**THOMAS CAMPBELL’S**

***Declaration and Address***

The American religious historian William Warren Sweet describes Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* as “one of the greatest religious documents ever produced in America.” Bill Humble says: “The importance of this document lies in its formulation of the restoration principle. There is no other statement by an early restoration leader that is as thorough or detailed in its treatment of the restoration principle.”1

Circumstances in Thomas Campbell‘s life, in the British Isles and in America, that presaged the *Declaration and Address*, culminated in three fast-moving events in 1809 that led to his writing this singular work. (1) His troubled relations with the Associate Synod of North American, the Seceder Presbyterian authority under which he preached after coming to the New World, resulted in his withdrawal from that body on May 23. (2) His informal preaching in the following months when he advocated the unity of Christians on the Bible alone, led to establishing, on August 17, the Christian Association of Washington (Pennsylvania) to promote Christian unity. (3) The Association promptly authorized the issuing of a paper stating its purpose, principles, and procedure.

Drafting the proposed statement naturally fell to Campbell. Near the place where the Association had erected a log meeting house, he was given “a little chamber up stairs” in the home of Dr. Nathan Welch, a friend and association member. “In this quiet place of retirement,” Campbell wrote the *Declaration and Address*. “When this was finished, he called a special meeting of the chief members and read it to them for their approval and adopting. Having been unanimously agreed to, it was at once ordered to be printed, September 7, 1809.”2

Campbell composed the commissioned document in less than a month, but its roots ran deep in his knowledge and experience, which shaped his thinking long before he expressed his views with pen and ink. His profound respect for and extensive knowledge of the Bible formed the solid foundation of his plea for unity. Scriptural references, phraseology, and illustrations pervade every page and paragraph.

The reformer’s scorn for religious division sprang from his unpleasant experience with acrimonious sectarianism in the Old World and in America. In fact, it had been partly due to distress over division among the Seceders in Scotland and Ireland that he developed the “pale, dyspeptic, and weak” condition that caused his physician to recommend a sea voyage, which led to his coming to America. Weeks at sea and settlement on the American frontier improved Campbell’s health, but he soon found himself again in the midst of religious disputes inflamed by human creeds and ecclesiastical authorities. This renewed and intensified his longing for peace among Christians. He reserved his most anguished words for religious division. In the first paragraph, he wrote: “Moreover, being well aware, from sad experience, of the heinous nature and pernicious tendency of religious controversy among Christians; tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of party spirit, we would desire to be at rest.”

The spark that helped kindle Campbell’s plea for unity *on the Bible alone* was no doubt struck by independent preachers of Scotland and Ireland. The work of John Gibson and the “Independents” in the vicinity of Rich Hill made a great impression on him. He occasionally attended an “Independent” church near Rich Hill. “Among those who preached there were Rowland Hill, James Alexander Haldane, Alexander Carson, and John Walker. These men were generally Calvinistic in basic doctrine but they held to the right of private judgment, the independence of the local congregation, and an evangelical type of preaching with a view to creating a greater public interest in the subject of religion.”3

After leaving the Seceders, Campbell attracted a small group of neighbors and friends of various backgrounds, who shared his interest in Christian unity. In a meeting of sympathizers at the home of Abraham Altars, Campbell preached one of the most significant sermons of Restoration history. He dwelt “with unusual force upon the manifold evils resulting from the divisions in religious society—divisions which, he urged, were as unnecessary as they were injurious, since God had provided, in his sacred Word, an infallible standard, which was all-sufficient and alone-sufficient, as the basis of union and Christian cooperation.” Campbell “insisted with great earnestness upon a return to the simple teachings of the Scriptures, and upon the entire abandonment of everything in religion for which there could not be produced a Divine warrant.”

“Finally, after having again and again reviewed the ground they occupied in the reformation which they felt it their duty to urge upon religious society, [Campbell] went on to announce, in the most simple and emphatic terms, the great principle or rule upon which he understood they were acting, and upon which, he trusted, they would continue to act, consistently and perseveringly to the end. ‘That rule, my highly respected hearers,’ he said in conclusion, ‘is this, that WHERE THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK, WE SPEAK; AND WHERE THE SCRIPTURES ARE SILENT, WE ARE SILENT.’”4 That sermon, in the early summer of 1809, is the basis for the *Declaration and Address*, written between August 17 and September 9. The principle that concluded the sermon is the essence of that amazing document.

Describing Campbell’s work, W. E. Garrison says: “It was a pamphlet of fifty-six pages containing four parts: first, a Declaration (3 pages) stating briefly the reasons for the organization, its central idea, and its purposes; second, an Address (18 pages)… amplifying the argument for the unity of all Christians and developing in some detail the means by which it could be attained; third, an Appendix (31 pages), answering actual and anticipated criticisms and explaining several points in the Address; fourth, a Postscript (3 pages), written three months later, suggesting immediate steps to be taken for the promotion of the enterprise.”5

**The Christian Association**

The reformation led by Thomas Campbell in 1809 began with a small band of Bible believers who were not Christians in the Bible sense of the term. Few, if any, of them had been scripturally baptized. The bonds that bound them were love for God, aversion to religious division, and the desire to follow the Bible. That an important movement could begin, much less produce such a remarkable document as *Declaration and Address*, under such unfavorable circumstances comports with the nature of spiritual growth. The men Christ chose to be apostles were weak in faith and unstable in character when he called them. They did not understand his teaching at first, but they could only grow in grace and knowledge while they walked in his light.

Campbell found the path to reform in the Scriptures. Although he at first did not see where the path would lead, he knew that its builder and maker was God. Whatever confusion he saw in the religious world, whatever misunderstandings he had regarding the remedy for it, and whatever inconsistencies existed in his faith and practice, he knew that the Scriptures provide the only direction for unity in serving God. He first attempted to affect his plea for unity by organizing the Christian Association that authorized the writing of *Declaration and Address.*

The Association denied that it was a church or that *Declaration and Address* was a creed. But it aimed to promote unity among Christians on the principles stated in its document. Those principles, to the extent that they are anchored in divine truth, are valid despite inconsistencies in the society, and notwithstanding its failure to fully understand or to effectively appropriate them at the time. The society not only inconsistently attempted to implement divine principles by a human institution, but under Campbell’s lead, the members made an abortive attempt to affiliate with the regular Presbyterian Church.

Campbell supposed that this would prevent their being viewed as a church. They did not then see that the principles they had adopted would prevent their union with any denomination. But in the beginning, their vision was blurry, like the blind man who first saw “men like trees, walking.” They aimed to promote unity on the Bible alone and their principles would accomplish that, although the full light of those principles had not yet dawned on them. The Association hoped to attract other preachers who shared their views and whom they could support as missionaries. It also hoped to encourage the formation of other societies like theirs with kindred purpose.

“These hopes were not destined to be realized. No more ministers joined the Christian Association. No missionaries went out from it. No similar societies were formed.”6 In less that two years after its beginning, the Association dissolved and its members constituted themselves into a local church. “Thus the Association became a distinct church, seeking to restore the New Testament pattern, being guided in all things solely by the Scriptures.”7

The principles held by the Christian Association were right, but the society itself, by its very existence, contradicted them. It was not until the members abolished the society and formed an independent church that they could effectively practice the Bible principles in *Declaration and Address*. It took time before their vision, like the sight of the blind man, “was restored” and they saw “everything clearly.” (Mark 8:22-25.)

**Thomas Campbell’s Bible**

The Bible so fully engaged Campbell’s mind that his thoughts reflected its light. This is apparent even from a casual reading of his unity plea. It misses the spirit of his reformatory work to ignore the Biblical basis on which it was launched and on which he hoped to reach his intended goal. He opposed division, not alone because of its attendant evils, but because the *Bible* expressly forbids it. He pursued unity among Christians, not only through tolerance, love, and good will, which true unity demands, but on the basis of the *Bible* itself, without which any unity would be unacceptable to God. The synthesis Campbell sought could be achieved only by forsaking all human authority in religion and returning to the faith and practice of the apostolic church.

In the opening sentence of the “Declaration,” Campbell said it was high time “to take all our measurers directly and immediately from the Divine Standard; to this alone we feel ourselves Divinely bound to be conformed, as by this alone we must be judged.” He further wrote: “We are also of opinion that as the Divine word is equally biding upon all, so all lie under an equal obligation to be bound by it, and by it alone….” When he spoke of being bound by the Bible, and by the Bible “alone,” he made it clear that he meant that Christians must conform to the *express* teaching of the Bible apart from “any human interpretation of it … rejecting human opinions and the inventions of men as of authority, or as having any place in the church of God.”8

Further, when Campbell spoke of the Bible as the sole authority, he meant the Bible “rightly divided.” He saw Christ alone as “the *head*, the center, his word alone the *rule*,” and “an explicit belief of, and manifest conformity to it, in all things—*the terms,*” the foundation of acceptable unity. He did not imagine Christ being served apart from the gospel. He wrote: “That although the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the Church—yet as to what directly and properly belong to the immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution of the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and government of the Old Testament church, and the particular duties of its members.” The distinction he drew between the testaments was more clearly articulated by Alexander Campbell in his “Sermon on the Law” in 1816, but the New Testament was held as solitarily supreme by Thomas Campbell seven years before.

Campbell not only held the Bible as the inspired and complete revelation of God’s will, and the supreme guide in life, but its words and images suffuse his language in *Declaration and Address*. Christopher R. Hutson compiled a “Scripture Index” to the document, listing all quotations, citations, references, allusions, and the free use of Biblical expressions that Campbell employed. He found that close to two hundred passages are evident. However, this is not the whole story. It is not Campbell’s prolific use of Scripture that is important, but his *manner* and *attitude* in its use. He obviously heeded the words of Jesus not only to, “Take heed *what* you hear” (Mark 4:24), but also to, “Take heed *how* you hear” (Luke 8:18).

It is likely that Campbell’s attitude toward the Bible and its use in writing *Declaration and Address* is the most troublesome aspect of the document to liberal critics. They find his unswerving emphasis on Bible principles as the basis for unity very unsettling. They appear to wish he had not regarded the Bible as verbally inspired and complete, and that he had not held to what some call the “dogmatic proof text” concept of Bible authority, which simply means that Campbell took God at his word.

But regardless of the liberal detractors’ evaluation of *Declaration and Address*, whether they see it as “a wellspring of the ecumenical movement,” “a progressive manifesto,” or as holding “to one principle and one alone—the union of God’s people,” most recognize its Biblical orientation. No fair analysis will fail to concede that Campbell promoted unity, not as an end within itself, but in conformity to the Scriptures alone. His use of the Bible is simply too pervasive to be ignored, rationalized, or treated with intellectual contempt. There is no question that Campbell’s primary aim was Christian unity, but it is a disservice to him to ignore the basis on which he sought it.

On whether he had taken the right “means of promoting” unity, Campbell said: “All we shall venture to say as to this is, that we trust we have taken the proper ground; at least, if we have not, we despair of finding it elsewhere. For, if holding fast in profession and practice whatever is expressly revealed and enjoined in the Divine standard does not, under the promised influence of the Divine Spirit, prove an adequate basis for promoting and maintaining unity, peace, and purity, we utterly despair of attaining those invaluable privileges by adopting the standard of any party.”

*Declaration and Address* is not faultless. It is a human document reflecting human frailty. Some errors are apparent in Campbell’s reasoning. His words carry no divine authority. But in his relentless appeal to the Bible, *and to it alone*, as the channel for achieving religious unity acceptable to God, he chose the right course. Christians today are indebted to him for his pioneering work in the restoration of apostolic faith and practice. They should not allow revisionist views of men who have little or no sympathy with Campbell’s restoration agenda to whittle away his work until all that is left is a brilliant frontier version of modern ecumenism.

**Rest From The Party Spirit**

To fully appreciate the motivation of Campbell’s plea for unity, one must consider the divisions that fractured denominationalism near the beginning of the nineteenth century. His careful study of the Scriptures led him to see that God had no pleasure in such divisions. His own painful experience in the crosscurrents of religious controversy offended his sensitive soul and drove him to Paul’s “unity of the Spirit.” Campbell’s revulsion of religious division is one of three motivational factors in his pursuit of reform. The others are the unity of all Christians, the *antidote*, and the Bible alone, *the means to that end*. Campbell emphasized these themes repeatedly.

Division, unity, and the Bible, then, form the tripods of Campbell’s search for the ancient order. Observation and experience taught him that ecclesiastical and denominational standards (human creeds and authorities), although designed to promote unity, had miserably failed. They only acerbated the problem. So he turned to the only basis of unity approved by God: “the Bible alone.” But it was the “horrid” evil of religious division that initiated his action. This is apparent in the opening paragraph of the long document in which he decried the party spirit and yearned for rest from it.

It was not only the fact that division negated the expressed will of God that disturbed Campbell, but also the evil fruit that it bore in the lives of many people. He said: “What dreary effects of those accused divisions are to be seen, even in this highly favored country, where the sword of the civil magistrate has not as yet learned to serve at the altar. Have we not seen congregations broken to pieces, neighborhoods of professing Christians first thrown into confusion by party contentions, and, in the end, entirely deprived of Gospel ordinances; while in the meantime, large settlements and tracts of country remain to this day entirely destitute of a Gospel ministry, many of them in little better than a state of heathenism, the Churches being either so weakened with divisions that they can not send them ministers, or the people so divided among themselves that they will not receive them.”

Campbell distinctly identified the religious forces that caused division and the great evils it generated among professed Christians. Human creeds, ecclesiastical powers, and sectarian attitudes were the major causes of alienation between and within particular brotherhoods. Campbell sharply denounced each of these culprits, saying: “Thus, while professing Christians bite and devour one another, they are consumed one of another, or fall a prey to the righteous judgments of God; meantime, the truly religious of all parties are grieved, the weak stumbled, the graceless and profane hardened, the mouths of infidels opened to blaspheme religion, and thus the only thing under heaven divinely efficacious to promote and secure the present spiritual and eternal good of man, even the Gospel of the blessed Jesus, is reduced to contempt, while multitudes, deprived of a Gospel ministry … fall an easy prey to seducers, and so become the dupes of almost unheard-of delusions.”

Among the “Propositions” Campbell submitted “for opening up the way, that we may come fairly and firmly to original ground,” he included the condemnation of religious division. Proposition 10 reads: “That division among the Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is antichristian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is antiscriptural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express command. It is antinatural, as it excites Christians to contemn, to hate, to oppose one another, who are bound by the highest and most endearing obligations to love each other as brethren, even as Christ has loved them. In a word, it is productive of confusion and of every evil work.”

Campbell exposed the incongruity of people professing interest in unity while furthering the party spirit. When he wrote *Declaration and Address*, Napoleon Bonaparte was ravaging Europe with wars of conquest. Campbell said: “To advocate the cause of unity, while espousing the interests of a party, would appear as absurd as for this country to take part with either of the belligerents in the present awful struggle, which has convulsed and is convulsing the nations, in order to maintain her neutrality and secure her peace. Nay, it would be adopting the very means by which the bewildered Church has, for hundreds of years past, been rending and dividing herself into factions, for Christ’s sake, and for the truth’s sake; though the Bible says that the first and the foundation truth of our Christianity is union with him, and the very next to it in order, union with each other in him (Rom. 15:7; 1 John 3:23-24).”

**“That All May Be One”**

The second of these foundation truths repeatedly high-lighted by Thomas Campbell was the union of Christians with each other. Estrangement from brethren in Christ, he said, is at variance with the Scriptural requirement for unity. He added: “But how to love and receive our brother, as we believe and hope Christ has received both him and us, and yet refuse to hold communion with him, is, we confess, a mystery too deep for us. If this be the way that Christ has received us, then woe is unto us.” Campbell saw the Lord’s Supper as reflecting this fellowship. It was around the Lord’s Table that divisions of his day were focused. His trouble with the Seceders arose in part from his inviting Presbyterians of other sects to participate in the communion.

Campbell did not want fellowship extended to those who disobey the *express teaching* of Christ. “We do not here intend,” he said, “a professing brother transgressing the express letter of the law, and refusing to be reclaimed. Whatever may be our charity in such a case, we have not sufficient evidence that Christ has received him, or that he has received Christ as his teacher and Lord. To adopt means, then, apparently subversive of the very end proposed, means which the experience of ages has evinced successful only in overthrowing the visible interests of Christianity, in counteracting, as far as possible, the declared intention, the express command of its Divine author, would appear in no wise a prudent measure for removing and preventing these evils.”

In opening his “Address,” Campbell wrote: “That it is the grand design and native tendency of our holy religion to reconcile and unite men to God and to each other, in truth and love, to the glory of God, and their own present and eternal good, will not, we presume, be denied by any of the genuine subjects of Christianity.” Here in one sentence, he capsulates the most fundamental reason for Christian unity. It is the “grand design and native tendency” of Christianity (1) to reconcile people to God in Christ and (2) to unite them to each other in him. The latter part of this equation had been grossly neglected by the denominations. They preached union with God, but built barriers to union among Christians. People do not fulfill the grand design of Christianity when they have fellow-ship with God, if at the same time they do not make reasonable effort to also obtain fellowship with all his faithful children.

Campbell was optimistic that when people saw the true nature and tendency of human barriers to unity in Christ, they would cease holding “those artificial bonds.” He prayed: “May the Lord soon open the eyes of his people to see things in their true light, and excite them to come up out of their wilderness condition, out of this Babel of confusion, leaning upon their Beloved, and embracing each other in him, holding fast the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

The “Address” closes with an appeal to Christ’s teaching on brotherly love. The writer knew that the love Christ demands for one another finds expression in “humility, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance.” Thus, he concludes with the Lord’s plea and prayer. “‘By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,’ says he, ‘if you have love for one another.’ And ‘This is my commandment, That you love one another as I have loved you; that you also love one another.’ And again, ‘Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they may be one, as we are one;’ even ‘all that shall believe in me; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, ever as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them as thou has loved me.’ May the Lord hasten it in his time. Farewell.”

**The Original Standard**

No greater abuse of *Declaration and Address* arises among heirs of the Restoration than attempts to ignore, rationalize, or discredit the means Campbell proposed to achieve unity among Christians. Some see the document as “a clarion call to institutional church unity,” while others view it as the “wellspring of the ecumenical movement.” No serious student of the treatise denies that it sprang from the author’s desire for unity. But this is so related to restoration that one cannot be uprooted without extricating the other. They are too closely entwinedfor separated by even the most skilled literary surgeons. Holding Campbell’s marvelous plea for unity, while aborting the Bible plan he proposed for achieving it, is an unwarranted analysis of his work.

While acknowledging Campbell’s restoration model, some revisionists say, in effect: “He said it, but he didn’t mean it.” They see unity and restoration as a marriage with “irreconcilable differences.” The incompatibility is in their minds, rather than in Campbell’s words. They read the unity he sought in light of their ecumenical presuppositions, which conflicts with restoration. Consequently, they magnify his appeal for unity and minimize his restoration plea. But the unity he urged is what Christ prayed for and the restoration he pled is what Christ commands.

Some claim that unity necessitates such diversity in faith and practice as to render restoration impossible. But conformity to what is *“expressly”* taught in the Scriptures is precisely what Campbell endorsed as the only means to Christian unity. Yet, he knew that in conforming to the Bible, there are differences that necessitate toleration. These come from interpretations, opinions, deductions, inferences, and levels of maturity. But he did not confuse these with “what is expressly enjoined by … Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.” To ignore this distinction in order to deny that Campbell was serious about restoration, or that his restoration ideal was only a vague loyalty to Christ, distorts what he said.

What Campbell “meant,” “thought,” or “intended,” beyond what he *said*, is an exercise in intellectual gymnastic by men who cast him as a forerunner of ecumenism. But what he *said*—the principles of unity and restoration he upheld—is plain. He denied that unity on human creeds and organizations is scriptural. He said the first and foundation truth of Christianity is union with Christ, “and the very next to it in order [is] union with each other in him.” Unity rests on “the Bible, and the Bible alone.” To have Bible unity, he said, demands a return to the “profession and practice of the primitive Church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of the New Testament Scripture.”

Concerning the evils of division, Campbell wrote: “To cease from all such things, by simply returning to the original standard of Christianity, the profession and practice of the primitive Church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of the New Testament Scripture, is the only possible way that we can perceive to get rid of these evils. And we humbly think a uniform agreement in *that* for the preservation of charity would be infinitely preferable to our contentions and divisions; nay, that such a uniformity is the very thing that the Lord requires if the New Testament be a perfect model, a sufficient formula for the worship, discipline, and government of the Christian Church. Let *us* do as we are there expressly told *they* did, say as *they* said; that is, profess and practice as therein expressly enjoined by precept and precedent, in every possible instance, after *their* approved example; and in so doing we shall realize and exhibit all that unity and uniformity that the primitive Church possessed, or that the law of Christ requires.”

It would be difficult if not impossible to more clearly frame a plea for the restoration of apostolic Christianity than Campbell does in *Declaration and Address*. We are with revisionists’ views of his work about like the elderly sister of whom F. B. Srygley told. A sectarian preacher tried to explain away a plain passage of Scripture by telling her that it did not mean what it said. The good sister replied, “If the Lord didn’t mean what he said, why didn’t he say what he meant?” So it is with Campbell.

**Arrogance of Power**

Mistakes were made in *Declaration and Address*, but Campbell had a remarkably clear view of the causes of religious division and its divine remedy. Both experience and observation showed him that one of the bars to unity on the Bible alone was the intrusion of *men with assumed power* between the Bible and Christians. Such men postulated the right to determine for and to impose upon others the articles of their faith. They sought to maintain their alleged power by claiming to preserve the purity of the church and to expel from fellowship anyone whose latitude exceeded their concept of divine truth. They robbed individuals of the right to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Campbell regarded the promotion of unity through restoration as a responsibility impartially shared by all Christians. Thus he wrote: “Is it not a matter of universal right, a duty equally belonging to every citizen of Zion, to seek her good? In this respect, no one can claim a preference above his fellows, as to any peculiar, much less exclusive obligation. And, as for authority, it can have no place in this business; for, surely, none can suppose themselves invested with a Divine right, as to anything peculiarly belonging to them, to call the attention of their brethren to this dutiful and important undertaking. For our part, we entertain no such arrogant presumption.”

While Campbell was earnest in his appeal for unity on the Bible alone and severe in denouncing the causes of division, both are executed in his monumental work with a frequently expressed and generally apparent humility. Nothing in the extensive paper suggests the spirit of an angry preacher, embittered toward those who did not equal his depth of understanding, or lashing out in personal attacks on their integrity. He suffered much from preachers and ecclesiastics, yet not once in the fifty-five page document does he mount a crusade against them. He criticized men on principles and condemned their erroneous practices, but he did not seek to advance himself as a reformer on the backs of those conceived to be in error. Character assassination found no place in his plea. Not once did he denounce an exponent of division by name, or thinly veiled portraiture.

The document’s ninth proposition reads: “That all that are enabled through grace to make [a profession of faith and obedience to God], and manifest the reality of it in their tempers and conduct, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brethren, children of the same family and Father, temples of the same Spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same Divine love, bought with the same price, and joint-heirs of the same inheritance. Whom God has thus joined together no man should dare to put asunder.” Such a plea could not be sincerely made without the greatest humility, nor practiced without the poverty of spirit that the Savior requires for possessing his kingdom. Campbell not only rejected any presumption of power over the faith of others, he also claimed no superiority of knowledge over them.

From a deep sense of humility, he wrote: “Let none imagine, that … we arrogate to ourselves a degree of intelligence superior to our brethren; much less superior to mistake. So far from this, our confidence is entirely founded upon the express Scripture and matter-of-fact evidence of the things referred to.” Thus while deprecating the presumption of power that contributes to division, Campbell sought no power for himself. “We have,” he said, “no nostrum, no peculiar discovery of our own to propose to fellow-Christians, for the fancied importance of which they should become followers of us…. Upon the whole, we see one thing is evident: the Lord will bear with the weaknesses, the involuntary ignorances, and mistakes of his people, though not with their presumption.”

The assumed power exercised by ecclesiastics, or such like, can be exercised by brethren in a congregation. This is evident, Campbell said, when men are admitted to or excluded from fellowship on the basis of creeds, doctrines, or opinions of men. He asked, “Do we find any parallel for such conduct in the inspired records, except in the case of Diotrephes, of whom the apostle says, ‘Who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them….” Of such power wielders in the church, Campbell asked: “Or who that reads his Bible…does not perceive that such a state of things is as distinct from genuine Christianity as oil is from water?”

# Three Great Evils

One of the charges Campbell anticipated against his plea for unity on the Bible alone was that of Latitudinarianism. Critics said that renouncing human creeds and ecclesiastical bodies would open the church to free thought in teaching and practice. Campbell replied: “If we take no greater latitude than the Divine law allows, either in judging of persons or doctrine—either in profession or practice, (and this is the very thing we humbly propose and intend,) may we reasonably hope that such a latitude will appear, to every upright Christian, perfectly innocent and unexceptionable?” The latitude he proposed was only as extensive as the Bible. To those who said “the commandment is exceedingly broad,” he said: “we intend to go just as far as it will suffice us, but not one hair-breadth further.”

Campbell asked those, who were disposed to consider it, whether the charge of Latitidarianism, “when taken in the bad sense … must truly and properly belong, whether to those that will neither add nor diminish anything as a matter of faith and duty, either to or from what is expressly revealed and enjoined in the holy Scriptures, or to those who pretend [claim] to go further than this, or to set aside some of its express declarations and injunctions, to make way for their own opinions, inferences, and conclusion?” The question is variously repeated three times, apparently to stress the point. Campbell denied that the “odious charge of Latitudinarianism” belonged to those who “neither manifestly op-pose nor contradict anything expressly revealed and enjoined in the sacred standard,” but charged that it rather belonged to those who “reject such.”

Knowing the necessity of declaring “in the name of the Lord” only that which is “expressly declared in his holy word,” Campbell saw “three great evils” of the opposite practice: “evils truly great in themselves, and at the same time productive of most evil consequences.” He said: “First, to determine expressly, in the name of the Lord, when the Lord has not expressly determined, appears to us a very great evil. (See Deut 18:20).” This is a major theme of *Declaration and Address*: making laws where God made none. “A second evil is, not only judging our brother to be absolutely wrong, because he differs from our opinions, but more especially, our judging him to be a transgressor of the law in so doing, and, of course, treating him as such by censuring or otherwise exposing him to contempt, or, at least, preferring ourselves before him in our own judgment, saying, as it were, Stand by, I am holier than thou.”

“A third, and still more dreadful evil,” he said, “is when we not only, in this kind of way, judge and set at naught our brother, but, moreover, proceed as a Church, acting and judging in the name of Christ, not only to determine that our brother is wrong be-cause he differs from our determinations, but also, in connection with this, proceed so far as to determine the merits of the cause by rejecting him, or casting him out of the Church, as unworthy of a place in her communion, and thus, as far as in our power, cutting him off from the kingdom of heaven…. [And] we also take upon us to judge, as acting in the name and by the authority of Christ, that his error cuts him off from salvation.”

Here, then, in Campbell’s view, are three great evils: (1) going beyond the authority of the Scriptures to speak where the Lord has not spoken; (2) judging, censuring, or exposing to contempt one who differs from our *opinions*; and (3) casting such a person out of our fellowship as one unworthy of salvation. “Thus,” he concludes, “have we briefly endeavored to show our brethren what evidently appears to us to be the heinous nature and dreadful consequences of that truly Latitudinarian principle and practice which is the bitter root of almost all our divisions, namely, the imposing of our private opinions upon each other as articles of faith or duty, introducing them into the public profession and practice of the Church, and acting upon them as if they were the express law of Christ, by judging and rejecting our brethren that differ from us in those things, or at least by *so* retaining them in our public profession and practice that our brethren can not join with us, or we with them, without becoming actually partakers in those things which they or we can not in conscience approve, and which the word of God nowhere expressly enjoins upon them.”

At this point, Campbell again appeals to the sole solution of all divisive evils among Christians. “To cease from all such things, by simply returning to the original standard of Christianity, the profession and practice of the primitive Church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of the New Testament Scripture, is the only possible way that we can perceive to get rid of these evils.”

**Personal Holiness**

In highlighting the need for Christians to conform to the divine standard, Campbell included the importance of morality. What benefit are unity and restoration, however nearly perfect they otherwise are, if professors do not develop a life of *personal holiness*, an essential ingredient for eternal life? Throughout *Declaration and Address*, the author reiterates the necessity of faith, purity, humility, love, honesty, integrity, justice, and temperance. At the same time, he denounces those qualities that nullify moral character, including haughtiness, pride, conceit, bigotry, immorality, and pomposity. No doubt Campbell’s experience with willful clergymen who lacked true holiness acerbated his concern and led to its repeated emphasis.

The church as Campbell saw it consisted not only of those who believe and obey Christ, but who also “manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else.” It was to such people that he made his appeal for unity. “By the Christian Church throughout the world, we mean the aggregate of such professors as we have described in Propositions 1 and 8, even all that mutually acknowledge each other as Christians, upon the manifest evidence of their faith, holiness, and charity. It is such only we intend when we urge the necessity of Christian unity.”

So clearly did Campbell see the importance of holiness that the unity and restoration he sought were inconceivable without it. “Here, then,” he insisted, “we have a fixed point, a certain description of character which combines in every profess-sing subject the Scriptural profession, the evident manifestation of humility, faith, piety, temperance, justice, and charity, instructed by, and evidently answering to the entire declaration of the word upon which, as of old, manifestly divides the whole world, however otherwise distinguished, into but two classes only. ‘We know,’ said the apostle, evidently speaking of such, ‘that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.’”

When he wrote *Declaration and Address*, Campbell not fully grasped the nature of congregational independence, but he clearly saw that the unity demanded by the Scriptures required a restoration of the faith and practice of the apostolic church. But in urging a restoration of the ancient order, he did not overlook the most basic unit of the church—the individual Christian. It is not enough to restore the teaching, faith, and practice of the early church collectively, due attention must also be given to restoring, wherever lacking, the holiness of *individual* Christians. It is unthinkable that the apostolic order for the church could be restored without at the same time restoring the apostolic requirement of *personal holiness*.

**Conclusion**

If I were not fearful of being called a Campbellite, I would conclude with the observation that Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* comes as near bearing the marks of inspiration as any work I know of by an *uninspired* man. One reason for this may be that the document is saturated in Scriptural authority. It illustrates what Campbell meant when he said: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” The principles of unity and restoration in the document rest on the unshakable foundation of divine truth. If these principles had been adhered to over the past two hundred years, the church would not have suffered the vicious and hostile divisions that tarnish the trail of Restoration history even to this good hour.

**Notes**

1Bill Humble, *The Story of the Restoration*.

2Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, Vol. 1.*

3James D. Murch, *Christians Only*.

4Richardson, *Memoirs*.

5W.E. Garrison and A.T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ—a History*.

6Ibid.

7James D. Murch, *Christians Only*.

8F.L. Rowe, *Pioneer Sermons and Addresses*. All quotations of Thomas Campbell in this work are from

Declaration and Address by Thomas Campbell given fully in Rowe’s book. No references are given

for individual quotations of Campbell.

Annandale, 2002, Earl Kimbrough