

Church History

Denominations

Alexander Campbell

- Growing in knowledge
- Baptism is for believing adult – immersion – forgiveness of sins
- Would he have needed to be baptized again?
- Acts 19:1-7
- Acts 2:38 – “gift of the Holy Spirit”
 - Gift given by the Holy Spirit or Gift which is the Holy Spirit?
 - John 4:10 – “gift of God”
 - Rom. 5:17 – “gift of righteousness”
 - *"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:32 NIV)*

Denominations

- The religious diversity of the American colonies called for a new understanding of the church – especially within the Puritan tradition.
- The use of the word to describe a religious group came into vogue about 1740.
- But the theory began to be developed about a hundred years before by some Puritan leaders in America and England.
- Denominationalism, as originally designed, is the opposite of sectarianism.

Denominations

- A sect claims the authority of Christ for itself alone. It believes that it is the true body of Christ; all truth belongs to it and to no other religion. So, by definition a sect is exclusive.
- The word *denomination* by contrast was an inclusive term. It implied that the Christian group called or *denominated* by a particular name was but one member of a larger group – the church – to which all denominations belong.
- The denominational theory of the church insists that the true church cannot be identified with any single ecclesiastical structure.
- The Reformers had planted this seed, but did not follow it. They tried to suppress religious dissent.
- The true succession is not of bishops but of believers.

Denominations

- The Independents (Congregationalist), were the architects of the denominational theory and looked for some way to express Christian unity even when Christians did not agree.
- Considering our inability to see truth clearly, differences of opinion are inevitable.
- Our differences may be opinion, but they are not always matters of indifference. Every Christian is to practice what he believes the Bible says.
- No single church has a final and full grasp of divine truth.
- The mere fact of separation does not itself constitute schism. It is possible to divide on many points and still be united.

Denominations

- This tolerant attitude was not born of doctrinal indifference.
- The Independents had no intention of extending Christian unity to all religious professions.
- The identity of the “one true church” was restricted to those who shared a common understanding of the core of the Christian faith.
- Few advocates of the denominational view of the church in the seventeenth century envisioned the hundreds of Christian groups included under the umbrella today.
- They had no intention of reducing the basic beliefs of Christianity to a general feeling of religious sincerity. (Quotations from “Church History In Plain Language” by Bruce L. Shelley, pages 306-308)

Restoration

- Jesus' prayer for unity "they may be one, as we are one"
- Various proposals for unity:
 - Authoritarian – agreement with one church – Roman Catholic Church.
 - Interdenominational – Christianity contains no divine pattern of organization, doctrine and worship.
 - Undenominationalism – New Testament is the revealed will of God. Each is to search its pages to find what God would have us to do.
- Creeds
- Away from creeds and back to the Bible.

Restoration

- James O'Kelley – Five Cardinal Principles of the Christian Church 1794
 - Christ is the only head of the church.
 - The name Christian is the only acceptable name.
 - The Bible is the only rule of faith.
 - Christian character is the only test of church fellowship.
 - The right of private judgment is the privilege of all.
- Thomas Campbell – “Declaration and Address” (1809)