
Christian Restoration

Parts 1-4

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Part 1. Reform Was Not Enough

The Protestant Fathers could protest against institutional Christian corruption. They could reform and improve Christianity. They could publish the scriptures and allow the common man to read the words of Christ, prophets and apostles for the first time. What they could **not** do is restore again what had been lost.

Between the close of the New Testament and the 16th Century Christianity had not merely declined, it had perished. It had become an institutionalized belief system with fixed forms of conducting that system. Professional clergy, supported by the tithes and offerings of the believers, was universally accepted before and after the Reformation.

Churches owned property and exercised control. There was no separation between Christianity's right to preach morality and the right to enforce morality. It had never been done, and therefore the Protestant Reformation Fathers assumed that was altogether proper.

What changed was not persecution and abuse. Only the identity of the denomination changed. Whereas Catholic abuses, burnings, killings and rule ended in areas controlled by newly rebelling denominations, in its place Lutheran abuses, burnings, killings and rule assumed that prerogative. The new sects did not know how to behave any better than the Catholics they rejected. During the Peasant Rebellion Martin Luther concluded that the peasants "would not listen; they would not let anyone tell them anything; their ears must be unbuttoned with bullets, till their heads jump off their shoulders." He instructed, "On the obstinate, hardened, blinded peasants, let no one have mercy, but let everyone, as he is able, hew, stab, slay, lay about him as though among mad dogs, . . . so that peace and safety may be maintained."

Zwingli was similarly disposed, as was John Calvin. Calvin wanted Michael Servetus executed for “blasphemy” but thought he ought to be beheaded rather than burned. Servetus did not believe in infant baptism or the Trinity. John Knox believed in killing Catholics, and thought religious freedom belonged only to those who believed as he did. He has been called the Apostle of Murder. Because of his role in the murder of Cardinal Beaton, John Knox was sentenced to years as a galley slave.

In short, Reform was unable to escape the low and un-Christian condition the Reformers inherited from their Catholic predecessor.

It would take generations following the Reformation before the development of benign Christian thought would begin to change Christianity to be more Christian. Reforming is not the same as restoring. And without Christ’s direct involvement, there is no way to recover what was lost.

Protestant Reformer John Wesley reflected on one of the results of losing original Christianity. In Wesley’s sermon *The More Excellent Way* he explained, "The cause of this [decline of spiritual gifts following Constantine] was ... `the love of many,' almost of all Christians, so called, was `waxed cold.' The Christians had no more of the Spirit of Christ than the other Heathens. The Son of Man, when he came to examine his Church, could hardly `find faith upon earth.' This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian Church; because the Christians were turned Heathens again, and had only a dead form left."

Once Christianity died, it needed to be reborn. And for that something more than earnest desire was needed. It required God to be directly involved.

Part 2. Essential Missing Parts

A great deal of good was accomplished by the Protestant Fathers, but some things required for original Christianity could not be reformed back into existence. It is not possible to reform a corrupt institution and recover the original.

Wishing, studying, hoping, and working to recover original Christianity is a task beyond the ability of theologians. For that it requires God and someone who is sent by God to do the work.

New World Reformer Roger Williams, was considered a dangerous heretic who fled from the colony of Massachusetts when facing arrest and imprisonment for his beliefs. He founded Providence, Rhode Island where he established the First Baptist Church in America. He was an abolitionist and opposed slavery in America. He learned to speak Native American languages and thought they should be treated equally.

Williams was born and educated in London, but fled to the American colonies because it was dangerous to hold unorthodox religious views in England. When Alexander Leighton published a book critical of the Anglican Church he was sent to prison for life, fined ten thousand pounds, whipped, his ears cut off, his nose slit and his face branded with a hot iron. This convinced Roger Williams to leave England in 1631.

His anti-Anglican views were unwelcomed in Massachusetts, resulting in him relocating to Rhode Island. Reflecting on what he saw when church and state power were combined, he conceived of separating church and state. He wrote, "When they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broken down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, and made His garden a wilderness, as at this day." These words inspired Thomas Jefferson to later coin the phrase of "wall of separation between church and state" which was the reason underlying the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Roger Williams became convinced that there was no possibility for recovering original Christianity without God's direct involvement. He wrote, "Christianity fell asleep in the bosom of Constantine, and the laps and bosoms of those Emperors who professed the name of Christ." This sober reflection led to his conviction that freedom of conscience was necessary to allow every soul to search for and accept all truth they could find. He declared, "There is no regularly constituted church of Christ on earth, nor any person qualified to administer any church ordinances; nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the Great Head of the Church for whose coming I am seeking."

Without God directing a restoration of the original faith, it had been lost and could not be recovered. There was too much that had been lost and too little that had been kept. The conclusion Roger Williams reached was the correct

and inevitable outcome from beginning the Reformation. Reform could and should lead to Restoration, if God would return the essential missing parts.

Part 3. Early Attempts at Restoring

If Roger Williams was willing to wait for a restoration, Thomas Campbell wanted to cause one. A Scottish Presbyterian minister who migrated to the United States in 1807, Thomas disagreed with Presbyterian teachings that led to a split between him and that church. He published a tract in 1809 titled *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington*.

The 4th and 5th parts of his tract included:

4: That this society by no means considers itself a church... nor do the members, as such, consider themselves as standing connected in that relation... but merely as voluntary advocates for church reformation; and, as possessing the powers common to all individuals, who may please to associate in a peaceable and orderly manner...

5: That this society, formed for the sole purpose of promoting simple evangelical Christianity, shall... [not] inculcate any thing of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men, as having any place in the constitution, faith, or worship, of the Christian church—or, any thing, as matter of Christian faith, or duty, for which there cannot be expressly produced a thus saith the Lord either in express terms, or by approved precedent.

Thomas Campbell hoped to recover apostolic Christianity and regarded all of the Historic Christian Creeds, starting with the Nicene Creed, as unnecessary and divisive. He thought the Bible was clear enough to render Creeds unnecessary.

Campbell's motto was: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

This view was a direct affront to Historic Christianity because all denominations, Catholic and Protestant, accepted the creeds. Rejection of the creeds was rejection of Historic Christianity itself. Therefore, Thomas Campbell was a heretic.

Alexander, the son of Thomas Campbell, followed his father into the Presbyterian ministry. He also became disillusioned with Presbyterian inadequacies and pettiness and left Scotland for America.

By the time father and son were reunited, they both had rejected traditional Historic Christianity and welcomed restoring the Primitive Christianity of the New Testament.

Alexander observed concerning the Christian Creeds, “It requires but little reflection to discover that the fiercest disputes about religion, are about what the Bible does not say, rather than about what it does say.”

The Campbells organized congregational churches that were locally governed by the congregation itself. They claimed to be merely “Christians” but their followers were nicknamed “Campbellites.” Their movement is now referred to as “the Church of Christ,” or “the Disciples of Christ,” or “the Disciples.”

Campbells hoped to recover the original by subtracting errors. Their calculation was that by eliminating every superfluous thing, what remained would be the original. These mathematics could not, however, recover anything lost. For that things necessarily had to be added. And adding could only come from God.

Part 4. God Speaks Again

While Alexander Campbell wanted to restore Primitive Christianity, a 14 year-old boy went alone into the woods to ask God which church to join. Like Moses seeing a bright bush that seemed afire but was not consumed; like Paul on the road to Damascus who heard a voice and saw a light; Joseph Smith encountered a pillar of fire and learned that God had a work to him to do.

In the years that followed, Joseph Smith said angels appeared to him, gave him an ancient book that he translated “by the gift and power of God” into the Book of Mormon, founded a church, organized two cities, and was killed at age 38.

Joseph Smith declared God told him Christianity was lost to apostasy, but God was restoring it again. Smith testified Jesus Christ appeared to him on several occasions, to restore not only lost truths, but also the authority to minister ordinances.

Joseph said on multiple occasions that his religion was “truth” and that all truth, wherever found, was part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Unlike the Protestant Fathers, Joseph Smith produced new scriptures and recorded revelations from God in the first-person voice of Jesus Christ. The missing “thus saith the Lord” from the Campbellite movement was supplied through Joseph.

Whereas missing parts of original Christianity could not be recovered in either Protestantism or the Campbellite restoration, Joseph Smith claimed it was possible to recover everything lost from Christianity through modern revelation.

Smith attracted tens-of-thousands of followers. Those who believed Joseph Smith’s claims were nicknamed “Mormons.” A complete restoration began, but was not finished in Joseph Smith’s lifetime. He produced more scripture than any prophet or apostle of the Bible. He provided prophecies about events to happen prior to Christ’s return in glory. Many of these prophecies have been fulfilled and many are yet to be fulfilled. The tens-of-thousands inspired by his message gathered into a community expecting to establish a last days Zion. However, his followers, were often the source of his persecution. His death was the result of a conspiracy of former followers and angry outsiders. His death left the prophesied last days Zion something another generation would later fulfill.

Following the death of Joseph Smith Mormons splintered into groups claiming that God favored their claims to be the lawful successor possessing the restored gospel. The largest faction followed Brigham Young into the western wilderness to the Salt Lake Valley, where they are headquartered today.

There are nearly 100 groups claiming Joseph Smith as their founder. They oppose one another and most have taken the step of excommunicating all other Mormons.

All “Mormons” accept the Book of Mormon as a volume of scripture. It has an account of the resurrected Jesus Christ appearing to people in the Americas as part of His “other sheep” mentioned in the New Testament.

Joseph Smith was not a Protestant, nor a Reformer, but instead claimed to be the Restorer of the original Christianity. Joseph Smith's claims are based on his testimony that God opened the heavens and spoke to mankind again.