

THE AMERICAN CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY SOCIETY

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A sad note was struck in the harmony of the effort to restore New Testament Christianity when Alexander Campbell, a prominent leader, began to sound a call through the pages of his paper, the *Millennial Harbinger*, to organize the churches for purposes of evangelism in a way that would go beyond the organization of each local congregation. Campbell endeavored to base his view on the silence of the scriptures regarding organization of the universal church. His ideas on church organization appeared in the *Millennial Harbinger* between 1841 and 1848. Campbell pursued the effort aware that the bulk of the brotherhood was behind him. Through his paper he suggested that a committee be appointed to investigate and report to the brotherhood on the subject. The result of these urgings emerged in a convention of 156 messengers from eleven states which represented above 100 congregations on October 23, 1849. The convention lasted four days. Although absent due to “an unusually severe indisposition,” Alexander Campbell was elected president. Four vice-presidents were elected, David S. Burnett, John O’Kane, John T. Johnson, and Walter Scott, but before the convention was over twenty vice-presidents were appointed including these original four. Thirteen articles were adopted. The American Christian Missionary Society officially was begun. (See: *Search For The Ancient Order* by Earl I. West, Vol. 1, pp. 166-127 and Vol. 2, pp. 45-72).

The dates given for the American Christian Missionary Society are given as 1849-1869 because opposition to it had grown to the point where it must be addressed or the missionary society was going to completely fold. In Louisville, Kentucky October 19-21, 1869, the whole organizational structure of the society was revamped resulting in what came to be known as the Louisville Plan. It marked the end of the American Christian Missionary Society and forming of the General Christian Missionary Society, (See: William Woodson, *Standing For Their Faith*, p. 22). Opponents to the society were unconvinced by the new name. West summarizes objections to the missionary society into three categories. First, membership depended on a stipulated amount of money. Second, the apparent danger of it infringing on the independence of a local congregation. And third, it was an unauthorized human organization and, therefore, unscriptural. In 1866, the society flexed its muscle against the *Gospel Advocate* beginning again because writers for it might oppose the society. This caused great concern and proved the society to be more than an expedient in evangelism. It was clearly a legislative

body with powerful influence. Much later in 1891, the *Christian Standard* said of the state convention, “It shall be the highest body in the State.” Opposition to the direction they were heading was not unfounded. The society had become the master and not as originally intended the servant.

The church was, and is, responsible for evangelizing. The gospel spread in the first century with no man-made organization larger than the local congregations. The organization the Lord ordained was demonstrated to be adequate. Paul wrote, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). The church was and is and will always be “the pillar and ground [support or foundation] of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). One statement found on the lips of many during the time that has application and bears repeating today is where zeal for doing the Lord’s will is decreasing an interest in human inventions and imaginations is increasing.