*America's 19th Century Religious Figures:*

*A Comparison of Alexander Campbell, Joseph Smith, and Charles Finney*

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Introduction

Alexander Campbell, Joseph Smith, and Charles Finney were three figures instrumental in defining American religion during the 19th century. The influence of these three men continues in the American religious landscape today. Although none of these men achieved precisely what they tried to accomplish, they all impacted the American religious culture. In some ways, these men were similar; in others, they could not have been more different. Events around them heavily influenced all three, while they also influenced American culture. The public ministry of these three contemporaries overlapped. Even though none of the three formally acknowledged the influence of the other two, they were aware of each other and each other's religious work. Alexander Campbell wrote several articles, including in the *Millennial Harbinger,* where he strongly criticizes Mormonism and was rebutted in return by Mormon leaders.[1]

This paper will examine the origins, education, travel, political involvement, and theology of these men, comparing and contrasting the trio while showing the influence some of the contemporary social, cultural, and political events had on them and their religious work. Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* argues that American religion in the antebellum era differed from before. These three religious leaders will be used to explore how accurately Hatch portrays American religious expression of this era[2], accepting ecstatic

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[1] Thriceholy.net, "Joseph Smith: Letter in Response to Alexander Campbell," Thriceholy.net, n.d. accessed April 6, 2023, https://trisagionseraph.tripod.com/Texts/Cowdery.html; Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry, Book of Mormon Central, Book of Mormon Central, 2023, accessed April 6, 2023, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/disciple-witness-essays-latter-day-saint-history-and-doctrine-honor-richard-lloyd-anderson; Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on "The Mormon Bible," Restoration Movement Archives, December 28, 1999, accessed April 6, 2023, https://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/mh1839/ROTMB.HTM.

[2] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 50.

religious expression, centering around non-elite charismatic informally trained religious leaders[3] who often preached colorful extemporaneous sermons in local styles[4], encouraging novel recruitment techniques to acquire converts, and overturning established hierarchies[5] fit with known aspects of their work.

Although Hatch noted that no "serious biography" of Campbell, Finney, or Smith existed when he wrote *The Democratization of American Christianity* in 1989, this is no longer true.[6] Finney[7] and Smith[8] have had extensive biographies written about them that certainly meet the criteria of serious and academic. An even more recent Campbell biography by Douglas A. Foster arguably meets those criteria.[9] Several other less academically rigorous biographies of Campbell exist.[10] Campbell left behind extensive but scattered writings, but few researchers have used these primary sources directly.[11] The Bethany College Archives has attempted to collect many of Campbell's scattered documents. Finney's own writings and contemporary accounts collected by the Oberlin College Archives represent Finney well.[12] Several recent biographies use some of these works, including Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe. The historiography of Smith is entirely different. During his lifetime, he wrote little, most of those around him did not write extensively, and he died at a relatively young age. Nevertheless, the church he founded has laboriously

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[3] Ibid, 4-5.

[4] Ibid, 57.

[5] Ibid, 58.

[6] Ibid, 220.

[7] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney: and the Spirit of American Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

[8] Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

[9] Douglas A. Foster, *A Life of Alexander Campbell* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020).

[10] Peter Jay Rasor, III "The Influence of Common Sense Realism on Alexander Campbell's View of the Nature of Scripture and Hermeneutics" PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 2010, Benjamin L. Smith, *Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1930), Roland Herbert Bainton, *The Sage of Bethany: A Pioneer in Broadcloth* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1960), and Alger Morton Fitch, *Alexander Campbell: Preacher of Reform and Reformer of Preacher* (Austin: Sweet Publishing Company, 1970) are some of the more readily available.

[11] Archivist at Bethany College, conversation with Joseph Baumstarck, Jr., August 15, 2016.

[12] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, viii.

collected any item remotely related to him and placed it in a single archive with limited access.[13]

<div align="center">Origins</div>

Alexander Campbell was born in Antrim County, Ireland, on September 12, 1788, the son of Thomas and Jane Campbell.[14] At the time of Alexander's birth, his father was a Presbyterian minister of the Seceder, Anti-Burgher branch with Old Light roots.[15] This group formed as an independent synod of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, which had split from the Church of Scotland (England) in 1733, followed in 1747 by a second split over the Burghers' Oath, which required acceptance of civil enforcement of religious affairs.[16] His family moved several times within Ireland during Campbell's youth. As four more children joined the family, Thomas Campbell needed extra income to support them and began an academy with Alexander as his helper to earn additional income.[17] Eventually, Thomas left the family in Ireland while he went to America to seek a better financial future for the family. In the two years before the family reunited in America, Alexander made a life-changing religious decision, renouncing the Presbyterian religion in 1808.[18] Before he assumed duties as his father's assistant at the academy, Campbell was a mediocre student who preferred physical activity to formal schooling. In his new position, he developed an intense interest in church history, shaping his decision to renounce Presbyterianism. He also developed his views regarding creeds and denominations that drove his religious work for the rest of his life.[19] In 1809, the rest of the Campbell family, including Alexander, joined Thomas in Virginia, making Alexander a first-generation immigrant to

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[13] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, ix.
[14] Robert Richardson, *The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1868), 1:19.
[15] Rasor, "Common Sense", 6.
[16] John McKerrow, *History of the Secession Church* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Son, 1839), 272-278.
[17] Rasor, "Common Sense", 5.
[18] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 1:190.
[19] Rasor, "Common Sense", 4,6.

America.[20] During the early republic, he joined thousands of other Irish immigrants who traveled to America looking for a better future. The Campbells followed earlier Irish Presbyterians' footsteps to the mid-Atlantic states, where many similarly inclined immigrants had settled.

Finney was born on August 27, 1792, in Litchfield County, Connecticut,[21] but was primarily raised in rural New York.[22] He was the seventh child of Sylvester Finney and Rebecca Rice, modest landowners and farmers.[23] As a young man, he taught for a few years in New Jersey before returning to assist his ailing mother in New York. Between 1818 and 1821, he studied law in Adams while assisting his mother. He grew up in a Baptist household. Following his conversion experience, he became a Presbyterian minister, initially following the Old Light tradition but switching to a New Light orientation after a few years in the ministry.[24] Eventually, he changed denominations becoming a Congregationalist.[25] He also embraced many antebellum reforms but retained a primacy of religion in his life and work. Finney's life experiences were typical of many in the Northeast - modest landowners who strove for greater material prosperity and struggled with their Congregational faith.

Joseph Smith was born on December 23, 1805, near Sharon, Vermont, to Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Smith, Sr., the fifth of eleven children. Although the Smith family started well on a farm and $1000 given to them as a wedding present, the couple chose to rent out the farm and began a store six years later. As was common during this era, much of the Smith inventory was sold for harvest commodities which often were not paid.[26] By 1803 they had to sell the farm

[20] Harold L. Lunger, *The Political Ethics od Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1954) 22.
[21] Christian Classics Ethereal Library, "Charles G. Finney: American Revivalist Preacher and Educator," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2015, accessed August 13, 2016, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/finney.
[22] Christianity Today, "Charles Finney," Christianity Today, 2016, accessed August 13, 2016, http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/charles-finney.html.
[23] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 3.
[24] Christianity Today, "Charles Finney."
[25] Christian Classics Ethereal Library, "Charles G. Finney."
[26] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, xiii, xvii,18.

and use the wedding money to pay debts incurred when their store could not stock merchandise due to the commodities owed to the Smiths having drained liquid assets and a high-risk Chinese ginseng importation scheme resulted in the swindling of the Smiths.[27] Thereafter, the family moved frequently, and in his youth, Joseph lived in Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York. The Smith family was inconsistent in their church attendance. Lucy eventually joined a Presbyterian church, but her husband and most of the children, including Joseph, did not belong to any church.[28] The Smith family also participated in many spiritual practices common to the era, including astrology, herbalism, seer stones, witching, and almanacs.[29] During his youth, Joseph ended up with an infected bone in his leg following a typhoid epidemic that almost resulted in amputation. After surgery to remove the infected area of bone, he suffered a limp for life.[30] The Smith family, like many comparable families in New England, moved frequently and eventually headed further west where available land was cheaper. In more settled areas, "respectable people" generally supported the local Congregational Church, while in the frontier regions, newly established churches became a unifying force for the community.[31] The failure of the Smith family to join a church aroused questions and influenced public opinion of the family. The revivals in New York's "burnt-over district" disturbed the religious complacency of many, including Joseph Smith, who struggled over which church to join, often in solitude in the woods. Eventually, he experienced the visitations that led to the Book of Mormon and reshaped his life.[32]

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[27] Ibid, 19.
[28] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 37.
[29] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 70-72, Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 26 and David D. Hall, *World's of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) discuss avariety of these and the Smith's involvements in them.
[30] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 21.
[31] Hall, *World's of Wonder*, 117-165.
[32] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 24-26, 35-41, 30-56.

Smith's origins made him unlikely to pursue a career as a churchman and verify Hatch's argument that many church leaders in antebellum America's democratized Christianity came from obscure origins. Finney's background was slightly less unlikely, but with no clerical ancestors in his immediate background and the non-elite status of his family, he would also have been an unlikely clerical candidate in a more traditional religious environment of an earlier time. Campbell's background would have been consistent with many ministers' Protestant backgrounds. With a father already in the ministry and a comfortable lifestyle, Campbell would have been able to pursue a ministerial position within the Presbyterian denomination based on his background.

<div align="center">Education</div>

As noted previously, Campbell's early school days were unremarkable. While helping his father at the family's academy, Campbell bloomed as a student and took a serious interest in church history.[33] Alexander continued the academy for another year after his father left for America. The family then set out to meet his father in Virginia. Early in the voyage, their ship foundered in a storm. The family was stranded near Glasgow for the winter of 1808-1809, enabling Alexander to attend the University of Glasgow, though what classes he attended remains unclear.[34] Scholars have concluded that he took at least four classes, including a course on Thomas Reid's common sense moral philosophy. This course significantly impacted Campbell, though he did not graduate from Glasgow.[35] His family left for Virginia the following spring, and he continued his education through self-study.[36] Throughout his life, he read extensively and acquired a significant library. In Virginia, Campbell continued teaching and

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[33] Rasor, "Common Sense", 5-6.
[34] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 87-128.
[35] Rasor, "Common Sense", 23-24.
[36] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 87-128.

tutoring and became increasingly involved in religious activities. He soon established an academy in his home that he oversaw for many years. Campbell's academy eventually grew into Bethany College, and he served as its first president.[37]

Finney was an active youth who did well in his classes when he could attend. As a young man, he taught for several years but stopped teaching when his mother became ill and required his assistance.[38] While assisting his mother, Finney attended law school for at least a portion of three years.[39] During the same years, he had a conversion experience and began seminary training under a mentorship program because he lacked the money to attend an established seminary. An excellent student, Finney became involved in the New Light wing of the church. Although he never completed a formal degree program, he was ordained and began preaching. Later in life, he taught theology at Oberlin College in Ohio, eventually becoming its president, a post he held for many years, despite often finding himself at odds with faculty and students.[40]

Smith had minimal formal schooling, and scholars debate whether he could read and write. The documents definitely written by him do not reveal a high level of education. However, many who knew him said he was well-read and a good conversationalist who followed contemporary events. As his parents' family grew, Smith usually hired out for manual labor but was interested in education his entire life.[41] While the temple in Kirtland, Ohio, was being built and the church's endowment established, Smith founded a school for training missionaries and church leaders. He founded comparable schools in each place he settled but left the teaching to others. He did not support public education or build a college. Smith directed his educational

[37] Bethany College, "Bethany: A Small College of Distinction," Bethany College, n.d., accessed November 10, 2016, http://www.bethanywv.edu/about-bethany.

[38] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 2-3, 5.

[39] The Gospel Truth Ministries, "Chronology of the Life Events of Charles Grandison Finney," The Gospel Truth Ministries, 2014, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.gospeltruth.net/finneychronology.htm.

[40] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 21, 24-25, 131.

[41] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 20, 28, 41-42.

efforts toward religious purposes, but his schools included basic educational elements because he believed literate missionaries were more effective at helping people and proselytization.[42]

Since none of the three men ever attained a formal, theological degree from a recognized denominational seminary, they would all qualify as the self-trained, or minimally trained, clergy Hatch argues established congregations and achieved religious success during the antebellum era based on personal charisma and self-study. Of the three, Finney came the closest to achieving a "proper" theological education by completing a mentorship program with a recognized churchman, George Washington Gale, and formal ordination into a recognized denomination.[43] Smith never attended any formal theological training. While Campbell attended a recognized educational institution that also dispensed clerical degrees for one winter, there is no evidence that he intended to pursue a ministerial degree at Glasgow.

<div align="center">Travel</div>

Daniel Howe argues in *What Had God Wrought* that the antebellum era saw profound technological and infrastructural development. Space and time contracted because of better transport facilities. The new transportation network enabled each man to travel extensively and spread their influence throughout the United States and even western Europe.[44] Few preachers in previous eras had such significant influence over such a vast area in such a short time.

Campbell traveled extensively during his youth and after he became the leading figure of the Restoration Movement. His first significant voyage involved leaving Ireland for the United States and stopping in Scotland. Despite shorter travel times, trans-Atlantic crossings were perilous, especially during the winter. Campbell eventually settled in Bethany, Virginia, where

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[42] Ibid, 210-212.
[43] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 24-27.
[44] Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: the Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

he spent most of his life.[45] As the foremost apologist of the Restoration Movement, he traveled extensively through Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee. He still had family in Ireland and Scotland that he returned to several times, spreading the Restoration Movement to England and Europe.

Finney traveled mainly in New York along the Erie Canal and to Oberlin College in Ohio. The Erie Canal figured prominently in his revivals. He developed his revival techniques in a region where he was comfortable and understood the culture. As his fame grew, he traveled to Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Wilmington, Providence, and other eastern population centers. His technique changed, and he proved less successful than along the Erie Canal, where he had successfully preached to the middle-class people affiliated with the canal and the opportunities it provided. He also traveled to England and Wales on two occasions to promote revivals.[46]

Smith traveled extensively through the New England states, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. During his youth, he frequently moved within New England. After establishing Mormonism, disgruntled neighbors forced him from New York, and he moved to Kirtland, Ohio. Beginning to establish a new religious center there, neighbors forced him to move to Missouri, where he first settled in Independence and then Far West. After being pushed from these areas, he settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, where he met his demise. Smith traveled frequently, and members of his church scouted distant locations Mormons could successfully settle. As the situation in Kirtland deteriorated, Mormons founded a second center in Missouri that required extensive travel between the two centers by members and leaders of the church. Smith frequently traveled the over one thousand miles between the two centers. He also frequently traveled to the East Coast, an additional thousand miles in the opposite direction. He never traveled to foreign countries,

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[45] Christianity Today, "Alexander Campbell," Christianity Today, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/denominationalfounders/alexander-campbell.html.
[46] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney,* 173, 174.

though the Mormon Church established missions in Canada, England, the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America during his lifetime. He sent missionaries to cover these countries while he remained in the United States. He traveled extensively in the United States for missionary activities, church business, and political reasons.[47]

## Politics

In an era of political democratization, these three religious leaders pursued influence. All three believed, however, that political pursuits were secondary to their church work. All three believed religious values should inform politics, but they did not believe their religious work should suffer because of their political pursuits.

Though a first-generation immigrant, Campbell enjoyed quick acceptance at the highest level of political activity. In 1829-1830, he was elected to the Virginia legislature for a session. He completed a year as a Virginia legislator, proposed several pieces of legislation, and was recognized as successful and influential by the state's political leaders.[48] He even attracted attention and received the compliments of several leaders at the federal level.[49] Throughout his life, he wrote about political issues in *The Millennial Harbinger*, especially slavery. Nevertheless, he consistently focused on his religious work because he believed he could not simultaneously pursue politics and religious efforts.[50] As president of Bethany College, he avoided most political issues of the day.[51]

Charles Finney became increasingly involved in the reform movements that were a hallmark of the antebellum era. He lived in New York, where many of these movements

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[47] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*.
[48] Lunger, *Political*, 12.
[49] Eva Jean Wrather, *Alexander Campbell: Adventures in Freedom: A Literary Biography,* vol.2 (Ft. Worth: TCU Press and the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 2007), 301.
[50] Ibid, 387.
[51] Lunger, *Political.*

originated and had a significant influence. Despite his affinity for several reform movements -

including temperance, abolition, and women's rights - he opposed the tactics of many reformers.

He believed that individual moral change was more important than the moral reform of society

because a person who had found Christ would naturally accept most of the reforms. Finney's

approach put him at odds with many reform leaders who believed that changing society would

promote individual betterment.[52] Many reform leaders made individual conversion secondary

and concentrated on achieving social reform.[53] Finney rejected this approach, believing instead

that conversion needed to remain the primary focus and that reform would follow. Thus, he

believed reformers should promote revivals to secure the eternal salvation of individuals rather

than promote social change of secondary importance. Many reformers openly criticized Finney's

approach, and Oberlin College adopted reforms such as abolition that directly conflicted with

Finney's position. Finney did, however, embrace women's rights, promoting co-ed education,

the formal involvement of women in ministry, and women's suffrage. His support for women's

rights probably reflected the influence of his three wives, all of whom were involved in

progressively greater degrees in the women's movement.[54]

Of the three figures, Smith was most directly involved in politics. As he developed his

denomination, he concluded that the church should develop cities rather than congregations. He

instructed converts to Mormonism to move to a central location where they could establish the

New Jerusalem. Many Americans shared Smith's view of the United States as a New Jerusalem,

but Smith and his followers believed democracy was neither desirable nor necessary.[55] Smith

transposed the hierarchical church structure of Mormonism to the political realm, calling on

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[52] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney.*
[53] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 81-104.
[54] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 198-227, 237.
[55] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 101-105, 122-126, 500-525.

Mormons to vote in blocks as directed by their leaders.[56] Although the lowest levels of the

Mormon hierarchy were more democratic and focused on lay leadership, the highest offices of

the church were strictly hierarchical. Opponents feared Mormonism in part because of its

antidemocratic structure and practice.[57] During his career, Smith served in several political

offices, primarily to promote Mormonism.[58] As the opposition to the church grew, Mormons

tried to use politics to influence public policy. Mormon leaders worked to control the ballot box

and elect Mormons and candidates friendly to Mormonism. Smith held various political offices

in Missouri and Illinois, including militia leader, justice of peace, mayor, and councilman. As

Smith gained national prominence and opposition to Mormonism increased, Mormons attempted

to garner support from local, state, and federal politicians. When Mormons failed to gain support,

Smith pursued the presidency of the United States.[59] Although never a viable national candidate,

Smith's campaign represented the most audacious political effort by any of these three religious

leaders.

<div align="center">Theology</div>

These three leaders differed the most in theology. Campbell and Finney never questioned

traditional Christian beliefs but rather how the church represented these beliefs and social

expectations. Smith, the least well-trained of the three in formal theology, had little concern for

traditional Christianity. As Hatch states, all three reflected the move toward a more exuberant

worship style, were charismatic leaders who spoke extemporaneously from the pulpit and

encouraged lay involvement in the church.[60] However, they achieved these ends in different

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[56] Annette P. Hampshire, "Nauvoo Politics," BYU Harold B. Lee Library, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Nauvoo_Politics.
[57] Bushman, *Joseph Smith.*
[58] Ask a Mormon, "Prophet Joseph Smith," Timeline, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, http://prophetjosephsmith.org/index/life_joseph_smith/joseph_smith_timeline.
[59] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 514-517.
[60] Hatch, *Democratization*, 12-16.

ways and placed differing emphasis on the aspects.

Coming from a traditional Presbyterian clerical family, Campbell started within a traditional church structure. Influenced by common sense moral philosophy, he came to see the divisions within Christianity as the most significant weaknesses of the faith. Along with his father and other religious leaders with similar ideas, Campbell developed the theological framework that supported his beliefs and became the spokesman for a group of like-minded theologians and preachers.[61] He struggled to develop a consistent theology that supported Christian unity despite denominational differences and became the foremost theologian concerned with making unity a reality.[62] Although in 1839 Campbell wrote The Christian System, which spelled out his views on Christianity and church structure, he never wrote a formal systematic theology that would have laid out his theological beliefs. Despite this, he was instrumental in shaping other leaders' thinking regarding unifying Christians. Campbell's views helped weaken established church hierarchies and enabled increased lay involvement.[63] Campbell believed the lay leadership of individual congregations represented the highest organizational structure in the church. Each congregation acted autonomously, and as long as it obeyed Scripture, no organizational structure could direct its form of worship or clergy. Each congregation freely chose its preacher and leaders without a central leadership overseeing training. The congregation also decided membership and could accept or deny anyone who approached the congregation.[64] When an individual's beliefs are consistent with Scripture, a congregation should embrace them as a fellow Christian.[65] Here Campbell encountered

[61] Scott Harp, "History of the Restoration Movement," Restoration History, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, http://www.therestorationmovement.com.
[62] Rasor, "Common Sense", 7.
[63] Christianity Today, "Charles Finney."
[64] Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians, and the Restoration of Primitive Christianity, As Plead in the Current Reformation* (Pittsburg: Forrester and Campbell, 1839).
[65] Granville T. Walker, *Preaching in the Thought of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1954), 128.

significant opposition. In principle, many agreed with the supremacy of the congregation, but how the congregation decided who was acceptable became a problem. Campbell was forced to become a referee, a development he had not foreseen and did not seek. Campbell chose the early first-century church structure described in Acts as his model for each congregation.[66] Believing that common sense enabled the words of Scripture to be understood by all, he proposed several criteria for determining membership in the congregation and who was fit for congregational leadership. Campbell believed his criteria were simple and self-explanatory, but they were difficult to apply.[67] Campbell spent most of his career and much of his writing trying to answer these questions. These areas also generated significant controversy and garnered his personal attention. Campbell's charisma and influence held together the conglomeration of individual congregations that resulted. No one could assume his position when he died, and individual congregations faced difficult choices.[68] Some congregations became autonomous, rejected any cohesive organization, and became the Churches of Christ. Other congregations gradually adopted a more hierarchical governing structure, with little setting them apart from other congregational-based churches. These churches eventually became the Disciples of Christ and assumed a formal denominational structure.[69]

Finney started preaching later in life after an early career in law. The revivals in New York influenced his search for salvation, and his training for the ministry followed a mentorship model. The preacher who mentored him was an Old Light Presbyterian, and Finney initially embraced similar ideas. However, after Finney began preaching at smaller revivals, he realized that Old Light Calvinism limited individual choice and offered a weak foundation for a revivalist

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[66] Charles W. King, *Acts: Blueprint for the Church* (Lulu Publishing Services, 2016).
[67] Campbell, *The Christian System.*
[68] Peter A. Verkruyse, *Prophet, Pastor, and Patriarch: The Rhetorical Laedership of Alexander Campbell* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005) , 153.
[69] Harp, "History."

ministry. He gradually shifted to a New Light position, espousing a theology between

Arminianism and Calvinism. Finney emphasized the sovereignty of God while simultaneously

embracing individual choice, the focus of his revivals. He eventually decided his position was

unsustainable within the Presbyterian Church, and rather than face expulsion, he switched to the

Congregational Church, which accepted his approach.[70] Individual choice also fit well with

Finney's later emphasis on social reform. Finney focused on individual choice more than most

evangelical theologians and churchmen of his day. He eventually felt compelled to write a

Systematic Theology that placed his views within those of accepted Christian principles.[71]

Finney believed in individual perfection, a notion at odds with much of the established Protestant

teaching of his day. However, it fit well with Finney's emphasis on individual conversion

through revivalism. Finney's belief that perfection was achievable in this world resulted in

significant friction between Finney and other evangelicals.[72] Finney encouraged exuberant

expressions at his early revivals, a practice that garnered him considerable opposition. Finney

tamed such enthusiasm in later revivals, establishing a "seekers bench" that identified potential

converts without the extreme emotionalism of his earlier revivals.[73] Finney carried his message

and revivals to established population centers, developing the idea of noon prayer meetings for

businessmen and sparking several businessmen's revivals.[74]

  Both Campbell and Finney remained within the bounds of established Christian practice

and belief. Although some individuals disapproved of their teachings, they remained within

traditional evangelical boundaries and emphasized Scripture.

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[70] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 23-28, 36-40, 108, 122, 162-163.
[71] Charles G. Finney, "Systematic Theology (1878)," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2015, accessed December 2, 2016, http://www.ccel.org/f/finney/theology/.
[72] Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 181-185.
[73] Ibid, 101-130.
[74] William P. Farley, "Charles Finney: The Controversial Evangelist," AG Enrichment Journal, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200601/200601_118_Finney.cfm.

Smith was a different story. His search for salvation and a suitable denomination led him

to conclude that God had appointed him as a prophet with instructions to bring to light a new

Scripture. Initially unsuccessful in convincing those beyond his family and close associates of

the legitimacy of his message, he translated the plates he claimed he had been given into the

*Book of Mormon* which became an additional Scripture for believing Mormons. Other books and

revelations followed, pushing Mormonism further from established Christian beliefs and toward

a new religion.[75] In contrast to Campbell, Smith did not seek to end the boundaries between

denominations, but he shared with Campbell a concern to restore the church to its first-century

roots as described in Scripture. The two leaders disagreed over how to achieve this end, but they

attempted to do so from different perspectives.

Smith developed a clerical and political hierarchy that did not exist in any of the churches

of his day.[76] Smith developed temples instead of churches in as many places settled by Mormons

as he could. These temples were significant, not just as symbols of the New Jerusalem and as

replacements for the actual Jerusalem temple, destroyed in 70 AD, but as places where Smith's

new church was able to perform sacred rituals, known as endowments, which gave new meaning

to marriage, including plural and eternal marriage, ordination to the different levels of the

priesthood, and places where dead relatives and acquaintances could be baptized through proxy

allowing them to enter heaven with their Mormon relatives.[77] He did not produce any formal

theological works, but his Book of Mormon and the other texts he wrote represented a theology

no longer centered on the Christian Bible. Other denominations differed over the interpretation

of established Scripture, while Smith introduced new sacred texts. Unlike Finney, Smith was

unconcerned with revivals and the salvation of individual souls. Instead, he sought to establish a

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[75] Bushman, *Joseph Smith,* 35-41.
[76] Ibid, 251-269.
[77] Ibid, 448-452.

new church, one that he believed God had directed him to build. Smith's need for personal

relationships led him to establish endowment ceremonies in the temples he built and develop

ways in which people could be spiritually united.[78] The endowments drifted even further from

traditional Christian belief, embracing polygamous and eternal marriage, baptism for the dead,

and other beliefs. Smith asserted that these practices did not violate the Scripture, but he did not

feel bound by the Bible when formulating his beliefs.

## Preaching Style

All three were known as extemporaneous preachers who did not write out sermons. This

does not mean that sermons were flippant remarks since all three spent significant time preparing

for preaching engagements. Formal homiletics were not a significant part of sermon preparation

for any of them. This means that few sermons survive from any of these men, and the few that do

are usually paraphrases from notes others took during the sermon.

Finney's revivals were highly fluid events that did not lend themselves to verbatim

sermon preparation practices. Although much of what Finney said during different revivals was

similar, in most cases, the order in which he spoke about things and his emphasis on certain

aspects varied significantly from place to place and was audience and time specific. There is no

known recorded template for a Finney revival sermon and it is doubtful that Finney kept such a

device. Since Finney usually used a few specific passages from the Bible for his revivals, he

developed an extemporaneous way of speaking about these areas of Scripture.[79]

Campbell was well known as an extemporaneous speaker who usually preached

exegetical sermons, which began at one Scriptural passage and continued directly through to a

concluding portion of Scripture. These segments were more extensive than those usually used by

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[78] Ibid, 217, 308-315.
[79] Farley, "Charles Finney."

preachers of the established denominations and were mainly explanatory rather than the topical

approach that many denominational preachers used. Campbell often preached sermons as a

series, with each sermon starting with the Scripture verse where the previous sermon had ended

until the whole passage originally chosen was elucidated. This approach fit well with Campbell's

belief that Scripture was written so that anyone of average intelligence could understand and

profit from it. It also fits well with the emphasis on the individual study of the Scripture which

was encouraged during this era by preachers such as these men.[80]

Smith rarely preached during a worship service like typical denominational preachers did.

He rarely used the Bible as the focal point of his sermons. He relied instead on a mixture of

church business and expositions of the revelatory writings, such as the Book of Mormon and the

other writings Smith had translated, which he introduced to the people. He also included new

revelations he received and then explained how these applied to the community's current

situation. He was open to questions from the congregations and even encouraged such questions

as long as they did not question his authority.[81]

Finney's service could begin with a passage of Scripture he frequently used but rapidly

moved in any direction depending on the situation. He was accepting of outbursts and other

vocalizations from the audience. His sermon often shifted its focus and included the expressed

congregational elements.[82] Smith also allowed audience participation in his sermons but was

much stricter about the content of these interruptions and did not allow the spontaneity that

Finney allowed.[83] Campbell was the more traditional of the three. He did not allow disordered

utterances from the audience to change his sermon. Although he preached extemporaneously, he

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[80] Walker, *Preaching.*
[81] Bushman, *Joseph Smith.*
[82] Farley, "Charles Finney."
[83] Bushman, *Joseph Smith.*

had a set agenda for that service, which he followed.[84]

## Recruitment Methods

None of the three men recruited members like traditional denominational ministers did. The traditional approach saw regular church services conducted by an ordained minister of a specific congregation who preached in the church built for his congregation. Interested people were expected to show up at the church and eventually join the congregation. There was little active recruitment involved of people who did not attend church at the appointed service time.

Campbell used a camp meeting approach when operating in areas where no churches were part of the Restoration Movement. He did not have a specific church where he regularly preached. In the early years of his ministry, he traveled extensively through Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Ohio like an itinerant preacher. As congregations became established, he would visit existing congregations, and occasionally the existing congregations would sponsor a camp meeting revival to attract new members from the area. After the revival, Campbell would leave. The local congregation took over all ministerial duties, including preaching and further recruitment, and became a church modeled on the first-century churches in Acts. An area that generated friction between Campbell and denominational churches was the frequent leaving of existing denominations by fully established congregations that had accepted the Restoration ideas promulgated by Campbell. In a time when Baptists and Methodists were actively establishing conferences composed of several congregations in a geographical region, these congregational exits encouraged by Campbell were seen as a serious breach of etiquette since traditional denominations did not accept the recruitment of members by outside ministers from existing congregations or denominations to create another.[85] Prior to Campbell, few preachers

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[84] Walker, *Preaching*.
[85] Christianity Today, "Alexander Campbell."

recruited entire congregations.

Smith's approach was the most different. He recruited not just members or congregations but developed whole cities from the ground up, which were then expected to adhere to a theocratic model. Once a member joined Mormonism, all of life became a part of the church. Involvement with the church did not end with Sunday service. It continued throughout the week, working as part of a Mormon community to establish the New Jerusalem in spiritual and earthly realms. One was not accepted as a full community member unless one became a church member. Thus church and community became merged in a way that was not normative for the era.[86] The lack of concern about individual salvation and the concern about the development of the community was different from any of the other two men. Although Finney was involved with some groups intending to reform society, these were reformations of existing society and not the creation of a totally new sort of society that Smith promoted.

Conclusions

Although similar in some ways, Campbell, Smith, and Finney were more different than they were similar. They were also different from their contemporaries in church work. Nevertheless, they were all a good fit for their era, allowing for significant religious experimentation that would not have been acceptable in previous eras. Although all were on the edge of acceptable religious behavior, Smith is the only one who crossed the invisible line between creatively different and unacceptable.

The lives and ministries of these three churchmen support Hatch's statements regarding religion during this era. Ecstatic religious expression was not only allowed but actively encouraged by Finney. Campbell allowed some behaviors, especially during camp meetings,

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[86] Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 251-269.

which would have been considered inappropriate by many. Although church members behaved with decorum during regular services and in ways that would have been acceptable to most denominations, there was less concern with social and cultural hierarchy than a typical denominational church would have displayed. Smith did not allow the ecstatic displays but allowed congregational involvement in church services in a way that would not have been acceptable in established denominational churches.

Campbell's origins put him into an elite category that would not fit Hatch's statement about church leaders. However, the lack of formal ministerial training and affiliation with an existing denomination would have qualified. Finney did have the proper origin to meet Hatch's criteria, but his mentorship training and eventual ordination into an established denomination would give him more training and church status than Hatch seems to indicate. Smith would completely qualify since he had neither the training nor the origin to be church leadership material.

All three preached in extemporaneous styles, with Campbell coming across as stuffy and overeducated in some quarters. Finney had more success with his revival techniques when preaching to people similar to those he grew up with along the Erie Canal. He did, however, strive to develop a more sophisticated style and had increasing success among the higher classes later in his ministry. Smith never preached what most churches would have considered a sermon, but did use an extemporaneous style during his church meetings which worked well with the lower classes usually composing his congregations.

All three used recruitment techniques that fall into the novel category. None just held regular services in a denominational church building and waited for a congregation to show up.

The established hierarchies did not approve of any of the three. Finney came the closest

to acceptance with ordination in a Presbyterian conference and transfer to a Congregational one. Toward the end of his ministry, he attained celebrity status and was welcome in many quarters of society. Campbell grew up in the Presbyterian church but left all denominational religion as a young man. He was well-accepted politically and socially but did not ever achieve full acceptance in religion. Smith was not accepted either in society or in religion. Smith was eventually killed by forces in society which saw him as such a threat to the social order that his death seemed to be the only solution.

Overall Campbell, Smith, and Finney verify the statements of Hatch and demonstrate a definite trend toward a more democratic form of religion.

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