

Milligan's Passivity During the Civil Rights Movement: Its Theological Roots and the Hopeful
Movement Towards an Active Approach to Social Justice

Isaac Wood

Dr. Todd Edmondson

COMP 211 - Inquiring Minds: Foundational Analytical Composition

With issues of racial and social injustice at the forefront of American concern, Christians today come face to face with the question of how to approach such issues. As ever, there are differing opinions - while one side labels the other as "radical and progressive", the other extreme responds with "fundamental and racist". Division is not new. During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s there were two polarized sides, one in favor of social change and one against it. Many people, however, occupied a middle ground of moderation and passivity. The American Church divided itself along almost identical lines during the 19th century over how to handle slavery. One side thought that Christians should not endorse slavery, some thought it should be allowed, and some fell into passive moderation. These lines of argumentation have pervaded issues of social change throughout the history of racial injustice in America.

Christian historian Jemar Tisby, in *The Color of Compromise*, writes against passivity among Christians in regards to racist oppression. He argues that throughout America's history of racial injustice "[Christians] chose comfort over constructive conflict and in so doing created and maintained a status quo of injustice."¹ Tisby continues to say that the passivity of Christians has given way for hatred: "the failure of Christians to decisively oppose racism provided fertile soil for the seeds of hatred to grow."² (Tisby 15) Acknowledging these truths is important. However, Christians must not simply look dejectedly at the church's shortcomings in the past without allowing them to inspire its actions now and moving forward. Tisby says that honest reflection is only the beginning of the process: "There can be no repentance without confession. And there can be no confession without truth."³ With this in mind, Christians should approach the Church's

¹ Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 15.

² Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 15.

³ Ibid.

past of complicity in racial injustice with a humility that allows them to seek truth and admit shortcomings with the ultimate goal of turning from and rejecting their former complicity.

One of the most well known Christian leaders during the Civil Rights era was Billy Graham, the leader of the Evangelical movement. Martin Luther King Jr. was a preacher and leader in the Civil Rights Movement. King and Graham, as influential Christian leaders at the time, had the opportunity to speak out against racial injustice. King did so, but Graham did not. He did take certain admirable steps, but as a whole he failed to utilize his platform to shape the Christian conversation towards justice.

Milligan College, a private Christian institution of higher learning in East Tennessee, also had the opportunity to shape the Christian conversation through its institutional decisions.

Amidst the popular Evangelicalism and its moderacy toward racial justice, this Christian college could have proactively paved a road in advocating for social justice. Instead, it exhibited a reactionary response to the Civil Rights Movement similar to the approach of Billy Graham and his evangelical movement. Although not an adversary of civil rights, Milligan failed to lead the charge amidst calls for racial justice. Instead, it tended to act according to the status quo. The first black student enrolled at Milligan in 1968. By that time, although not an ubiquitous agreement, integration was generally deemed to be a good thing. Milligan's reactionary response regarding integration has roots in the founding movement of the college.

Milligan was founded as a part of the Stone-Campbell movement in the 19th century. Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone were alive when America was having the debate over slavery. Amid such a lively debate the founders of the movement were, rightly, expected to speak on the issue at hand. Alexander Campbell's stance proved to be diplomatically accomadating to both sides of the issue (pro-slavery and anti-slavery) for the sake of unity while

Barton Stone spoke out against slavery in accordance with his apocalyptic worldview. However, as the two figures and their followerships became a single movement, the approach of Campbell took precedence over Stone's focus on social justice. Being a part of that movement, Milligan has naturally been affected by the theology of its founders. Because of that, understanding the founders' approaches to social issues of their time is necessary in order to understand Milligan and its response in the face of social, specifically racial, injustices.

Milligan's motto is "Christian Education - the Hope of the World". As a true educator and nourisher of young minds and souls, Milligan has undoubtedly lived up to that motto, evidenced in countless people who leave their four years there transformed and prepared to quite literally change the world. Even so, like all people and all institutions, it is affected by the context in which it exists. The Christian context during the Civil Rights era and the tenets of the Stone-Campbell Movement impacted the response of Milligan in the face of racial injustice and oppression. The school's initial approach, or lack thereof, was neither a stark opposition to civil rights nor a staunch agent of change, as Barton Stone might have encouraged. Instead, the institution seemed to follow in Alexander Campbell's footsteps of moderacy as it managed the diplomatic interplay between each side of the issue. Such a stance was responsive instead of proactive. A passive approach is not equipped to address the issues of the world such as poverty, violence, human rights, and climate change. Christians should take an active approach against the world's issues so that it might grow closer to being what it was created to be. An analysis of Milligan's response and its contextual catalysts can help us begin to understand why silence and inaction exist among the tradition of Christianity; this honest confession is integral in the work of moving forward in loving and justice-oriented action against social injustices of all kinds.

The general term "Civil Rights Movement" refers to the period in the 1950s and 60s when people in America called for change in the face of racial injustice. The Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* decided, in 1954, that the segregation of public schools is unconstitutional. This decision can be considered as a tangible starting point of the movement.⁴ Although many schools remained segregated at first, this decision was the spark that ignited the minds of many American people who began to protest injustice throughout the 50s and 60s.⁵ The 60s brought a sense of success when President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968.⁶

During this time two prominent leaders of American Christianity, Martin Luther King Jr. and Billy Graham, represented two approaches to injustice taken by Christians. The work of Martin Luther King Jr. as a political activist and religious leader shows that the American church had a large influence on the push for civil rights at that time. There is no doubt that the Civil Rights Movement was very much influenced by Christian thought and action. Still, it would be a mistake to tout Martin Luther King Jr. and the expression of Christianity he represented but fail to assess Billy Graham and the expression of Christianity he represented.

Graham has received praise for being against segregation, but he still failed to be an active voice in support of civil rights. One moment he is praised for is when he took down ropes that divided black and white seating at one of his crusades in 1953. Tisby gives him credit for efforts to desegregate his events, a stance that many white moderates did not match. However, he also points to Graham's failure to proactively speak out for change. One example is when he "avoided scheduling crusades in the South for a period" after the *Brown v. Board* decision.⁷

⁴ History.com Editors. "Civil Rights Movement Timeline." HISTORY.
<https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/civil-rights-movement-timeline>.

⁵ Civil Rights Movement Timeline

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 134.

Tisby explains that although Graham took certain, small steps toward civil rights, "he assiduously avoided any countercultural stances that would have alienated his largely white audience and his supporters."⁸ In other words, he chose to sacrifice boldly speaking against injustice for the sake of attractability. It should have been the other way around. The avoidance of controversial viewpoints for the sake of diplomacy is a longstanding tradition that Christians should be weary of, especially as it led Alexander Campbell to take a neutral stance in response to slavery and influenced Milligan during the Civil Rights era.

Milligan's tradition, the Stone-Campbell movement, was not directly linked to Billy Graham and the Evangelical movement he led, but, as part of the church, they were interrelated. The students, faculty, and administration at the time would have been aware of his ideals. In fact *The Stampede* (Milligan's school newspaper) reported in 1967 that the President of Milligan at the time, Dr. Dean Walker, attended a meeting with other church leaders that was organized by Billy Graham "to consider a joint evangelistic strategy."⁹ This meeting reveals that Milligan's president was at least engaged with Graham's focus on evangelism. This should clearly not be seen as a bad thing. As a Christian institution and adherer to Jesus' command to go and make disciples, Milligan naturally would have been engaged with the most prominent Christian leader and would rightly have participated in considering a "joint evangelistic strategy." However, a single minded focus on evangelism can lead to a neglect to take action against injustice, a neglect that can be identified in Milligan's passive stance during the Civil Rights era.

Articles in *The Stampede* at that time give snapshots of how Milligan responded at that time. There are articles by students that support social change and those that oppose it. One

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Dr. Walker Attends Convention, Oct. 20, 1967." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n447/mode/2up?q=billy+graham>.

example of opposition comes from a student who wrote, "It is certainly easier to be a rabble-rouser than to play it cool and think,"¹⁰ implying that people insisting on change are just taking the easy way out. The diversity of such articles suggests that students did not hold a widespread consensus on the matter, which makes sense as it is a body of people who do not all share the same ideas. Along with articles that reveal students' point of view, there are also published articles in *The Stampede* that show the perspective of staff at the time.

Dr. C. Robert Wetzel was a professor at that time who would later go on to be an administrator. He is still appreciated by professors and former students alike for his helpfulness and jovial character. A student published an interview with him that gives voice to potential concerns with Milligan's approach to civil rights and Dr. Wetzel's thoughtful responses to those concerns. The interview from May of 1968 includes answers to many pointed questions such as what Milligan's "unspoken sentiment" towards black people had been and how Milligan would handle different situations that might arise with integration.¹¹ Dr. Wetzel expressed consistent support for integration on campus and said that most of Milligan's campus had an "enlightened view" and did not object to having black students on campus.¹² Although, when asked if he had "seen signs of extreme racial prejudice", he did admit, "If by extreme racial prejudice, you mean overt actions such as we read about in the papers, no, I haven't. If you mean a prejudice that prevents racial dialogue, very definitely yes."¹³ He continues to say, "I would hope that meaningful dialogue could continue because, no matter how much we differ from each other, this

¹⁰ Coleman, Phil. "Playing it Cool in a Hot Spot, April 17, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n713/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.

¹¹ Rohrbaugh, John. "Interview With Dr. Wetzel, May 29, 1968." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n579/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.

¹² Rohrbaugh, "Interview With Dr. Wetzel."

¹³ Ibid.

is the kind of problem that needs to be the subject of continuing dialogue."¹⁴ To conclude his answer to that question, he said, "Milligan College has always been known for its friendliness and its courtesy, and I think it will continue to be that way."¹⁵

To follow up on Dr. Wetzel's previous answer, the interviewer asked, "Even with its friendliness and courtesy, why has Milligan College never been integrated?"¹⁶ Dr. Wetzel responded, "Let me give this some historical perspective."¹⁷ He went on to explain how "we don't have a large Negro membership in the Christian churches" and that he thought East Tennessee State University in Johnson City was more attractive to black students at the time.¹⁸ These are potentially valid propositions for practical causes. However, the end of his answer importantly reveals a reality of Milligan's motivation through the years prior, while also giving an example of how to reflect honestly on one's own past: "Then I'm confident that to some degree there has been a time in the history of Milligan College when it was thought that for expeditious reasons it would be better to maintain the status quo."¹⁹ This sentence suggests that Milligan had failed to initiate integration because going against the status quo would not have been helpful for "expeditious reasons". He did not elaborate on what he meant by this term. It could have meant that it would have been impractical. It could have meant that it was better to not take a definitive stance for the sake of financial efficiency. One cannot be sure.

One possibility is that Milligan might have wanted to avoid negative reactions from financially contributing churches and individuals who might have disagreed with integration. Dr. Wetzel was asked if integration would offend supporting churches, and he definitively responded:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

To a certain degree whatever stand we take on any kind of social question is going to receive criticism. It is a matter of judging the ultimate influence of that criticism: whether it is a matter of following an expediency or whether it is a matter of standing on moral principle. I personally believe that by far the greater percentage of our church people have an enlightened view about this matter. I don't think that our location is a serious factor. East Tennessee State University has had Negro students in it for years, and really we're coming to this so late in the game that the problem has been pretty well settled for us in other circles.²⁰

Dr. Wetzel's attitude towards criticism aligns with the views of people such as Tisby, as he says that Milligan should not respond to criticism that is based in practicality or ease. Instead, it should listen to criticism that is "a matter of standing on moral principle". However, just a few answers before, Dr. Wetzel explained Milligan's lack of integration was because "it was thought that for expeditious reasons it would be better to maintain the status quo." He goes on to say that ETSU's campus had been integrated "for years" and "we're coming to this so late in the game that the problem has been pretty well settled for us in other circles." Dr. Wetzel's elevation of moral principle over expediency is exactly what is needed to bring about social justice, but that does not negate the reality that Milligan was far from leading the charge in doing so. By this time, the problem had been "pretty well settled for [them] in other circles." In other words, for the school to integrate in 1968 was not going against the status quo, but simply going along with the status quo once it had moved toward racial justice.

In March of 1969, a student named George Balser expressed reproach towards the bias he perceived in the speakers chosen for the college's required convocations. Balser's critique included a description of the narrow point of view that had been given voice at convocations:

The choice of speakers has reflected an extremely biased point of view, not permitting students to hear a greater number of those representing points of view other than conservative Christianity. We have been exposed to Christian speakers condoning our war effort, expressing ultra - conservative thoughts concerning the Negro civil rights

²⁰ Ibid.

movement, and still others who strongly oppose student activism. Yet, we have not heard one Christian leader speak of pacification, love, or peace.²¹

Balser continues to call for a more balanced presentation of different perspectives on what it means to respond to their social situation as Christians. Balser is an example of a student who thought Milligan was not using its speaking platform at convocation to present students with Christians who supported being proactive in the fight for racial justice.

In the following month's issue, *The Stampede* published an interview with Dr. Dennison, a Milligan faculty member who was in charge of scheduling convocation speakers, that addressed the "Letter to the Editor" in the prior issue. The interview did not spend a lot of time discussing the lack of diversity among convocation speakers. But, Dennison did briefly speak to it. He said that they had tried to "make it as varied as possible" and went on to explain how they were making efforts to include more diverse opinions.²² Generally, his responses did not admit to any fault in the previous choices for convocation speakers. To be fair, their previous choices might have been plenty varied, and Balser might have been a student looking for anything to support his argument against compulsory convocation. But to completely dismiss him as a disgruntled student would be to ignore the perspective of a Milligan student at that time who seems to be clear headed when he wrote, "Yet, we have not heard one Christian leader speak of pacification, love, or peace."²³ And if Balser's claims of extreme bias were grounded, then that was a large oversight from Milligan during such an important time. Further, Dennison avoided any acknowledgement of such a mistake. Instead, he gave answers that kept Milligan's conduct

²¹ Balser, Gregory. "Letter to the Editor, March 14, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n695/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.

²² Rohrbaugh, John. "Interview With Dr. Dennison, April 17, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n713/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.

²³ Balser, "Letter to the Editor."

in a good light and failed to take the first step in moving toward reconciliation: confession. The lack of confession in this interview is an example of Milligan not taking advantage of a chance to actively pursue justice during the Civil Rights era.

This is not to say, however, that Milligan completely failed to enact changes on campus for the sake of racial justice. In fact, in *Stampede* articles from the late 60s there are multiple examples of Milligan personnel responding with honesty and activism (not to mention all the people who might have opposed racial injustice at Milligan who simply did not have an article written about them). As described above, Dr. Wetzel offers an example of a leader at the college who honestly assessed the reality of Milligan's response to racial injustice. In the interview with Dr. Dennison, he speaks of change already happening at that point: "Next week, by vote of the Student Council, we are bringing Bill Milliken and two Negroes who are very tuned in to the drug problem and the civil rights problem to our campus."²⁴ This shows that they were already beginning to take heed of the call for diversified perspectives. That continued when Dr. James Hefley spoke at the first convocation of the following year.

Dr. Hefley opened with, "I challenge you to wake up to your mad, mad world," as he spoke to an audience of around eight hundred people at the 1969-1970 formal Fall Convocation.²⁵ According to *The Stampede*, he went on to pointedly call out Christianity for its lack of zeal and "urged, then, that Christians be more radical for their cause, instead of being identified with 'the status quo of live-and-let-live... philosophy."²⁶ He did, however, warn that, "Courageous Christian prophets have always been opposed by the self-sufficient, we've-never-had-it-so-good majority."²⁷ Dr. Hefley here presents a perspective that advocates for

²⁴ Rohrbaugh, "Interview With Dr. Dennison"

²⁵ "First convocation held, Oct. 3, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n733/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>

²⁶ "First convocation held."

²⁷ Ibid.

Christians to be proactive and radical instead of just going along with the status quo. His perspective and the fact that he was chosen to speak at the opening convocation ceremony point to a shift in Milligan's approach to civil rights. Similarly, Dr. Wetzel's honest reflection on Milligan's prior adherence to the status quo is an example of someone who is willing to admit past shortcomings. These are all good things, but they came late in the game. All of these developments happened at the end of the 1960s. Milligan had begun to make changes, but only once it was expected that they would do so.

Although friendly and courteous with a generally "enlightened view", as Dr. Wetzel described previously, Milligan had not been a forerunner in the quest for integration. *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided by the Supreme Court in 1954,²⁸ which means integration had been a topic of discussion in the country since then, and likely before. In the *Stampede* article, published in 1968, Dr. Wetzel acknowledged, "We currently have two Negro students in our student body,"²⁹ which is corroborated by *Milligan Celebrates 150 Years: Scholarship, Community, Faith*. Following its highlight on integration, the book of Milligan history goes on to say, "These individuals are signs that steps were taking place to make the Milligan community more racially diverse, an effort that has been ongoing."³⁰ While this development undoubtedly points to efforts towards diversity, it still was not until 1968 before a black young adult was enrolled as a Milligan student. Nearly fifteen years had passed between when the Supreme Court decided that black and white students should be educated together and when Milligan began taking these steps to "make the Milligan community more racially diverse." It is good that these steps were taken, but they should have happened sooner. Milligan, as an institution during the

²⁸ Civil Rights Movement Timeline

²⁹ Rohrbaugh, "Interview With Dr. Wetzel."

³⁰ Holloway and Fierbaugh, *Milligan Celebrates 150 Years*,

Civil Rights Movement, had the opportunity to actively lead the charge towards racial justice, but they did not. Why?

To understand Milligan's passive response, it is necessary to examine the non-denominational Christian movement from which it emerged, known today both as the Stone-Campbell Movement and the Restoration Movement. The movement's two titular figures, Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell, were 19th century evangelists who led Christian movements in Kentucky that eventually joined forces to form what the movement is known as today. Milligan's website states that it has "maintained an active relationship with the nondenominational Christian churches. Committed to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and the unity of all believers, these congregations are a dynamic and growing fellowship."³¹ The "restoration of New Testament Christianity" and "the unity of all believers" are two foundational elements of the Stone-Campbell movement. Although the theological and historical origins of the movement are more complex than these two ideas, they were two of the most important tenets for the movement and have undoubtedly continued to inform its members and their theologies, including Milligan and its response to the Civil Rights Movement.

These two principles, the restoration of New Testament Christianity and the unity of all believers, were especially important to Alexander Campbell, and they were actualized in three perspectives on the Bible and Christianity. As explained by Richard T. Hughes in *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, "To understand Campbell at this point, we must assess his theological agenda in three respects," which are the reading of scripture, individual conversion versus social ethics, and the canon within the canon.³² These

³¹ "A Christ-Centered University." *Milligan*. Last modified May 29, 2020. <https://www.milligan.edu/academics/a-christ-centered-college/#a-christ-centered-college>.

³² Hughes, Richard T. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 274.

three aspects of Campbell's theology sprout from the focus on scripture for the sake of restoring New Testament Christianity.

Campbell's reading of scripture involved viewing the biblical text as a scientific manual of sorts which prescribed ways of living for the church and Christians which would bring uniformity when it came to "the essentials" or "matters of faith."³³ For Campbell, the only essentials were those for which the Bible gave clear directions.³⁴ Since other issues were not discussed in the Bible and were therefore not central to the Christian faith, they "were not suitable issues for debate in the larger Christian community."³⁵ This view of scripture led Campbell to make the claim that, although slavery was an important social issue, it was not the duty of the Church to address it.

Like Billy Graham, Campbell had a strong focus on the conversion of individuals and their "obedience to 'first principles' - faith, repentance, confession, and immersion."³⁶ Although he did not completely separate ethics from the Christian life, he dedicated such a large amount of time focusing on the specifics of individual conversion that he failed to give adequate attention to questions of social justice. Individual conversion is certainly important, but if Christians are only worried about conversion then they fail to consider what being a Christian requires when it comes to racial injustices.

Campbell also deemed a specific section of the Bible to be the source of the regulations to which Christians should devote most of their attention. He believed Christians should return to the early Christian age of the Bible, which he considered to have begun with the Pentecost in Acts 2.³⁷ Because of that, he placed his focus on the section of the Bible from Acts 2 to

³³ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 274.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 275.

³⁷ Ibid.

Revelation 22.³⁸ This "effectively downplayed those biblical materials that spoke most directly to questions of social justice - the Old Testament prophets, for example, and the Gospels, which contain the pointed teachings of Jesus regarding compassion and social concern."³⁹ Campbell focused on the early church and therefore avoided many texts from the rest of the Bible. He did not give voice to many texts that advocate for social justice and care for the oppressed.

All of these Biblical perspectives were integral in the theology of Alexander Campbell, and he applied them to his arguments concerning slavery. The stance he took was to hold a position that would not be off putting to either Christian abolitionists or Christians in support of slavery. In an article that assesses Campbell's arguments on slavery, T. Brian Pendleton suggests that Campbell's position on the matter derived from his insistence on unity among Christians:

Under the reforming mandate of maintaining and promoting unity within the church, Campbell was able to use his emphasis upon the priority of the biblical witness to forge a distinction between faith (i.e., the essential, revealed aspects of Christianity) and opinion (i.e., areas where there was room for disagreement). This distinction, which allowed Disciples to disagree on slavery, allowed Campbell to articulate a kind of mediating position between the abolitionist and pro-slavery parties.⁴⁰

Campbell considered unity among Christians to be of the utmost of importance. Unity is certainly not a bad thing - it is a good thing. But, should unity be conserved at all costs, even if it is attained at the expense of systemic, racial oppression? Campbell did not seem to think that speaking out against the institution of slavery was worth the division it might evoke. He chose unity over justice. However, Campbell was not the only founding member of the Stone-Campbell movement.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Pendleton, T. Brian. "Alexander Campbell and Slavery: Gradualism and Anti-Slavery Rhetoric in the Millennial Harbinger." *Restoration Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2000, pp. 149–154. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001282924&site=eds-live&scope=site.

On the other hand, Barton Stone did not initially share the same focuses as Campbell, but instead actively denounced slavery and racism among the Church. Hughes quotes the autobiography of a man named Joseph Thomas when he discusses the time he visited Stone and his movement, "the christians of these parts *abhor* the idea of *slavery*, and some of them have almost tho't that they who hold to slavery cannot be christian."⁴¹ In the beginning of their existence, Stone's community held a strong opposition to slavery which was expressed to the extent that it was almost a prerequisite to being a Christian. What aspect of Stone's theology led him to take this stance?

Hughes says that Stone's stance on social justice can only be understood if his apocalyptic perspective is understood.⁴² The term apocalyptic refers not to speculation of end times, but rather "signifies an outlook that led Stone and many of his followers to act as though the final rule of the kingdom of God were present in the here and now."⁴³ Since the kingdom of God was present in the "here and now", they believed that they should apply the rule of God to all matters of life: religious, moral, social, etc. They deemed the ownership of slaves, the pursuit of wealth, and self-interest to all be values of the world and therefore not in line with the kingdom of God.⁴⁴ They thought that "those who took seriously the values of Jesus would refuse either to vote or to fight, would free their slaves, and would turn their backs on wealth, power, and selfish advantage over human beings."⁴⁵ Not only did Stone and his followers believe that the kingdom of God was present, but they allowed that belief to lead them to consider themselves responsible for participating in that kingdom. For Stone, part of that responsibility included not owning people who were created in the image of God.

⁴¹ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 271.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Stone's focus on social justice, however, was diminished when he and his followers joined forces with Alexander Campbell. Campbell "brought to those churches the scientific reading of the biblical text, the privatistic understanding of the Christian faith, and the emphasis on the restricted canon."⁴⁶ The former focus on social justice among Stoneites was largely affected by the non-activistic theology of Alexander Campbell and his followers. Together, the movement began to consider slavery as a social problem that was unrelated to the faith of Christians and therefore not their responsibility. This does not necessarily mean that Milligan had an identical approach to racial injustice. It does mean, however, that the movement's prevailing stance on slavery certainly influenced the ways in which Stone-Campbell Christians responded during the Civil Rights Movement, including Milligan College.

Milligan exhibited a passive response to racial injustice similar to those of Billy Graham and Alexander Campbell. It continued the tradition of maintaining the status quo for the sake of unity or expediency instead of advocating for racial justice as Barton Stone did with the way he lived his life in tune with the kingdom of God. Although Milligan eventually participated in honest reflection and social change, much of its participation was a reaction to a shifting in the status quo instead of a proactive initiative to, regardless of what was easy or popular, find truth and justice for the oppressed. Reactionary responses disallow people and institutions from being able to address the unjust realities of the world, including racism, human trafficking, and countless others.

Dr. Hefley impelled us to live differently when he concluded his remarks at the convocation in 1969 with these pointed and kindling words:

⁴⁶ Ibid., 275.

Wake up to your world. Keep asking the right questions that prick and pain a callous church. Love those who don't understand your motives. Help resurrect the church from its cultural hangups and indifference to the suffering millions who groan in spiritual darkness. Put your life where your mouth is and do something.⁴⁷

May we heed these words as we prick and love and resurrect and act. May we follow in the footsteps of Dr. C. Robert Wetzel as we honestly assess our past and humbly admit when we have come up short. May we look to Barton Stone as a beacon for how we might live lives that profess, here and now, the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁴⁷ "First convocation held."

Bibliography

- "A Christ-Centered University." *Milligan*. Last modified May 29, 2020.
<https://www.milligan.edu/academics/a-christ-centered-college/#a-christ-centered-college>.
- Balser, Gregory. "Letter to the Editor, March 14, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n695/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.
- Coleman, Phil. "Playing it Cool in a Hot Spot, April 17, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n713/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.
- "Dr. Walker Attends Convention, Oct. 20, 1967." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n447/mode/2up?q=billy+graham>.
- "First convocation held, Oct. 3, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n733/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>
- History.com Editors. "Civil Rights Movement Timeline." HISTORY.
<https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/civil-rights-movement-timeline>.
- Holloway, Clinton J. and A. Lee Fierbaugh. *Milligan Celebrates 150 Years: Scholarship, Community, Faith*. 2015.
- Hughes, Richard T. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Pendleton, T. Brian. "Alexander Campbell and Slavery: Gradualism and Anti-Slavery Rhetoric in the Millennial Harbinger." *Restoration Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2000, pp. 149–154. EBSCOhost,
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001282924&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Rohrbaugh, John. "Interview With Dr. Dennison, April 17, 1969." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n713/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.

Rohrbaugh, John. "Interview With Dr. Wetzel, May 29, 1968." *The Stampede*. Stampede, 1965-1969. The Holloway Archives at Milligan University. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/stampede1969stam/page/n579/mode/2up?q=civil+rights>.

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.