

Women's Movement vs. Restoration Movement:
The Founding of the Churches of Christ

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The religious movement known as the restoration movement gave birth to many Christian denominations, such as the Churches of Christ. Today the Churches of Christ still represent a large portion of America's religious heritage with over 1,265,000 members and 13,000 congregations.¹ However, exactly how this tradition was formed and why is a matter of dispute. In this paper I intend to argue that the Churches of Christ founding was in direct response to the political, social, ideological and theological disputes of the time. Although these issues can be related, my argument will focus primarily on a liberal, social/political movement and the Churches of Christ reaction against this movement by maintaining an extremely conservative religious tradition. The Churches of Christ were an offshoot of the Disciples of Christ and were declared a separate denomination in the 1906 federal census. This places the foundation alongside the first wave of feminism and the early years of the women's suffrage movement. This paper does not endeavor to examine the Churches of Christ theology in light of its correct or incorrect interpretation of scripture; rather, I will be argue that political, social, and theological issues became extremely interconnected in the foundation of the Churches of Christ.

The Start of a Tradition

In the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, when the new nation was still shouting "freedom, liberty, and independence," the leaders of a new religious movement realized that if they could participate in democracy politically, they surely could participate in religious democracy. That is, the leaders of a new movement wanted to establish religious ideology in light of the values of liberty, freedom, and independence learned from the war. This resulted in the movement known as the Restoration Movement; its leaders wanted to restore their religion to its original source—the bible—which would be done through democratization.

¹ This statistical information can be viewed in *Churches of Christ in the United States: 2006 Edition*, (Nashville: 21st Century Christian, 2006), 15.

In the late 1700's and early 1800's, a wave of democratic reform in America's churches began to result in major social, political, and religious changes in America.² Barton W. Stone (1782-1844), a Presbyterian Minister active in North Carolina and Virginia went to Kentucky to attend the Cain Ridge Revival in 1801.³ This camp meeting⁴ inspired Stone as he then set out to evangelize the frontier. However, Stone soon realized that Presbyterianism did not work on the frontier but revivalism did because the audience was not interested in an educated speaker from a pulpit. Therefore, Stone abandoned his Presbyterianism for congregational affiliation and "the sweets of gospel liberty."⁵

In contrast to Stone, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), distrusted emotional or charismatic religion and set out to evangelize the masses through writings on "biblical rationalism."⁶ However, Stone and Campbell had a common belief in restoring the Christian religion to their interpretation of the bible. By 1830, Campbell, who was also inspired by the revolutionary principles of liberty, freedom and independence, began a quest for primitive Christianity and led his followers, the 'Disciples of Christ,' to unite with Stone's 'Christians.'⁷ These leaders realized that they needed to democratize the church in order to restore their religion to biblical principles and unite their religion under those principles.

Stone and Campbell began to follow the model of the reformation in the 16th century but concluded it only reformed the church back to the 4th century. They told themselves that what

² Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 149, is correct in saying that, "The American Revolution stimulated social changes every bit as dramatic as the political changes it brought about....The Revival became the dominant religious force in American Protestantism...because it so effectively expressed the country's democratic spirit."

³ See Mark A. Noll, *History*, 167.

⁴ A camp meeting was where revival preachers would set up a stage and charismatically preach, teach, and evangelize. This was a non-denominational practice but was highly charismatic with reports of speaking in tongues and fainting.

⁵ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 77.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

the reformation should have done was reform the church back to the time of the New Testament. Thus, their new movement would teach that Christians should only rely on the Bible for their beliefs and practices and should reject speculative philosophy and theology. Indeed, the Bible was to be the only authority—“No creed but the Bible” and “where the holy scriptures speak, we speak; and where they are silent, we are silent”⁸—and was seen as “a book of facts.” Stone and Campbell also believed that rationality would tell the reader the truth about how to interpret the Bible.⁹ As such, there were to be no denominations because denominations were based on creeds and traditions, and the church was to have a congregationalist government instead of a hierarchal chain. This movement appealed to the common sense¹⁰ of the believers because they could read and interpret the bible for themselves

Thus, the Stone-Campbell or Restoration Movement was born. With charismatic preaching on one hand and a rational, literalistic interpretation of scripture on the other, the movement would grow strong for almost a century before it eventually succumbed to division and dissent—it is this division and dissent on specific issues from which the Churches of Christ were founded. However, the Churches of Christ still represented upon their founding a tradition that showed that “this blend of Christianity and democracy created a Christian message specifically adapted to the shape of American social realities.”¹¹

The Beginnings of the Schism

Overall, the Restoration Movement can be seen as a step forward for women’s leadership roles in ministry because the democratization of religion would eventually bring about women’s rights and leadership movements through a realization that women had not only an active part in

⁸ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale, 2003), 291.

⁹ Mark A Noll, *History*, 151.

¹⁰ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology*, 291.

¹¹ Mark A Noll, *History*, 151.

religion but also an active voice on their own interpretation of scripture. Once democracy spread through politics and religion, it was only a matter of time before it entered the social sphere. However, the movement also brought about considerable controversy concerning women's roles in ministry. This controversy reflected the social conditions of the era. In fact, following the Civil War up to World War II, almost every major American denomination had some serious disagreement between their conservative and liberal factions.¹² One of the issues that denominations disagreed about was the social gospel,¹³ which is "often associated with moral liberal trends in theology."¹⁴ Yet, the social gospel is best understood as a loosely organized and informal movement "which was at force from roughly 1880 to the start of the Great Depression in 1929."¹⁵

The Disciples of Christ were among these traditions that had factions within the church that disagreed with each other on issues such as the social gospel. The traditionalists among the Disciples of Christ, who would later become the Churches of Christ, were later regarded as a part of the fundamentalist movement within the Disciples denomination¹⁶ because they disagreed on some doctrinal or interpretive scriptural subject, such as leadership roles of women. These traditional elements in the Disciples of Christ by the late 1800's had mobilized primarily in the South. Although the Churches of Christ were not yet recognized as a separate tradition, the beginnings of a schism between the progressives and the fundamentalists was already apparent. The fundamentalists rejected the social and theological liberalism, such as women's rights, that was entering the church. Although some debates were held among its members on topics like women's roles in the church, "in the South the debates were in most cases short-lived, because

¹² George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford, 2006), 102.

¹³ The social gospel during this period can be understood as a movement for equal rights in society and religion.

¹⁴ Mark A Noll, *History*, 307.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁶ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 102.

dissent was simply not tolerated. As early as the first half of the nineteenth century, advanced theological views had usually been associated with advanced social views.”¹⁷ This means that there was a causal relationship between the liberal social views of the time and the liberal religious views of the time.

The South after the civil war was already extremely conservative and resistant to change. The Churches of Christ represented a tradition that was extremely powerful in the South.¹⁸ In addition, this tradition was not willing to yield or change because of its fundamentalist stance on scriptural and doctrinal subjects. The mainstream Disciples of Christ began to involve themselves in political and social reforms and “by the early twentieth century the more sectarian congregations gradually separated into a distinct fellowship, the Churches of Christ, while most of the more liberal congregations kept the label ‘Disciples of Christ.’”¹⁹

The Traditional View of Women in the Restoration Movement

The Restoration Movement represents a dichotomy of theology between unity and restoration due to the deep tensions that lied beneath the shallow surface agreements. This made the movement the most schismatic in American religious history.²⁰ More women in the Restoration Movement served in leadership roles than before the movement. Yet, the “Disciples with few exceptions, rejected on biblical grounds any leadership or speaking roles for women in

¹⁷ Ibid., 103.

¹⁸ Kathy J. Pulley, “Women in Ministry: Twentieth Century: Churches of Christ,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, eds. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 779.

¹⁹ Paul K. Conkin, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1997), 33.

²⁰ Ibid.

the church.”²¹ If women wanted leadership roles in the church, this usually meant that they had to create their own church.²²

Nevertheless, the later part of the nineteenth century saw expanded roles for women in religion which became an important factor in American society.²³ The increase in women’s leadership roles can be traced to many factors: “Among them were increasing educational opportunities for girls; women’s financial and legal independence from their husbands and fathers....and a growing sense among women that they had special gifts to use in service to the church.”²⁴ Yet, the dominant theological viewpoint on women’s leadership roles in the restoration movement, especially among conservative and established denominations, was that “the introduction of females into their ministry [was seen] as radical, unbiblical, and unsuitable to the ‘weaker’ sex.”²⁵ Women were not to have authority above any man which meant, in this conservative theology, that women could not teach or preach. Indeed, to most denominations, like the Disciples of Christ, the entire women’s “movement for ‘women’s rights’ and women’s preaching must be regarded then as simply infidel. It cannot be candidly upheld without attacking the inspiration and authority of the scriptures.”²⁶ One such women’s movement was the Christian Women’s Board of Missions.

Isaac Errett (1820-1888), who ended up giving the Disciple leadership to the progressive wing after the Civil War,²⁷ endorsed women’s rights in the article: “Help Those Women” in the

²¹ Ibid., 35.

²² Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, eds., *A Documentary History of Religion in America since 1877: Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 35.

²³ Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement*, Revised Edition (Abilene: A.C.U., 2003), 220

²⁴ Debra B. Hull, “Women in Ministry: Nineteenth Century,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, eds. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 776.

²⁵ Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Documentary*, 35.

²⁶ Ibid., 39

²⁷ Henry E. Webb, *Search*, 208.

Christian Standard.²⁸ After this monumental endorsement the Christian Women's Board of Missions was founded in 1874. Restoration historian, Henry E. Webb, notes that this women's movement "was the beginning of a new era in the history of the Disciples...It signified a determination by some to press forward even if that meant separation from those who chose to remain with the old ways."²⁹ In other words, this endorsement meant that the progressive side, the Disciples of Christ, preferred action over unity, while the conservative side, the Churches of Christ, rejected women's rights in society and women's leadership roles in the church. Strong advocates against these societal and church movements were Tolbert Fanning³⁰ and David Lipscomb.³¹ Together these two Church of Christ leaders would lead the traditionalist faction away from the Disciples of Christ.

However, notable and famous women did uphold, on the authority of scripture, that women had the right to serve in leadership roles in the church and in society. Women like Frances E. Willard (1839-1898) led the Women's Christian Temperance Union,³² and feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) fought for women's rights against the traditional restoration theology.³³ Yet, the conservative factions could not maintain these new political, social, and

²⁸ Ibid., 506.

²⁹ Henry E. Webb, *Search*, 221.

³⁰ Noted church of Christ historian Richard T. Hughes offers the suggestion that Tolbert Fanning rejected these types of missionary societies because he saw them as a human institution, not a biblical one. He also rejected temperance societies on the same grounds. See Richard T. Hughes, *The Churches of Christ: Student Edition* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 54-55. However, this analysis is misleading: what the temperance and missionary societies represented were newfound leadership roles for women; and Fanning, a second generation leader of the Churches of Christ, could not compromise on these women's movements. See also Paul K. Conkin, *American*, 35.

³¹ See Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving The Ancient Faith: The Story of churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 41.

³² Willard linked the temperance society with women's suffrage. See David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ, 1865-1900: A Social History of the Disciples of Christ, Volume 2* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003.), 256.

³³ Indeed, in one of the most famous works published for feminist studies, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 11, objected to traditionalist restoration theology by saying in 1895, "How can women's position be changed from that of a subordinate to an equal, without opposition, without the broadest discussion of all the questions involved in her present degradation."

theological views and moved to distance themselves from them. Indeed, these events could be the main source of the division that was recognized in 1906.³⁴

In 1907,³⁵ the conservative faction known as the Churches of Christ finally listed themselves as a separate denomination from the Disciples of Christ largely due to these constant debates over women's leadership roles in the church. Noted Church of Christ historian, Richard T. Hughes, says of the division between the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ that in 1907 David Lipscomb, who was the most influential leader in the Churches of Christ at the time, told the federal census of 1906, "to list 'Churches of Christ' and 'disciples of Christ' as two entirely separate religious entities."³⁶ Yet, this is vague because he does not list why this split occurred but simply states that the division was due to "theological, cultural, and economic factors."³⁷ Indeed, most Churches of Christ historians when trying to pinpoint what, precisely, were the theological and cultural issues that caused the division,³⁸ find themselves arguing for three main factors: the conflict between restoration and unity,³⁹ the differences in the theologies of Stone and Campbell,⁴⁰ and finally, the Civil War.

The Civil War is of special interest because it highlights the cultural division between the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ. The *Gospel Advocate*, which was suspended

³⁴ Henry E. Webb, *Search*, 222.

³⁵ Richard T. Hughes, *The Churches of Christ: Student Edition* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 1.

³⁶ Richard T. Hughes, *Churches*, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Richard T. Hughes, *Churches*, 5-10.

³⁹ The conflict between restoration and unity highlights problems in how Christians are to unite if they differ in their interpretation of the bible; which supposedly tells them all then need to know about what to believe and how to practice that belief.

⁴⁰ These differences were minor in application by this time period as these two leaders decided to join together because they had so many similarities. Furthermore, Stone and Campbell were first generation leaders of this movement; by this time differences in theology lay in the second generation leaders not in Stone and Campbell. These differences in the second generation leaders are highlighted by differences theological views of the roles of women in religion and society. The second generational differences are also highlighted by region, which was due to the civil war—geographical differences of Campbellites being mainly in the Middle West where the Disciples of Christ eventually thrived while most of the Stoneites hailed from the Middle South where the Churches of Christ eventually thrived

during the war, was resurrected to serve this ‘southern church theology.’ Yet, these political views in the Churches of Christ narrowed over the years following the war and eventually the “Churches of Christ grew far more concerned with legalistic considerations regarding the forms and structures of the primitive church.”⁴¹ Before the formal separation of the two traditions, the primitive church structures that were debated were those concerning women’s leadership roles in the church. Therefore, given the historical context of the debates and the movements, it is clear that the formal or final division was over women’s leadership roles in the church and other social women’s rights movements. Disciples of Christ historian, David Edwin Harrell Jr., notes of the division that, “While some liberal church leaders mellowed in their scriptural interpretations as the century wore on, conservative Disciples continued to label the women’s rights movement as apostasy....[and] by 1890 Disciples leadership generally favored the women’s rights movement.”⁴²

A Voice from Within the Churches of Christ and the Voice against Her

Controversies about women’s leadership roles in ministry were debated in the church publications of the time as a matter of the proper interpretation and application of scripture.⁴³ This meant that women’s roles were being debated for social and religious reasons on the basis of biblical interpretation. As stated before, the Bible provided all that needed to be said on how the Christian should live their life—social and political issues were no different than religious ones. In Churches of Christ this debate can be seen in the churches’ most popular publication—*The Gospel Advocate*.⁴⁴ Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) had begun the *Gospel Advocate* in 1855

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ, 1865-1900: A Social History of the Disciples of Christ, Volume 2* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003.), 257 and 261.

⁴³ Debra B. Hull, “Women,” 777.

⁴⁴ Henry E. Webb, *Search*, 208. The *Gospel Advocate* also “became after 1865 the most influential periodical in the South” (Paul K. Conkin, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* [Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1997], 37).

because he wanted “to meet some of the infidel systems of theology which are insinuating themselves into churches.”⁴⁵ However, after Fanning died, *The Gospel Advocate* would become a vehicle for dissention via vigorous debates. These debates were often held by men but sometimes women were allowed to contribute by writing. Therefore, this section will focus on the two most prominent figures in this debate.

In one of the most electrifying and controversial debates in theology in Christian publications of the time, David Lipscomb (1831-1917) and Silena Moore Holman (1850-1915), debated the roles of women in the church.⁴⁶ David Lipscomb was clearly the most influential person among the Churches of Christ at that time until his death in 1917,⁴⁷ and Silena Moore Holman was one of the earliest and most notable supporters of women’s leadership roles in the Churches of Christ. Holman was also active in the work of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and she wrote articles in the *Gospel Advocate* advocating for more extensive leadership roles for women.⁴⁸ Holman’s fight for women’s leadership positions began in 1888 when she responded to an article by David Lipscomb, who was the editor of the *Gospel Advocate* at the time. In the 1890’s she argued for the ‘new woman’ as a model for the church and the proponents of the ‘new women’ supported: “women’s suffrage, involvement in reform organizations (e.g., WCTU), better education for women, and more leadership positions held by women in the churches.”⁴⁹ Leaders in the church at that point, like David Lipscomb, rejected

⁴⁵ Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving The Ancient Faith: The Story of churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 71.

⁴⁶ In the words of Disciples of Christ historian, David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Sources*, 262, “Perhaps the most complete debate in the church on women’s rights took place in the *Gospel Advocate*. Nowhere was the clash of ideas more striking and nowhere was the conservative mind more revealed. Editor David Lipscomb was a staunch biblical literalist; he announced that he ‘regarded this movement [women’s rights] as essentially infidel in its tendency.’”

⁴⁷ Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving*, 119.

⁴⁸ Kathy J. Pulley, “Women,” 779.

⁴⁹ Lisa W. Davidson, “Holman, Silena Moore (1850-1915),” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Edited by Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 402.

women's leadership roles by arguing in the *Gospel Advocate* that "to disobey Paul's command on silence would lead women to eternal death"⁵⁰ and "that the women's rights movement was hurtful to humanity and dishonoring to God."⁵¹

In the March 14, 1888 edition of the *Gospel Advocate*, Minister T. J. Hunsaker posed a question to editor David Lipscomb: "You will please just tell us just what limit—if any—to put on the 'I suffer not a woman to teach, for it is a shame for them to speak in the church. Let them keep silent.'"⁵² Little did Hunsaker know that this question would be pondered and debated until it was the main cause of separation between the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. Lipscomb answered the question by Hunsaker vaguely by saying that it is hard "to determine the limit of the law forbidding women to teach or usurp authority publicly. It is clear women must teach privately or be condemned."⁵³ Lipscomb did, however, allow for women to teach other men and children privately "in a quite social way"⁵⁴ and saw that scripture allowed for the assembly of women for prayer and edification. Yet, to Lipscomb, the underlying issue was how far women's roles may go "before they violate the law."⁵⁵ Lipscomb then cites 1 Timothy 2:12-13⁵⁶ and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35⁵⁷ and says that "this seems to me, given as it is, an absolute and universal rule."⁵⁸ Indeed, Lipscomb drew the line at where women can and cannot serve. He says explicitly that scripture "prohibits women assuming the position of public teacher or preacher, of assuming authority in the management of church affairs, of conducting the worship

⁵⁰ Kathy J. Pulley, "Women," 779.

⁵¹ , David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Sources*, 263.

⁵² David Lipscomb and T. J. Hunsaker, "Women's Work in the Church," *Gospel Advocate*, March 14, 1888, 7.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. As quoted by Lipscomb: "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the men, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed then Eve. And Adam was not in the transgression, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

⁵⁷ Ibid. As quoted by Lipscomb: "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak. But they are commanded to be under obedience as saith the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church."

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of the church...or attracting public attention to herself.”⁵⁹ This was not, however, to be the final word on the subject—far from it.

Less than two months later, Silena Moore Holman countered Lipscomb’s argument against women’s leadership roles in the church with an argument of her own⁶⁰ in the *Gospel Advocate*.⁶¹ Holman began with a reflection on the various disruptive issues of the Restoration Movement⁶² and spoke of the elder who left the church because women talked in Sunday school and she initiated the previous discussion on women’s roles as “the doctrine being carried to the extreme.”⁶³ She also noted that more than any other passage in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is known among the sisters and the brothers because it is “so often” quoted to women. Holman argued that bible passages must be kept in their own context “and not in detached parts; always interpreting every passage of scripture so as to harmonize with every other passage.”⁶⁴

Thus, Holman began to offer a “woman’s standpoint” on the question of women’s leadership roles in the church. In a rather humorous method, Holman states that if the 1 Corinthians passage was to be interpreted literally, women would have to stay home from church altogether because they must only learn from their husbands at home. She notices that this would be very difficult on women and the church, considering that women at that time maintained two-thirds of the membership at churches. Holman recalls, “A gentleman once said

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Although pioneers like Holman disagreed with Lipscomb’s theology, the Churches of Christ, the Restoration Movement, the Women’s Movement, and the Humanities in general, owe a debt of gratitude to Lipscomb, as the editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, for publishing Holman’s work so that it may survive through the centuries. If nothing else, it shows that Lipscomb did not shy away from dissenting viewpoints and, in fact, Holman stated that she would look at the question of women’s leadership roles in the church if Lipscomb permitted it.

⁶¹ Silena Moore Holman, “A Peculiar People,” *Gospel Advocate*, May 2, 1888, 12.

⁶² Ibid. Here Holman lists the missionary societies as a disruption that almost fractured the church.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

to me while discussing this passage, ‘When I want to know anything about the bible I go to my wife.’”⁶⁵ Humor aside, Holman states that readers of the Bible:

Must take into consideration the entire teaching of the New Testament [on] the subject. In one place Paul says in Christ there is neither bond nor free, NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE. Does not that passage seem to indicate a perfect equality before the Lord[?]...When Christ came into the world, woman was little better than a slave...Christ came, and woman's emancipation began. Never...had such a following of women as the Savior. And he had no word of rebuke for their love of, or work for him...No woman was found among his enemies... Women were ‘last at the cross and first at the tomb.’⁶⁶

Holman gave many more accounts of women’s service in the New Testament, but her argument hinges on this underlying point: women in the New Testament were counted as equals in the spreading of the good news and worthy to give the news of Jesus’ resurrection to the rest of the disciples and to teach men who were learned and eloquent; but now, in the nineteenth century, they aren’t even allowed to read the Bible publicly in front of a man or ask questions in Sunday school. Concluding her article, Holman states of the restoration movement: “Verily, we have grown better than could have been expected, when we have grown too wise and too good to permit what the disciples permitted as a matter of course.”⁶⁷ What she probably meant by this statement of irony was that if the Restoration Movement was supposed to actually bring the New Testament church into present reality, the leaders of the movement have been blinded by their own assumptions and “rationality” that have lead them to believe in a church that the disciples would not have recognized.

Although 1907 was the date that Churches of Christ were formally recognized as independent from the Disciples of Christ, the division between the two had started several years earlier. Even though this division can be better understood as a process instead of an event, the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

role of women was fearlessly debated and “a good case may be made for fixing the date for the division in the ranks of the movement in 1889 or 1892 because of the frank espousal and widespread acceptance of the schism as the means of dealing with the problem.”⁶⁸ And if we look back into history we see that the years between 1889 and 1892 comprise the bulk of the debates between Holman and Lipscomb in the *Gospel Advocate*.⁶⁹

Certainly in the Restoration Movement there were many small reasons that the Churches of Christ decided to distance themselves from the Disciples of Christ, but it is clear that the Women’s Movement was at odds with the Restoration Movement. Although no historian to my knowledge has made a formal argument stating that this conflict between the Women’s Movement and the Restoration Movement was the main cause for the division, the primary sources indicate that this is a strong possibility.

There is no one absolute cause for the division between the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ; however, something had to give, and it was the conservative section of the Restoration Movement that distanced itself from their more liberal section. If we put ourselves back in that time and in the shoes of David Lipscomb, we see a movement that has gone through a civil, social war, and a theological war. Lipscomb could not bring himself to allow women to have authority in the churches. Holman was dangerous to Lipscomb as she was well educated in languages and interpretation of the scriptures. Not only this, but she represented exactly what the restoration movement was supposed to be—a movement where rationally and individual interpretation can bring back the reality of the New Testament context. However, this context was, in the end, too frightening for Lipscomb and the conservative wing of the Churches of

⁶⁸ Henry E. Webb, *Search*, 209.

⁶⁹ See David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Sources*, 414-415.

Christ. Holman was to be silenced. After several correspondences, Lipscomb rejected Silena's request to be published and subsequently silenced the debates on women's roles.

Conclusions

This paper has provided both primary and secondary sources for this argument; yet there was undoubtedly a lot more being said about women's rights and leadership roles in the church than could have filled the *Advocate's* pages. Therefore, we must conclude that out of all the reasons for division—political, social, and religious—the Women's Movement fell into all three categories making it the most overarching schismatic issue between the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. The democratization that initially formed the movement based on restoration and unity now caused modernization and dissent; and in the end, American Christians still could not agree on their views of the bible and its relation to their everyday lives.

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