

Misrepresenting the Campbells

by Bill Crews

When the dead are misrepresented, there is nothing that they can say or do by way of defending themselves or responding. But if they wrote extensively, and their writings are still extant, then an appeal to those should be worth more than anything else. In my library, I have several books written by and about Thomas and Alexander Campbell, father and son, and in my lifetime I have read many of their words. I know that they have often been misrepresented by being assigned positions they did not hold and credited with results they did not produce. Still, we must remember that they were mere men, albeit good men and perhaps even great men. Certainly they were neither apostles nor prophets, and they made many mistakes.

My brethren and I are sometimes mislabeled “*Campbellites*” by those who think that we belong to a church founded by Thomas and/or Alexander Campbell, and that we subscribe to doctrines authored by them. We are not aware that the Campbells founded any denomination, nor do we knowingly subscribe to any doctrines originated by them. We are earnestly seeking to subscribe to the things taught in the Scriptures (1 Thess. 2:13; Acts 2:42; 2 Jn. 9), to be nothing more nor less than Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16), to be members of the church built by the Lord Himself (Matt. 16:18; Heb. 8:1-2), and to constitute only congregations after the New Testament pattern (Rom. 16:16).

The present-day “*Disciples of Christ*” denomination (their congregations are nearly always called “*Christian Churches*”) has begun to refer to Alexander Campbell as its founder. I quote from an announcement made by a Baton Rouge, La. Disciples of Christ (or Christian) Church. “Dr. Perry Gresham, noted author and lecturer, will be the special guest of the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 8484 Old Hammond Highway, as the church celebrates the 200th birthday of one of its founders, Alexander Campbell, on the weekend of September 16-18, 1988.” But I know for a fact that Alexander Campbell had no intention of founding a new church (he believed that Christ had already, long ago founded His own church, and would, if alive today, deny the above allegation).

Many years ago I received the March/April 1993 edition of “The Researcher,” a publication of “The Research and Education Foundation,” of which “Dr.” Robert A Morey is the director. The “R.E.F.” is headquartered in Austin, Texas. In an article by Mr. Morey titled “Joseph Smith: Pathetic Plagiarist” (Joseph Smith claimed to have been a prophet, taught that many truths were lost from the Bible, produced “*The Book of Mormon*,” and officially founded “*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*” -- commonly known as “The Mormon Church” -- BC) he charges Joseph Smith with stealing ideas from Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and writes: “The Campbells started what they called ‘The Restoration Movement.’ According to them the Gospel was lost ‘after the death of the apostles,’ and the rest of church history was in error. Then God ‘restored’ the Gospel, set up the ‘Church of Christ’ once again and reestablished baptism for the remission of sins. Their church was the ‘restored’ Church and hence the only true church.” A greater garbling of what the Campbells taught and did I have never read. The most blatant misrepresentation is that they taught that the gospel of Christ was lost -- they never taught anything like this. They believed, in fact, that the gospel of Christ existed and was available throughout the ages, but that men who professed to be Christians had departed from it in founding their own churches, devising their own doctrines, and writing their own creeds. The Campbells, and other preachers before them and after them, called upon all who would to give up human names, human doctrines, human creeds, and human organizations and to go back to the Scriptures and back to being just Christians and to constituting churches such as we read about in the New Testament. Nobody has to “reestablish baptism for the remission of sins”; it has been right there in Acts 2:38 all along (and compare it with Matt. 26:28).

270503