

Alexander Campbell and the Status of Women:
A Case Study in Ambivalence

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Alexander Campbell is arguably the most influential leader in the history of the American Restoration Movement, which emerged from the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century and sought to reunite Christians by rejecting human creeds, breaking ties with denominations, and rediscovering the essential core Christian beliefs and practices in the Bible alone. Some four million people in a handful of Christian groups today find roots in this movement, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, the acapella Churches of Christ, and the International Churches of Christ. The earliest major document in this movement was the “Declaration and Address,” written by Alexander’s father, Thomas Campbell.¹ In that work the senior Campbell denounced denominationalism as a great evil which divides the body of Christ. In 1832, the group led by the Campbells merged with a similar movement in Kentucky that began under the leadership of an American-born Presbyterian named Barton W. Stone. Thus the terms Restoration Movement and Stone-Campbell Movement have come to be used interchangeably.

In spite of Stone’s important role, it was Alexander Campbell who gave energy to the movement and defined its doctrines. Educated at the University of Glasgow, he was influenced by English philosopher John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment, and also by James and Robert Haldane of Scotland, who emphasized a return to original Christianity as found in the NT. His hermeneutical method followed the model formulated by Edward Dering in the late sixteenth century, which also was adopted by various groups interested in detailed patterns of

¹ George C. Bedell, Leo Sandon and Charles T. Wellborn, *Religion in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 463ff.; C. A. Young, ed., *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin: College Press, 1985), 71-209.

church polity.² Alexander Campbell was aware of the grammatico-historical approaches to biblical studies applied in Germany and Britain, and he made every attempt to be scientific in his exegetical and hermeneutical methods.³ He became an iconoclast and reformer in the early years of his ministry and was a progressive thinker on issues such as war, education, and slavery. Unfortunately, however, this article can fairly be subtitled “A Case Study in Ambivalence” because his writings reflect an ardent devotion to biblical literalism which maintained and fortified a theology of women firmly rooted in traditional patriarchy—that is, rooted in male rule in the home, the church, and society.

Campbell’s views on women are primarily contained in articles and editorials in a periodical he edited called the *Millennial Harbinger*.⁴ His writing displays a dramatic tension between progressive and traditional interests. On the one hand he asserts the equality of men and women, in large part because both have been redeemed by Christ. Some of his essays and speeches express a clear recognition that the spirit of the gospel is opposed to the injustice and degradation suffered by women throughout history.⁵ Therefore the principles of social reform and equity were to Campbell important elements of the gospel message, and issues such as slavery and the status of women demanded his attention. As a result, some have touted Campbell as a champion of women’s social equality.⁶

² Scottish Presbyterians, English Puritans, and various Reformed and independent churches. See Theodore D. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988), 70.

³ Thomas H. Olbricht, “Alexander Campbell in the Context of American Scholarship,” *ResQ* 33 (1991): 13-28.

⁴ Alexander Campbell, ed., *Millennial Harbinger* 1830-1870 (Joplin: College Press, reprint ed., 1987); hereafter abbreviated *MH* with references to year and page.

⁵ *MH* 54:204-9, 55:149, 56:314.

⁶ Lester G. McAllister, ed., *An Alexander Campbell Reader* (St. Louis: CBP, 1988), 109.

However, his doctrinal position on women in the home, church, and society is unmistakably traditional and stands in stark contrast with the spirit of the gospel represented by modern egalitarianism.⁷ His interpretation of relevant biblical passages is similar to that of Calvin, Luther, and the majority of his contemporaries, concluding that God designed woman as the helper of man and that her divinely appointed role is secondary, supportive, and subordinate. As Ray Lindley points out, a constant struggle between Campbell's literalism and liberalism is especially evident in his attitude toward the place of women in church organization:

In a day when the spirit of democracy had led to movements advocating women's rights, while Campbell was in the vein of progressive thinking on issues such as education, slavery and war, he was often reactionary regarding the place of woman, not only in society but in the church.⁸

This tug of war between conflicting interests arises out of Campbell's presuppositions about how best to interpret the Bible. He is devoted to restoring true Christianity by means of biblical literalism.⁹ Campbell views the Bible as a blueprint for all matters of Christian life and faith, and the only acceptable basis for unity among believers. Unfortunately, this presupposition prevents Campbell from following through with what appears to be an intuitive sense of female equality and social justice. The biblical literalism in Campbell's theology became a prescription for the thinking of many of his followers in future generations, the most prominent example being the insistence by some on a cappella worship music on the basis that the NT includes neither command nor example of instruments in worship. Such biblical literalism would become the primary basis for a split in the movement by 1900.¹⁰

⁷ Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilie T. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 32-34.

⁸ D. Ray Lindley, *Apostle of Freedom* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1957), 173.

⁹ Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1992), 54-55.

¹⁰ Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship*, 66, 155.

Female Education and Elevation

Clearly, Campbell supported female education.¹¹ In the *Harbinger* he often promotes and endorses various academies, colleges and seminaries for women. In a review of several newly established institutions of higher learning he writes: “These are but mere samples of what, as a people, we are doing and (are) about to do, in this greatest of temporal and evangelical interests to the church and the world.”¹² Campbell regularly published essays and letters submitted by women, and highly respected their views. Sarah H. C. Gardiner, for example, is a frequent correspondent and writer for the *Harbinger*. In one editorial note Campbell commends her for her perspicuity, piety, intelligence, good sense, and force of style, and comments that her essay “commends itself to the perusal of all our female readers as an example of how they might exert a positive influence in both the church and community.”¹³ One contributor to the *Harbinger* identified only as Deborah claims to have followed Campbell’s publications and theology since before the days of his earliest periodical, the *Christian Baptist*, and states her conviction that it was always his aim to elevate and exalt female worth and character.¹⁴ Women were also among the most active and generous financial supporters of Bethany College, the educational institution Campbell chartered in 1840, as well as various missions and other special projects undertaken by his followers. In this regard, his wife, Selina Campbell, often submitted notes or letters for publication, either thanking women for their prayers, encouragement, and financial support or generating funds for some new project.¹⁵

¹¹ *MH* 38:143.

¹² *MH* 52:531.

¹³ *MH* 39:424-6.

¹⁴ *MH* 45:39.

¹⁵ Selina Huntington Bakewell was Alexander’s second wife. His first wife, Margaret Brown, died in 1827. *MH* 56:119, 57:383, 415, 58:652. See Loretta M. Long, *The Life of Selina*

During this period the concept of moral superiority of women emerges in Campbell's works. The *Harbinger* abounds in submittals, essays, and editorials which extol and venerate the traditional female role, including select biographies that epitomize female dignity and influence on society.¹⁶ For example, a submittal by a certain Judge Hopkinton states:

There cannot be a moral society where they [women] are licentious; there cannot be a refined society where they are neglected or ignorant. Upon them depend the earliest education and first impressions of their children. They regulate or materially influence the principles, opinions, and mannerisms of their husbands and their sons. Thus the sound and healthful state of society depend on them.¹⁷

In a similar submittal, Judge Story writes:

The chamber of the sick, the pillow of the dying, the vigils of the dead, the altars of religion, never missed the presence or sympathies of woman. Timid though she be, and so delicate that the winds of heaven may not too roughly visit her, on such occasions she loses all sense of danger and assumes a preternatural courage which knows not and fears not consequences. Then she displays that undaunted spirit, which neither courts difficulties nor evades them, that resignation which utters neither murmur nor regret, and that patience in suffering which seems victorious over death itself.¹⁸

In one issue of the *Harbinger*, Campbell reviews a speech delivered by English Lord Ellesmere for the Mayor of Boston. Campbell writes that he was charmed by the speaker's "just and appropriate tribute to woman, its felicitous allusions to her moral supremacy over our species."¹⁹

Campbell: A Fellow Soldier in the Cause of Restoration (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

¹⁶ See *MH* 45:283-8 for a lengthy biographical tribute to the Honorable Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, extolled as a lofty model and example to women for her benevolence, godliness, and mission zeal. She constructed numerous churches, and opened a college at Brecknockshire in 1768. See also *MH* 45:349 for a tribute to Princess Elizabeth of the Rhine, eldest daughter of Frederick V of Bohemia in 1620, and Lady Rachel Russell, daughter of the Earl of Southampton in the early 1600s. There is nothing in these biographies which either supports or refutes the traditional paradigm of female subjection.

¹⁷ *MH* 44:237-8. See also *MH* 52:675-7 for a submittal by a certain H. H. H. on Woman's Mission, in which the writer states that on her "falls the duty of imparting to the child the first religious instruction."

¹⁸ *MH* 32:418.

¹⁹ *MH* 53:511.

And in his own lecture to the young women of Hopkinsville Female Institute in Nashville, Tennessee, Campbell clearly affirms that, while women are perhaps physically weaker than males, they are at the same time stronger morally and in enduring faith. During times of stress, for example, women tend to be more constant and devoted.²⁰ In 1849 Campbell delivers the opening address at a symposium in Louisville, Kentucky, entitled *On the Amelioration of the Social State*. In that speech he declares that woman is the quickening, animating, and conservative element of society, created from the side of man to sit at his side, not at his feet. He praises woman for her influence in history, naming literally dozens of notable women in history who stand as models for female excellence. And he forcefully declares that, as society moves toward maturity, which no doubt he envisioned in terms of the millennial kingdom of Christ, woman would play a leading role of guidance.

Society is not yet fully civilized. It is only beginning to be. Things are in process to another age, a golden, a millennial, a blissful period in human history.... Woman, I believe, is destined to be the great agent in this grandest of all human enterprises, an effort to advance society to the access of its most glorious destiny on earth.²¹

In that speech, Campbell goes on to focus on female education as a means of assisting women to achieve this noble task. On the surface Campbell appears to lend credence to the trend toward affirming women's rights, but in reality it is evident that his placating and carefully chosen words speak only of motherhood and childrearing, with no suggestion or support of important aspects of female equality such as suffrage and leadership roles. Patronization by exalting

²⁰ *MH* 55:146-54.

²¹ McAllister, *Alexander Campbell Reader*, 111; quoting *Alexander Campbell, Popular Lectures and Addresses*, 47-72.

motherhood and female subordination, urging women to take pride in their role as man's divinely appointed helper, is found throughout Christian history.²²

Patriarchal Conviction

When confronted with questions and issues addressed by express biblical texts, Campbell stands with tradition, arguing that woman's place is in the home and that her divinely appointed status is one of subjection to man. In one issue of the *Harbinger*, Campbell reflects on a speech he heard in Indianapolis, Indiana, by Robert Dale Owen, son of Welsh social reformer Robert Owen whom Campbell had met in a celebrated debate on "The Evidences of Christianity." The subject of the younger Owen's speech is, in Campbell's summary, "the quest for a new order of society, adapted to man without religion and its conscience." Here Owen discusses the rights of women, supporting their equality in society and their equality in marriage. This view Campbell dismisses as "eccentric" and "whimsical," the "visionary and imaginative aberrations" of men with little understanding of the true will of God for the family or society. Campbell does not deny that women have throughout history suffered indignity and injustice. But he implies that reports of such injustice are generally exaggerated, and he is cautious about lending support to any notion of true gender equality. He comments concerning the trend to "redress these nameless wrongs by a correct theory of woman's rights," which effort he suggests is commendable and leans on the side of virtue, but at the same time is misguided and counterproductive.²³

In 1848, drawing from *Blackwood's Magazine*, Campbell denies that woman's proper place and purpose on earth includes making laws, leading armies and governing enterprises, or to

²² Debates on the status of women arise early among the church fathers (e.g., Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, Jerome, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas) and continue through the Reformation (e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox).

²³ *MH* 51:17.

function on an equal plane with males.²⁴ She is rather a subordinate to the man, designed by God to play a secondary and supportive role in a world where the male is the glory and supreme reflection of the Creator. Campbell finds what he considers the true and correct paradigm for both the home and society in scripture.

We have but one infallible standard on this subject; and indeed, being a subject of such transcendent grandeur and importance, it merits just such an infallible standard as God himself has ordained. Well, the question first to be propounded is, What says God's grand institute of woman's rights or wrongs? They are summed up in a few leading particulars. The first great fact is that Adam was first formed, then Eve. Hence the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. He is first and she is second. He is senior and she is junior. They are, therefore, neither equal in rank nor in age.²⁵

Campbell's bondage to biblical literalism is nowhere more evident than in his views of the proper role and status of women. In his writings, both female subjection and ontological inferiority are founded upon numerous NT texts, several of which in turn lean heavily upon the creation narrative in Genesis.²⁶ Following the perspective of both Jewish and Christian traditions, Campbell believed Adam and Eve to be literal figures, fashioned by God and placed in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of human history. The biblical account, in Campbell's mind, provides a universal paradigm for social and marital gender stratification. Certain facets of woman's lot in life are fixed by creation, and others result from Eve's sin and the fallen state of humanity. But woman's station as a whole is divinely determined. Woman's rightful place, by God's design, is in the home.²⁷ Campbell states that man's office is earthwide, but woman's is

²⁴ *MH* 48:115.

²⁵ *MH* 54:204.

²⁶ The Adam and Eve story (Gen 2:18-3:24) is the foundation of Judeo-Christian beliefs concerning the origin of humanity and various traditional ideologies concerning the genders. This account also lies at the root of relevant Pauline texts (cf. 1 Cor 11:8-12, Eph 5:31, 1 Tim 2:13-15).

²⁷ Titus 2:5.

housewide.²⁸ Those occasions where women have ascended to the level of queen, whether in contemporary England or ancient Israel, he considers to be endured by God as a choice of lesser evils in the absence of a suitable king—exceptions rather than a precedent for female ambition. In Campbell’s view woman is constitutionally, legally, and religiously inferior, whose place is to be “modest and retiring in the presence of him whom God made first.”²⁹

In the February, 1833, issue of the *Harbinger*, Campbell includes a lengthy dialogue which also clearly presents his own views.³⁰ Mr. Goodal is a dignified family patriarch living with his family in the village of Newtonfields, Ireland, near Earl Moira’s Castle. On New Year’s Eve, 1800, he and Mrs. Goodal had a conversation with their guests Mr. and Mrs. Reed. The comments of all four, related to 1 Cor 11:9-10, support the common view of marriage which has been perpetuated throughout mainstream Christian history, namely that the husband is the head of the household, both head and lord over the wife, a hierarchy which traditionally is founded both in logic and scriptural authority. The covering of the woman’s head, they state, is necessary because of the angels.³¹ The husband is both a brother and master to the wife. Her veiled head symbolizes her subordination to her husband’s authority, given by angels to Eve and reiterated at Mt. Sinai in the Mosaic Law.³² The dialogue also suggests that, because of the redemptive work

²⁸ *MH* 54:204.

²⁹ *MH* 54:205. Campbell appeal to Homer’s Hector, who on going to battle begs his wife Andromache to remain and keep order at home.

³⁰ *MH* 33:65-8.

³¹ The precise meaning of this assertion in 1 Cor 11:10 remains a point of debate among biblical scholars.

³² See also *MH* 54:205 where Campbell understands the Apostle Paul to have taught women to veil their faces in the synagogue and wear long hair for a covering in the Christian assemblies.

of Christ as well as the impact of his teaching on the world, woman's lot has been significantly elevated.³³

In a later issue, Campbell employs a fictional dialogue entitled "Conversations at the Carlton House," in which he offers instruction on family culture.³⁴ Mr. Carlton, the father and head of the household, engages his children in a rather formal and awkward conversation about various religious topics, including the origins of certain Christian customs and values. One daughter, Eliza, declares that woman was created second, as a companion for Adam. Another daughter, Mary, adds that Satan, whom she identifies as "the Adversary" and calls "a liar and murderer from the beginning," entered into the Serpent of Gen 3 as an instrument of his evil interests and deceived "our mother, who believed a lie rather than the truth of God, obeyed her enemy, and included her husband with her in the catastrophe."³⁵

Campbell, however, does not belabor the issue of woman as the root of sin and the cause of the fall, either in this dialogue or elsewhere. On the contrary, in a lecture to young women at Hopkinsville Female Institute in Kentucky, he affirms that each of the characters in the creation story stands alone and bears the consequences of his or her own deeds. Adam is responsible for his own sin, his own condemnation, and his own punishment. Likewise, Eve and the Serpent bear the responsibility for their own choices.³⁶

³³ Neither male nor female in Christ, Gal 3:28. Campbell believed that Christian principles were the impetus for social advancement in general.

³⁴ In January, 1840, Campbell prefaced a new series in *MH* with a resolution to promote family education. The two part didactic series is written in the form of a dialogue, and is entitled "Family Culture; Conversations at the Carlton House." The setting is the household of Olympas Carlton and his wife Julia at Carmel Place, and it is likely that Campbell bases this material on his own household. See *MH* 40:3-4, 8-9, 72-6.

³⁵ *MH* 40:76.

³⁶ *MH* 55:150.

Nonetheless, Campbell clearly opposes female leadership in the church. In 1840 a reader submitted a question to the *Harbinger* concerning whether women, referring to them as sisters, have a right to teach, deliver lectures, exhortations, and prayers in the public assembly of the church of God. Campbell's reply consists of a quotation of 1 Tim 2:12 and the added comment, "I submit to Paul and teach the same lesson."³⁷ In a later issue he quotes segments of *Macaulay's History* with reference to the Queen, comparing her sacerdotal role in the Church of England to that of the Pope to the Roman Catholic Church: "Well might the dissenters of that age and all reasonable men of this, ask whether it is not monstrous that a woman should be chief Bishop of a church in which an Apostle had forbidden her even to speak."³⁸

A more poignant statement of Campbell's position is found in an 1854 editorial where he offers a summary of several relevant NT passages:

Nor would an apostle, who commanded and importuned them to be chaste, keepers at home, obedient to their own husbands, to adorn themselves with modest apparel, with good works, with a meek and quiet spirit; who commanded them to marry, to raise and educate children, and to teach the junior women to follow their example in similar pursuits, contradict himself and stultify his own wisdom and discretion, by telling them, at the same time, that they had political and civil rights and duties, incompatible with this, calling them off into the busy circle of the forum, or the battlefield, or the tumultuous cabals and contrivances of men.³⁹

Campbell's conclusion is not surprising. If Paul silenced garrulous women, prohibiting them from even asking a curious question in the religious assembly, it is certainly a shame, rather than a right or an honor, for them to speak out, teach, or preach.⁴⁰

What, says he, women, came the word of God out from you, or did it come only to you? Did God send women to illuminate the world by making them depositories of his truths

³⁷ *MH* 40:521.

³⁸ *MH* 49:337.

³⁹ *MH* 54:205. See 1 Cor 11:3, Eph 5:22-23, Col 3:18, Titus 2:3-5, 1 Pet 3:1.

⁴⁰ 1 Cor 14:34-37.

or the oracles of salvation to mankind? If he did not, why should the church send them, and still, less why should they send themselves?⁴¹

Campbell concludes with a quotation from Mrs. Sigourney, a contemporary Christian poet and author whom he describes as “a distinguished lady,” who extols women to avoid contention for power, rather joyfully and gratefully submitting to the traditional role God designed: “a helpmeet, such as was fitting for man to desire, and for woman to become.”⁴²

In 1856 Campbell addresses a large assembly of young women at Henry Female Seminary in New Castle, Kentucky, and subsequently publishes the entire address in the *Harbinger*.⁴³ In his characteristic eloquence he contrasts the grandeur and perfection of Lady Eve, the mother of all living whose very name means life,⁴⁴ placed in the ambrosial bowers of Eden’s Paradise, with Lord Adam for whom she was fashioned as a suitable helper: “Woman was created to be a companion, perfectly suitable to man; hence it is equally her duty, her honor, and her happiness to accomplish herself for this high and dignified position.”⁴⁵ Indeed, Campbell argues that woman is man’s better half “in delicacy of thought, in sensitiveness of feeling, in patient endurance, in constancy of affection, in moral courage, and in soul absorbing devotion.”⁴⁶

She holds a great and mysterious power to influence the course of history. Every distinctive element of her sex was conferred upon her in order to her accomplishment for the great work of forming and molding human nature in reference to human destiny.⁴⁷

However, this noble task Campbell defines in terms of a divinely ordained hierarchy where woman’s purpose and duty is to support the enterprises of man. While, on the one hand,

⁴¹ *MH* 54:206.

⁴² *MH* 54:206-7.

⁴³ *MH* 56:301-14.

⁴⁴ A segment of this lecture is published later in the same year; *MH* 56:392. He argues that Adam named Eve “life” because she was the source of all social happiness, joy, pleasure, and a fountain of strength and moral heroism.

⁴⁵ *MH* 56:305.

⁴⁶ *MH* 56:308.

⁴⁷ *MH* 56:312.

the dignity and significance of womanhood is apparent in Campbell's thinking, it is nonetheless embraced by the traditional paradigm of male dominance. Woman is clearly a secondary entity in creation whose role is to support man and influence the world for good only through clearly defined maternal and domestic tasks, including ministry to the poor, the sick, the wounded and dying. It has been noted that Campbell favors and promotes female education. However, in his mind the purpose of such education is better to equip women for their maternal and domestic tasks.

She was an extract of man in order to form man; in order to develop, perfect, beautify, and beatify man. And hence these four terms comprehend the whole duty, honor, dignity and happiness of woman; consequently, her education should be equal to her mission.⁴⁸

There is no need, Campbell contends, for women to preach or teach publicly in order to fulfill their purpose and mission. For support he appeals to 1 Cor 11 on the veiling of woman's head and face from "staring sensualists," and "green striplings of pert impertinence" who gaze lustfully at women with ogling glasses. While Campbell did not appear to require head coverings for females in his own congregations, he argues that if Paul required such of women to maintain modesty in the church assembly, he would never have encouraged women to take on authoritative roles in the church nor would he have sent out women as missionaries.⁴⁹

Concerning modest feminine attire, Campbell defers to an essay by famed Baptist missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson, who draws from both 1 Pet 3:3-4 and 1 Tim 2:9-10 to support his traditional posture.⁵⁰ Of particular concern to Judson is "the appalling profusion of ornaments" worn by some Western women, both by visitors to Burma and by those he witnessed

⁴⁸ *MH* 56:312.

⁴⁹ *MH* 56:314.

⁵⁰ Adoniram Judson, "Address to Christian Women," *MH* 32:326, 57:495-502. Judson was a Baptist missionary working in Moulmein, Burma. The essay is dated October, 1831, and appears in *MH* in part in 1832 and in its entirety in 1857.

during brief furloughs at home, which he attributes to a “demon of vanity laying waste the female department.”⁵¹ He specifies ankle bracelets, necklaces, earrings, braided hair, rings on the fingers, arm and wrist bracelets, and other such vanities which he declares are strictly forbidden by the NT. Judson states that as a missionary he had refused to even baptize or administer the Lord’s Supper to local Karen women unless they abandoned such vain and gaudy adorning, not as if it represented their former religious beliefs but because it violated the specific commands of the apostles.

After the death of Thomas Campbell in 1855, Alexander experiences a decline in mental acumen, and his work as editor of the *Harbinger* suffers.⁵² For this reason his son-in-law W. K. Pendleton begins to assume responsibility for the paper. From 1857 material in the *Harbinger* on the subject of women comes largely from Pendleton, but there is little doubt that Pendleton’s views reflect the theology of Alexander Campbell.⁵³

Addressing the specific question, “Can a Christian wear gold jewelry?” Pendleton states that dress is the outward expression of the inward spirit, and addressing Christian women specifically he quotes 1 Pet 3:4. On another question, “Do sisters have a right to vote for those who rule over them (elders) in the church?” Pendleton writes that they have as much right as they do to select their own husbands. He adds that in this regard there is neither male nor female.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *MH* 57:495.

⁵² Other personal tragedies, such as a fire at Bethany College, may have contributed to his decline as well.

⁵³ Transfer of the editorship of the *Harbinger* occurred in January, 1864. See Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Joined in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: CBP, 1989), 146.

⁵⁴ *MH* 57:459; Gal 3:28.

A more volatile issue gaining momentum at this time is female leadership in the church, suggested in the question submitted by a reader: “Do the Christian Scriptures authorize females to lead in prayer, or to engage in exhortation in the meeting of the church for worship?”⁵⁵

Pendleton’s lengthy response is based on 1 Cor 14:33-35 and 1 Tim 2:8-12. First he distinguishes between public worship and small private gatherings, the latter of which he concedes might be an acceptable venue for women praying even if men are present. But on the general topic of women addressing a church assembly he writes:

We cannot see how a prohibition could be more explicit or universal. It is said they must keep silence; that they are not permitted to speak in public; that they may not even so much as publicly ask a question, but must wait and ask it privately at home; that it is disgraceful for them to speak publicly in the congregation; and that they must learn in silence, with entire submission. What could the apostle say more explicit than this?⁵⁶

In his discussion of 1 Cor 11:5 Pendleton argues that Paul addresses custom, but in no way condones women prophesying or praying in the assembly. Instruction on this matter is left until later (1 Cor 14) when Paul forbids public praying and prophesying by women altogether. Pendleton concedes that some women in the Corinthian church possessed gifts of prophecy, but insists that Paul forbade the practice in the assembly. Pendleton rejects all “farfetched arguments” to justify women preaching, and concludes by quoting patristic writers such as Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Epiphanius to say that women were never ordained to offer sacrifice, hold office, teach men or perform any solemn service in the church, and should not be today.⁵⁷ In reference to 1 Tim 2 he refers to the grave danger of “self deception in the weaker sex.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *MH* 64:325-30.

⁵⁶ *MH* 64:326.

⁵⁷ *MH* 64:328.

⁵⁸ *MH* 64:329.

Challenges to Pendleton's position are submitted by R. Faurot of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and appear in various issues of the *Harbinger* in 1864, but Faurot limits his contentions to women praying in a public assembly, and published rebuttals are brief and reflect little scholastic depth.⁵⁹

Summary

These materials represent the most significant voice in the Stone-Campbell Movement and briefly precede the debate on ordination of women which took place in 1880 – 1881 and in a second bout from 1891 – 1893, presented largely in two journals, the *Christian-Evangelist* and the *Christian Standard*.⁶⁰ Campbell certainly envisions a trend toward increased rights and female elevation in society, and he supports it in terms of education, influence, respect, and dignity. But on the more fundamental subject of female status in the home, in the church, and in the male hierarchy in the church and home, he remains firmly traditional.

The term “traditional” in this context refers to the fact that, from the earliest written records, it is evident that some form of patriarchy has been deeply embedded in the structure of nearly every human society. Therefore, in addition to Campbell's theology, it can be presumed that his views concerning the status of women are also influenced to some extent by numerous other factors, such as his own family of origin, his social environment both in Scotland and America, and his education at the University of Glasgow. His theological perspectives, however, are the primary concern and focus of this paper.

⁵⁹ *MH* 64:370, 415.

⁶⁰ David A. Jones, “The Ordination of Women in the Christian Church: An Examination of the Debate, 1880-1893” *Enc* 50, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 205.

It is ironic that the conflict in Campbell's views of women parallels a similar conflict within Pauline works, which comprise the major "proof texts" for the traditional Christian doctrine on women.⁶¹ Another irony is that both Campbells, Thomas and Alexander, viewed the Old and New Testaments as having different levels of importance in terms of their constitutional authority for Christians. Yet, following his understanding of the Pauline letters, especially 1 Tim 2, Alexander unwittingly rooted his theology of womanhood in a patriarchal understanding of Gen 2-3 and thereby perpetuated among his followers a gender hierarchy inherited from ancient Judaism.⁶²

Those in the Stone-Campbell Movement who, in contrast, supported increasing women's rights in the nineteenth-century were able to do so by rejecting the traditional interpretation of relevant biblical texts such as 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2, and in turn by moving away from a slavish biblical literalism. Conversely, later generations of Campbell's spiritual descendants who have rejected female equality, and therefore have maintained traditional patriarchy in the home and the church, have followed Campbell in their allegiance to biblical literalism of the Campbell tradition.⁶³

⁶¹ Elaine Pagels, "Paul and Women: A Response to Recent Discussion," *JAAR* 42, no. 3 (April 1974): 544. The concept presented in Gal 3:23, "neither male nor female" is set in juxtaposition to Pauline doctrine as a whole and to mainstream Christian tradition.

⁶² Doris Franklin, "Impact of Christianity on the Status of Women from the Socio-cultural Point of View," *RelSoc* 32, no. 2 (June 1985), 46.

⁶³ See M. Eugene Boring, "The Disciples and Higher Criticism: The Crucial Third Generation," in *A Case Study of Mainstream Protestantism: The Disciples' Relation to American Culture, 1880-1989*, ed. D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 30-31. See also D. Newell Williams, "Future Prospects of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," in *Case Study of Mainstream Protestantism*, 563.