance at the 1962 meeting, but has since conversed with many who were, indicates that regardless of the outcome of the 1962 gathering, people on both sides of the issue equally share the blame—both in causing the division and allowing it to perpetuate.

⁴⁴ Clovis Cook, interview by author. digital recording, Springfield, MO, March , 13 2007.

I wouldn't want anybody to understand me to say that the results of the 1962 meeting in Springfield were designed to foment division. I rather believe the opposite, the design was, indeed, how to prevent division. . . . Now I have to say, I was not at that meeting, so I don't have that hands-on feel for everything that occurred there. . . . But judging from the input over the years, from here and there, it seems to me that the general blame for the division was placed upon the Robertsons—H. E. Robertson, Larry and Luke—as being representative of the “no exception” viewpoint. . . . I'm not really interested so much in a “blame game,” frankly, as [I am], “Where do we go from here?” From my personal perspective, there's been enough blame on either side of this issue to go around. To call into question the integrity of those involved in those different decisions made and assign a motive to them for making those decisions, I don't think is ours to do. “Who knows the things of a man save the spirit of a man that's in him?” And often in any division, suspicions are aroused by those that are on the opposite ends of either spectrum, and then they begin to assign motives to people's actions that they are not privileged to know, and I think that's detrimental.⁴⁵

This habit of assigning motive has certainly been the case with individuals on both sides of the division after the split occurred. Fingers were pointed and blame has been hurled at both sides by both sides. Once again, calls to “line up” on an issue were voiced throughout the brotherhood. The most influential preachers from both sides emphasized the issue from church pulpits and in printed tracts, and a new journal—*The Light*—published by the “no exception” group, appeared in 1969, and helped cement the division, offering a monthly periodical to those of the “no exception” persuasion.⁴⁶ A mixture of rash actions, hurtful, and sincere convictions words of many of the people involved played an integral part in the eventual division of the one-cup Churches of Christ, but another factor that also unquestionably contributed to this event was the evolution of the “great social question” that Church of Christ leaders had been writing of since the days of the *Millennial Harbinger*: the dramatic rise of the number of divorces in

⁴⁵ Clark Carlo, interview by author, digital recording, Cabool, MO, March, 15 2007.

⁴⁶ Fred Kirbo, “Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” recorded sermon given in Austin, TX, November 22, 1960., Larry Robertson, “The Importance of Marriage and the Home,” recorded sermon given in Austin, TX, July 1975, and Larry Robertson, ed., *The Light*, 1, no. 1 (September 1969).

America. This factor pushed the divorce and remarriage issue out onto center stage and forced church leaders to make up their minds on how to deal with this problem in their congregations. The result of this social pressure was another division within the Churches of Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion: Holding Fast to Unchanging Doctrines in an Ever-changing Society

Near the conclusion of his first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul provides contrast to his typically dense and difficult writing style by including a flourish of quick and concise admonitions, including the statements, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”¹ This verse efficiently enunciates a principle by which the Churches of Christ have tried to guide their actions and govern their decisions. Both statements have, at times, given the church difficulty throughout its history. Providing scriptural justification for the form and function of the church’s every doctrine, decision and practice is viewed as an essential objective among all of the various branches throughout the Churches of Christ. Indeed, they all claim to speak only where the Bible speaks, and yet many disagreements and divisions are present among their millions of members.

Despite this fact, it is difficult not to admire their sincerity and desire for spiritual truth. In a religious landscape that has become increasingly tolerant of virtually any practice or belief among Christians—all claiming to follow the example of a single Galilean teacher—the Church of Christ’s efforts to “prove all things” and their desire for practicing only the Biblically sanctioned provide striking contrast to many of their progressive-minded peers. Holding fast to these static doctrines however, has been difficult while existing in an incessantly evolving social context.

¹ I Thess. 5:21 (KJV).

While many religious groups pride themselves on their ability to adapt with the evolution and progression of the culture surrounding them, the Churches of Christ try to spiritually insulate themselves from the effects of these social changes. Mastering the balancing act of clinging to the past while thriving in the present has been a difficult undertaking for all of the various branches within the Churches of Christ at large. Precisely how each of these groups has managed (or mismanaged) this task begs for further historical inquiry. This paper merely examines two divisions within a small sector of the Churches of Christ. Much more work in this area—the intersection of the Churches of Christ and society—remains undone.

In the examples considered in chapters two and three of this study, two social forces invaded the spiritually insulated space in which the Churches of Christ strive to operate. The influence of these external developments—the cultural reactions to the germ theory of disease and the increasing number of divorces coupled with the decline of social stigma attached to divorce itself—made their way into the Churches of Christ. As this happened, church leaders were required to address and decide on issues that had never before called for such scrupulous levels of attention. The advancement of the germ theory of disease in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries eventually forced Church of Christ members into choosing between demanding exclusively one cup in their communion services or accepting any number of drinking vessels. Decades later, in the 1950s and 1960s, the rising number of divorces in America—and eventually in the Churches of Christ—demanded that congregational leaders examine and address the Bible passages governing marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In each of these instances,

the escalation of these issues, both in print and in practice, resulted in divisions within a movement originally founded on Christian unity.

These two examples, however, are by no means the only times that social pressure has brought difficult decisions and unfortunate division to the Churches of Christ, and they probably will not be the last. The issue of the Sunday School method of teaching—breaking the congregation down into small classes—has divided the church in the past, and the question of the proper, Biblically sanctioned role of women in the church holds divisive potential for the future. Both of these issues were and are related to social movements, and the historical study of how the Churches of Christ have dealt with these developments calls for further attention.

Although many Church of Christ members, because of their insistence on being governed by the Bible only, would hesitate to admit that society has drastically and dramatically influenced the direction of the Church of Christ, this fact is not lost on many of the church's older members, who have seen first-hand the impact of social change on their congregations. One seasoned evangelist, in an interview for this project remarked:

In my years of preaching, about sixty years, we have undergone tremendous social change. When I first started to preach, you never heard of divorce. It was almost unheard of, and today, the break-up of the family has impacted the church far beyond my ability to even comprehend. And emerging out of that have been differences of belief and opinion over what is divorce, what is adultery, who may divorce, who may not divorce. . . . I guess what I'm saying to you is, what happens in the world impacts the church sooner or later. You can't get away from that. . . . The greatest challenge to the church is how to deal, in a scriptural way, with the impact society is having on it, or the changes in society are having on it. . . . If you go back to the Bible . . . you can go back to the Old Testament, where the people came to Samuel and said, "You're getting old, and your sons have not been faithful, so give us a king that we may be like the nations about us." That's exactly the trouble with the church today, or maybe I should say it this way: that's what's facing the church today. Are we going to be like the nations about us, or

are we going to maintain a distinctive role and existence in society. That's the great threat in my opinion.²

If history has provided us with any explicit certainties, we can be sure that the nations surrounding the Churches of Christ will continue to transform and evolve politically, socially, and culturally. How the church reacts to those changes will likely determine the face and fate of the Churches of Christ in the future.

² Wade, Ronny F., interview by author, digital recording, Springfield, MO, March, 13 2007.

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