

# Stone-Campbell Dialogue 2015

## Introduction

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Good morning, I am Newell Williams, a member of the Stone-Campbell Dialogue. This dialogue began 16 years ago with the purpose of developing “relationships and trust within the three streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement through worship and dialogue.” The dialogue is composed of three teams—one from the Churches of Christ, one from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and one from the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Each of the teams is composed of six persons. Over the years, the dialogue has engaged a wide range of topics, from issues that historically divided us into separate streams, to contemporary issues on which we yet differ, to issues of common concern.

This dialogue is of this third type. “Addressing Race and Racism within the Church and Society” is a topic that engages sensitive Christians in all three of our streams. And we begin this dialogue with a common confession: Racism has been a part of our Stone-Campbell tradition from the very beginning.

Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell both opposed slavery. But, their record on race is another matter. Early in his ministry, Barton Stone called for the emancipation of enslaved Africans and their integration into the larger society. At some point, however, his observation of the struggles of free blacks convinced him that such freedom was a curse to both blacks and whites. Hence, he became an enthusiastic supporter of the Colonization Society, which proposed to end slavery in America by freeing

enslaved Africans and sending them to Africa. In his enthusiasm for this effort, he remarked that although he had long been an opponent of slavery, he would have been among the first to leave any region in which emancipation had become the general practice.<sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell was also an enthusiastic supporter of the Colonization Society.

At length, Stone repented of his racism, calling for the immediate abolition of slavery without colonization of the former slaves; affirming that the first step toward preparing enslaved Africans for liberty was to acknowledge them as human beings and the wrong done to them.<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Campbell never came to this position, but continued to oppose slavery primarily on the grounds of its inexpediency commenting, “Much as I may sympathize with a black man, I love a white man more.”<sup>3</sup> For Campbell, if not ultimately for Stone, it must be said that white lives mattered more than black lives.

But, here is the good news: God did not allow the racism that has been part of our Stone-Campbell Movement to prevent African Americans from joining and giving leadership to this movement. Thus, there is a real prospect of a better ending to this story. And to that possibility, we now turn our attention.

God, may your spirit be in us, both in our speaking and in our listening. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian Messenger* (December, 1827): 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Messenger* (May, 1835): 97-98.

<sup>3</sup> *Millennial Harbinger* (May, 1845): 234.