

1-1-2009

The Stone-Campbell Movement--A Global View

Lindsay Jacobs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jacobs, Lindsay (2009) "The Stone-Campbell Movement--A Global View," *Leaven*: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 8.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol17/iss3/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.

The Stone-Campbell Movement— A Global View

LYNDSAY JACOBS

The Stone-Campbell family (Christian Churches, Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ) is in its bicentenary era. In 1988 we celebrated the 200th birthday of Alexander Campbell, in 2001 the bicentennial of Barton Stone's Cane Ridge Revival and in 2004 the bicentennial of the dissolution of the Springfield Presbytery, an event which effectively established the Christian Church. This year in particular marks 200 years since the publication of the *Declaration and Address* of Thomas Campbell, visionary foundation documents emphasizing the essential unity of the church of Jesus Christ. There are more events to celebrate, especially the "handshake" of 1832, and the first "cooperative" meeting of British Churches of Christ in 1842 (congregations had been formed since the second half of the eighteenth century). The Restoration Movement had origins in the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia, but because of the communist revolution in Russia it was virtually eliminated there.

Two hundred years ago legalism, authoritarianism and exclusivity were the marks of the church worldwide. Pioneers of our movement saw that this rigid and divided atmosphere was a huge barrier in spreading the gospel message. It was clear to them that Christian unity was essential if the church was to be effective in mission, and that unity could be achieved if the church of the New Testament was restored. Unity became our "polar star" but that was a means to an end—just as "restoring" the New Testament church was. The prime concern was that people would find the "natal star"—and come to know Jesus Christ.

In 1824 Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell met. Their United States' movements came together in the famous handshake of 1832, and a period of definition and consolidation for a united movement followed. The nineteenth century saw significant growth and the Christian Church (which had never intended to be anything other than a movement within the church) became the fifth largest church in the United States.

In the United Kingdom "Church of Christ" was the name used and churches in the former British Commonwealth still usually use this name. By the 1840s there were Churches of Christ in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and later in India, South Africa and (using current names) Malawi, Thailand, Zimbabwe and Vanuatu. By the time of the 1909 Centennial Convention, United States churches had established work in Argentina, China, the Belgian Congo, Cuba, Hawaii, India, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Tibet.

In the United States, the twentieth century was marked by division. By 1906, congregations currently known in the United States as Churches of Christ (*a cappella*) had become a distinct group. In the decades from the 1920s to the 1960s a further division in the Christian Church occurred, culminating in the more liberal and ecumenical group restructuring as the Disciples of Christ in 1968, with those not wishing to be a part of this denomination remaining as "independent" Christian Churches.

The second half of the century has seen tremendous growth (now to about 14 million people in 180 countries) and better relationships amongst the North American "streams." The profile of the movement is ever-changing. We are used to referring to the three streams, but it is more helpful when thinking globally to

refer to six streams. We can add to those in (and related to) the United States a “Commonwealth” stream, a stream of churches involved in uniting churches (for example, the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Southern Africa and India), and a stream of emerging national churches. Two examples of the latter would be in Vanuatu and Zimbabwe, where our movement is defining itself. Zimbabwe has over 1000 congregations; Vanuatu has probably the largest ratio of members to population of any country (one in twenty-five people belong to our movement). The national stories of these two countries (along with 125 others) can be found on the World Convention website—see www.worldconvention.org.

In 1930 the first World Convention of Churches of Christ was held to provide our family with an appropriate way of sharing globally. The seventeenth convention was held in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2008, and the next will be held in Brazil in 2012. The networking ministry of World Convention provides a unique means of building fellowship, understanding and common purpose within our diverse Christian world communion. The conventions themselves are only one of a dozen ways this ministry seeks to achieve this.

Our movement has dreamed of the church united in essentials, tolerant in non-essentials and loving in all things—so that the world might really believe and Christ’s community might come.

Being this authentic and effective church of Jesus Christ is still our challenge.

FOR A BIOGRAPHICAL ANNOTATION FOR LYNDSEY JACOBS, SEE HIS ARTICLE “THE NEW ZEALAND STORY: THE ‘STONE-CAMPBELL’ MOVEMENT IN NEW ZEALAND.”

