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ABSTRACT

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND CHURCH AUTHORITY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND
PRACTICE OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL
AND ELLEN G. WHITE

by

Wendy Ann Jackson

Advisor: Denis Fortin, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND CHURCH AUTHORITY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND PRACTICE
OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND ELLEN G. WHITE

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Date Completed: March 2015

Problem

A clear understanding of the nature of church unity and the role of authority in the maintenance of unity is imperative for the church in the face of its increasing growth and diversity. While a considerable volume of literature addresses the topic of unity of the church, little attention has been paid to the historical dimensions of the differing viewpoints on church authority, which present contemporary obstacles to Christian unity.

Purpose

In an attempt to address this void, this dissertation examines the views of Alexander Campbell and Ellen White with regard to the nature of church unity and how

this is to be attained, with a specific focus on the nature and role of church authority in the accomplishment of that goal.

Methodology and Sources

The approach of this study is to survey the published primary sources of both leaders in an attempt to establish their understanding of the nature of unity and how it is to be attained. It does so in the context of their hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and views on the authority structure of the church. The theory of each individual is then supplemented with case studies which examine how these principles function in their own practice of ministry. A mixture of published and unpublished material is utilized to maximize the value of the case studies. The descriptive data is then used to perform a comparative evaluation of the two views.

Conclusions

The study finds that that both Campbell and White have Christ centered models of unity, which emphasize that unity cannot occur without authentic Christianity. However, differing concepts of the underlying causes of disunity, along with differing views of what Christian unity looks like, result in two very different models for maintaining unity. The models are further impacted by the hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and eschatological viewpoints of Campbell and White. Campbell's approach to unity as part of a comprehensive restoration of primitive Christianity effectively limited the possible authority structures of the church. Campbell nevertheless used creative approaches to circumvent this problem. Ellen White's views on the other hand are not dependent upon any one particular form of authority structure. Instead they emphasize the importance of order, and the character of the leaders within the authority structure.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
Background to the Problem	1
Problem Statement	7
Purpose Statement	7
Justification	7
Outline of the Study	8
Scope and Delimitations	10
Chapter	
1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT	11
Socio-Political Conditions of Nineteenth Century America	11
Christianity in Nineteenth Century America	13
Christian Unity and the American Church	15
Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century	15
Nineteenth-century	22
Considerations of Internal Church Unity	23
Voluntary Societies	25
Co-operation and Alliances between Denominations	27
Organic Forms of Christian Unity	30
Nineteenth Century Unity Initiatives in Other Parts of the World	38
Biographical Sketch of Alexander Campbell	40
Biographical Sketch of Ellen White	50
2. ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND ECCLESIAL UNITY	58
Introduction	58
Campbell's View of the Bible and Hermeneutics	58
Inspiration and Revelations	58
A Canon within a Canon	62

Hermeneutical Rules	65
Authority of the Bible	68
Summary	70
Overview of Campbell's Ecclesiology	70
Nature of the Church	71
Function of the Church	77
Officers of the Church	79
Ordinances of the Church	82
Summary	87
Campbell's Understanding of Unity	88
Mandate for Unity	88
Purpose of Christian Unity	89
Nature of Unity	91
Problem of Disunity in the Church	97
Causes of Christian Disunity	100
Human Speculation and Opinion	100
Incomplete Reformation	104
Misplaced Emphasis	105
Non-Theological Issues	107
How Unity is Attained	108
Scripture as the Rule of Faith and Learning	110
Return to the Order and Practices of the New Testament	114
Confession of Jesus as Lord	116
Unity of Faith, Not Opinions	118
A Return to Pure Speech	121
Unity and the Evangelical Alliance	124
Summary	127
Source and Locus of Church Authority	129
Prior to 1830: Authority and Aggressive Pursuit of Restoration	129
Exposing Pretensions of Authority	130
Authority and standing of clergy	130
Claim to be successors of the apostles	131
Special call from God	132
Marks of authority	134
Authority of ecclesiastical councils	136
True Source of Authority	138
Authority and the Local Church	140
Bishops	144
Deacons	146
Evangelists	147
Congregationalism	148
From 1830 Onward: Revisions, Reflection and Organization	149
Organization and the Interdependence of the Church	150
Discipline	155
Roles and Authority of Church Offices	158

Bishops	158
Evangelists	160
Education of Leaders	163
The Role and Authority of Editors of Religious Periodicals ...	165
Summary	169
Chapter Summary and Conclusions	170
3. CASE STUDIES: ALEXANDER CAMPBELL’S PRINCIPLES OF UNITY AND AUTHORITY IN ACTION	175
Case Study 1: Union of the Disciples with the Christians	175
Starting the Dialogue.....	177
Discussions Move to the Local Church	180
Joint Worship Begins	181
Problems with the New Union	183
Conclusions	185
Case Study 2: Jessie Ferguson Controversy	188
Ferguson Publishes a Novel Interpretation of Scripture	189
Campbell’s Critique	191
Controversy Escalates	193
Impact on Ferguson.....	196
Ferguson Embraces Spiritualism.....	198
Conclusions	199
Case Study 3: Slavery Threatens to Divide the Movement	204
Early Views on Slavery.....	206
Responding to Internal Tensions Regarding Slavery.....	207
Open Letter to Christians in Kentucky	212
Campbell and the Fugitive Slave Law	213
Impact of Slavery on the Unity of the Disciples	214
Conclusions	216
Case Study 4: Fallout from Increased Organization	219
A Role for Voluntary Societies	220
A Call for Improved Organization	221
A National Convention	223
Conclusions	230
4. ELLEN WHITE AND ECCLESIAL UNITY	232
Introduction	232
White’s Understanding of the Bible and Hermeneutics	232
Revelation and Inspiration	232
Authority of Scripture	235
Hermeneutical Considerations	237
Summary	243
Overview of Ellen White’s Ecclesiology	243

Nature of the Church	243
Function of the Church.....	249
Offices of the Church	252
Ordinances of the Church.....	254
Summary	258
Ellen White’s Understanding of Unity	259
Mandate for Unity	260
Purpose of Christian Unity.....	261
Nature of Christian Unity.....	263
Problem of Christian Disunity	271
Causes of Disunity	273
How Unity is to be Attained or Maintained.....	276
Connection with Christ	276
Correct Attitudes.....	280
Scripture as the Rule of Faith and Practice.....	284
Focus on Clear and Vital Truths	287
Appropriate Relationship with the Church	291
Gospel Order.....	293
Unity and Alliances.....	295
Summary	298
Source and Locus of Church Authority.....	299
Prior to 1863: Authority in a Developing Movement.....	300
A Call to Gospel Order	303
Discipline	305
Teachers and Preachers.....	307
More Extensive Organization	310
Between 1863 and 1886: Early Authority Structure.....	313
Authority of the Church	313
Role of the General Conference and its President	314
Response to Ongoing Criticism of Organization.....	315
Gospel Ministers	316
Local Church Offices	318
After 1886: Re-evaluating and Dispersing Authority	320
General Conference and its President.....	320
Need for Restructuring.....	322
Authority and Leaders at All Levels.....	322
Union and Local Conferences.....	324
Gospel Ministers	326
Local Church Offices	328
Authority and the Members of the Local Church	329
Summary	330
Chapter Summary and Conclusions	331
 5. CASE STUDIES: ELLEN WHITE’S PRINCIPLES OF UNITY AND AUTHORITY IN ACTION.....	 336

Case Study 1: Tensions Surrounding the 1888 General Conference	337
Key Issues	337
Concerns of the General Conference President	341
Minneapolis General Conference Session	345
Continued Attempts to Maintain Unity after the Session	351
Conclusions	354
Case Study 2: The Kellogg Crisis	356
Major Points of Tension Between Kellogg and Ministers	357
Controversial Decisions	360
White's Responses to Kellogg's Decisions.....	362
White's Attempts to Maintain Unity.....	365
Responses to New Challenges to Unity	370
Conclusions	382
Case Study 3: Conflict Associated with Reorganization	384
A Long Standing Controversy	384
Issues which Exacerbated the Underlying Tensions.....	385
Debate over the Need for a President.....	386
Major Reorganization Begins	388
A Short Lived Harmony	391
A Fight for Control of the Battle Creek Sanitarium.....	394
Continuing Mediation After the 1903 General Conference Session	399
Conclusions	401
 6. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	 405
Introduction	405
Integrating Theory and Practice	406
Alexander Campbell and Ecclesial Unity	406
Ellen White and Ecclesial Unity	412
A Comparative Review	418
Mandate for Unity	418
Nature of Unity	419
Causes of Disunity	422
Means for Maintaining Unity.....	423
Truth and Unity	425
Role of the Holy Spirit in Unity.....	426
Role of Scripture and Hermeneutics	427
Nature and Role of the Church in Relation to Unity.....	428
Role of Authority Structures in Maintaining Unity	429
Authentic Christianity and Unity	431
Unity and Religious Alliances	431
Unity and Church Leadership	432
Evaluation of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Position	433

Alexander Campbell.....	433
Ellen White.....	437
Implications and Contributions for the Twenty-First Century.....	445
Implications Specific to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.....	445
Broader Implications of the Study.....	448
Recommendations for Further Study.....	451
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	453

LIST OF FIGURES

1. The Core Components of Alexander Campbell's Unity 408
2. A Model of Ellen White's Understanding of How Unity is to be Attained..... 415

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Center for Adventist Research
GC	General Conference
IMMBA	International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association
MS	Manuscript
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I reach the end of my dissertation, I am acutely aware of God's faithfulness to me during my journey, and I pray he will always be glorified in my teaching, preaching and writing. In addition to the blessings of God which have made this journey possible, I am overwhelmed by the support and encouragement of so many people who in various ways have contributed to the completion of my dissertation.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family, particularly my parents, who introduced me to Jesus, and inspired me through their lives and example. Their love and support has carried me through the times when completion of my dissertation seemed to be nothing more than an impossible dream.

I also want to express my appreciation to my dissertation committee members. Very special thanks go to my adviser, Dr. Fortin. I feel privileged to have been able to work closely with someone I respect and admire. Dr. Fortin stimulated my interest in ecclesiology very early in my seminary studies. He also taught me the value of openness and vulnerability in teaching, and reinforced the necessity of a Christ-centered relevant theology. He continued to challenge my thinking as I entered my doctoral studies, and helped me refine the ideas in my dissertation. He carefully read and commented on multiple drafts of my chapters, always giving me helpful feedback promptly, even when his schedule was overly full. The other members of my committee also played important roles in the completion of this document. The careful reading of my dissertation by Dr. Jerry Moon, located many formatting errors that I overlooked, and his probing questions identified sections of the dissertation which needed more careful articulation. The insightful comments of Dr. Darius Jankiewicz also helped focus many of my ideas and

improve the flow of my final product. His enthusiasm, encouragement and friendship were invaluable.

I also wish to acknowledge the help of library staff at the many libraries I used in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Tennessee, and New South Wales, Australia. Particular thanks go to Marian de Berg and John Skrzypaszek at the Ellen G. White Research Center at Avondale College of Higher Education, McGarvey Ice at the Disciples of Christ Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, and the staff at the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University, who tirelessly chased up and pulled resources for me, and suggested other resources that might be helpful for my studies.

To the trustees of Women in Ministry, the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, and Avondale College of Higher Education I owe a special debt of gratitude for the financial support which enabled me to undertake this degree. Their support enabled me to focus on my studies rather than worrying about how to make it through the next month financially. I still shake my head in wonderment that they were willing to take a risk in supporting someone whose background was in a completely different discipline.

Final thanks go to the host of other individuals who have encouraged and supported me. These include the members of my beloved small group; the South Pacific Club who became my family during my sojourn at Andrews University; my wider church families in Berrien Springs, Cincinnati and Cooranbong; and my colleagues at Avondale College who have not only encouraged and prayerfully supported me, but also shouldered higher workloads to enable me to take a research semester. My heartfelt thanks goes to all of them for their love, concern, and prayers.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The importance of the concept of the unity of Christian believers has been recognized since the very inception of the Christian church.¹ Underscored by the concept's inclusion in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, unity or oneness is acknowledged as a fundamental attribute of the nature of the church.² The outward appearance of the Christian church however is far from united. Heresy, conflict, schism, excommunications, and all-out war have marred the history of the Christian church. Even discussions regarding the meaning of the concept of unity and how it is to be accomplished have caused divisions.

The principal obstacles to achieving consensus in the unity debate are inextricably linked to questions of authority. While most Christians affirm that "God is the ultimate authority" over the church, the real question as Bruce Shelley suggests, is "*how* does God mediate his authority?"³ The answers to this question result in turn in diverse understandings of the nature of Biblical authority and hermeneutics, as well as the nature

¹The focus of Jesus' final prayer for his followers was unity: "that they may be one as we are one" John 17:11, 22. The need for this unity was apparent even before the close of the canon, as false teachers, heresies, and lack of submission to leaders threatened the small community. Paul takes up the theme of unity in 1 Corinthians 1 and 12 and his metaphors of the church imply unity: there is one body, one bride, one temple. The ante-Nicene fathers were also concerned for unity. See for instance Clement of Rome's *Letter to the Corinthians*, Ignatius' letters, and Cyprian's *On the Unity of the Church*.

²Though not present in the creedal pronouncement of the Council of Nicea in AD 325, the revision at the First Council of Constantinople AD 381 recognized the church as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic". Philip Schaff, *The History of the Creeds*, vol. 1 of *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper, 1919), 28-29.

³Bruce L. Shelley, *By What Authority? The Standards of Truth in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 15.

of the church and its authority to interpret Scripture, articulate doctrine, and administer discipline.

Consequently, models for church unity are most easily grouped according to forms of authority structure. Churches with an Episcopal form of church government have in common three requirements for unity: an agreed upon set of beliefs which are understood to be of apostolic origin, participation in the sacraments of the church, and an episcopate composed of bishops in an unbroken succession from the apostles.⁴ The Roman Catholic Church further specifies that the episcopate has one visible head, the pope who is considered the successor to Peter and “is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of both the bishops and the whole company of the faithful.”⁵ Other religious groups are regarded as separated from this unity by their rejection of the authority supposedly vested in the pope and bishops.⁶ Such a view attaches a very high degree of authority to the church and in particular to the pope.

⁴The Roman Catholic Church has long recognized the necessity of all three components for unity, but this has been most clearly expressed in the twentieth century, and can be found in both the documents of Vatican II and the current Catechism. See Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), #815; Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism: Unitatis Redintegratio*, trans. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1964), #2-4, #19.

Similar sentiments can be found in the Oberlin statement by representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church. Athenagoras Kokkinakis et al., "The Oberlin Statement: Christian Unity as Viewed by the Orthodox Church" (paper presented at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, OH, September 3-10, 1957).

The Anglican understanding of unity is best expressed in the Lambeth Quadrilateral which adds the Protestant focus of Scripture to the threefold requirements of the episcopate, Nicene Creed as a sufficient statement of faith, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, vol. 3 of *The Creeds of Christendom with History and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper, 1919), 948.

⁵ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #882.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism: Unitatis Redintegratio*, #3. The Orthodox position is similar. While not requiring an acceptance of a pope, it also regards other Christian groups outside the Orthodox Church as separated from unity which can be recovered “only by entering into the bosom of that Church which preserved its identity with early Christianity.” Kokkinakis et al., "The Oberlin Statement: Christian Unity as Viewed by the Orthodox Church."

Protestants with a Presbyterian form of church government on the other hand recognize the authority of synods, assemblies and other representative bodies, and delegate authority to elders who govern the church. Typically, denominations with this kind of church government have focused on a form of unity which is based on common confession of fundamental doctrines such as found in the ancient creeds, and church practices which include teaching a pure gospel and taking part in the sacraments.⁷ This means that a variety of views on non-fundamental doctrines are tolerated without them being considered a threat to the unity of the church. Thus, while still attributing significant authority to the church, this model disperses the authority and allows greater latitude for individual beliefs than the Episcopal model.

Groups with a congregational form of church government locate authority in local church assemblies and thus are more likely to see the congregation itself as the focus of unity. The key components of this unity are the gathered believers who accept a common code of belief and conduct, and a strict internal discipline which maintains purity of doctrine.⁸ Independent groups with little or no formal church government are more likely

⁷A Reformed view can be found in the Second Helvetic Confession (1561) #17 which recognizes that unity consists in the truth of the catholic faith as found in the Apostle's Creed, the harmonious preaching of the gospel, and in the sacraments or rites instituted by Christ. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, 868-875.

Interestingly, many Lutheran churches, while Episcopal in form of church government have a confession on unity that is more consistent with the Presbyterian statements. The Augsburg Confession (1530), Point #7 states: "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike." Melancthon, Philip, "The Confession of Faith: Which was Submitted to His Imperial Majesty Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in the Year 1530." in *Triglott Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. F. Bente, trans. W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1921), 37-95.

⁸See for example Littell's treatment of the doctrine of the church in Anabaptist tradition. Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Boston, MA: Starr King Press, 1958).

to understand unity as an entirely invisible concept or an ideal to be attained at some point in the future.⁹

While there is recognition of the impact of different authority structures on attempts to achieve unity, there is poor understanding of the historical dimensions of the relationship between unity and church authority that underlie various denominations' viewpoints. This is particularly so with the views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. No studies have been undertaken to clearly ascertain the views of the founders in relation to church unity, nor have there been any officially voted contemporary statements about unity and the relationship of Seventh-day Adventists to the ecumenical movement.¹⁰

The name of Seventh-day Adventist cofounder Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is relatively unknown in relation to nineteenth-century considerations of Christian unity. However, she is the only Seventh-day Adventist to have written extensively on the topic. While her original focus was one of restoration of truth in anticipation of the imminent second coming of Christ,¹¹ Christian unity became an increasingly dominant theme in her

⁹While almost all Christians accept some degree of invisible unity due to the fact that Christians are united in Christ, these groups tend to reject any form of visible unity. G. W. Bromiley, *The Unity and Disunity of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 27.

¹⁰A single document on the topic can be found on the official website of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. While not an officially voted statement of the church, its content is an accurate reflection of the church's struggle to live with the tension between recognizing that Christ prayed for unity, and at the same time trying to maintain its historical understanding of its own role in eschatology. An introductory paragraph reveals the tenor of the document. "Generally, it can be said that while the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not completely condemn the ecumenical movement and its main organizational manifestation, the World Council of Churches, she has been critical of various aspects and activities. Few would wish to deny that ecumenism has had laudable aims and some positive influence. Its great goal is visible Christian unity. No Adventist can be opposed to the unity Christ Himself prayed for. The ecumenical movement has promoted kinder interchurch relations with more dialogue and less diatribe and helped remove unfounded prejudices....However, in the total picture, the banes tend to outweigh the boons." Walter Raymond Beach and Bert Beverly Beach, "Ecumenical Movement," Official Site of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church, June 1985, accessed, 21 January, 2015, <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/ecumenical-movement/18/>.

¹¹White's emphasis on restoration of truth must be seen within the context of her other themes, especially the Great Controversy theme. Typical of her call for restoring and upholding the truth is her cry

writings as her ministry progressed. The stimulus for this added focus was one of praxis. The new and rapidly enlarging Seventh-day Adventist movement had begun to experience tensions which threatened both the unity and the authority of the church.¹² Due to White's significant personal influence, and the fact that she was considered as a prophet by most Adventists, she was frequently called upon for advice in dealing with these situations. Her writings thus contain valuable information about unity and church authority not only from a Biblical and theological viewpoint, but also from a practical standpoint.

While White's dedication to Christian unity went largely unnoticed, one of the prominent names associated with the vision of Christian unity in the nineteenth-century is that of Restorationist Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). Profoundly influenced by the divided state of the Presbyterian Church in which he had been raised, he had an intense desire to pursue the unity of the Christian church.¹³ To accomplish this goal he urged a return to the New Testament faith and primitive church model.¹⁴ His restoration of the New Testament ideal was applied rigorously resulting in a discontinuation of any church

for believers to be "repairers of the breach" and "restorers of paths to dwell in." Ellen G. White to the Leaders of the Church, November 1890 (Letter B-001f, 1890), CAR.

¹² These tensions include arguments between leaders over the relative roles of grace and law, various doctrines, and church structure as well as specific conflict over levels of authority.

¹³ While Alexander desired Christian unity, Bainton has pointed out that Campbell had the distinction of accomplishing the exact opposite of what he set out to do. Even though he had no intention of forming a new sect or denomination, Campbell started a new group, and is now considered a cofounder of three major contemporary religious groups. The Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and Christian Churches all trace their beginnings to Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. Roland Bainton, "Alexander Campbell and Church Unity," in *The Sage of Bethany: Pioneer in Broadcloth*, edited by Perry E. Gresham, 81-94 (St. Louis, MO: Bethany, 1960), 81. For Campbell's claim see Alexander Campbell, "Reply to 'T.T.,'" *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 7 (1826): 216-18.

¹⁴ Alexander Campbell described how this is to be accomplished in *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Plead in the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati, OH: Bosworth Chase and Hall, 1871). First published in 1835, this work mirrors many of the ideas in his father's *Declaration and Address* of 1809.

practice that Campbell felt was not validated by scriptural authority.¹⁵ As part of this restoration, he advocated a congregational church structure, believing that this form of authority structure not only conformed to the apostolic model, but at the same time reduced the tendency to abuse power, and tore away obstacles to the true monarchy of Christ in the church.

The ministries of Alexander Campbell and Ellen White overlapped in time and were therefore subject to many of the same social, economic, and political pressures. Both individuals called for a return to Scripture as the rule for doctrine and life,¹⁶ and both rejected creeds as an adequate representation of truth.¹⁷ Yet in spite of these similarities, White and Campbell held widely divergent views on the nature, unity, authority and structure of the church. Campbell openly embraced an organic form of unity at the same time championing a congregational church structure, while White spoke

¹⁵Practices Campbell discarded included such things as music in worship services, missionary societies and paying the clergy. Later in his ministry he changed his mind on some of the practices he earlier decried. For instance, for views on paid clergy see Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. V," *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 7 (1824): 42-43.

¹⁶“The Bible alone is the Bible only, in word and deed, in profession and practice; and this alone can reform the world and save the church.” Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, 6. “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and practice.” Ellen White to O. A. Olsen, May 22, 1896 (Letter O-83-1896), CAR. “‘The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the foundation of our faith.’ It is the work of the people of God to uphold the Bible as the standard of religion and the foundation of hope.” Ellen G. White, “God Warns Men of His Coming Judgments,” *Review and Herald*, November 5, 1889.

¹⁷ Ellen White stated that “the Bible and the Bible alone is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this holy word will be in harmony.” Ellen G. White, “A Missionary Appeal,” *Review and Herald*, December 15, 1885. Alexander Campbell wrote regarding creeds, “They are called human, not merely because they are the production of human effort, but because they are also the offspring of human authority. No one can, in reason and truth, assign to them a divine authority; because no man can produce any precept or divine warrant for their manufacture. No apostle, prophet, or evangelist gave any authority to any church, community, or council, to furnish such a document.” Alexander Campbell et al., *A Debate Between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. L. N. Rice: On the Action, Subject, Design and Administration of Christian Baptism; also, on the Character of Spiritual Influence in Conversion and Sanctification, and on the Expediency and Tendency of Ecclesiastic Creeds, as Terms of Union and Communion* (Lexington, KY: Skillman and James, 1844), 763.

primarily about internal church unity within a more Presbyterian model of church structure.¹⁸

Problem Statement

A clear understanding of the nature of church unity, and the role of authority and authority structures in the maintenance of unity, is imperative for the church in the face of its increasing growth and diversity. However, such clarity has been elusive, with contemporary discussions about unity failing to adequately recognize the historical dimensions of the relationship between unity and church authority that underlie various denominations' viewpoints. This is especially so for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Such information, while an important starting point for further study of the nature of unity, is not readily available.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand, compare, and evaluate the views of Alexander Campbell and Ellen White regarding the nature of church unity and how this is to be attained, with a specific focus on the nature and role of church authority in the accomplishment of that goal.

Justification

While the problems and conditions of the twenty-first century may be different from those of the nineteenth-century there are parallels between the two periods. Just as it was in the nineteenth-century, the church is faced with a rapidly changing society and an ever growing variety of beliefs as the ideals and values of everyday life spill into religious life. Mobility has again reached unprecedented levels. The success of

¹⁸ White's understanding of church structure developed over time. The final form was one that incorporated features of both the Presbyterian and congregational models of church government, although the former model was the predominant one.

contextualized mission is also contributing to diversity and division both within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and within Christianity as a whole.

Thus, in the twenty-first century the Seventh-day Adventist Church is faced with questions regarding both its own internal unity and its relationship to the ecumenical movement. As it attempts to meet these issues it must grapple with the role of its authority and authority structure.¹⁹ It is hoped that an examination and analysis of the writings of White and Campbell, who appear to represent opposite poles on these issues, will bring new insights to these discussions.

Outline of the Study

The issues of unity and authority are complex and require more than a simple reading of the statements penned on these topics. Such views are integrally dependent on one's degree of acceptance of Biblical authority, hermeneutical presuppositions, ecclesiological understanding, and lived experience. Furthermore, many statements are written in direct response to events that are affecting the church at the time. This is particularly so for both Campbell and White, since their writings were not merely the idealistic thoughts of theologians writing from a seminary desk, but rather the thoughts of frontline workers faced with real conflicts and divisions. Consequently, considerable context needs to be provided for the understanding of their writings on the role of authority in the search for unity.

The first chapter of the dissertation considers the immediate context of the ideas of Campbell and White. It begins with the socio-political and religious conditions of the first half of the nineteenth-century. This is complimented by a brief historical survey of

¹⁹ Seventh-day Adventist church government emphasizes representative church structures and is thus predominantly Presbyterian in nature. It does however have some congregational features such as maintenance of church membership and administration of discipline at the local church level.

considerations of Christian unity in the North American context to the end of the nineteenth-century, which allow the reader to appropriately situate the ideas of both Campbell and White. The chapter is rounded out with short historical sketches of the two leaders whose ideas will be pursued in the following chapters.

Chapter two provides a descriptive account of Campbell's views on unity and the role of church authority in the context of his hermeneutics and ecclesiology. It attempts to show how Campbell considered the essential unity entered into through baptism could be made visible through attention to biblical authority and a return to the apostolic practices. It explores his wrestling with authority structure and the accompanying church offices as he attempted to remain consistent to his ideals but at the same time enable maximum efficiency and unity for mission.

Chapter three is based on four case studies which explore Campbell's actions in relation to unity. It begins by considering the response of Campbell to Barton Stone's overtures to unify their two groups, and is followed by three case studies which were chosen to represent the different types of threats to unity including threats from doctrinal differences, organizational changes, external social pressures, and personal differences. These include Campbell's response to the slavery question, the Jessie Ferguson controversy, and the fallout from changing authority structure.

Chapter four provides a descriptive account of views of Ellen White in relation to unity in the context of her hermeneutics and ecclesiology. It describes her relational and Christ-centered approach which develops from her assumption that disunity is fundamentally caused by disconnection from Christ. This is followed by an examination of her changing ideas on church authority structure and its implications for unity.

Chapter five reviews Ellen White's actions and practices in relation to unity through a series of three case studies. Like those of Campbell, case studies were chosen to represent threats to unity from doctrinal differences, organizational changes, external social pressures, and personal differences. They include the tensions surrounding the

1888 General Conference session, the move to introduce widespread organizational change in 1901 and 1903, and the John Harvey Kellogg crisis.

The final chapter provides a comparative evaluation of the two views focusing on the consistency and the relative strengths and weaknesses of their ideas about unity in the light of both their theological systems and Scripture, before considering applications to twenty-first century discussions about unity.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study is delimited primarily by practical considerations. Unity is one of the attributes of the church and as such it is a descriptor of the nature of the church and an integral component of any ecclesiology. While the dissertation will include a brief overview of other ecclesiological aspects that relate directly to the topic of unity and church authority, a comprehensive ecclesiology of either theologian is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Likewise, a comprehensive understanding of Campbell's and White's hermeneutic is also outside the scope of the dissertation.

Christian unity is a complex and demanding subject. Threats to unity arise from a variety of theological and non-theological sources. Some of these non-theological sources of unity and disunity are discussed in relation to specific incidents and quotations in this study. However, inasmuch as this study is theological in nature, no attempt will be made to address sociological and socioeconomic dimensions for every case nor will they be addressed in a comprehensive or exhaustive manner.

Since Campbell and White were both prolific writers with an extensive volume of printed material, this study concentrates on their published writings. Exploration of unpublished writings is only undertaken when required in relation to the case studies.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Developments in the church cannot be fully understood without a consideration of the historical context in which the ideas or changes emerge. Any considerations of Christian unity therefore must be explored in their historical context. This chapter attempts to provide this context by means of a brief overview of some of the socio-political conditions of early nineteenth-century America, a survey of historical developments with regard to unity on the America continent between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and a brief biographical sketch of the two leaders whose ideas will be examined in the rest of the dissertation.

Socio-Political Conditions of Nineteenth Century America

The commencement of the nineteenth-century brought with it rapid change and upheaval which permeated almost every sphere of American life. The total population multiplied rapidly as people flocked to the land of promise.¹ Waves of new immigrants along with the prevailing attitude of America's 'manifest destiny' fueled the drive to expand the nation's territory, pushing the frontier ever westward.² Fifteen new states

¹The population in 1800 was five million. By 1850, it had reached twenty-five million. John Mayfield, *The New Nation: 1800-1845* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), 6.

²Though most often used to describe the attitude that led to the expansion of the United States between 1815 and 1860, the phrase 'manifest destiny' was first used by John L. O'Sullivan in 1845 in an article pushing for annexation of Texas. He assumed that Providence had given the continent to America, therefore expansion was inevitable and certain. For full article see John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no. 1 (1845): 5-10.

were added to the Union within the first half of the century, and voting was extended to males who did not own property.³

The nineteenth-century was also a period of developing democratic government. Andrew Jackson became the first president elected by popular plebiscite.⁴ Jackson's inauguration also signaled the era of the common man. Up until his election, politics had been dominated by an elite group of well-bred and well-educated men. Jackson could claim neither of these things, and was distrustful of those who did.⁵ He rallied support from common people who like himself were discontent with the system. His presidency thus added political ferment to the social upheavals already gripping the country.

At the same time the predominantly agrarian society was being transformed to a more industrialized and urbanized society. Spurred on by the effects of the Embargo Act of 1807 and the War of 1812, the nation was striving for more economic independence. A dramatic rise in steamboat numbers, the advent of the railway, the invention of the telegraph, and improvements in printing meant that communication was dramatically improved. The result was faster and more extensive dissemination of information, which laid the foundation for widespread industrialization.⁶

³ David S.Reynolds, *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson*, Sydney, Australia: HarperCollins, 2008, location 24-25, Kindle edition.

⁴ Recent historians have been critical of Andrew Jackson's legacy and the appellation of Jacksonian democracy which is often applied to his presidency. While Jackson was the first president elected by plebiscite, most of the changes initiated by his administration benefitted white males at the expense of the subjugation of both Native Americans and African Americans. For a balanced appraisal, See Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

⁵ Winthrop S. Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment," in *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Edwin S Gaustad, 1-17 (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 4.

⁶ The improvements in dissemination of information would also benefit religious groups. The advances in printing meant that almost anyone could establish a printing business. Hence, the dramatic increase in popular literature was matched by an explosion of literature from religious presses, something

The combination of massive social and economic change in the first half of the nineteenth-century, along with the rapidly expanding territory, challenged not only the existing political structures, but also existing religious structures.⁷ The ferment of society would be mirrored by ferment in religion.

Christianity in Nineteenth Century America

By the beginning of the nineteenth-century, most of the religious groups of Europe were represented in the United States. As immigration increased, so did the variety of religious subgroups. The multiplicity of groups was further exacerbated by the values that molded American economic and social change. As the values of liberty and individualism spilled over into religious life, Christians began to challenge traditional religious authority. Religious experimentation was encouraged by the innovation occurring in wider society. As a result, the early nineteenth-century was marked by both sectarianism and denominationalism.

Many of the established churches experienced divisions. Some were a direct result of the increasing emphasis on personal religion and emotionalism generated by popular revivals. Other divisions grew out of disagreements over social issues such as slavery, and still others appeared to be primarily doctrinal in nature.

which both Alexander Campbell and Ellen G. White use to their advantage. See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989, 144.

⁷In the political arena these forces would result in a much more democratized political system. Initially, this democracy was somewhat limited in scope with most power in the hands of the rich. See evaluations by the following historians: Frank Otto Gatell and John M. McFaul, *Jacksonian America, 1815-1840: New Society, Changing Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); Mayfield, *The New Nation: 1800-1845*.

In the religious arena many changes occurred but the most immediately successful and obvious attempt at unity was the cooperation of Christians in non-ecclesiastical organizations and voluntary societies such as the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and temperance and anti-slavery groups. Samuel McCrea Cavert, *Church Cooperation and Unity in America: A Historical Review: 1900-1970* (New York: Association Press, 1970), 13.

Completely new religious groups also arose, including some such as Campbell's Disciples, who decried the growing disunity of the church, and the prescriptive tendencies of established religion. Their emphasis on a return to New Testament Christianity meant Protestantism's call to emphasize the Bible alone as a rule of faith was given new life in the nineteenth-century.⁸ Other new groups emphasized holiness, and still others were driven by eschatological hopes, such as the Millerites, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Despite the growing diversity, Protestants experienced a time of unprecedented growth and revitalization. Revivalist and social reformer, Charles Finney became the symbol of the common man in religion, mirroring many of the tendencies Jackson had displayed in politics.⁹ His success in camp meeting revivalism coincided with the timing of Jackson's political success.¹⁰ Uninhibited revivalism swept the nation.¹¹ It was often associated with extreme emotionalism, and at times ecstatic experiences which were "interpreted as fresh revelation."¹² Emotionalism however, was not the sole legacy of revivalism. An emphasis on personal conversion and turning away from sin leading to moral action and holiness was a recurrent theme of the revivalist preaching. This in

⁸George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 31. Knight claims that Restorationists "set the agenda" for nineteenth-century Protestants in America.

⁹ Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment," 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹Collectively, the many revivals that marked the American nation in the first half of the nineteenth-century are referred to as the Second Great Awakening. While the precise dates assigned to these revivals vary between historians there is general agreement that this group of revivals was of unprecedented length and geographic scope. Iain Hamish Murray and Banner of Truth Trust, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 116.

¹² Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment," 9.

combination with millennial hopes which led to renewed emphasis on mission, drove Christians to attempt to transform their society.

Christian Unity and the American Church

Having examined the primary religious impulses of the nineteenth-century, we turn our attention to the topic of Christian unity in America, starting from the seventeenth century impulses, and moving to the nineteenth-century context of Campbell and White.

Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

The impetus that drove most settlers to the American continent was one of hope founded in the possibility of new opportunities. For some, the opportunities offered by the New World were land, and wealth, but for many, America was a place to practice their religion without the fear of the persecution that they had experienced within their homelands. Given the joy in a new found religious freedom, the concept of ecclesial unity was far from the thinking of most settlers. Indeed, as Gerald MacDonald has observed, “the story of religion in America is not a story of union, but of separation.”¹³ Nevertheless, in this environment of division, there were a few isolated voices which expressed a vision for Christian unity.

One of the earliest known individuals in America to seriously consider the topic of Christian unity was John Eliot (1604-1690), a Puritan minister and missionary to the American Indians. While propagating his own religious views amongst the Indians, he became concerned that the rivalry between the Presbyterian churches and the Congregational churches would confuse new converts. Thus he took the unusual step of establishing an authority structure for the new converts that combined both the idea of

¹³Gerald T. MacDonald, “The Brethren and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf’s Pennsylvania Synods (1742),” *Brethren Life and Thought* 58, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 138.

ruling elders from his own Congregationalist tradition, and the concepts of councils or synods similar to those of the Presbyterian Church.¹⁴

Eliot's concerns however, were not limited to the impact of disunity upon the American Indians. He was also concerned about the impact of division on the wider evangelism of the church. This led him to propose a method to achieve reconciliation between the independent Congregational Churches and the Presbyterian Church, which he considered was an essential precursor to the achievement of unity between all Christian churches, and hence more effective mission.¹⁵ Building upon his experiments with the authority structures he had trialed within the Christian Indian settlements, Eliot suggested the adoption of a basic congregational model with ruling elders for all churches, but also recommended four levels of co-operative councils so that all the particular churches could work together for the good of the whole Christian Church.¹⁶ His creative solution saw an extensive role for the councils which included not only cooperation for missionary work, promoting of love, and the joint sending of laborers to the field, but also working to limit heresies, dangerous opinions, discord, and schism.¹⁷

¹⁴ Don Herbert Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," in *History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, 3rd ed., edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 219-259 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 227. See also Wilson, John, *Life of John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians* (Edinburgh, Scotland: William Oliphant, 1828).

¹⁵ The intent is obvious from the extended title of his pamphlet Eliot, John, *Communion of Churches; or the divine management of gospel churches by the ordinance of councils, constituted in order according to the Scriptures: As also, the way of bringing all Christian parishes to be particular reforming Congregational Churches; humbly proposed as a way which hath so much light from Scriptures of truth, as that it may be lawfully submitted unto by all, and may, by the blessing of the Lord, be a means of uniting these two holy and eminent parties, the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. As also to prepare for the hoped-for resurrection of the churches; and to propose a way to bring all Christian nations into a unity of the faith and order of the gospel.* (Cambridge, [MA]: Marmaduke Johnson, 1665).

¹⁶ Eliot proposed district councils which would meet monthly, provincial councils that would meet quarterly, national councils which would meet yearly, and a worldwide ecumenical council which would convene on a continuous basis in Jerusalem. See Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," 227.

¹⁷ Mather, Cotton, Thomas Robbins, and Samuel Gardner Drake, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, the ecclesiastical history of New-England : from its first planting in the year 1620. unto the year of our*

While innovative, Eliot's ideas gathered little interest, and resulted in no significant changes beyond his Indian settlements.

Cotton Mather (1663-1728), was one of the few who expressed interest in Eliot's ideas. He was the biographer of John Eliot, and the Puritan pastor at the Old North Church in Boston. Like Eliot before him, Mather linked the need for unity to evangelism. Mather's views however appear to have been driven primarily by an eschatological consciousness, which lent an air of urgency to the proclamation of the gospel.¹⁸ Mather recognized that the large number and variety of churches in New England hindered effective evangelization, and unnecessarily involved the new converts in controversies and problems that distracted from the gospel.¹⁹ Thus he considered reconciliation between the churches was vital for the ongoing evangelization of the church.²⁰ As a first step Mather urged unity of action between all Christian groups, and advocated the formation of missionary societies that were both interdenominational and international.²¹

A more extensive plan for implementing unity was outlined by Mather in a letter to Pietist August Herman Francke. It focused upon recognizing common religious beliefs. Mather outlined fourteen points of belief which he considered were common to all the different Christian churches, and upon which he believed churches could unite for common evangelization and action. These fourteen points he subsequently summarized

Lord, 1698. In seven books. Volume 1, (Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus and Son, 1855), 555, accessed December 15, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/magnaliachrist01math>.

¹⁸ Ernst Benz, "Pietist and Puritan Sources of Early Protestant World Missions (Cotton Mather and A. H. Francke)," *Church History*, 20, no 2 (June 1, 1951), 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," 227. Mather's consideration of the unity of all Christian groups did not extend to Roman Catholics.

into three essential bonds of union: belief in one God who exists in three persons, belief in Christ the redeemer who reconciles us to God, and love for neighbors arising from the experience of being loved by God.²² Together these formed the essence of Christianity, and hence bound all Christians as one. Mather's suggestions, while welcomed by Francke, never amounted to anything more than dreams on paper. Any influence he might have had due to his prominent position, were tainted by his association with the Salem witch trials.²³

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the prominent reformed preacher associated with the eighteenth-century New England awakening, also had reason to ponder the topic of Christian unity. Recognizing the biblical declaration that there is one faith, one baptism and one Lord, Edwards acknowledged an intrinsic unity of the church, and called for this to be manifested visibly.²⁴ His vision of unity was based primarily on common worship and common action in relation to issues that pertained to the whole body such as its growth and health.²⁵ In particular, Edwards focused on the need for Christians to come

²² Benz, "Pietist and Puritan Sources of Early Protestant World Missions (Cotton Mather and A. H. Francke)," 44-45.

²³ Cotton Mather is best known for his notorious role in the Salem witch trials. Although Mather did not actually attend the Salem witch trials, his influence regarding the validity of spectral evidence, his writings in *Wonders of the Invisible World* which actively defended the ongoing trials, and his role in setting up the courts where the trials took place, have resulted in many historians placing much of the blame upon Mather for their outcome. Some 20th century historians have been kinder in their evaluation of his role, suggesting he was a moderating influence on the trials. See for instance Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1979), 18; Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 123. A more positive legacy for Mather can be found in his active support and push for smallpox inoculation in the face of both medical and Puritan resistance.

²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Edward Hickman (London: Ball, Arnold, and Co., 1840), 2:295.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

together to pray for the revival of the church, and for the spread of the gospel.²⁶ Such joint action was not simply for the invoking of God's aid in the work of the church. Edwards considered that the action would also promote a willingness to be personally involved in the activities for which they were praying.²⁷

Prayer was not the only way in which Edwards believed Christians were called to manifest unity visibly. He believed there were two other important ways that Christian unity could be demonstrated. First, participation together in the Lord's Supper was seen as a way to unite Christians in worshiping God.²⁸ Second, Christians needed to show love and affection to all other members of the visible church.²⁹ While Edward's calls for unity in worship and prayer had limited impact in his lifetime, they have had significant impact since his death as his writings were republished.³⁰

Hence it can be seen that while there were several important considerations of Christian unity in the first one and a half centuries of the colonization of the New World, they existed primarily as theories without implementation. Each was motivated by

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. "For persons to be thus engaged in extraordinary prayer for the revival and flourishing state of religion the world, will naturally lead each one to reflect on *himself*, and consider how religion flourishes in his own heart, and how far his example contributes to that for which he is praying."

²⁸ Ibid. However, in order to ensure the authenticity of their Christianity, Edwards believed that those who partook of the Lord's Supper needed to visibly demonstrate a knowledge and experience of God's grace. For more detailed information on the vision of Edwards for the Christian church, see Rhys S. Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145-212.

²⁹ Jonathan Edwards, "An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God concerning the Qualifications requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Edward Hickman (London: William Ball, 1839), 1:458. Edwards recommended some practical steps here such as visible repentance when one Christian wounded another, so as to confirm their love of the offender.

³⁰ Thomas A. Schafer, "Jonathan Edwards' Conception of the Church," *Church History* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 1955): 57. The writings of Edwards were however used to call Christians to unite in regular prayers in Scotland in 1747.

mission, and focused primarily on the idea of common action to achieve Christian goals including evangelization. Apart from the writings of John Eliot, little thought appears to have been given to the impact of the preexisting understandings of authority and authority structures amongst the Christian groups the ministers sought to unite.

Pennsylvania became the site of the first serious ecumenical experiments in the New World. Pennsylvania had attracted a wide variety of German religious groups each of which enjoyed freedom to practice their unique beliefs. Yet, the relationship between them was largely characterized by intense rivalry, with each group considering themselves to be the true church.³¹ Concerned, a small group of Pietist members met together monthly for prayer and worship between 1736 and 1739 in an attempt to move past the rivalry and mistrust.³² While they as individuals experienced some mutual edification, no significant impact was made upon the warring churches.

Gottlieb Spangenberg, one of the members of this concerned group, believed that Moravian and ecumenical thinker Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf could further their aims in the deeply divided community, and invited him to Pennsylvania. Thus Zinzendorf began a series of interdenominational meetings or synods in Pennsylvania in 1742.

Zinzendorf believed that it was the responsibility of the church to make visible its inherent unity upon the earth. This was not to be done by obliterating different

³¹ Gerald T. MacDonald, "The Brethren and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Synods (1742)," *Brethren Life and Thought*, 58, no. 1 (Spring, 2013), 137. Such rivalry between religious groups was rife especially on the frontier. Yoder described the rivalry as follows: "In most cases it was a free for all – there were no ethics in the battle for the souls of the pioneers. Baptists were obliging enough to immerse any stray Methodists they could find; mounted Methodist circuit-riders were glad to rope and brand Calvinistic sheep with the marks of Arminius and Wesley." Don Herbert Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 219-259 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954), 232.

³² MacDonald, "The Brethren and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Synods (1742)," 136-7. The group went by the name of the Associated Brethren of Skippack.

denominations to form one new group. True unity demanded recognition that people think and act differently. Indeed, the various denominations were evidence of God's love for mankind.³³ Therefore, it was not denominations in themselves which created the obstacles to unity of the church, but rather, "the injury done to the 'Body of Christ' through pride, denominational bigotry and self-deluding ignorance of nominal Christians."³⁴ Zinzendorf thus pictured a visible Christian unity in which Christians put aside their pride and bigotry to worship and work together. This involved the coming together of God's people to form the "Congregation of God" in the Spirit while at the same time maintaining their denominational affiliations.³⁵ Thus his synods in Pennsylvania began with the goal of establishing a 'Congregation of God in the Spirit' and reaching a consensus about the essential points of doctrine in relation to salvation.³⁶

The endeavor experienced problems from its inception. Although the first synod was well attended, with Christians hailing from at least seven different denominational backgrounds, only one religious group sent official delegates.³⁷ Thus the majority of attendees had no official power to act. Furthermore, the announcement of the agenda was met with suspicion, with some going as far as suggesting that it equated to "the resurrection of Babel."³⁸ For the much smaller number of Christians who chose to return

³³ A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf, the Ecumenical Pioneer: A Study in the Moravian Contribution to Christian Mission and Unity* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

³⁶ MacDonald, "The Brethren and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Synods (1742)," 141.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

to subsequent synods, distrust was magnified as Zinzendorf used organizational procedures which hailed from his own Moravian background to run the meetings.

While Zinzendorf had resigned from his Moravian episcopate in order to reduce his denominational ties, and be seen in a more undenominational light, his biases became increasingly obvious as the synods progressed.³⁹ He unintentionally alienated groups by his rejection of baptism by immersion, and subsequently by implying that God loved the traditional churches more than sects.⁴⁰ As a result, Zinzendorf's grand plan fell apart and the synods failed to meet their goals. Rather than fostering the commonalities between the denominations, the synods instead highlighted the differences between the groups.

Nevertheless, the experiment was not without some positive results. During the third synod a small group of converts were organized into a non-denominational congregation and an interdenominational ordination took place.⁴¹ Furthermore, some interdenominational devotional material was published, and co-operation was obtained in the mission to the Indians.

Nineteenth Century

The rapidly changing conditions of the nineteenth-century promoted increased thought about Christian unity on the American continent. The combination of a new awareness of the fragmented nature of the church, the needs of the frontier, and the results of revivalism all contributed to an increased consciousness of the need for some form of church unity.⁴² As a consequence, experiments with unity in nineteenth-century

³⁹ Ibid., 141-145; Lewis, *Zinzendorf, the Ecumenical Pioneer*, 143

⁴⁰ MacDonald, "The Brethren and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Synods (1742)," 142,143.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Zinzendorf, the Ecumenical Pioneer*, 145, 148.

⁴² Lefferts Augustine Loetscher, *The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Richard C. Wolf, Historical Series (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 8. Loetscher

America were much more productive than those of the earlier centuries. New developments in thinking about Christian unity can be divided into four main categories which overlap in time. The first development was an increased consciousness of the need for unity within and between churches of the same denomination. The second development was the formation of voluntary societies. The third development was the rise of cooperation and alliances between churches of different denominations, while the final development was a more organic consideration of unity which was most evident in new Christian movements specifically focused on the notion of Christian unity.

Consideration of Internal Church Unity

Many denominations working in newly populated areas developed independently from churches of the same denomination in other states, provinces and countries. The resulting differences in beliefs and practices raised important questions about the unity of those of the same faith. One such question, that of how much latitude is acceptable between those of the same faith, was raised by the liberal beliefs of Anglican Bishop Colenso in Natal, Africa.⁴³ The scandal created by his beliefs contributed to the decision of the Archbishop of Canterbury to call the first worldwide meeting of Anglican bishops to discuss matters of importance to the Anglican Church. While the meeting did not occur on the American continent, it did involve and have important consequences for the American church. Meeting at Lambeth in 1867, the bishops considered matters which would improve the unity of the church including the need for better communication, the

suggests that for the most part, the move towards Christian unity was one of practical necessity rather than one which began with theological principles.

⁴³ Bishop Colenso was an Anglican Bishop of English descent who was appointed to the bishopric of Natal in 1853. Colenso's attempts to contextualize religion for the native inhabitants of his parish pushed beyond what others considered acceptable boundaries. Scandal was created by his advocacy for tolerance toward polygamy, his denouncing of the colonist treatment of the Zulus, his arguments for universalism, and his declaration in 1862 that the Pentateuch was unhistorical. For an interesting discussion and evaluation of Colenso's ideas and legacy, See Harold T. Lewis, *A Church for the Future: South Africa as the Crucible for Anglicanism in a New Century* (New York: Church Publishing, 2007), 11-22.

need for consistent standards of faith and doctrine while allowing for culturally appropriate variations in worship services, and matters related to discipline and authority.⁴⁴ The resolutions of the Lambeth Conference were not considered binding upon the individual churches, but the conference nonetheless helped churches think more carefully about internal unity and its visible expression. Subsequent Lambeth conferences were held at ten yearly intervals with continued emphasis on organization and matters related to internal unity.

The Anglican Church was not alone in its attention to internal unity during the nineteenth century; other denominations also saw wisdom in both national and international conferences. Many of these like the first Lambeth conference took place outside of North America, but had significant impact on the churches within the American continent.⁴⁵ While the Methodists denied a need to resolve doctrinal and political issues such as those which motivated that Anglican conference, they nevertheless recognized the need for increased cooperation and efficiency in the achievement of the goals of the church. Consequently, they organized an international meeting in 1881.⁴⁶ The Old Catholic Churches followed suit in 1889, the Congregational Churches in 1891, and the Baptists in 1905.⁴⁷ While many of the associations and conferences would adopt ecumenical goals in later meetings, the initial focus of these conferences was one that concentrated primarily on internal unity and organization.

⁴⁴ Anglican Consultative Council, *The Lambeth Conference Resolutions Archive from 1867*. (Anglican Communion Office, 2005), accessed January 8, 2015. <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/downloads/1867.pdf>

⁴⁵National synods and assemblies were still lacking for many denominations, and in the wake of the world denominational fellowships, more effort went into coordinating national bodies.

⁴⁶ Henry Renaud Turner Brandreth, "Approaches of the Churches towards each other in the Nineteenth-Century." *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 261-306 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954), 267.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 266-268.

Voluntary Societies

The most popular and successful development of nineteenth-century America in relation to Christian unity was initiated by laity, and occurred largely outside of ecclesiastical organizations.⁴⁸ It did not have an explicit aim of Christian unity. Rather, the impulse for unity happened as an unexpected side effect of the Second Great Awakening which brought revitalization to the Protestant churches of the United States.

The revival brought with it a new awareness of the connection between conversion and transformation, in particular the need for Christians to lead moral and upright lives. When combined with the widely held belief that society needed to be purified in preparation for the millennium, a profound force for change was unleashed. Together the impulses of revivalism and postmillennialism addressed the needs of society.⁴⁹ As a consequence thousands of Christians from a variety of backgrounds actively engaged in organizing voluntary associations with aims to change the society around them. Some voluntary groups embraced overtly evangelistic goals such as the American Home Missionary Society, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Tract Society. Other organizations targeted social reform in order to rid the country of its social ills, such as prostitution, poverty, alcoholism, and slavery.

Astounding levels of participation were achieved in the voluntary associations. One estimate suggests that in some cities “nearly half of all adult Protestant males”

⁴⁸ Loetscher, *The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth-Century America*, 7.

⁴⁹ The Great Awakening has therefore been visualized as “an organizing process that helped to give meaning and direction to people suffering in various degrees from social strains of a nation on the move into new political, economic and geographical areas.” See Donald Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” in *Religion in America: Interpretive Essays*, edited by John M Mulder and John Frederick Wilson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 203.

belonged to a church-related voluntary association.⁵⁰ Such a profound level of religious activism in the public arena was unprecedented yet remarkably effective in achieving its goals.⁵¹ In addition to the goals of each society, and more importantly for our discussion of unity, the voluntary societies put members of multiple denominations in a position where they cooperated in a visible organization to achieve common goals both religious and social. Furthermore, the goals were not limited to a single geographical area, but to the whole nation. It was the first time in American history that such unity between Christians had been achieved.⁵² The positive experience of unity between Evangelicals that emerged within the voluntary associations became so important that some associations began holding their annual meetings together to enhance the fellowship between Christians.⁵³

The positive impact of united fellowship and mission in the service of student based volunteer associations, such as the Young Men's Christian Association, and the Student Volunteer Movement, impacted the modern ecumenical movement even more directly. Members and leaders from these associations would go on to become intimately involved in the formation of the World Council of Churches, and take on

⁵⁰ John G. West, "Nineteenth Century America" *Building a Healthy Culture: Strategies for an American Renaissance*, edited by Don Eberly, 181-199 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 185. The chapter is also available online as a pdf with the title "Evangelical Reform in Early Nineteenth Century America" at <http://www.discovery.org/f/5221>.

⁵¹ Ibid., 183-5. West noted that the voluntary associations were particularly successful in improving Sunday School attendance, decreasing alcohol consumption, and providing upward mobility for the poor.

⁵² Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," 236.

⁵³ West, "Nineteenth Century America" 189. At the local level, similar value was attached to cooperation with some denominations prepared to share their pulpits with ministers from other denominations.

leadership positions in various capacities within the twentieth-century ecumenical movement.⁵⁴

Cooperation and Alliances between Denominations

Concern for Christian unity was not limited to lay members. Religious leaders also began to take up the cry for Christian union. Leaders from the Lutheran and Reformed churches in the middle and southern states of America, spurred on by the cooperation between their Prussian counterparts,⁵⁵ began sharing ownership of property, and at times even shared Sunday Schools and treasuries.⁵⁶ This simple cooperation between the two groups prompted consideration of a more formal union between them in the late 1830s although the idea failed to gain adequate support.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The two most notable examples of leaders emerging from the student associations were John Mott and Willem Visser 't Hooft. For a detailed assessment of the role of voluntary movements in the development of ecumenism, see Ruth Rouse, "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 309-349 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954).

⁵⁵ In 1817 the King of Prussia outlined a plan for union of the Prussian Lutheran and Reformed churches to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. The plan involved a new joint confession and liturgy, and subsequently a new name – the Evangelical Church. While the outward justification was one of celebration, King Frederick William III was likely more interested in the political benefits of a strengthened state at a time when unification of Germany was desirable. While there was some resistance from Lutherans who felt their heritage was threatened, the link between church and state meant that overall the union was successful. Several smaller German states followed Prussia's example. For a detailed consideration of the Prussian Plan of Union see Walter H. Conser, Jr., *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America 1815-1866* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1984), 14-22.

⁵⁶ Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," 242. The extent of the cooperation extended to those in Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Ohio.

⁵⁷ Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," 242, 243. For instance, Pastor Gottlieb Schober a Lutheran pastor in North Carolina urged the Ministerium of Pennsylvania to consider uniting the Lutheran and Reformed Christians as their parent churches had done in Europe. For more information on Schober, see Jerry L. Surratt, *Gottlieb Schober of Salem: Discipleship and Ecumenical Vision in an Early Moravian Town* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983). Surratt's volume suggests that the various Lutheran synods in America struggled to agree on their own internal affairs and beliefs, so it is not surprising that suggestions for more extensive cooperation went unheeded.

But other voices were to arise within the Lutheran and Reformed traditions which took up the plea for Christian union. The two most prominent of these were Lutheran theologian Samuel Schmucker (1799-1873) and Reformed theologian Phillip Schaff (1819-1893).

Schmucker, who was instrumental in the founding of the Lutheran General Synod, and the head of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, believed strongly in Christian unity.⁵⁸ His ideas about Christian unity were first expressed in a document entitled *Fraternal Appeal to the American Churches, with a Plan for Catholic Union, on Apostolic Principles*, where he proposed that Christians form an alliance which would allow cooperation and federative action, while allowing denominations to retain their own identity, authority, and decision making.⁵⁹ Membership of the alliance would require agreement to an “Apostolic Protestant Confession” which was composed of doctrines which he considered were common to all the main Protestant creeds, while joint actions would be coordinated by an advisory council.⁶⁰

Schmucker’s views while reaching a large audience because of his association with the Lutheran General Synod were regarded with suspicion by many Lutherans who doubted his allegiance to Lutheranism.⁶¹ Nevertheless, his proposal was supported by the 1839 Lutheran General Synod, and his later *Overture of Christian Union* was

⁵⁸ C. G. Fry, “Schmucker, Samuel Simon (1799-1873),” in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, edited by Daniel G. Reid, Robert Dean Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, and Harry S. Stout (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

⁵⁹ Paul A. Crow, Jr. "The Anatomy of a 19th-Century United Church." *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1983): 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Schmucker’s attempts to make Lutheranism more American were regarded as doctrinal laxity by the Confessional Lutherans. See Walter H. Conser, Jr, *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America 1815-1866* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1984), 270.

endorsed by forty-five leaders of many denominations.⁶² It is unclear how much of this support translated into real joint action, however, it was instrumental in the formation of the American Branch of the Evangelical Alliance in 1867.⁶³

A modified form of Schmucker's original proposal was issued in 1870, under the title of *The True Unity of Christ's Church; Being a Renewed Appeal to the Friends of the Redeemer, on Primitive Christian Union, and the History of its Corruption*. In this version he moved beyond his original proposal, and called churches not only to subscribe to a joint creed, but to consider themselves as branches of the one Apostolic Protestant Church. While allowing individual churches to keep their own belief systems and ways of worship, he called for a shedding of denominational names, free interchange of ministry, and open communion.⁶⁴ Such suggestions while still endorsing federative action moved him closer to a position of real organic Christian union.

In the German Reformed Church, Philip Schaff, a professor of church history, was inspired to consider Christian unity by his study of the development of the church. He concluded that the Reformation would be incomplete until institutions united into an Evangelical-Catholic church.⁶⁵ However, while Schaff appeared to be promoting a merger of sister churches, or at least predicting its eventuality, his idealism was tempered by reality, so that he rejected the necessity of a single organization, a single

⁶² Steven M Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2002), 119-120, accessed January 5, 2015. <https://books.google.com.au/books?isbn=0271021993>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Crow, "The Anatomy of a 19th-Century United Church," 8.

⁶⁵ Philip Schaff, *The Principles of Protestantism: As Related to the Present State of the Church*, trans. John W. Nevin (Chambersburg, PA: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1845), 183. See also Stephen Ray Graham, *Cosmos in the Chaos: Philip Schaff's Interpretation of Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 218.

visible head, or a single form of worship.⁶⁶ Indeed, Schaff noted that there were significant problems to organic or corporate models of union under a single government and proclaimed that Christ the head of the Church “promised us one flock under one shepherd, but not one fold.”⁶⁷ All denominations he considered had a role to play in elucidating the truth.⁶⁸ Therefore, he upheld both individual forms of union where Christians came together for a common purpose, and federal union which he defined as a voluntary association of churches who maintained their own individual freedom and independence, while at the same time working together for the common good.⁶⁹

Organic Forms of Christian Unity

The final developments to be discussed with regard to Christian unity in nineteenth-century America are attempts at organic forms of union. The term organic union refers to a Christian unity where churches establish a new common identity, rather than maintaining their own separate identities as they work together.

⁶⁶ Schaff, *Principles of Protestantism*, 168-169. Nevertheless, the Mercersburg Theology he co-developed with John Williamson Nevin in the 1840's provided a theological basis for organic Christian unity. It particularly emphasized the living, mystical union between the believer and Christ. Christian unity was thus a reality to be celebrated visibly and jointly through the sacraments. See Crow 9-10;

⁶⁷ Philip Schaff, “The Reunion of Christendom,” 93-130 in *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, ed. Richard Hughes Seager (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1993), 105.

⁶⁸ Graham, 227. Schaff outlined other models of union which were to be rejected. These included absorptive or organic union which included incorporation of all religious groups into one of them, negative union based on allegiance to the Bible alone, and formation of an eclectic creed composed of elements of multiple creeds. It seems somewhat surprising to find a rejection of union based on allegiance to the Bible alone. Schaff justified this rejection by arguing that union on this basis would undo all of Christian history, which would need to be repeated. See Philip Schaff, *Christ and Christianity: Studies on Christology, Creeds and Confessions, Protestantism and Romanticism, Reformation Principles, Sunday Observance, Religious Freedom and Christian Union* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1885), 146-148, accessed January 7, 2015. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89087895835;view=1up;seq=5>

⁶⁹ Philip Schaff, “The Reunion of Christendom,” 104. Schaff outlined five ways in which such union could be hastened: treating fellow Christians with kindness, cooperation in Christian and philanthropic causes which aid humankind, avoidance of interference with the mission efforts of others, the study of church history to reduce misunderstanding and prejudice, and earnest prayer.

German Reformed theologian John W. Nevin (1803-1886), a professor at the German Reformed seminary in Mercersburg is credited with developing a theology of the church which anticipated the organic union of the church. In an environment which emphasized individualistic theology, Nevin instead emphasized that oneness was part of the very essence of the church. Consequently, he recognized that real unity would only result when individual Christians have authentic Christian experiences.⁷⁰ Nevin's ideal of a united church spurred the German Reformed Church to actively seek unity with other reformed churches, but none of these efforts resulted in union during the nineteenth-century.⁷¹

Better success attended the efforts to unite the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in New York and Ohio in 1801. Having cooperated since the colonial period, these churches expressed a willingness to move beyond simple federated action, by recognizing each other's ministry and planting union congregations in new districts.⁷² While advancing on previous attempts at Christian unity, they still stopped short of full organic union. The cooperation continued successfully for nearly forty years but was dissolved due to increasing rivalry.⁷³

Proposals for organic unity also came from within the Episcopal Church, the most important of which came from William Reed Huntington (1838-1909) who urged his church to consider union beyond the boundaries of the denomination. His optimism about the benefits of such a union arose from his personal experience cooperating with a

⁷⁰ Crow, "The Anatomy of a 19th-Century United Church," 10.

⁷¹ Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America," 247.

⁷² The radical plan even allowed ministers called to serve in the other's denomination to hold membership in the local church they served while at the same time maintaining commitments to their own denomination. Crow, "The Anatomy of a 19th-Century United Church," 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

Roman Catholic priest. Huntington's proposal outlined in *The Church Idea, An Essay Toward Unity*, led the 1886 General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States to pass a resolution which has become known as the Chicago Quadrilateral. It expressed a commitment to interfaith unity, and outlined four core beliefs which were considered essential for union.⁷⁴ Two years later, the Lambeth Conference adopted a revised version of the Chicago quadrilateral and expressed commitment of Anglicans around the world to pursue a more ecumenical unity.⁷⁵

While some visions of organic unity arose from within existing denominations as noted above, the nineteenth-century notably saw the emergence of new groups whose primary focus was return to the authority of the Bible, and with it, an organic form of Christian unity. Indeed, several parallel movements with similar ideals arose independently in different parts of the country.

The earliest of these groups was begun by James O'Kelly (1735-1826). O'Kelly, a Methodist elder serving in Virginia, disagreed with the episcopal governing structure of his church.⁷⁶ In 1793, when his pleas for a more democratic government went unheeded,

⁷⁴ The Chicago Quadrilateral considered the following beliefs essential: (1) "The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the revealed Word of God." (2) "The Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith." (3) "The two Sacraments – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with un failing use of Christ's words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him." (4) "The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church." Robert B Slocum, "The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Development in an Anglican Approach to Christian Unity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 33, no. 4 (1996): 472.

⁷⁵ The Lambeth Conference maintained the general intent of the Chicago Quadrilateral but adapted the wording of the first three points while leaving the fourth untouched. The first point was reworded to acknowledge the Scriptures as "containing all things necessary to salvation" and as "the rule and ultimate standard of faith." The second was reworded to add the Apostles Creed as a baptismal symbol, while rewording of the third made clear that the Sacraments had been instituted by Christ himself. See Anglican Consultative Council, *The Lambeth Conference Resolutions Archive from 1888*. (Anglican Communion Office, 2005). Accessed January 8, 2015. http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/downloads/_1888.pdf

⁷⁶ Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity*, revised and expanded (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 1997), 87. James O'Kelly was particularly concerned

he withdrew from the official Methodist Church and set up a new group which he initially called the Republican Methodist Church. The group rejected any form of church hierarchy, instead promoting the equality of ministers through a congregational authority structure.⁷⁷ Within a year of formation, the Methodist label was discarded completely in favor of the name Christians, and the Bible was voted as their only creed.⁷⁸ O’Kelly saw these changes as a chance to promote Christian union since the name was non-sectarian, and the repudiation of creeds removed potentially divisive elements.⁷⁹ He met with a measure of success. Estimates suggest that close to 8,000 ministers and church members joined O’Kelly within six years.⁸⁰

By 1801, Abner Jones (1772-1841), a Free-Will Baptist in Vermont was also convicted of the need for a simple Christianity which encouraged unity. Leaving the Baptist Church, he organized a church which, like the church of O’Kelly, came simply to be known as the Christian Church. Jones was joined shortly afterwards by New Hampshire Baptist minister Elias Smith (1769-1846).⁸¹ Together they established churches throughout New England which promoted the sufficiency of Scripture, and the

about the power and authority that was being centered in one man: the newly appointed Head of the American Methodist Church, Bishop Francis Asbury.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁸ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginning of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 145.

⁷⁹ Ibid. While O’Kelly had removed some obstacles to Christian union, his almost modalistic views on the Godhead provided a significant obstacle to his goals.

⁸⁰ Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity*, 87.

⁸¹ Like most Restorationist leaders Smith devoted himself to attack what he considered were unbiblical doctrines. These included Calvinism, sprinkling, and the Trinity. The legacy of Smith however, is one of being unable to decide about the extent of salvation. He repeatedly embraced and then renounced universalism making leaders of other Restorationist groups nervous about uniting with him. See for instance Lynn Waller, “Elias Smith (1769-1846),” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

unity of the church through the abandonment of creeds. After becoming aware of the similarities between their churches and that of O’Kelly they began cooperating together under the name Christian Connection.⁸² Together their members numbered about 20,000.⁸³ However, the Universalism of Smith became an obstacle to the cooperation or joining together with other groups seeking Christian unity.⁸⁴

The more important Restorationist groups were those of Alexander and Thomas Campbell, and Barton Stone. In Kentucky, Barton Stone (1772-1844), a Presbyterian minister, became aware of the divisive nature of denominational names and confessions. After being profoundly impacted by the unity in worship that he observed during the ecumenical revival at Cane Ridge in 1801, Stone determined to pursue Christian unity.⁸⁵ Withdrawing from the Presbyterian Synod, he along with four ministers with similar beliefs founded the Springfield Presbytery in 1803. But, just one year later, convinced

⁸² Christian Connection is sometimes spelled with the original spelling of Christian Connexion. I have elected to use the more modern spelling which appears to be used more frequently in contemporary Restorationist literature. Christian Connection members were quite receptive to the teaching of William Miller and many embraced his teaching. Seventh-day Adventist co-founders James White and Joseph Bates were both active members of the Christian Connection. Alexander Campbell however, was quite adamant that Miller’s premillennialism was wrong, so Disciples members were less likely to embrace Miller’s message.

⁸³ Thomas H. Olbricht, “Christian Connection,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004). While it appears that Smith became aware of the churches of O’Kelly as early as 1808, cooperation did not begin until around 1810.

⁸⁴ Alexander Campbell was particularly opposed to the Unitarianism which was prevalent amongst the New England Christians. See D. Duane Cummins, *The Disciples: A Struggle for Reformation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009), 44.

⁸⁵ In 1801, Barton Stone along with seventeen other Presbyterian ministers, held a large camp meeting revival which unexpectedly drew many thousands of people. While it was intended for Presbyterians, many individuals from Methodist, Baptist, and other denominational backgrounds also joined the throng. Singing, praying, preaching weeping, groaning, and various forms of emotional excess continued for seven days. Religious revival ensued despite the chaos with between 1,000-3,000 conversions estimated to have resulted directly from the meetings. For more information on the Cane Ridge Revival see Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1990).

that this name also created a barrier to unity, they decided to cast off the name and simply be known as Christians. Their decision along with a plea for unity of all Christians was announced in *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*.⁸⁶

Christian unity became his focus as he continued to minister in Kentucky and Ohio. Indeed, he identified unity, as the “polar star” which was to guide and direct all religious activity.⁸⁷ But the next few years did not bring about the harmony and unity that Stone or his colleagues had envisioned. Rather, they were filled with doctrinal controversy, particularly in relation to the doctrines of atonement and trinity.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Stone continued to urge that denominational identity be surrendered so that there could truly be only one body of Christ. By 1830, more than sixteen thousand people in mid-western states had joined his Christian congregations.⁸⁹ Many of Stone’s followers would join forces with Alexander Campbell’s Disciples after 1832, while others chose to join with O’Kelly’s endeavor.

Meanwhile, Irish Presbyterian minister Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), was also concerned about the disunity of the church. He had argued for union of the various factions of his own Presbyterian Church in both Belfast and Scotland without success in

⁸⁶ *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* was penned by Richard McNemar but appears to have represented the thinking of all five of the ministers who had formed the Springfield Presbytery. Their beliefs were influenced by the understanding of the nearness of millennium.

⁸⁷ Barton Stone, “An Address to the Christian Churches of Christ,” *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 9 (1832): 266.

⁸⁸ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, Kindle Edition (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press in cooperation with Disciples Historical Society, 2013), location 707. See also D. Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), 107-109. These were not the only doctrines they espoused which would cause difficulties in promoting Christian union. Stone’s relaxed stance on the mode of baptism was problematic for Stone’s desired union with the churches of Alexander Campbell.

⁸⁹ D. Newell Williams et al, *The Stone Campbell Movement*, Kindle Edition, location 756. The acceptance of baptism by immersion along with a focus on the authority of the Bible was attractive to Baptists who made up a large proportion of his adherents.

1804, and on arrival in America was distressed to discover that the disunity in the Presbyterian Church was just as marked in the New World. The simple action of inviting other Presbyterian subgroups to join the Seceder Presbyterians in communion, resulted in his censure by the local Presbytery in Western Pennsylvania.⁹⁰ The callous disregard for the unity of the church, and the obvious intolerance for divergent beliefs led Thomas Campbell to end his relationship with the Associate Synod of North America. Nevertheless, he continued to preach independently, focusing on the gospel and the topic of Christian unity. Instead of confessions and creeds, Campbell proclaimed “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”⁹¹

Followers banded together in 1809 to form the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, a group with a mission to promote “simple evangelical Christianity free from all mixture of human opinions and inventions of men.”⁹² Thomas wrote a statement of purpose for the new association entitled the *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association in Washington* which contained the following guiding principles: (1) The right to private judgments and opinions; (2) Scripture as the authority and rule of practice for Christians, rather than human opinions or interpretations of it; (3) Recognition that disunity resulting from sectarianism was contrary to God’s

⁹⁰See Alexander Campbell and Thomas Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell Together with a Brief Memoir of Mrs. Jane Campbell* (Cincinnati, OH: H. S. Bosworth, 1861), 10-18; Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1868), 1:222-246.

⁹¹ This well-known quote from Thomas Campbell, while often referred to as part of the *Declaration and Address*, does not occur in the published script of the Declaration. Our knowledge of this saying relies on a letter from Elder James Foster which Alexander quotes in his memoirs of Thomas Campbell. Campbell and Campbell, 19-20, footnote 4. Thomas Campbell, and subsequently his son Alexander, understood that if the Scriptures were silent on a subject, individuals should be free to form their own opinion on the topic.

⁹² Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (Washington, PA.: Brown and Sample, 1809), 4, accessed June 10, 21014. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924006307817>. The principles in the preamble were repeated and expanded in the thirteen propositions listed in the following Address component of the document.

ideal and that Christians should strive for peace and unity; (4) The need for the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide; and (5) Christ as the only source of salvation.⁹³ He therefore urged a return to the primitive practices of the New Testament church where unity reigned.⁹⁴

The Christian Association was effectively a “voluntary parachurch missionary society” which focused on core Christianity as a means to Christian unity.⁹⁵ Ultimately however, it was difficult to assent to the principles of the Washington Association and still retain membership in a specific denomination.⁹⁶ Cummins observes that “No ministers joined, no missionaries were sent out, and no additional associations were formed.”⁹⁷ Consequently, if it were not for Thomas’ son Alexander, the movement might have floundered and the document been of little overall impact. Alexander accepted the core ideas of his father, and would go on to flesh out the rationale for unity, and the means by which it should be obtained. His ideas which form part of this dissertation were spread by preaching, debate and printed word, and resulted in followers numbering over 200,000 by the beginning of the Civil War.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid., 3-4.

⁹⁴ Such an assumption belies the obvious controversy apparent in many of the churches, especially those of Galatia and Corinth.

⁹⁵ D. Duane Cummins, *The Disciples: A Struggle for Reformation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009), 46.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ David Edwin Harrell, Jr., “Disciples of Christ Pacifism in Nineteenth-Century Tennessee,” in *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition*, edited by Michael W. Casey, and Douglas Allen Foster, 455-465 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee, 2002), 455.

Nineteenth-Century Unity Initiatives in Other Parts of the World

A detailed account of the Christian unity initiatives in other parts of the world is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it should be noted that while the conditions on the North American continent favored moves towards Christian unity in the nineteenth-century, the impulse was not limited to this geographical region. The Evangelical Awakening touched other parts of the world and with it, brought renewed consideration of the nature of the church. The various world denominational conferences which have already been mentioned in the previous section are indicative of the increasing attention paid to the nature of the church in the nineteenth-century on a worldwide scale. New understandings of the church raised questions about the nature and role of unity. Individually, churches began to consider closer relations with fellow Christians, with some beginning the process of negotiating actual terms of union. On the European continent, there were several attempts at union, the largest of which was the Prussian Plan of Union, which in 1817 united the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Prussia.⁹⁹ Elsewhere, there were attempts at union between Methodist groups in Canada,¹⁰⁰ and between Presbyterian groups in Scotland.¹⁰¹

However, it is the formation of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 which is of particular relevance to this dissertation.¹⁰² While many Protestants in the previous

⁹⁹ Conser, *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America 1815-1866*, 14-22.

¹⁰⁰ Brandreth, "Approaches of the Churches Towards Each Other in the Nineteenth Century," 300-302.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 302-305.

¹⁰² The Evangelical Alliance is commented on directly by Campbell, and indirectly by White as will be noted later in the dissertation. While initially very skeptical of the foundation of the Alliance, Campbell seemed to be more amenable to its possibilities after he received a favorable report from the meeting. Campbell was invited to attend the meeting, but instead sent W.K. Pendleton to represent the Disciples of Christ.

decade had suggested the need for a meeting to promote Christian unity, it appears to have been a suggestion by Congregationalist Angell James at the annual Congregational Union in London in 1842 which finally led to action.¹⁰³ While in sympathy with the scriptural command for unity, James was also concerned about the growing power of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Tractarian movement within Anglicanism. He considered that a union of Protestants would be useful to combat these problems.¹⁰⁴ In the end a more biblical foundation was laid for the conference, but it is likely that many sympathized with the views of James.¹⁰⁵

The inaugural meeting of the Evangelical Alliance was held in London between August 19 and September 1, 1846 with the motto “We are One Body in Christ.” It was attended by some 800 delegates, the majority of which were from Britain and the United States. Fifty-two religious groups were represented.¹⁰⁶ The object of the Alliance was to facilitate Christian interaction with a goal of closer fellowship and co-operation.¹⁰⁷ While resolving not to create a new creed, the conference nevertheless

¹⁰³ Rouse, “Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate,” 319.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. The Tractarian Movement originated at Oxford University in the 1833, and got its name from the series of some 90 tracts produced to disseminate the key ideas of the movement. Its leaders John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Edward Pusey were concerned about a growing lack of respect for the heritage of the Anglican Church and its continuity with the past. They pushed for the inclusion of many of the old traditional practices in its services, and for a renewed emphasis on the sacraments. These High Church measures made many Anglicans suspicious that the movement wanted to Romanise the church, and undo the advances of the Reformation. The later conversion of Newman to Catholicism was seen as proof of their suspicions.

¹⁰⁵ In addition to the high level of tension in Anglicanism in relation to the Tractarian movement, an anti-Catholic sentiment was growing in the United States catalyzed by the increasing number of Catholic migrants coming to its shores. While anti-Catholic sentiments were not enshrined in the foundational documents for the Evangelical Alliance, the Alliance continued to have an anti-Catholic bias. See Pietro Bolognesi, “A History of the Relationship of the Evangelical Alliance with the Roman Catholic Church, *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 32, no. 3 (2008): 210-223.

¹⁰⁶ Ian M. Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

voted to require individual members to be able to assent to core beliefs which were considered representative of evangelicalism.¹⁰⁸ To the disappointment of some, it ignored the push for unity between churches, and instead opted for cooperation of individual Christians. Nonetheless it was a clearly ecumenical organization which would go on to stimulate united prayer, actively educate Christians about other Christian traditions, advocate mission, and fight for religious liberty.¹⁰⁹

Biographical Sketch of Alexander Campbell

While Thomas Campbell's "Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington" is considered the foundational document of the Stone Campbell movement,¹¹⁰ it was Alexander's passion for unity which ensured that the document was neither forgotten, nor left as simply an interesting piece of theoretical literature.

Alexander Campbell was born on September 12, 1788, near Ballymena, Ireland, the oldest child of Thomas Campbell, an ordained minister of the Seceder Presbyterian

¹⁰⁸ The nine core doctrines forming the basis for membership in the Evangelical Alliance were as follows: "(1) The Divine Inspiration, Authority, and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. (2) The Right and Duty of Private Judgment in the interpretation of Holy Scriptures. (3) The Unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of the Persons therein. (4) The utter Depravity of Human Nature in consequence of the Fall. (5) The Incarnation of the Son of God, His work of Atonement for the sinners of mankind, and his Mediatorial Intercession and Reign. (6) The Justification of the sinner by Faith alone. (7) The work of the Holy Spirit in the Conversion and Sanctification of the sinner. (8) The Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Body, the Judgement of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Eternal Blessedness of the Righteous, and the Eternal Punishment of the Wicked. (9) The Divine institution of the Christian ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper." Evangelical Alliance, *Evangelical Alliance: Report of the Proceedings of the Conference held at Freemason's Hall, London, from August 19th to September 2nd inclusive, 1846* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1847), 189. Accessed January 16, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/reportproceedin00alligoog>.

¹⁰⁹ Rouse, "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate," 321-322.

¹¹⁰ Clinton J. Holloway, "Essentially, Intentionally, and Constitutionally One," in *One Church: A Bicentennial Celebration of Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address*, ed. Glenn Thomas Carson, Douglas A. Foster, and Clinton J. Holloway (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2008), 344. Holloway described the document as "our foundational document, the Magna Charta of the Movement, the source of our DNA."

Church.¹¹¹ Tight finances meant that Alexander was home-schooled by his father who supplemented the family income with private teaching. Alexander was an adept student who loved books, and on reaching his teens he began assisting his father in his teaching endeavors while continuing his own study. Although he quickly gained a reputation as an excellent teacher, Alexander was urged by his father to consider ministry rather than teaching as his career. Meanwhile, Thomas immigrated to America, continuing his own ministry in Pennsylvania. The rest of the family set out to join Thomas in America in October 1808, however, their ship ran aground and was wrecked off the coast of one of the Hebrides Islands.¹¹² During the storm Alexander vowed to spend his life in ministry if his life was spared. Rescued, he returned to Glasgow along with other passengers to await better weather for sailing.¹¹³

This delay in travel plans allowed Alexander to undertake a year of formal study at Glasgow University. Both his classroom study and his extracurricular activities during this year were to have a lasting impact upon his life. In the classroom he studied Greek,

¹¹¹ Although much has been written about Alexander Campbell, most biographies are 100 or more years old. The most comprehensive of these is the two-volume *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* written by Robert Richardson, the associate editor of the *Millennial Harbinger* for thirty years. Because of his close association with Campbell and its more comprehensive nature I have used this work in conjunction with Campbell's own writings in writing the biographical section of this chapter. However Richardson's work is far from a critical biography or even an accurate recording of history. His work enmeshes the biography into the story of the Disciples movement as a whole, and is an attempt to reaffirm faith in God's work within the movement. Eva Jean Wrather's more recent literary biography which was brought to completion by Duane Cummins after her death also lacks a significant critical component. A more critical look at Campbell's thought is expected from the pen of Douglas Foster who is working on a biography for the American Religious Biography series published by Eerdmans, while Richard Cherok is in the early stages of planning a biography around the theme of Campbell's pursuit of the millennium. (Richard Cherok, March 29, 2009, e-mail message to author).

¹¹² Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 2 (1824): 92. This and subsequent references to the *Christian Baptist* from Alexander Campbell, ed. *The Christian Baptist*, Revised by D. S. Burnet from the 2nd ed., Seven Volumes in One (Cincinnati, OH: D. S. Burnet, 1835).

¹¹³ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell: Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 1:103-107.

French, logic, classics and philosophy, including Locke whose epistemology was to become central to Campbell's understanding of unity.¹¹⁴ Outside the classroom he was influenced by his association with Greville Ewing whose house church he attended, and Greville's friends, the reformers Robert and James Haldane. The actual content of Campbell's discussions with these men is uncertain, but what is clear is that the discussions provided much of the basis for his thought on matters relating to ecclesiology, a return to New Testament Christianity, and the great need of unity within the Christian church.¹¹⁵

Alexander's personal study of Scripture, along with the discussions with the Haldanes and Ewing, resulted in a growing internal tension between the sectarian beliefs and practices of the Seceder Church to which he belonged, and his understanding of the words of Scripture. It also prompted an increasing longing for unity amongst his fellow Christians. Thus, although Alexander arrived in America with credentials of good standing in the Anti-burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church, he reported that his faith in

¹¹⁴ Campbell's philosophy is widely acknowledged to integrate epistemology and other ideas from Locke. Indeed, Campbell acknowledges Locke by name in his writings. Some scholars such as F. Kershner however, argue for the Scottish enlightenment as the predominant philosophical influence in Campbell's writings. A thoughtful review of the two influences is provided in Michael W. Casey, *The Battle over Hermeneutics in the Stone Campbell Movement, 1800-1870*, Studies in American Religion (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1998), 35-50.

¹¹⁵ Both the Haldane brothers and Alexander Campbell promoted Scripture and its authority, were anti-creed, and anti-authoritarian, took non-sectarian approaches to religion, promoted the priesthood of believers while exposing the fallacy of a separate class of clergy, encouraged weekly celebration of the Lord's supper, and preached the essential nature of the elements of the gospel while tolerating variance in other areas. For more information on the Haldane brothers see their biography: Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of the Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of His Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (New York: R. Carter and Brothers, 1853). An interesting review of the tension between their evangelical and restoration ideals can also be found in Camille K. Dean, "Evangelicals or Restorationists? The Careers of Robert and James Haldane in Cultural and Political Context" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 1999).

creeds and confessions “was considerably shaken.”¹¹⁶ He determined not to make anything newer than the New Testament the basis for communion among Christians.¹¹⁷

Alexander’s father Thomas had also become frustrated by the disunity in the Presbyterian Church, which was as marked in the new world as in Scotland.¹¹⁸ Severing his ties with the Presbyterian Church he continued to preach, focusing on the gospel and the topic of Christian unity based on the Bible alone. “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”¹¹⁹ He soon had many interested listeners who together formed the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, a group with a mission to promote “simple evangelical Christianity free from all mixture of human opinions and inventions of men.”¹²⁰ It was this group who persuaded Thomas to write and publish his famous *Declaration and Address*.¹²¹

When Alexander arrived in America, Thomas shared the newly printed manuscript of the *Declaration and Address* with him. Alexander found himself in agreement with the principles of the document but did not make his first public

¹¹⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," 92.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ After observing that some members of Presbyterian sects other than his own were unable to celebrate communion due to a lack of available clergy, Thomas invited them to join his Seceder Presbyterians in communion, a move that resulted in his censure by the local Presbytery in Western Pennsylvania. This effectively ended his relationship with the Presbyterian church. See Alexander Campbell and Thomas Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell Together with a Brief Memoir of Mrs. Jane Campbell* (Cincinnati, OH: H. S. Bosworth, 1861), 10-18; Richardson, 1:222-246.

¹¹⁹ This well-known quote from Thomas Campbell, while often referred to as part of the *Declaration and Address*, does not actually occur in the published script of the Declaration. Our knowledge of this saying in the context of the delivery of the *Declaration and Address* relies on a letter from Elder James Foster which Alexander quotes in his memoirs of Thomas Campbell. Campbell and Campbell, 19-20, footnote 4. Campbell understood that nothing should be required of the Christian if the Scriptures were silent on a subject, and also recognized a freedom of opinion in such areas.

¹²⁰ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (Washington, PA: Brown and Sample, 1809), 4.

¹²¹ See discussion of the *Declaration and Address* on page 38.

declaration of his position until one year later when on July 15, 1810, using the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount for his text, Alexander preached his convictions regarding the authority of Scripture and the need for the Christian church to be independent of creeds.¹²² Thereafter he earnestly devoted himself to these principles as he sought Christian unity.

Alexander married Margaret Brown, the daughter of a revolutionary war veteran, in March 1811,¹²³ and two months later he was licensed to preach in the newly formed Bush Run Church.¹²⁴ Neither Thomas nor Alexander had planned to set up a separate church, but with the growing opposition of denominational churches to their message of reform, they saw this as the best way to meet the needs of those who embraced the principles of Biblical authority and Christian unity. The church began with twenty-eight members whose membership was dependent only upon the simple confession of Jesus as Lord. Alexander quickly proved himself there as a competent preacher, and ordination followed.

When Campbell was expecting his first child in 1812, he was driven to examine the nature of baptism more closely. Previously, Alexander had noted that infant baptism was not found in Scripture, but unwilling to go beyond that, he had suggested that it be made a matter of forbearance.¹²⁵ However, with childbirth imminent, he had to make a decision one way or the other. Studying the matter closely, Alexander concluded that infant baptism was not only unauthorized in Scripture, it was positively contrary to

¹²² Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," 92.

¹²³ Eva Jean Wrather, *Alexander Campbell: Adventurer in Freedom: A Literary Biography*, ed. D. Duane Cummins, 3 vols. (Fort Worth, Tex.: TCU Press, 2005-2009), 1:162-3.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 165-6.

¹²⁵ The matter had been discussed at the semi-annual meeting of the Christian Association in November, 1810 where the *Declaration and Address* had been reaffirmed with revisions including the forbearance of Infant Baptism.

Scripture since the infant being baptized was unable to demonstrate any faith or understanding in the ritual.¹²⁶ Since he himself had therefore not received valid baptism, he asked a Baptist minister to baptize him by immersion provided that it was into the Christian church as a whole, and not into the Baptist Church.¹²⁷

The news of Campbell's baptism spread quickly, especially amongst the Baptists who tried to cultivate a relationship with him. This relationship was formalized in 1815 when the Bush Run Church members agreed to join the Redstone Baptist Association on the condition that they would be free to preach and teach what they understood Scripture to say, and would not be forced to follow Baptist beliefs when the two conflicted.¹²⁸ Although Campbell had some concerns about the relationship, he also saw it as a means to influence thousands of other Christians.

The cordial relation between the Bush Run Church and the Redstone Association was short lived. Alexander's preaching of his "Sermon on the Law" at the 1816 annual meetings of the Redstone Association, while popular with the laypersons, was regarded as heresy by many of the clergy, and created a tension between Campbell and the Baptists that would escalate as the differences between them became more clear.¹²⁹

Campbell's entrance into the arena of public debate occurred two years later. John Walker, a Presbyterian minister had challenged the Baptists to a debate on the

¹²⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Anecdotes, Incidents, and Facts, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 5, no. 5 (1848): 279-283. Campbell outlines how he came to his understanding of the necessity of baptism by immersion.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹²⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," 93.

¹²⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Anecdotes, Incidents, and Facts, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd Series, 5, no. 10 (1848): 552-553. The "Sermon on the Law" introduced Campbell's idea on dispensations and showed the unsuitability of the law to rule men's daily life. He thereby rejected the use of the Old Testament as a basis for authority for religious practices. The sermon was initially published as a pamphlet and later republished in the *Millennial Harbinger* years later. Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 9 (1846): 493-521.

subject of baptism after the Baptists had held a successful revival in Ohio. There were no takers, and in desperation the local Baptists asked Campbell to be their advocate. He declined, reluctant to contribute to disunity. However, after three requests, he agreed to defend the truth even though he considered that nothing good would come out of it.¹³⁰ After two days of debating, Campbell was clearly the winner having impressed with his Biblical knowledge, clear arguments and scholarly support.¹³¹ The result was a new found fame for Campbell both within the Baptist community and the wider Christian community, along with a number of converts. His fame was further enhanced on the publication of the debate which reached a wider audience. The call for the Bible alone as the Christian's authority and the principles of restoration of New Testament Christianity were thereby able to reach many people. Encouraged by the results, Campbell began to realize the potential of debate and printed word to convey the principles of restoration to thousands who could not be reached by a single congregation, or even a handful of congregations. More debates would follow over the next few years, addressing topics such as baptism, sects, creeds, unity, evidences of Christianity, and the Roman Catholic Church.¹³² Each was used to propagate his principles and the major debates were then printed to reach a larger audience.

¹³⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 2 (1824): 92; The content of the debate can be found in Alexander Campbell and John Walker, *Infant Sprinkling Proved to Be a Human Tradition Being the Substance of a Debate on Christian Baptism between Mr. John Walker and Alexander Campbell* (Steubenville, OH: J. Wilson, 1820).

¹³¹ Since reports of the debate generally come from Restorationist sources, bias in this conclusion is likely. Nevertheless, there does appear to be a clear distinction between the quality and quantity of the arguments between the two debaters, with Walker appearing over confident and under prepared.

¹³² The principal oral debates after the debate with Walker are: Debate on baptism with Presbyterian minister William McCalla in 1823; Debate on the evidences of Christianity with skeptic Robert Owen in 1829; Debate on the Roman Catholic religion with Catholic Bishop John Purcell in 1837; Debate on multitude of subjects including baptism, role of Holy Spirit, creeds and union of Christians with N. Rice in 1843. Debates were also undertaken in the pages of the *Millennial Harbinger*, the most notable of which extended for two years with a Universalist, identified as Mr. Skinner.

Following the success of the second printing of the Campbell-Walker debate, Campbell issued a prospectus for a new periodical, the *Christian Baptist* with the aim of “the eviction of truth and the exposing of error in doctrine and practice.”¹³³ It would continue for seven years, with the majority of the content contributed by Campbell himself. Critical of creeds, sects, pretensions of the clergy and voluntary societies, it succeeded beyond expectations in the democratic-minded, liberty-loving frontier of America. However, at the same time it increased the friction between Campbell and the Baptist clergy that resulted in a formal separation between Campbell and the Baptists in 1830.¹³⁴

The formal separation from the Baptists in Ohio occurred following a widely circulated letter from the Beaver Creek Association anathematizing the churches in the Mahoning Association. This separation between Baptists and Campbell’s followers in Ohio is generally regarded as the commencement of the Disciples as an independent movement. Nevertheless, association with Baptists continued in Virginia for another two years before the Dover Association forced a separation there too.¹³⁵

These changes were accompanied by a new phase in Campbell’s writing. He discontinued the *Christian Baptist* and replaced it with a new periodical the *Millennial Harbinger*. Although this work was “devoted to the destruction of Sectarianism,

¹³³ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 2:50. Campbell felt that since the new journal was not bound to a sect, truth could be stated without fear of retribution. See the discussion of the freedom he anticipated in Alexander Campbell, "Preface to the First Edition," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 1 (1823): 1-4.

¹³⁴ Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 2:68-70. Campbell thwarted attempts by leaders of the Redstone Baptist Association to excommunicate him in September 1823, by moving out of the Bush Run church and establishing a new unaffiliated congregation prior to the annual meeting of the Association. The new Wellsburg congregation joined the more open Mahoning Baptist Association until its dissolution in 1830. The formal break from the Baptists occurred soon after the dissolution of the Mahoning Association.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2: 363-364.

Infidelity, and Antichristian doctrine and practice,”¹³⁶ it was generally more constructive as Campbell anticipated preparation for the introduction of the millennium.¹³⁷ The name change thus reflected both the separation of identity from the Baptists and its constructive goal.

Campbell’s debates and writing, along with the introduction of evangelistic preachers had successfully won many to the cause of restoration.¹³⁸ With this influx of followers, practical problems began to arise, and the new periodical was the ideal place to not only follow the now rapid progress of reform but also deal with the principles that might reduce and even avoid the issues that were getting in the way of the mission of the church, as well as nurture the new members. Thus we find articles on church order, practical advice on ministry, church life and cooperation, articles on slavery, character and the role of mothers, Bible studies, debates and even a children’s segment among its pages. Campbell continued to edit this enormously successful and influential periodical until shortly before his death in 1866.

In addition to his debates and periodical articles, Campbell also published his *Christian System*, a translation of the Bible called the *Living Oracles*, a hymnal, multiple tracts, and other works.

¹³⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Prospectus," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 1 (1830): 1.

¹³⁷ Alexander’s idea of the millennium differed significantly from the pre-millennial fervor that characterized the Millerite Movement of the mid-nineteenth century America. In the prospectus for the *Millennial Harbinger* Campbell identified the millennium as “a political and religious order of society” that would bring about the ultimate improvement in human society. Ibid. Unity of Christians was essential for the commencement of the millennium. A useful overview of Campbell’s ideas on the millennium can be found in Kevin James Gilbert, "The Stone-Campbell Millennium: A Historical Theological Perspective," *Restoration Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2001): 34-38. The relationship between Campbell’s millennial ideas and the American political and social climate is explored in Dawn Leslie Alexander-Payne, “Alexander Campbell and the Dilemma of Republican Millennialism” (Texas Christian University, 2009).

¹³⁸ Between July 1827 and May 1828 four evangelists reported over one-thousand-nine-hundred baptisms between them. By 183,2 it is reported that over one-thousand Baptists in Kentucky had left their church to join the Disciples. See Earl Irvin West, "1827 - *Annus Mirabilia* - and Alexander Campbell," *Restoration Quarterly* 16, no. 3/4 (1973): 253-254.

Barton W. Stone, the leader of the “Christians” in Kentucky was attracted to Campbell’s “Disciples” due to their common goal for Christian unity even though they disagreed in many areas. Stone initiated an attempt to unify the two groups. Although things did not go as smoothly as Stone anticipated, within several years of the first joint meetings in January 1832, the two groups had largely merged within the state of Kentucky. Although Stone continued to be a strong leader, Campbell maintained the preeminent leadership role in the united movement.

The demand for more order and organization amongst the Disciples already urgent was now critical.¹³⁹ Campbell contributed to this need in several ways. He laid the groundwork for increasing organization in several series of articles, moving the group from radical congregationalism to cooperation for mission, state associations, and finally called for a national convention. He started Bethany College as a place to educate leaders for the growing ranks, serving as its president for twenty years, and travelled extensively providing support, answering questions, preaching and baptizing. He also tried to protect the group from schism and heresy, both in writing and in person.¹⁴⁰ Alexander Campbell thus must be seen not only as a founder of a Restoration Movement, but also as a thoughtful leader who guided it through its first fifty years of existence.

¹³⁹ Accurate membership figures are difficult to establish because of the loose organization of the movement. Estimates of the total believers in the combined movement in 1832 range from 22,000 to 30,000 while estimates of the number of Stone’s Christians who contributed to that total range from 10,000 to 12,000. See Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 2:370; William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Saint Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), 181.

¹⁴⁰ This can be recognized in his dealings with prominent Disciple John Thomas who went on to found the Christadelphians; Sidney Rigdon a Disciples pastor who converted to Mormonism, taking many Ohio believers with him; and Jessie Ferguson, a fellow editor with Spiritualist and Universalist leanings.

Biographical Sketch of Ellen White

Ellen Gould Harmon and her twin sister were born on November 26, 1827 in the farming community of Gorham, Maine and spent most of their childhood in nearby Portland, Maine. While their early childhood was unremarkable, this changed when Ellen suffered a significant head injury from a stone thrown by a classmate. The ongoing effects of the injury effectively ended Ellen's formal education at the age of nine years and may have contributed to medical problems that she suffered for the rest of her life.¹⁴¹

Reared a Methodist, Ellen showed an early sensitivity to God in spite of many fears and doubts.¹⁴² After experiencing conversion as a teenager, she requested baptism by immersion.¹⁴³ Then as a teen she was drawn to the prophetic teaching of William Miller, and along with her family, readily accepted William Miller's views of an imminent Second Advent.¹⁴⁴ But the new beliefs led to the family to be ostracized and

¹⁴¹ While a head injury can lead to ongoing symptoms of a neurological nature and may account for White's ongoing symptoms of headache, dizziness, depression and emotional exhaustion, it is doubtful that there was any relation between the accident and some of the health issues that White herself attributed to it, such as dropsy and heart disease. See for instance, Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol 1 (Battle Creek: James White, 1858), 154. Suggestions such as those by Ronald Numbers that many of White's ongoing neurological symptoms are best explained by a "somatization disorder and a histrionic personality style" are plausible, however, her high level of productivity would seem to argue against the later diagnosis. Ronald L. Numbers *Prophetess of Health: E. G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee, 1992), 215.

¹⁴² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1943), 20-25.

¹⁴³ Ibid. White demonstrated an early commitment to truth in her choice of mode of baptism. Believing immersion was the biblically correct mode of baptism, White requested that her baptism take this form. While baptism by immersion was not the regular practice of Methodism, and was increasingly discouraged as the nineteenth-century progressed, Methodist policy allowed both sprinkling and immersion as valid modes of baptism. Karen B. Westerfield, *American Methodist Worship*. (New York: Oxford, 2001), 96-97.

¹⁴⁴ William Miller was a Baptist farmer and lay preacher whose interest in prophecy along with his adoption of a systematic approach to study of Scripture led him to the conclusion that the parousia along with the end of the world would occur in 1843. This conviction propelled the otherwise shy farmer to share his conclusions with other Christians beginning in 1831. Miller's message proved attractive to many thousands of Christians from variety denominational persuasions. Consequently the Millerite movement flourished on the Eastern seaboard of the United States, and an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 awaited Christ's coming at first between the dates of March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844, then again on October

finally disfellowshipped from their Chestnut Street Methodist church in the summer of 1843.¹⁴⁵

Along with the other Millerite believers, Ellen experienced bitter disappointment when Jesus did not return as Miller had predicted on October 22, 1844.¹⁴⁶ But rather than causing her to abandon all her beliefs, the disappointment stimulated her to earnestly study her Bible seeking for an understanding of where she had been wrong. It was during this search in December 1844 that she experienced the first of many visions.¹⁴⁷ The content was one of assurance and encouragement for those who continued to believe in the soon coming of Christ.¹⁴⁸ Two weeks later she experienced a second vision in which she was encouraged to share what she had seen in vision with other Advent believers. Though reluctant she began sharing the messages of the visions both in person and in writing.¹⁴⁹ The visions came to be seen as proof that the movement was being led by God, while at the same time confirming her role as a messenger or prophet.

22, 1844. Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1979), 51; P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1977), 15. The scholarly biography of Miller by David Rowe provides a good overview of Miller's life and teaching. David L. Rowe, *God's Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). It is to be preferred over Robert Gale's, *The Urgent Voice: The Story of William Miller* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1975) which is largely unreferenced and directed at a more general Seventh-day Adventist audience.

¹⁴⁵ White, *Life Sketches*, 53; Merlin D. Burt, "The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G White's Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844-1849" (PhD, Andrews University, 2002), 24.

¹⁴⁶ White, *Life Sketches*, 61.

¹⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (1882; repr., Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1963), 14-23. A second vision followed two weeks later instructing her to relate what she had seen. White is estimated to have had more than 2,000 visions and dreams during her lifetime. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: A Brief Biography* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 2000), accessed March 11, 2007, www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp.

¹⁴⁸ White, *Early Writings*, 14-15.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen G. Harmon, "Letter from Sister Harmon," *The Day Star*, January 24, 1846, 31-32. The first publication of her vision occurred without White's consent when Enoch Jacobs, the editor of the Day Star published a personal letter from Ellen White believing that it would be encouraging to others.

In the course of her travel, Ellen met James White; a Millerite preacher with a Christian Connection background. They were married on August 30, 1846 and subsequently had four children, two of whom died in childhood. Together James and Ellen travelled from place to place devoting their time and resources to encouraging the Millerite believers who retained a belief in an immanent Advent, and sharing the news of new biblical discoveries such as the seventh-day Sabbath.¹⁵⁰

The difficulties of maintaining contact with the scattered group, and a new found impetus to share the Advent message beyond those who had experienced the Great Disappointment in 1844, led Ellen to encourage her husband to begin publishing a small religious paper called the *Present Truth* in 1850. It was the first of many publishing ventures James would undertake. Ellen, who had first been reluctantly published in 1846, would contribute articles to the new paper. The following year she published her first book, entitled *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*. Many more works would emerge from her pen. Indeed, at the time of her death, she had written 5,000 articles and 40 books, which along with unpublished material such as personal letters, sermons, and diary entries totaled an estimated 100,000 pages.¹⁵¹

Having emerged as key leaders amongst the Sabbatarian Adventists, they were invited to move to Battle Creek, Michigan in 1855. It was here that the Whites along with Joseph Bates would go on to lay the foundations for the formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. James was involved not only in publishing, but also in administration, and would spend ten years as the General Conference President of

¹⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1885-1909), 1:75. Ellen and James were introduced to the idea of the Seventh-day Sabbath within a few weeks of their marriage and begun keeping it soon afterwards.

¹⁵¹ Herbert E. Douglas, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 108. Ellen White is considered to be the third most translated author in history.

the newly formed church. Ellen White continued to receive visions, which she dutifully shared both in person and in print.

Two visions in particular would have a lasting influence on her writing and theology. The first in March 1858 revealed a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, in which the key point of dispute was the character of God. She began exploring and developing this theme which became known as the Great Controversy theme in her series of books entitled *Spiritual Gifts*. Over the course of her ministry she would continue to expand on the theme until it found its mature form in the *Conflict of the Ages* series which spanned all of earth's history. Throughout she always upheld the love and character of God, and the centrality of Christ for the Christian. The Great Controversy theme would also form the basis of a theological framework in which she considered other areas of theology, especially ecclesiology, mission and eschatology.

In June 1863, White had a second important vision in which her attention was drawn to the relationship between health and spirituality. The discovery would lead to the linking of Adventist evangelism and health work, with the latter being considered the right arm of the church. As a consequence, White began promoting health reform, and in 1866, supported the establishment of the Western Reform Institute, which would later become the famous Battle Creek Sanitarium, the first of many health institutions supported by the church.

The expanding work of the church meant that there was a need for more leaders, be they ministers, teachers, or health workers. White championed the establishment of church run education institutions to fill the need, as well as developing an extensive educational framework and philosophy.

While White had been active in preaching and writing since her first vision, it was the death of her husband James in 1881 that opened the way for her to take on a much more hands on role in church affairs. The church now numbering some seventeen thousand, keenly felt the loss of a major founder, and was unprepared for

administration without him.¹⁵² Ellen became increasingly sought after for speaking appointments and advice. It was in this later period of her life that she would be faced with divisive crises which would lead to the development of her thinking on the topic of unity.

No longer being tied down to one place by a husband in office, White was able to begin an extended two-year sojourn in Europe in 1885. During this time she visited and encouraged the various mission endeavors of the church, spoke to large crowds, and took part in various evangelistic meetings.

White was back in the United States by the time of the landmark General Conference session held in Minneapolis in 1888. During the conference White actively supported the concept of righteousness by faith which she believed had been lost in the push of the church leaders to emphasize truth. She also found herself in the uncomfortable position of trying to bring unity between parties representing different doctrinal positions. In the aftermath of the conference she travelled around the country urging unity and the acceptance of the doctrine of righteousness by faith. Nevertheless, she faced ongoing resistance, some of which came from those holding some of the highest positions of responsibility in the church.

In 1891, White was sent to Australia to help in the development of the mission work there.¹⁵³ She worked tirelessly in the establishment of the church in Australia and

¹⁵² Arthur White, *Ellen G. White: The Lonely Years 1876-1891* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1984), 177,178.

¹⁵³ White did not want to go to Australia; however, she dutifully followed the directions of the leaders of the church. While she had been told that the church in Australia desperately needed her messages and the help that she along could give, she believed that the real reason she was sent to Australia was because the brethren did not want to listen to her messages any longer, preferring instead to do what they wanted. See Ellen G. White to O. A. Olsen, December 1, 1896 in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials: Letters, Manuscripts, Articles, and Sermons Relating to the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference*, edited by the Ellen G. White Estate (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 1622. Ellen G. White, "Experiences in Australia," in *Manuscript Releases: From the Files of the Letters and*

New Zealand, and frequently called on the more established church in America to support it with funds, resources, and personnel. Due to the distance from the United States, and the time to get answers to questions from the church leaders there, she also encouraged a degree of independence and urged members to start their own training school, even advising on the location where a permanent institution should be established.¹⁵⁴ It was in Australia that her deepening experience with Christ led her to pen some of her most loved books including *The Desire of Ages*, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* and *Christ's Object Lessons*.

White's return to the United States in 1900 was triggered by the need to deal with the increasing division and antagonism between the ministers and the medical work of the church.¹⁵⁵ The first five years after her return were devoted largely to this endeavor and to battling the increasing centralization of power which was rampant in the General Conference. Her counsels during this time were pivotal to the extensive reorganization of the authority structure of the church which took place between 1901 and 1903.

For health reasons, White had decided not to return to live in the center of church activity in Battle Creek and instead took up residence in St Helena, California on her return to America. Despite her advanced age, she continued writing, preaching, and encouraging the establishment of more institutions. A further nine major books were completed and published between 1902 and 1915 before she died at the age of eighty-seven.

Manuscripts Written by Ellen G. White, edited by the Ellen G. White Estate (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981-1993), 2:150.

¹⁵⁴ See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years 1891-1900* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1983), 147-151.

¹⁵⁵ White had been requested by the General Conference leaders to return, but she did not agree until she felt impressed by the Spirit that she must return to America. It seems somewhat ironic that the General Conference leaders who had tired of hearing her messages, now urgently wanted her help.

A charismatic leader, with a practical approach and deep personal spirituality, White influenced the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in many ways. Although she never held an official leadership office, and had limited formal education, her contribution exceeded that of many of her male colleagues.¹⁵⁶ Her impact reaches from theology, to education, health, spirituality, mission, and organization. Moreover, her recurring calls for the Bible alone as the authority for Christians along with her understanding of the centrality of Christ provided a strong framework for the transformation of a disorganized, disheartened group of ex-Millerites, to a coherent worldwide movement numbered over 136,000 at her death.¹⁵⁷

However, while White's contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist Church are considerable, her role has not been without controversy. In recent years, her work has been criticized for the way she used sources in some of her books.¹⁵⁸ In addition, questions have been raised about what, if any, authority Ellen White's views should hold for Seventh-day Adventist Christians today given the fact that it is now a hundred years

¹⁵⁶ Ellen White's extensive legacy was recently recognized by the Smithsonian when it named her as one of the 100 most influential Americans of all time. See <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonianmag/meet-100-most-significant-americans-all-time-180953341/?no-ist> Accessed January 13, 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G White: A Brief Biography*, Revised August 2000 <http://www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp> Accessed November, 31, 2014.

¹⁵⁸ Concerns about White's use of sources were raised as early as 1887 by ex-Adventist minister Dudley M. Canright. However, it was not until the 1970's and 1980's that the accusations gained significant traction, spurred on by Walter Rea's book *The White Lie*, Ronald Numbers Book titled the *Prophetess of Health*, and added to by various theological challenges such as the doctrinal controversy ignited by the teachings of Desmond Ford. White readily acknowledged literary borrowing. Her practice was not to give specific credit if a source was simply being used because the author's presentation of the subject was clear and concise. In this way she hoped not to distract the reader from the overall message being presented. See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (1911, repr. Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), xi-xii. Although White's practices are unacceptable by today's standards, a legal review by Washington copyright lawyer Vincent L. Ramik concluded that by the standards of her time, she did not infringe copyright laws, and therefore did not plagiarize. See "Ellen White's use of Sources," *Review and Herald* September 17, 1981, 3. All subsequent references to *Great Controversy* refer to the 1911 revised edition unless otherwise noted.

since her death, and given the Church's clearly stated position of sola scriptura.¹⁵⁹ While these are important questions, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to evaluate the validity of White's role as a messenger or prophet of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, nor to evaluate her use of sources. Since any expressions borrowed were done so with the intent to reflect her own thought, the accusations of plagiarism are irrelevant to this study. Furthermore, her ideas on unity fit coherently with the major themes arising across her entire body of work, and her obvious passion for unity is expressed in interactions, letters, and diary entries that are clearly her own work.

¹⁵⁹ Much of the controversy surrounding White's role appears to have its genesis in the combination of more critical historical analysis of her work, and an inconsistent or poorly understood view of inspiration. Indeed the inconsistency with regard to inspiration is evident even in the articulation of the fundamental beliefs of church. Reconciliation of the findings of historical research, with the prophetic status of Ellen White whilst holding onto a fundamentalist understanding of inerrancy, is likely to raise significant questions regarding White's ongoing authority for the church. On the other hand, those who accept a more robust doctrine of inspiration are less threatened by the findings of historical research.

CHAPTER 2

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND ECCLESIAL UNITY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the views of Alexander Campbell on the topic of Christian unity in the context of his understanding of the authority of Scripture and his views of ecclesiology. The chapter begins by examining Campbell's views on Scripture and hermeneutics which provide the foundation for understanding the central role of the New Testament in Campbell's theology. This is followed by an overview of his ecclesiology, particularly the nature and role of the church and the role of baptism which are integrally related to Campbell's view on unity. A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to an exploration of Campbell's specific comments on unity and disunity with an emphasis on how unity is to be maintained. The chapter is rounded out by an examination of Campbell's changing opinions on the authority structure in which unity should occur. A primarily descriptive and analytic approach is taken with evaluative comments generally withheld for discussion in the final chapter of the dissertation.

Campbell's Understanding of the Bible and Hermeneutics

Inspiration and Revelation

The call to return to Scripture as the rule of faith and practice was central to Alexander Campbell's unity and restoration efforts. Therefore, an examination of his understanding of hermeneutics and the nature of Scripture is essential prior to embarking on a review of Alexander Campbell's views of unity and church authority.

Campbell, reasoning from a Lockean derived epistemology, argued that human beings were born with no innate knowledge. Knowledge, he claimed, was obtained through the five senses and reflection, with one exception: God cannot be known through the senses.¹ God can only be known by supernatural revelation. “We can neither have ideas concerning spiritual things, nor names, without the aid of immediate and direct revelation.”² Indeed, “without revelation, we could no more conceive of these ideas than we could invent names for them.”³ Humans are thus completely dependent on supernatural revelation for knowledge of God.

This supernatural revelation is to be found in the Bible, which “in Hebrew and Greek, contains a full and perfect revelation of God and his will, adapted to man as he now is.”⁴ However, although the Bible contains a full revelation of God, and communication from God to man, Campbell did not consider that the Bible as a whole should be understood as Divine Revelation.⁵ The reason for this distinction between the Bible as revelation, and the Bible as containing revelation, can be found in Campbell’s definition of revelation.

Revelation, properly so called, is an exhibit of supernatural things, a disclosure of things unknowable by any other means in the reach of mortals. Whatever can be known by reason, or the exercise of our five senses, is not a subject of revelation

¹ Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity, Containing an Examination of the "Social System" and of All the Systems of Scepticism of Ancient and Modern Times* (Bethany, VA: Alexander Campbell, 1829), 153.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System: In Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Pleaded in the Current Reformation*. (Nottingham: T. Kirk and Peter Gate, 1843), 15.

⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Social System and Deism, No. II" *The Christian Baptist* 4, no. 11 (1827): 344. See also Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents* (Bethany, VA: Alexander Campbell, 1852), 36.

at all... To constitute a divine revelation, in our sense of the terms, it is not only necessary that God be the author of it, but that the things exhibited be supernatural, and beyond the reach of our five senses.⁶

Thus Campbell clearly distinguished between supernaturally revealed truths and historical facts that can be known by the writer. He insisted that discrimination must always be made between the Divine and human elements of Scripture, and that failure to recognize this distinction between what is and what is not revelation, has been the source of most of the “nonsense called argument against the Revelation of God.”⁷

This twofold division of revelation is also reflected in a twofold theory of inspiration. Where knowledge is supernaturally revealed by the Holy Spirit “the ideas were suggested and expressed in words.” It is this form of inspiration that appears to give rise to Campbell’s reference to the Bible being “dictated” by the Holy Spirit,⁸ and is what he referred to as “proper” or “primary” inspiration.⁹ However, Campbell went on to recognize that this form of inspiration represents “only a small fraction of both Testaments.”¹⁰

The greater part of Scripture, which is not technically revelation, also had some input by the Divine. A sort of supernatural aid is associated with such material. The

⁶ Campbell, "The Social System and Deism, No. II," 344. Campbell illustrates with reference to the Pentateuch which he notes contains thousands of historical facts which were known by the author and therefore cannot be considered supernatural revelation.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Alexander Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice, on the Action, Subject, Design and Administration of Christian Baptism; Also on the Character of Spiritual Influence in Conversion and Sanctification, and on the Expediency and Tendency of Ecclesiastic Creeds, as Terms of Union and Communion*, 1st ed. (Lexington, KY: A. T. Skillman & Son, 1844), 616.

⁹ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, Bethany, VA: Alexander Campbell, 1851, 52.

¹⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on the Bible, No. II," *The Christian Baptist* 6, no. 5 (1828): 499.

writers of these sections experienced “a revival in their minds of what they themselves had seen and heard; and in reference to traditions handed down, such a superintendency of the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge as excluded the possibility of mistake in the matters of fact which they recorded.”¹¹ However, the words and phrases used to convey the information were chosen by the writer.¹² This form of aid Campbell referred to as secondary inspiration.¹³

It is within this context that we must approach Campbell’s seemingly inconsistent statements about inspiration. While stating in 1826 that the “whole of Scripture is divinely inspired,”¹⁴ elsewhere Campbell boldly proclaims that “It is not true that ‘*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*’ It is palpably false.”¹⁵ It seems likely that Campbell was referring to inspiration in both its primary and secondary forms in the former statement, while only to the primary process of inspiration in the latter statement.

Regardless of this twofold distinction, between that which is divinely revealed and that which is merely governed by some level of divine superintendence, Campbell emphasized that the result is one that “excluded the possibility of mistake,”¹⁶ such that the writers become infallible witnesses with regard to history, divine communications,

¹¹ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 52.

¹² Campbell, "Remarks on the Bible, No. II," 499.

¹³ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 52.

¹⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Christian Morality, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 11 (1826), 246.

¹⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Power of the Scriptures," *Millennial Harbinger* 5th ser., 7, no. 2 (1864): 79. Campbell goes on to show the absence of the verb ‘is’ between “Scripture” and “given” in 1 Timothy 3:16, should lead to the proper English rendering of “All Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, &c., that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to good works’ – a glorious, happy being.”

¹⁶ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 52.

supernatural subjects and narratives.¹⁷ This should not be read to mean that Campbell believed that there are no errors in minor details of Scripture. Indeed Campbell noted Matthew's use of Jeremiah rather than Zechariah and Paul forgetting how many he had baptized.¹⁸ He argued that these errors do not get in the way of the message and should not be used to argue that the writers were not given an infallible knowledge of the details of the gospel about which they wrote.

Thus, the distinction between types of revelation and inspiration should not be seen as an attempt to exclude content or remove divine authority from any part of the Bible messages. Rather, it allowed Campbell to see the Bible as a predominantly human text and thus subject to the same problems and the same rules of interpretation as any secular book. It thus allowed for errors of minor details, and it obviated the need to see every detail as important to revelation while retaining the infallibility of its message.¹⁹ Campbell therefore hoped to walk a middle line between skepticism and superstition without compromising the facts of the gospel.

A Canon within a Canon

Although Campbell believed all of Scripture was important, he made distinctions between the applicability of different parts of Scripture. The basis for the distinctions can be found in "The Sermon on the Law," one of Campbell's best known sermons.²⁰

¹⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Social System and Deism, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 4, no. 11 (1827): 345.

¹⁸ Owen and Campbell, 97.

¹⁹ Campbell, "The Social System and Deism, No. II," 345. Campbell gives several examples of details he considered unimportant to revelation including Jacob obtaining the blessing, Abraham denying his wife, and the Israelites carrying off goods obtained from the Egyptians.

²⁰ Campbell, "Sermon on the Law," 493-521. The sermon was preached at the regular Baptist Association in Cross Creek, Virginia in 1816, and originally published in pamphlet form. It was republished in the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1846.

Using Romans 8:3, he argued for a difference between the Old and New Testament covenants, and concluded that the Old Testament with its emphasis on law should not be used to command Christian behavior and practice.²¹ Campbell further refined this idea, dividing history into three dispensations, the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian, each with their different “administrations of mercy.”²² People could only approach God in the way that was acceptable for the dispensation that the individual lived in.²³ The patriarchal dispensation concluded at Mount Sinai, and the Jewish dispensation ended when Christ was inaugurated as King, corresponding to the time of Pentecost. Thus, the Bible is effectively divided into three sections: Genesis 1 through Exodus 20, Exodus 20 through Acts 1, and Acts 2 through the end of Revelation.

The result of this division is that only that which is described in the New Testament particularly after Pentecost can be used as normative in the life of the Christian and the Christian church.²⁴ This dispensationalism has a significant influence on Campbell’s ecclesiology. For instance, Old Testament church structure could not have any bearing on the Christian church structure, and Campbell was able to discount easily any argument that posited infant baptism as the replacement for circumcision in his many debates and writings on baptism. Campbell went as far as to say that appeals made to the Old Testament for matters related to Christian worship was in effect “sending Christ the *Son* to Moses the *servant* to be instructed.”²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 520.

²² Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 60.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 60-61. This principle governs rule number two in Campbell’s rules for scriptural interpretation.

²⁵ Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 1:448.

Thus, Campbell can be considered to have a canon within a canon. In addition to the profound effect on Campbell's ecclesiology, the results of this division are twofold. First, the emphasis in his sermons, debates, and writings is one that largely concentrates on Acts and the Epistles.²⁶ Second, the teachings of Christ, who is God in the flesh, are largely ignored, with the exception of passages directly related to the areas Campbell was passionate about, in particular Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17. This preference for the delegated authority over the source of authority is surprising in view of Campbell's views on Christ's role in church authority.²⁷

This is not to say however, that Campbell completely ignored the rest of Scripture. Indeed, he saw knowledge of the united Old and New Testaments as important for the Christian, even though the Old Testament was not normative for their life. He noted that the whole of Scripture points to the mission of the Son of God. The Old Testament like the New Testament is built on a historical framework thus providing testimony that builds faith.²⁸ It also provides typology for understanding the New

²⁶ Eugene Boring has also come to this conclusion and presents statistics to back the assertion. M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1997), 70, 72-73. Less than a sixth of Campbell's early sermons were from the Old Testament, and in the *Christian System* and *Millennial Harbinger* the New Testament is dealt with three times more frequently than the Old Testament. Quantitatively, Campbell relied more on the Epistles than Acts, with most references to Romans and Hebrews. Boring suggests Hebrews as the core of Campbell's canon, that is, a canon within a canon within a canon, based on its quantitative use, Christology, and covenant theology. There seem to be no good reasons for defining such an inner core, and I think the broader foundation of Acts to Epistles as a whole in keeping with his dispensational ideas is more realistic since this provides the strong foundation for his dual ecclesiastical and soteriological theology.

²⁷ This inconsistency makes Campbell appear guilty of the same thing he had complained about in drawing conclusions from the Old Testament. That is, taking Christ to be judged by someone else, in this case the apostles. Compare with Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 1:448.

²⁸ Campbell, *Christian System*, 19.

Testament, and contains “thousands of developments of human nature and of divine providence, full of instruction to all mankind in all ages of the world.”²⁹

Hermeneutical Rules

Campbell considered that differences in faith and opinion amongst those who respect and honor the Bible resulted from either “false principles of interpretation” or from a “misapplication of the true principles” for interpretation.³⁰ This was problematic because multiple interpretations meant that divine revelation was no longer a standard of any sort for human thought or action.³¹

Campbell contended that it was possible for the Bible to be able to be interpreted in such a way that the unanimity obtained in science could also be found in Biblical interpretation, but for this to happen, there was a “necessity for fixed and certain principles or rules of interpretation.”³² Such fixed rules are possible because God communicated to man in human language, and therefore it is quite natural to examine the Bible “by the same rules which are applicable to the language of any other book”, unless there were additional special rules found within the book itself.³³

Seven major fixed principles of interpretation of Scripture are outlined by Campbell. They are as follows:

Rule I. On opening any book in the sacred Scriptures, consider first the historical circumstances of the book. These are the order, the title, the author, the date, the place, and the occasion of it.

²⁹ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 29.

³⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Tracts for the People, No. III. The Bible - Principles of Interpretation.," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 1 (1846): 13.

³¹ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 50.

³² Campbell, "Tracts for the People, No. III. The Bible - Principles of Interpretation.," 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 17.

II. In examining the contents of any book, as respects precepts, promises, exhortations, &c. observe who it is that speaks, and under what dispensation he officiates, Is he a Patriarch, a Jew, or a Christian? Consider the persons addressed – their prejudices, characters, and religious relations. Are they Jews or Christians – believers or unbelievers – approved or disapproved? This rule is essential to the proper application of every command, promise, threatening, admonition, or exhortation in the Old Testament or New.

III. To understand the meaning of what is commanded, promised, taught, &c., the same philological principles, deduced from the nature of language, or the same laws of interpretation which are applied to the language of other books, are to be applied to the language of the Bible.

IV. Common usage, which can only be ascertained by testimony, must always decide the meaning of any word which has but one signification; but when words have according to testimony, - (i.e. the Dictionary) – more meanings than one, whether literal or figurative, the scope, the context, or parallel passages must decide the meaning; for if common usage, the design of the writer, the context, and parallel passages fail, there can be no certainty in the interpretation of language.

V. In tropical language ascertain the point of resemblance, and judge of the nature of the trope, and its kind, from the point of resemblance.

VI. In the interpretation of symbols, types, allegories, and parables, this rule is supreme. Ascertain the point to be illustrated; for comparison is never to be extended beyond that point – to all the attributes, qualities, or circumstances of the symbol, type, allegory, or parable.

VII. For the salutary and sanctifying intelligence of the oracles of God, the following rule is indispensable: - *We must come within the understanding distance.*

There is a distance which is properly called the *speaking distance*, or the *hearing distance*, beyond which the voice reaches not, and the ear hears not. To hear another, we must come within that circle which the voice audibly fills.

Now we may with propriety say, that as it respects God, there is an understanding distance. All beyond that distance cannot understand God; all within it can easily understand him in all matters of piety and morality. God himself is the center of that circle, and humility is its circumference.³⁴

From these rules it can be seen that Campbell subscribed to a form of grammatical historical method. Indeed, he quotes Melanchthon's statement that "The

³⁴ Ibid., 23.

Scripture cannot be understood *theologically* until it is understood *grammatically*.”³⁵

Thus, if the historical factors are taken into account, the grammar and meanings of words is clearly understood, and the reader came to the text with an open humble attitude, Campbell was sure that readers would come to the same obvious meaning of Scripture.

Campbell’s emphasis on the importance of grammar and word meanings, along with a view that all could come to these meanings, naturally fuelled his desire for an accurate, contemporary translation of Scripture, and at the same time saw him engage in textual criticism.³⁶ Campbell was not, however, a higher critical scholar. He did not question the traditional authorship, historicity or the truth of Scripture. Thus, he could accept that creation, the story of the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah represented actual events.³⁷ Though he recognized that we may not know all the authors of Scripture with certainty, he accepted Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and clearly spelled out that the New Testament was written by six apostles and two evangelists.³⁸

One further area which is best addressed under hermeneutic rules is the idea of inference.³⁹ By inference, Campbell understood the drawing of conclusions and implications from Scripture based on syllogistic logic. Campbell initially flatly rejected inference as providing authority for any Christian belief or practice, since it was subject

³⁵ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 59. This quote from Melancthon is used in a number of nineteenth-century religious publications.

³⁶ This can be seen for instance in his appendix to the *Living Oracles*, and also a number of supporting articles written during his preparation for this volume.

³⁷ Campbell, "The Social System and Deism, No. II," 345.

³⁸ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 23-24. This is one of many endorsements of Moses and the apostles as Bible authors.

³⁹ For a comprehensive consideration of Campbell and inference, see Michael W. Casey, "The Development of Necessary Inference in the Hermeneutics of the Stone-Campbell Movement" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1986).

to human understanding and is therefore capable of being mistaken.⁴⁰ He rightly pointed out that conclusions we draw in our thinking process are influenced by the amount of information we have on the problem, our background, education, passions and methodology.⁴¹ Such conclusions are “always private property and can never be placed upon a level with the inspired word.”⁴² As a result we cannot require anyone else to adhere to any conclusion reached by inference. The problem was, Campbell struggled with inference whether he realized it or not, and inference was often evident in his arguments in popular debates. This inconsistency was inevitable given Campbell’s confidence in man’s ability to reason. By 1830, inference had become important in Campbell’s reasoning as he struggled to effectively organize his rapidly increasing group of reformers. Since the information he needed was not to be found in the Bible facts alone, inference was required in order to remain faithful to his use of Scripture as the ultimate authority for Christians. Inference from apostolic precedent or practice thus became integrated into his thinking even as he continued at times to deny that inference had any authority for Christians.

Authority of the Bible

In light of Campbell’s twofold theory of revelation and inspiration, and his development of a canon within the canon, we must consider what authority Campbell attributed to the Scriptures, and if this authority is consistent over all Scripture, or varies based on dispensation, and mode of inspiration.

⁴⁰ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. II," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 8 (1825): 134; Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 218; Campbell and Walker, *Infant Sprinkling a Human Tradition*, 70.

⁴¹ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. II," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 8 (1825): 134.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Campbell stated repeatedly that “The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is its standard of faith, of piety, and of humanity,”⁴³ and he affirmed that the Bible is “the only infallible standard by which all the relations of human life, and all the duties and obligations growing out of them, are to be adjudicated, so far as morality and religion are concerned.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, in the context of his discussion about the two fold idea of supernatural input of the Bible, he wrote that “the sense or sentiment of all the sacred books is of divine authority.”⁴⁵ Thus, Campbell acknowledged the divine authority of all sacred books is unaffected by the degree or type of inspiration involved.

In spite of the fact that divine authority extends to all biblical books, it is the New Testament that Campbell saw ultimately as the authority for Christian worship, government, life, and behavior. This focus on the New Testament can be seen as early as 1812 in Campbell’s journals and correspondence.⁴⁶ It continues throughout Campbell’s work, with the New Testament regarded as the court of “oyer and terminer”⁴⁷ on all

⁴³ Here taken from Alexander Campbell, "Short Sermons for Business Men, No. XII," *Millennial Harbinger* 5th ser., 4, no. 11 (1861): 611. Similar statements can be found in most of Campbell’s works.

⁴⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 5 (1851): 249.

⁴⁵ Campbell, "Remarks on the Bible, No. II," 499.

⁴⁶ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 1:448. Richardson records the explicit appeal to the singular authority of the New Testament in a letter to Alexander’s father, Thomas Campbell, where he stated “I think we may rest satisfied. . . . that all worship and forms of worship, ordinances, discipline and government belonging to the Christian Church must be learned exclusively from the New Testament.” He goes on to suggest that using the Old Testament for these things would be equivalent to sending Christ to be instructed by Moses.

⁴⁷ See Campbell, "Short Sermons for Business Men, No. XII," 611. The term “oyer and terminer” is sometimes used strictly in its French meaning, that is, to hear and decide. The name was also given to a court authorized to hear and determine wrongdoing from treason to misdemeanor. Several states in 19th century United States had courts of Oyer and Terminer.

questions. The New Testament is thus to be “the first and last appeal in all mooted doctrines, disquisitions, and infractions of law or gospel.”⁴⁸

Summary

Campbell understood the Bible as a book containing divine revelation, written in human language under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a human book it was subject to human rules of interpretation. Nevertheless, the Bible contained an infallible message, the authority of which was to be maintained by the use of fixed rules of interpretation and the avoidance of inference.

The tension between the human and divine contributions to Scripture created some difficulties for Campbell. Particularly noticeable is the tension between Campbell’s confidence in the human ability to reason, and the lack of authority accorded conclusions resulting from reasoning. A further problem is created by Campbell’s rejection of inference when the application of his hermeneutical principles frequently required the use of inference.

While Campbell believed that all of Scripture was important, his division of Scripture into three dispensations meant that only the New Testament was normative for the Christian. This belief had direct implications for Campbell’s ecclesiology, and in turn implications for his understanding of unity.

Overview of Campbell’s Ecclesiology

We turn now to consider Campbell’s ecclesiology since any attempts at unity presuppose an understanding of what actually constitutes the church. This section will particularly focus on Campbell’s understanding of the definition and the nature of the church and its officers. As one of the two loci of Campbell’s theology, Campbell wrote

⁴⁸ Ibid.

extensively on the church and its government, however, I will limit my discussion here to a general overview and synthesis of his thought on this doctrine, returning later in the chapter to address more fully specific issues of relevance to the topic of our discussion.

The Nature of the Church

Campbell's idea of the church was grounded in his understanding of the New Testament, while at the same time being influenced by the ideals of individual freedom and democracy to be found in nineteenth-century America. This resulted in a complex interplay between biblical models and societal values.

The church was an institution that both separates and joins together. It joins together "the people of God in a peculiar community" while at the same time separating them from the world around them.⁴⁹ While Campbell understood the church to include all Christians,⁵⁰ and his unity principles reflect this desire for the union of all Christians, his focus especially prior to 1830 is on the local community of believers as the expression of the church. As an institution, the church is both clearly visible, and historical. Indeed, Campbell wrote "As to an invisible church in a visible world, schoolmen may debate about it till doom's day, but we know nothing of an invisible church in our portion of creation."⁵¹ Integral to this visible institution, was an emphasis on church structure. For Campbell, this structure was to be dictated by the primitive structure of the New Testament apostolic church. A return to this structure would aid in

⁴⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 72.

⁵⁰ By this Campbell understood those who had confessed Jesus was the Christ and obeyed his precepts. He did not mean all Christian denominations, sects, or Protestants which he regarded as leading Christians into Babylonian captivity. For his Babylonian concerns see Alexander Campbell, "Extract of a Letter from the Editor," *Christian Baptist* 4, no. 7 (1827): 309-312.

⁵¹ Alexander Campbell, "Periodical Conventions," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 3, no. 2 (1853): 106.

the pursuit of unity. The true church of God is built “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets and recognizes Christ as its head.”⁵²

Campbell also saw the church as a perfect society. Since the church is both the building of God and inhabited by God, it is “of necessity a perfect institution.”⁵³ This did not mean that the church could do no wrong, but rather that the church lacked nothing for its own completeness, or for its mission in the world. This idea contributes to Campbell’s early objections to voluntary societies such as missionary societies and Bible societies. Such societies he suggested diluted the perfect message given to the church and detract from the power and role of the church. In doing so they suggest that the church is somehow lacking or imperfect.⁵⁴

Although Campbell recognized the church as an institution, he was careful in his ontology to describe the church in terms of both the church’s relationship to Christ and its membership, rather than simply describing a church hierarchy. For instance, he described the church as “a society of disciples professing to believe the one grand fact, voluntarily submitting to his authority and guidance, having all of them in their baptism expressed their faith in him and allegiance to him, and stately meeting together in one place, to walk in all his commandments and ordinances.”⁵⁵ The key to all his definitions

⁵² Campbell, "Address to the Public," *Christian Baptist*, 2, no. 3 (1824): 94.

⁵³ Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 3, no. 9 (1853): 481.

⁵⁴ Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Religion," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 1 (1823): 6-7; Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Robert Cautious," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 5 (1823): 33-34. This was not Campbell’s only reason for objecting to voluntary societies. He was also concerned about the lack of scriptural injunctions for such societies.

⁵⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to 'the Bishop of a Respectable Church'," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 11 (1824): 70. The one grand fact is that Jesus is the Messiah. A similar definition can be found in Campbell, *Christian System*, 76-77.

of the church are individuals that acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, and actively seek to obey to his authority and commands.

There are two key images of the church in Campbell's ecclesiology. The first of these is the church as the body of Christ. This image is sometimes qualified by the word mystical, and less frequently by the words figurative or spiritual. Campbell generally used the idea of the mystical simply to distinguish the church as the body of Christ from the literal physical body of Christ.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, on at least one occasion he used the term "mystical body of Christ" to describe the church as a moral wonder of creation unlike any other institution in "its origin, development and destiny."⁵⁷ Campbell's focus, however, was largely on the metaphor of the body rather than its qualifying adjectives.

He used the image of a body to remind readers of the fact that supreme authority does not reside with a human being, but with Christ himself. Christ is the head of the body and the Holy Spirit its life and heart.⁵⁸ Both Christ and the Holy Spirit are thus, "inseparably united" to the body's "health, prosperity, and happiness," and ultimately enable it to grow and fulfill its mission.⁵⁹

The fact that the body is a single organism emphasizes the fundamental fact that the church is one and should act as one. Just as the eyes and hands and feet don't act to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 76; Alexander Campbell, "False Issues - the Reign of Heaven," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 4, no. 5 (1854): 262; Alexander Campbell, "Organization, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 7 (1855): 373. In the latter article Campbell actually uses the words mystical and figurative in the same sentence in a synonymous way.

⁵⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 3, no. 6 (1853): 306. This understanding is in keeping with the idea of the perfect society instituted by God, and includes the unity which is only available through Christ that enables the church to reflect God's character. While it makes the church superior to human institutions, Campbell does not extend this understanding to encompass the sacramental meaning that the Roman Catholic Church also attaches to the term mystical.

⁵⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Organization, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 7 (1855): 373.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

oppose each other, but rather act together to carry out an action, the body of Christ should cooperate in all things pertaining to salvation.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the various component parts exist not for themselves but for the whole body.⁶¹ “Thus the eye sees for the whole body, the ear hears for the whole body, the hands minister to the whole body,” and so forth.⁶² Each part is essential, and the whole body must compensate when one part is missing.

The body image is also used to show the role of church officers. The various parts of the body are organized for action, and so long as the church is an organized body, it needs organs which Campbell equated to officers.⁶³ These officers of the church see for it, hear for it and protect it.⁶⁴ The body having both private and public parts has both private and public duties.⁶⁵ The private duties are matters that pertain to the “economical, moral and religious bearing of individual members of a single community towards each other and the world,” whereas the public duties have to do with the relationship of the community as a whole toward other communities and the world.⁶⁶

The second major image of the church that Campbell used is the idea of the church as a spiritual kingdom, variously called the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of

⁶⁰ Campbell, *Christian System*, 80, 81.

⁶¹ Campbell, "Organization, No. I," 373.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Campbell, *Christian System*, 82.

⁶⁴ Campbell, "Organization, No. I," 373.

⁶⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. 12," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 7, no. 2 (1843): 84.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

heaven and the kingdom of God.⁶⁷ Campbell concluded that the kingdom commenced at Christ's inauguration as king after his ascension to heaven, and was signaled by the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost.⁶⁸ This kingdom is the visible kingdom of Christ on earth, and like any earthly kingdom it consists of five main elements, namely, a king, constitution, subjects, laws, and territory.⁶⁹ Although a purist might point out that the church should be understood strictly as the realm of God's kingdom, or the area of his rule, in Campbell's writings the church and the kingdom of God are virtually synonymous.⁷⁰

Campbell was particularly fond of using this image in his later discussions regarding the necessity of organization within the church. Thus, he stated: "Christ's institution is a kingdom – not a mob, not a fierce lawless democracy, led by every aspirant and demagogue, who has some byends and selfish impulses urging him forward in the career of personal honor, fortune, or aggrandizement."⁷¹ Its king and lawgiver is Jesus Christ, and thus the kingdom is a Christocracy unlike the Theocracy that characterized God's kingdom during the Jewish dispensation. This king is set up by the

⁶⁷ Campbell, *Christian System*, 158-159. Campbell discusses the difference between the kingdom of God in the Old Testament and the Kingdom of Heaven in the New Testament. While the latter term is to be preferred when talking of the Church, Campbell recognizes that Matthew sometimes uses these terms interchangeably. Since the Kingdom was given to Christ by God of course it is more rightly called the Kingdom of Christ and God.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷⁰ Leonard Allen also agrees with this conclusion. See his discussion in Crawford Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and after) the Modern Age* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood 2004), 36.

⁷¹ Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 5, no. 11 (1841): 533. The word byends in this context means selfish motive.

constitution which is from eternity,⁷² but Campbell noted that the New Testament is the constitution “adapted to the existence of the kingdom in the world.”⁷³ The laws of the kingdom, are “all of divine origin and authority having emanated from the bosom, and having been promulgated in the name of the Universal Lord.”⁷⁴ The supreme law of the kingdom is one of love, both love of the King and of each other.⁷⁵ When individuals become citizens of the kingdom of Heaven “they are bound to implicit obedience in all the institutes and laws of their sovereign.”⁷⁶

The subjects of the kingdom are all those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior. “Christ’s kingdom, were it to assume it’s true, divine, and ancient character, would throw its arms around every one in every place who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus out of pure heart, and it would hold and keep him responsible to the Head, and Monarch, and Theocrat of all.”⁷⁷ While this kingdom is considered a single united community, it is composed of many smaller communities.⁷⁸

Campbell also used the ideas of the kingdom of heaven in his defense of immersion as the mode of baptism. Admission to the kingdom only occurred by a

⁷² Campbell, *Christian System*, 162.

⁷³ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. III," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 9 (1825): 140.

⁷⁴ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXIII: The Church," *The Christian Baptist* 5, no. 8 (1828): 429.

⁷⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Kingdom of Heaven," *Millennial Harbinger* Extra, no. VII (1834): 410.

⁷⁶ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXIII: The Church," 429.

⁷⁷ Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. I," 533.

⁷⁸ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 489.

defined “constitutional act of naturalization.”⁷⁹ This constitutional act of naturalization is baptism, but not just any baptism. Since the constitution or New Testament only discussed baptism by immersion, naturalization could only occur through immersion. There could be no defense or validity of other forms of baptism.⁸⁰

Other images of the church also occur in Campbell’s writings although on a less frequent basis. These include the church as “the people of God,”⁸¹ or “the congregation of God.”⁸² Both of these images emphasize a community which has God as its foundation and the source of its constitution. The images of the house, temple, or building of God in turn emphasize not only that God chooses to dwell in his church but also that members of the church each possess God’s Spirit.⁸³

Function of the Church

The Christian church exists to “enlighten and reform the world,”⁸⁴ and thus must be considered separate from, and in some sense, more enlightened than the world. This enlightenment comes from the understanding that the church is created as “the pillar and support” or ground of truth.⁸⁵ It is this truth that the church is to use to critique society

⁷⁹ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. III," 140.

⁸⁰ Campbell points out that not only does the constitution require baptism by immersion, but the idea of naturalization requires it. Naturalization requires a choice to belong to a different kingdom, a declaration recognizing the kingship of its ruler while renouncing allegiance to other sovereigns, and voluntary submission to the kingdom’s constitutional requirements. Sprinkling of babies fails to meet these requirements of naturalization and so cannot be a method of being naturalized into God’s kingdom. See Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. III," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 9 (1825): 140; Campbell, *Christian System*, 217-221.

⁸¹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 76.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸³ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 334.

⁸⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on Missionaries," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 2 (1823): 16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Campbell’s claim appears to be based on 1 Tim 3:15.

while pressing towards reform. It is also this truth which transforms the church. Indeed, Campbell saw the church exhibiting its civilizing, moralizing power, and thus ultimately converting the world by its doctrine and its example.⁸⁶ Yet Campbell recognized that the character of the church was far from where it was supposed to be. Rather than being an attracting force in the world, the character of the church had become the biggest stumbling block to the conversion of the world.⁸⁷

Thus, Campbell called his readers to recognize that every church member has a role in the conversion of the world.⁸⁸ This essential function of the church is not the province of elders or ministers alone. Every member contributes to the witness of the church. They are called upon to be “peaceful, benevolent, humane, forgetful, and forgiving of injuries,” hating “war, oppression, theft,” and falsehood, and demonstrating to all God’s universal law of love.⁸⁹ But this demonstration of God’s love does not take the place of the specific proclamation of the gospel. Although Campbell recognized that missionaries might not be needed if the character of God’s love were mirrored correctly in the church, every church that was able was called upon to send out qualified men to preach the gospel and establish churches.⁹⁰ The church must fulfill its urgent mission to convert the world in preparation for the coming millennium by uniting together to eradicate conflicts due to sectarianism.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Conversion of the World," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 6 (1824): 41.

⁸⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on Missionaries," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 2 (1823): 16.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Alexander Campbell, "Millennium, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 2 (1830): 53-58; Alexander Campbell, "Prefatory Remarks," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 1 (1830): 3-8.

Drawing from Ephesians chapter 4, Campbell also discusses the role of the church in the education and edification of its members. Education is for both the spiritual growth of the members and the fitting of members for their role in the conversion of the world. Indeed, the only hope for the conversion of the world was if “the Christians themselves reformed.”⁹² Campbell likewise uses the term edification broadly to deal with both internal and external aspects of the role of the church. “The edification of the church, in numbers and in faith, is, indeed, the whole business of the church, with all its didactic and evangelical machinery.”⁹³ Thus, the church’s focus on education and edification is also ultimately for the conversion of sinners.

Offices of the Church

The church is neither defined by its clergy, nor dependent on clergy for its existence. The church existed prior to the existence of its officers.⁹⁴ Thus, the absence of a professional preacher does not negate the existence of a church congregation in any locale.⁹⁵ Churches could theoretically carry out their function of mission and edification without the necessity of ordained officers because every member has the right to perform any function in the church if required. Indeed, Campbell claimed that “A Christian is, by profession, a preacher of truth and righteousness, both by precept and example. *He may of right, preach, baptize, and dispense the supper, as well as pray for all men when the circumstances demand it.*”⁹⁶

⁹² Campbell, "The Conversion of the World," 41.

⁹³ Alexander Campbell, "Prefatory Remarks," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 1 (1850): 7.

⁹⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Hints: To the Advocates of a Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, and the Proclaimers of the Ancient Gospel," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 8 (1830): 368.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Campbell, *Christian System*, 86.

Nevertheless, Campbell saw order as a defining feature both of God's universe and the church.⁹⁷ If the church is the kingdom of God, then it must of necessity be orderly. Officers or stewards acting with delegated authority are necessary for the church to function in an efficient and orderly manner. This observation is bolstered by the fact that the Scriptures reveal officers in the apostolic church. Thus, officers, while not absolutely required for the existence of the church, are paramount to the perfection of the church.

Campbell recognized the New Testament as sanctioning three major groups of officers. The first group is bishops also called overseers, and sometimes elders.⁹⁸ The bishop's role consists of two general areas, teaching and presiding. Because the Bible also uses the title of elder for this office, the individuals filling this office should be older and more mature members of the congregation.⁹⁹ The second office is that of the deacon or public servant who serves the temporal and financial needs of the church in various ways.¹⁰⁰ The third class of officers serve the external affairs of the church and are

⁹⁷ Ibid., 15, 301-302.

⁹⁸ Campbell uses the titles of bishop and overseer interchangeably, but is inconsistent in his approach to the titles bishop and elder. In some passages he used the term elder not as an office but simply as a sign of maturity. See for instance, Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXXII: Official Names and Titles," *The Christian Baptist* 7, no. 2 (1829): 585-586. However, elsewhere, bishops were called elders because they represented older converts. See Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No XIII: The Bishop's Office, No. II," *The Christian Baptist* 3, no. 11 (1826): 242. Campbell also applies the Biblical passages regarding elders to bishops and talks of elders undertaking the specific roles assigned to bishops. See for instance, Alexander Campbell and John B. Purcell, *A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion Held in the Sycamore-Street Meeting House, Cincinnati, from the 13th to the 21st of January, 1837* (St Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1886), 141. The offices of bishop and elder are explicitly equated in Alexander Campbell, "To Dr. James H. Otey, Bishop of Tennessee, Letter I," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 5 (1835): 230.

⁹⁹ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XII: The Bishop's Office, No. I," *The Christian Baptist* 3, no. 9 (1826): 232.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XIX: The Deacon's Office," *The Christian Baptist* 4, no. 10 (1827): 335-336.

therefore more or less public functionaries.¹⁰¹ These are the missionaries or evangelists who go out from the local congregation as witnesses to the gospel and set up new congregations.

Campbell's ideas regarding the roles and authority of these classes of officers developed with time and will be addressed more fully along with other issues of church government, as the topic of authority is explored later in this chapter. For the moment it is also useful to note two ideas about church officers that follow from Campbell's understanding of the New Testament pattern.

First, officers do not exist apart from, or prior to, the local congregation.¹⁰² There is no inward call to office. Officers, particularly bishops, are consequently never self-appointed, but rather are called by the church to specific roles of service for a local church community.¹⁰³ When they move to another church they do not continue to hold the office in which they were ordained.¹⁰⁴ Thus, officers are not ordained into some permanent role, but rather as leaders of a specific congregation.

Second, the only officers needed are those described by the New Testament. Campbell regarded the proliferation of clergy and titles in many churches as representative of the clergy's greed and hunger for power.¹⁰⁵ Offices he insisted should reflect function and not rank or power. All persons are of the same status before God, as

¹⁰¹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 83.

¹⁰² Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XII: The Bishop's Office, No. I," 231.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Campbell seems to have moved away from this principle later in his career, at least in regard to the evangelists or missionaries, some of whom were ordained at Bethany College on completion of their studies.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Bishops," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 9 (1830): 427-428.

members of the royal priesthood.¹⁰⁶ There is thus no difference between clergy and laity, simply differences in gifts and functions of individuals.

Church officers were customarily set apart for their function by the laying on of hands by members of the congregation who elected them. The officers entered into a covenant with those who elected them. The officers pledge to serve faithfully while the congregation pledges to submit to their rule and respect the authority that they have given these officers.¹⁰⁷

Ordinances of the Church

Campbell's call for restoration of original Christianity included the call for the restoration of the Christian ordinances as taught by the apostles. Campbell discussed three main ordinances of the church: baptism, the Lord's supper, and the Lord's day, although he provided several more generic lists that include, preaching the gospel, fasting, prayer, praise, and confession of sins.¹⁰⁸ The church has been given these ordinances by divine design and divine authority.¹⁰⁹ Such divine origin implies that they are not to be changed or altered in any way by human hands. Rather, they are designed to be continued throughout the existence of the church in the same manner as they were observed by the New Testament church.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 3 (1823): 27; Campbell, *Christian System*, 325-326.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Order," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, Extra No. VIII (1835): 497-498.

¹⁰⁸ Short lists of three ordinances can be found in several places. See for instance, Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 18. The more generic lists show some variance. One of these generic lists can be found in Campbell, *Christian System*, 185.

¹⁰⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 77- 78. See also Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 428.

In discussing the three main ordinances, Campbell described them as “monumental to the Christian facts” of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.¹¹⁰ The Lord’s Supper remembered Christ’s death, the Lord’s Day commemorated his resurrection, and baptism recognized the entire sequence of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. Personal participation in the ordinances is thus an act of worship which entails confession of Jesus as Christ, recognition of his sacrifice for our salvation, and submission to the Lordship of Christ.¹¹¹

With the exception of baptism which is a onetime event, Campbell called for the ordinances to be observed by all faithful Christians weekly in their public assemblies.¹¹² This both conformed to Campbell’s understanding of the frequency of celebration of ordinances in the New Testament church, and his understanding of their function. He considered that they contained “life-giving, and sanctifying power,” were “fountains of life, health and happiness,”¹¹³ and were “a means of grace” for the church and its members.¹¹⁴ This grace could only be enjoyed through the ordinances and each ordinance had its own peculiar grace, resulting in the conclusion that not one of the ordinances can be dispensed with by the Christian desirous of perfection of Christian character.¹¹⁵ Campbell’s insistence that baptism, Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Day were a means of

¹¹⁰ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹³ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 244.

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 19. See also Campbell, *Christian System*, 185.

¹¹⁵ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 247-248.

grace, suggests that Campbell understood them in some sort of sacramental manner even though he believed that they should be called ordinances.¹¹⁶

The Lord's Day was a special day when Christians assembled together in the presence of Christ for community worship.¹¹⁷ Its celebration was to include the activities that Campbell more generically calls ordinances, in particular prayer and praise. The Lord's Day he considered was also time for the body of Christ to understand its unity as it came together in social worship.¹¹⁸ These aspects made its ongoing celebration essential for the church.

The Lord's Supper was an ordinance for commemorating blessings already received.¹¹⁹ It was however also instrumental in communicating the blessing of pardon to participants.¹²⁰ While it was to be eaten with a repentant heart, the Lord's Supper should be a celebration and a time of joy not a time of sadness and mourning.¹²¹ The proper participants were members of the church baptized by immersion. However, Campbell accepted an open communion where individuals take responsibility for

¹¹⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Tracts for the People, No. XXXII. Baptism, No. XX: Design of Baptism, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 2 (1849): 61.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Reformation, No. XII: The Lord's Day," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 9, 418-421. See especially page 420.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks [on Discipulus' 'What Is the Real Design of the Lord's Supper?'," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 7 (1846): 396.

¹²⁰ Alexander Campbell, *A Debate on Christian Baptism between the Rev. W.L. MacCalla, a Presbyterian Teacher, and Alexander Campbell held at Washington, KY commencing on the 15th and terminating on the 21st Oct. 1832 in the presence of a very numerous congregation* (Buffalo, NY: Campbell & Sala, 1824), 125.

¹²¹ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. VI. On the Breaking of Bread, No. I," *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 1 (1825): 176.

deciding whether or not to participate in the supper.¹²² This meant that those baptized as infants may choose to participate even though not specifically invited to do so. Since it is the Lord's table, clergy and other humans cannot forbid or withhold the ordinance from individuals who want to participate.¹²³ Nevertheless, Campbell felt strongly that those who had been educated about the biblical basis for immersion but had stubbornly refused to be immersed themselves should not participate since their willfulness suggested they had not accepted the Lordship of Christ in their lives.¹²⁴

Campbell devoted a lot of space in his writings to baptism, the one ordinance that he considered was essential for church membership. However, when asked, he admitted that everyone who confessed Christ was a Christian regardless of whether they had been baptized by immersion and could at least potentially be saved without undergoing this ritual.¹²⁵

Campbell's main writings on baptism, addressed the nature of the subject for baptism, the mode of baptism, and the purpose of baptism. Campbell argued clearly on the first two points. Scripture presents baptism as a personal act of choice involving an individual's confession of Jesus as Lord. Thus, the only suitable subject for baptism is an

¹²²Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Magazine," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 3 (1845): 139-140; Alexander Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice, on the Action, Subject, Design and Administration of Christian Baptism; Also on the Character of Spiritual Influence in Conversion and Sanctification, and on the Expediency and Tendency of Ecclesiastic Creeds, as Terms of Union and Communion.*, 1st ed. (Lexington, KY: A. T. Skillman & Son, 1844), 798.

¹²³ Campbell, "The Christian Magazine," 139.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 140.

¹²⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Any Christians among Protestant Parties," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 1, no. 9 (1837): 411-412. Campbell's response to the letter from a woman in Lunenburg aroused surprise and opposition from Disciples members who thought such an admission undid Campbell's hard work in championing a return to the apostolic practices of the New Testament. In their opinion it negated any need for baptism by immersion.

adult who can make those choices.¹²⁶ Infant baptism had no biblical basis and therefore was not baptism at all. To critics who used circumcision on the eighth day as an argument in favor of infant baptism, Campbell replied that circumcision could not be used as an analogy since that occurred in another dispensation that did not apply to the Christian.¹²⁷ An understanding of the Greek in the New Testament left no doubt that the only acceptable means of baptism was by immersion. Sprinkling neither represented the meaning of the ancient Greek, nor the symbolism that the Bible associated with baptism.¹²⁸

Campbell's views on the purpose of baptism changed over time. In his earliest writings and debates baptism appears to be purely emblematic of salvation that is already received, and thus an outward indication of a completed transaction.¹²⁹ Elsewhere, he suggested that baptism is the act in which formal remission of sins occurs.¹³⁰ While real forgiveness occurs by faith in Christ's shed blood, and the water itself has no efficacy, the act of washing is necessary for this formal washing away of sins.¹³¹ At the same time baptism is the "proof and token" of remission of sins.¹³² In other places however, Campbell suggested that baptism is the medium through which forgiveness of sins is

¹²⁶ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 219-233.

¹²⁷ Campbell and Walker, *Infant Sprinkling a Human Tradition*, 20.

¹²⁸ Campbell amassed an impressive number of Greek resources to support his view. These are outlined in Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 122-134.

¹²⁹ Alexander Campbell, "The Ancient Gospel, No. VII: Christian Immersion," *Christian Baptist* 5, no. 12 (1828), 269. Campbell and Walker, *Infant Sprinkling a Human Tradition*, 125, 141.

¹³⁰ Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 135.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

imparted, and is itself the washing of regeneration referred to in Titus 3:5.¹³³ While Campbell's views on what baptism accomplishes in relation to sin changed over time, he remained firm in his idea of baptism as the means of entry into Christ, and therefore, baptism by immersion is important to his understanding of Christian unity.

Summary

The church is essentially one, and composed of all those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. Campbell's key metaphors for the church, the body and a spiritual kingdom provide important information for understanding various components of the Campbell's views on unity. The metaphor of the body is used to highlight the necessity of every person for the function of the church, the oneness of the church, and most importantly, to emphasize that authority belongs to the head Jesus Christ. The concept of the church as a spiritual kingdom, or the kingdom of God, is also used to highlight Christ's authority, along with the need for organization within the church. At the same time, the idea is also used to validate the necessity of immersion as the mode of baptism.

Campbell believed that the church is visible, and lacks nothing for completion of its mission which is to enlighten, reform, and convert the world in preparation for the coming millennium. Fulfillment of this purpose requires the involvement of all members not just the officers of the church.

Order is a defining characteristic of the church, and because of this, some church officers are required. However, offices were not to be seen as a mark of personal power, but rather as evidence of function and gifting. Furthermore, the number of clerical offices should be limited to those outlined in the New Testament, namely, bishops or elders, deacons, and missionaries or evangelists.

¹³³ Campbell, *Christian System*, 212-217. This later suggestions make it tempting to see a real change of state occurring at baptism, but Campbell is not entirely clear on this matter.

The ordinances of the church were of divine origin and included baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Day. Together they were monuments to the great facts of Christ's work on behalf of humans. Campbell focused particularly on the ordinance of baptism which marked entry into God's kingdom, and remission of sins. Much of Campbell's argumentation is focused on defending immersion as the appropriate mode of baptism. The relevance of this focus will become more obvious as Campbell's understanding of unity is unfolded.

Campbell's Understanding of Christian Unity

This section focuses specifically on Alexander Campbell's views of Christian unity. It begins with a review of his understanding of the mandate for, and the purpose of Christian unity. Campbell's evaluation of the state of the church and the causes of Christian disunity follow, setting the stage for a discussion of his understanding of the nature of Christian unity, and how this unity is to be attained. The section is rounded out with Campbell's analysis of the unity sought in the formation of the Evangelical Alliance.

Mandate for Unity

Campbell understood the consequences of the fractured state of Christianity in America, and was therefore cognizant of the practical necessity of Christian unity, but ultimately, the central core of Campbell's quest for unity was to be found in Scripture, the sole authority for the Christian. It was there that Christian unity was revealed as the will of the Savior himself. Embedded in the high priestly prayer of Jesus before his crucifixion, the mandate to seek Christian unity was inescapable.

I pray – for those who shall believe on me through their teaching, *that all may be one*; that as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, *they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and that thou gavest me the glory which I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them, and thou*

in me, *that their union may be perfected*: and that *the world may know* that thou hast sent me, and that thou lovest them as thou lovest me.¹³⁴

Since the union and cooperation of Christians, was God's will and part of a larger divine purpose for conversion of the world, Campbell regarded it as the "*summum bonum*" towards which Christians should strive after they had ensured their own salvation.¹³⁵ As the supreme good, the matter of ultimate importance, these ideals were worthy of any sacrifice, and thus determined the priorities, decisions, and actions of Campbell himself.¹³⁶ He wrote of himself and the other leaders of their restorationist movement, "Our predilections and antipathies on all religious questions arose from, and were controlled by, those all-absorbing interests."¹³⁷ The union of Christians thus became a supreme end, driving everything Alexander Campbell preached, debated, and wrote. It is in this context that we look at the ideas of Christian union and unity that Campbell pursued with such single-minded devotion.

This mandated union of Christians finds its basis in the harmonious and perfect nature of God. God the Father and God the Son live in such a way as to be "one" and call upon believers to be one so that the world will know that God the Father sent the Son.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Campbell, *Christian System*, 110. This is Campbell's translation of John 17:20-23 with his own emphasis.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, ix. Although Campbell is discussing union of Christians as the *summum bonum* of the leaders of the reformation he was advocating, the sum of Campbell's writings support the idea that he regarded it as the *summum bonum* of all who would consider themselves Christians.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 110, 113.

Purpose of Christian Unity

In Campbell's thought, Christ's prayer not only provided evidence that Christian unity is God's will, but that such unity was part of a divine plan for the conversion of the world. Thus, while Christian unity has many benefits, Campbell focused on the specific purpose of Christian unity, that is, the conversion of the world.

Campbell noted three main ideas in Christ's prayer which are inseparably linked: the testimony of the apostles, the unity of those who believe, and the conviction of the world. Together, the testimony of the apostles and the unity of believers lead to conviction and conversion of the world.¹³⁹ "Neither truth alone, nor union alone, is sufficient to subdue the unbelieving nations; but truth and union combined are omnipotent. They are *omnipotent*, for God is in them and with them, and has consecrated and blessed them for this purpose."¹⁴⁰ Because of this link between unity and conversion, Campbell recognized that the success of the church in relation to its primary purpose necessitates the unity of believers.¹⁴¹ While the whole world might not be converted by a united church, the disunion of Christians is a formidable stumbling block to the accomplishment of that aim.

Since disunion blocks the conversion of the world, it also delays the millennial reign of Christ. Thus, unity of Christians along with destruction of that which is divisive are in Campbell's view necessary and "indispensable prerequisites to the subjection of the world to the government of Jesus, and to the triumphant appearance of Christ's religion in the world."¹⁴² It is a Christian duty to remove any stumbling block to the

¹³⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 112.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

¹⁴² Campbell, "Millennium, No. I," 55.

attainment of the one body of Christ, laboring with “unremitting zeal and diligence” for the union of Christians which was not only prayed for by the Lord, but “perfumed by the fragrance of his dying love.”¹⁴³

Nature of Unity

Like most Christians, Campbell considered that unity inherently belongs to the nature of the church. Alexander’s father, Thomas Campbell had clearly articulated this idea in the oft quoted statement from his *Declaration and Address*, that the church is “essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”¹⁴⁴ While less well known, Alexander wrote a similar statement claiming that Christians are “radically, essentially, spiritually one.”¹⁴⁵ His support for the inherent unity of the church may also be found in his discussions of the models of the church and its foundations. Indeed the unity of the church is implicit in the New Testament models of the church, in particular one of Campbell’s favorite models, the idea of the body of Christ.¹⁴⁶ Church is a community composed of those who are ‘in Christ’ by faith and baptism. As one body with one head, it is unthinkable to imagine its existence and function in multiple pieces.

We have already noted that Campbell found the basis for Christian union in the harmonious and perfect nature of the Father and Son as revealed in the prayer of Christ in John 17. However, Campbell more frequently described a broader basis for Christian unity. Christian unity, he suggested, grows out of “the apostolic center” or the “seven

¹⁴³ Alexander Campbell, "The Seven Ecclesiastic Isms, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 7 (1855): 365.

¹⁴⁴ Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Union," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 10 (1840): [484]. Page number is misprinted as 494.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

pillars” of the church.¹⁴⁷ Derived from Ephesians 4:4-6, this center is “one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one hope, one body, one Spirit, and one God and Father of all.”¹⁴⁸ Any legitimate form of Christian union he contends will arise out of these pillars.

However, simple acknowledgement of the pillars at the core of unity is not sufficient in itself to result in unity. This can be seen by the fact that Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists all acknowledge these pillars, yet still have three distinct communion tables and forms of church organization.¹⁴⁹ Union requires a practical acknowledgment of the pillars, an acknowledgement that transforms the regular practices of the church. Thus, Campbell drew the obvious conclusion from the premise that Christians are one, their union ought to be visible and manifest to all.¹⁵⁰ Essential unity cannot be hidden away. It must be lived out in the life of the church

For Campbell unity involved the concept of union. In fact, the words union and unity are used in an almost synonymous manner in his writings. He envisaged unity as the union of all God’s people upon the divine basis already described.¹⁵¹ This union however, is not to be understood as a union of sects, parties, or denominations, but rather as a union of Christians. A union of sects, Campbell argued, would not be a union of

¹⁴⁷ The list from Ephesians 4:4-6 occurs repeatedly in Campbell’s writings with some variation in the order elements are listed. See for instance Campbell, *Christian System*, 108; Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union Pleaded by the Romanists," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 7, no. 4 (1843): 188; Alexander Campbell, "Evangelical Alliance, No. 2," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 8 (1846): 445; Alexander Campbell, "An Address Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Christian Missionary Society, A.D. 1857," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 7, no. 11 (1857): 613.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell at times replaced “one baptism” with “one immersion.” See for instance his summary of the Disciples’ beliefs in Alexander Campbell, "The Disciples of Christ in the 19th Century," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 4 (1855): 209.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Campbell, "The Seven Ecclesiastic Isms, No. II," 362.

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Union," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 10 (1840): [484].

¹⁵¹ Alexander Campbell, "Preface," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 1 (1840): 3-4.

Christians.¹⁵² In defining the word Christian he stated that a Christian is “not a mere *character*, nor a believer of any thing or every thing called Christianity. *He is one that believes that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of the Living God, and submits to his government.*”¹⁵³ Thus, there are two key components to his definition of Christian: the confession of Christ, and the submission to his government. While Campbell readily admitted to the probability of the presence of Christians amongst the sects, the groups as a whole cannot be considered Christian.¹⁵⁴ Members of sects might be expected to have confessed Christ as Savior, but there seems to be some doubt about the second component of the definition. Most members of sectarian groups he considered submit first and foremost to the government and creeds of their sect or party.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, a union of sects would allow party loyalties to get in the way of the objectives and mission of the church. This could not be tolerated. The Christian kingdom must instead have “paramount authority over the understanding, the conscience, and the heart of man.”¹⁵⁶ Thus the idea of a union of Christians would seem to preclude any mass union and focus unity at the personal level.

¹⁵² Alexander Campbell, "Union of Christians, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 5 (1839): 212.

¹⁵³ Alexander Campbell, "Reply [to J. J. Harvey "Christian Union, No. V]," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 12 (1846): 690.

¹⁵⁴ While this admission occurs multiple times in Campbell's writings, the best known confirmations of the presence of Christians in other Christian groups occur in the series of articles written in response to a letter from a women in Lunenburg, Virginiaia. See Campbell, "Any Christians among Protestant Parties," 411-414; Alexander Campbell, "Letters to England, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 1, no. 6 (1837): 272-273.

¹⁵⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Evangelical Alliance, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 7 (1846): 385-386. It was the Alliance's paramount loyalty to denominations and sects that led to Campbell's initial skepticism over the Evangelical Alliance.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 3, no. 6 (1853): 308.

Campbell also defined this union by exclusion. It is not to be a union in theory, doctrine or politics,¹⁵⁷ nor a union in opinion, outward forms, or ceremonies.¹⁵⁸ It is rather a union on catholic principles. Thus, in 1839 Campbell proposed a convention of Protestant parties in which the basis of union would be “whatever in faith, in piety, and morality is catholic, as universally admitted by all parties” and “whatever is not by all parties admitted as of divine authority, shall be rejected as schismatical and human.”¹⁵⁹ Campbell recognized that whatever is universally admitted must have been in the church at the origin of the church, and therefore is apostolic in its nature. But this acceptance also created problems since some issues such as baptism by immersion, while considered apostolic truths by Campbell, do not fall into the category of universally accepted truths. Should the true apostolic nature of these issues be acknowledged, or should these “truths” be classed as divisive and human as his statement might indicate?

The answer might be found in another attribute of union. Campbell regarded true union as a union in truth.¹⁶⁰ For Campbell, truth thus involved a correspondence with either a fact or an expression of external reality articulated in propositional form.¹⁶¹

Since Campbell considered the Bible to be a book of facts, the Bible therefore must contain truth. The facts and reality expressed in Scripture were truths to be sought after and understood. All its commands were to be obeyed. However, the center of truth, and the truth above all truths was the truth that Jesus was the son of God, and King of the

¹⁵⁷ Campbell, "The Seven Ecclesiastic Isms, No. II," 363.

¹⁵⁸ Campbell, "Reply [to J. J. Harvey, "Christian Union, No. V]," 690.

¹⁵⁹ Campbell, "Union of Christians, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 5 (1839): 212.

¹⁶⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 1, no. 5 (1837): 194.

¹⁶¹ Alexander Campbell, "Preface to Volume VI," *The Christian Baptist* 6, no. 1 (1828): 461-462. See also Campbell, *Christian System*, 116.

Universe. It was this truth that reconciled sinners to both God and their fellow men, thus serving as a bond of union.¹⁶² At the same time, this truth was connected with every other truth that God revealed to man.¹⁶³ Regarding his own relationship to truth, we find the following:

Often have I said, and often have I written, that *truth*, truth eternal and divine, is now, and long has been with me the *pearl of great price*. To her I will, with the blessing of God, sacrifice everything. But on no altar will I offer her a victim. If I have lost sight of her, God who searcheth the hearts, knows I have not done it intentionally. With my whole heart I have sought the *truth*, and I know I have found it. Not all truth, but the life giving truth of Jesus.¹⁶⁴

Thus, we find that recovery of truth was as important to Campbell and as central to his work and to the periodicals he produced, as his conviction of the necessity of unity.¹⁶⁵

Truth and union had an important relationship. Campbell underscored that God is in both union and truth, and has consecrated and blessed them both for the purpose of subduing the unbelieving nations. Neither union nor truth alone is sufficient for that purpose, they must occur together. Thus, Campbell considered the combination of union and truth to be omnipotent.¹⁶⁶

While this suggests that Campbell regarded both unity and truth to be imperative to the mission of the church, it does not resolve the tension between the exclusivity of

¹⁶² Alexander Campbell, "To Elder William Jones, of London, Letter VIII," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 1 (1836): 28-29.

¹⁶³ Campbell, "Reply [to J. J. Harvey, "Christian Union, No. V]," 690.

¹⁶⁴ Alexander Campbell, "A Demand for Justice from Editors in General, and Mr. Brantly in Particular," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 3 (1830): 97.

¹⁶⁵ This is evident not only from the content of the magazines, but is explicit in the preface of his *Christian Baptist* and the prospectus of the *Millennial Harbinger*. See Alexander Campbell, "Preface to the First Edition," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 1 (1823): 1-4; Alexander Campbell, "Prospectus," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 1 (1830): 1-3.

¹⁶⁶ Campbell, *Christian System*, 112.

truth and the inclusivity of unity which results in instances when a decision must be about the priority of one over the other. Which of these important principles must have priority when pursuit of one of them necessarily sacrifices the other? To this Campbell had a categorical answer. "No truth of the Bible is necessarily to be sacrificed for union: errors, opinions, and traditions are indeed to be abandoned, and a becoming humility and deference to the opinions of others must be cultivated and displayed."¹⁶⁷ No truth is to be sacrificed, not even one for the sake of union. This union then is not simply to be any union but must of necessity be a union in truth and of truth.¹⁶⁸ It is the element of truth which Campbell understood contributes strength to the union.¹⁶⁹

In summary, Campbell's definition of union first of all emphasized the very real and visible nature of the union. This was not simply a theoretical union, nor simply put on for show such as might be found in outward forms and ceremonies. The union was to be a union which permeated the everyday practices of the church resulting in loving relationships and cooperation between fellow members of God's church. Second, his definition of unity emphasized the personal nature of union. Like salvation and reformation, union must occur at a personal level. Third, union is spiritual.¹⁷⁰ This does not mean invisible since we have already seen that Campbell expected unity to be visible. Rather, it is inextricably linked with confession of Christ and union in the body of Christ.

¹⁶⁷ Campbell, "Union," [484]. A printing mistake occurs in pagination. Although printed as page 494, it is actually page 484 in sequence. See also Alexander Campbell, "Response to Dr Lynd," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 12 (1855): 705.

¹⁶⁸ Campbell, "Reply [to J. J. Harvey, "Christian Union, No. V]," 690. See also Alexander Campbell, "Letter to Elder William Jones, No. VI," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 8 (1835): 353.

¹⁶⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on 'Proposition for Union' " *Millennial Harbinger* 5, no. 3 (1834): 105.

¹⁷⁰ Campbell suggested, "According to the teaching and prayer of the Messiah, it is a union most intimate, spiritual and co-operative." Campbell, "Evangelical Alliance, No. II," 445.

Fourth, this definition recognizes that truth must not be sacrificed in the pursuit of union. Indeed, Campbell wrote that this union must be a union in truth. However, at the same time he insisted that the union is not a union in doctrine. Fifth, church politics must take a back seat in any attempt to attain a visible form of unity. Church politics cannot take the focus away from what is really important. And finally, since this union is not a union in opinion or politics, we may conclude that Christian union does not demand uniformity in all areas of life. Indeed, Campbell, while looking for unity in truth, was thoroughly American in embracing of freedom of thought.

Problem of Disunity in the Church

Not content with simply noting that disunity is an obstacle to the accomplishment of the mission of the church, Campbell described the way in which disunity affects the church as a whole. The toleration of schism he noted, results in three evils, the loss of good from the church, retaining what is bad in the church, and confirmation or creation of infidelity in the world.¹⁷¹ Schism also impacts the available resources of the church. Campbell contended that more is spent on maintaining the divisions and advertising opinions than is spent on missions, adding a second blow to the church's aim of converting the world. Campbell did not hesitate to use strong terms to describe this problem.

Arguing from the writings of Paul, Campbell stated that division among Christians is "clear proof of carnality," and evidence that they continued to walk in the flesh and not the spirit.¹⁷² It was a sin against Christ, his mission, his teaching, his

¹⁷¹ Alexander Campbell, "False Issues - The Reign of Heaven," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 4, no. 5 (1854): 258.

¹⁷² Alexander Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 193.

gospel, and his intercessory prayer¹⁷³ and elsewhere, “an abomination to the Lord.”¹⁷⁴ Indeed, he interprets Paul as representing divisions amongst Christians as “equivalent to a literal dividing of Christ.”¹⁷⁵

Some might argue that there are times when an individual causes schism for a good reason, such as standing firm for something he believes to be true. But Campbell argued that there is no such thing as a righteous cause of discord, and went as far as labelling such action as a sin.¹⁷⁶ The absence of a righteous cause for discord means no one can be excused for causing division in the church of God.

Given the strong condemnation Campbell had for disunion, it should not be a surprise to find that Campbell described heresy not in terms of doctrine perversion or deviation from orthodoxy, but rather in terms of disunion. “A heretic is a schismatic – one who makes division, and not one who errs in judgment, or who is simply dogmatical and overbearing.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, it is not so much the views of the person as the way they use their views that is the problem for the church. No matter how innocuous the opinion, if it

¹⁷³ Alexander Campbell, "Grace, Faith, Repentance, Baptism, Regeneration, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* 5th ser., 2, no. 3 (1859): 130.

¹⁷⁴ Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 195.

¹⁷⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Incidents on a Tour to Nashville, Tennessee, No. VI," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 3 (1831): 113.

¹⁷⁶ Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 195. The context of this statement is that Campbell is responding to an accusation that he himself is schismatic. Campbell noted “But who can state a righteous cause of discord amongst the brethren of Christ? I answer, no man. Zeal against any opinion, or set of opinions, not subversive of ‘holding the head,’ (Christ) is rather itself a sin, than a just cause of division. . . . No speculation, nor opinion, nor tenant, nor doctrine that will dissever a man from Christ, can authorize any person for non-fellowshipping him as a child of God.”

¹⁷⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Queries," *Millennial Harbinger* 5, no. 3 (1834): 141.

is forced upon others then it cannot be endured.¹⁷⁸ A person who reverts to force is like a leper or a cancer that should be removed from the church.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Campbell suggested that divine precept calls for removal of all “schismatics, heretics, and party-makers, from the church.”¹⁸⁰

In true reformer fashion, Campbell did not hesitate to evaluate the reality of the church in face of the above conclusions. The evaluation is harsh, but heartfelt.

If this be true, and true it is – if Jesus be the Messiah, in what moral desolation is the kingdom of Jesus Christ! Was there at any time, or is there now, in all the earth, a kingdom more convulsed by internal broils and dissensions, than what is commonly called the church of Jesus Christ? Should anyone think it lawful to paganize both the Greek and Latin churches – to eject one hundred millions of members of the Greek and Roman communions from visible and invisible precincts of the Christian family or kingdom of Jesus Christ, and regard the Protestant faith and people as the only true faith and the only true citizens of the kingdom of Jesus; what then shall we say of them, contemplated as the visible kingdom over which Jesus presides as Prophet, Priest, and King! Of forty millions of Protestants shall we constitute the visible kingdom of the Prince of Peace? Be it so, for the sake of argument; and what then? The Christian army is forty millions strong; but how do they muster? Under forty ensigns? Under forty antagonist leaders? Would to God there were but forty! In the Geneva detachment alone there is almost that number of petty chiefs. My soul sickens at the details!¹⁸¹

The strength of Campbell’s convictions on the divine mandate for unity, and the evil nature of division, led him to evaluate the nineteenth-century church not only as morally desolate as in this passage, but also as apostate.¹⁸² This combination had resulted in the church becoming paralyzed, and unable to fulfill its mission, a sorry state

¹⁷⁸ Alexander Campbell, "The Crisis, No. 5," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 1, no. 10 (1844): 470-417.

¹⁷⁹ Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 195.

¹⁸⁰ Campbell, "The Crisis, No. 5," 469.

¹⁸¹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 110.

¹⁸² Alexander Campbell, "Elementary Views, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 4, no. 7 (1854): 362.

that can do nothing but sicken and tear at the hearts of all who love Christ.¹⁸³ But all was not lost. Campbell went on to say, “Shall we turn from the picture, lay down our pen, and languish in despair? No: for Jesus said, ‘Happy the *peace-makers*, for they shall be called *sons of God*.’”¹⁸⁴ The church must once again recognize the divine mandate promoting peace and unity in its midst.

Causes of Christian Disunity

Campbell wrote extensively on causes of disunity prior to dealing with the means of attaining Christian unity. He gave priority of place to the role of human speculation especially as it is embodied in creeds, but other causes of disunity also appear in his writings and will be discussed under the headings of incomplete reformation, misplaced emphasis, and non-theological causes of disunity.

Human Speculation and Opinion

Throughout his life, Campbell decried what he saw as the biggest cause of division in the church, that is, the introduction of human speculation, philosophy and other opinions into religion. Speculation and opinion he insisted is not knowledge and should not be regarded as such. It has no authority. While humans form opinions on all manner of subjects and follow these opinions where revelation is not available, to follow one’s own opinions “rather than faith, or in opposition to faith, is effectually to make the Book of God of no authority.”¹⁸⁵ Thus to build a religion upon human opinions is

¹⁸³ Alexander Campbell, "An Address Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Christian Missionary Society, A.D. 1857," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 7, no. 11 (1857): 613.

¹⁸⁴ Campbell, *Christian System*, 111.

¹⁸⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Opinionism, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 1, no. 10 (1837): 441.

tantamount to an act of treason against Christ, and at the very least is subversive towards his government.¹⁸⁶

Most clergy and Protestant denominations claim they follow Scripture, and not opinions, but Campbell was quick to point out that the problem was an insidious one. Opinion had entered little by little over the years being cemented in confessions and councils with little awareness of the true import of these actions. In Campbell's estimation, opinion had become so intertwined with religion that few ministers could tell the difference between opinions and faith or doctrines and faith. Even popular teachers were not immune from this problem, commonly mixing the two in sermons and other teaching from the pulpit.¹⁸⁷ The result was confusion not only of clergy but of members who trusted in those who taught them week by week.

Although human opinion could enter religion in many ways, for Campbell, creeds were the biggest offenders.¹⁸⁸ The use of creeds perpetuates the mix of human opinion and speculation in religion. Campbell even went as far as suggesting that such confession and creeds were not in any way confessions of faith but should instead be considered as "declarations of opinions."¹⁸⁹ But they also have a secondary problem. They reduce the believer's contact with, knowledge of, and attachment to the Bible.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 196.

¹⁸⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Elementary Views, No. II: God and His Moral Universe," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 4, no. 7 (1854): 367.

¹⁸⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Above [Letter from Spencer Clack]," *The Christian Baptist* 5, no. 1 (1827): 361. Campbell in this statement blamed creeds and the councils that formed them for all the division and arguments in Christianity over its history.

¹⁸⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Doctrine Not Faith, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 5th ser., 2, no. 11 (1859): 642.

¹⁹⁰ Campbell, "Reply to Above [Letter from Spencer Clack]," 361.

Thus, Christians are susceptible to mixing even more opinion into their belief system. A lack of familiarity with what is true allows human errors to be accepted as unexamined truth. Creeds were thus to be rejected as having any place in the life of the Christian and the Church.

Given Campbell's hatred of creeds, it is important that we understand what he meant by the term creed. A creed for Campbell is any ecclesiastical doctrinal summary that must "be assented to, or to be subscribed by, individuals, as their understanding and their adoption of the doctrines of a party and people."¹⁹¹ Thus the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, and the Westminster Confession of Faith, would all be considered creeds.¹⁹² Campbell's objection was not that a summary of beliefs is being made, but that such a summary was being used as a test of Christian communion or Christian character.¹⁹³ Uninspired deductions and inferences made by uninspired men should not be upheld as either terms of ecclesiastical fellowship or as a bond of union. It was this that Campbell decried. Consequently, it mattered not whether the opinions expressed in the creeds were true or false. It was the

¹⁹¹ Alexander Campbell, "Campbellism Examined, No. III," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 4 (1855): 183.

¹⁹² Ibid. It should be noted that Campbell generally regarded the Apostles Creed in a different category than that of other creeds. While he insisted that it was not compiled by the apostles, he did recognize its content to be representative of apostolic faith. The Nicene and later creeds he considered had wandered far from the apostolic faith. Although he considered the content of the Apostolic Creed to be apostolic, he still rejected the Apostolic creed being used as a bond of union due to the fact that it drew people away from the Scriptures, and for other reasons noted in the discussion that follows.

¹⁹³ Alexander Campbell, "Replication No. II to Spencer Clack," *The Christian Baptist* 5, no. 2 (1827): 370. This distinction between a summary of belief and a creed is important, since not only is Campbell's *Christian System* a summary of his beliefs, but he also wrote at least one other shorter summary of his beliefs in response to an enquirer. Some of Campbell's opponents were quick to point out these summaries and try to argue that they were creeds. See for instance Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *Campbellism Examined* (New York: Sheldon, Lamport, & Blakeman, 1855), 33-34. Other opponents such as Rev. Rice saw the *Christian System* as a creed but were willing to accept that the Disciples had no written creed since the church as a whole had not endorsed it. Nevertheless, he accused the Disciples of having an exclusive unwritten creed. Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 771, 777.

replacement of the divinely inspired ideas with the uninspired human speculations that was problematic.¹⁹⁴ Such uninspired documents could not provide the “dimensions, texture, and solidarity, as to be either the foundation or constitution of Christ’s glorious church, redeemed by his blood and sanctified by his Spirit.”¹⁹⁵ Only the New Testament written by inspired men could provide such a foundation and be acceptable as a creed for the Christian.

Furthermore, using a human and therefore fallible summary of beliefs in an authoritative way suggests that our attempts at defining truth are better than God’s presentation of truth through the Holy Spirit. A creed must therefore be considered as an insult to God for it unconsciously opposes his pronouncement regarding Jesus: “This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I delight; HEAR HIM.”¹⁹⁶ Rather than allowing believers to hear what God the Father or the Lord Jesus Christ say, creeds let believers hear whatever the predominant religious authority thinks is important at that time.

The fallible nature of creeds also makes them more likely to cause division since their fallibility opens them up for criticism and competition.¹⁹⁷ In the absence of divine authority, one man’s authority is pitted against another’s authority, and one council’s authority is pitted against the authority of other councils. Hence, Campbell considered that even the very proposition to create and adopt creeds is essentially divisive.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Alexander Campbell, "'Campbellism Examined' by Jeremiah B. Jeter, of Richmond, Va. New York, 1855," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 2 (1855): 68.

¹⁹⁵ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 764.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 824.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 763.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 763-765.

When such fallible documents become the constitutions of churches they become in effect rival systems to the one set up by God, and therefore they injure both the growth and peace of the kingdom of God.¹⁹⁹ The words of human authority take the place of God's authority, and the church becomes a servant to the creed instead of a servant to God.²⁰⁰ Thus, creeds should not only be seen as a cause of division, they should be recognized as documents that preserve division. While many parties and divisions are older than creeds themselves, it is the dogmatic opinions of the churches and councils that are passed down in the form of ecclesiastical documents that preserve the strife that originated them. Divisions and speculations that otherwise would have been long forgotten are preserved by the supposed solutions in the council documents and creeds.²⁰¹

Incomplete Reformation

Religious history is replete with attempts at reformation, but each of these reformations was incomplete, and as a consequence more division has developed than before the commencement of the reformations. Hence, what began as simply Protestantism has been reformed into Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, Methodism, and Baptist congregations among others, and each of these has been further reformed resulting in a multitude of denominations. The problem Campbell claimed was that none of these reformations had gone back far enough; none had shed all the trappings of human traditions and speculation to arrive at the original form of Christianity. The insidious mingling of truth and human opinions is at fault. What was seen as the goal of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 890.

²⁰⁰ Campbell, *Christian System*, 113- 114.

²⁰¹ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 796. Campbell illustrates the point by using the example of Arius and the Nicene creed. Had it not been for the theologians at Nicaea who embodied their thoughts in the permanent form of a creed, the echo of Arianism might never have reached this generation.

each reformation was already an admixture of truth and error, of divine revelation, and human speculation. Thus, while all these previous attempts at reformation were laudable, a failure to distinguish between divine and human ideas had resulted in the retention of dubious practices and “relics of Popery,” and therefore were only partial reformations.²⁰²

While Protestantism had restored the availability of the Scripture to the people, and even proclaimed a religion based on the Bible alone, it had not restored the ancient faith of the Scripture to the people, and the result was catastrophic to the mission of the church. The Bible was “in the lips” but not in the head or the heart.²⁰³ As such, it did not transform nor produce moral or ecclesiastical good. Simply acknowledging the word was not enough. The Bible must be understood and obeyed to make a difference in the life and mission of the church. Acknowledging the Bible while adhering to the doctrines of men on the other hand, produced division and disharmony.

Misplaced Emphasis

In addition to the mixing of divine truth with human opinions and philosophy, Campbell also saw divisions as being fostered by the tendency of individuals and sects to emphasize points of doctrine that did not deserve emphasis. Rather than emphasizing the gospel truths, sects gave “their circumstantial or expediencies the weight, and reason, and authority due only to their own essentials.”²⁰⁴ These minor matters then become the new center of union and importance. Campbell argued that this in effect creates a new

²⁰² Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 15.

²⁰³ Campbell, *Christian System*, iv.

²⁰⁴ Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 196.

foundation and thus ignores the scriptural injunction to avoid laying another foundation other than Jesus Christ.²⁰⁵

Parties and sects were being built up around such peculiarities, and people were being excluded from the kingdom of God on earth because they did not agree with the opinions of the sects on these minor matters and deductions which were based on nothing more than human philosophy. Each minor matter that was made the center of attraction generated more disagreements which in turn built up more parties and sects.²⁰⁶ Every Protestant party he considered had a single distinctive idea. “They baptize themselves at the laver of that idea, and assume the name of it, whatever it may be. . . . They build on what is peculiar, and thus, in effect, undervalue that which is common to them all.”²⁰⁷ While sects may have more than one peculiarity, the other peculiarities are secondary to the one attractant idea and represent simply a “coloring, modification, or development of this idea.”²⁰⁸

Campbell noted that many, if not most of these peculiar ideas are not only minor issues unrelated to the facts of the gospel, but are centered upon the nature of church government or other ecclesial politics. The names of the sects are sufficient evidence to verify the idea. Hence we have churches such as Episcopalians and Presbyterians, the main difference between them having nothing to do with salvation, faith, or holiness, but rather whether one bishop or a presbytery should run the church.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Millennium, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (1830): 145-146.

²⁰⁷ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 17.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Such misplaced emphasis not only multiplies the division in the church, but is harmful for the individual spiritual life of the Christian. Sectarian theories have “no renovating, regenerating, or soul transforming efficacy, on saint or sinner. They may gratify a speculative or poetic fancy – they may politically advance a party in favor with certain casts of society; but farther than this they have no power.”²¹⁰

Non-Theological Issues

Campbell had little to say about social and economic causes of disunity until he was forced to face such issues practically.²¹¹ In his more philosophic discussions of disunity, his main focus was directed to the ideas we have already examined regarding human speculation mingling with Biblical truth, and the misplaced emphasis that places peculiarities and church government above the gospel.

Campbell did however address one social issue, that is, the tendency for people to be attracted to charismatic clergy and teachers.²¹² In this instance, disagreement in doctrine is not a necessary prerequisite to schism.²¹³ While initially such personal attachments as Campbell described may not seem to be a problem, the division they cause is real, and begins in the hearts of those who are attached to particular individual teachers or leaders. To fall in love is to transfer attachment from one individual to another. Thus, Campbell concluded that you do not fall in love with a teacher without

²¹⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Colleges," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 1 (1855): 10.

²¹¹ Issues such as slavery and the Civil War were far from Campbell's mind when writing of the causes of disunity. These issues however, would have a profound impact on the church and its unity. The threat to unity from the issue of slavery will be examined further in the next chapter as a case study.

²¹² Campbell, *Christian System*, 100. Campbell illustrates his claim by reference to the division amongst believers over Paul, Apollos, and Cephas in Corinth.

²¹³ *Ibid*,

losing some of your love for Christ.²¹⁴ In an even stronger note, he saw partisan attachment as “the essence of the first sin.”²¹⁵ Not only is love transferred but the first seeds of hatred can be found concealed at its core. The result is illustrated using prominent Christian leaders. “He who loves Wesley for any sectarian attribute, hates Calvin just in the same ratio of his attachments to his leader; as he loves Calvin for his humanisms, hates Wesley for opposing them.”²¹⁶

When the focus is drawn away from Christ towards another individual, the stirrings of the heart will inevitably lead at some point to a visible schism or heresy. Such attachment to an individual is frequently followed by a secondary attachment to the doctrines of these teachers without personal investigation or critical examination. Thus members are drawn away from the gospel focused on Christ. While there may have been no sinister motives for their course, this is still schism and thus to be regarded as treason against Christ.²¹⁷

How Unity is Attained

History shows that there have been multiple attempts at Christian unity but each has failed. Campbell attributed this to a failure to follow the plan for union that God had ordained. Instead they carried out their own plans against the established order of heaven. If earlier attempts at Christian union had simply followed God’s plan for unity

²¹⁴ Ibid., 104.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 104-105.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 106. See also Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 196.

and conversion of the world they would have been victorious.²¹⁸ Campbell summarized his understanding of the divine plan in the following rhetoric:

Let THE BIBLE be substituted for all human creeds; FACTS, for definitions; THINGS for words; FAITH, for speculation; UNITY OF FAITH, for unity of opinion; THE POSITIVE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, for human legislation and tradition; PIETY, for ceremony; MORALITY, for partisan zeal; THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION, for the mere profession of it: and the work is done.²¹⁹

Campbell believed that unity could be obtained through the restoration of Christianity to its original form which he calls “the ancient order” or sometimes “original Christianity.”

The early years of Campbell’s ministry were marked by a strict Restorationist ideal which involved a return to both the faith and form of the ancient church as handed down by the apostles. In his more mature work, he still called for a “restoration of original Christianity both in theory and practice,”²²⁰ but his emphasis on form was more moderate. Nevertheless, the restoration or reformation was still to be a reformation unlike that which had gone before.²²¹ Instead of becoming entangled in the traditions of men, Campbell recognized that the only way forward was to return to the New Testament

²¹⁸ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. III," 139.

²¹⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 115. Campbell’s emphasis has been retained, but I have removed the italics which were applied to almost all the remaining non-capitalized words.

²²⁰ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 18.

²²¹ Theologians disagree on whether it was Alexander Campbell’s intent to restore the church to its original form, or bring about a major reformation. Although a dictionary defines the ideas of reformation and restoration differently, Campbell uses both terms in his writings and uses them in a more or less synonymous manner. So on one hand he talked of his movement as “the current reformation”, on the other, he wrote a series of articles entitled “The Restoration of the Ancient Order.” This dissertation will likewise use the terms in a synonymous manner reflecting Campbell’s own usage. Regardless of how one interprets these ideas, there can be no doubt that Campbell intended for the church to be very different from the state he found it early in the 19th century.

example. Only Christianity in its pristine form is adapted to all men for all time.²²²

Campbell therefore considered that attempts to unite Christians without the original form of Christianity as the basis would therefore fail.

Campbell outlined five major principles that he considered were essential to this restoration effort. These principles were: Scripture as the rule of faith and learning, restoration of the practices of the apostles, personal confession that Jesus is Christ, unity of faith and not opinion, and finally a return to pure speech. We will examine each of these principles in turn.

Scripture as the Rule of Faith and Learning

The primary action which underpinned Campbell's plan for unity was the return to Scripture as the rule of faith and learning. Scripture, he noted, was "the only perfect and complete rule and standard of Christian faith and manners, adapted to man as he is, contemplated in both his individual and social character – in the family, church, and national relations of life."²²³ He described it as the "foundation" of any attempt at unity or communion.²²⁴ This should not be surprising in the light of Protestant Christianity's cardinal doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Although all Protestant churches claimed to base their doctrine on the Bible alone Campbell considered this was not so in reality. Tradition had trumped the Bible in many instances, resulting in a proclamation of the

²²² Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 878.

²²³ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 18.

²²⁴ Campbell, *Christian System*, xii. "While, then, we would, if we could, either with the tongue or the pen, proclaim all that we believe, and all that we know, to the ends of the earth, *we take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as the foundation of all Christian union and communion.*" Campbell elsewhere described both Christ and faith as the foundation of union. It is possible for all three to be described as foundational because of the relationship Campbell's saw between the three ideas. The Scriptures provide testimony to the facts of Christ's existence while in turn the testimony provides the basis for faith.

authority of the Bible which did not match practice. Campbell was quick to point out that “The Bible in the lips, and the creed in the head and in the heart, will not save the church from strife, emulation, and schism.”²²⁵ The church will only be protected from schism when proclamation of the role of Scripture matches actual practice.

Following in the footsteps of his father’s plea for unity, Campbell suggested that on questions where the Scripture is silent or lacks explicit detail, “we ought not to be either positive or dictatorial.”²²⁶ And after dealing with the speculations of John Thomas, he is quoted as saying “where the Bible is silent we ought to be as silent as the grave; and when it speaks often and clear, we ought to speak with corresponding clearness and frequency.”²²⁷ By proposing a radical return to Scripture with the removal of any necessity for practices not endorsed within its pages, he hoped to exclude the human opinions, speculation, and philosophy which had reduced the idea of *sola scriptura* to an ideal confessed in word but not put into practice.

But even restriction of belief and practice to what the Scripture said would not be sufficient to bring about unity. Two people could read the same verse and understand what it said very differently based on their preconceptions, education, and experience. Campbell suggested ideas to reduce this variation in understanding.

²²⁵ Ibid., iv.

²²⁶ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXXI: Discipline of the Church, No. VIII," *The Christian Baptist* 6, no. 10 (1829), 550.

²²⁷ Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell: Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2:449. Campbell’s statement here appears to be a restatement of his father Thomas Campbell’s well known phrase “Where the Scriptures speak we speak, where the Scripture is silent, we are silent.” Campbell was concerned that John Thomas was speculating on issues surrounding the state of the dead, the resurrection and the destiny of the wicked. These issues were not only causing confusion but division. John Thomas was therefore requested to refrain from discussing these issues. Thomas who had a great many ideas that diverged from Campbell eventually left the Disciples taking many members with him.

First, he suggested, that the Bible must be translated in the current vernacular.²²⁸ Reading a Bible in a language that had changed considerably since it was first published was bound to cause confusion, especially for the lay person with no knowledge of biblical languages. The outcome of this failure to translate adequately was to make the laity more reliant on the clergy for understanding what Scripture actually says. Like Luther, Campbell compared the situation to the Babylonian captivity. Although the Scripture is now legally owned and read by non-clergy, the meaning is still chained to them and thus the captivity continued in a new way.²²⁹ The Authorized Version which had not been changed for over 200 years needed to be translated into the English of the American people of the nineteenth-century. Indeed, he suggested that translations need to be revised at a minimum every 200 years.²³⁰ Such translations would not only put the truth of Scripture into language that was unambiguous for the current generation, but would also use the latest discoveries of manuscripts to correct errors that had crept in over time. The whole Bible when accurately translated is “more intelligible,

²²⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Bible Union Convention Held at Memphis, Tennessee, April 2, 1852," in *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, ed. Alexander Campbell (St Louis, MO: Christian Publishing Company, 1861), 566. Campbell recognized that such translation has three specific purposes: the union of Christians, conversion of the world, and perfection of the church. Failure of the church to pursue this objective was sinful, immoral and negligent. Alexander Campbell, "Improved Version of the Bible," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 10 (1850): 567.

²²⁹ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. IV," *The Christian Baptist* 2, no. 11 (1825): 159; Campbell, "Extract of a Letter from the Editor," 309-310. Campbell also connects the use of impure or non-biblical language to the Babylonian captivity. This language is invented by, and advocated by the clergy thus continuing the reliance of the laity on clergy for understanding of the Scripture.

²³⁰ Alexander Campbell, ed., *Living Oracles: The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ Commonly Called the New Testament, Translated from the Original Greek by George Campbell, James Macknight, and Philip Doddridge* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1832), 4.

comprehensive, and consequently better adapted to the whole family of man, than any formula of Christian doctrine ever delivered to man.”²³¹

Second, drawing on critical scholarship of the time, Campbell proposed a set of hermeneutical rules as we have already observed earlier in this chapter.²³² He was convinced that if everyone used the same set of rules for interpreting Scripture then everyone would come to the same conclusions.

Campbell’s most interesting solution to the need for a consistent understanding of the Bible was that the Bible must be understood as a book of facts and not a book of doctrine. He proposed that revelation took the form of God acting through historic events which can then be known through the senses. Such events or action are to be considered facts. For anything to be a fact there had to be a verb involved. For instance, Jesus broke bread or Jesus was born to a virgin. Thus, when he said that the Bible was a book of facts, he meant that the Bible “contains the sayings and doings of God and men.”²³³ These facts are testified to by the words of the inspired prophets and apostles and are therefore, “faithfully represented in words.”²³⁴ The testimony to these facts or what is known as history composes a large part of both the Old and New Testaments and is the most important genre of the Bible.²³⁵ Such importance is achieved both from role of history in conveying revelation from God, and because Campbell considered that “All true and useful knowledge is an acquaintance with facts; and all true science is acquired

²³¹ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 18.

²³² *Ibid.*, 61-62.

²³³ Alexander Campbell, "Mr. Lynd on the Influence of the Holy Spirit," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 1, no. 12 (1837): 531.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Campbell considered prophecy was part of this genre since it is a record of things to be done, that is, a record of future facts. See *Christian System*, 118-119.

from the observation and comparison of facts.”²³⁶ On the other hand, anything that is not witnessed, or which does not fall into the category of supernaturally revealed facts must of necessity be opinion or speculation.²³⁷ The result of reducing the Bible to a book of facts was intended to focus faith on the testimony to God’s acts in history, rather than opinions, theories, or principles.²³⁸ This in turn, effectively reduces the subjects on which debate can take place, since everything else is speculation or opinion.

Campbell also recognized that facts have power that logical truths do not.²³⁹ We learn more about God and his love in his actions than in argument about his perfections or any discourse about his love. Facts, as Campbell defined them, allow us to see God’s physical and moral character in action. God created man in such a way that “facts alone can move the affections, and command the passions of man.”²⁴⁰ Thus, he recognized that the power of the gospel is in its facts. Indeed, not only is the power of the gospel in the facts, but all that is necessary to become a Christian is to believe these facts.

Return to the Order and Practices of the New Testament

A second essential principle of Alexander Campbell’s restorationism, and hence a basis of unity, is a return to the practices of the New Testament, in particular the practices

²³⁶ Campbell, *Christian System*, 123.

²³⁷ Campbell points out that technically it is only possible to believe something that you or someone else have experienced, or something that has substantive existence. Since theories have no substantive existence, and are neither seen nor experienced, it is impossible to believe or affirm any so-called doctrine. Alexander Campbell, "Elementary Views, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 4, no. 12 (1854): 661-662.

²³⁸ Eugene Boring reaches a similar conclusion and points out that the result is a Christian faith that is “personal, existential, and theocentric . . . The object and content of Christian faith is thus not a Christological theory about Jesus, but an act of God.” Boring, 66-67.

²³⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 116.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

of the apostles. As an outgrowth of Campbell's return to the facts of Scripture, he searched the apostolic testimony to discover the facts of the early church. He assumed that what they practiced represented what was important about the church and initially called for a return to the structure, practices, and order of worship of the New Testament church as an essential step in attaining unity. Indeed, Campbell went so far as to suggest that apostolic practices were equivalent to an apostolic command to follow their example.²⁴¹

Campbell also assumed that there was a divinely instituted order of worship for Christian assemblies and that the order of worship was uniformly the same between different groups and within the same group from week to week.²⁴² Thus, if the New Testament mentions a particular practice in a Christian assembly, Campbell assumed that it was a practice to be followed by all on a weekly basis, unless that practice could be demonstrated to be purely cultural in nature. He concluded that weekly worship included singing, prayer, exhortation from Scripture, and the Lord's Supper.

In making the distinction between what was prescriptive and what was cultural, or his preferred term, circumstantial, Campbell suggested that this must be done by comparing the practice of several congregations as recorded by the same historian, or as found in the letters to the churches written by the apostles.²⁴³ From this principle he

²⁴¹ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. VII: On the Breaking of Bread, No. II," *The Christian Baptist* 3, no. 2 (1825): 180. Campbell goes on to suggest that "To suppose the contrary, is to make half of the New Testament of non-effect. For it does not altogether consist of commands, but of approved precedents. Apostolic example is justly esteemed of equal authority with an apostolic precept."

²⁴² Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No VIII: On the Breaking of Bread, No. III," *The Christian Baptist* 3, no. 3 (1825): 188. Elsewhere Campbell demonstrated this from principles of reason by looking at the opposing hypothesis, that there is not a specified order of worship, and then reducing it to absurdity.

²⁴³ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. VII: On the Breaking of Bread, No. II," 181.

concluded that Christians everywhere are not required to sell all their possessions like the church in the second chapter of Acts. However, he does not appear to be completely consistent in his application of these principles. For instance, he argued away the holy kiss which is mentioned in at least five different epistles, stating that since Paul needed to mention it so often it can't have been a regular part of worship.²⁴⁴ He also argued away foot washing by categorizing it as a good work rather than an ordinance or an act of social worship.²⁴⁵

While Campbell continued to advocate the important role of apostolic practices throughout his life, by the 1830s he had shifted his emphasis. Specific matters of worship order became less prominent, with more stress being placed on the ordinances as observed by the apostles, in particular baptism and the Lord's Supper. From the viewpoint of unity, there was also a shift in emphasis away from these more doctrinal issues, to confession of Jesus as Lord and the other areas listed below.

Confession of Jesus as Lord

A third essential principle of Alexander Campbell's restorationism and plea for unity was the common confession of Jesus as Lord. Although Scripture contains many facts, Campbell considered that there was one central and fundamental fact: "that God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth as the only Savior of sinners."²⁴⁶ This fact was central to the plan for union that Campbell embraced; indeed, he felt it was central to the plan of

²⁴⁴ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, XI," *The Christian Baptist* 3, no. 8 (1826): 224.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. Campbell's argument here hinges on Paul's instruction to Timothy about supporting widows. The list of qualifications includes washing feet of the saints in a list of other "good works." If foot washing as an integral part of worship it would be impossible for the widow to be part of the congregation and not taken part in the action, and thus it would be unnecessary to list it with other good works.

²⁴⁶ Campbell, *Christian System*, 127.

union that God Himself ordained.²⁴⁷ It was also central to salvation and church membership. No assents to doctrinal understandings were required for church membership. No creeds need be recited. It did not matter whether the individual was a Calvinist or an Arminian. Campbell insisted that no minister has the right or authority to ask for anything more than this simple declaration for baptism and church membership.²⁴⁸ While the minister could check that the individual understood what they were saying and appeared sincere in their belief, they could not insist on any specific theological beliefs.²⁴⁹

This singular requirement emerged from Campbell's understanding of Scripture. Since there are no instances that could be produced from Scripture of individuals being asked for any other faith, candidates for baptism cannot be asked for more than a simple confession of belief in this fact. Furthermore, the emphasis Jesus himself laid on Peter's confession that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," (Matt 16:18) suggests that this confession was fundamental to the building up of the church.²⁵⁰ When all Christians build on this foundation, there will be unity of faith and cooperation. But without it, such unity cannot exist.²⁵¹ Without this confession there are dire consequences for the church. Campbell goes as far as saying, "that every denomination built on any other foundation than this rock – on this simple confession of faith in the

²⁴⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (1824): 60.

²⁴⁸ Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 19. See also Alexander Campbell, "Tracts for the People, No. XX. Necessity of Evangelical Reformation, and the Character of It," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 4, no. 9 (1847): 488.

²⁴⁹ This is at odds with Campbell own insistence on baptism by immersion.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. Campbell understood Jesus to be referring to Peter's confession when he spoke of the Rock on which he would build his church, in Matt 16:18.

²⁵¹ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 822-823.

fair, just, and well defined meaning of its words, will as certainly perish from the earth as man does.”²⁵²

Campbell understood the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, to not only highlight the divinity of Jesus but to encompass “the whole revelation of the mystery of the christian constitution – the full confession of the christian faith. All that is peculiar to christianity is found in these words; not merely in embryo, but in clearly expressed outline.”²⁵³ For in making this confession, an individual concedes that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is their personal Savior who takes away their sin, and that his lordship of their life influences their behavior.

Unity of Faith Not Opinions

The fourth essential principle of Alexander Campbell’s restorationism is that unity is to be a unity in faith and not opinions. Unity based on opinion is “as unstable as the wind,” whereas unity founded on faith is “firm as the everlasting hills.”²⁵⁴ But distinguishing between these two ideas seemed to be a problem for many of Campbell’s listeners. Just where does opinion end and faith begin? In Campbell’s mind the distinction was clear cut.

With us, then, faith is *testimony believed*; knowledge is our own *experience*; and opinion is *probable inference*. Whenever we have clear, well authenticated testimony, we have faith, and this faith is always in the ratio of the testimony we have, or in our apprehension of its truth and certainty. Our personal acquaintance with men and things constitutes our knowledge; of which, different individuals, according to their discrimination and capacity, have various proportions. But, in

²⁵² Ibid., 823.

²⁵³ Ibid., 822. The original lack of capitalization of the word Christian has been retained.

²⁵⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Notes on a Tour to New York, No. 6," *Millennial Harbinger* 5, no. 2 (1834): 76.

the absence of our own personal acquaintance, observation and experience, and in the absence of good and well authenticated testimony, we have mere *opinion*.²⁵⁵

Faith never involves the blind acceptance of an idea, but requires proof of some sort. This proof is abundant when it comes to Christian faith. But Campbell distinguished between faith and “the faith.”²⁵⁶ Faith is simply belief in testimony be it human or divine, but “the faith” is the testimony of God concerning every aspect of the life, role and mission of Christ.²⁵⁷ Since there is to be but one faith just as there is one Lord and one baptism, faith must be limited to this testimony. “Where that testimony begins and ends, faith begins and ends.”²⁵⁸

The faith must never be confused with systems of doctrine. The word doctrine has its origin in the Roman language where it never had the connotation of faith. Rather, it was understood to indicate the teaching or ideas of an individual or group.²⁵⁹ Campbell considered that all sects are founded on doctrine and opinions and not on faith.²⁶⁰ Although churches and other groups claimed to be Christian, one of two errors prevail: either they are confused about where faith ends and opinion begins resulting in an equal emphasis on right faith and right opinion, or, their emphasis is not on the great gospel facts that all believe, but rather on their opinions and traditions.²⁶¹ The result of both of

²⁵⁵ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 835-836. This distinction can also be found in Campbell’s response to the Connellsville church which struggled to understand Campbell’s meaning on this matter. Alexander Campbell, "Response [to "The Church at Connellsville"]," *Millennial Harbinger* 5, no. 12 (1834): 609.

²⁵⁶ Campbell, "Doctrine Not Faith, No. I," 643.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 836.

²⁵⁹ Campbell, "Doctrine Not Faith, No. I," 642.

²⁶⁰ Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 835.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 836.

these errors is that the majority of energy is spent on maintaining doctrines and opinions. So long as focus is on maintenance of the opinions and traditions, instead of what is truly central to the faith, there cannot be true union or unity. Thus, Campbell recognized that any attempt at union of sects will not lead to a lasting unity. For Christians to unite, all sectarian bias must be put aside. Until this happens, there will be tension between the status of the gospel facts and the status of the doctrinal basis of the sects.

Of course, opinions cannot be dismissed altogether, since every person forms opinions based on his or her experience. Campbell's concern was not to stifle this freedom of opinion which he considered a basic right of individuals, but rather, to put personal opinions in their appropriate place within the framework of the church as understood by divine revelation. Thus, he stated that the church may have thousands of opinions while holding one faith determined solely by the testimony of the Scriptures.²⁶²

Campbell recognized that we are commanded to receive one another without regard to these different opinions (Rom 15:1-2), but how is this to be done when such diverse opinions could pull the church apart? The solution he proposes is this: "A Christian man has the right to express a private opinion when asked for it; but he has no right to obtrude it upon any one unasked; much less to gain a party to it contrary to the desire of the church or community to which he belongs."²⁶³ Thus, the church can tolerate those with opposing opinions since they do not express those opinions in public, claim them as gospel, or press others to follow them. But the church need beware, for the person who propagates an opinion and seeks support for it is a factionist and not to be tolerated.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice*, 836.

²⁶³ Campbell, "The Crisis, No. 5," 471.

²⁶⁴ Campbell, "Opinionism, No. 1," 441.

In many ways, the distinction between faith based on facts and opinions is a reworking of Peter Meiderlin's idea of essentials and non-essentials, but with one major difference.²⁶⁵ In a reply to the Connellsville church which asked Campbell for clarification on this similarity, Campbell indicated that while there was an appearance of similarity, they should note what is meant by the definition of what is essential and non-essential. Sects who took this essentials and non-essentials approach, divided up God's commands into essentials and non-essentials, whereas for Campbell, all commands were essential and to be obeyed. It was areas that fell outside of the facts of revelation, which were subject to speculation and opinion that were to be considered non-essential.²⁶⁶

A Return to Pure Speech

The fifth principle of Campbell's restorationism and platform for unity is the need for a return to pure speech. In calling for pure speech, Campbell meant that Christians should use Bible names and phraseology instead of theological terms not found in Scripture. Arguing from Zephaniah 3:9, where the prophet says "Then I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent," Campbell suggested that in order to serve the Lord in unity, the people of

²⁶⁵ Peter Meiderlin was a 17th century Lutheran theologian who lived in Augsburg. He wrote under the name, Ruperuts Meldenius and is often referred to by this name. Faced with warring factions within the Lutheran church and within Protestantism, Meldenius saw the best way to both maintain the important heritage of the church and at the same time bring about peace, was to focus on essentials. His rule in its English translation suggests: "In essentials, Unity; in non-essentials, Liberty; and in both, Charity." While not the first to champion the idea of essentials and non-essentials, an idea which goes back at least to Augustine, it is Meldenius' phrase that is best known in Disciples' circles. His book in which this idea occurs is a Latin work titled *Paraenesis votiva pro pace ecclesiae ad Theologos Augustanae Confessionis*. It was reprinted in German by Lücke in the larger work *Über das Alter*. John B. Rust has produced an English summary of this German work under the title of *The Great Peace Motto: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in both charity"* (Cleveland: Central Publishing House, 1929). For more information on Meirderlin see *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (Herzberg, Germany: Traugott Bautz, 1993), s.v. "Meldenius, Rupertus."

²⁶⁶ Campbell, "Response [To "The Church at Connellsville"]," 610.

God must purify their language.²⁶⁷ He called the language used in the Scriptures, the language of Canaan, whereas the multiplication of theological words not found in Scripture was the language of Ashdod. Christians were called to choose the pure language of Canaan, and call Bible things by Bible names. They were to abandon the language of Ashdod, for only as they spoke the same thing could Christians be of one mind and experience the union God desired.²⁶⁸ Indeed, Campbell wrote that “There is nothing more essential to the union of disciples of Christ than purity of speech. So long as the earth was of one speech, the human family was united. Had they been then of a pure speech, as well as of one speech, they would not have been separated.”²⁶⁹

Campbell illustrated what he means by non-biblical language by listing whole paragraphs of words that have made their way into theology. They include ideas such as Trinity, God the Holy Ghost, original sin, original righteousness, total depravity, eternal sleep, Christian Sabbath and the Holy sacrament.²⁷⁰ These words and doctrines that arise from them have not been given by God and therefore Christians are not required to believe them.²⁷¹

Campbell defended his assertion that Christians should only use biblical phraseology with four main arguments. First of all he considered it “presumptuous and

²⁶⁷ Campbell, *Christian System*, 132.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. See also Campbell, "Tracts for the People, No. XX. Necessity of Evangelical Reformation, and the Character of It," 489-490.

²⁶⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 132. See also Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XVII: Purity of Speech," *Christian Baptist*, 14, no. 8 (1827), 312-314.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 131. See also Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. IV," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 11 (1825), 158-160.

²⁷¹ Ibid. A good example of this is the doctrine of the Trinity. While Campbell acknowledges that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all God, he rejected the notion of Trinity simply because the word was not found in Scripture.

insolent” to adopt language that is our preference rather than that which is God given.²⁷² If God is perfect, his words are perfect, and convey what is meant without the addition of other words. To insert human words is tantamount to placing human wisdom and authority above God’s wisdom and authority. Second, it is impossible for man to express what he understands imperfectly. This is especially so for ideas in relation to God and things invisible. Since God understands what he is conveying perfectly, his language is to be preferred over that of humans who understand imperfectly.²⁷³ Third, the use of non-biblical terms inevitably communicates human ideas rather than the truth because human expressions choose words that convey human understandings or ones that suit their own views.²⁷⁴

Campbell’s concern reflects a mistrust of human understanding and a suspicion that if a word was not in the Bible, the idea it represented was not there either.²⁷⁵ The fourth reason for the return to the use of pure biblical language is that use of impure language is the source of many unnecessary debates and controversies. Campbell astutely noted that “the fiercest disputes about religion, are about what the Bible does *not* say, rather than about what it *does* say – about words and phrases coined in the mint of speculative theology.”²⁷⁶

²⁷² Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. IV," 159.

²⁷³ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. IV," 159. This idea and the one that follows are closely aligned to Campbell’s understanding of truth as a correspondence with reality. In this case the reality is one that only God knows.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Campbell, *Christian System*, 131-132.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 132. Campbell illustrated his claim that the fiercest disputes arise from what the Bible does not say, by making reference to the Christological controversies of the fourth century, in particular those associated with the Council of Nicaea. He suggested that such words do not add to knowledge or wisdom, nor lead to conversion or sanctification.

The main concern underlying these reasons for adopting a pure language is the need to separate the human from the divine, and thus avoid mixing human speculation with divine revelation. Mixing the two only leads to confusion, debates, and division, making what Campbell regards as a simple gospel much more complex and unintelligible.²⁷⁷ Believers could only return to the divine plan of union when the human element was removed, since divine authority was supreme.

Unity and the Evangelical Alliance

Further insight into Campbell's ideas on unity can be found in his discussion about the Evangelical Alliance which was formed in the United Kingdom in 1846.²⁷⁸ The Alliance emphasized the spiritual union of Christians expressed in cooperation together. As an Alliance there was no intention to unite into a single ecclesiastical body or form a new denomination or sect. Rather, it was expected that the Alliance could help Christians better experience spiritual union while at the same time co-operating to deal

²⁷⁷ Campbell, "The Christian Religion," 7.

²⁷⁸ The inaugural meeting of the Evangelical Alliance was held in London between August 19 and September 1, 1846. Its formation built on the ecumenical spirit of revivalism, with impetus for its formation emerging out of concern about the growing power of Roman Catholicism and opposition to the Tractarianism of the High Church Anglicans. Unity and catholicity were central tenets which found expression in the motto of the conference, *Unum Corpus Sumus in Christo*, that is, "We are One Body in Christ." A resolution at the meeting declared that the object of the Alliance was "to enable Christians to realize in themselves and to exhibit to others that a living and everlasting union binds all true believers together in the fellowship of the Church." The majority of the approximately eight-hundred delegates from fifty-two denominations at the initial meeting were from Britain (85%) with about half of the remaining delegates representing the United States. While initially conceived as an international body, differing understandings on slave holding between delegates from Britain and the United States appear to have derailed this ideal. For more information about the history of the Evangelical Alliance, see Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2001).

with forces that threatened evangelical Protestantism. A nine-point statement of belief was adopted and considered representative of the various Evangelical Confessions.²⁷⁹

Campbell had been invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the Alliance, but when he was unable to do so, he sent his son-in-law, W. K. Pendelton, to represent the Disciples. In spite of Campbell's passion for Christian unity, his initial assessment of the Evangelical Alliance was predominantly negative. He could not see that it was beneficial for Christian life or mission in any way.²⁸⁰ Campbell identified two main problems with the alliance.

First, Campbell understood the aim of the Alliance as an attempt to make an alliance of sects. Even if the core dogmas of the Evangelical Alliance were scriptural, no significant progress could be made while individual members continued to advocate and hold onto their own denominational organizations. While denominational differences were retained, more stress is put on what divides than what unites, and each accuses the other of being in error.²⁸¹ Such antagonism between parties in all areas other than what they had in common was not conducive to union.

Second, Campbell identified the central object of the alliance as the maintenance of Protestantism, whereas the Bible suggested that the central object of Christian union should be "the sanctification of the faithful and the conversion of all nations to Christ."²⁸² An organization which failed to understand the core role of the church could not succeed

²⁷⁹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1919), 1:915-918. The nine points of agreement were not to be considered a creed, nor were they meant to limit or legislate belief of member churches, but rather give some sort of general indication of the beliefs of the group.

²⁸⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Evangelical Alliance, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no 7 (1846), 384-385.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 385-386.

²⁸² Alexander Campbell, "Evangelical Alliance, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 8 (1846): 445.

in achieving unity. While political or economic union might thus result from such an Alliance, Campbell was adamant that true Christian Union would never occur. Christian union must be accompanied by Christian communion and demanded a singular aim in all things pertaining to the salvation of men.²⁸³ Both of these crucial factors were lacking in the Evangelical Alliance. Campbell hoped, however, that the association of various Protestant groups together might help them to “feel better disposed to one another” and thus enable more thoughtful discussion of their differences.²⁸⁴ Ultimately, however, since the correct basis of union was thus lacking, he felt the alliance was doomed to be “a short lived truce” and a “feeble and transient union.”²⁸⁵

By the following year, Campbell appeared to be more optimistic about the Alliance. He now described the Evangelical Alliance as a “great initiatory institution” that with the Bible Society would “work very great changes in all religious institutions in the present Christendom.”²⁸⁶ This optimism, however, did not mean that he had abandoned his concerns about the Evangelical Alliance. Indeed, in addition to the concerns expressed in 1846 Campbell registered two more concerns. The first was about the nature of authority of the organization. He wondered whether human authority and expediency might get in the way of the paramount ideas of Christianity, but was pleased that the Alliance had “declined all powers peculiar to a church association.”²⁸⁷ The

²⁸³ Ibid., 446.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 447.

²⁸⁵ Campbell, "The Evangelical Alliance, No. I," 386.

²⁸⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union, No. VI. Evangelical Alliance, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 4, no. 1 (1847): 31. This new-found optimism likely reflects a positive report by his son in law after the first meeting of the Alliance, or an awareness of some tangible increase in awareness of Christian unity that occurred in the community in its wake.

²⁸⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union, No. X. Evangelical Alliance, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 4, no. 5 (1847): 254.

second concern regarded the wording of the basis of union. While thrilled that the Alliance upheld the truths he had fought for so zealously, he urged rewording of the central points of union in Biblical language.²⁸⁸

The major difference in this later series of articles seemed to be that Campbell was more pragmatic. He was willing to recognize that the Evangelical Alliance might be a step along the journey to unity. Because of that, it should be a source of courage for anyone passionate about Christian unity.²⁸⁹ The step provided by the Alliance was not however a step forward in the methodology of achieving Christian union. Campbell did not consider the terms of the alliance any more advanced than the doctrinal basis of union advocated by his father in 1809. Indeed, in some areas he considered his father's ideas to be superior,²⁹⁰ nevertheless, he recognized the existence of the Evangelical Alliance as evidence that the Spirit was at work removing more obstructions to full Christian union and communion.²⁹¹ He hoped and prayed that if it accomplished nothing else, it would be an influence for good in opening up interest and discussion about the topic of unity.²⁹²

Summary

Unity is mandated by the will of Christ expressed in his high priestly prayer, and after personal salvation, is the most important thing for which Christians should strive. Its divine purpose is for the conversion of the world. On the other hand, disunion causes

²⁸⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union, No. VII. Evangelical Alliance, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 4, no. 2 (1847): 83. Continued in, Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union, No. VIII. Evangelical Alliance, No. III.," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 4, no. 3 (1847): 167-170

²⁸⁹ Campbell, "Christian Union, No. VI. Evangelical Alliance, No. I," 31-33.

²⁹⁰ Campbell, "Christian Union, No. X. Evangelical Alliance, No. V," 254. Campbell considered the his father's pursuit of the original Christianity free from human opinions, as far superior to the Evangelical Alliance's consensus statements of belief.

²⁹¹ Campbell, "Christian Union, No. VI. Evangelical Alliance, No. I," 32-33.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 31.

a stumbling block for the conversion of the world, and hence a delay in the millennial reign of Christ.

The church in its very nature has essential unity, but this must be made visible for it to accomplish its purpose. The definition of unity for Campbell is one of organic union, and hence visible unity finds its expression in the union of Christians who confess Christ and submit to his lordship. This unity is not to be confused with the union of sects or denominations, nor with a union in theory, doctrine, or church politics. Rather, unity is both personal and relational. While unity is not a union in doctrine, Campbell was clear that truth should not be sacrificed to enable union.

Campbell outlined four main causes of disunion: human speculation and opinion, especially that associated with creeds; incomplete reformation of the church; misplaced emphasis on minor issues rather than what is common to all Christians; and charismatic leaders who divert attachment from God to themselves.

Consequently, Campbell's views on how visible unity is to be attained find their roots in preventing or reducing these causes of disunion. They have in common an underlying principle of the return to the New Testament faith and practice. Specifically, Campbell called for the New Testament to be the rule of faith and practice, and further suggested that consistent understanding could be aided by using a contemporary translation of Scripture, adhering to specific hermeneutical rules, and by understanding Scripture as a book of facts rather than doctrines. Emerging out of the authority of the New Testament as a rule for Christian practice, Campbell called for a return to the practices of the apostles which he considered should be seen as equivalent to a direct command. Other important steps toward unity were the need for authentic Christianity demonstrated by means of personal confession of Christ as Lord and Savior, an appropriate emphasis on faith and not opinion, and the abandonment of non-biblical terminology which Campbell considered caused confusion.

Campbell's concerns about the Evangelical Alliance reflect these major principles. He considered the Alliance would fail because he thought it was going to be an Alliance of sects rather than authentic Christians and because its intention to maintain Protestantism did not reflect the true purpose of unity. While subsequently offering a more optimistic view of the Alliance, he was still concerned about its failure to use biblical language in its articles of faith, and the prominence of human authority.

Source and Locus of Church Authority

An understanding of the source and locus of church authority within a particular structure is important to any discussion of unity relating to that structure. We have noted that models of church unity are frequently linked to specific understandings of how God's authority is mediated through the church. More importantly for our discussion, church authority structures can either aid or obstruct the unity that is sought. A thorough review of Campbell's understanding of the source and locus of church authority is thus undertaken as a basis for evaluating the case studies presented in the next chapter which examine how authority is used to attain and maintain unity.

Prior to 1830: Authority and Aggressive Pursuit of Restoration

Campbell's early years were marked by an aggressive pursuit of restoration. As part of this focus Campbell addressed important issues of authority within the Christian church. To expose the true locus of authority, false pretensions to authority need to be unmasked and actively opposed. Thus, Campbell's early writings are packed with accusations against the so-called authority of clergy, ecclesial organizations, and creeds which not only claimed authority they didn't possess, but stood as the main obstacles to

the reform he proposed.²⁹³ This anti-authority thrust appealed to the values of independence and democracy that pervaded the rapidly growing nation while at the same time stirring up the leaders of the established churches and sects leading to heated debates that overflowed into the presses.

Exposing the Pretensions of Authority

Authority and standing of clergy

Campbell was concerned about the unwarranted power and influence that clergy wielded over people which was exacerbated by their lack of accountability.²⁹⁴ The result was that their commands often superseded the commands of God.²⁹⁵ But the laity remained ignorant of the problem since clergy had taken away the “key of knowledge” when they declared that only the clergy could interpret Scripture.²⁹⁶

The influence of clergy, Campbell considered, was obtained through a pretense at authority. Such pretense is obtained falsely by one or more of the following: claiming biblical support for their position, claiming an internal call to ministry, or by outward marks of authority such as titles and education. By exposing the nonexistent foundations upon which these claims to authority rely, the hold of the clergy upon the people could be broken and thus the people would be freed to read Scripture for themselves and armed with more Bible knowledge, recognize the value in the reformation that he advocated.

²⁹³ Alexander Campbell, "Address to Readers of the Christian Baptist, No. I," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 5 (1823): 32. Campbell uses this article to actively defend his motives for “dethroning” the clergy.

²⁹⁴ Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 3 (1823): 18.

²⁹⁵ Campbell and Walker, *Infant Sprinkling a Human Tradition*, 204, 205, 207. For instance, Campbell suggested that it was the commandments of clergy and theirs alone that were being obeyed when infants were sprinkled or baptized. While Campbell was careful to state that not all clergy are guilty of these practices, he was convinced that the vast majority were involved in such practices. *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁹⁶ Campbell and Walker, *Infant Sprinkling a Human Tradition*, 143.

The clergy's claims of biblical support for their authority relied on two arguments: first, the claim to be successors of the apostles, and second the claim of a special call from God. The first claim in particular brought with it a considerable amount of power and authority which clergy supposed could be wielded equally in the nineteenth-century church as in the original institutions from which their presumed predecessors originated.

Claim to be successors of the apostles

Campbell considered that the apostles were individuals who had specific roles designed for the starting up of the Christian church. Once the church was birthed, however, there was no further need for apostles, and hence the apostolic role no longer existed.²⁹⁷ Campbell argued this point from his understanding of the qualifications of the apostles. He insisted that both apostles and successors of the apostles required three qualifications. First, using the first chapter of Acts as a guide, he maintained that they must have been eyewitnesses to the events and teachings of the Lord. Their testimony is firsthand, not heard from others. Second, they must have heard the Lord's voice telling them to go, that is, they must have experienced a special call from the Lord, and third, they must be recognized by the rest of the church as having this authority.²⁹⁸ While those in the 19th century church might claim the latter two qualifications, they were not witnesses to the events and teaching of the Lord, hence they could not possibly fulfill these criteria, and therefore could not be apostles.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Essays on the Work of the Holy Spirit, in the Salvation of Men, No. III Spiritual Gifts," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 3 (1824): 95.

²⁹⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Order," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, Extra No. VIII (1835): 494.

²⁹⁹ Campbell also rejected the second qualification, the claim to special call, but even allowing that he could be wrong on this point, there was in his mind no possible way for nineteenth-century clergy

While Campbell recognized that the Bible does record the institution of some officers responsible for the various needs in the early spread of the church, nowhere is it indicated that the apostolic role continued, or that those elected to these offices should be considered as apostolic successors in the sense understood by the Roman and Episcopalian churches.³⁰⁰ The church of God did not require clergy that retain connection to the original church by succession because the church's apostolicity is shown by its acceptance and obedience to the apostolic testimony and practices. Direct succession from the apostles was therefore not a source of authority for ministry or ecclesial practices, nor indeed a defense in favor of the existence of clergy at all.

Special call from God

For many clergy, their claim to a direct call from God to ministry, or more particularly to preaching, served as the foundation for their authority. But Campbell considered this claim to be little more than a self-delusion, or in some cases perhaps even a fabrication to bolster their power and influence.³⁰¹

Indeed, one of the problems with the use of "a call to ministry" as proof of authority is its inability to be tested. Thus, there is no proof that the call is real. While some considered their call could be proved by education, response to their preaching, or the production of a license from a denomination or denominational institution, Campbell

to be successors of the apostles due to their inability to be eyewitnesses of Christ. See next section for his discussion of call.

³⁰⁰ Campbell further countered, that neither Catholics nor Protestants can produce evidence that proved a direct succession ever existed. He suggested "there were breaches in the popish *chain* of succession, and in the Protestant *chain*, that all the spiritual artificers in christendom could not repair. . . . if such a fountain had been laid up in Peter and had been transmitted to his successor, that since that time there had been many leaky popes, prelates, and clergy, that every drop had oozed out, and that all the hands and joints in christendom could not produce one genuine drop of the original fountain." Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 385-386.

³⁰¹ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," 19.

argued that these things, particularly the denominational licensing, cannot prove a divine call. If they did, then logically “God calls men to preach different gospels and to teach different kinds of Christianity!”³⁰² Since there is but one gospel this is not an option. The only thing that could provide adequate proof of a person’s call is a divine attestation or miracles. In view of the fact that such evidence cannot be produced, a divine call cannot be a valid basis for authority.

Campbell’s analysis of the experience which the clergy interpret as call was simple. Clergy were confusing a general call to service with a special call to the preaching ministry because of a mistaken notion that the only way to serve God is as a clergyman.³⁰³

While Campbell acknowledged that the Bible does give examples of calls to teaching or preaching, such examples differed from the so-called call of the contemporary clergy. Each of the biblical examples had three things in common. Not only had each individual heard the voice of God calling them, but they were considered to be able to speak infallibly, and in addition were able to confirm their call by divine affirmation or miracle working.³⁰⁴ Campbell therefore considered it “absurd, vain and presumptuous” for clergy to suggest they were specially called to ministry since they did not possess these three essential attributes.”³⁰⁵

Rather than an internal call, Campbell suggested that call was initiated by the local church. The local church recognized someone within their own ranks as having the

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Alexander Campbell, "Reply [to a letter from J.C. (a Friend from North Carolina)]," *Christian Baptist* 4, no. 5 (1826): 292.

³⁰⁴ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," 20.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

right character, knowledge, and skills to be an elder or bishop. These jobs were never of the person's own choosing, for officers of the church are never self-appointed. Rather, they are chosen by others to fulfill these roles in the local church. Those chosen in this capacity are not to be considered as priests, ministers of religion, or clergy in any way, for they are simply overseers of a voluntary association of those who accept Jesus as Lord.³⁰⁶

Marks of authority

Campbell's criticism was not isolated to the supposed source of the clergy's authority. He aimed further barbs at things the clergy pointed to as the marks of their authority. Indeed, Campbell was critical of the clergy in almost every respect. He classified them as pretentious, power-hungry and money-loving. Like the kings of Europe, their greed knew no end and was only gratified by obtaining power and influence.³⁰⁷ In an extensive piece on the similarities between kings and clergy, Campbell noted that the object of the alliances of kings and alliances of clergy were also the same: power, titles, and money.³⁰⁸ Unafraid of his audience, and with the directness that he was renowned for, Campbell identified the hypocrisy which made it acceptable for Americans to laugh at the pretension of European kings while at the same time tolerating priests and clergy who were little different.³⁰⁹

One of the so-called marks of the clergy's authority was the rank or title they sported. The multiplicity of ranks and titles of "the kingdom of the clergy" had no

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. III," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 5 (1823), 29.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 30.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

biblical support and could not be considered in any way as marks of authority.³¹⁰ They were nothing more than the evidence of clergy's insatiable greed for wealth and power.³¹¹ In some cases, title and ranks were little more than a means to mask clergy's lack of qualification for the positions they held, for some clergy did not meet even the basic qualifications that the Bible sets out for bishops or elders.³¹²

The educational background of clergy fared little better from the wrath of Campbell's pen. Although such education might seem to be a mark of authority, the education that clergy received was worthless and generally unsuited for the biblically described roles of church officers. The emphasis in the education of the clergy on the classics, philosophy, sermon making, and the doctrine of sects, left little room for the study of Scripture which in consequence was relegated to the role of "a book of proofs for the numerous articles of his creed."³¹³ The clergy's education thus failed to educate them in the most important aspects of the gospel while indoctrinating them in the beliefs of the sects. Most importantly, it failed in any way to contribute to their "possessing the grace of God."³¹⁴ Indeed, their training could be positively harmful to the Christian experience of the clergy. Campbell went as far as to suggest that when you compared a group of physicians, carpenters, and clergy, the percentage of Christians would be the same in each group.³¹⁵ That is, a significant number of clergy not only lacked the grace

³¹⁰ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," 19.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No XIII: The Bishop's Office, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 11 (1826): 242-243.

³¹³ Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. IV," *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 6 (1824): 35.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 35-36.

of God but could not even be considered Christians. Thus, the education of the clergy reinforced the human behavior of relying on learned skills rather than exercising faith and experiencing the grace of God in their day to day duties.³¹⁶

Having demolished the common proofs used for the authority of the reigning clergy, Campbell suggested: “Let us have no clergy at all, learned or unlearned – let us have bishops and deacons, such as Paul appoints, such as he described.”³¹⁷

Authority of ecclesiastical councils

The systems to which the clergy belonged were also corrupt beyond repair and falsely claimed authority. But Campbell’s ire during this early phase of his thought was mostly directed at one part of those systems, that is, the ecclesiastical councils, confederations, general assemblies, associations, synods, courts, and conferences. Such gatherings and associations he considered did not exist for the stated purpose of church government but rather for clergy to maintain their authority and control over the church.³¹⁸

Campbell challenged the authority of church government by ecclesiastical council in three ways. First, he undermined the presumed biblical precedent for such meetings, second, he challenged the authority of the church at any level to make legislative decisions, and third, he tried to prove that the locus of authority for decisions that the church can make is held at the local church level.

Campbell argued that those using Acts 15 to validate ecclesiastical councils had not examined the passage carefully and thus misunderstood it. The Jerusalem Council was

³¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 36. He refers to both 1 Tim 3:1-14 and Titus 1:5-9.

³¹⁸ Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 4 (1823): 25.

unlike the contemporary gatherings for church government.³¹⁹ Instead of being a precedent for annual or semi-annual meetings of church government, the Jerusalem Council was a unique, never-to-be repeated experience. It did not deal with some trivial issue, it dealt with issues of basic Christianity that were to be preserved in Scripture for the church of all time, and thus the decisions were the decision of the Holy Spirit. After the decisions were made, the council never met again. Thus, the Jerusalem council cannot be considered a precedent for the ecclesiastical councils of today.

A consistent application of Campbell's early idea of restoration of original practices and order meant that Campbell could not condone forms of organization not found in the New Testament. Thus, we also find him arguing that ecclesiastical councils had no right to govern because the local church with its bishops and deacons was the "only ecclesiastical body recognized in the New Testament."³²⁰ The local church was to be the "highest court of Christ"³²¹ or the "highest tribunal on earth to which an individual Christian can appeal."³²²

In spite of this honor, the local church did not have the authority to make any laws of its own.³²³ The church has but one lawmaker and that is Christ, who has already laid down the laws for church and made them known to His people in Scripture. No further laws are necessary or wanting. The church need only execute those laws.³²⁴ This

³¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

³²⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Essays on Ecclesiastical Characters, Councils, Creeds, and Sects, No. III," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 12 (1824): 73.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Campbell, "The Clergy, No. II," 25.

³²³ Ibid., 25-26.

³²⁴ Ibid.

of course also has implications for the authority of ecclesiastical councils. To suggest that together the churches have more power than one church is to wrongly place the authority and power of the church in the hands of human beings rather than in its king, Jesus Christ, since his words and authority do not change.³²⁵

True Source of Authority in the Church

Authority in the church thus belongs to Christ alone. Campbell described the New Testament church government as an absolute monarchy in which Jesus Christ himself was the absolute monarch.³²⁶ He coined the term Christocracy to describe this state of government which was not to be confused with the Theocentric Jewish church in which the Father was the absolute monarch. Christ's enthronement signaled that all authority had been transferred from the Father to the Son.³²⁷ Consequently, Campbell suggested that in Christ resided all branches of governmental authority: legislative, judicial, and executive.³²⁸ It was thus the Son's will, and his will alone, that was to be the "sole law of the church."³²⁹ This will was clearly stated and available to all in the form of the New Testament, and therefore, churches required no other rulers or rules.³³⁰

Nevertheless, Campbell was careful to clarify that although legislative authority is Christ's alone, the Son chose to delegate some of his authority to apostles who were

³²⁵ Ibid. Campbell applies the same analogy to show that since one church is not infallible, no amount of churches meeting together can make an infallible decision.

³²⁶ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. II," 25.

³²⁷ Ibid. This provided one of the bases of Campbell's rejection of the baptismal formula as often understood. To baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to baptize by the authority of the three of them. This is problematic since all authority has been given to the Son.

³²⁸ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 488.

³²⁹ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. II," 25.

³³⁰ Ibid.

especially chosen individuals in his church. The apostles were handpicked by Christ and given “authority to act in his name, and when his kingdom came he authorized them to sit on thrones, pronouncing statutes and judgments to the Israel of God.”³³¹ Thus commissioned, they possessed the authority necessary for the initial setting up of the Christian church. Since their authority was recognized by their fellow Christians as God-given, their commandments were to be considered as the commands of Christ.³³² This form of legislative authority ceased with the death of the apostles. It was not passed directly to some sort of successors.³³³ The primary human authority in the church was to remain the authority of the apostles which lived on in the testimony and commands they left in Scripture.³³⁴ Campbell considered these more than adequate to meet the needs of the church

However, in order to function effectively, the local church needed to have some form of order and organization. The day-to-day running of the church could not be left to a distant monarch, or simply to the words in a book.³³⁵ For day-to-day needs of the church, executive authority was invested in the entire body of Christ.³³⁶ The nature of this authority and its expression will be examined in the next section.

³³¹ Ibid., 26.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 482. Hereditary authority Campbell asserted is as unscriptural as hereditary faith

³³⁴ The apostolic writings gain primary authority in the absence of direct writings of Jesus Christ himself. Campbell calls both Christ and the Scripture the foundation of the church.

³³⁵ Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. I," 533-534.

³³⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Four Queries Answered," *The Christian Baptist* 6, no. 5 (1828): 500. The executive function is one that preserves, defends, and executes the laws.

Authority and the Local Church

The church as a whole was entrusted with the mission of the church from the time of the death of the apostles forward.³³⁷ All members, by virtue of their baptism, have equal authority to make certain decisions.³³⁸ But the types of decisions and the degree of authority attributed to members are limited to accepting new members, selection of church officers, and temporal matters such as church buildings and finances.³³⁹ While each individual has a right to contribute to such decisions, matters are not be decided by a single individual. They “are to be decided by the vote of the whole community, or not at all.”³⁴⁰

Decisions made by the church are not to override or conflict with the authority of Scripture or God’s role as head of the church. Furthermore, Campbell suggested that in instances where Scripture is silent decisions of the church should not be dogmatic.³⁴¹ In 1835 Campbell clarified this further suggesting that,

³³⁷ Ibid. Campbell follows this idea with the opinion that “giving up conversion of the world into the hands of a certain class, however designated, chosen, and appointed, has been the greatest check to the progress of Christianity which it has ever sustained.”

³³⁸ In spite of the equality of baptism for all persons, there is evidence that Campbell had concern about women controlling the voting. See Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXX: On the Discipline of the Church, No. VI," *Christian Baptist* 6, no. 8 (1829): 531. Campbell would later express concern about the voting of several types of individuals in the church. He was particularly concerned about votes begin swayed by children, new Christians, and women. He felt that female predominance in the Baptist church government was an obnoxious feature of the Baptist church government. See for instance Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. 2," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 6, no. 2 (1842): 62.

³³⁹ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXXI: Discipline of the Church, No. VIII," *Christian Baptist* 6, no. 10 (1829): 550-551. In other words the decisions of the church are limited to decisions that cannot be made by the Bible alone.

³⁴⁰ Campbell, "Order," 512.

³⁴¹ Ibid. Campbell was critical of a church which decided to meet on a monthly basis, and considered that this decision was in conflict with the God’s revealed will of meeting weekly, and thus a decision that the members were not entitled to make. Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of

They are not to vote on questions of faith, piety, or morality. Truth is not to be settled by a vote, nor is any divine instruction, respecting the worship or morality of the christian church, to be decided by a majority. These are matters of revelation, of divine authority, and to be regulated by a "thus saith the Lord," and not by a thus saith the majority! But in all matters not of faith, piety, or morality; in all matters of expediency, and sometimes in questions of fact pertaining to cases of discipleship, there is no other way of deciding but by vote of the brotherhood.³⁴²

It is particularly important to note that truth and matters of faith are not to be settled by a vote. Campbell expected that a "thus said the Lord" would be sufficient to decide these questions. Nevertheless, in decisions that related to the day-to-day running of the church we find some form of democracy. Thus, Campbell described a church that is at once both a monarchy, and a limited democracy. He was, however, cautious in his claim of democracy.

All Christians also have a second kind of authority, and that is the authority to perform a variety of functions within the church. "A Christian is by profession a preacher of truth and righteousness, both by precept and example. He may of right preach, baptize, and dispense the supper, as well as pray for all men when circumstances demand it."³⁴³ The divine right to perform these functions is thus not limited to a group such as the clergy. However, Campbell clarifies the extension of rights with the phrase, "when circumstances demand it." Campbell recognized that a church functions more smoothly and efficiently when responsibilities are divided rather than every individual trying to do a multitude of tasks. Indeed, if the church is like a body as Paul suggested in Ephesians, then we expect that there will be some sort of delegated authority and

Things, No. XXXI: Discipline of the Church, No. VIII," 549-550. The Bible is to be considered the voice of God regardless of decisions made by the members of the church.

³⁴² Campbell, "Order," 511-512.

³⁴³ Campbell, *Christian System*, 86.

diversified function, with each person working together in harmony for the good of the church.

Thus, in spite of his attempts to free the church from forms of existing church government, Campbell recognized the validity of some church offices. Examining the New Testament pattern, he noted that the apostles encouraged new church communities to appoint individuals to the office of bishop also known as elder or overseer, the office of deacon, and to the office of evangelist. Appointment of these officers was always made by the “call of the congregation.” There were to be no self-appointed leaders, or leaders appointed from afar by some denominational entity.³⁴⁴ Consequently, the congregation was to be served by leaders they knew and trusted.

Scripture provided guidance on the qualification of these leaders, and in this way the apostolic authority was exerted in the decision regarding leaders. However, when it came to choosing between candidates, human discretion was the key. The congregation needed to make a democratic decision about which individuals have the scriptural qualifications for the office in question, and which individuals have the necessary intellectual and leadership characteristics to preside over them.³⁴⁵ Thus, anyone who oversees the church obtains his authority not by succession, education, or appointment by outsiders, but by the mutual consent of the membership of the local church that he will oversee.

This flow of authority from members to officers was demonstrated in the ceremony of ordination in which elected officials were inaugurated or set apart to their elected office. Local church members rather than other clergy were to place their hands

³⁴⁴ Campbell, "Order," 502. The use of self-appointed leaders fails to recognize the flow of authority within the church and violated principles of good order.

³⁴⁵ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No XIV: The Bishops Office, No III," *The Christian Baptist* 4, no. 1 (1826): 260.

on the elected candidate during the ceremony.³⁴⁶ A covenant was then made between the church and the individual being ordained, the congregation using their latent authority to authorize leaders to act on their behalf. The individual taking up office covenanted to devote themselves to the duties of their office, while the congregation who were laying hands upon them agreed in turn to submit to their leadership and support, and sustain them as their resources allowed.³⁴⁷

The consequence for the individual member is that even though they could of right perform certain activities in the church, respect for the authority given to the officer elected by the church, resulted in them choosing not to perform functions that had been delegated to that officer unless asked to do so by that officer. “No one is to read, speak, teach or exhort in the congregation without a special call or leave of the bishop presiding for the day.”³⁴⁸ This voluntary submission to the authority of church officers also extended to any discipline that the officer might exercise over the congregation. Members agreed to be bound by whatever decision the officer made provided only that officer continued to hold office.

Because authority for office was obtained from the local congregation, individuals holding church office only had jurisdiction within the local church. They had no authority over any other congregation, and ceased to hold office if they moved to another church, or were deemed unfit to continue in office by the church which appointed them.³⁴⁹ To

³⁴⁶ Seniors or elders could represent the congregation in this process, but the laying on of hands by one not of the congregation had no precedent since authority was being given to the officer by the local congregation to act on their behalf.

³⁴⁷ Campbell, "Order," 497-498.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 505.

³⁴⁹ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," 21.

suppose otherwise Campbell suggested, would be to affirm the unbiblical conclusion that there were two classes of disciples, clergy and laity.

Bishops

Bishops were needed in every church and were to be distinguished from priests, ambassadors, ministers of religion, and clergymen. They were to be considered simply as persons who had “oversight of one voluntary society.”³⁵⁰ Given this function of oversight, and the Biblical usage of overseer, Campbell used the term bishop interchangeably with that of overseer. He was, however, inconsistent and at times contradictory in his assessment of whether this office was also equivalent to the role of elder. On one hand Campbell claimed that the term elder does not “designate the nature of any office.”³⁵¹ With this reasoning he suggested that the bishops created in the New Testament were called elders simply because they were older converts in the congregation.³⁵² Yet elsewhere he seemed to use them interchangeably, and in one passage specifically equates the two titles and roles.³⁵³

The bishop oversees one church and one church only. While there may be more than one bishop in a church, there was no precedent for one bishop attached to multiple churches.³⁵⁴ This was essential in maintaining the presumed flow of authority from the

³⁵⁰ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," 21.

³⁵¹ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No XIII: The Bishop's Office, No. II," 242.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ For instance he applies the Biblical passages regarding elders to bishops and talks of elders undertaking specific roles he has assigned bishops. See for example, Campbell and Purcell, *A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion*, 141.; The two offices are equated in Campbell, "To Dr. James H. Otey, Bishop of Tennessee, Letter I," 230.

³⁵⁴ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No XIII: The Bishop's Office, No. II," 242.

congregation to the officer, and at the same time ensured the officer was known and trusted by those he oversees.

The scriptural qualifications of the bishop tell us about the nature of his function in the church. These qualifications Campbell divided into two types: those related to his work such as the gift of teaching and presiding, and those relating to strength of character that befits the prominent role the bishop plays in the church.³⁵⁵ Thus, the primary roles for the bishop were seen as presiding and teaching. Preaching was not one of his specific roles, but rather a role that Campbell saw all disciples were called to participate in some form.³⁵⁶ The explanation for this seemingly odd reversal to most Christian thinking is found in Campbell's distinction between preaching and teaching. Preaching is making the facts of the gospel known only to those who have not heard them, while teaching "makes known the meaning" of the facts to those who are already acquainted with the facts.³⁵⁷ The latter requires more skill than a recitation or reading of the facts, and it is the skill of the teacher who prepares the disciple to adequately share the gospel facts.³⁵⁸ Thus, in giving authority to the bishop to teach the congregation, significant credence is being given to the explanations of the bishop regarding the gospel facts.

Campbell also recognized that the bishop is called to give a degree of personal guidance and care to the congregation that entails such things as "watching over them,"

³⁵⁵ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XII: The Bishops Office, No. I," 232.

³⁵⁶ Campbell, "Reply to 'the Bishop of a Respectable Church'," 71.

³⁵⁷ Alexander Campbell, "A Familiar Dialogue between the Editor and a Clergyman, Part I," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 12 (1824): 76.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

“admonishing them,” and “visiting them in all their afflictions.”³⁵⁹ The bishop is to be concerned for the spiritual wellbeing of every member, actively “guarding them against seduction, apostasy, and every thing that militates against their growth in knowledge, faith, hope, and love, and retaining their begun confidence unshaken to the end.”³⁶⁰ He is thus contrasted with the person who schools himself in sermon making and prayer and concentrates his efforts on oratory for the congregation who will pay him the most.

In terms of authority, Campbell compared the bishop with the civil magistrate. Their role is to “see that the laws are obeyed, but they have no power nor right to legislate in any one instance, or for any one purpose.”³⁶¹

Deacons

Although the word *diakonos* is translated as servant in English, Campbell considered servant had too broad an application to be used in an unqualified form to describe the office of the deacon. Deacons were more specifically, the “servants of the church in its temporal concerns,” and their role included both the functions of treasurer and steward.³⁶² The deacon had charge of the treasury and dispensed resources as required to take care of the church, the bishop, and the poor.³⁶³ In order to dispense funds appropriately, the deacon must be “intimately acquainted with the families and

³⁵⁹ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XII: The Bishops Office, No. I," 233.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXIII: The Church," 428-429.

³⁶² Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XIX: The Deacons Office," *Christian Baptist* 4, no. 10 (1827): 335.

³⁶³ Ibid.

wants of the brethren.”³⁶⁴ They are to be acquainted with all members. The amount of attention required to attend to these matters meant that a plurality of deacons, both male and female, were required to provide the best service to the church.

Like the bishops, the deacons were delegated their authority by the consent of the congregation. Their function meant that they were entrusted with much personal knowledge as well as money. The simple flow of authority from members to the deacons ensured that the congregation would be served by deacons who had already proved themselves within the congregation.

Campbell was critical of the way churches of his time viewed the role of deacons. He considered that the meaningless tasks often given to deacons are a form of “pompous etiquette,” and represent a failure to understand the biblical example of the role of the deacon.³⁶⁵ Indeed, he suggested that the appointment of a treasurer when there was already a deacon appointed in a church amounted to saying that the deacon was “not to be trusted, or is not qualified for his office.”³⁶⁶

Evangelists

Campbell initially did not see the importance of the evangelist as a church office. In his opinion, evangelists were not considered a permanent office.³⁶⁷ Their role was one of preaching the gospel to those who had not heard it, and in Christian countries,

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXXII: Official Names and Titles," 586. Campbell's main use of the term evangelist prior to 1830 is to delineate the authors of the four gospels. The impression given is that Campbell at least initially saw the role of evangelist dying out during the early church along with the role of Apostle, but he is not explicit on this matter.

such a role was redundant.³⁶⁸ In 1829, Campbell started moving toward an acceptance of a role for evangelists, but only if a specific need existed in the area of the local church. However, he believed that if Christians restored a primitive form of Christianity, “such persons will not be necessary, any more than a standing army in a time of peace.”³⁶⁹ Campbell thus allowed evangelists to be commissioned by the local church and sent out to preach the gospel in areas of specific need outside of the church. A more detailed role for evangelists and their relationship to the local church does not emerge in Campbell’s thinking until several years later.

Congregationalism

Campbell claimed that the local church was the “only ecclesiastical body recognized in the New Testament.”³⁷⁰ As such, it was “perfectly independent of any tribunal on earth called ecclesiastical. It knows nothing of superior or inferior church judicatories, and acknowledges no laws, no canons, nor government other than that of the Monarch of the Universe and his laws.”³⁷¹ Since the local church was independent of every other local church, and responsible only to its head, Jesus Christ, every congregation must settle its own problems. There could be no appeal from one

³⁶⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Queries," *Christian Baptist* 5, no. 12 (1827): 353. This redundancy existed because Campbell considered the few who had not heard the gospel in Christian countries to mainly comprise children. Since parents were to proclaim the gospel to this group specific evangelists were not needed. The overseers of the church he considered sufficient to reach the few remaining individuals who had no knowledge of the gospel.

³⁶⁹ Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXXII: Official Names and Titles," 586.

³⁷⁰ Campbell, "Essays on Ecclesiastical Characters, Councils, Creeds, and Sects, No. III," 73.

³⁷¹ Campbell, "Reply to 'the Bishop of a Respectable Church'," 70.

congregation to another, nor could the churches get together to make a decision.³⁷² To consider that churches in aggregation held more power than a single church community was “to place the power or authority in men and not in the one king or head. For if numbers create greater power, it is the power of men – it is human authority, and not the authority of God.”³⁷³

Campbell did however see a role for associations of churches, even though they were to have no role in decision making. Their importance lay in the opportunity to worship with other Christians,³⁷⁴ and for “mutual intelligence, exhortation, and comfort.”³⁷⁵ But Campbell’s condemnation of synods, councils, and other ecclesiastical legislative bodies induced the total dissolution of some Baptist associations, and the withdrawal of many Disciples’ Churches from other such associations during the second decade of the nineteenth-century. The Christian Church thus embraced Campbell’s early radical Congregationalist model but failed to recognize the important function of this tangible aspect of the unity of Christ’s body.

From 1830 Onward: Revision, Reflection and Organization

The rapid growth in the number of Campbell’s followers by the end of the third decade of the nineteenth-century forced Campbell to reconsider the structure and organization of the church. There was little if any communication between many churches, individuals with inadequate qualification for their task were moving from area to area to spread the gospel, and others were claiming falsely to represent the church

³⁷² Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXX: On the Discipline of the Church, No. VI," *Christian Baptist* 6, no. 8 (1829): 531.

³⁷³ Campbell, "The Clergy, No. II," 25-26.

³⁷⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Mr. W.," *Christian Baptist* 5, no. 7 (1828): 419.

³⁷⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on the Communion of Churches," *Christian Baptist* 4, no. 1 (1826): 262.

when they were peddling their own views. Campbell recognized that it was a time of crisis that demanded more thought.

Organization and the Interdependence of Churches

Campbell's re-examination of the organization and authority within the church resulted in a recognition that the New Testament church showed evidence of co-operation between churches for the purposes of mission. By 1831, Campbell was willing to admit that a group of churches could accomplish "what a single congregation cannot."³⁷⁶ Using 2 Corinthians 8:19, he demonstrated that the New Testament churches elected messengers who cooperated with the Apostles in a variety of functions to benefit the church, and he inferred that churches today should appoint such messengers if the situation demanded it.³⁷⁷ Since the churches in the New Testament seemed to cooperate within geographical and political boundaries, he suggested that the church in America should consider cooperating within the boundaries of counties and states for evangelistic purposes.³⁷⁸

By 1835, Campbell not only saw evidence of cooperation in the New Testament, he insisted that cooperation among Christian churches was "inscribed on every page of apostolic history," and encompassed "the very essence of the christian institution."³⁷⁹ He encouraged cooperation in mission, prayer, counsel, and humanitarian work.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ Alexander Campbell, "The Co-Operation of the Churches, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 4 (1831): 237.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

³⁷⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Co-Operation of the Churches, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 10 (1831): 436.

³⁷⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Reply[to M. Winans, "Co-Operation",]" *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (1835): 120.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

Cooperation became essential to the life of the church, and thus Campbell felt able to endorse the use of cooperation between the churches to whatever extent was required to accomplish their mission.

This meant two related about-faces for Campbell. First, was the changed role of the local church. Campbell had previously suggested that the local church had the responsibility, means, and ability to carry out its mission, and that anything beyond the local church detracted from the role of the church and made the church appear impotent. Now, he argued that the local church was not all-sufficient for its mission, and that more could be accomplished by churches working together. The second change involved the movement toward formal organization. Although Campbell did not actively advocate new organizational bodies at this time, the implications of his move towards cooperation were not lost on astute members who saw this as the first step on a slippery slope towards the forms of church government that Campbell had been so critical of in his iconoclastic years. They rightly recognized that to put in place the degree of regular consultation and systematic cooperation that Campbell had outlined meant nothing short of some sort of organization for the hundreds of churches which until this point had enjoyed total independence.

In 1841, Campbell commenced a new series of articles entitled “The Nature of Christian Organization.” Although not all articles in the series were written by Campbell, those written by correspondent AN-C were used as a starting point for his deliberations and comments on the idea of organization in relation to the church. In them, Campbell re-examined the roles of church officers in the local church and once again stressed the need for cooperation. Responding to criticism of his advocacy of cooperation and organization, he opines:

There must, then, be some great mistake lurking in the minds of those who imagine that Christ's kingdom is a collection of ten thousand particular communities, each one being wholly absolved from any respect, co-operation,

inspection, or subordination in reference to any work or purpose necessary to the carrying out and perfecting that grand system of sanctification and conversion which began in Judea under the rich effusion of the Holy Spirit . . .³⁸¹

As the series continues, Campbell derived organizational principles from the apostolic example. In addition to the obvious need for church officers with specific roles and appropriate authority, these principles include two specific suggestions for cooperation. The first of these two suggestions is the need for special deliberations or group discussions when complex or emergency situations arise.³⁸² The second recognized the need for some sort of general geographic superintendence of districts by the Christian ministry in order to take care of the common interests of the kingdom in the district in which they are located.³⁸³

Scripture is thus seen as providing a precedent for the church to move toward organization with group deliberations and conventions having a valid role in this process. Initially, Campbell suggested that such meetings should only occur to discuss any difficulty of discipline, great questions of finance, and the methods and planning of any significant public object.³⁸⁴ Such meetings were irregular and on an as needed basis. But by 1853, Campbell suggested that full co-operation required statistical knowledge, joint consultation, working together on an executive board, and regular meetings in addition to the emergency meetings.³⁸⁵ Instead of seeing the collective vote as supplanting God's authority, Campbell now suggested that working together provided

³⁸¹ Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger*, n.s., 6, no. 2 (1842): 64.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

³⁸⁴ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. XII," 86.

³⁸⁵ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. IV," 307.

safety in a multitude of counselors.³⁸⁶ However, since the church had executive but not legislative function, the meetings were not to be “ecclesiastical courts of *oyer and terminer*, or judicial tribunals; but rather deliberative, co-operative, and executive meetings.”³⁸⁷

The attendees were to be specifically appointed by their churches, with each delegation including as many elders and deacons as possible.³⁸⁸ Thus, while the group included a mixture of individuals, church officers clearly were to have priority amongst the delegates.

The moral and ecclesiastic authority of any meeting composed of delegates is dependent on the local churches and their agreement to recognize the decisions of the meeting. Thus, cooperative meetings had “no other authority than the voluntary agreement of the parties or churches entering into them,” although parties entering into agreement should consider the decisions morally binding.³⁸⁹ Given the limited authority of such decisions, Campbell recommended that discussion of issues be confined to those which could not be dealt with by single congregations.

In the wake of Campbell’s call for more cooperation and organization, many district and state cooperative associations were formed. But even this did not satisfy Campbell. There was need for something at a national level to further the kingdom of God. “I am of the opinion that a Convention, or general meeting, of the churches of the Reformation is a very great desideratum. Nay, I will say further, that it is all important to

³⁸⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. 4," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 5 (1849): 272.

³⁸⁷ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. IV," 307-308.

³⁸⁸ Campbell, "Church Organization, No, XII," 86.

³⁸⁹ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. 4," 272.

the cause of reformation.”³⁹⁰ Such a meeting, he insisted, would be unlike the ecclesiastical conventions and courts that he had previously condemned. Its focus would be mission. While individual churches and districts can do much to evangelize their own areas, the reality was that “the world is the field of the whole church, and the whole church ought, as far as in its power, to co-operate in the great cause of sending the gospel to all nations.”³⁹¹ To do less would mean that the church failed in its duty to God.

In keeping with his sense of order and authority, Campbell suggested that messengers to the national convention needed to be elected rather than self-appointed, and that the convention be truly representative of the churches with messengers from every church, and where that was not possible, messengers from a district could represent them.³⁹²

A properly constituted national meeting was not only expedient from a mission and an organizational point of view but also from an authority point of view. Local churches choose their own officers and give them authority to work within their own church. But local churches could not give any more authority than their own individual membership. When evangelists or missionaries were going to be working in districts or states or even nationally, they needed the authority of those in the areas they would be ministering. “The field of labor, and the authority in it and over it, are necessarily commensurate. The credentials of a minister or ambassador, sent to a nation or a state, must have the approval of the nation or state that sends him, and it must be regarded as

³⁹⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Convention," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 8 (1849): 475.

³⁹¹ Alexander Campbell, "Conventions," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 11 (1851): 605.

³⁹² Campbell, "Convention." In spite of Campbell's calls for a representative meeting, the first national convention was far from this ideal. It was instead a mass meeting. A few churches had sent messengers, and some districts had also sent delegates, but by far the majority of those present were individuals who had come on their own volition to be part of the meeting. In the end, all attendees were enrolled as delegates even though many did not have the authority to represent their churches.

good and valid by those to whom he is sent.”³⁹³ A properly constituted meeting of elected messengers from churches within states, territories, and nations was thus necessary and proper for providing the appropriate authority for these individuals and for any objects of state, territorial or national importance.

Discipline

Along with Campbell’s new emphasis on organization came renewed attention to the topic of discipline. Lack of attention to the necessity of discipline, he considered, was responsible for many of the difficulties of the church.³⁹⁴ Churches had failed to recognize the importance of discipline. He urged them to learn from mariners who recognized the need to prepare for storms before they arrived, rather than being caught unprepared when the storm broke.³⁹⁵

Prior to 1830, the finality of the local church as the highest court on earth had been all encompassing. The church as a whole or via its officers was responsible for maintaining discipline in the church. However, the recognition that local churches were interdependent upon each other rather than independent of one another raised questions regarding this practice. Should the same cooperation that Campbell recommended for mission also impact the way church discipline was carried out?

In reviewing Scripture, Campbell realized that the church was a single body composed of many communities which were to be subordinate to each other. After he restudied the example of the church at Antioch referring a case to the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem, he moved away from his original conclusion that the Jerusalem Council

³⁹³ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 483.

³⁹⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Difficulties in Churches, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 1 (1840): 33.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

was not in any way a model for church councils and meetings, instead concluding that it set an important precedent for churches to ask for help from other churches, particularly as it related to church discipline.³⁹⁶

The initial application of Campbell's discovery was to cases where there were no impartial parties or where parties to a misunderstanding made up the majority of the church. The scriptural solution in such cases, he reasoned, was to call for help from one or more neighboring churches. The authority of the resulting disciplinary committee "is either found in the selection of the parties who give it, or in the power of the church herself to choose and appoint it."³⁹⁷

A disciplinary case in Baltimore further crystallized his thoughts on discipline and the interdependence of churches. Four members of a church in Baltimore had been disciplined and expelled in a manner that they thought was unfair. They wrote to Campbell hoping for some right of appeal; something that his earlier thought would have denied. Campbell argued that if there is no ability to appeal the decision of a single congregation, then in effect the decision is not only supreme but also infallible. But since no church claims to be infallible, their decision must not be regarded as absolute in all cases, and thus there must be some ability to appeal decisions.³⁹⁸ Integrating this idea with the interdependence of churches, Campbell further justified the need for appeal by the "principles of New Testament justice" and the example of the Jerusalem Council.³⁹⁹ He recommended the appeal go to a committee composed of the elders from two or three

³⁹⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Difficulties in Churches, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 10 (1840): 435.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 434.

³⁹⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Appeals: Is there no Appeal for the Decision of a Single Congregation?," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 10 (1840): 503.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 503.

nearby churches.⁴⁰⁰ While Campbell still saw the local church as responsible for its own affairs including discipline, there were times when its decisions would and could be questioned. No longer was the local church to see itself and its affairs in isolation from the wider church of God, but as a responsible segment of the church of God accountable to the church as a whole. Campbell therefore suggested the following principles guide disciplinary appeals:

1. No local church is independent of the whole church; therefore it must be “amenable to the whole church for its administration of its affairs.”⁴⁰¹

2. If there is a matter that involves the peace and prosperity of other communities, then all interested parties should have a part in the decision. The single community, while independent in managing its own affairs, cannot scripturally disregard the views, feelings, and judgments of other communities that might be affected.⁴⁰²

3. The majority cannot “oppress a weak minority without the right of appeal from its decisions.”⁴⁰³

4. The help of sister churches is warranted when there are difficult cases or where there are no impartial parties in the church where the dispute is centered.⁴⁰⁴

5. Appeal by individuals or churches to other churches for help means accepting their decision as final and ultimate. There are to be no further appeals.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 503-504.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 504.

⁴⁰⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Difficulties in the Churches, No. VI," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 5, no. 2 (1841), 58.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

Campbell was, however, careful to articulate that Acts chapter 15 does not set a precedent for “annual, biennial or triennial synods, councils or conventions; but it institutes a special conference or convention when exigencies may require.” In doing so he tried hard to distance his expanded disciplinary role for churches beyond the local congregation, from the ecclesiastical courts he had earlier decried.

Roles and Authority of Church Officers

Bishops

Campbell continued to advocate for a plurality of elders or bishops in every church except the smallest churches where size might make this impractical.⁴⁰⁶ However, he also recognized that where there are many elders, one often naturally takes on the role of chief bishop, overseer, or president based on spiritual gifts.⁴⁰⁷ Campbell encouraged these chief bishops to serve full time in their churches instead of continuing in the part time voluntary role characteristic of most Disciples officers.⁴⁰⁸ Lest he be misunderstood, Campbell was careful to stipulate that this job was not to be understood as a different order or office, or as an excuse for some sort of hierarchical church government.⁴⁰⁹ It was rather a natural outworking of spiritual gifts and the cornerstone of good order. Although Campbell regarded the bishop as primarily a teacher rather than

⁴⁰⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Questions," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 5 (1840): 238. For small-church exception see Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. III," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 3, no. 5 (1853), 247.

⁴⁰⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. XIII," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 7, no. 4 (1843): 151.

⁴⁰⁸ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. XII," 85.

⁴⁰⁹ Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. XIII," 151.

a preacher, emergence of a chief or presiding bishop in local churches was accompanied by the increasing acceptance of the terms minister and pastor.

In this time period, Campbell also further clarified the extent of the bishop's authority. He concluded that the New Testament does not show evidence of bishops caring for more than one church, authority of supervision given to one class of officers to superintend over inferior officers, or any parish beyond the limits of one single congregation.⁴¹⁰

In keeping with Campbell's increasing focus on order and organization, he began to emphasize the need for the bishops to rule well. But ruling has many connotations, and could easily be confused with the nature of ruling exercised by other ecclesiastical bodies. To prevent this confusion, Campbell clarified the limits of the authority of the bishop. The authority of the bishop did not extend to judging beliefs and opinions of others. Rather, bishops were given authority to discipline behavior unbecoming of the Christian, and to deal with other disciplinary matters.⁴¹¹ They were also to be "vigilant superintendents" of congregational education.⁴¹²

Initially, Campbell had interpreted Matthew 18 to recognize a role for the church as a whole in the resolution of disputes. Although he felt the church should only inquire as to whether the appropriate steps according to Matthew 18 have been undertaken, rather than into the nature of the dispute itself, the congregation as a whole could call for reparation and reconciliation and exclude members who refused to heed the

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 148-149. There is some inconsistency between this description of equality and the new supervisory role given to the evangelists. See following section on the evangelists role.

⁴¹¹ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks [On "Nature of the Christian Organization, No. VI"]," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 6, no. 8 (1842): 328. Although Campbell uses the word elder here, he also clarifies that it is an office he is talking about, and not simply the older members of the congregation. Thus, it is assumed that he is using elder in the sense of equivalent to bishop.

⁴¹² Ibid.

congregation's advice.⁴¹³ However, two issues bothered Campbell with this approach. First, such trials disturbed church harmony and order, and second, he did not regard everyone as competent to judge. He expressed concerns about the judgment of children and individuals new in the faith.⁴¹⁴ For these reasons, we see Campbell moving towards making the elders or bishops the judges when an offence needed to go before the church. There is "neither wisdom nor propriety in calling a whole community together to prove a fact, or to examine an evil report against a brother. This is the duty of the elders of the church. The whole church are not bishops. Their official duties reach to these cases."⁴¹⁵ Under this system, the elders are to collect the data, ascertain the facts, make a judgment, and simply report their decision to the church.⁴¹⁶ Since the congregation has placed authority in the elders to make decisions on their behalf in other areas, this added authority is simply an extension of the covenant between the people and the elders.

Evangelists

Campbell reports that he received many complaints about the availability and the character of evangelists. While gifted, many were indiscrete, uneducated, arrogant, money grabbing, deceitful, and self-willed resulting in more harm than good to the movement.⁴¹⁷ Others went about without any valid authority though carrying letters that made them appear to be of good character. Agitated by the frequency of the problem

⁴¹³ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. XXV: On the Discipline of the Church, No. II," *The Christian Baptist* 6, no. 1 (1828): 467.

⁴¹⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Discipline," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 7 (1839): [329]. Page 329 is incorrectly printed as 339 in the College Press edition.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, [329]. See previous note on pagination.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁴¹⁷ Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. I," 535.

Campbell urged that “It is time that something were done more efficiently to prevent so many and so frequent occurrences of this sort.”⁴¹⁸

Although evangelists were sent out by local churches, Campbell was quick to point out that any church who patronizes them is “responsible for their dogmatic theories or day-dreams, in all their consequences and bearings.”⁴¹⁹ This is problematic, especially if the church supporting or aiding the evangelist in some way differed in their beliefs, or disagreed with their behavior.

To avoid or at least minimize these problems and misrepresentations, Campbell envisaged a better system of authorization for evangelists. Since evangelists belonged to the whole community and not simply the local church, evangelists should have the approval of all the churches in the area they serve.⁴²⁰ This had the dual advantage that the local churches in the area recognized their responsibilities, and the evangelists received authority and credentials appropriate to the field of their labors.⁴²¹ Not surprisingly, Campbell considered local cooperation meetings an ideal venue for the appointing and approval of evangelists.

Campbell was now also more specific about the duties of the evangelists. Using Timothy and Titus as models for the evangelists of the Christian Church, he found precedents for evangelists or missionaries to “preach the gospel, baptize the converts,

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 484-485.

⁴²⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 8 (1849): 461.

⁴²¹ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 483.

constitute churches, and set them in order.”⁴²² Although evangelists usually work alone, Campbell considered that a plurality of evangelists working together is a preferable scenario, and more likely to meet with success.⁴²³

The evangelist’s role in preaching, baptizing, and setting up churches was not new to his readers, what was new however, was Campbell’s emphasis on another role of evangelists: the supervision of the new churches the evangelists planted and the training of their elders and other officers.⁴²⁴ Speaking from experience, Campbell was critical of the failure of evangelists to realize their ongoing obligations to churches they have planted, and accuses them of “incompetence or neglect of duty.”

Campbell had previously been silent on this role of the evangelist but by 1840 he gave it increasing emphasis along with their preaching role.⁴²⁵ Although initially he seemed to confine the role of the evangelists to the immediate establishment of the church, with time he envisaged them taking a more supervisory role in the ongoing work of the church.⁴²⁶ Using 1 Timothy and Titus he argued that evangelists were responsible for keeping the church in order. Specifically, the evangelists were to keep the churches they planted free from errors, to edify, reprove, and exhort as needed, to train and

⁴²² Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Ministry and Its Support, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 9 (1850): 482-483. See also Alexander Campbell, "Response To "Office of an Evangelist" By William Rawlin's," *Millennial Harbinger* 5th ser., 1, no. 6 (1858): 327-332.

⁴²³ Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 482.

⁴²⁴ Campbell, "Organization, No. I," 385.

⁴²⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., VI, no. VI (1842): 243-245; Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Organization, No. XV," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 7, no. 6 (1843): 261; Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 8 (1849): 460-461..

⁴²⁶ Campbell, "Organization, No. I," 382-384.

discipline elders, and see that the elders rule well, while being properly sustained by the church.⁴²⁷

While it might seem natural that a more experienced Christian mentor newer Christians, especially those in leadership roles, these expectations of evangelists blurred the lines of authority Campbell had espoused. Campbell seemed fully aware of the dilemma this inconsistency posed. He continued to insist that after the church had been organized and set in order, the evangelist had no official authority over it but found himself having to clarify what he meant.⁴²⁸ Thus, instead of noting that the work of the evangelist has ceased when the church is organized, only his “proper work” has ceased. While the members of the church are not under the evangelist now “as an official,” the officers are still under his supervision in some special sense.⁴²⁹ The result is, in effect, that bishops and evangelists are no longer equals in authority. The evangelist has taken precedence.

Education of Leaders

The combination of the social milieu of the individual church and the independence of each local congregation meant that there was a great diversity in the education, character, and competence of the officers amongst the Disciples. Campbell recognized that elders were often weak with a poor knowledge of Scripture, and lacking in the attributes needed to rule well.⁴³⁰ The state of biblical knowledge was so bad that Campbell was not confident that many elders could recognize the difference between

⁴²⁷ Campbell, "Office of an Evangelist," 330.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Campbell, "The Crisis, No. 5," 471-472.

faith and opinion, nor facts from idle speculation.⁴³¹ These inadequacies confounded the practical issues of administration growing out of the phenomenal growth of the Disciples. The small frontier churches continued to exist, but they were joined by new large city churches with many educated members. While the uneducated frontier bishop could serve effectively in small country churches, such an individual could not adequately rule a church of professionals.

In order for the Disciples to continue to grow, an adequate education of its leaders and some sort of official qualifications became vital. “The ministry of the Christian church, in any system or organization, is the most essential article. That a community must have its officers, and that they must have official qualifications and a constitutional authority, is as clearly an oracle of revelation as of reason, and a dictate of universal experience.”⁴³²

The strength of this conviction that education is imperative for church leaders led Campbell to donate some of his own land in Bethany, Virginia, for a new institution in which church leaders could be trained. Thus, Bethany College opened its doors in 1840 with Campbell at its helm.

For some of Campbell’s readers, his interest in ministerial education seemed like an about-face from the vigorous condemnation of theological education that had taken place in the *Christian Baptist*. But these readers had at least partly misunderstood Campbell by failing to read the context of his condemnation. Campbell had been concerned about the sectarian nature of theological education which concentrated on ecclesiastical history and denominational confessions. Such education he considered was

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Campbell, "Church Organization, No. V," 459. Note also that Campbell now regards the ministry as essential.

more harmful than good. He now proposed an education that was founded on biblical knowledge learned from the Bible alone, and not from any other sectarian textbook.⁴³³ In this way leaders could be grounded in Scripture and not the speculations of man.

Campbell's other concerns had related to the self-selection and thus frequent unconverted state of many training in the ministry. No amount of education, he had countered, could make up for the absence of a relationship with God.⁴³⁴ In order to avoid this problem in the training of Disciples leaders, he called upon churches to nominate and support potential leaders who were converted Christians.⁴³⁵

Embracing the need for education does not imply that Campbell understood educational qualifications as the source of authority for church officers. Rather, this education equips and prepares for more effective service, those individuals that the church has already authorized as leaders or those the church considered as potential leaders.

The Role and Authority of the Editors of Religious Periodicals

Much of the success of the Disciples, along with many other nineteenth-century Christian groups in the United States, can be attributed to the increase in religious periodicals which characterized the church at that time. The liberty that was so valued in the land of freedom was applied to the press in equal measure, resulting in a virtual explosion of literature, uncensored and largely uncontrolled.⁴³⁶ Inevitably, this freedom

⁴³³ Alexander Campbell, "Prospectus," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 5 (1840): 240.

⁴³⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Our Changes," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 5, no. 6 (1855): 343. Based on this principle Campbell still opposed training for ministry in most theological schools.

⁴³⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Schools and College, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 3 (1850): 170-174.

⁴³⁶ Prior to the beginning of the nineteenth-century all journals were published in three cities: Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. A mere thirty years later religious periodicals were being published

of press brought with it problems. The varying educational background of editors and writers, and the lack of control meant that abuses of the press were common. Campbell listed six of these abuses: reputations were ruined for the sake of one's own reputation; discussions of questions tended to the interests of the editor rather than edifying the reader; the presentation of erroneous views of truth; publication of any sentiment no matter how inappropriate; "the exhibition of weak, crude and silly conceptions;" and the unnecessary repetition of content.⁴³⁷ These abuses were particularly disconcerting because of the significant influence editors were having upon their readers and subscribers.⁴³⁸

The cause of reformation was being hurt by the abuses of the "irresponsible and unlicensed presses."⁴³⁹ Ideas that circulated reflected on the church as a whole, and were considered normative of the denomination or group that was represented by the editor's background. Inappropriate content engendered strife instead of edification and growth,⁴⁴⁰ and the principles of Christianity were being ignored in the process.⁴⁴¹

The first step in addressing these critical issues Campbell suggested was the responsibility of subscribers. Since the subscribers are essentially casting their vote for,

in 195 different cities across the continent. See Nathan O. Hatch, "The Whirlwind of Religious Liberty in Early America," in *Freedom and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Richard J. Helmstadter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 45. Disciples history is characterized by several dozen periodicals, twenty- four of which are listed by Campbell in the opening pages of the first issue of the 1841 *Millennial Harbinger*. However, while religious periodicals proliferated, many vanished almost as fast as they appeared.

⁴³⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Religious Periodicals," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 5, no. 5 (1941): 228.

⁴³⁸ Alexander Campbell, "The Crisis, No. III," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 1, no. 4 (1844): 170.

⁴³⁹ Campbell, "Religious Periodicals," 228.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Alexander Campbell, "Too Many Periodicals," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 11 (1839): 549.

or giving authority to editorial candidates by choosing to subscribe to their periodicals, Campbell contended that subscribers needed to be more responsible in their choices. They needed to “vote” for the editors who demonstrated “piety, good character, good taste, good manners, ability, and prudence.”⁴⁴² But of paramount importance in any choice was the editors knowledge of biblical truth and their willingness to work in harmony with fellow editors of the Christian cause.⁴⁴³ Such careful choice by subscribers would not only improve the quality of periodicals but also reduce the number of circulating periodicals, something that Campbell greatly favored.⁴⁴⁴

A second step was to introduce the idea of reviews or some sort of censorship. Campbell first raised the idea in the preliminary remarks of the 1841 volume of the *Millennial Harbinger*. “There needs to be a censor of the Reformation Press just as much as a church needs a bishop, a family a head, or the literature of England and Scotland the London and Edinburg Reviews.”⁴⁴⁵ Such a censor would likely be unpopular, something Campbell had confirmed by experience. He noted that he “dared not to assume the ungrateful office” but made no other suggestions as to a possible censor at that time.⁴⁴⁶ The idea resurfaced when Campbell commented on Jessie Ferguson’s novel interpretation of the Scripture, in the *Christian Messenger*. “We must have reviews. While we have so many voluntary, and only partially educated scribes and irresponsible

⁴⁴² Campbell, "The Crisis, No. III," 170. Campbell also rightly suggests that the community can be judged by the periodicals they read and the editors they sustain.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Campbell, "Too Many Periodicals," 548-550. In addition to the problems with editorial license, Campbell felt that the multiplicity of periodicals distracted workers from more important duties and placed unnecessary financial strain on the members.

⁴⁴⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Prefatory Remarks," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 5, no. January (1841): 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

editors, we must have reviews.”⁴⁴⁷ Given the risks of such a job, who should do the reviews, and who should decide if the material was acceptable? Seeming to have abandoned the concept of a single censor, Campbell now suggested that young should voluntarily submit to judgment of those older, and presumably wiser than themselves.⁴⁴⁸

The voluntary changes Campbell suggested improved member and editorial responsibility but ultimately left editorial authority unchecked, something that bothered Campbell, and motivated the following question. “When a community is once organized, has every member of it, on his own motion, a right to appear as its public advocate, either as a preacher or an editor, or ought he to wait for a call and an appointment from the community?”⁴⁴⁹ The answer here is a given, since we have already seen Campbell’s concern that church officers including preachers be elected rather than self-appointed. In advocating that editors also be appointed however, Campbell had finally come to the place that he recognized the editor was as much a church officer as the elder, deacon, or evangelist, and thus needed some sort of formalization of their editorial authority. Such appointment Campbell envisaged should be at state or territory level rather than at local church level.⁴⁵⁰ Campbell had not been appointed, but since his periodicals had begun prior to church organization he appeared to excuse himself from this requirement.

Like their fellow church officers, editors are called upon to actively represent the body who had given them authority. Thus, the periodicals are not to be works to show

⁴⁴⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Spirits in Prison: An Attack on the Millennial Harbinger and its Editor, by Jesse B. Ferguson, of the Christian Magazine," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 2, no. 9 (1852): 494.

⁴⁴⁸ Campbell, "The Crisis, No. III," 173.

⁴⁴⁹ Campbell, "Too Many Periodicals," 549.

⁴⁵⁰ Campbell, "Religious Periodicals," 229. There is not enough evidence to assume as Lindley does, that Campbell wanted a single central publishing center. The United States was a default option if the weekly, monthly and quarterly periodicals that Campbell suggested could not be managed more locally.

off the editors' prowess or to broadcast pet theories. Rather, they are to exhibit the principles that the community holds dear.

In spite of Campbell's clear preference for appropriate editorial authority by election, he adamantly rejected the formation of a central publishing center, the Christian Publication Society, which had been voted into existence by a General Convention of Disciples. His stated reason for his rejection is the fact that not all the delegates making this decision had been elected by their churches or associations. While this is in keeping with Campbell's strict sense of order, suspicion abounds that Campbell was more concerned about protecting his own publishing venture.⁴⁵¹

Summary

Campbell's writings prior to 1830 exposed what he considered were the wrong perceptions of authority which had permeated the Christian church. They focused on two main areas, the pretensions of the clergy whom he depicted as greedy and power hungry; and the authority of ecclesiastical councils. Campbell demolished the arguments for clerical authority by showing that there was no such thing as apostolic succession or special call after the apostles died, and further that the so-called marks of authority, namely education and titles, simply masked the fact that clergy were self-reliant and failed to live up to the New Testament qualifications for overseers.

The true source of authority for the church was Christ, who had delegated some legislative authority to the apostles. After their death the church ceased to have any new legislative authority. Instead, it was given a limited executive authority which was

⁴⁵¹ The strong competition between D. S. Burnet, the prime mover behind the central publishing house, and Campbell's Bethany ventures is documented by Noel Keith, who includes testimony from Campbell's son in law W. K. Pendleton. See Noel L. Keith, *The Story of D. S. Burnet: Undeserved Obscurity* (St Louis, MO: Bethany, 1954). Burnet seems to have loved Campbell and worked hard for the Disciples, but Campbell had strong negative feelings for Burnet. Campbell's need for control meant that Burnet failed to receive the approval of Campbell that could have made many of his ventures successful.

delegated to every member. Together these members of the local congregation were able to make decisions, but never on matters of truth which were to be determined by Scripture alone.

The need for order in the church meant that some individuals were needed to undertake organizational tasks. Such individuals were called by the local congregation to their roles, and given delegated authority by them. Campbell described three main organizational roles: the bishop or elder who was an overseer and teacher of the congregation, the deacon who oversaw temporal matters of the church and acted as a treasurer, and evangelists who preached to those who had never heard the gospel.

After 1830, Campbell increasingly recognized the interdependence of churches and advocated cooperation between them. He suggested geographical supervision of districts, and periodic conventions of delegates for discussion of matters that pertained to all the churches in the area. With time, he went as far as to suggest the need for occasional national conventions to discuss and coordinate the mission activities of the church. These suggestions appeared to contradict Campbell's earlier views of the nature of the church and its authority.

Campbell's increasing focus on cooperation and organization was also reflected in the extension of discipline beyond the local church in special circumstances; the revision of the roles for evangelists and bishops; a call for education and official qualifications for leaders; and his consideration of editors as church officers.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

In the midst of the upheaval of the nineteenth-century as denominationalism and division in the Christian church surged, Alexander Campbell emerged as a Christian leader who, with his father, founded a movement with the express aim of uniting Christians. His early approach was largely iconoclastic as he attempted to release the church of God from the bondage of human speculation, tradition, and inappropriate

wielding of power and authority. Release from these bonds was necessary to open the way for the church to attain the unity required of it. Only then could the church accomplish its mission of conversion of the world and thus usher in a new millennium of triumphant Christianity.

Instead of bowing to established church creeds, Campbell emphasized the pivotal role of Scripture in the life of the church. He attempted to forge a path that both acknowledged Scripture's Divine authority and its human characteristics by proposing a twofold theory of revelation and inspiration. In this way he envisaged Scripture as providing the necessary rule for life, while also being able to be interpreted as any other human book. Since interpretation of Scripture is not the sole domain of the clergy, all are encouraged to study its contents for themselves. By applying Baconian assumptions to its study, it is expected that all will reach the same understanding of truth.

A radical view of *sola scriptura* is endorsed that, at least in theory, requires biblical evidence for every tenet of faith. However, Scripture in its totality is not considered normative for the Christian. Recognizing the inadequacy of the law for Christian life, Campbell proposed a dispensational framework of Scripture that left the New Testament, and in particular, its contents from Acts 2 forward, the only basis for determining what is required of the Christian.

The apostolic church thus became the model for the Christian church, and the center of Campbell's call for a return to the original form of Christianity. Due to its Divine institution, and its inhabitation by God, the church is a perfect society that lacks nothing for its mission. By means of the apostolic example and the biblical images of the church Campbell emphasized both the essential unity of the church, and an authority structure that places God and the members of the church in the correct relationship and roles.

Christian unity was seen as central to the Divine plan for the church which existed to enlighten and convert the world. The mandate for such unity is found in Christ's high priestly prayer, which expresses unequivocally that it is the divine will for Christians to be one. Unity and cooperation between Christians is therefore the *summum bonum* towards which all Christians should strive and worthy of any sacrifice. The Christian world however, instead of embracing unity seemed to be forever dividing, creating a major obstacle to the conversion of the world. The major cause of this disunity Campbell identified as human speculation and opinion. His wrath was particularly focused on creeds which replaced inspired words with human deductions and inferences, and insulted God by suggesting that human summaries of truth are better than God's own words. The fallibility of these documents opened them up to criticism, competition, and ultimately division. Other contributions to the division in the Christian world include incomplete attempts at reformation, misplaced emphasis on minor matters which receive undue priority over gospel facts, and charismatic teachers who either willingly or unwittingly invite attachment to their persons. Social and economic issues were largely ignored in Campbell's thinking until slavery emerged as a major issue for his followers.

Campbell presupposed that the church has an essential unity which is founded in the apostolic center or seven pillars of the church found in Ephesians 4:17. Such essential unity is incomplete without a visible manifestation in the life of the church, since unity is intended for the conversion of the world. Campbell thus envisaged a unity that goes beyond the simple unity of purpose that was to be found in nineteenth-century non-ecclesiastical voluntary organizations such as the Temperance Union. Unity was to be expressed in the form of an actual union of Christians. While there were other 19th century attempts at union, the uniqueness of Campbell's idea can be found in his rejection of a union of sects as a valid manifestation of this union. Instead, the union was to be a union of Christians who reject sectarian labels. This Christian union he defined as

both spiritual and visible. In addition, it is personal and entered by individual confession of Jesus as Christ. It is a union that will not sacrifice truth and rejects church politics.

Campbell attributed failure to achieve this type of union to a failure to follow the divine plan for union, which involves a restoration of Christianity to its original form. However, in making this association between restoration and unity, Campbell sets up a tension between the exclusivity associated with restoring the ideal, and the inclusivity of union. This tension makes any attempt at union difficult. Campbell specified a series of five principles by which restoration of original Christianity is to occur, and hence unity can be accomplished. They center on a return to Scripture as the rule of faith and learning which entails belief in the facts of Scripture, obedience to the commands of Scripture, and willingness to be silent on matters not discussed in the Bible. To improve understanding of the content of Scripture which provides this rule for life, Campbell advocated that the Bible be translated into the current vernacular, specific hermeneutical rules be followed, and a recognition of the Bible as a book of facts rather than a book of doctrines. The other principles for attaining unity build on this Scriptural foundation: a return to the practices of the apostles, particularly the ordinances of baptism by immersion and the Lord's supper, a return to pure speech which uses only the terms and phrases of Scripture, confession of the central fact of Scripture that God has anointed Jesus as Savior, and unity of faith and not opinion.

The underlying function of these principles was to establish the source of authority for the Christian, while at the same time they set up boundaries to reduce or prevent the confusion of this divine authority with human authority. Thus, Campbell's principles for the accomplishment of unity are integrally tied to matters of authority.

Campbell was skeptical of other attempts at unity that ignored these principles. Thus, we find him initially pessimistic regarding the usefulness of the Evangelical Alliance because of its failure to recognize the real purpose of unity, the need for

elimination of sectarian loyalties and the divine principles for attaining it. But with time he was prepared to recognize that any attempt at unity might have positive results, and was evidence of the Holy Spirit's work.

Although Campbell envisaged a union between all Christians, his early radical congregationalism which affirmed the independence and autonomy of the local church meant that there were limited outlets for the necessary visible manifestation of this union. The authority of individual members was delegated to local church officers who were to maintain internal harmony by upholding the principles of unity, and by discipline that involved both ruling on certain actions and removing divisive individuals from the congregation. However, these officers were not to be monitors of opinion or doctrine which were considered private matters.

The rapid growth of the movement with its attendant problems led to a reassessment of the church and its authority structure. While local congregations were to exercise their authority, Campbell realized that the implication of a church that includes all Christians is that individual congregations are not only responsible to their own members but also to other church congregations. The mission of the church is thus best accomplished by cooperation between the local congregations, and such co-operation requires meetings and some sort of structure to enable the coordination of resources. This increasing attention to the authority structure of the church also enables fellowship with a larger body of Christians, and a more visible union of Christians to occur.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDIES: ALEXANDER CAMPBELL'S PRINCIPLES OF UNITY AND AUTHORITY IN ACTION

We have seen that Campbell clearly outlined how unity was to be attained and maintained. He likewise provided a clear line of authority in the church structures he suggested, which defined the way in which church authority should be used in attaining and maintaining that unity. This chapter examines these principles in action by means of case studies. While there are many possible cases that could be analyzed, four issues within Campbell's ministry were chosen to represent both the process of attaining unity, and the different types of threats to unity including threats from doctrinal differences, organizational changes, external social pressures, and personal differences. The four case studies reviewed in this section are: (1) the union of Campbell's followers with those of Stone's Christians, (2) the Jessie Ferguson controversy, (3) the response to the threat of division over slavery, and (4) the move to introduce organization.

Case Study 1: Union of the Disciples and the Christians

Barton W. Stone was a poor frontier preacher who like Campbell sought after unity, made Scripture the source of authority for the Christian, and rejected creeds and sectarianism. He saw the call for Christian union within the priestly prayer of Christ, and saw disunion as sinful since it directly contravened the will of God. Division he saw as "condemned in almost every page" of the Bible.¹ However, Stone believed the

¹ Barton Stone, "Objections to Union Calmly Considered," *Christian Messenger* 1, no. 2 (1826): 25.

foundation of unity was not a return to the apostolic practices or conformity to key principles of faith as Campbell suggested, but rather it was the manifestation of God's spirit in the lives of Christians.² The emphases of the two men were different in regard to the foundation of unity, but the fact that they both focused on the subject of unity, ensured that the parallel courses taken by the two men would eventually fall under Stone's scrutiny.³

Campbell and Stone first met in Georgetown in 1824 during one of Campbell's tours to Kentucky. Their meeting led to friendship, and a request for Campbell to preach in Stone's church as both found they were pleading for a return to Scripture as the rule of faith and practice, and both advocated the union of Christians.⁴ Friendly dialogue began

² Barton Stone, "Of the Family of God on Earth," *Christian Messenger* 1, no. 1 (1826): 6; Barton Stone, "The Retrospect," *Christian Messenger* 7, no. 10 (1833): 314-315. In the later article Stone compares four types of union. Book union which was founded on creeds and confessions, head union based on unwritten belief systems, water union based on baptism by immersion, and fire union based on the unity of the spirit. Only fire or spirit union would succeed.

³ Stone considered that belief in the principle of unity, accompanied by prayer alone was an inadequate Christian response. "Do these people expect that God will work miracles to effect this union? Do they not know that he has ordained the means to effect this end? and that these means are within the power of us all?" A passive attempt at union was not enough. Christians must actively seek union by the means which God had given them. Stone, "Of the Family of God on Earth," 16.

⁴ In his autobiography Stone summarizes his thoughts on the theology of Campbell during the visit to Kentucky. "When he came into Kentucky, I heard him often in public and in private. I was pleased with his manner and his matter. I saw no distinctive feature between the doctrine he preached and that which we had preached for many years, except on baptism for remission of sins. Even this I had once received and taught, as before stated, but had strangely let it go from my mind, till brother Campbell revived it afresh. I thought then that he was not sufficiently explicit on the influences of the Spirit, which led many honest Christians to think he denied them. Had he been as explicit then, as since, many honest souls would have been still with us, and would have greatly aided the good cause. In a few things I dissented from him, but was agreed to disagree." Barton Stone, "A Short History of the Life of Barton W. Stone Written by Himself," in *Voices from Cane Ridge*, ed. Rhodes Thompson (St Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1954), 105-106.

later in their respective journals, but no concrete propositions for union were initially entertained.⁵

Starting the Dialogue

The first two volumes of the *Christian Messenger* laid a strong foundation of Stone's principles of union, so that by the third volume, Stone was fielding questions about the reality of that union. One Baptist is quoted as asking, "Why do not you, as a people, and the *New Testament baptists* [*sic*] unite as one people?"⁶ Stone in part replied:

But the New Testament reformers among the Baptists have generally acted the part which we approve. They have rejected all party names and have taken the denomination, *Christian*; so have we. They allow each other to read the Bible, and judge of its meaning for themselves; so do we. They will not bind each other to believe certain dogmas as tests of fellowship; nor do we. In fact, if there is a difference between us, we know it not. We have nothing in us to prevent a union; and if they have nothing in them in opposition to it, we are in spirit one. May God strengthen the cords of Christian union.⁷

Although Campbell responded to various items from the *Christian Messenger* he did not directly address Stone's suggestion that there was nothing to prevent a union between the two groups. Instead, Campbell expressed pleasure at Stone's adoption of the weekly celebration of the Lord's supper,⁸ while at the same time expressing sadness that his Christian brother had not understood the role of baptism for remission of sins, and concern over his willingness to worship and join at the Lord's table with unimmersed persons.⁹ Stone, he considered, allowed too much latitude to "opinions" allowing them

⁵ Campbell had only been publishing the *Christian Baptist* for a year at the point of their meeting, and Stone did not commence his journal the *Christian Messenger* until 1826.

⁶ Barton Stone, "Comments on Christian Union," *Christian Messenger* 3, no. 11 (1828): 261.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁸ Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Messenger," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 10 (1830): 473.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 473-475.

to control his thinking about “almost all the laws, ordinances and worship of the Christian institution.”¹⁰

Stone repeated the suggestion that there was nothing to prevent such a union in the August, 1831 issue of the *Christian Messenger*. Stone saw the two movements as already united in spirit, and was ready to move beyond the intangible union to some sort of union in form.¹¹ He regarded the Disciples’ unwillingness to tolerate the opinions of Stone’s followers, as the only thing standing in the way of making the union a reality. “We acknowledge a difference of opinion from them on some points. We do not object to their opinions as terms of fellowship between us. But they seriously and honestly object to some of ours as reasons why they cannot unite.”¹² Based on Campbell’s indirect responses, Stone assumed the disputed items that were preventing the union were the differences in the role of baptism and its necessity and the different names the two groups had taken. Stone could not agree with Campbell’s insistence that unimmersed persons could not “receive remission of sins and should be excluded from fellowship and communion on earth.”¹³ Nor would he give up the name Christian. Stone was not suggesting that the union was an acceptance of all the opinions of the other party. Rather, Stone was prepared to unite on the basis that both groups acknowledged Christ as Savior, and were attempting to obey to the best of their understanding of his will as found in the Bible.¹⁴

¹⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Opinion," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 2 (1831): 102.

¹¹ Barton Stone, "Union," *Christian Messenger* 5, no. 8 (1831): 180-185. The article was republished in the September issue of the *Millennial Harbinger* of the same year under the title, “Union, Communion and the Name Christian.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 181.

Campbell's reply followed swiftly.¹⁵ He expressed concern about the form of union that Stone had in mind, and the process by which it might occur. Any form of union needed to take into account the appropriate levels of authority in the church. In Campbell's mind, any union between two religious movements containing multiple congregations was inappropriate because it failed to recognize that the locus of authority was at the local church level. Congregations must be able to express their own opinion on the subject of unity rather than being required to be part of a formal union.¹⁶ Furthermore, a wholesale union would overlook the important personal and spiritual component of unity. Any union is in spirit and truth, and it is faith in Jesus and love for the saints which "constitute, if not the bond, the concentrating principle of union, among faithful followers of Jesus Christ."¹⁷ Indeed, he wondered if union could occur at anything other than at an individual level to best recognize the nature of unity as he understood it.¹⁸

As to the theology that divided them. Campbell claimed that Stone had misunderstood the issues, especially regarding baptism. It is not opinion that divided them, but rather "the *practice* of setting aside a divine institution, not in the judgment of the person received, but in the judgment of those who receive him."¹⁹ The question of the name he considered was of subordinate importance to this big issue. Campbell

¹⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Union, Communion, and the Name Christian," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 9 (1831): 389-396. The article was reprinted by Stone in his October issue of *Christian Messenger*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Campbell also seems upset by Stone appearing to give the Christians precedence over the Disciples.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 392.

considered that the ancient form of Christianity outlined in Scripture was indispensable to the Disciples, not to be overlooked or hidden for the sake of union with a group that shared other characteristics such as being anti-sectarian.²⁰

Stone in turn admitted that he was uncertain what form the union should take but he was convinced that the two groups should be united in form, even if it was nothing more than simply worshipping together.²¹ He rejected any intent to prioritize one group over the other, and defended his statements as an attempt to show the similarities between the groups.²² If the two groups did not unite, it would be detrimental to both their causes since Stone considered that their anti-sectarian arguments will be nullified and be used against them by those who suggest that the Bible alone is insufficient to unite Christians.²³

Discussions Move to the Local Churches

While the conversation between Stone and Campbell is revealing in its elucidation of the importance of various beliefs in their respective quests for unity, and in a sense opened up the way for more concrete steps towards unity, the reality was that union would never have taken place had Stone limited himself to dialogue with Campbell. They were no closer to a solution than when the correspondence had begun. It was another friendship that would be instrumental in moving the two groups toward the concrete reality of union. While the correspondence between the leaders was taking place, Barton Stone was also strengthening his friendship with John T. Johnson, a

²⁰ Ibid., 391.

²¹ Barton Stone, "Remarks on A. Campbell's Reply on Union, Communion, and the Name Christian," *Christian Messenger* 5, no. 11 (1831): 249.

²² Ibid., 250.

²³ Ibid., 251.

Disciple of Christ elder in his hometown of Georgetown, Kentucky. Both men longed to see unity of Christians, and agreed to unite their efforts to bring about union of the Disciples and Christians.²⁴

As a result of the efforts of these men, their congregations began meeting together some time in October 1831. The following month, leaders of both the Disciples and Christian groups in the Georgetown and surrounding area met together informally to decide on steps to bring their congregations together on a more permanent basis. Included in this group were Christian leaders Barton Stone and John Rogers, and Disciples leaders John Johnson and John “Raccoon” Smith.²⁵ They decided that there would be a series of two, four-day meetings held for the purpose of joint worship, and for discussion and questions of the members of both groups. The first meeting would be in Georgetown over Christmas and the latter in Lexington over New Year.

Joint Worship Begins

While no official records of these four-day meetings exist, a description of the Lexington meetings can be found in Williams’ biography of leader, John “Raccoon” Smith.²⁶ He reports that there were concerns expressed by both groups. The Disciples were concerned about the Christian beliefs regarding the Trinity and atonement, and were suspicious that they were Arian. Stone’s followers on the other hand were concerned that

²⁴ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 2:379; Barton Stone and John Rogers, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself; with Additions and Reflections* (New York, NY: Arno, 1972), 77-78. As a visible sign of this intention, Stone decided to take on Johnson as co-editor of the *Christian Messenger*.

²⁵ D. Newall Williams, *Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), 190-191.

²⁶ John Augustus Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith: With Some Account of the Rise and Progress of the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati, OH: R. W. Carroll, 1871), 450-457. Like most early biographies of Disciples leaders, this volume tends to view Smith primarily in the light of the progress of the movement as a whole rather than critically evaluating the thought and actions of Smith.

Disciples attached an undue importance to baptism by immersion and denied the role of the Spirit in conversion and the life of the Christian. After much discussion, Smith and Stone wrapped up the meeting at the end of the four days. Smith acknowledged the differences between the two groups, and noted that it was unlikely that they would be resolved quickly. However he was convinced that there was only one church on earth, and that unity was possible if members were willing to put aside inferences and deductions as requirements for fellowship, choosing instead to be guided by the words of Scripture alone. He concluded, "Let us then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of *lights*. But let us all come to the Bible, and the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the Light we need."²⁷

Stone for his part made a short speech in which he acknowledged that he had often fallen into the trap of preaching speculation, but desired to do better. He concluded

That the controversies of the Church sufficiently prove that Christians never can be one in their speculations upon these mysterious and sublime subjects, which, while they interest the Christian philosopher, can not edify the church. . . . I perfectly accord with Brother Smith that these speculations should never be taken into the pulpit, but that when compelled to speak of them at all, we should do so in the words of inspiration.

I have not one objection to the ground laid down by him as the true scriptural basis of union among the people of God; and I am willing to give him now and here, my hand.²⁸

The two shook hands and called upon those who were willing to unite to give each other the hand of fellowship. Excitement and joy were expressed as most of those present agreed to the union.

²⁷ Ibid., 454.

²⁸ Ibid., 454-455.

Notice of the successful meeting was published in the January edition of the *Christian Messenger*.

We are happy to announce to our brethren, and to the world, the union of Christians in fact in our country. A few months ago the Reforming Baptists (known *invidiously* by the name of Campbellites,) and the Christians, in Georgetown and the neighborhood, agreed to meet and worship together. We soon found we were indeed in the same spirit, on the same foundation, the New Testament, and wore the same name *Christian*. We saw no reason why we should not be the same family. The Lord confirmed this union by his presence; for a good number was soon added to the Church. We agreed to have a four days meeting on Christmas in Georgetown, and on New Year's at Lexington, for the same length of time. A great many Elders, Teachers and Brethren of both descriptions, assembled together, and worshipped together in one spirit, and with one accord. Never did we witness more love, union, and harmony, than was manifested at these meetings. Since the last meeting we have heard of the good effects. The spirit of union is spreading like fire in dry stubble.²⁹

The announcement was republished in the March edition of the *Millennial Harbinger*, with little comment by Alexander Campbell save wishing them well in their endeavor.³⁰

Problems with the New Union

But it was not long before the union was in disarray in one of these combined churches. Barely a month later, a letter to the editor of the *Millennial Harbinger* reported the breakdown of the unity between the two groups in Lexington over the inability to find an elder that was suitable to both sides, and the unwillingness of Stone's followers to celebrate the Lord's supper without an ordained elder.³¹ As a result, the Lexington churches decided they were not ready for union. They dissolved their pledge to work together just one day short of the expected final ratification of the union where names

²⁹ Barton Stone, "Union of Christians," *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 1 (1832): 6-7.

³⁰ Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Messenger," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 3 (1832): 137-139.

³¹ H. C. Coon, "Letter to the Editor," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 4 (1832): 191-192. The letter is dated February. In the week before final ratification of the union it was discovered that some of the men and all of the women were unwilling to join the union because of differences between the leaders about the choice of elder. The central problem as Coon suggests related to differences in understanding of clergy, church officers and their authority.

were to be inscribed on a list of members of the united society.³² The Georgetown group fared better presumably because of Barton Stone's presence and calming influence.

Campbell was quick to note the problem which seemed to validate his concerns about the union. Union of Christians, he suggested, was worthless unless it led to happiness and holiness amongst themselves or conversion of the world.³³ This supposed union was accomplishing neither of these objectives, and hence the world was no better off. Critical of Stone's Christians, he suggested

But until the christians have more love to Jesus Christ, and more veneration for his Apostles, than for fine oratory, or the warmth of a fervid and boisterous declaimer; until they regard one another as the children of God, and his kings and priests to God; as a chosen generation and a kingly priesthood; until they prefer communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, in keeping his institutions, to the formalities of the kingdom of the clergy, it will be in vain to profess reformation, or a love for the union of christians upon New Testament premises.³⁴

The solution of the leaders in Kentucky was along more practical lines. At the joint meeting, John Smith and John Rogers, one representative elder from each group, had been set apart to travel together throughout the state to solve problems, and thus consolidate the union, while also encouraging the union between Christians and Disciples in other churches.³⁵ Though not initially successful at the church in Lexington, they had better success elsewhere. They encouraged putting aside speculation and returning to scriptural language on which all could agree. Breaking bread with someone of different opinions they suggested, did not mean that you sanction the other person's opinions, only that you agree upon and celebrate the saving grace of Christ. Everyone is entitled to their

³² Ibid. It would be three years before they would attempt any form of union again.

³³ Alexander Campbell, "The Union," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 5 (1832): 194.

³⁴ Ibid. I have retained the lack of capitalization of the original.

³⁵ Stone, "Union of Christians," 7-8.

own private opinions therefore you should be willing to give to each other what you claim for yourself.³⁶

As a result of the specific attention to problem solving, the union between the Disciples and Christians was largely successful throughout Kentucky by 1835. It was less successful in Ohio and Indiana where many of Stone's followers choose to join the Smith-Jones and O'Kelly congregations in preference to joining Campbell's Disciples.

Conclusions

Up until Stone's suggestion that congregations from the two groups should unite, Campbell's movement had grown primarily by means of individuals embracing the goals of the restoration movement. This growth had been accelerated by a few individual church congregations joining the movement, but the ecumenical aspects of Campbell's unity principles had not been tried on a larger scale. However, faced with the possibility of uniting two groups of congregations, Campbell's love for unity was largely eclipsed by his concern for the fundamentals of faith and order as he understood them. The only hint, in the discussion between Stone and Campbell, that Campbell thought unity should be pursued further, comes in a statement that urges further correspondence on the issues and calls those who love the ancient order to give attention to the ideas of union and co-operation.³⁷

Given the major theological differences between the two men, Campbell had reason to be concerned. While both Campbell and Stone agreed upon the Bible as the source of authority for the church, their underlying assumptions about religion were very different. Furthermore, they had significant differences in their understanding of almost

³⁶ Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith: With Some Account of the Rise and Progress of the Current Reformation*, 464-470.

³⁷ Campbell, "Reply to Union, Communion, and the Name Christian," 391.

every area of doctrine. Campbell was optimistic about human potential. Confident in human ability to reason he liberally adapted the philosophical thought of Locke and the Common Sense Philosophers in his construction of theology. He rejected the emotionalism of revival religion, instead preferring a rational approach to faith. Stone on the other hand was pessimistic about human potential, and encouraged a more emotional “heart” religion guided by the Spirit. Yet Campbell failed to address these major differences or the fundamental doctrinal differences between the groups which included major doctrines such as the doctrine of God, atonement, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology.³⁸ Instead, he seemed preoccupied with the role of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and its requirement for church membership.

Since the two men and their followers agreed on Scriptural authority and the need for confession that Jesus is Savior, it is the distinction between faith and opinion, the necessity for pure language, and the restoration of apostolic practices that might be expected to form the core of Campbell’s concerns during any discussion of unity between the two movements. Therefore, at first glance, Stone’s unorthodox views of Christ,³⁹ the Trinity,⁴⁰ and the atonement⁴¹ might be expected to cause the most concern for

³⁸ A concise overview of Stone’s theological positions can be found in D. Newell Williams, "Stone, Barton Warren (1772-1844)," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 700-720.

³⁹ Ibid., 713. Stone took the position that Christ, while derived from the Father and of the same substance of the Father, was nevertheless not equal with the Father. Although an Arian-like belief, Stone rejected accusation of Arianism outright however since he believed Christ was of the same substance of the Father.

⁴⁰ Ibid. In addition to his unorthodox view on Christ, Stone also saw the Holy Spirit in an unorthodox way. The Holy Spirit was not an individual member of the Trinity but rather the power of God. Although he corresponded with Campbell over his Trinitarian beliefs in 1827, they never became part of the discussion on union between the two men.

⁴¹ Stone’s views of atonement varied with time. The major difference from Campbell appears to be his rejection of substitutionary theory. Stone saw belief in the substitutionary theory as unbiblical. He engaged in discussion with both Thomas (1833) and Alexander Campbell (1840-41) on this topic.

Campbell, but the distinction Campbell made between faith based on the facts of the gospel and opinion based on speculation of the meaning of the facts helps clarify why this was less of an immediate issue for Campbell.⁴² Discussions regarding the nature of Christ were speculation since the Bible tells little more than that Christ was both God and man. The use of terms such as *homoousios* in the debate of Christ's nature did not occur in Scripture, and as such also counted as speculation. Even though Stone did not see Jesus as equal to the Father, he still considered him to be the Savior. Therefore, since Stone's personal views of the nature of Christ did not get in the way of his understanding of the matter of faith, they should be regarded as opinion. As opinion they could be held without comment or discipline. On the other hand, Campbell saw baptism by immersion as a clear command of God in Scripture, and thus something that could be fairly drawn into the discussion as a matter of faith.⁴³

Campbell's concern about maintaining the authority of the local church was in the end respected by Stone, but only because Stone was frustrated by the lack of progress in his discussions with Campbell. Once the center of discussion moved to the local churches, the first unions took place in a matter of months. While local church leaders prepared for union of the churches, individual members still were able to participate in the discussion, and choose the ultimate outcome, agreeing or disagreeing to add their names to the joint membership documents.

⁴² Campbell would continue to engage Stone in debate on atonement in 1840-41 a full eight years after their union.

⁴³ Campbell's later suggestion that facts of faith are what is commonly believed and has always believed would have made Stone's unorthodox beliefs an even larger major obstacle for any attempt at union between the two movements.

Stone's working with local church leaders led to a more open though perhaps less informed discussion of the issues that stood in the way of union. The divergence between the two groups regarding the nature of Christ, atonement, and practical ecclesiology were more prominent in these discussions, however Smith and Stone were able to get their members to tolerate the diversity of beliefs by classifying them as opinions. The lack of clear boundaries on what constituted opinion left the local church to define these in whatever way suited their purpose. On the same basis, the local church leaders also chose to ignore Campbell's concerns regarding the outright disregard of Stone and his followers for enforcing that which Campbell considered a clear command to baptism by immersion. Thus, while Campbell's concerns for the authority of the church were respected, his major concerns went unheeded. The resulting unity was more in keeping with Stone's theology, that is, it occurred on the basis that both groups acknowledged Christ as Savior, and wished to live together in peace, obeying God's will to the best of their understanding.

Case Study 2: Jessie Ferguson Controversy

Jessie Ferguson was both brilliant and ambitious, but he is remembered less for these traits than for the controversy that surrounded his theology. An excellent orator, he became the pastor of the Nashville Christian Church in February 1846. His charismatic preaching was popular, and under his leadership the Nashville church experienced rapid growth and great prominence. One historian went as far as to say that he was considered the "greatest and most eloquent pulpit orator in the South"⁴⁴ This combination of

⁴⁴ H. Leo Boles, *Biographical Sketches of Gospel Preachers* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1832), 188. Glowing reports of the influence of his preaching can also be found in the biography written by Spiritualists in England. See Thomas Low Nichols, ed., *Supramundane Facts in the Life of Rev. Jesse Babcock Ferguson, A.M., LL.D., Including Twenty Years' Observation of Preternatural Phenomena* (London: F. Pitman, 1865), 30, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015062490837>.

popularity, charisma, and skills in preaching and debating, made it likely that he would be seen as a rival to Alexander Campbell.

In addition to his preaching, Ferguson was both a writer and an editor, another point which called forth comparison with Campbell. He took over the *Christian Review* from Tolbert Fanning in 1848, publishing it under a new title, the *Christian Magazine*.⁴⁵ Two years later it became the property of the Christian Publication Society of Tennessee and was sent to all members of the society as the official journal of the Christian churches in Tennessee.⁴⁶

Ferguson Publishes a Novel Interpretation of Scripture

The controversy over Ferguson's theology began in 1852 with the publication of a personal interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6 entitled "The Spirits in Prison." Published with caution, he prefaced the article with a note that recognized the novelty of his views. "We could have wished more leisure, in which to prepare systematically, and corroborate at length" our view and because of its difference from most other published views "we hesitated long in its public expression, hoping to be able to see something more clear,

⁴⁵ Ferguson's writing was not limited to the *Christian Magazine*, he also contributed articles to other Christian magazines including the *Christian Review*, *Heretic Detector*, *Millennial Harbinger*, *Christian Journal* and *Bible Advocate*. Even prior to the controversy surrounding Ferguson's theology, he drew attention to his editorial role by his criticism of the editorial practices of other Christian magazines. Christian periodicals he considered were needlessly full of controversy because editors wanted to show off their own prowess. See for instance, J. B. Ferguson, "Editorial Puffery," *Christian Magazine* 3, no. 4 (1850): 123-125. He was particularly critical of the unwarranted degree of authority that many editors exercised in their periodicals. Deluded into thinking their opinions were expressed for the common good, they made personal opinions the standard by which others were judged. His concerns were again expressed in 1850 when he opined, "I fear the invasion of church independence, but not from Co-operation meetings, or Conventions properly convened, but from the invasion of church rights by our periodicals." J. B. Ferguson, "Fear of Consolidation-Independence of Individual Churches," *Christian Magazine* 3, no. 7 (1850): 209.

⁴⁶ The Christian Publication Society of Tennessee was formed the year before by recommendation of a subcommittee of the Tennessee State Co-operation. They voted immediately to have Ferguson continue as editor. See "Minutes of the Tennessee State Co-operation Meeting," *Christian Magazine* 2, no. 12 (1849): 325-327

consistent and satisfactory than has yet appeared.”⁴⁷ Following this introduction, Ferguson presents his translation of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6⁴⁸ in which he concludes that Jesus by his spiritual nature preached to the spirits of all the dead in some invisible world.⁴⁹ Since these dead are contrasted with those “in the flesh” and are in some sort of prison, he asserts that the dead cannot be construed to mean the morally or spiritually dead as many other interpreters had concluded. Ferguson suggested that his interpretation was consistent with the idea that Christ died to reconcile both things on earth and in heaven, since this preaching of Christ’s role in effect gives a second chance at salvation to the dead who for whatever reason did not hear or accept the gospel during their life, thus ensuring that those who are judged by the gospel actually have the opportunity to hear the gospel.⁵⁰ Such an interpretation he saw as hopeful. “We never commit the body of a

⁴⁷ J. B. Ferguson, "Exposition of Scriptures: The Spirits in Prison - 1 Pet. iii. 18-20 and iv. 1-6," *Christian Magazine* 5, no. 4 (1852): 113. The article was reprinted by Campbell under the title “A New Discovery” in the June issue of the *Millennial Harbinger*. The change in title exposes Campbell’s suspicion of Ferguson’s interpretation before the reader even has a change to consider the facts for themselves.

⁴⁸ Ibid. The translation reads: “It is better to suffer, doing well, (if the will of God be so,) than doing evil, because even Christ once suffered about sins, the just over the unjust, to bring us near to God; put to death, indeed, in consequence of the flesh, but made alive in consequence of the Spirit, in which Spirit, also, he went and preached to the Spirits now in prison, to those once rebellious, when the long suffering of God waited out in Noah’s days, while the Ark was being prepared, entering into which a few, that is, eight souls were brought safely though the waters: corresponding to which, Baptism also now saves us, (not the putting off the filth of the flesh, but the asking of a good conscience after God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven, angels and powers being arranged under him. Christ, then, having suffered over us in consequence of flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, (for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,) that you no longer live the remaining time in the flesh after the lusts of men, but after the will of God. For the time past is sufficient to have wrought the will of the Gentiles when you walked in excesses, lusts, revellings and lawless idolatries. On which account they stand astonished - that you no longer run into the same profligate dissoluteness, mocking you, - who shall pay their reckoning to him that is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this end the gospel was preached to them that are dead, that they might be judged like men in the flesh, yet live after God in the Spirit.”

⁴⁹ Ferguson understood the use of Noah in the passage to be an indication of the inclusiveness of this preaching, that is, that the preaching was to all the dead.

⁵⁰ Ferguson, "The Spirits in Prison - 1 Pet. iii. 18-20 and iv. 1-6," 114-115.

single human being to the grave, for whom it is not a pleasure for us to know, that his soul has already entered where the knowledge of Christ *may yet* be his: and that if at last condemned, it will not be for any thing that was unavoidable in his outward circumstances on earth.”⁵¹ But this one sentence on hope, more than any other in the article, left him vulnerable to accusations of Universalism, a vulnerability that Campbell did not hesitate to expose.

Some months later, after having received several concerned letters from brethren, Campbell reprinted Ferguson’s article in the *Millennial Harbinger* and followed it with fourteen pages of critique. Campbell often prefaced or followed articles with comments or critique, but rarely to this extent. He wrote that he felt duty-bound to present the subject with “a few remarks, which I conscientiously and fraternally feel to be due to its author and to our common readers.”⁵² The basis of this duty is offered in his conclusion. Unlike wayward or indiscreet ministers who are heard by but a few individuals, the words of editors and scribes are disseminated widely with their influence continuing long after they die.⁵³

Campbell’s Critique

Campbell also made a translation of the disputed passage and suggested that the spirits were Noah’s contemporaries, not some disembodied spirits of the dead. They were individuals of Noah’s day who were addressed by Noah, speaking through the Holy Spirit. Noah, through that Spirit, the same spirit that was in Christ, announced repentance to his contemporaries who were bound in a prison of time lasting 120 years.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., 115.

⁵² Alexander Campbell, "A New Discovery," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 2, no. 6 (1852): 317.

⁵³ Ibid., 329.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 322-323.

What followed was a wider ranging critique which soundly condemned Ferguson's position. Campbell was critical of Ferguson's process of translation. He accused Ferguson of falsely interpolating the word 'now' before prison, and adding 'the' before spirit. These changes were not only unwarranted but changed inspired words.⁵⁵ He insinuated that Ferguson had borrowed from a school of thought which annihilates the very center of Christianity, which is the sacrificial death of Christ.⁵⁶ In doing so Campbell raised the red flags of heresy for anyone who failed to follow his other arguments. The translation he suggested was unbiblical because it confused Hades and heaven,⁵⁷ there was no evidence that anyone ever preached to a disembodied spirit, and it made judgment impotent.⁵⁸ The implications of the translation however were the centerpiece of Campbell's argument. Since a posthumous gospel was available, worldly people would put off decisions and die in their sins, thereby negating the need for evangelism in this world. Once in Hades, "subterranean spirits will be saved by sight, and not by faith," in clear contradiction to Scripture with the ultimate result being universal conversion since anyone in Hades will accept the offer in an instant.⁵⁹ In case this was not enough, Campbell also engaged in a personal censure of Ferguson. He suggested that Ferguson had "indulged his imagination at the expense of truth,"⁶⁰ and

⁵⁵ Ibid., 322.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 321.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 319.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 320. Campbell based this argument about the judgment on the words "Depart ye cursed" and "come ye blest." Ferguson's argument he suggested, made these statements void since another last judgment would be required

⁵⁹ Ibid., 318.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 328.

exercised poor judgment in printing the ideas. New ideas he saw as rare and dangerous and “must be entertained with great caution.”⁶¹

In short, Campbell’s arguments can be summed up by the statement that Ferguson’s interpretation contradicts the clear statements of Scripture and not only weakens but actively negates the gospel.⁶² It thus represented a new and dangerous gospel that “saps the very foundation of Christianity.”⁶³ As such, Campbell claimed that he had “never read, from a quarter in our ranks, an essay of more vulnerable or a more censurable character.”⁶⁴

In addition to his own critique, Campbell also printed two critical letters from leader John Rogers and Brother Church in the July issue of the *Millennial Harbinger* and appended a call for a public retraction by Ferguson.⁶⁵

Controversy Escalates

Ferguson interpreted Campbell’s critique and subsequent publishing of critical letters as a personal attack upon himself and his magazine and accused Campbell of planning the attack with friends during the Bible Convention in Memphis which had occurred earlier in the year. He claimed that he had been misrepresented and that not even one of Campbell’s accusations had any foundation. He denied any Unitarian connection or use of their Bible translation and clarified that he had no leanings toward

⁶¹ Ibid., 324.

⁶² Campbell’s critique is thus in direct contradiction to Ferguson’s claim that it is consistent with the gospel as he understood it.

⁶³ Campbell, "A New Discovery," 329. Thus, Campbell places Ferguson’s interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18f very clearly in the category of altering faith.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Spirits in Prison," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 2, no. 7 (1852): 414-415.

universalism.⁶⁶ He had not represented a ground of hope for everyone but only those “whose extraneous circumstances in life have precluded their knowledge of redemption in Christ.”⁶⁷ Irritated, he wondered whether Campbell desired to find something against him, and had therefore “determined in advance that, as we do not mouth his dogmas or reiterate his measure of divine knowledge, therefore, we must be heretics, and it is his solemn duty to hold us up as such?”⁶⁸

Ferguson continued with personal attacks against Campbell and the *Millennial Harbinger* and suggested that Campbell’s view of his own opinions as orthodox and evangelical, while accusing him of being neologistic and dangerous, make the *Millennial Harbinger* “wear the appearance of an ecclesiastical court, set up to try the faith and character of every man that does not mouth its Shibboleths, and who gains sufficient importance to command its notice.”⁶⁹ His accountability he reminded readers is not to the *Millennial Harbinger* or its editor. “As an editor, we are responsible to the Christian Publication Society of Tennessee; and as a Christian Minister, to the Church of Christ in Nashville. We recognize no other earthly tribunal, having any authority over our religious faith or Christian Character.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ J. B. Ferguson, "The Attack of the "Millennial Harbinger" Upon the "Christian Magazine" and Its Editor," *Christian Magazine* 5, no. 8 (1852): 241.

⁶⁷ Ibid. While there is one sentence in Ferguson’s first essay that might suggest restriction of the posthumous gospel to only those who have not heard the gospel in life; he was not explicit on this point. Furthermore, he was very clear in his explanation that Christ preached to all the dead. His statement about hope at the graveside also seemed to suggest the wider availability of the posthumous gospel, giving Campbell adequate grounds for his critique.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 243.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Finally summing up what he considered had been said in his first article, he wrote: "I have uttered an opinion, that men who have not heard the gospel, will hear it before they are condemned by it. This is the substance of the whole matter."⁷¹ This is significant both for its summary, and for the use of the word opinion. Ferguson clearly thought that his writings came under the category of opinion, and therefore he was entitled to hold them without interference or discipline.

Campbell was astonished at Ferguson's scathing accusations which he likewise felt were unfounded. His September issue contains both a copy of Ferguson's response above and Campbell's reply. Even though Ferguson denied a leaning towards universalism and had clarified that he believed Christ's preaching is only to those who did not have the chance to hear the gospel, Campbell appeared to ignore this, and continued to deplore the translation and expose its universalism. In response to the accusations of usurping authority, he asserted that:

I usurp no authority. I legislate for no Christian community. I dictate nothing to any man's faith. I judge no man's heart or conscience. But I will advocate truth and justice, morality and religion, while I have a tongue to speak or a pen to write.⁷²

As for the independency of churches, I have, from the beginning till now, been an unwavering advocate. But this individual independency does neither annihilate nor render inexpedient the cooperation of independent communities, upon general principles, and for general objects, not otherwise obtainable. I do not annihilate nor surrender any personal rights, when as an individual, I enter into a family relation. Nor does a single church annul its individual rights, by entering into a general co-operative union of churches, for objects not otherwise to be accomplished. Hence, the larger the platform of co-operation, the more limited the premises on which it is founded.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid., 245.

⁷² Alexander Campbell, "The Spirits in Prison: An Attack on the Millennial Harbinger and Its Editor, by Elder Jesse B. Ferguson, of the Christian Magazine," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 2, no. 9 (1852): 493.

⁷³ Ibid., 494.

Recognizing the responsibility of Ferguson's *Christian Magazine* to the people of the Christian Churches in Tennessee and specifically to the Christian Publication Society of Tennessee, Campbell further asserted that public declarations whether oral or printed on religious and moral topics are not to be "of voluntary and individual creation."⁷⁴ They are to fairly represent the ideas of the group that runs and supports them. In Campbell's opinion, Ferguson's interpretation betrayed the people he represented by introducing a new doctrine contrary to the Scriptures and the Christian Church.⁷⁵ Unless Ferguson's views were rebuked and disowned by the churches in Tennessee they must "be regarded as the approved views of the churches of that state."⁷⁶

Ferguson continued to defend his position that 1 Pet 3:19 taught a chance to hear the gospel after death. The *Christian Magazine* carried further defenses in the August and September issues followed by an extra in December which included Campbell's responses from June, July, August, and November along with yet another defense from Ferguson. Campbell for his part also stood firm, continuing to oppose him, calling on Ferguson to repent of his error and upon the Nashville church to take disciplinary action against him if he did not do so.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Magazine," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 2, no. 11 (1852): 633.

⁷⁶ Alexander Campbell, "The New Doctrine and the Christian Magazine," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 2, no. 10 (1852): 568.

⁷⁷ Campbell, "The Christian Magazine," 633.

Impact on Ferguson

In the absence of any resolution to the dispute Ferguson gave notice of his intention to resign as editor of the *Christian Magazine* at the end of 1852.⁷⁸ The Tennessee Publication society was unable to find another editor and so discontinued the magazine as a state paper but allowed Ferguson to continue publishing into 1853 as an independent journal. However, the controversy with Campbell had destroyed much of its subscriber base, and tired of controversy, Ferguson finally quit publishing the *Christian Magazine* in late 1853.

Other prominent leaders joined Campbell in condemning Ferguson's views as Universalist and thus dangerous for the church and the attacks continued in the pages of the *Millennial Harbinger* for another year.

While the controversy had eroded Ferguson's subscriber base, and opinion against him was strong outside of Tennessee, he remained popular in Nashville. He was even elected to office at the Tennessee State Co-operative Meetings for 1853. A handful of his Nashville church members offered objection to Ferguson's views as published, but only two thought the issue was significant enough to change pastors.⁷⁹ Indeed, Ferguson records that his congregation gave him three "votes of confidence" as the attacks continued through 1853.⁸⁰ Some twenty-five persons chose to leave his church because of his doctrines over that year. They set up a group in opposition to him and pronounced

⁷⁸ Brooks, Major, "The Campbell-Ferguson Controversy," in *Explorations in the Stone-Campbell Traditions: Essays in Honor of Herman A. Norton*, ed. Anthony L. Dunnivant and Richard L. Jr Harrison (Nashville, TN: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1995), 63.

⁷⁹ J. B. Ferguson, *History of the Relation of the Pastor to the "Christian Church" of Nashville* (Nashville, TN: M'Kennie & Brown, 1855), 4-5. Ferguson noted that six individuals objected to his views initially and only two of those felt strongly enough to want a changed pastor. There were subsequent votes over the next year, but each time the church expressed confidence in Ferguson remaining as pastor.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

Ferguson and those who followed him to be infidels,⁸¹ but since this was a small fraction of his large city church, Ferguson was able to remain on with strong support from the remaining members of his home church, and calls from Campbell to discipline Ferguson consequently went unheeded.

Ferguson Embraces Spiritualism

Ferguson's removal from the church became certain, when in October 1853 Ferguson moved to fully embracing spiritualism after experiencing spiritual manifestations from a spirit that identified himself as a deceased preacher whom Ferguson had known.⁸² Ferguson began to integrate Christian and Spiritualist beliefs leading him to claim that the Bible was "a record of Spiritual Communications, made through departed human Spirits,"⁸³ and that continued spiritual communion shed light on its truths.⁸⁴ In spite of his now very deviant ideas, Ferguson actively defended his right to remain a Christian pastor whilst embracing spiritualism, along his church's right as independent of church creeds to maintain views consistent with Unitarianism, Universalism and Spiritualism.⁸⁵

Unaware of this twist, Campbell decided to go to Nashville in December of 1854 to talk to Ferguson face to face, but Ferguson refused to meet Campbell on advice from

⁸¹ Ibid., 5-6.

⁸² J. B. Ferguson, *Spirit Communion: A Record of Communications from the Spirit Spheres* (Nashville, TN: Union and American Steam Press, 1854), 15-16. The spirit identified himself as Dr William Ellery Channing who had been one of the foremost Unitarian preachers in America. It is of interest that in this record Ferguson identifies this pastor as someone who he knew, despite having previously dismissed any connection with Unitarians. Ferguson's wife was also found to be a medium.

⁸³ Ibid., 238.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 238-239.

⁸⁵ This defense is found in Ferguson, *History of the Relation of the Pastor to the "Christian Church" of Nashville*.

his spirit guide. On becoming aware of the spiritualism, Campbell denounced Ferguson as a Spiritualist in addition to condemning his post-mortem gospel and universalism.

Although Ferguson was able to maintain his job as pastor after Campbell's denunciation, the ongoing controversy led him to resign from his pastorate three years later, taking a large portion of the Nashville church with him.⁸⁶ Evidence suggests he travelled widely and remained a popular speaker.⁸⁷

Conclusions

The controversy had taken up some 280 pages of periodical space and the Nashville church, once one of the biggest in the Disciples movement, was left decimated.⁸⁸ The unity that Campbell prized so highly had been lost. As the controversy evolved, Campbell's principles of unity and authority were tested by intense real-world dynamics, and the ability of Campbell to consistently follow through on these principles was seriously challenged. Although Ferguson's embracing Spiritualism made his removal inevitable, we must examine the handling of the controversy prior to this point.

The Jesse Ferguson controversy once again highlights the difficulties of having no clearly defined boundaries on what constitutes faith and what constitutes opinion. Although Campbell called for unity of faith and not opinion, his loose definitions of what constituted both of these matters left Campbell and Ferguson disagreeing about the nature of Ferguson's interpretation. For Ferguson, the translation was unquestionably a

⁸⁶ Norton documents that less than sixty were left of a church that once numbered over 850. See Herman A. Norton, *Tennessee Christians: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee* (Nashville, TN: Reed and Company, 1971), 79.

⁸⁷ See, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, s.v. Ferguson, Jessie Babcock (1819-1870).

⁸⁸ Enos E. Dowling, *An Analysis and Index of the Christian Magazine 1848-1853* (Lincoln, IL: Lincoln Bible Institute Press, 1958), 201-202. Dowling documents the debate as filling 100 pages in the *Millennial Harbinger*, and 182 pages in *Christian Magazine*.

personal opinion which no one else had a right to dictate.⁸⁹ For Campbell however, the translation altered the understanding of a matter of faith, therefore undermining the gospel. The interpretation was thus unquestionably heretical and to be condemned in the strongest terms.

In evaluating Campbell's response, we must be mindful that Campbell ignored Ferguson's explanation and denial of universalism, choosing instead to judge on the basis of his own misunderstanding of the translation.⁹⁰ It is possible that Campbell saw implications of the translation that Ferguson's astute mind failed to grasp, but even if this was the case, the ongoing personal nature of Campbell's attacks is troubling.

If Campbell's conclusion that Ferguson's translation implied universalism is removed from the picture, Campbell's view that Ferguson's translation impinged on a matter of faith can still be justified by the way he had defined the distinction between the faith and opinion. Since the translation of 1 Peter implies an action of Christ including preaching, the interpretation specifically involves the gospel facts and therefore is a matter of faith.⁹¹ However, using Campbell's alternative definition that matters of faith consist of catholic principles, this conclusion would be more tenuous. By Ferguson's own admission, his translation was unlike other translations, but it did not contradict the gospel fact in creedal statements of Protestants unless universalism is introduced into the

⁸⁹ Ferguson, "The Attack of the "Millennial Harbinger" Upon the "Christian Magazine" and Its Editor," 245.

⁹⁰ The willful choice to ignore Ferguson's explanation is concerning, and has led some authors to conclude that Campbell was unfair in his accusations. See *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, s.v. Ferguson, Jesse Babcock (1819-1870).

⁹¹ This is at variance with Major and Dowling who suggest that Ferguson was more correct in claiming his translation was an opinion. Dowling, 229; Brooks, 66. The variance between the conclusion of these scholars and my own conclusions further highlight the problems with Campbell's loose definition of the difference between matters of faith and opinion. The boundaries are not clear enough to prevent different interpretations of how they apply to any given situation.

picture. It seems likely then that the troublesome implications of the translation swayed Campbell's conclusion since in his mind universalism undermined the entire gospel.⁹²

What is surprising is that this judgment, ostensibly on the basis of presumed universalism, is diametrically opposed to Campbell's response to Aylett Raines in 1828.⁹³ Campbell had defended Raines' right to hold opinions on universalism.⁹⁴ The result of the brethren largely ignoring Raines' Universalist opinion was that within twelve months he considered he had been in error.⁹⁵

While there is similarity between the two cases in that both involve the accusation of Universalism, there are also significant differences. Raines agreed to hold silence on his views, while Ferguson not only published his views, but did so in a journal that was the organ for the Tennessee Disciples churches. Even if the interpretation was an opinion, opinions were private property and not to be disseminated in such a public manner. Given the widespread reaches of this magazine throughout Tennessee, and the

⁹² Campbell, "A New Discovery," 329.

⁹³ Richard Cheroke argues that at the time Campbell interacted with Raines, he was considering classifying Universalism as a "tolerable opinion," but as a direct result of subsequent debates with Universalists Johnathon Kidwell and Dolphus Skinner in the 1830s, his opinion changed to one which considered the belief dangerous. Cheroke suggests that this was not based on theological reasons. Instead, he attributed the change to two factors: the unchristian character of those backing Universalism, and the tendency of Universalism to lead to atheism. See Richard J. Cheroke, "Alexander Campbell and the Question of Universalism," *Discipliana* 67, no. 1 (2008): 5-22.

⁹⁴ Aylett Raines was a minister and evangelist. His universalist views had caused some to question the right of Raines to preach at the Mahoning Association meetings in 1828. Both Alexander and Thomas Campbell upheld his right to this opinion though they requested that he refrain from preaching this opinion. See *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, s.v. "Aylett Raines (1788-1881).

⁹⁵ Raines wrote approvingly of the course Campbell and the leadership had taken in dealing with him. "I was dealt with, and my case managed, by Bro. Campbell and all the chief brethren in very great kindness and wisdom. Had they attempted to brow-beat me I might have been ruined forever. But treating me kindly, at the same time that they convinced me that my opinion, whether true or false, dwindled into nothingness in comparison with the faith of the gospel, redeemed me. I became a day and night preacher of the gospel, and my mind becoming absorbed in this vast work, the opinion faded, and in ten months was numbered with all my former errors." See A. S. Hayden, ed. *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati, OH: Chase and Hall, 1875), 169-170.

long lasting influence of the printed word, the presentation of such a divergent opinion had the potential to cause havoc and division.⁹⁶ Thus, there was reason to express concern about Ferguson's wisdom in publishing the translation regardless of whether it impinged on issues of faith or not.

Raines was a successful preacher, but it is doubtful that his popularity and charisma matched that of Ferguson who was well known throughout Tennessee even outside of the church. The implications of this popularity were twofold. First, his prowess in preaching and publishing, along with his wide influence made Ferguson appear to be a rival to Campbell, thus eliciting jealousy and intensifying the conflict between the two men. Second, Ferguson fitted the description of the charismatic leader who invites undue attachment. Such leaders Campbell had previously claimed detracted focus from Christ and eventually resulted in schism.⁹⁷ Thus, issues of influence and editorial authority must also be taken into account in any assessment of Campbell's response to Ferguson's interpretation.⁹⁸

The biggest concern in the handling of this case however, relates to exercise of authority in an attempt to maintain unity. If Campbell was correct in assessing

⁹⁶ This concern can be seen in the conclusion of the Campbell's first critique where he wrote "We may have indiscreet preachers . . . but there are two consolations in their cases – their voice does not extend over the continent, and it soon ceases. But not so our editors and scribes. The *picta tabula manet* – the printed sheet remains; and after they have died, the leaven lives and sometimes works." Campbell, "A New Discovery," 329.

⁹⁷ See Campbell's assessment of the divisive nature of charismatic persons in the previous chapter. Ironically, Campbell had a similar persona resulting in strong attachments.

⁹⁸ While various theories have been advanced to explain the reasons for the apparent change of heart by Campbell between 1828 and 1852 over the issue of universalism, none take into account Campbell's changing understanding of authority within the church, and the role of editors within that scheme. Major, for instance advanced theories that integrate personal jealousy and sociological factors associated with the changing phase of the movement as a whole. They recognized that by the time of Ferguson's translation the movement had a more denominational outlook and thus was more interested in conservation and consolidation. See Major, 65.

Ferguson's translation as altering a matter of faith, and contradicting the facts of the gospel as understood by the majority of Disciples members,⁹⁹ then condemnation of the idea was required to prevent the threat to unity. But such condemnation should have come from the local church which Campbell regarded as the highest authority in matters of dispute, and perhaps from the Christian Publication Society of Tennessee to which the *Christian Magazine* was accountable.¹⁰⁰ The Nashville church clearly supported Ferguson, allowing him to survive multiple votes of confidence.¹⁰¹ Campbell's concern about undue attachment to a charismatic leader played out exactly as he had outlined, with support ongoing even after Ferguson's open endorsement of Spiritualism, and schism resulting when he chose to leave the Nashville Church. While the Christian Publication Society of Tennessee eventually dropped the *Christian Magazine* as the church paper in Tennessee, it did not reprimand Ferguson nor ask for an apology. Although under Campbell's organizational scheme, sister churches also had the right to be involved in discipline should a whole church become wayward or unable to decide an issue, the sister churches near Nashville were also generally accepting of Ferguson, lulled by his preaching and charisma.

Campbell did not wait to see if any of the appropriate bodies were going to act. He felt the severity of the threat to the Disciples demanded immediate critique and discipline in the pages of the *Millennial Harbinger*, and only later called for the

⁹⁹ This assumption is not a foregone conclusion, but the assumption is made solely for the purpose of outlining the inappropriate use of authority in this case.

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson recognize this breach of authority stating "As an editor, we are responsible to the Christian Publication Society of Tennessee; and as a Christian Minister, to the Church of Christ in Nashville. We recognize no other earthly tribunal, having any authority over our religious faith or Christian Character." Ferguson, "The Attack of the "Millennial Harbinger" Upon the "Christian Magazine" and Its Editor," 243.

¹⁰¹ Ferguson's endorsement of Spiritualism gave a more clear cut reason for discipline since it effectively removed the authority of Scripture, replacing it with spirit communication as the rule for life and interpreter of Scripture.

appropriate bodies to enforce discipline. Although he was the president of the American Christian Missionary Society, this position did not give him any authority to discipline Ferguson. Campbell relied instead on the good will of his readers and the respect he had garnered as a founder of the movement to add power to his call for discipline. He was joined in this endeavor by other prominent and influential leaders of the Disciples movement who also condemned Ferguson's supposed universalism. Even though Ferguson pointed out the inappropriate use of authority in the controversy, scant attention was paid to his protests.¹⁰² Ultimately the clout of Campbell and other leaders, along with Campbell's strategy to label Ferguson's views as outright heresy - not simply in opposition to the Disciples, but to all Protestantism - proved too much for Ferguson, and he left the movement taking many other members with him. Campbell failed to see that in criticizing the editorial authority of Ferguson, he himself had overstepped the lines for editorial authority.

Others have questioned whether things might have been different had Campbell followed the same course that he did with Raines, and simply ignored Ferguson's translation, or offered an alternative with little comment. We will never know the answer to that question. What we see instead is that Campbell's concern for truth and principles of unity, spurred on by jealousy over the popularity and influence of Ferguson, led Campbell to disregard the authority structure he had championed.

Case Study 3: Slavery Threatens to Divide the Movement

One of the most divisive social issues in United States history was the issue of slavery. The complex moral, political, and socio-economic aspects of slavery resulted in

¹⁰² J. B. Ferguson, *Christian Magazine* "The Attack of The 'Millennial Harbinger' Upon The 'Christian Magazine' and Its Editor." *Christian Magazine* 5, no. 8 (1852): 241.

heated discussions amongst political representatives from the very first Constitutional Convention. While undertones of moral evil associated with the practice of slavery eventually resulted in the 1808 law forbidding the importation of slaves from Africa, the invention of the cotton gin which rapidly extended the Southern agricultural trade and hence the economic advantages of slavery, ensured that these moral undertones had little immediate effect on the slaves already in bondage. Nevertheless, by the early 1840s the population of the United States was polarized on the issue of slavery. Churches were not immune from this division, with history recording that many denominations divided into Northern and Southern organizations as a result of strong opinions about the acceptability of owning slaves.¹⁰³ Since this polarization occurred during the midst of Campbell's ministry, it provides an excellent case study of Campbell's application of unity principles and the role of authority in maintaining unity.¹⁰⁴

Alexander Campbell, and Barton Stone with whom he joined forces, had both been slave owners. Campbell inherited slaves from his wife's family along with a significant amount of property in the early 1820s. However, slavery was distasteful to Campbell, and he set about teaching his slaves to read and write, and educating them in the ways of the Bible before he set them free.¹⁰⁵ This practice was in keeping with the

¹⁰³ Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists all experienced significant denominational splits as a result of positions on slavery and slave ownership. Given Campbell's former close ties with the Baptists, it is likely that the 1845 declaration of Southern Baptists that the Bible sanctioned slavery with the resultant formation of the separate Southern Baptist Convention was a strong motivating factor in the 1845 series on slavery in the *Millennial Harbinger*. For information on the denominational splits, see J. Gordon Melton, "Introductory Essay: An Interpretive View of the Development of the American Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 3rd ed., xxxvi-xxxvii (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1989).

¹⁰⁴ This review tries to tease out the issue of slavery from the Civil War. While this is an artificial distinction, virtually all of Campbell's writing on slavery preceded the Civil War, and attitudes were already firmly entrenched before the outbreak of war.

¹⁰⁵ The timing of Campbell's freeing of his slaves remains obscure as many of the early histories of the Disciples fail to mention his slave holding altogether. This omission is likely deliberate because

emancipationist ideal that slaves need to be prepared for freedom rather than receiving instantaneous freedom through the immediate dissolution of slavery as suggested by the abolitionists.

Early Views on Slavery

Campbell's earliest writings and speeches in which reference to slavery is made, do not call for either emancipation or abolition. His first article in the 1823 *Christian Baptist* condemned Christians who extolled religious and civil liberty while at the same time taking part in "a system of cruel oppression" that separates family because of skin color. While condemning some of the practices of slavery where families were separated he falls short of calling for an end to slavery.¹⁰⁶ His speech at the Constitutional Convention of Virginia in 1829, which argued against changes which would perpetuate the political power of slave holders, also fell short of calling for any change in the practice of slavery.¹⁰⁷ Campbell was however more direct in the prospectus for the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1830 where he asserts that one of the objects of the new journal was to write "Disquisitions upon the treatment of African slaves, as preparatory to their emancipation, and exultation from their present degraded condition,"¹⁰⁸ and later in the same issue that "knowledge and slavery are incompatible."¹⁰⁹ Becoming bolder he

Campbell's slave holding would further confuse the already misunderstood position of Campbell on slavery. Campbell himself however is quite open about this part of his past.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Religion," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 1 (1823): 8. This unsigned article in the first issue of the new periodical is generally considered the work of Campbell.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 2:311-312.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Prospectus," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 1 (1830): 1.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Georgia Slaves," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 1 (1830): 47. The knowledge referred to here is the knowledge that Negroes have souls as had been discussed in the Virginia Convention.

identified slavery as “evil,” the “largest and blackest blot upon our national escutcheon,” a “many-headed monster,” and “that deadly Upas, whose breath pollutes and poisons every thing within its influence.”¹¹⁰

Following a brutal slave insurrection in Southampton in 1832, Campbell, in his political role, proposed a concrete solution to the American slavery problem. He recommended that from 1834 forward, \$10 million be annually appropriated from the budget by Congress to provide for colonization of the slaves “until the soil of our free and happy country shall not be trod by the foot of a slave, nor enriched by a drop of his sweat or blood.”¹¹¹ Yet when communicating to his fellow Christians in the *Millennial Harbinger* about the issue, he wrote that it was a delusion to believe that exiling those of color will remedy the existing evils.¹¹²

Responding to Internal Tensions Regarding Slavery

With the increasing polarization of the country over the issue of slavery, the disputes among religious leaders both within the Disciples and amongst other

¹¹⁰ Alexander Campbell, "The Crisis," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 2 (1832): 86. Some have taken the statements in this article to imply that Campbell understood slavery as a sin at that time and therefore understand his early views as abolitionist, giving rise to the assertion that Campbell changed his mind about slavery over time. See for instance A. T. DeGroot, *Disciple Thought: A History* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University, 1965), 159-160. However, the article discusses slavery from a political and economic viewpoint rather than a religious viewpoint. Campbell is quite open about the many political and economic wrongs of slavery, not the least of which was the mockery that it made of the Declaration of Independence. While Campbell does make some moral judgments upon the practice of slavery in America, most of these relate to the abuses of slavery, rather than to the practice of slavery itself. If Campbell had regarded slavery itself as a sin in the abolitionist sense it is doubtful that he would have asserted later in this article that it is wrong to criticize the Southern slave holders who had the misfortune to be born as slave holders in a system they did not create, nor would he have used the term evil in his later rebuttal of his views on slavery directly after affirming that the Bible accepts the relationship of slave and master. Careful review of Campbell's writings suggests that while he saw slavery as distasteful and inexpedient, he held a moderate emancipationist view of slavery throughout his life.

¹¹¹ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 2:368. The idea of colonization was not original with Campbell.

¹¹² Alexander Campbell, "Slavery in Virginia," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 1 (1832): 14.

denominations had become intense. Campbell devoted a whole series to the topic of slavery, sensing the time had come to address the issue more fully, so that as a religious community “Our duties should be clearly defined and our attitude in respect to those conflicting views fully ascertained.”¹¹³ This series is more reasoned and integrated with faith than any of Campbell’s preceding notes on slavery, for after discussing the unfortunate division of the Methodist church on the basis of differing views on slave holding, he boasts that “We are the only religious community in the civilized world whose principles (unless we abandon them) can preserve us from such an unfortunate predicament.”¹¹⁴

The main thrust of the 1845 series was not to push Campbell’s personal opinion, but to view the biblical dimensions of slavery with their resulting obligations for the Christian. Unity was a priority for Campbell, and the division occurring in other religious groups made the specter of schism all too real. It was time to evaluate the issue by the one and only thing that the Disciples were pledged to use as a rule of life, the Christian Scriptures. Only the Bible’s view as it affects the Christian’s behavior with regards to slavery was to be considered the rule for Christian practice.¹¹⁵ While the American Declaration of Independence, political rights, and natural rights were important, they could not be used to determine the church’s position on slavery, slave holders, or rules of fellowship with them. These decisions must be based on the Bible alone. Though far from exhaustive in this endeavor, Campbell nevertheless provided a

¹¹³ Alexander Campbell, “Preface,” *Millennium Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 1 (1845):2.

¹¹⁴ Alexander Campbell, “Our Position to American Slavery,” *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 2 (1845): 51.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 52-53. Alexander Campbell, “Our Position to American Slavery, No. VI,” *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 5 (1845): 236-237.

reasonable overview of the biblical evidence often through the words and ideas of Baptist pastors Wayland and Fuller.¹¹⁶

Campbell contrasted the positions of the pro-slavery group who believed that slavery was divinely sanctioned with that of the abolitionists who while acknowledging slavery occurred in the Bible, recognized slavery as a moral evil that transgressed the command that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.¹¹⁷ In reviewing the evidence he noted that the Bible indicated that slavery existed in every dispensation of religion at the time each dispensation was being set up.¹¹⁸ Slavery was not only present at the beginning of the Christian church, but tolerated, as evidenced by the fact that some masters and slaves were Christians. Since nothing is tolerated in the New Testament which is sinful or immoral we would expect that the New Testament would condemn these Christian masters if slavery was morally wrong.¹¹⁹ But, the apostolic writings do not contain any outright condemnation of slavery as morally wrong. Instead they prescribe duties of masters and slaves. Thus in some circumstances, slavery may indeed be lawful and right.¹²⁰ In consequence the relationship between master and slave cannot

¹¹⁶ Francis Wayland and Richard Fuller were prominent Baptist ministers who publically debated the slavery issue. The principal debate between these men can be found in Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution: In a Correspondence Between the Rev. Richard Fuller and the Rev. Francis Wayland*, 5th ed. (New York: Lewis Colby & Co, 1847). Campbell gives his most comprehensive and personal review of the biblical evidence in relation to slavery in 1851.

¹¹⁷ Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery," 52-53.

¹¹⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 2 (1845): 69-70. See also Alexander Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 4 (1845): 145-146.

¹¹⁹ Alexander Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. VII," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 5 (1845): 240.

¹²⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. VIII," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 6 (1845): 257.

be said to be a sin in all cases, and slavery cannot be necessarily or essentially immoral.¹²¹ Therefore Campbell concluded that

As Christians, we can lawfully, under Christ, go no farther than to exact from Christian masters and Christian servants all that is comprehended in those precepts. We have no authority as Christians, to go farther. We have no warrant to annihilate the relation; but we have warrant, and are under obligation to enforce the precepts, and to see that the relative duties of both parties are faithfully performed.¹²²

Thus, if the Disciples were governed by the Bible, they could not rightfully discipline members for owning slaves. They could not bar them from communion or other means of fellowship. They could only go as far as to enforce any Biblical injunctions on the slave master relations.

This conclusion supported neither the abolitionist nor the pro-slavery movement. Slavery is neither morally wrong nor a divine institution. While appearing to be a middle ground between two extremes, this position caused confusion and distress from members on both sides of the debate, and as a result neither southern slavery supporters nor northern abolitionists were placated. Letters to the *Millennial Harbinger* complained that Campbell had abandoned his early anti-slavery attitudes and was now defending the South's practice of slavery, an accusation that Campbell soundly rejected.¹²³

¹²¹ Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. IV," 145. Alexander Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 5 (1845): 194.

¹²² Alexander Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. III," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 3 (1845): 108. I have removed Campbell's capitalization which encompassed the entire first sentence of this quote.

¹²³ Alexander Campbell, "Elder Hartzell's Debate," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 4, no. 8 (1854): 473. In discussing what had been written about his view and that of Elder Hartzell, Campbell noted. "It is affirmed that I take the position, and Elder Hartzell denies the position, 'that the Bible sanctions slavery.'" I never took nor defended such a position. I do maintain the position, against all opposition, that both "the Bible" and "the New Testament" admit and sustain the relation of master and servant for life, or the relation of bond master and bond servant for life. This I have maintained and do maintain, and must continue to maintain, until I see something more rational, more scriptural, than I have ever yet seen, even in the late debate. But the anomalous maxim of all evils, moral, political and religious, called "slavery," in

Since the issue of slavery was unrelated to the facts of salvation and the gospel, and there was no direct prohibition of it in Scripture, Campbell very clearly identified beliefs on slave holding as a matter of opinion, and therefore a matter of private property. Thus Campbell asserts, “we are not allowed to make our own private judgment, interpretation, or opinion, a ground of admission into, or exclusion from, the Christian church.”¹²⁴ Christians of course were allowed their own opinions on the subject of slavery, but they must be recognized as opinions and not forced upon others. Members were reminded that allegiance to God was the key issue. Therefore, Campbell insisted that slavery should not get in the way of the unity of the church.

Campbell ended the series by stating his own personal opinion that although slavery was not sinful, American slavery was not expedient. His opinion was based on the following concerns: slavery was open to abuse, it demoralized society, it was not economically sound, and it conflicted with both the spirit of the age, and political institutions.¹²⁵ As a result Campbell, in his political role, was an advocate for gradual termination of the practice of slavery.¹²⁶ However, his personal views, no matter how strong could not be made a term of communion in the church.

Recognizing that it was difficult for those on either side of the argument to understand the positions of the other side, Campbell advised that the South be allowed to

Algiers, West Indies, Africa, Italy, or America, I never defended, and, so long as the Bible lives, never can, and never will defend. It is the duty of the Christian ministry to convert the world and edify the church, not to reform the world or its worldly institutions.”

¹²⁴ Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. VI," 233. This position contrasted sharply with the earlier practice of Barton Stone who refused to admit slave holders as members in Kentucky, and John Kirk who refused communion and other fellowship to anyone not strictly anti-slavery.

¹²⁵ Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. VIII," 257-258.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

follow their own polices without interference.¹²⁷ Those in the North having never lived with the system do not understand it, while those in the South confused the moderate brethren with radical abolitionists. Furthermore, outside interference in the matter only tended to inflame passions rather than help the situation. But Campbell had trouble following his own advice.

Letter to Christians in Kentucky

Campbell saw the Kentucky constitutional convention in 1849 as an opportunity to address the slavery issue with the Kentucky Christians and wrote an open letter to them entitled a "Tract for the People of Kentucky." In it he mixes personal, political and Christian viewpoints. Campbell was critical of slavery pointing out that "The law that binds the slave binds the master."¹²⁸ Extending his previous argument that the Bible has claims on both masters and slaves, he suggested that it is the Christian master's duty to "render to him [the slave] whatever is *just* and *equal*."¹²⁹ If Christians really understood what this meant, and tried to apply the principle they would "speak and vote like Christians at the polls" thus demonstrating a "love of liberty and right, by extending to them every thing in the form of man that breathes its air or treads its soil."¹³⁰ He called for them to vote to insert a clause in the Constitution that will either consider the option of emancipation or give the right to change the Constitution at a later date by majority opinion. But Southern Christians complained that he was ignoring his own advice not to interfere with their practice and his call went unheeded.

¹²⁷ Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. V," 195.

¹²⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Tracts for the People, No. Xxxiii. A Tract for the People of Kentucky.," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 5 (1849): 248.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

Campbell and the Fugitive Slave Law

The introduction of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 brought forth another series of articles from Campbell's pen.¹³¹ Penalization for simply helping runaway slaves was distasteful to many Northern Christians who felt that God's laws were being trampled. Many considered that they were entitled to break this inhumane law.¹³² But Campbell disagreed.

In the affairs of this life – in all temporal and earthly matters – the civil law, the social compact, is our rule of action. In religion, in faith, in piety, God alone is Lord of the conscience. In these we recognize no human authority. In matters purely moral and religious, God alone is the supreme legislator. But this is not the precise case before us.¹³³

The Fugitive Slave law he considered was not a moral law but a civil law. He therefore called for Christians to do their Christian duty in upholding the law. However, he considered that things were not as black and white as might appear on a first reading of the law. In analyzing the law he suggested that the law did not prevent the Christian from feeding, clothing, and lodging runaway slaves, only concealing them from arrest when specific proof of their runaway status was brought by an official.¹³⁴

¹³¹ The Fugitive Slave Law was passed on September 12, 1850 and signed six days later. It amended an earlier law of 1793. It contained many distasteful aspects but the issue that caused most consternation to Christians was the provision that citizens who prevented the arrest of a fugitive, aided in their rescue or in any way concealed them from officials would be penalized by a \$1000 fine and six months imprisonment.

¹³² See for instance reference to Rev. Colver's sermon in Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 8 (1851): 426. Also the letter from Berrien, Michigan printed in Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 3 (1851): 172.

¹³³ Alexander Campbell, "The Fugitive Slave Law," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 1 (1851): 30.

¹³⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 7 (1851): 388. Campbell also took this opportunity to reiterate his position that the Bible does not make slavery a sin, but he did not approve of slavery as it was practiced in America.

Impact of Slavery on the Unity of the Disciples

The results of Campbell's two series applying his principles of unity are difficult to assess in part because of the loose organization of the Disciples and incomplete local church records. His authority structure ultimately allowed local churches to make their own decisions, though Campbell did not hesitate to use the written word and his standing as a founder to plead for calm and unity during this time of crisis. Both before and after Campbell's explanation of his position, many individual churches decided to make slave holding, abolition, and later, war, a test of fellowship.¹³⁵ This trend also extended to the cooperative associations in some cases where communion was refused to slave holders. A small number of congregations split entirely over the slavery issue, but this seems to be the exception rather than the rule.¹³⁶ Ties between the churches of the movement were inevitably strained.

Two rival organizations also sprang up. Bethany College, the pre-eminent educational institution of the Disciples, located in Virginia, a slave-holding state, had a southern student majority, and according to the abolitionists it favored the South in its politics. Abolitionists within the Disciples therefore felt justified in setting up a rival educational facility called Northwest Christian University in Indianapolis so that students would not be exposed to "the habits and manners that exist in populations where slavery

¹³⁵ John Kirk, "Our Position to American Slavery," *Millennial Harbinger*, 4th ser., 1, no.1 (1851), 49-51. John Kirk's strongly worded letter to Campbell suggests that the churches in the Western Reserve would not support anyone who was not anti-slavery typifies the types of decisions made at local church level.

¹³⁶ Alexander, Campbell, "Trouble Among the Campbellites," *Millennial Harbinger*, 4th ser., 4, no. 3 (1854): 173. Campbell noted a split in the Bloomington, IL congregation. He would only recognize the new group as a faction. Since the periodicals were a primary source of information about what was happening around the churches, we would expect more notices in the periodicals if a significant number of churches had split.

exists.”¹³⁷ Although Campbell contended that this was a ruse to segregate students, the staff denied an unwillingness to cooperate with Christians in slave states and refusal to admit students from such states. The new university struggled due to lack of financial support from the Indiana congregations.¹³⁸

The second rival institution was set up in 1859, this time in opposition to the Christian Missionary Society by members who supported abolition of slavery.¹³⁹ Ovid Butler who had complained about Campbell’s interference on the topic of slavery was elected its president. Although this rival missionary society elicited significant support at the beginning, it failed to attract the ongoing support needed for its survival, and folded a mere four years later.

Thus, although tensions were high amongst the churches, and there was division in opinion, the Disciples did not experience the formal and lasting division experienced by other churches during the life of Alexander Campbell.¹⁴⁰ This has led prominent

¹³⁷ Excerpt from a John O’Kaneto and Ovid Butler, cited in Henry K. Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples: A Comprehensive History of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Indiana* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1966), 140. North Western Christian University later became Butler University. It should not be confused with Northwest Christian University in Oregon, or with Northwestern University currently located in Evanston and Chicago.

¹³⁸ Based on anti-slavery principles, and clashing even with the moderate position of many northern Disciples, the university was limited to support from abolitionists which made up only a small fraction of the Disciples. See *Ibid.*, 170.

¹³⁹ David E Harrell, *The Quest for a Christian America* (Nashville, TN: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 119.

¹⁴⁰ Modern historians have challenged the conclusions of the earlier historians that the church was not divided by the issue of slavery. See for instance David E Harrell, *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ, 1865-1900*, *A Social History of the Disciples of Christ* (Atlanta, GA: Publishing Systems, 1973), 324-326; Henry K. Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples: A Comprehensive History of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Indiana* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1966), 155-163. Harrell uses statistics to show that the majority of subsequent Churches of Christ members came from southern states, while Shaw suggested that slavery and the war caused a ‘de facto’ division. However, the underlying hypotheses of both of these challenges is that the rift created by slavery and the Civil War in some way contributed to the first formal division of the Disciples of 1906. While their hypotheses may be true, the fact that a form of union was maintained for nearly forty years after the end of the Civil War and the death

Disciples of Christ historian, A. T. DeGroot to suggest that “While the major Protestant denominations on the American scene were thus almost unanimous in sectional loyalties the Disciples of Christ remained unique in their solidarity.”¹⁴¹

Conclusions

Campbell’s application of the principles of unity in this case appears generally consistent with his articulation of them. He appealed to the apostolic precedent on slavery, thus placing Scripture before other considerations. He noted that the basis of unity is in Christ, not views on slavery, and clearly defines slavery as an opinion and not an issue of faith. In the midst of Campbell’s slavery writings we find he explicitly reminded readers of the commitment of the church toward unity, “it becomes us to recur first and fundamental principles, to anticipate any unfavorable issue of views and feelings, and to fix our minds upon the profession of allegiance to the Lord, and the ground of union, communion, and co-operation which we have assumed before the universe in our ecclesiastical relations and duties.”¹⁴²

There are however, two questions that arise from Campbell’s application of unity principles. Was he fair in placing slavery into the category of opinion, and was Campbell’s interpretation of Scripture in regards to slavery based on expediency or principles of proper biblical interpretation?

The decision to label slavery as opinion rather than faith, or more accurately, a social issue rather than a moral issue, is reliant on both the absence of a specific

of Campbell suggests that another generation was thus able to keep opinions as opinions without them getting in the way of their faith. Tucker on the other hand suggested that an actual division occurred in the Disciples during the Civil War. William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Saint Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1975), 208.

¹⁴¹ A. T. DeGroot, *Disciple Thought: A History*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University, 1965, 159.

¹⁴² Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. VI," 234.

command against slavery in Scripture, and an apostolic example that tolerates slave holders in their midst without judgment. Campbell's decision is consistent with his hermeneutical stance which urged the binding nature of scriptural commands but recommended silence on matters that Scripture did not address directly. To make slavery a moral issue required not only a decision about how love acts, but an inference about the dignity and spiritual worth of slaves. It thus risked adding human speculation and judgment to the clear word of God. Thus, while many Christians understood slavery as a moral issue, Campbell's stance was bound by his hermeneutical principles.

The second question is a little less clear. Disciples historian, DeGroot suggested that ulterior motives such as pride and money may have influenced Campbell's conclusions about slavery.¹⁴³ Support for this position is drawn from the fact that major schism would wreck the movement since nearly half of the Disciples members lived in southern states, and many of these were slavery advocates.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, even the first international missionary of the Disciples, J. T. Barclay was a slave holder. The withdrawal of both students and financial support from the South would potentially cripple the Disciples. Thus it seems impossible for these factors not to have weighed heavily upon Campbell's mind.

Further suspicion about Campbell's objectivity arises from his wording of the following paragraph.

To preserve unity of spirit among Christians of the South and of the North is my grand object, and for that purpose I am endeavoring to show that the New Testament does not authorize any interference or legislation upon the relation of master and slave, nor does it either in letter or spirit authorize Christians to make it a term of communion. *While it prescribes the duties of both parties, masters and slaves, it sanctions the relation,* and only requires that these duties be faithfully discharged by the parties; making it the duty of all Christian churches to

¹⁴³ DeGroot, 159-160.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 161.

enforce these duties and to exact them under all the pains of Christian discipline, both from the master and from the slave – leaving it to the Lord to judge, correct, and avenge those that are without.¹⁴⁵

The concern is that Campbell is “endeavoring to show” a particular point of view simply to preserve unity, rather than presenting a good exegesis of Scripture.¹⁴⁶ This concern is difficult to dismiss since we cannot isolate Campbell’s actions, opinions, and writing from the passions and platforms that were central to Campbell’s entire ministry. Campbell engages the New Testament passages on slavery and rightly notes that the emphasis is on the rights and responsibilities of the slave and slaveholder, and not the end or abolition of slavery. His failure to engage the issue of slavery in the context of the entire message and spirit of the New Testament is, however, consistent with his literalistic hermeneutical principles as discussed above.

A third line of support for Campbell’s position, being one of expediency rather than thorough exegesis, arises from his approach to slavery. Although Campbell championed the need to distinguish between personal opinions and faith, he often failed to make this distinction in his own writings. His opinions he usually equated with correct scriptural interpretation. But on this topic he carefully divides his views from scriptural interpretation. In addition, Campbell frequently went beyond Scripture and used inference to emphasize points he felt strongly about. His reluctance to do so in regards to slavery suggests he was mindful of the fine line he was walking in this argument. It thus

¹⁴⁵ Campbell, "Our Position to American Slavery, No. V," 195.

¹⁴⁶ Attorney Jess Hale concluded that Campbell’s concerns about unity of the church effectively controlled his approach to slavery, and thus argued that Campbell’s response should be seen as that of a “prudent ecclesiastical politician.” See Jess O. Hale, Jr., “The Long Shadow of Slavery: American Public Morality and the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement,” *Stone-Campbell Journal*, 8, no. 1 (2005): 3-16, especially pages 5-8. For a more detailed treatment of Campbell’s response to slavery by Hale, see Jess O. Hale, Jr., “Ecclesiastical Politics on a Moral Powder Keg: Alexander Campbell and Slavery in the *Millennial Harbinger* 1830-1860,” *Restoration Quarterly*, 39, no. 2 (1997): 65-81.

seems likely that Campbell's strict adherence to hermeneutical and unity principles was a calculated plan on Campbell's part to avoid the demise of the Disciples.

Case Study 4: Fallout from Increasing Organization

While Campbell had always been an advocate of church order, the move towards organization beyond the local church in his more mature thought was seen by some as inconsistent and indeed contrary to the critical views he had advocated previously in regards to the church government. Campbell's 1831 series on church cooperation sounded the first alarm bells in the heads of some of the Disciples. In May 1832, correspondent A. G. B. suggested that Campbell's thoughts on co-operation, while appearing innocent, sounded very much like "an association in embryo," and as such presented a threat to all he had worked so hard to build up. He warned that the "many headed monster" which Campbell had so soundly condemned had grown from just such an innocuous beginning.¹⁴⁷ "There never was, and there never can be, any occasion for such a combination of "the churches" to build up the Redeemer's kingdom. His kingdom is built – is come. His church is one."¹⁴⁸

Although disputing A. G. B.'s starting point, the reply by Francis Emmons reveals that suspicion of co-operation ran deep even amongst those who supported Campbell's progressive understanding. He wrote, "I, too, have been jealous of this co-operation scheme, and am still exceedingly afraid of all representative bodies,

¹⁴⁷ A. B. G., "Co-Operation of Churches, No. V (Containing Correspondence between A. B. G. & F. W. E.)," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 5 (1832): 201.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

associations, synods, general assemblies, &c. &c. whose professed object is ‘the advancement of the Redeemer’s kingdom.’”¹⁴⁹

A Role for Voluntary Societies

Campbell’s endorsement of cooperation led him to also start accepting and even encouraging voluntary societies much to the surprise of many who remembered his early denouncement of voluntary societies.¹⁵⁰ This induced correspondent Epaphras to accuse Campbell of being inconsistent in his writing on co-operation and the church. Campbell had condemned associations and voluntary societies in the past, and now appeared to be advocating the very thing he had condemned.¹⁵¹ Campbell refuted the idea of inconsistency by calling Epaphras to look at the big picture. He admitted that he had spoken against Missionary, Bible, Education, Sunday School, Tract and Temperance societies, but this was because the ones in existence tended to aid the corrupt priesthood in their search for power and money more than fulfilling the reason for which they had come into existence. It had been “the eternal echo of the word Money, and the profusion of it on the agents and apostles of these schemes of benevolence, which called forth our strictures upon them.”¹⁵² Besides, Campbell argued, Satan had used these corrupted

¹⁴⁹ F. W. Emmons, "Reply [to "Co-Operation of Churches, No. V]," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 5 (1832): 203.

¹⁵⁰ Campbell was particularly vocal in supporting the work of the Baptist run American and Foreign Bible Society and its translation of Scripture. However, when D.S. Burnett and others tried to gain support for a Disciples run Bible society in 1845, Campbell was critical. Given his prior concern about the preaching of sectarian gospels, and his concern that Christians not cooperate with sects, it might be expected that Campbell would welcome the commencement of such an organization. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Such a society he countered would stretch the limited resources of the church which in turn would threaten the survival of Bethany College, and his own publishing work. For Burnett’s suggestion, and Campbell’s Response, See D. S. Burnett, “American Christian Bible Society (with remarks by Alexander Campbell),” *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 2, no. 8 (1845): 367-373.

¹⁵¹ Epaphras, "Epaphras, No. 5," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 12 (1832): 612-614.

¹⁵² Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Epaphras, No. 5," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 12 (1832): 614.

agencies to hide the real condition of the church and thus the need for reform.¹⁵³ Thus he suggested that he had not argued against societies and cooperation as such, but rather against what they had become, and how they were being used. While there is some truth in this assertion, Campbell purposely omits or fails to recognize some of his other previous arguments, in particular, the way such organizations detracted from the self-sufficiency or perfection of the local church.¹⁵⁴ In spite of these early concerns, on the whole, Campbell's burden for co-operation of local churches generated a positive move towards district and state co-operation.

A Call for Improved Organization

In his series on church organization, Campbell lamented that "Our organization and discipline are greatly defective and essentially inadequate to the present condition and wants of society."¹⁵⁵ Scripture he argued, provided a precedent for moving towards group deliberations and meetings on subjects that concerned all, but did not provide all the details of how that was to be done. The church could not be ruled by a book alone.¹⁵⁶ These more concrete suggestions for a more formal type of organization than the loose co-operation he advocated for mission in the previous series brought with it confusion and concern from his readers.

A. P. Jones reported that the series had caused all sorts of misunderstandings, and that many now understood Campbell to be calling for some sort of ministerial presidency

¹⁵³ Ibid., 614-615.

¹⁵⁴ It was convenient to omit this argument since mentioning it would entail agreeing with Epaphras that he had indeed changed his ideas, in this instance on the nature and role of the local church.

¹⁵⁵ Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 5, no. 11 (1841): 532.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 533-534.

over the body of Disciples.¹⁵⁷ To this end he asked Campbell to clarify whether he was indeed calling for some sort of ministerial presidency composed of clergy who would regulate morals and discipline or whether he was simply advocating a general concert of understanding and action amongst the Disciples.¹⁵⁸

In his comments, Campbell does not directly answer the questions Jones proposed, but instead discusses election and authority in Christian government. Those who hold authority must be elected and not self-appointed, and the authority they wield in the Christian community can only be exercised in specific ways. Campbell is very clear that such individuals can only discipline members' actions, not their opinions or sentiments.¹⁵⁹ Thus Campbell rules out any censorship of belief and opinions, which appears to be the concern that underlies the questions of Jones.

One of the preeminent evangelists of the Disciple movement also condemned the idea of more organization, complaining that Campbell was introducing a new and unwarranted degree of organization.¹⁶⁰ To follow Campbell's suggestions would mean giving efficacy to a "political embodiment of Christians that has no foundation in the Scripture." Furthermore, the "iron grasp of both the Pope and the emperor" would be

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Campbell, "The Nature of the Christian Organization, No. VI," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 6, no. 8 (1842): 326.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 326-327.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁶⁰ Alexander Campbell, "Organization," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 1, no. 1 (1844): 42-43. Campbell here presents snippets on the topic of organization, which he identifies as from the same source as the article preceding this one in the *Millennial Harbinger*. This could mean from the same author, i.e. evangelist Adamson Bentley, but seem more likely to be from the same journal source, i.e. *The Evangelist* edited by evangelist Walter Scott since I can find no record of comments such as this from Bentley, and Campbell refers specifically to Scott on the next page. Scott had previously quarreled with Campbell over the naming of the organization. Organization itself however did not seem to be a major focus of Scott at this time. Sympathetic to some of the pre-millennial ideas of William Miller, *The Evangelist* instead carried articles on eschatology and the interpretation of Daniel.

necessary to maintain it.¹⁶¹ Such new organization was not needed. “Our position is this that our churches with bishops and deacons are already organized; and I dare say all our readers concur with us in our opinion of this fact.”¹⁶²

Campbell simply responded that he was not suggesting some organization that subverts the apostolic example. While the Disciples have scriptural organization at the congregational level, they now badly need a scriptural system of cooperation above that to enable adequate communication between churches. Such organization would allow common understandings, common projects and causes, and common pooling of resources.

A National Convention

It was however the organization of a national convention and the subsequent establishment of the Christian Missionary Society at the convention that sparked ongoing opposition to organization.¹⁶³ Membership of the Missionary Society was only available on the basis of monetary contribution. Twenty dollars bought delegate rights for life, while one hundred dollars bought director rights for life.¹⁶⁴ Five thousand dollars was subscribed immediately indicating an enthusiastic response.¹⁶⁵ Most of the influential leaders of the church supported the establishment of the Missionary Society and

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ The first national convention met in Cincinnati in October 1849 following the American Christian Bible Society meetings. The establishment of a missionary society they envisaged was enabling funds and resources of the church to be dispersed appropriately for its mission. See report of the meeting, W. K. Pendleton, "The Convention of Christian Churches," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 12 (1949): 689-695.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Campbell, who was not present at the meetings, expressed his pleasure at the two major outcomes of the convention.

The Christian Bible Society, co-operating with the American and Foreign Bible Society – now approved by all the churches present, and commended by them to all the brethren, removes all my objections to it in its former attitude, and will, no doubt, now be cordially sustained in its claims for liberal patronage from all our communities. The Christian Missionary Society, too, on its own footing, will be a grand auxiliary to the churches in destitute regions, at home as well as abroad, in dispensing the blessings of the gospel amongst many that otherwise would never have heard it. These Societies we cannot but hail as greatly contributing to the advancement of the cause we have so long been pleading before God and the people. There is indeed nothing new in these matters, but simply the organized and general co-operation in all the ways and means of more energetically and systematically preaching the gospel and edifying the church. . . . Union is strength, and essential to extensive and protracted success. Hence, our horizon, and with it our expectations, are greatly enlarged.¹⁶⁶

However, letters of concern were received not only by the *Millennial Harbinger*, but also other Restorationist papers. Jessie Ferguson at the *Christian Magazine*, writing about the fear organizational changes were producing, revealed that the periodical had received a large amount of mail in the span of week “which brought to us letters from some of almost every class of laborers in the Lord’s vineyard, and every variety of talent and acquirement, urging us, by appeals to the highest motives, to lift our voice against the ‘the present dangerous tendency of the Reformation.’”¹⁶⁷ He summarized the concerns of the letters which ranged from a belief that such organization was contrary to the teachings of the Disciples, to the very real fear of usurpation of power, and the loss of privileges and independence of the churches.¹⁶⁸ Passions were aroused, as disagreeing leaders urged that it was “the imperative duty of every sincere Disciple of Christ to throw himself in the breach if he would not lose everything that has been gained by our

¹⁶⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on 'The Convention of Christian Churches,'" *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 6, no. 12 (1849): 694-695.

¹⁶⁷ Ferguson, "Fear of Consolidation-Independence of Individual Churches," 207.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

struggle.”¹⁶⁹ Ferguson provided a somewhat quieting influence on the matter. While he acknowledged his readers’ concerns, he regarded the threat of organization to be secondary to the threat posed by the uncontrolled authority of editors within the church.

The most vocal opponent to national organization was Jacob Creath, Jr. At least ten of his letters appeared in the pages of the *Millennial Harbinger*, the *Reformer*, and the *Proclamation and Reformer* in 1849 and 1850 condemning both the convention and the Missionary Society. Two letters were also published in the *Christian Age*, in August, but the editors refused to print subsequent letters from Creath, angering him even more.¹⁷⁰ First and foremost, Creath was concerned about the lack of scriptural support for the meeting. He called on those who supported the convention to provide a Bible chapter and verse in support of such a meeting.¹⁷¹ To fail to provide an apostolic precept or example for such a meeting was to remove the “Landmarks laid down by all Protestant Reformers” thus negating the long-held position of the Disciples “that the Bible alone is the Polar Star of Christians.”¹⁷² The convention, he suggested, made the Disciples just like the Roman Catholics because instead of taking the Bible as the sole source of truth, Disciples now include the Bible, the clergy or church, and tradition as sources of truth.¹⁷³ The biblical evidence not only lacks support for such conventions but argues against their authority.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Jacob Creath Jr., "Arguments Vs Clerical Organization, No. 2," *Proclamation and Reformer* 1, (1850): 89. Creath commences this article with complaints about the suppression of his letter to the *Christian Age* and calls for honesty over the reason it was suppressed.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 90.

¹⁷² Ibid., 91.

¹⁷³ Jacob Creath Jr., "Conventions, No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 11 (1850): 615.

¹⁷⁴ Creath’s “biblical evidence” is weak at best, with statements ripped from their contexts. For instance he uses Matt 10:17 where Jesus warns his disciples to beware of men who would turn against

Creath was convinced that the convention was a clerical council under another guise. Since Campbell had previously condemned both clerical councils and missionary societies, the decision to hold a national convention which Creath understood to be a clerical council along with the resulting formation of a missionary society meant either Campbell was wrong now, or he had been wrong before. Creath suggested that Campbell needed to confess his mistake.

If you were right in the Christian Baptist, you are wrong now. If you are right now, you were wrong then . . . Instead of denying this fact, and endeavoring to conceal it, and to throw the blame upon us, we believe it would be more just and Christian to confess the charge, and to acknowledge that the arguments you offered in the Christian Baptist, against conventions, are much more unanswerable than any that have been offered for them since that time. It is the desire of many brethren, who sincerely love and admire you, that you will reconcile the arguments in the Christian Baptist, offered against conventions, with those you now offer for them. We are unable to do this, and, therefore, we ask it as a favor of you to do it.¹⁷⁵

Notices about the meeting pointed out the harmony and money subscribed. But Creath felt this had no bearing on the case. It did not prove the meeting was from God but rather obscured the fact that the meeting was an artificial and unwarranted creation of man.¹⁷⁶ Nor does the fact that the meeting was generally considered acceptable to the majority of leaders make it right. Lest anyone be deceived by numbers and reports, he suggested that it is seldom that things are acceptable to both God and man.¹⁷⁷

Going further, Creath pointed out the problems with organized bodies, quoting both William Channing's pamphlet on associations and rehashing arguments Campbell

them and drag them before councils to suggest that the Savior warned against holding such meetings. The fact that Christ along with many of the apostles were condemned by such councils he also suggested is further evidence against them. A concise list of some of Creath's arguments can be found in Jacob Creath Jr., "Arguments Vs. Clerical Organizations, No. 3," *Proclamation and Reformer* 1, no. 3 (1850): 170-173.

¹⁷⁵ Jacob Creath Jr., "Conventions, No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 11 (1850): 637.

¹⁷⁶ Creath Jr., "Arguments Vs. Clerical Organization, No. 2," 90.

¹⁷⁷ Jacob Creath Jr., "Dr Wm. E. Channing's Opinion of Conventions, No. Ii," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7 no. 8 (1850): 471.

had once made himself in the *Christian Baptist*. The central theme of these arguments is the abuse of conventions and associations. He pointed out the tendency for associations to accumulate power in a few hands,¹⁷⁸ the danger of sacrificing individuality and independence of the local churches,¹⁷⁹ the likelihood of members being carried along by the current or influence of the majority regardless of the nature of the proposal,¹⁸⁰ and the tendency towards despotism.¹⁸¹

Even if someone could prove that such a meeting was sanctioned by Scripture, Creath had other concerns. First, there was no true representation at the meeting. Many present were not elected delegates, and the churches which had sent delegates were few in number. Such incomplete representation had no authority to decide anything on behalf of all in a district or state. In addition, he noted that many prominent Kentucky leaders were not made life members of the new Missionary Society while younger men were. Wiser and more experienced leaders were being pushed aside in favor of younger persons.¹⁸² Second, he ascribed wrong motives to the need for such a meeting. He accused the Bible society of being in debt and organizing the convention simply as a means to get the church as a whole to assume its debt.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 469-470.

¹⁷⁹ Jacob Creath Jr., "Dr Wm. E. Channing's Opinion of Conventions," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 7 (1850): 408; Creath Jr., "Dr Wm. E. Channing's Opinion of Conventions, No. II," 470.

¹⁸⁰ Jacob Creath Jr., "Arguments against Clerical Organization, No. 4," *Proclamation and Reformer* 1, no. 4 (1850). Creath compares the problem to what happens when things get caught up on the current of the Ohio River.

¹⁸¹ Creath Jr., "Dr Wm. E. Channing's Opinion of Conventions," 408.

¹⁸² Creath Jr., "Arguments against Clerical Organization, No. 4," 224.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 223-224.

Campbell did not answer all of Creath's objections, but focused on those that he saw as most important. He started out addressing the two major arguments that he heard from many individuals: the lack of biblical support and the accusation that he was raising up an ecclesiastical court. He emphatically denied that the convention was an ecclesiastical court. A convention was nothing more than a meeting composed of individuals for a particular purpose. The nature of the purpose defines the difference between different types of conventions.

A convention, authoritatively to decide matters of faith and Christian doctrine, and a convention to deliberate on the ways and means of printing the Bible, of supplying waste and desolate places with the Book of Life, or for sending out evangelists and providing for their maintenance, are just as different as a lion and a lamb, though both are quadrupeds.¹⁸⁴

The convention of Disciples was not composed of clergy for the purpose of legislating or ruling on any issues of faith, nor did it override the authority of the local church. Since its function was purely executive, it could not be considered an ecclesiastical court or council.¹⁸⁵ Having dispensed with the idea of the convention of Disciples being an ecclesiastical court, Campbell addressed the question of biblical support for such conventions.

Stated conventional meetings, for legislation or ecclesiastic jurisdiction, are unknown to the Christian Scriptures. But that cases amongst the brethren and churches may and do occur, requiring the aid, the counsel, or the arbitriments of difficulties, on the part of a convention, is a matter so evident and so common in all communities, as to need no demonstration. A case of this sort occurred before the New Testament was completed, and required the wisdom and authority of apostles and elders, in convention assembled, to adjudicate and decide. Conventions of this character constitute a part of the Christian dispensation, and

¹⁸⁴ Creath Jr., "Conventions, No. V," 638-639.

¹⁸⁵ Campbell compares the convention to building committees and school committees. These conventions are nothing like ecclesiastical courts, being neither Pope nor Sanhedrin. Alexander Campbell, "Reply to 'Conventions, No. IV.'" *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 11 (1850):616-617.

the experience of all ages shows how important it is to have such tribunals, on certain occasions and emergencies, well selected and ordained.¹⁸⁶

Thus, although the Bible did not support ecclesiastical courts, Campbell grasped at the Jerusalem Council as an example of a similar meeting to that of the Disciple Convention. Not only did Campbell consider such conventions illustrated in the Christian Dispensation, but he went further to suggest that they occurred in all large communities on earth. When it came to the Christian church with its far flung membership and worldwide mission, such conventions were indispensable to “peace and prosperity.”¹⁸⁷

Campbell readily agreed with Creath that there was a tendency for abuse of authority to occur within associations and conventions, but he suggested that this alone was not a valid reason to avoid associations. Indeed, he reminded Creath that local churches themselves are associations and therefore subject to the same tendency to abuse of power and authority. There was no call to abandon churches so why make a fuss about this particular convention. “The abuse of any thing” he insisted “is no reason, no argument against it.”¹⁸⁸

Surprisingly, Campbell had little to say about procedural concerns given his insistence before the meeting that it be representative in order to validate its authority to make decisions. It is possible that his election as president of the Christian Missionary Society, along with the perceived benefits of the joint meeting caused him to overlook these matters.

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Conventions," *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser., 1, no. 11 (1851): 605.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on "Dr Wm. E. Channings Opinions of Conventions" by Jacob Creath, Jr," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 7, no. 7 (1850): 410-411.

Conclusions

Campbell's handling of the move to increasing organization shows the difficulty he had in harmonizing his unity principles with a church structure that enabled a visible expression of Christian unity. All principles except for the confession that Jesus was the Christ were challenged in some way. As Campbell's critics recognized however, the key threat was to the role of Scripture in governing the life of the church. Campbell's approach was three pronged: (1) he reinterpreted Scripture in the light of the current circumstances, thus recognizing the Jerusalem Council set an important precedent where before he had dismissed it as an extraordinary meeting with little relevance for the daily life of the church; (2) he found support for his organization principles by using extensive inference, something he had previously rejected; and (3) he finally admitted that not every issue can be determined by a book. These concessions left him exposed to accusations that he had changed his position on these key ideas, something he strenuously denied in spite of the evidence.

Because the Bible was neither explicit nor clear about organization beyond the local church level, or the regular need for extraordinary meetings such as the Jerusalem Council, Campbell found himself pushing an idea that if governed by his rules, he could not enforce. Of course Campbell did not force anyone to adopt more organization, but he pushed the idea of its expediency through the pages of his periodicals in a way that was clearly in violation of his principle that opinions are private property that are kept to oneself. This violation of principle was rarely noted by his critics because of the concerns at the more foundational level of scriptural authority. While he could have justified himself by using the excuse of the freedom of the press, Campbell as we have seen was not ready to extend this same freedom to other editors.

When it came to the actual process of organizing, Campbell did not play an active part. Although championing the cause of organization, it was up to the local churches to

decide whether or not they wanted to work together with other churches. It was the local churches who formed associations and cooperated at state level. Thus Campbell tried to maintain unity in the process by respecting levels of authority. Although Campbell suggested that there was urgent need for a national meeting and even suggested possible locations and dates, he again left the details to others. This meeting however was not organized or authorized by local congregations and state associations, although some would endorse it by sending delegates to the meeting. Instead the planning was largely the work of David Burnett and a handful of other men.

While initial opposition to organization settled down within a couple of years of the first convention and organization of the Christian Missionary Society, it would return again after Campbell's death and contribute to the eventual split of the movement.

CHAPTER 4

ELLEN WHITE AND ECCLESIAL UNITY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the views of Ellen White on the topic of church unity in the context of her understanding of Scripture and her views of ecclesiology. Such a broad approach is necessary given that both authority and authority structures are important in interpreting any views of unity and how they are to be applied. The chapter begins with an examination of White's view of the Bible and hermeneutics since this is central to understanding all of her theology. This is followed by an overview of her ecclesiology, her specific comments on unity, and finally the authority structure in which White considered this unity should occur. A primarily descriptive and analytic approach is taken with evaluative comments generally withheld for discussion in the final chapter of the dissertation.

White's Understanding of the Bible and Hermeneutics

Revelation and Inspiration

Ellen White believed that we only know about God because he has chosen to reveal himself to humankind. His ultimate revelation was to be found in Jesus Christ, but in the absence of Christ's physical presence today, man is reliant upon other sources of God's revelation such as nature and Scripture.¹ But relying on God's revelation in nature

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4th ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 8:256, 265, 287; Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1942), 423.

also has inherent limitations. The effects of sin have distorted the witness of nature and have reduced the ability of man to discern God's revelation within nature. Consequently, relying on this form of revelation alone results in an imperfect knowledge of God.² Biblical revelation thus fills an important role in clarifying the character and will of God to those who were not witnesses to the Son's incarnation on earth.

The entire Bible is inspired by God,³ and is to be considered the "authoritative, infallible revelation of his will."⁴ Theories of partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration are explicitly rejected.⁵ By implication, the entire Bible is important for the Christian. No part of it can be neglected. Even those sections which critics have declared uninspired, White recognized as being placed in Scripture specifically to provide for the needs of men.⁶ Therefore, attempts to dissect out inspired from supposedly uninspired writing in Scripture is foolish. It pits human wisdom against God's wisdom, and places the individual in the position where Satan can work to diminish their spiritual growth.⁷

White insisted that the Holy Spirit had an integral role in all phases of inspiration: the selection and qualification of the men and women who were entrusted with the

² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:256.

³ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 462.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), vii.

⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:748; Ellen G. White, Letter to R. A. Underwood, January 18, 1889, Letter 22, 1889, published in part under the title "No Man to Pronounce Judgment upon God's Word," in *Selected Messages from the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 3 vols., (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:23; Ellen G. White, "The Discernment of Truth," MS 16, 1889, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials: Letters, Manuscripts, Articles, and Sermons Relating to the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference*, (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 257.

⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:748.

⁷ Ellen G. White to R. A. Underwood, January 18, 1889. Letter 22, 1889. In *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 238.

transcription of revelation and the process by which the inspiration itself occurred.⁸ It was the Holy Spirit who “guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write.”⁹ Scripture provided evidence of a number of ways that such guidance was given including dreams and visions where symbols, figures, and illustrations were presented to individuals to explain truth in a way that was clearly understood by each writer.¹⁰ The resulting text however, is not a proxy production in which the words were dictated by the Holy Spirit while the individuality of the writer was hidden. Indeed, White insisted that it is not the words of the Bible that were inspired, but rather the writers themselves who were inspired.

Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.¹¹

Consequently, the Bible exhibits a wide variety of styles as each author employs their own experience and expressions in their writing. Yet the utterances are still to be considered the Word of God. The language being human is by its very nature imperfect, but for White this does not indicate the probability of error, but rather the inability of God to fully convey infinite ideas in the limited language of man.¹² Thus, the imperfection of human language does not lessen the authority of the Biblical text in any way.¹³

⁸ White, *Great Controversy*, vi.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, “The Bible God’s Inspired Word,” *The Bible Echo*, August 19, 1895, 259.

¹¹ White, *Selected Messages*. 1:21. The mystical nuances of the combined human and divine wills and minds in this passage would be uncomfortable to many contemporary Seventh-day Adventists.

¹² It should be noted that White does not endorse the inerrancy of Scripture.

¹³ Ibid. Ellen White goes on to explain the limitations of human language. She does not specifically address minor errors in content which do not affect the message of Scripture such as those

To further explain the co-operation between the human and the divine found in the production of Scripture, White presented an analogy between God's revelation in Christ and God's revelation in Scripture. Both exhibit a form of union between the human and the divine while retaining their divine authority. Thus, even though the Bible is inspired by God, the truths contained within its pages have been "expressed in the words of men and are adapted to human needs."¹⁴

Authority of Scripture

The divine inspiration of the Bible confers upon it a divine authority. Lest there be any doubt about this authority, White also highlights the practice of Jesus with regard to the Scriptures.¹⁵ Since Jesus who is both the Son of God and our model "pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority," Christians should also recognize its undisputed authority.¹⁶ Thus, the example of Christ combined with the inspiration of the Bible call the Christian to identify the Bible "as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith."¹⁷ Indeed, she goes as far as to suggest that the Bible should be regarded as "God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears."¹⁸

Building on 2 Timothy 3:16, which she quoted extensively, White recognized that the authority of the Bible makes it suitable for a variety of tasks. For instance, the Bible

mentioned by Campbell. She does however admit the probability of errors occurring in the process of copying and translating the Bible. However, these errors are not to be seen as obscuring truth since God has guarded his truth carefully. See Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, 5th ed. (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1963), 220-221; White, *Selected Messages*, 1:16.

¹⁴White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:747; White, *Great Controversy*, vi.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1969), 38-39.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁸Ellen G. White, "Our Great Treasure-House III. The Incarnate Word.," *Signs of the Times*, April 4, 1906.

is to be the standard for every doctrine, the standard for preaching,¹⁹ the standard of character and “the basis for all reforms.”²⁰ It is also the resource for evaluating opinions, and detecting error.²¹

While many churches attempt to summarize their beliefs and maintain unity by making use of creeds, White believed that all human creeds were to be rejected. Unlike some of her Adventist contemporaries, Ellen White does not list a multitude of reason for her rejection of creeds or specifically link them with the concept of Babylon.²² Rather, she saw creeds as getting in the way of individuals searching Scripture for themselves, and recognized that adherence to creeds can produce a false complacency when what is really necessary is real change of heart and spiritual life.²³ Thus, she uplifted “the Bible, and the Bible alone” as the only creed for Christians.²⁴ This was to be the sole bond of Christian union, and function as a sufficient and infallible “rule of faith and practice.”²⁵

¹⁹ White to Brethren Who Shall Assemble in General Conference, August 5, 1888, Letter B-20-1888, in *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 44.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, 595.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² James White and Joseph Bates, along with other early Adventist pioneers, wrote passionately against creeds. Bates suggested that creeds replaced the progressive nature of revelation with a rigid understanding of truth. See Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps: or A Connected View of the Fulfillment of Prophecy, by God's Peculiar People, from the Year 1840-1847* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 53-54. James White associated creeds with confusion and misuse and suggested that they represented an unbiblical way to secure doctrinal unity. For instance, James White, “Gospel Order,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 13, 1854, 180; James White, “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 4, 1862, 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, 455-456; Ellen G. White, “Truth as it is in Jesus - No. 1,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 14 1899, 131.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, “Opinion and Practice to be Conformed to God's Word.” *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1902.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; Ellen G. White, “The Word of God,” *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1902, 254; Ellen G. White, “The Faith That Will Stand the Test,” *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1888. The idea of the Scripture as a rule of faith and practice will be further explored when examining White's understanding of how unity is to be attained.

Consequently, all beliefs must be tested by Scripture and discarded if they are not in harmony with it, and all new insights should be subjected to a search for a "thus saith the Lord." ²⁶ Only as every opinion was subjected to the judgment of Scripture as the supreme authority on all matters of faith, would truth be able to be discerned and safeguarded.²⁷

Hermeneutical Considerations

White insisted that it is the responsibility of all to study Scripture.²⁸ Such individual study is possible because she assumed the great Protestant principle of the perspicuity of Scripture. The Bible meaning is not mysterious or obscure, but rather it is "clear as noonday" and thus able to be understood by all.²⁹ With this presupposition, it became the duty of Christians to personally evaluate opinions and doctrines in the light of divine revelation. White reinforced this idea by asserting that "no man should be relied upon to think for us, no matter who he may be or in what position he may be placed. We are not to look upon any man as a perfect guide for us."³⁰ The only infallible guide is the Bible, and it is this alone which is to end all controversy.

Some help was provided for those who needed guidance on how to study Scripture. In 1884, White endorsed the adoption of several rules for interpretation of Scripture that had been outlined by William Miller whose teaching on prophecy had led

²⁶ Ellen G. White, "The Scriptures as a Safeguard." *Review and Herald*, June 7, 1906.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:214; White, *Great Controversy*, 598; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 65.

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1957), 89; White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 39. This statement should not be taken to mean that White believed that every single nuance of Scripture is readily understood, but rather that the key ideas such as the human need of God, and salvation, and the way Christians are to live, are readily accessible to every reader regardless of background or level of education.

³⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Bible Our Guide," *Bible Echo*, October 15, 1892, 306; White, *Steps to Christ*, 89.

thousands to wait for Jesus to come in 1843 and 1844.³¹ She highlighted the following five broad rules which can be found in the booklet *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology*.³²

1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible;
2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study;
3. Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering;
4. To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without contradiction, you cannot be in error;
5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound it to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible.³³

Together these rules illustrate the strong biblicism that characterized not only the emerging Adventist movement, but also 19th century Protestantism as a whole.³⁴

While Ellen White did not compile a single list of her own interpretive rules for Scripture, she liberally sprinkled guidelines for Bible study throughout her writings. Two imperative guidelines were repeated often. The first imperative was that Bible study is to

³¹ For more information on William Miller see the excellent overview of the Millerite movement in George, Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010).

³² Joshua V. Himes, ed. *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology, Selected from Manuscripts of William Miller*. (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 20-24. The list has fourteen rules, the first five of which are quoted by White. The next eight relate specifically to rules for prophetic interpretation, while the last rule which Miller considered the most important, related to the necessity of approaching Scripture with faith. It is likely White chose to highlight the first five rules due to their applicability to any passage of Scripture, and did not add Miller's final rule since it does not seem sufficiently differentiated from rule number three.

³³ Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1884, 4.

³⁴ Scholars of Adventist history have also pointed out the significant influence of rationalism on such lists of hermeneutical rules. See for instance Jeff Crocombe, "A Feast of Reason - the Legacy of William Miller on Seventh-Day Adventist Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Intertextuality and the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture*, ed. Paul Petersen and Ross Cole (Cooranbong, Australia: ATF Theology/Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 236.

be undertaken only after prayer.³⁵ Prayer reduced the opportunities for Satan to “take control of our thoughts”, and suggest false interpretations to our minds.³⁶ At the same time commencing with prayer encouraged the Bible student to place themselves in a position where God has priority in the thoughts. But more than prayer in general, White specifically encouraged prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the passages studied. By calling the Holy Spirit to aid in the interpretation of the passage, the sincere seeker of truth received the aid of the one who was actively involved in the initial inspiration of the passage. This is essential for any “true knowledge” of what the Bible means.³⁷

The second imperative guideline was that the reader must come to Bible study with the right attitude. This attitude is one of humility,³⁸ reverence,³⁹ and willingness to be taught.⁴⁰ It is an attitude where the reader is willing to lay down and put aside any prejudice, assumptions, and preconceived ideas⁴¹ and seek only the wisdom of God. White recognized however, that frequently individuals studied the Bible for wrong reasons, seeking to prove their own theories rather than for understanding God and his will. She warned,

³⁵ See for instance White, *Great Controversy*, 521; White, *Steps to Christ*, 100; Ellen G. White, “Our Great Treasure-House XVI. How to Study the Bible,” *Signs of the Times*, September 19, 1906.

³⁶ White, *Steps to Christ*, 110.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *Education* (1903, repr., Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1952), 189. See also White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:704; White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 408; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 107.

³⁸ White, *Great Controversy*, 521.

³⁹ White, *Steps to Christ*, 110; Ellen G. White, “Our Great Treasure-House I. God's Word Our Guide,” *Signs of the Times*, March 21, 1906.

⁴⁰ White, *Great Controversy*, 521.

⁴¹ White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 463; White to Brethren Who Shall Assemble in General Conference, August 5, 1888, Letter B-20-1888, in *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 46.

If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. Open mind and heart that you may behold wondrous things out of God's word.⁴²

Thus, an open mind and a willingness to follow and obey the truth found are crucial to any study of the Bible.

Specific principles of interpretation are also presented by White. Since all biblical authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit, the various parts of the Bible do not contradict one another, but rather form a consistent and comprehensive whole. Therefore, the Bible can and should be used as its own expositor, governing our understanding of what each passage means.⁴³ As Scripture is compared to Scripture, "One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident."⁴⁴

The singular source behind Scripture meant that identification of the Bible's themes is also an important interpretive guideline. White identified the plan of redemption, or the restoration of the human to the image of God as the central theme of the Bible.⁴⁵ Recognition of this theme throughout Scripture provided the key to the understanding not just some, but all of the treasure contained in God's word.⁴⁶

⁴² White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 112.

⁴³ Ellen G. White, "The Science of Salvation, the First of Sciences," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 1, 1891, 737.

⁴⁴ Ibid. See also White, *Steps to Christ*, 90, 91; White, *Education*, 125, 126; Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1954), 511; White, "Our Great Treasure-House XVI. How to Study the Bible," *Signs of the Times*, September 19, 1906, 7.

⁴⁵ White, *Education*, 126; Ellen G. White, "Our Great Treasure-House V. 'They Are They Which Testify of Me.'" *Signs of the Times*, April 18, 1906, 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

White rejected the tendency to rush from reading one Bible passage to the next. Such reading did not allow for the message to be understood or for transformation to occur. It was of more value to research and study one passage until the meaning and beauty of the passage was clear before moving on to other passages.⁴⁷

White further suggested that Bible passages are not to be separated from their context. Using single and even part verses to support a theory can not only lead to erroneous doctrine but to ascribing a completely opposite meaning to the passage than the author intended.⁴⁸ The context of any passage is thus to be studied carefully. In addition to providing a framework or background to the passage studied, the context provides indicators for whether the language used should be understood as literal, symbolic, or figurative. In the absence of typology or indicators for symbolic or figurative understanding the language of the Bible is to be understood in its plain and obvious meaning.⁴⁹ This distinction is also important in avoiding misinterpretation of Scripture. White warned of the dangers of over spiritualizing to the point that the clear meaning of the passage is lost, and of straining the meaning of Scripture to suit our whims.⁵⁰ She asserts that humans often look for such alternative meanings because they don't want to obey the clear instructions of God.⁵¹ But if they were to take the Bible as it reads then a great benefit would result.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, "Our Great Treasure-House XVIII. How to Study the Bible," *Signs of the Times*, October 3, 1906, 6.

⁴⁸ White, *Great Controversy*, 521.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 598. Compare to William Miller's rule XI: "How to know when a rule is used figuratively. If it makes good sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, then it must be understood literally, if not, figuratively." Himes, *Views of the Prophecies*, 22.

⁵⁰ White, *Selected Messages*, 1:170.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Facsimile Reprint ed., 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1870-1884), 4:343.

⁵² White, *Great Controversy*, 598.

An understanding of the customs of those who lived in Bible times, the geography of Bible lands, chronology of Bible events and other issues of historical context are also recommended to Bible students. Together these help clarify and bring “out the force of Christ’s lessons.”⁵³ Nevertheless, this knowledge while helpful is not “absolutely essential,” for the truth of salvation is readily available to all who would seek it.⁵⁴

Although each individual is to study Scripture for themselves, White counseled that care be taken with any supposed “new light” or “new interpretations” that arose from such study. Truth is never given to one person in isolation, but rather, truth is entrusted to the church.⁵⁵ Therefore, she suggested that those who consider they have new light take counsel from other experienced and mature Christians who are to examine the matter in the light of the totality of Scripture.⁵⁶ In this way the church was to be protected from side issues of little importance, outright errors, and extreme views.

Higher criticism was firmly rejected as having any part in interpretation of Scripture. Higher critics, she suggested, unduly exalt themselves, ultimately putting themselves in the place of God by judging the word of God according to their own wisdom. The result of this methodology is a distortion and division of the Bible to such an extent that the effect is to render it a powerless shell unable to fulfill the needs of man it was designed to meet.⁵⁷ Thus, she saw the application of higher critical methods as equivalent to the kiss of betrayal that marked the treachery of Judas.⁵⁸

⁵³ White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 518.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, Excerpt from *Manuscript 12b, 1896*, in *Manuscript Releases from the Files of the Letters and Manuscripts Written by Ellen G. White* (Ellen G. White Estate), 10: 301.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1946), 45.

⁵⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:293.

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1911), 474.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, “Perils of the Last Days,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 16, 1897.

Summary

The Bible was written in human language by individuals who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Every part of it was to be considered inspired, the revelation of God's will, and authoritative for the Christian. This authority meant that the Bible was to be the Christian's only creed, and bond of union. All other creeds were to be rejected since their formulation stifled the ongoing search for truth.

Christians were not to simply rely on the interpretations of others, but to study Scripture for themselves. White's conviction was that the main themes and ideas of Scripture could be easily understood by all regardless of education. Nevertheless, a number of rules were suggested to aid in the interpretation of Scripture. These included looking at all texts on a given subject, using Scripture to interpret Scripture, and approaching all study with prayer and an attitude of humility. Higher criticism which elevated the authority of human reason rather than subjecting human opinions to God's authority, was therefore to be rejected.

Overview of Ellen White's Ecclesiology

Nature of the Church

White uses the term church in a broad sense to encompass not only the historical church on earth but also all of God's people prior to the incarnation of Christ, and those heavenly beings who worship God in heaven.⁵⁹ In her thinking, both the heavenly and earthly churches work together in harmony to accomplish God's purposes.⁶⁰ However, for the purposes of our current study I will limit discussion to her views of the earthly

⁵⁹ Ellen G. White to E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, February 18, 1887, Letter 37, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 27; Ellen G. White, "The Vineyard," (August 25, 1899) in *Manuscript Releases*, 16:328-329.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

church which exists as a visible and historical entity within the world.⁶¹ This historical body is defined in her writings primarily in terms of its relationship to God and its God-ordained function.

The church is God's creation, formed not by human will but rather, by divine will.⁶² Consequently, the church is the object of "God's supreme regard."⁶³ Its members are chosen and favored, and it lacks nothing, as the Father supplies everything needed for its success.⁶⁴ In particular, the church benefits from an extravagant outpouring of grace which results in the church being described by White as the "repository of the riches of the grace of Christ," and elsewhere as a repository of "heaven's wealth."⁶⁵

The divine origin of the church makes it not only God's creation but God's property.⁶⁶ Consequently, the church has responsibilities and obligations towards its owner. One of White's favorite images of the church: "the people of God," puts this relationship between God and the church at the forefront of any discussion of the church.⁶⁷ Because of this relationship God's people are called upon to be loyal

⁶¹ Ellen G. White, "Unity of the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 19, 1880; Ellen G. White, Excerpts from *Manuscript 1, 1878*, in *Manuscript Releases: From the Files of the Letters and Manuscripts Written by Ellen G. White*, ed. Ellen G. White Estate (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1993), 143.

⁶² White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 3: 376; White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 196.

⁶³ Ellen G. White, "The Inestimable Gift," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 11, 1888, Extra, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.; Ellen G. White, "The Remnant Church Not Babylon," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 12, 1893, 578; Ellen G. White, "Unity of the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 25, 1887, 49.

⁶⁵ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 9; White, "The Inestimable Gift," 1.

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, "Church the Property of God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 17, 1893; Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967), 284.

⁶⁷ See for instance James White and Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1880), 316; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:223, 2:444. The concept of the "People of God" is not original to White. In the Old Testament it is used to denote the Israelites, while in the New Testament it is used of Christians. Consequently, the idea of the "People of God" is used by a variety of theologians. However, in

“representatives of sacred truth”, striving to reach a higher standard than the world around them.⁶⁸

The intimate relationship between church and the Godhead is further reinforced by the identification of Christ as the head, cornerstone, and foundation of the church.⁶⁹ Taking her cue from the apostle Paul, White links these ideas to specific metaphors of the church. Hence the concept of Christ as the foundation or cornerstone of the church is linked with the metaphor of the church as a building or a temple.⁷⁰ Christ provides the stability and basis upon which the church is built,⁷¹ while the building is composed of both the “pillars of the faith” and the members themselves who are described as living stones.⁷² The building is pictured as carefully crafted by God, with each piece being chosen, cut, polished, and placed so that the completed building reflects the beauty of Christ.⁷³ Thus, the image of the church as a building emphasizes not only the centrality of Christ to the church, but the growth and transformation of those in connection with Christ, along with the necessary connectedness of each member.

contemporary discussion, the concept of “People of God” is particularly associated with the Catholic ecclesiology of Vatican II.

⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, Remarks during the Third Business Meeting, April 4, 1901 in *General Conference Bulletin*, April 5, 1901, 69.

⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, “The First Prophecy,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 18, 1882, 449. White, *Desire of Ages*, (1898, repr., Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 414; White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 596.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 595-599.

⁷¹ When Christ is referred to as the cornerstone rather than the foundation, the apostles and prophets are also considered as part of the foundation of the church. See White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 596-597.

⁷² Ellen G. White, “Believers Christ’s Representatives,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 6, 1884, 289.

⁷³ Ellen G. White, “The Return of the Exiles. No. 7: Words of Encouragement,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 19, 1907, 9.

Likewise, Christ's headship is tied to the metaphor of the church as a body. Christ as head of the church has the supreme authority and control over the church.⁷⁴ All parts of the body are dependent upon him for coordination of their function so that despite their diversity they move and act like a single unit in harmony and symmetry.⁷⁵ Every part of the body is necessary since no one part can accomplish every function of the body.⁷⁶ But all must be connected to the head and work with each other to achieve the goals of the body. For, just as there is no room in a functioning body for any independent action, so it is with the action of members of the church; all are to act together in unity.⁷⁷

As God's creation, and with Christ as its living head, the church is in some sense intrinsically holy. Nevertheless, it is also a body which is composed of individual members who are imperfect and unholy. To think otherwise is to place the future heavenly characteristics of the church upon an earthly institution which is composed of erring men and women.⁷⁸ Although the church's imperfection and human composition make it weak and inefficient in itself, there is no reason for the church to remain in this state since power and life is freely available from God. Indeed, White expresses surprise that those who purport to be God's people are failing to maintain contact with Him,

⁷⁴ Ellen G. White, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 9, 1895, 433; Ellen G. White, "Words to Church Members," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, October 7, 1907.

⁷⁵ Ellen G. White, "Till We All Come to the Unity of the Faith," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 12, 1908, 7-8; Ellen G. White, "Christian Unity," *Signs of the Times*, January 18, 1883, 25.

⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, "Humility before Honor," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 8, 1887, 689.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, "The Remnant Church Not Babylon (Continued)," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 5, 1893, 562.

ignoring His instructions, and failing to look to Him for their strength and success.⁷⁹ Such behavior is unthinkable for the church which is dependent on God for its very existence.⁸⁰

Ellen White's understanding of the church was shaped not only by God's creation and ownership of the church, but by her conception of a major conflict between good and evil which she called the Great Controversy.⁸¹ The Controversy commenced with Satan's rebellion in heaven, and the ongoing battle between God and Satan is closely monitored by a waiting universe. Central to this Controversy is the fact that the nature of God's character is on trial. The church which is considered God's representative on earth has a specific role in the battle. It is called upon to demonstrate the true character of God, and to counteract the influence of Satan in this world.⁸² However, because of the church's allegiance to God, it is subject to attacks by forces which seek to corrupt and destroy the church.⁸³ The church is therefore visualized as an army in which every Christian is called upon to put on the armor of God and fight with all their might to uphold truth and make conquests for Christ by the rescue of souls from the enemy.⁸⁴ With this metaphor in mind, there is no room for individual carelessness, slumber, or unfaithfulness since the consequences are cosmic in nature.

⁷⁹ Ellen G. White, "The Church's Great Need," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 22, 1887; Ellen G. White, "Two Classes in the World," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 31, 1894.

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1963), 318.

⁸¹ The great controversy theme is most fully explored in her book entitled *The Great Controversy*, but can also be found in many of her other writings.

⁸² Ellen G. White, "Be Zealous and Repent," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 23, 1890, Extra, 2; Ellen G. White, "Friendship with the World Is Enmity with Christ," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 23, 1892, 529.

⁸³ Ellen G. White, "The Remnant Church Not Babylon (Continued)," 562.

⁸⁴ For one of White's more extensive explanations of the church as an army see White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:394.

But over the centuries the Christian church has failed to remain connected with the source of truth and strength. Compromise, conformity, and a desire to find support for individual theories and actions allowed error to creep into the church almost imperceptibly. Human tradition replaced biblical truth with the result that the church itself became apostate. White's focus on eschatology arising out of biblical apocalyptic literature led her to recognize this apostatized church as the Babylon of Revelation.⁸⁵ However, throughout history, there have been a faithful few; a remnant, who have held fast to biblical truth in spite of pressures to conform to majority opinions. Since White understood the end of the world to be near, she focused on the eschatological remnant whose faithfulness to truth is characterized by keeping all the commandments of God, including the teaching of Jesus, and worshipping God as creator. These characteristics led her to equate the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the "remnant church" although admitting that some of God's remnant can be found outside of its membership.⁸⁶ The remnant is one of the most dominant images of the church in White's writings, carrying with it both a sense of identity and a sense of purpose as will be noted in the following section.

A variety of other metaphors of the church appear in Ellen White's writings. Two other prominent images which are related to the role of the church as the remnant are those which picture the church as light bearers and watchmen.⁸⁷ Both emphasize the connection between the church and truth. The former image is used to reinforce the important role of the church in sharing truth with the world, while the latter emphasizes

⁸⁵ White included both the Roman Catholic Church and apostatized Protestant churches as part of Babylon. White, *Great Controversy*, 383.

⁸⁶ White, *Great Controversy*, 382; Ellen G. White, "They Shall Be Mine, Saith the Lord of Hosts," *Signs of the Times*, November 23, 1904, 1

⁸⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:19, 5:135. See also Ellen G. White, "A Living Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 3, 1880, 353; White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 361.

the vigilance required in maintaining the truth, and keeping it free from error. Like her use of the term remnant, White uses both of these terms primarily in relation to the Seventh-day Adventist church which she regarded as being entrusted with “the last warning for a perishing world.”⁸⁸

Since the ideals of God’s kingdom are incompatible with the ideals of this world, the church is called to be separate and distinct from the world.⁸⁹ The separation has benefits for both those inside of the church and those outside of it. The difference between the church and the world is to be so clear that all can see what God is doing in the lives of church members.⁹⁰ At the same time, separation from the world places God’s people together in a “divine enclosure,” producing an environment where they can be “brought under cultivation” by God and be transformed to bear the fruits of the spirit.⁹¹

Function of the Church

The primary function of the church in White's writings flows out of her concept of the Great Controversy. It presents the church as God's appointed representatives in the world. As such the church is to “make known the love of God to men, and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love.”⁹² This task of leading men to a saving knowledge of God is the reason for the church’s existence and is to be the center of its action.⁹³

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, “A Spiritual Awakening,” *Australasian Union Conference Record*, April 15, 1912, 2.

⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, “Consecration,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 18, 1862, 91-92.

⁹⁰ Ellen G. White, “Unlimited Progress and Improvement,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 7, 1904, 1-2; White, *Selected Messages*, 3:17.

⁹¹ Ellen G. White, “Represent Christ in Self-Denial,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 19, 1893, 790.

⁹² Ellen G. White, “The Church and Its Mission - No 1,” *East Michigan Banner*, January 18, 1905, 1.

⁹³ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 122.

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.⁹⁴

This passage confirms that the sacred charge is not exclusively addressed to the pastors, elders or other leaders of the church. Every member of the church is called to represent God faithfully and to be "a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of his grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ."⁹⁵ The call to represent God is not optional, but rather to be understood as an obligatory part of the covenant made when joining the church, for members not only accept Christ as Lord, but commit to working for his interests at all times.⁹⁶ White urges each person to recognize their responsibility in this mission not only for the advancement of the gospel but also for the health of the church.⁹⁷ However, she is under no illusion that this task is easy. There are important implications for personal lifestyle. There is no room for selfish or indulgent living. To faithfully represent God, selflessness and self-denial is demanded. Only as self-denial is regularly practiced will members bear true witness to the world of the extravagant love and transforming power of God.⁹⁸

White's understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the end time remnant meant that she saw the Seventh-day Adventist Church as having a very specific

⁹⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 600.

⁹⁶ Ellen G. White, "Scattered Churches," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 6, 1881, 161.

⁹⁷ Ellen G. White, "Address and Appeal, Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 12, 1878, 185.

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, Excerpt from *Letter 43, 1903*, in *A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1933), 24.

role as God's representatives. They were to call people back to forgotten truths, especially the seventh-day Sabbath.⁹⁹ Their faithfulness to truth in its entirety would witness to, and vindicate the true character of both God and his law.¹⁰⁰ In addition to this important role, the remnant was tasked with presenting the nations of the earth with the final warning message that announced judgment and the imminent second coming of Jesus.¹⁰¹

While the primary role of the church was one of representation of God and his truth, White also recognized that the church had a function in the encouragement and spiritual growth of its members. This was to be accomplished as its members interacted and used their gifts and talents within the community.¹⁰² The expectation was that every member would serve to benefit the church as a whole. Indeed, White suggested that unless a member "feels under sacred obligations to make his connection with the church a benefit to it rather than to himself, it can do far better without him."¹⁰³ Consequently, church membership is not to be taken lightly. It is a sacred relationship in which individuals entered a "solemn covenant with God to obey his word, and to unite in an effort to strengthen the faith of one another."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings as Illustrated in the Captivity and Restoration of Israel* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 678.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Remnant Church, Not Babylon," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 12, 1893, 579; Ellen G. White, "Preparation for the Testing-Time," *Signs of the Times*, April 22, 1889, 242.

¹⁰¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:153.

¹⁰² White, *Selected Messages*, 3:15.

¹⁰³ Ellen G. White, "Unity of the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 25, 1887, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Ellen G. White, "The Ministry Is Ordained of God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 12, 1903, 8; Ellen G. White, "Unity of the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 19, 1880, 113.

White also insisted that God uses the church to communicate “His purpose and His will.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, connection with a church not only benefited individuals with an understanding of God’s will, it also taught trust in others whom God has called to lead the church. Consequently, White considered church membership to be indispensable part of Christian life¹⁰⁶

There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.¹⁰⁷

However, while emphasizing the importance of church membership and involvement, White was careful to indicate that church membership alone does not guarantee individual members will be saved.¹⁰⁸

Offices of the Church

White considered that the initial organization of the church in Jerusalem modeled what organization should look like in the wider church. This did not mean that its exact form was to be slavishly copied. Indeed she noted that organizational structures were

¹⁰⁵ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

¹⁰⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:432-433. See also White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 164. White uses the example of Paul, who while confronted directly by Christ, was sent to the church for further instruction.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:16. “Uniting with the church, although an important and necessary act, does not make one a Christian nor ensure salvation. We cannot secure a title to heaven by having our names enrolled upon the church book while our hearts are alienated from Christ.”

reviewed and adapted as the church grew in size.¹⁰⁹ It was the principles of order and organization illustrated by the New Testament church that were to be followed.¹¹⁰

White observed that wherever there were a group of believers in the New Testament, churches were organized, officers were appointed, and systems were set up to monitor conduct in relation to church affairs.¹¹¹ These actions she considered were necessary both for the spiritual growth of individual members and to further the unity of the body of Christ.¹¹² Church officers were thus integral to her understanding of both effective organization and a united church.

While she considered that the apostles were unique in their role, and were not replaced at their death,¹¹³ the other offices of the New Testament church had a continuing role in the contemporary church. These included the offices of evangelists, overseers or elders, and deacons. Her ideas regarding the roles and authority of these offices will be addressed when the topic of authority is explored later in this chapter.

For the moment it should be noted that White rejected apostolic succession, while endorsing a non-sacramental ordination and setting apart of officers by means of the laying on of hands.¹¹⁴ The ritual of ordination provided the officers with “public recognition of divine appointment,” along with the authorization of the church to perform

¹⁰⁹ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 91.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 185. These principles included the need for leaders to demonstrate particular attitudes and character in their relationships in order to promote unity and harmony.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ The apostles were seen as the New Testament equivalents to the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament. Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 467, 161-162.

ecclesial tasks such as baptism, and church organization.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, White does not limit this rite to evangelists, ministers, elders, and deacons. She also endorsed setting apart others by laying on of hands, including medical missionaries and women involved in gospel tasks.¹¹⁶

In spite of the importance White attached to church officers, the church was not defined by them, nor were they the only ones to be actively involved in the mission of the church. Although White saw a need for officers to maintain organization and unity in the church, she understood that every individual member was to be involved in the mission of the church whether or not they were ordained. Believing in a priesthood of all believers who have been given gifts to further the work of the church,¹¹⁷ White suggested that simply by taking the name of Christ they were in effect “ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men.”¹¹⁸

Ordinances of the Church

The church has three main rites: baptism, the Lord’s Supper and foot washing.¹¹⁹ Each rite is of great significance in the life of the Christian and the church and

¹¹⁵ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 161; Ellen G. White, “Separated Unto the Gospel,” *Review and Herald*, May 11, 1911, 4.

¹¹⁶ See for instance Ellen G. White, “The Medical Missionary Work,” (Manuscript 5, 1908) in *Manuscript Releases*, 20:264-265; Ellen G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895. White does not specifically use the word ordination in relation to these latter groups. She seems to have some flexibility in the way she understood ordination. For instance, in the case of W. W. Prescott, a college president she noted that if ordination could help him serve God any better, then it would be best if ordination occurred. See Ellen G. White, “The Matter of the Ordination of W. W. Prescott,” (Manuscript 23, 1889) in *Manuscript Releases*, 12:57.

¹¹⁷ Ellen G. White, “Workers with Christ,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 2, 1890, 737-738.

¹¹⁸ Ellen G. White, “Our Work,” *Signs of the Times*, August 25, 1898, 2; White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 110, 355.

¹¹⁹ White used the term ordinance both to denote the collective laws and decrees of God, and for a number of prescribed practices for God's people. This section of the dissertation will only discuss those ordinances which are specific to the church.

consequently they are not to be taken lightly.¹²⁰ White considered these rites as ordinances undertaken by the church in response to the commands of Christ, and rejected the transmission of grace simply by participation in them.¹²¹

Baptism is a “sign of entrance” into Christ’s spiritual kingdom.¹²² The action itself does not convert nor make individual Christians; it is simply an outward sign of the choice to follow Christ. However, baptism is to be regarded as “a positive condition” for being recognized as being under the “authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”¹²³

Baptism is both an oath of allegiance to God, and a covenant between God and the baptismal candidate.¹²⁴ While the former metaphor saw the candidate as the only person making a pledge, the image of baptism as a covenant extended the idea to include a reciprocal pledge by God. The candidate pledged to surrender themselves and their gifts to God, and to live in a way that recognized God’s lordship. God on the other hand pledged to hear, answer and respond to the candidate’s every call for help.¹²⁵ The enormity of this commitment means that every person who contemplates baptism must

¹²⁰ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:91. Here White emphasized the importance of the rites by describing baptism and the Lord's Supper as “monumental pillars.”

¹²¹ Some confusion is caused by the fact that White frequently employed the word sacrament, and the term sacramental supper to describe the Lord’s Supper. See for instance White, *Desire of Ages*, 653, 655,659; Ellen G. White, “The Ordinances,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 22, 1897 and throughout the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* series on “The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing” which ran from May 31 through July 5, 1898. This appears to be a hangover from her Methodist background since she does not understand a transfer of grace occurring directly through the elements. See also White, *Desire of Ages*, 149.

¹²² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:91,93.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

¹²⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:98-99. Ellen G. White, “Lights in the World,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 18, 1904, 8.

prepare carefully, and demonstrate a change of heart and purposes prior to entering the waters of baptism.¹²⁶

As a direct result of engagement with the covenant motif, White sanctions, and even encourages rebaptism. In her eyes, this represents a covenant renewal which is appropriate in circumstance where the individual has lost sight of the covenant pledge and is reconverted,¹²⁷ or when new truth is encountered and the individual submits to the lordship of Christ in this new area of their lives.¹²⁸

White's acknowledgment of the authority of the Bible necessitated the rejection of both infant and adult sprinkling and the acceptance of baptism by immersion of candidates capable of understanding the meaning and implications of baptism.¹²⁹ While White says very little directly about the mode of baptism, her understanding of the symbolism of baptism specifically derives from the actions integral to immersion. Thus

¹²⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:95-06.

¹²⁷ Ellen G. White to Our Brethren at the Medical Missionary Council, April 19, 1903, Letter 63, 1903, published in part in *Evangelism*, ed. Ellen G. White Estate (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 375.

¹²⁸ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 285. Ellen White herself requested rebaptism after discovering the biblical truth of the Seventh-day Sabbath. See James White, *Life Incidents* (1868, facsimile reprint, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 273; Arthur L White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 121-122.

¹²⁹ Ellen White made only one direct statement about the mode of baptism, which occurs in the context of commenting on her own baptism. She noted that she could see no biblical support for anything other than immersion even though her family tried to persuade her that sprinkling was appropriate. This led her to specifically request immersion at age twelve even though this practice was unusual for her Methodist background. See White and White, *Life Sketches of James and Ellen G. White*, 145-146. The statement is repeated in part and in several of White's works. Only one other statement by White uses the word immersion, but it is in the context of the conversion of another individual. Indirect support for White's understanding of baptism by immersion can be found in her discussion of the symbolism of baptism, her strong emphasis on candidates being adequately prepared, and her approving reports on baptisms all of which occur by immersion.

in baptism, the individual provides testimony to being dead to the world, by being buried with Christ, and raised again to new life.¹³⁰

White took a view of the Lord's Supper similar to that of Zwingli, rejecting any physical presence of Christ in the actual elements of the rite, while affirming His spiritual presence amongst his people during the Supper.¹³¹ The elements of the Supper were thus purely symbolic, providing a memorable illustration of Christ's sacrifice and reminding participants of their total dependence upon Christ for their salvation.¹³² The broken bread symbolized Christ's broken body hanging on the cross, while the grape juice was a symbol of His cleansing blood.¹³³ The symbolism of the rites even extended the nature of the elements used. Only unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice were suitable for use in the Lord's Supper since fermentation represented sin and death and therefore compromised the picture of a sinless Savior.¹³⁴

The Lord's Supper was not to be exclusively restricted to those who were worthy.¹³⁵ It was to be open to any person who had accepted Christ as their Savior, and who was not living in open sin.¹³⁶ Beyond this, no judgment was to be made upon who could participate, and further, no one was to absent themselves from the ordinance

¹³⁰ Ellen G. White, "Lessons from the Second Chapter of Philippians." *Review and Herald*, June 15, 1905.

¹³¹ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 656; Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing – No 5," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 28, 1898, 405.

¹³² Ellen G. White, "The Passover." *Signs of the Times*, March 25, 1880, 133.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ White, *Desire of Ages*, 653; Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet Washing - No. 2" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 7, 1898, 357-358.

¹³⁵ White, *Desire of Ages*, 656.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

because they believed that someone unworthy was taking part, even if that person was the one administering the elements.¹³⁷

The Lord's Supper was to be preceded by the ordinance of foot washing which served as a reminder of the humility of Christ.¹³⁸ In keeping with the view that this is an ordinance and not a sacrament, she noted that the washing does not cleanse the participant from sin, but rather testifies that the heart has already been cleansed.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, White believed this was an important prelude to the Lord's Supper since the act of foot washing was a time of conviction, confession, and forgiveness of sins,¹⁴⁰ a time for clearing up of misunderstandings and putting away selfishness and self-exaltation,¹⁴¹ and consequently, an action which draws participants closer to both God and each other.¹⁴²

Summary

White's ecclesiology is predominantly functional in nature. The church as God's creation is to be understood in terms of both its relationship to God and its God ordained function. This results in several key metaphors of the church including the people of God, the body, a building, an army, and the remnant.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing - No. 1," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 31, 1898, 341-342.

¹³⁹ Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing - No. 3," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 14, 1898, 373.

¹⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing - No. 5," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 28, 1898, 405.

¹⁴¹ White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing - No. 1," 341-342; White, "The Lord's Supper and the Ordinance of Feet-Washing - No. 3," 374.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Two fundamental themes in White's writings, the Great Controversy theme, and the remnant, provide the context for understanding White's views on the function of the church. The Great Controversy defines the role of the church as God's representative throughout time, and its call to demonstrate the nature of God's character to the universe. The role of the remnant is considered more specifically in relation to the end time church, and associated in White's thinking specifically with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is tasked with calling people back to forgotten truths and declaring a last warning message to the world.

Order is essential for the church to operate and fulfill its mission; therefore church officers are also a necessary. While order is important, the church structure in which order occurs is not fixed, nor are its officers limited to those found in Scripture. Furthermore, the mission is given to every member of the church, not just its officers.

Three ordinances of the church are recognized: baptism by immersion, foot washing, and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is considered as a covenant, as is church membership. While baptism symbolizes entrance into God's kingdom, it does not have a direct role in White's understanding of unity.

Having briefly outlined White's understanding of the nature of the church, we now turn to examine how unity of the church is to be attained.

Ellen White's Understanding of Christian Unity

This section focuses specifically on Ellen White's views of Christian unity. It begins with a review of her understanding of the mandate for, and the purpose of Christian unity. A discussion of White's deep concern about disunity within the church follows. This sets the stage for a discussion of her understanding of the nature of Christian unity, and how it is to be attained. The section is rounded out with White's comments about alliances between the church and other religious groups.

Mandate for Unity

Like Campbell, Ellen White considered that the prayer of Jesus in John chapter seventeen provides the impetus for church unity. The desire of Jesus that his followers be one takes on the force of a mandate in her writings.¹⁴³ Consequently, we find White repeatedly refers to the prayer in situations where unity is discussed. For instance, in 1894 she directed believers to take the time to study the prayer, and apply its principles, suggesting that it was one of the most important things that they could do.¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, she commended the prayer as necessary reading and called those who profess to believe the truth to “implicit obedience” with regard to the wishes expressed by Christ.¹⁴⁵

Noting the wording of the prayer, White suggested that every person who has ever confessed Christ is embraced by this prayer.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, every person who considers themselves a Christian is called to take heed of the desires expressed by Christ. It might be expected that with such a broad statement White would consider the role of unity not only within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but within the wider Christian church. Yet in practice, her writing does not seem to embrace this broad principle.

¹⁴³ For instance, White claimed that Jesus’ prayer “is to be our church creed.” Ellen G. White, Manuscript 12, 1899 in White, *Selected Messages*, 3:21.

¹⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Living Testimony,” *The Bible Echo*, April 23, 1894, 123-124. White noted that there are urgent reasons why the believers need to take the prayer seriously, but the reasons for this urgency are not noted in the article. The context of this writing in 1894 most probably reflects White's concern that there is to be no repeat of the type of divisions that arose during the 1888 General Conference (see later case study), and the growing tension between the Battle Creek Sanitarium medical director John Harvey Kellogg and the church leadership.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Ellen G. White, “One, Even as We Are One,” *Bible Training School*, February 1, 1906, 130.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Rather she wrote to her own faith community, often qualifying statements in such a way as to suggest that she is addressing their unity alone.¹⁴⁷

The oneness called for is modeled by the relationship of the Father and Son, who are one in truth, in purpose, and in action.¹⁴⁸ This oneness becomes foundational for White's understanding of the nature of unity that Christians are called to demonstrate.

The context of Christ's plea for unity suggests that unity occurs in those who exhibit consecration to the Lord, are united to him, and sanctified through truth. Thus, the idea of relationship with Christ is linked not only to unity with other humans on earth, but also to the pursuit of truth. It is therefore presupposed that unity and pursuit of truth can, and indeed should occur together, a concept that White strongly endorses in spite of the tensions it raises.¹⁴⁹

Purpose of Christian Unity

In Christ's prayer for unity amongst his believers Jesus also provides a twofold reason for the unity for which he prays: so that the world would know that he was sent from God, and that the world would know that God loves them (John 17:20-23). Unity while desirable and necessary, is thus not merely an end in itself. Unity first and foremost contributes to the successful mission of the church. This link is so powerful that White declares that the success of the church in winning souls for Christ will be

¹⁴⁷ Qualifiers include such phrases as "the remnant" or "those who profess to believe the truth." See for instance Ellen G. White, "The Secret of Unity," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 2, 1889, 417; White, "The Remnant Church Not Babylon," 579; Ellen G. White, "Christ the Center of the Message," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 20, 1894, 177.

¹⁴⁸ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:446.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, "Work for the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 15, 1888; Ellen G. White, "Unity of the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 19, 1880, 113.

proportional to the unity that exists within the church.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, failure to attain unity brings reproach to the faith.¹⁵¹

The specific role of unity in support of mission is fourfold. First, unity provides living testimony of the power of the gospel.¹⁵² Since humans have such a difficult time living in harmony, unity amongst Jesus' followers provides a strong witness to the reality and transforming power of the gospel, whereas, the absence of unity casts doubt on the power and message of the gospel and thus actively works against mission. For this reason, Satan tries hard to thwart attempts at unity.¹⁵³

Second, unity provides both the church and individuals strength in their battle against evil.¹⁵⁴ Together, Christians can withstand the wiles of the Devil. When one falters, support and encouragement is at hand, and others stand to take their place on the battle lines. In order to meet united opposition, the church needs to provide a united front. This is critical as the church prepares for the final crisis predicted in Revelation.¹⁵⁵

Third, unity allows the diversity of gifts God has bestowed upon the church to be used for the purpose of reaching the diversity of individuals in the world. Individually, Christians can only reach a select group with like interests and minds.¹⁵⁶ But together,

¹⁵⁰White, "One, Even as We Are One," 130.

¹⁵¹ White, "Living Testimony," 124.

¹⁵² Ellen G. White, "Strength and Power in Unity," *Bible Training School*, April 1, 1903, 161; Ellen G. White, "Words of Counsel," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, November 15, 1903.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Like most aspects of White's theology, her discussion of unity must be understood in the context of her Great Controversy theme which involves the church in the battle between good and evil.

¹⁵⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:182.

¹⁵⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:145.

they reach the world in a way not possible if those with different ideas and methods separate themselves from each other or spend their energy fighting with each other.

Finally, unity contributes to the spiritual health of individuals and congregations with flow on effects for the mission of the church.¹⁵⁷ Spiritual health enhances the relationships in the local congregation but at the same time has further reaching effects. Since spiritually healthy individuals and churches grow and share their faith, this internal benefit contributes to the mission of the church.

Nature of Christian Unity

Before proceeding to examine the means by which White understood unity could be attained, this section will explore what Ellen White meant by the term unity. We have noted that Ellen White employed biblical models of the church, such as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the temple of Christ, which imply the oneness of the church.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, she noted that the church is a community of those who have been baptized into Christ, and have their foundation in the oneness of its Lord, and together have one baptism and one faith (Eph 4:1-5).¹⁵⁹ Unlike Alexander Campbell however, White never directly specified that the church is essentially one in its very nature.¹⁶⁰ Her emphasis was not on an intrinsic unity of the church, but rather, on the

¹⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, "Christ Is our Hope," *Bible Training School*, May 1, 1903, 177.

¹⁵⁸ Most theologians, and especially those with an ecumenical bent, would suggest that the unity of the church is implied by these models, exemplifying the principle that the New Testament never speaks about the church without at the same time speaking of its unity.

¹⁵⁹ Ellen G. White, "Till We All Come to the Unity of the Faith," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 12, 1908, 7; White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 175-6.

¹⁶⁰ See Alexander Campbell, "Union," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 10 (1840): [484]. Page number is misprinted as 494.

fact that unity is an essential quality that the true church is to strive for diligently.¹⁶¹ Indeed, “the unity that God requires must be cultivated day by day, if we would answer the prayer of Christ.”¹⁶² Thus, by avoiding the discussion of an intrinsic unity of the church and focusing on the conscious unity of the church, White highlighted the key roles of human choice and responsibility in attaining unity. While both corporate and individual responsibility are implied, we must see personal responsibility as central to understanding her concept of unity since the root cause of disunity is disconnection with Christ, and connection or re-connection occurs individually.¹⁶³

The intimate tie between unity and the mission of the church leaves no doubt that the unity Ellen White described must also be visible, for a unity which is not lived out in the life of the church cannot provide the witness that is intended by Jesus’ words in John 17. The new life Christians have in Christ must find its expression in our daily actions and relationships with others, not only outside the church, but also within it.¹⁶⁴ Visible unity is thus evidence that God is working within individuals and his church.

Understanding exactly what White meant when she used the term unity is complicated by the fact that White did not use a singular expression to describe unity. She opted to use a selection of phrases such as unity of purpose,¹⁶⁵ unity of action,¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ White, “Christ is Our Hope,” 177; White, “Unity of the Church,” 113; Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 12, 1885, 8.

¹⁶² Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, April 17, 1899. DF 193. Published under the title “To Our Chief Physician,” in *Battle Creek Letters*, Facsimile of 1928 mimeographed ed. (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn, 1928), 23.

¹⁶³ Church membership in itself does not make one a Christian, it is an individual choice to belong to God and remain connected with God. It is therefore not surprising that individual responsibility for the church, church unity, and church mission is emphasized in her writings.

¹⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, “Truth as It Is in Jesus,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 14, 1899, 97.

¹⁶⁵ This is not an exhaustive list of the terms White uses to clarify unity but fairly represents her spectrum of ideas regarding unity. For unity of purpose see for instance, Ellen G. White, “A Missionary

unity of spirit,¹⁶⁷ unity of thought,¹⁶⁸ unity of the faith,¹⁶⁹ and being of one mind.¹⁷⁰

Some of these phrases are clearly similar in intent and are quite self-explanatory. Other terms such as being one in thought and being of one mind require a more careful examination to understand whether some form of uniformity is intended. At first glance however, the predominant idea that emerges is twofold. First, God's people are to live in peace and harmony with each other, and second they are to move together with a unity of purpose and action.¹⁷¹

While the basis for unity of purpose and action finds its genesis in the unity which the Godhead displays, White's arguments for unity of action and purpose are often pragmatic.¹⁷² Arguments over organization, authority, and methodology of mission, along with petty personal squabbles get in the way of the church working together to fulfill its mission. White also considered that the lack of attention to working together

Education," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 6, 1908, 24; Ellen G. White, "The Southern California Conference," *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 26, 1901, 2.

¹⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, "Lessons from the Life of Solomon – No. 5: Order and Organization," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 12, 1905, 8; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:243.

¹⁶⁷ White, "The Remnant Church Not Babylon," 562; Ellen G. White, "Draw Night to God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. March 4, 1890, 129.

¹⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, "Unity a Test of Discipleship," December 13, 1898, MS 165, 1898. Published, in part, under the title "Critical Spirit to Be Overcome" in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 15:165.

¹⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, "Christian Unity," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 27, 1897, 257.

¹⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, "Unity of the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February, 19, 1880, 113-114.

¹⁷¹ White's use of the terms unity of interest, unity of feeling, and unity of spirit along with the explicit use of unity of purpose and action all carry this idea. See for instance White, *Historical Sketches*, 291; Ellen G. White, "Unity of Action Essential," *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 26, 1903, 1. The idea of unity of purpose and action is also present in several other terms which will be explored in further in this section.

¹⁷² See for instance, White, "The Southern California Conference," 2; Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-Day Adventists*. (1886, reprinted Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 291.

reflected a failure to honor the pledge made at baptism.¹⁷³ Church membership in essence was a solemn commitment not only to follow Christ, but to work in the best interest of his church.¹⁷⁴ Thus, members were assumed to already have a like interest and a willingness to prioritize the mission of the church. Consequently, if people truly understood their decision to unite with the people of God, then unity of interest, purpose and action would be a natural outcome.

One challenging expression regarding unity is the idea of being of one mind.¹⁷⁵ Examination of her usage of the term suggests four main meanings behind its use. In many instances White used the phrase “being of one mind” to exhort members to work in peace and harmony without selfish ambition and fault finding,¹⁷⁶ or to simply work together in doing God’s work.¹⁷⁷ The former idea is explicitly stated in a letter to S. N. Haskell in 1900 where she wrote, “We are often exhorted, ‘Be ye all of one mind,’ which means the same as ‘Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.’”¹⁷⁸ A third major sense, in which the idea of one mind is employed, is in the coming together of members in self-sacrifice, humility, and submission before God.¹⁷⁹ This allows Christ to be the leader of the church and prepares the way for harmony to occur.

¹⁷³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*. 5:480.

¹⁷⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Ministry Is Ordained of God,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 12, 1903, 8; Ellen G. White, “Unity of the Church,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 19, 1880, 113.

¹⁷⁵The idea is found in the phrases “unity of mind” and “being of one mind.” While the term “unity of mind” only occurs in one context, the term “one mind” occurs frequently in White’s writings. A significant number of these occurrences are simply quotations from Scripture including 1 Peter 3:8; Philippians 2:1-2; Romans 15:5, 6; 2 Corinthians 13:6 and 1 Corinthians 1:10. For single reference to unity of mind, see Ellen G. White, “The Work Before Us” (MS 11, 1912), in *Loma Linda Messages* (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn, 1981), 601.

¹⁷⁶ Ellen G. White to S. N. Haskell, April 5, 1900. Letter 53, 1900. Published under the title “Diversity and Unity in God’s Work.” in *Manuscript Releases*, 8: 68.

¹⁷⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:212.

¹⁷⁸ Ellen G. White to S. N. Haskell, April 5, 1900, in *Manuscript Releases*, 8:68.

But in most instances the use of “one mind” appears to support the primary ideas of peace between members and unity in action and purpose. The term “one mind” also occurs in the context of discussion regarding beliefs and doctrine. For instance, in a letter to Dr. J. H. Kellogg in 1886 she wrote,

The soldiers of Jesus Christ must move in concert, else it were better that they do nothing. For if one speaks one thing, and another presents ideas and doctrines contrary to his fellow laborers, there is confusion, discord, and strife. Therefore the apostle charges that all who believe on Christ be of one mind, one faith, one judgment, each moving in concert, influencing one another beneficially, because they are both obedient to the precious truth of the Word of God, attached to one Savior, the great Source of light and truth.¹⁸⁰

While the idea of working together in harmony is clearly present, the idea of teaching consistent doctrine is introduced. It is difficult to act in harmony when individuals are all presenting different ideas and doctrines. Thus, God’s followers are to speak the same things¹⁸¹ and teach the same truths.¹⁸²

However, presenting the same truths and articulating the same things does not necessitate an agreement on the details of all doctrines, so, we must explore further to distinguish if this is what White had in mind. To do this the phrase “unity of thought” will be examined. It occurs in three contexts and presents a similar range of meaning as the analysis of the phrase “one mind.”¹⁸³ The first context is a discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in breaking down old habits, customs, national pride, and prejudice and at

¹⁷⁹ Ellen G. White, “An Important Letter from Sister E. G. White,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 11, 1900, 796; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:469.

¹⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, “Christians, Like Soldiers, May Face Hardships, and Must Work Together in Unity,” (Letter to J. H. Kellogg, July 1886) in *Manuscript Releases*, 14:29.

¹⁸¹ White, “Unity of Action Essential,” 1.

¹⁸² Ellen G. White, “Walk in the Spirit,” *Signs of the Times*, December 25, 1893, 119. While the implications of this statement are wide they are written in the context of tithing.

¹⁸³ Ellen G. White, “The Swiss Conference and the European Council,” *The Bible Echo*, February 1, 1886, 27; Ellen G. White, “Who are Partners with Christ?,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 17, 1894, 449; Ellen G. White, “Unity a Test of Discipleship,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 15:165.

the same time bringing the fruits of the spirit and newness of life.¹⁸⁴ Doctrine is not the issue so much as the willingness of various nationalities to humble themselves and work together under a new sovereign, God. A second context limits unity of thought to the specific goal of arriving at the best methods of advancing the work of God,¹⁸⁵ and the final use is in concert with the ideas of unity of prayer and unity of action, and in the broader context of a problem arising from a critical spirit and tearing down of fellow workers.¹⁸⁶ None of these uses refer directly to the idea of oneness in doctrine.

There are however some indications that White considered unity of doctrine important. For instance, she gave two historical examples of this type of unity. She noted that the disciples of Jesus were vastly different individuals and yet still managed to “become one in faith, in doctrine, [and] in spirit.”¹⁸⁷ Bringing it closer to home she described the earliest pioneers of the Advent movement noting how they came together with humility, uniting in prayer and Bible study, so that they might come to agreement about the Bible’s teachings. When disagreements threatened to derail them, they would continue in this earnest seeking until such time as they were brought to agreement in faith and doctrine.¹⁸⁸

Furthermore, White often called the members of the Adventist church to a “unity of the faith.”¹⁸⁹ While many of her uses of this term, are somewhat ambiguous in

¹⁸⁴ White, “The Swiss Conference and the European Council,” 27.

¹⁸⁵ White, “Who are Partners with Christ?,” 449.

¹⁸⁶ White, “Unity a Test of Discipleship,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 15:165.

¹⁸⁷ White, *Desire of Ages*, 296.

¹⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, “Search the Scriptures,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 26, 1892, 465.

¹⁸⁹ The term “unity of the faith” is used frequently by White, although not always in an overtly doctrinal context. See for instance Ellen G. White, “Christian Unity,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,

meaning, allowing a possible interpretation of unity of action and purpose, or unity of faith in Christ, there are a few which leave no doubt as to their intent. For instance,

God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He will discipline and fit up His people. They will not be at variance, one believing one thing, and another having faith and views entirely opposite; each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith. If one man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinion of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others, how can he be fulfilling the prayer of Christ? And if another and still another arises, each asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases, without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony which existed between Christ and His Father, and which Christ prayed might exist among His brethren?

Though we have an individual work and an individual responsibility before God, we are not to follow our own independent judgment, regardless of the opinions and feelings of our brethren; for this course would lead to disorder in the church. It is the duty of ministers to respect the judgment of their brethren; but their relations to one another, as well as the doctrines they teach, should be brought to the test of the law and the testimony; then, if hearts are teachable, there will be no divisions among us. Some are inclined to be disorderly, and are drifting away from the great landmarks of the faith; but God is moving upon His ministers to be one in doctrine and in spirit.¹⁹⁰

In this passage, God's people are characterized by a love of truth and are called to a unity in the faith, while ministers are explicitly called to unity in doctrine. In the context, the unity of doctrine appears to relate to the landmarks of the faith and not all doctrine per se. It should be noted however, that while unity in doctrine is advocated, the emphasis in this passage is not on total uniformity. The bigger concerns seem to be that variance can cause individuals to push their ideas upon others, and even more concerning

April 27, 1897, 257; Ellen G. White, "He That Loveth Not His Brother Abideth in Death," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 27, 1900, 193. Other similar terms were also explored. White does not use the terms "unity of doctrine," or "unity in doctrine" in her writings. She does however write of being "one in doctrine." This phrase is only used once although it is quoted eight times in various publications with slight variation in use. See White, *Christian Experience and Teachings*, 201; White, "Love Amongst the Brethren," 353. The term "unity in faith and doctrine" occurs only as a heading for sections that describe the experience in the aftermath of the Great Disappointment of 1844 when Jesus failed to come as expected.

¹⁹⁰ White, *Christian Experience and Teachings*, 201

that it may result in independence from the church body. This was problematic given the essential role White attributed to the church, and thus her belief that “The Spirit of Christ never leads those of the same faith to separate into distinct, independent parties.”¹⁹¹

While White tightly linked the idea of truth and unity, she was adamant that unity does not require the loss of personal identity or character,¹⁹² nor does it require opinions, habits or tastes in temporal matters to be in harmony.¹⁹³ Unity therefore cannot be confused with uniformity. The diverse backgrounds and experiences that shape the members of the church may be expected to lead to different interpretations of Scripture. Furthermore, her encouragement for all to read and interpret Scripture leads to the expectation that variation will occur. Rather than condemning this variation she advises that members dwell “upon those things in which all can agree, rather than upon those things that seem to create a difference.”¹⁹⁴ She further counsels that failure to agree on all matters is not an appropriate reason to separate from the church.¹⁹⁵

Thus, we conclude that Ellen White’s understanding of unity was a visible and lived unity that has a high estimate of truth, and is primarily expressed as unity of action and purpose. Some degree of doctrinal unity in relation to vital truths is also envisaged within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, especially for ministers, but this should not be

¹⁹¹ Ellen White, “Unity Amongst the Believers,” *General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1900, 156.

¹⁹² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4: 65.

¹⁹³ White, “Christian Unity,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 11:50.

¹⁹⁴ White, “Diversity and Unity in God's Work,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 8: 68.

¹⁹⁵ White, “The Importance of Unity; the Holy Spirit a Mystery,” in *Manuscript Releases* 14:177. While agreement on fundamentals is highlighted, those in Christ should not waste their time disputing over “matters of little importance.” She further defines these unimportant issues as ones which are not essential for salvation.

confused with uniformity in all matters or lack of variance in personal understandings of specific Scriptures.

Problem of Disunity in the Church

In spite of the importance White attached to unity, which was expected to be borne out in the daily lives of Christians,¹⁹⁶ the church was guilty of doing little more than paying lip service to the idea of unity. This paradox vexed White as she wrote:

Why do those who profess to believe in Christ, who profess to keep the commandments, make such feeble efforts to answer the Savior's prayer? Why do they seek to have their own way, instead of choosing the way and will of the Spirit of God? Those who do this will one day see the harm done to the cause of God by pulling apart. Instead of co-operating with Christ, instead of laboring together with God, many who occupy positions of trust are working in opposition to Christ. The Lord has presented this to me in a most decided manner to present to his people.¹⁹⁷

Thus, the failure to pursue unity doesn't simply result in lost opportunities for mission, or merely render the church impotent. The effect of disunity is much more profound. It causes the church to work in opposition to its Lord.

Because the church represents God on earth, and its members are ambassadors for God, disunity dishonors both God and his name. If the people of God fight and remain divided, God is perceived as divided, inconsistent, and unloving.¹⁹⁸ Yet nothing could be further from the truth that the church is trying to present. By choosing to remain divided, God's people misrepresent truth. In this way they do indeed work in opposition to their Lord.

¹⁹⁶ Ellen G. White, "Faithful Stewardship," (June 26, 1900) in *Special Testimonies: Dr D. H. Kress Collection* (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn, 1979), 111.

¹⁹⁷ Ellen G. White, "Unity among Believers," *General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1900, 156.

¹⁹⁸ Ellen G. White to G. I. Butler, October 1, 1885, in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 15:362. Ellen G. White to Missionaries in South Africa, March 9, 1890, in Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Southern Africa* (South African Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1977), 26.

In addition to these blatant issues arising from a disunited church, disunity also presents other obstacles to the mission of the church. It distracts from what is most important.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, when the church spends its time arguing, whether the matters be trivial or even matters of some importance, it puts all its energy into fighting the perceived internal enemy. The time, energy and resources that should have been devoted to mission are forever lost.²⁰⁰

Disunity also affects the church by impinging upon person spirituality. Disunity tends to be associated with evil speaking, accusation, and fault finding;²⁰¹ characteristics which are the exact opposite of the fruit of the Spirit. These unloving and discourteous actions cannot coexist with love for Christ.²⁰² Thus by implication, disunity is symptomatic of a waning love of God. It therefore comes as no surprise to read White's bold equation of the lack of unity in the church with sin. "This is a sin in the sight of God," she warns, "a sin which, unless God's people repent, will withhold them from his blessing."²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, "The Opposer's Work," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 18, 1892, 642. See also White's response to the arguments over the meaning of the daily sacrifice Ellen G. White, to My Brethren in the Ministry, August 3, 1910, in White, *Selected Messages*, 1:167-168.

²⁰⁰ White is clear that all energies and means should be devoted to the mission or work of the church, and is disturbed when they are diverted elsewhere. "The enemy of our work is pleased when a subject of minor importance can be used to divert the minds of our brethren from the great questions that should be the burden of our message." White, *Selected Messages*, 1:164; and likewise, regarding the arguments over that meaning of the daily sacrifice she noted that the arguments diverted the members from "thoughtful consideration that should have been given the work that the Lord has directed should be done at this time in our cities." White, *Selected Messages*, 1:167.

²⁰¹ Ellen G. White, "Make Straight Paths for your Feet." MS 157, 1897. Published in part under the title, "Christian Unity" in *Manuscript Releases*, 11:50.

²⁰² Ellen G. White, "Words of Encouragement to the Beldens," in *Manuscript Releases*, 10:144. "It is impossible to love Christ and at the same time act uncourteously toward one another."

²⁰³ Ellen G. White, "The Work before Us," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 14, 1903, 7.

Causes of Disunity

Debate about division and disunity often focuses around the topics of doctrine and truth. White has much to say about unity and truth, however, she does not focus on doctrine as a cause for disunity.²⁰⁴ Instead she probes deeply to identify the very core of the problem. The cause for disunity within the church, and between fellow Christians she attributes to something far more fundamental. It is separation and disconnection with Christ.²⁰⁵ This is a stinging rebuke to those who claim to be followers of Christ. It is also timely reminder that a static understanding of the truth about God is inadequate for Christian life. Being a Christian by definition involves relationship. There is thus a necessity of an ongoing living relationship with God in the Christian life. Without this relationship, Christian growth will be stunted, the church's mission will fail, and disunity will continue to exist.²⁰⁶ Union with Christ therefore becomes a key to unity.

A secondary and more tangible cause of disunity is the lack of love for other people. Where love exists and is lived, unity exists.²⁰⁷ Conversely, a lack of love for others results in suspicion, jealousy, criticism, and mistrust not only between members but also between leaders.²⁰⁸ Individuals become quick to imagine the worst about others

²⁰⁴ While White does on occasion note that error always brings error and confusion, her focus is more on the individual's role in unity than external causes. See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:292.

²⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, "No Caste in Christ," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 22, 1891, 785; Ellen G. White to W. Ings, Letter 77, January 9, 1893, in White, *1888 Materials*, 1125.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*; Ellen G. White, "Union with Christ," *Signs of the Times*, December 10, 1896, 5.

²⁰⁷ Ellen G. White, "Christ to Be Presented," *The Bible Echo*, May 28, 1894, 164.

²⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, "Love among the Brethren," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 3, 1884, 353-354.

misinterpreting actions and words, and rumors emerge and in turn cause further disunity.²⁰⁹

White connected the lack of love for others to her primary concept of lack of union with Christ.²¹⁰ A lack of union with Christ results in a cascading sequence of events that culminates in lack of love to fellow humans. Specifically, disconnection with Christ allows the powers of evil to gain control in our lives. This in turn detracts from our love for God, results in hardness of heart, and ultimately pulling away from other people.²¹¹

Also flowing from disunity with Christ and intimately related to the previous cause of disunity is the failure to allow the Holy Spirit to work on the heart. Rejection of the Holy Spirit's transforming power White described as "the greatest hindrance" to unity.²¹² Without his softening and transforming work, people selfishly push individual ideas and agendas. Self becomes the central factor in all decision making and action.²¹³ Inevitably this results in a failure to see the truths God wants us to see in Scripture. Personal conclusions and opinions which can be mistaken are instead equated with truth, and any attempt at correction is resisted.²¹⁴ Conversely, if the Holy Spirit's softening

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Conversely, union with Christ brings us close to others. "The cause of division or discord in the church is separation from Christ. The secret of unity is union with Christ. Christ is the great Center. We shall approach one another just in proportion as we approach the Center. United with Christ, we shall surely be united with our brethren in the faith. White, "To W. Ings," 1125.

²¹¹ White, "The Living Testimony," 124.

²¹² Ellen G. White, "The Secret of Victory," *Bible Training School*, March 1, 1909, 177.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-Day Adventists*, Facsimile ed. (1886; repr., Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2005), 125.

influence is allowed, then hearts become teachable, and opinions, doctrines and relationships are willingly submitted to be judged in the light of Scripture.²¹⁵

Unbelief and doubt regarding the “true foundation of faith” can also be a cause of disunity.²¹⁶ Here the emphasis is not on false doctrine as a cause of disunity, but rather on refusal to accept what White regarded as the foundations of Christian belief. The difference is subtle, but important. It puts the responsibility for disunity on individuals and not external causes.

A further cause of disunity is identified as the failure of Christians to feel any responsibility for the work, mission, and prosperity of the church.²¹⁷ White suggested that when one becomes a member of the church they have “entered into a solemn covenant with the Lord to work for the best interests of his cause at all times and under all circumstances.”²¹⁸ Thus, the Christian who fails to participate in the work of the church not only contributes to disunity, but either fails to understand their commitment to Christ or deliberately ignores it. While White did not explain specifically how failure to take personal responsibility for the mission of the church results in disunity, it can easily be imagined that when individuals are not actively involved in the work of the church they have time to criticize what others are actually doing.

²¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings* (1922, repr., Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 203.

²¹⁶ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, December, 1904 in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 11:319. The message was written to John Harvey Kellogg when he was promoting panentheistic theories, and in outright conflict with church leadership.

²¹⁷ White, “Scattered Churches,” 161.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

In addition to the personal causes of disunity, White suggested that lack of order or organization in the church could also result in disunity. She went as far as suggesting that organization is considered “indispensably necessary” for unity.²¹⁹

How Unity is to Be Attained

White’s views of unity were not theoretical constructs, but rather developed out of her ministry in situations involving specific threats to the unity of the church. Consequently her principles of unity must be gleaned by a careful examination of her responses to these concrete situations. Division and dissension arose early in White’s ministry, but her earliest writings exhibit a relatively disconnected approach to the problem of disunity. More mature reflections on unity emerged during the 1880s and 1890s where White identified a number of fundamental elements to achieving unity and discussed them in a way that enabled the ideas to be fitted together into a cohesive schema which interlocked with her other motifs. The most important of these elements was personal union with Christ which she reinforced as the key requirement for unity of the church. Other important elements in attaining or maintaining unity included an (1) attitude of love and humility, (2) upholding Scripture as the rule of faith and practice, (3) a focus on clear and vital truths, (4) a correct understanding of the relationship between the Christian and the Church, and (5) gospel order,

Connection with Christ

The key means for attaining church unity does not come in the form of doctrinal management, diplomacy, or even human effort. Rather, our ability to have unity with others is directly dependent upon our union with Christ.²²⁰ Elsewhere she wrote, “The

²¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1854), 18.

²²⁰ Ellen White to W. Ings, January 9, 1893, Letter 77, 1893, in *1888 Materials*, 1125.

secret of true unity in the church and in the family is . . . union with Christ.”²²¹ This closest of possible relations is a spiritual,²²² mystical,²²³ personal²²⁴, and living union²²⁵ whereby the individual receives both moral and spiritual power.²²⁶

White’s primary understanding of this union emerges from the image of the vine and its branches outlined in John 15. The process of union is symbolized by grafting of believers into Christ the true vine.²²⁷ In this grafting, the identity of the believer is united with the identity of the vine. The union thus bears ontological significance informing the understanding of what it means to be a Christian. A profession of faith then cannot be taken as the criteria for identification of the Christian. While a profession of faith may be considered adequate for church membership, church membership does not make one a Christian.²²⁸ Participating in the rituals of Christianity,²²⁹ and mere intellectual ascent to

²²¹Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Warburton, Australia: Signs Publishing, 1980), 179. See also White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:28, where White indicates that disunity is impossible when there is true connection with Christ.

²²² Ellen G. White to Brother Eldredge, Letter 22, August 12, 1894, published, in part, under the title “A Knowledge of God Through Christ.” in *Manuscript Releases*, 10: 389.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 162.

²²⁵ Ellen G. White, Diary Entry, June 23, 1892, published, with other diary entries under the title “Exercising Faith and Rejoicing in the Lord in Spite of Pain and Suffering,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 21:117-21.

²²⁶ Ellen G. White, “Union with Christ,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 13, 1887, 169-170.

²²⁷ Ellen G. White, “The True Vine,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 20, 1881; Ellen G. White, “The Living Vine,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 11, 1883.

²²⁸ Ellen White to W. Ings, Letter 73, January 9, 1893, in *1888 Materials*, 1125.

²²⁹ Ellen G. White, “Ye Must Be Born Again,” *Signs of the Times*, September 26, 1892, 726. White lists examples such as keeping the Sabbath and praying.

the doctrines of the church are equally void of ability to make one a Christian.²³⁰

Without a living connection with Christ the true vine, the only thing that exists is a pretended union.²³¹

In addition to its ontological importance, union with Christ results in the ability to develop a Christ-like character. Just as the connection to a vine allows for the sustenance and fruitfulness of a grafted branch, so the union with Christ provides the means by which growth and spiritual fruitfulness of the Christian occurs. The goal of this fruitfulness is a spiritual transformation to the point that the Christian shows evidence of the character of Christ in their lives,²³² a characteristic which is essential for the development of unity.²³³ Particular emphasis was given to the emergence of the qualities such as love for fellow believers,²³⁴ a characteristic which is essential for the development of unity.²³⁵ Ultimately however, White understood that union with Christ will lead to the development of a heart of love for all of humankind.²³⁶ The power of

²³⁰ White, *Steps to Christ*, 35; Ellen G. White, "The Character Acceptable to God," *Bible Echo*, June 1, 1887, 81.

²³¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:228-229; White, *Desire of Ages*, 675.

²³² White, "The Character Acceptable to God," 81. White claimed that when the fruit of the Spirit appears in the lives of members, there will be unity in both thought and action.

²³³ The connection between love and unity will be explored further in the next section. White considered love as the basis for all Christian action since love is the foundational principle of God's government. See Ellen G. White, "The Plan of Salvation," *Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1893, 230.

²³⁴ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:341-348, 731.

²³⁵ The connection between love and unity will be explored further in the next section. White considered love as the basis for all Christian action since love is the foundational principle of God's government. See Ellen G. White, "The Plan of Salvation," *Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1893, 230.

²³⁶ Ellen G. White, "What Christ's Prayer Envisioned," MS 21, 1893, in *Selected Messages*, 3:18. This love is not confined to fellow believers. Union with Christ leads to a "compassion for depraved, guilty, suffering souls, dead in trespasses and sins!" Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (1905, repr., Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1942), 163.

transformation is so great that union with Christ can transform even the most unlikely appearing individual into a living, vibrant, and loving Christian.²³⁷

White explained the connection between the concept of union with Christ and unity of the church by invoking a metaphor of the sun and sunbeams.²³⁸ Beams of light closest to the center of the sun are very close together, almost touching, but as beams of light get further from their center in the sun, they become more and more widely separated from each other. In like manner, as believers move further from Christ the Son of righteousness, they lose both their love for Christ and for his followers. On the other hand, “The more closely we walk with Christ, the center of all love and light, the greater will be our affection for His light-bearers.” Indeed, “they must of necessity be drawn close to each other, for the sanctifying grace of Christ will bind their hearts together.”²³⁹

The formation of the bond of union with Christ cannot occur without recognition of a desperate need for Christ and utter dependence upon him for life. This recognition prompts a response of faith in Christ, a submission of personal will to God’s will, and obedience to his teachings.²⁴⁰ It results in a change of heart such that the believer wishes to be in harmony with the teachings and heart of God,²⁴¹ in every detail of their lives, whether it is in their thoughts or action.²⁴² Previous idols and attachments such as pride,

²³⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*. 5:47.

²³⁸ White to Uriah Smith, Letter 24, September 19, 1892, published under the title “The Message of 1888; an Appeal for Unity; the Need for the Indwelling Christ,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 15:88. Elsewhere she made a similar analogy to spokes of a wheel.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ White, “Union with Christ,” 769-770.

²⁴¹ Ellen G. White to Mrs. P. Vessels, March 7, 1897. Published, in part, under the title of “Christ Our Help in Time of Trouble,” in *Daughters of God*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1998), 184.

²⁴² Ellen G. White, “Abide in Me,” *Signs of the Times*, March 23, 1888, 177.

selfishness, and vanity, or indeed any cherished sin, cannot coexist with this new union. Indeed, White suggested that the reason many find the Christian life so hard is that they don't understand this inability to maintain both relationships at once.²⁴³

White was particularly concerned that her readers understand that union with Christ is not a onetime only isolated event. Union with Christ must be maintained and preserved lest disconnection occurs. Christ does his part to maintain the bond, but the believer also bears responsibility for preserving the bond by continual communion,²⁴⁴ “earnest prayer,” and “untiring effort.”²⁴⁵ Union with God is thus a bilateral relationship in which both partners take some responsibility. While the initiative and work that makes this bond possible comes from God, the relationship cannot work if only one partner is interested in its maintenance.

Correct Attitudes

Personal attitudes are also integrally related to the presence or absence of church unity. So much so that White made reference to attitudes in the majority of her discussions on unity of the church. The most essential attitudes for unity are identified as love and humility. On the other hand, pride, self-centeredness, and selfish ambition led individuals to consider their own abilities and reasoning to be superior to that of others, and as a result push their own views at the expense of the opinions and feelings of their brothers and sisters in Christ.²⁴⁶ This presents a major obstacle to the unity of the church

²⁴³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:231.

²⁴⁴ White, *Desire of Ages*, 676. Elsewhere, she suggested communion must occur daily or hourly. See for instance White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:47.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:47, 231.

²⁴⁶ See for instance, Ellen G. White to Brethren Who Assemble in Week of Prayer, Letter B-20a, December 15, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 196-198.

not only because it demonstrates a lack of love, but also because the consequences of these attitudes are spiritual death.²⁴⁷ Any attempt to work toward church unity therefore must begin with a personal examination of attitudes and motives of the heart.²⁴⁸

All Christian action should proceed from love since love is the foundation of God's government, and at the heart of God's character.²⁴⁹ But love is often missing, precisely because love is only derived while in connection with the one whose character defines love. When united with Christ love becomes central to our being, and the barriers to unity, both big and small, will become trivial.²⁵⁰ Consequently, White is able to conclude that "those who are truly connected with Him cannot be at variance with one another. His Spirit ruling in the heart will create harmony, love, and unity."²⁵¹

Along with love, the attitude of humility is essential in seeking unity. This encompasses both humility in relation to God, and humility in relation to fellow believers. Humility, White suggested, is at the root of greatness of mind and conformity with Christ.²⁵² Indeed, it is a necessary trait for understanding the working of the Spirit

²⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, "Christ, Man's Example," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 5, 1887, 417.

²⁴⁸ See for instance, Ellen G. White, "An Appeal to Our Ministers," a talk given on April 15, 1901, in *1888 Materials*, 1752. Similar sentiments appear in personal letters to Uriah Smith and G. I. Butler.

²⁴⁹ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 49; White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 551.

²⁵⁰ Ellen G. White to Brethren Who Shall Assemble in General Conference, Letter B-20, August 5, 1888 in *1888 Materials*, 41.

²⁵¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5: 28.

²⁵² Ellen G. White, "What It Means to Hunger and Thirst," (July 12, 1896) in *Manuscript Releases*, 5:342. The association of humility with greatness of mind is also implied in White's statement that "Humility is the constant attendant of true wisdom." White, "Do Not Lord It over Others," (1870) in *Manuscript Releases*, 15:126.

of God.²⁵³ Yet at the same time, a true attitude of humility can only be produced through a living union with Christ because heavenly power alone can extinguish selfish ambition and human pride.²⁵⁴

The ultimate example of this humility is presented by Christ as he humbled himself not only to take on the form of man, but die for sinful man. “He came to our world in humility, in order to show that it is not riches or position or authority or honorable titles that the universe of heaven respects and honors, but those who will follow Christ, making any position of duty honorable by virtue of their character through the power of His grace.”²⁵⁵ Regrettably, the church is handicapped by many who call themselves Christians while failing to follow this example.²⁵⁶ The omission represents a failure to recognize not only the example provided by Christ, but also a failure to remember that humans are created beings, in a state of sin, and utterly dependent upon the grace of God for their very life. An attitude of humility before God on the other hand respectfully acknowledges one’s true state allowing the Spirit of God to lead and guide. If all Christians demonstrated such a teachable heart, there would be no divisions amongst God’s people.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ White, “The Message of 1888; an Appeal for Unity; the Need for the Indwelling Christ,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 15:81.

²⁵⁴ White, “To the Brethren Assembled at General Conference,” November 1888, MS 15, 1888 in *1888 Materials*, 171. Heavenly power is not only responsible for ridding individuals of selfishness and pride but also for creating unity itself.

²⁵⁵ White, “To O. A. Olsen,” May 31, 1896, Letter O-81, 1896, in *1888 Materials*, 1562.

²⁵⁶ White, “The Message of 1888; an Appeal for Unity; the Need for the Indwelling Christ,” 15:81. Based on the linkage White made between humility and union with Christ, we must assume that the lack of humility also implies a failure to maintain union with Christ.

²⁵⁷ White, “Love among the Brethren.”

Humility before God is accompanied by submission and contrition for sin.²⁵⁸ Believers recognizing their dependence on God and his authority, “bow in submission to the discipline and restraining influences of the Spirit of truth,” and submit to the will of God as it is revealed to them.²⁵⁹

The attitude of humility is not to be confined to the relationship with God. White produced two strong arguments which justify the extension our attitude of humility toward our fellow humans. First, she cautioned that all men are fallible, and thus may be wrong in their conclusions.²⁶⁰ In this light, pushing one’s own ideas without listening to others in humility is inappropriate. Second, humility before others is a loving response, and accordingly is an indication of whether one is connected to Christ by a living union.²⁶¹ With this justification, humility towards fellow Christians looms large in White’s discussion of unity of the church. Even in particular instances where individuals claimed variant doctrines, little space in White’s response was devoted to condemnation of these variant doctrines. Often as little as one or two sentences were written on the doctrinal problem, while a much more significant amount of space was devoted to the need for an attitude of humility.²⁶² The doctrinal differences are thus seen as less

²⁵⁸ See for instance, Ellen G. White, “The Meaning of God's Providences,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 27, 1903, 8.

²⁵⁹ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 532.

²⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, “Counsel Together and Lean Wholly on God,” (1897) in *Manuscript Releases*, 21: 337.

²⁶¹ Ellen G. White, “Order in the Church,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 15 1880, 241; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, March 28, 1882, in Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1882), 21-22.

²⁶² See for instance case studies in the following chapter on Ellen White's response to the messages of Jones and Wagner in 1888 and on the Kellogg controversy.

important in their contribution to disunity than the attitudes that have led to the doctrinal differences, and the attitudes displayed in arguing for their doctrinal position.

Humility is demonstrated by a Christ-like life, in particular, by exhibiting the gentleness of Christ in one's life.²⁶³ But the core evidence of humility towards others is found in a willingness to listen to the ideas of others, and weigh their counsel in the light of Scripture and experience rather than pushing personal opinions.²⁶⁴ A readiness to yield to others is actively encouraged unless the issue under discussion is one of "vital importance."²⁶⁵ This is a crucial element in the attainment of unity, since unity is only possible when members of the church adopt a teachable spirit as they listen, and intentionally seek unity and peace.²⁶⁶

Scripture as the Rule of Faith and Practice

Ellen White's third key to attaining church unity is that of ensuring that the Scripture is the rule of faith and practice for the Christian. Despite the fact that some minor details may not be understood by all in the same way, White was confident that the important lessons and commands of Scripture which pertained to daily living were

²⁶³ White, *Christian Experience and Teachings*, 73-74. An understanding of humility in which individuals were claiming that creeping on the floor was evidence of their humility is denounced as misguided. A true understanding of humility would see this action as meaningless. She further adds that humility includes being ready "to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts." This would seem to blur the distinction between humility and love.

²⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, "Do Not Lord It over Others," 126.

²⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, "Unity in the Home and in the Church," (June 24, 1903), in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 19:68-69.

²⁶⁶ White, "Make Straight Paths for your Feet," MS 157, 1897, published in part under the title, "Christian Unity," in *Manuscript Releases*, 11:49. If only one person takes this initiative unity will never be possible. White emphasized that God's people are a unit, and thus, all need to work together for unity.

sufficiently clear that they could be understood by all.²⁶⁷ Consequently, no traditions, customs, or human creeds were necessary to interpret the instruction of Scripture.²⁶⁸

Hence the Bible itself was to be considered the Christian's creed, and the bond of union between members. White connected the ideas as follows:

When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow down to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.²⁶⁹

In choosing Scripture as the guide and authority to Christian life, the individual is necessarily drawn towards both Jesus and his fellow believers producing a harmony that cannot be attained in any other way. At the same time, they are also being brought into a place where truth can be discovered. The perceived tension between truth and unity would thus seem to be at least partly mediated by one's attitude towards the role of Scripture in their life.

As the only rule of faith, and doctrine,²⁷⁰ the Bible is an all sufficient and unerring guide for the believer, providing a means to separate truth from error.²⁷¹ In changing times and changing cultures, it alone is unchanging, providing a foundation for

²⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, "Our Great Treasure-House: XIX. Blessed are They that Do," *Signs of the Times*, October 10, 1906, 3.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. To use these other means to understand Scripture is compared to thinking that "the sun, shining in the heavens at noonday, needs the glimmerings of the torch-lights of earth to increase its glory."

²⁶⁹ White, "A Missionary Appeal," 770. The infallible nature of Scripture is considered central to both its authority for the believers life, as well as for its role in uniting believers.

²⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Value of Bible Study," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 17, 1888, 449; White, "To O. A. Olsen," White declares that "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and practice."

²⁷¹ White, *Great Controversy*, 186.

belief. The significance of this is highlighted by the danger that White saw in moving away from the explicit “thus saith the Lord.” To do so was to risk not only moving away from truth, but total separation from Christ.²⁷² Consequently, the safest course for the Christian is to “demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’” prior to “accepting any doctrine or precept.”²⁷³ In addition, the explicit requirement of “thus saith the Lord” should circumscribe what requirements are put upon believers. No tests or other requirements should be put on members that don’t find their origin in the Scripture.²⁷⁴

The solid platform of the unchanging word of God not only provides an unwavering standard as a basis for understanding truth and error, it also provides a sufficient platform for unity.²⁷⁵ “All who take the word of God as their rule of life,” she suggested, “are brought into close relationship with one another. The Bible is their bond of union.”²⁷⁶ On the other hand, individual impressions and opinions are nothing more than “changeable, uncertain standards,” which cannot provide a platform for unity and open the way for “Satan to control minds.”²⁷⁷ Those who choose to give precedence to

²⁷² Ellen G. White, “The Word of God,” *Bible Training School*, May 1, 1913, 193.

²⁷³ White, *Great Controversy*, 595. One must expect that the same criteria also be applied in cases of discipline, since White also identifies the Bible as the only rule of discipline. On this basis, discipline could only occur when behavior has violated explicit words of Scripture. Any case where interpretation of principle is required would be inadmissible since this is dependent upon individual or group opinions.

²⁷⁴ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, Expanded ed. (1915, repr., Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1943), 309.

²⁷⁵ White, “A Missionary Appeal,” 770.

²⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, “The True Missionary Spirit,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 10, 1883, 434.

²⁷⁷ White, *Great Controversy*, 186. White includes the deductions of science, and the creeds of ecclesiastical councils in the category of opinions. Even the opinions of learned men must be subject to the word of God. Such opinions while often representing a majority view are not only changeable but also discordant. See also page 595. In the same vein, caution should also be taken not to confuse the word of the church with the word of God and thus give higher authority to the pronouncements of the church than

their own ideas and opinions will find that they cannot resolve their difference with those who place ultimate authority in Scripture.²⁷⁸ Thus, the role of Scripture becomes paramount in the search for church unity.

Focus On Clear and Vital Truths

The fourth key to attaining church unity is to avoid non-essential issues,²⁷⁹ and instead concentrate on truths which fall into two main categories: those which are clearly understood and which everyone can agree upon,²⁸⁰ and those which are vital truths.²⁸¹ These subjects include, but are not necessarily limited to: the inspiration and role of Scripture, the fall of man, the incarnation, the plan of salvation, atonement, the perpetuity of the law, Sabbath, creation, the three angel's messages, the non-immortality of the soul,

that of Scripture. While the church is called to follow Scripture, and the church is given authority, its pronouncements do not take the place of Scripture.

²⁷⁸ White, "The True Missionary Spirit," 434. "But their companionship will not be sought or desired by those who do not bow to the Sacred Word as the one unerring guide. They will be at variance both in faith and practice. There can be no harmony between them; as they are unreconcilable. As Seventh-day Adventists we appeal from custom and tradition to the plain, 'Thus saith the Lord;' and for this reason we are not, and cannot be, in harmony with the multitudes who teach and follow the doctrines and commandments of men."

²⁷⁹ See for instance Ellen G. White, "Non-essential Subjects to be Avoided," September 12, 1904, MS 10, 1905 published in part in *Manuscript Releases*, 17:303-304. Non-essential things were not to occupy the mind or the preaching of the word. "We are not to allow our attention to be diverted from the proclamation of the message given us. For years I have been instructed that we are not to give our attention to non-essential questions." Similar ideas are expressed in Ellen G. White, "Ministers should Cooperate and Preach Practical Truths," September 10, 1899, Letter 233, 1899, in *Manuscript Releases*, 21:398-401.

²⁸⁰ For instance White says "Talk the simple truths wherein you can agree." Ellen G. White, "Self-Exaltation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 28, 1887, 401; Elsewhere she stated "If there are differences of opinion, keep not these prominent, but think and dwell upon those subjects upon which all can agree." Ellen G. White, "Fanaticism and Side Issues: Part II," January 14, 1894, MS 82, 1894, in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 3:34.

²⁸¹ Ellen G. White, "The Opposer's Work," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 18, 1892, 642; Ellen G. White, "Light in God's Word," MS 37, 1890, in White, *1888 Materials*, 830, White, *Gospel Workers*, 154.

the cleansing of the sanctuary, baptism, and the Lord's supper.²⁸² These truths are not to be discarded under any circumstances although slight differences in understanding should not unsettle faith nor result in disunity between members.²⁸³

The importance of some of the vital truths or landmarks was to be found in their obvious necessity for salvation, but for others, particularly those which are more specific to Seventh-day Adventists, God's apparent leading in their discovery accords them vital status. The fact that they had been obtained by careful, prayerful study, had been "testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord," and had shaped the identity of the Adventist Church could not be overlooked by those who earnestly sought after truth.²⁸⁴ Christians were thus to recognize that the same Spirit which breathed life into the Scriptures, continued to lead the church in truth.²⁸⁵ To ignore this leading was seen as tearing down what God had established and thus denying God's lordship, putting eternal destiny in peril.²⁸⁶

²⁸² White, "Standing by the Landmarks," MS 13, 1889, in *1888 Materials*, 518; White, *Great Controversy*, 582; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4: 211; White, *Christian Experience and Teachings*, 246; Ellen G. White, "Build on a Sure Foundation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 24, 1908, 7; Ellen G. White, "The Relationship of Christ to the Law Is Not Understood," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 4, 1890, 66. Doctrines which fall into these categories have been gleaned by looking at passages where White uses the phrases or terms "vital truth," "pillars of the faith," "waymarks," and "landmarks" which are used almost interchangeably in reference to doctrines she considered indispensable. The mixture of core Christian doctrines with those more specific to Seventh-day Adventism highlights White's conviction that the Spirit continues to lead the church in truth.

²⁸³ White, "Standing by the Landmarks," 518.

²⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *Letters to Physicians and Ministers*, Special Testimonies. Series B. No 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1904 and 1906), 59; Ellen G. White, "The Work for This Time," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 25, 1905, 17.

²⁸⁵ White, *Letters to Physicians and Ministers*, 59.

²⁸⁶ White, *Early Writings*, 258, 259; Ellen G. White, "The Work for This Time," 17; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:328.

The identification of core or vital truths is helpful given that agreement on all points of doctrine amongst a large group of people is unlikely. Indeed, White noted that she expected that there would be differences of opinion between members due to their varying backgrounds, knowledge and circumstances.²⁸⁷ But these need not get in the way of the unity of the church. Nor should disagreement on side issues and other minor points ever be used as an excuse to cause division in the church.²⁸⁸

To concentrate on the fundamental or central truths of Christianity which all agree upon is to harness the unifying power of truth and its consequences for the mission and movement of the church.²⁸⁹ Additionally, it follows the example of Christ who exercised restraint in the truths he chose to reveal. He “did not reveal many things that were truth” because he wanted to avoid the arguments over minor differences of opinion.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, “Remarks by Ellen White in the Missionary Farewell Service,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 25, 1901, 462.

²⁸⁸ White, “The Importance of Unity; The Holy Spirit a Mystery,” 14:177.

²⁸⁹The advice to concentrate on vital, fundamental, or essential truths is grounded in the dual concerns of disunity and diversion from what is important both for the members of the church and for the mission of the church. Multiple individuals were warned by White that their teaching was wasting time and diverting minds. For instance, she wrote:

“Again and again these non-essential subjects have been agitated, but their discussion has never done a particle of good. We are not to allow our attention to be diverted from the proclamation of the message given us. For years I have been instructed that we are not to give our attention to non-essential questions. There are questions of the highest importance to be considered. “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” the lawyer asked Christ. The Savior answered, “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” Ellen G. White, “Non-Essential Subjects to Be Avoided,” MS 10, 1904,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 17:304. The subjects White criticized for as being non-essential subjects range from such trivial issues such as whether the world is flat, to concerns associated with but peripheral to major truths, such as the nature of the law in Galatians, the exact nature of the Holy Spirit and his relationship to the Father, and the significance of the daily sacrifice.

²⁹⁰ Ellen G. White to E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones,” Letter W-037, February 18, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 24. The context of this statement is one in which Waggoner was actively advocating a view of the law in Galatians which was at variance with the view held by most Adventist leaders at the time.

Focus upon clear vital truths is of utmost importance when engaged in mission activities, especially evangelistic efforts. Issues that reveal marked differences of opinion do little more than confuse and confound hearers and observers.²⁹¹ Thus, White astutely recommended that leaders in public outreach should speak the same things as far as is possible.²⁹²

But the focus on vital truth is not to be limited to interactions with persons external to the church. Pastors were warned to avoid speculative ideas in their sermons and concentrate instead on the main pillars of the faith, particularly those which are associated with the second coming of Jesus.²⁹³ They were to avoid preaching on divisive subjects at the expense of love, and practical godliness; and to devote more time to the life and character of Christ.²⁹⁴ White expressed particular concern about the effect on individual Christians when too much focus is placed on the unclear or contentious subjects portions of Scripture. This misplaced focus puts members at risk of being distracted from topics that are vital to salvation, thus endangering their own spirituality,²⁹⁵ as well as endangering their focus on their mission when “we have not an hour to lose from the essential work to be done.”²⁹⁶

²⁹¹ See for instance, Ellen G. White to the Brethren, Letter B-062, August 3, 1910.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ White, “To E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones,” 24-31.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. Written to E. J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones in 1887 in the wake of teaching variant views on the law and an article in the *Signs* which emphasized these variant views. White warns them not to emphasize doctrinal differences, but rather exercise caution and wisdom even if they are convinced that their views are correct. The damage of dissension is sometimes irreparable.

²⁹⁵ White, “The Importance of Unity; The Holy Spirit is a Mystery,” in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 14:177-178. It is rightly pointed out that the search for new truth can be used by Satan to divert our minds from Christ and to make things even more obscure than they were prior to beginning the study. Addressed to a Mr. Chapman, this passage is a response to his confused ideas about the nature of the Holy Spirit. Chapman suggested that the Spirit of God was Christ, while the Holy Spirit was the angel Gabriel. While White considered he was in error and pointed out what we do know about the Holy Spirit from

It might be argued that concentrating on things upon which we agree precludes the ongoing search for truth. But White is equally clear about the need to search for truth.²⁹⁷ Rather than precluding this search, concentrating on core beliefs highlights the need for care in grounding oneself in the clear words of Scripture during this search.

Appropriate Relationship with the Church

A further key to the ongoing unity of the church is a correct understanding of the Christian's relationship with the church. Two aspects of this relationship are highlighted in White's statements about unity. The first aspect is that of the personal responsibility for the prosperity of the church. A correct understanding of this responsibility is expressed in concern and involvement in the mission of the church, and by prioritizing of the needs of the church over personal desires in an act of self-sacrifice.²⁹⁸ Although personal responsibility for the mission and progress of the church is repeatedly stressed in White's writings, the link between them and church unity is made less frequently.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, White considered that personal responsibility for the church was essential to the demonstration of the unity that God asks of his church.³⁰⁰ By bringing members together, whether by focusing together on a clear mission goal, or simply by uniting them

Scripture, she also suggested that "it is not essential for you to know and be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is."

²⁹⁶ Ellen G. White to the Brethren, Letter B-062, August 3, 1910.

²⁹⁷ White, "The Value of Bible Study," 449-450; Ellen G. White, "Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 8, 1892, 690-691; Ellen G. White, "Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 15, 1892, 706-707.

²⁹⁸ White, "Scattered Churches," 161-162; Ellen G. White, "We Shall Reap as We Sow," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 21, 1894, 529-530.

²⁹⁹ The idea of responsibility for the church's prosperity and mission are most frequently associated with an emphasis on a concern for the lost, willingness to sacrifice for the goals of the organization, testing that one understands their dependence on God, and as a means to spiritual growth.

³⁰⁰ White, "Scattered Churches," 161-162.

in the demonstration of love, they lose focus on the petty issues and arguments that divide them, and are able to exhibit attitudes of love and humility.³⁰¹ Additionally, the process enables them to practice love and harmony which like most habits, is “strengthened by exercise.”³⁰² However, while working together for a common goal provides an excellent catalyst for unity, unless this is combined with the spirituality that comes from being united in Christ, it will stop short of being the unity that Christ desires for his church.³⁰³

The second aspect of the relationship between the believer and the church that White emphasized in relation to unity is that of a willingness to yield to the voice of the church.³⁰⁴ While each believer is encouraged to search diligently for truth, “we are not to follow our own independent judgment, regardless of the opinions and feelings of our brethren.”³⁰⁵ A failure to be sensitive to the opinions of other members and to be willing to yield to them brushes over the sacredness of the relationship between the individual and the church, and ultimately leads to “anarchy and confusion.”³⁰⁶ Personal judgment should not be exalted above that of the church and its leaders. Instead, any new insights

³⁰¹ White, “We Shall Reap as We Sow,” 529. The full background to the reason this leads to unity is not explicitly spelled out here, but the idea seems implicit in her discussion of the way self-sacrifice draws people together. White reminds individuals of their responsibility to the church and its mission, noting that every person has a role in the mission.

³⁰² White, “Talk to Ministers,” October 21, 1888, MS 8a, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 136.

³⁰³ White, “The Work Before Us,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 10, 1903.

³⁰⁴ White, “The Unity of the Church,” *Bible Echo*, September 1, 1888, 129; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:492, 4:17-19.

³⁰⁵ White, *Christian Experience and Teaching*, 203. This endeavor is not for a few select leaders alone. White insists that “every minister should search the Scriptures with the spirit of candor to see if the points presented can be substantiated by the inspired word.” See also 3T 450.

³⁰⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:17, 19. This presumes that the issue is not one of vital importance, in which case holding firm is encouraged. See Ellen G. White, “Unity in the Home and in the Church,” (June 24, 1903) in White, *Manuscript Releases*, 19:68.

should be submitted for review by the church leadership, who are to prayerfully study the insight, considering its merits, and subjecting it to the testimony of the entire canon.³⁰⁷

Such submission should not be an issue for the individual who is fully surrendered to God.³⁰⁸ On the other hand, outright rejection of the judgment of the church was considered presumptuous, and regarded as evidence of pride and conceit in one's life.³⁰⁹

Implicit in the call to submission, are two major concepts. First, recognition that truth is not revealed exclusively to one individual, but rather to many individuals and specifically through God's church.³¹⁰ Second, the church has authority that has been delegated by God.³¹¹ This puts a significant responsibility upon those making decisions who must exercise their authority responsibly and prayerfully.

Gospel Order

One of the earliest keys that Ellen White presented for the attainment and maintenance of unity was that of gospel or biblical order. The concept was posed at a time when there was little more than a very loose congregational organization among

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 3:450.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 4:17.

³⁰⁹ White, "Sanctification,"316.

³¹⁰ White, "The Unity of the Church,"129. "Christ delegates his church the right of decisions, and has made his church a channel of light through it he communicates his purpose and will, and individual will is to be yielded." See previous discussion on the nature and function of the church.

³¹¹ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 122, 164; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:108. While somewhat idealistic, White was not naïve enough to imagine this was without problems. She recognized that leaders are imperfect, suffer from the same issues of pride and ambition that rank and file members do, and that they can make mistakes in their decisions and judgments. Nevertheless, because God gives authority to the church, decisions of the church must be taken seriously, and accorded the appropriate authority. See Ellen White, "Unity of the Church," *Bible Echo* September 1, 1888, 129. In the context of abuse of power, in the 1890s White expressed some concern over acceptance of decisions that were made by the General Conference, and even suggested it was no longer the voice of God. See, for instance Ellen G. White to Men Who Occupy Responsible Positions in the Work, Letter B-4, July 1, 1896, in *1888 Materials*, 1583.

Advent believers that lacked even the most basic church offices. The absence of organization and requirements for teachers and preachers meant that almost anyone could fill these roles, and subsequently, almost anything could be taught. Messengers with various ideas and agendas often contradicted one another, and confusion resulted.

A call to gospel order was thus timely and necessary. While the extent to which this order should be taken was debated, White unhesitatingly stated that order is “indispensably necessary to bring the church into the unity of the faith.”³¹² The situation of the nineteenth-century band of believers was little different than that of the early church. It was subject to false teachers, and therefore needed protection. Unless attention was given to order, Satan would take advantage of the chaos.³¹³ Believers were therefore called to follow the example of Scripture on the subject of order.

Specific recommendations regarding order were initially limited to the care in choosing those who were to teach or preach in the churches, and the appropriate setting apart and commissioning of these individuals by the church.³¹⁴ Although ordination of other church officers would follow, the fact that the other officers of the early church are not discussed in the first specific calls for order, suggests that White was not calling for an exact replication of the New Testament system of order, but rather, an application of the principles of order demonstrated in the New Testament. This is supported by her later discussion of the organization of the church at Jerusalem. While she noted that it was a model for other churches to follow, a paragraph later she noted that “the

³¹² Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1854), 18-19. While many believers could see that some form of organization was necessary, most wanted this to be minimal due to their belief that organized churches were Babylon. Further discussion regarding the progress of organization appears later in this chapter, and discussion of the resistance to organization occurs in the case studies in the following chapter.

³¹³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:210.

³¹⁴ White, *Supplement to the Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, 15-22.

organization was further perfected” in the in the early church, “so that order and harmonious action might be maintained.”³¹⁵ The concept of orderliness was thus more important to unity and harmony than the form of order itself.

Unity and Alliances

To complete this section on White’s views of Christian unity, we turn now to consider her views on alliances. While the first meeting of the Evangelical Alliance occurred prior to White’s emergence as a leader, subsequent attempts at Christian unity have often been associated with alliances between various Christian groups.

White interpreted the biblical injunction to avoid being unequally yoked with unbelievers in a way that resulted in a staunch rejection of any possibility of alliances between the church or church members, and trade unions,³¹⁶ secret societies,³¹⁷ political bodies,³¹⁸ or unbelievers.³¹⁹ But, she was not only concerned about alliances with unbelievers. White employed Charles Beecher’s³²⁰ concerns regarding the goals of the

³¹⁵ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 91.

³¹⁶ Ellen G. White, “Our Duty to Leave Battle Creek,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 14, 1903, 19; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:84.

³¹⁷ Ellen G. White, “Let Both Grow Together,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 10, 1893, 18; White, “Two Classes in the World,” 481; White, “The Work Before Us,” 6.

³¹⁸ Ellen G. White, “Be Ye Separate,” (1899) in *Gospel Workers*, ed. Ellen G. White (1915, repr., Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1943); Ellen G. White, “Special Testimony Relating to Politics,” in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, ed. Ellen G. White Estate (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1923), 475-484.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 482-483; Ellen G. White, “Lessons from the Life of Solomon - No. 20: 'Be Ye Separate',” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 1, 1906, 8. The main concern of White in regard to personal alliances with unbelievers be they political, marriage partnerships, or other alliances, appears to be likelihood of compromise and loss of faith.

³²⁰ Charles Beecher was a prominent Presbyterian and later Congregationalist minister who expressed strong opinions about a variety of matters including abolition, creeds, and councils. He appears to have first caught the attention of Seventh-day Adventists because of his anti-creedal stance. References to one of his anti-creedal sermons occur eleven times in the first fifteen years of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. Several other works from Beecher find acceptance in amongst early Seventh-day

1846 Evangelical Alliance³²¹ as a vehicle to express her own distress about alliances between Protestant groups.³²² She warned that the union of Protestant groups based on doctrinal agreement was to be avoided at all costs, even if the doctrines agreed upon were pivotal doctrines. Her concern was that alliances, while initially voluntary and tolerant of diversity of ideas between member parties, would with time and power transform into very different structures that would use their newly acquired power in a detrimental way. Indeed, alliances were merely the first step towards dictating what people should believe.³²³ When this transformation should occur, the Protestant churches would be no better than the Roman church of the medieval age. Visualizing the predicted results of alliances through a great controversy lens resulted in her further identifying the formation of alliances between Protestant churches as nothing less than the precursor of the apocalyptic image of the beast.³²⁴

Adventists. The statement White uses here was part of Beecher's argument about the errors of councils and was intimately tied to his concern that the final apostasy would develop not from Rome but from inside of Protestantism. See Edward Allen, "The First Step in Apostasy: The Anti-Creedalism of Charles Beecher as a Source of Early Adventist Historiography," (paper presented at Adventism and Adventist History: Sesquicentennial Reflections, Washington, DC, January 6, 2014), 3, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/conferences/ASTR/ASDAH%202014/02.%20Allen,%20Beecher%20and%20Adventist%20sources.pdf>.

³²¹The Evangelical Alliance was formed in August 1846 when a group of approximately 800 delegates from various Protestant denominations met in London with the goal of working together to promote Protestant interests in the face of a perceived resurgence of Roman Catholicism. They envisaged a oneness of action rather than any structural unity. Although a loose doctrinal statement was adopted it was not intended to be prescriptive but rather descriptive of the general beliefs of the Protestants involved with the Alliance.

³²² White, *Great Controversy*, 444-5.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

In view of these sentiments, it is perhaps surprising that Adventists sent representatives to the 1910 World Missionary Conference.³²⁵ Their reports were both enthusiastic and cautious reflecting the same eschatological presupposition as White.³²⁶ White records no response to their report.

It is unclear whether White's condemnation of union with other Protestant groups extended to cooperation with them in service of humanity. What is clear is that the condemnation did not appear to extend to membership or cooperation with lay-led and organized Christian voluntary societies with reform missions that were in harmony with Adventist values. For example, with regard to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, White suggested "We can heartily unite" with them.³²⁷ She further explains that we should "unite with them when by doing so we can aid our fellow men."³²⁸ But while White counseled that doctrinal differences should not get in the way of Adventists working with other Christians to aid those in need or to better mankind,³²⁹ she urged caution in choosing which voluntary group to join. While the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was acceptable, White warned that Adventists should only join with

³²⁵ Keith A. Francis, "Ecumenism or Distinctiveness? Seventh-Day Adventist Attitudes to the World Missionary Conference of 1910," in *Unity and Diversity in the Church: Papers Read at the 1994 Summer Meeting and the 1995 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson, 477-487 (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996), 477-487.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 482-484.

³²⁷ Ellen G. White, "Disseminating Temperance Principles," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 18, 1908, 8. White reflects balance on this point. On one hand, she points out the error of those who think that reforms such as the push for temperance should be rejected because they arose from other churches, while on the other hand she advises care in joining in reform movements lest they give all their time and energy to the project at the expense of the truth and mission of God. See also White, Testimonies for the Church, 6:110-11; and the compilation of quotations in Ellen G. White, *Temperance: As Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949), 217-227.

³²⁸ Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel: Meeting in Chicago," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 10, 1885, 82.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

those who respect God's laws.³³⁰ No moral or spiritual principle was to be sacrificed in the process of working with others.³³¹ Thus, joining with other Christians in voluntary societies was acceptable if the purpose was to benefit others, it had a positive rather than a negative influence on those involved, and principles were not sacrificed to accomplish the goals of the group.³³²

Summary

Christian unity was mandated by Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17, and was to provide a witness to aid the mission of the church. Although Christians are united in Christ by baptism, White does not describe an essential unity of the church, but rather emphasizes personal responsibility in striving for visible Christian unity.

White described Christian unity primarily in terms of unity of purpose and action, which is consistent with her functional approach to ecclesiology. A variety of other terminology is used in relation to unity, including unity of thought, and unity of mind, but the contexts suggest that unity of purpose and action is the primary idea intended in most instances. Unity is not to be confused with uniformity, and failure to agree on all matters should not be used as an excuse to separate from the church.

While the church is called to unity, the reality is that disunity has made the church impotent and caused it to work in opposition to its Lord. The major cause for this

³³⁰ See the compilation of quotations on the topic in Ellen G. White, *Temperance: As Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949), 217-227.

³³¹ Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel: Marshalltown, Iowa," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 21, 1884, 658.

³³² White outlined similar ideas when she was asked about joining literary societies. White suggested that they would be "a great advantage if controlled by religious elements" but as they stood, they could not be recommended. She urged that Christians consider two things in deciding whether or not to join a literary society. First, what is their purpose? Is it in harmony with Christian principles? Second, what are the results of its influence? Did it sacrifice of moral or spiritual values? Were people drawn away from God, and what is important, or drawn toward him? See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:127; Ellen G. White, "Literary Societies," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 4, 1881, 2-3.

disunity is identified as separation from Christ, and secondarily as lack of love for other people, failure to allow the Holy Spirit to do his transforming work, failure to take responsibility for the mission of the church, and failure to believe in the foundations of the faith.

Christian unity can only be attained if individuals remain in a living union with Christ as illustrated by the biblical metaphor of the vine. This is foundational to any attempt at unity. Other factors which are important in attaining unity are an attitude of love and humility towards both God and other people, the use of Scripture as the rule of faith and practice, focusing on clear and vital truths rather than less clear and controversial passages of Scripture, being in right relationship with the church, and the presence of some form of order in the church.

Alliances with other Christian groups were actively discouraged due to White's concern that pressure would be exerted on Adventists to compromise their beliefs. Thus, alliances were not the way forward to achieve Christian unity beyond the Adventist Church. However, White was open to individual Christians joining with other Christians in voluntary societies to work together for the betterment of society.

The Source and Locus of Church Authority

Before moving on to discuss specific case studies involving threats to the unity of the Advent believers, and later the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the lifetime and leadership of Ellen White, this section will undertake a thorough review of her understanding of the source and locus of church authority. This is foundational for evaluation of the case studies since authority structures can both aid and provide obstacles to attaining church unity.

Prior to 1863: Authority in a Developing Movement

The Sabbatarian Advent movement which would later form the Seventh-day Adventist Church arose from amongst the disappointed Millerites who earnestly sought to understand why Jesus had not returned on April 22, 1844 as Miller had predicted.³³³ Amidst the chaos, self-questioning, and prayerful Bible study that followed the Great Disappointment, little thought was given to ideas of church authority and organization. The immediate priority was to find some degree of stability and certainty, while remaining ready for an imminent parousia at a now undefined date. Hence, it was the authority of Scripture and not the authority of the church which was central to their thinking.

Furthermore, attitudes towards church authority and organization precluded any discussion of organization in the immediate aftermath of the Great Disappointment. The prior denominational affiliations of the founders, along with their Millerite experience,³³⁴ had shaped the prevailing attitude that organized churches were corrupt and represented nothing less than Babylon or the antichrist itself.³³⁵ This was reinforced by the observation that organized churches had abused their authority by persecuting those who

³³³ Although an understanding of the seventh day as the Sabbath was not adopted by founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church until 1845 in the case of Joseph Bates, and 1846 in the case of the Whites, I have used the term Sabbatarian Adventists in order to distinguish this group from other Millerite Adventists, in particular, those who adopted a statement of beliefs and congregational principles of association at the Albany Conference of 1845.

³³⁴ Ellen White came from a Methodist Episcopal background, but had along with her family experienced rejection, trial, and loss of fellowship for her belief in the soon coming of Jesus. For White's own description of this, see Ellen Gould White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851), 3-4. James White and Joseph Bates both came from the Christian Connection movement which rejected denominationalism, and embraced a congregational structure. All had experienced or witnessed the persecution of those who choose to believe Miller's assertion that Jesus was coming soon.

³³⁵ The association of the organized churches with Babylon, along with the call to come out of Babylon of Revelation 14:8, was most notably preached by Charles Fitch, J. V. Himes, and George Storrs beginning in 1843. See for instance Charles Fitch, *Come Out of Her My People*, (Rochester, NY: J. V. Himes, 1843) in The Millerite and Early Adventists Microfilm Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Section 2, R5:7, Ellen G. White Research Centre, Avondale College. While not accepted by all Millerites, many of the Sabbatarian Adventists had adopted these ideas on Babylon. Their expression is most visible in the discussion that surrounds the first attempts to formally organize the church.

followed biblical truth rather than endorsing religious freedom and promoting truth. Since believers were called out of Babylon, organization was to be resisted. The extent of resistance to church organization is evident even in the language choice of the pioneers. Most notably, the term church for the believers is absent in their earliest writings. In the two to three years after 1844, terms such as flock, the remnant, or simply the believers were preferred to the term church.³³⁶

In this context it is not surprising to find that Ellen White's earliest writings, like those of her colleagues have an absence of discussion about church organization or authority.³³⁷ Instead we find a tendency toward encouragement, discussion of biblical understandings, and an outline of her visions.³³⁸ This is typified by the pamphlet *A Word to the Little Flock* which was the first joint publication by the Whites and Joseph Bates. It contained three contributions by Ellen White which primarily addressed the doctrinal

³³⁶ By 1850 the concept of church had infiltrated back into the publications of the Sabbatarian Adventists and was used frequently by Ellen White.

³³⁷ Ellen White's earliest publication in 1846 was a description of her first reported vision. It was written in a personal letter to Enoch Jacobs, the editor of a journal called *The Day Star*. White had indicated that the letter was not for publication but Jacobs ignored this request. Deeming the information interesting and informative for his readers, Jacobs published the vision under the title "To the Little Remnant Scattered Aboard." in January 1846. See Arthur L. White. *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1969), 28. The vision was later republished in a variety of forms and was included in the pamphlet *A Word to the Little Flock* which was published at the behest of James White about sixteen months later.

³³⁸The claims to experience visions from God caused an authority problem of its own. Somewhat wary of the fanatical extreme, many refused to accept her visions. On the basis of biographic material from several early Adventists, George Knight noted that scores of individuals claimed to have prophetic gifts in this time. Many so called messages were extreme. Consequently, to claim the prophetic gift was simultaneously to label yourself as a fanatic. See George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 303. Thus after initially encouraging the publication of Ellen White's visions, her husband, James White decided that publication of Ellen's visions, at least in the printed voice of the group, *Review and Herald*, needed to be limited for a time to prevent prejudice towards the Sabbath doctrine. The visions were to be confined to supplements with a more limited circulation, however no extras reporting visions were ever produced. See *Advent Review Extra*, July 21, 1851, 4 for James White's intention. The move allowed the Bible to be upheld as the sole source of truth. As growth of the movement continued, Ellen's writings, and visions once again regularly graced the pages of the movement's publications.

The Advent believers were careful to study the Scripture diligently, and Ellen White's contributions clearly present biblical support for her positions. However, while she supports the majority of her assertions directly from Scripture, the visions were clearly quite influential on her understanding. The visions were considered confirmatory for her, rather than presenting new ideas in this respect. For instance, she had been keeping the seventh-day Sabbath for about six months prior to the vision on the role of the Sabbath described in *A Word to the Little Flock*. See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:75.

issues of eschatology, the cleansing of the Sanctuary, and the seventh-day Sabbath.³³⁹ In addition, she also provided encouragement to stay faithful to the Advent message, a critical and necessary contribution, as thousands of Millerites lost faith in the soon coming of Jesus.

While there had been no intention to initiate any formal church organization, the Sabbatarian Adventists found themselves propelled unconsciously down the pathway to towards a more formal organization. Motivated by an ongoing need for encouragement and unity, along with an urgency to disseminate the truths learned since 1844, loosely organized “Sabbath conferences” began to be held in various parts of the country.³⁴⁰ White was an active participant and supporter of the conferences, despite the financial burden it placed upon her family.³⁴¹ However, the widely scattered group meant that such events were infrequent for the majority of believers, and some more regular means of instruction and encouragement was needed. The solution emerged in one of Ellen White’s visions: a regular publication which could not only deliver truth on a frequent basis, but also disseminate it to many places simultaneously, something that was otherwise impossible for the small band of Adventist leaders.³⁴²

³³⁹ References to the seventh-day Sabbath will be noted simply as Sabbath for the remainder of the dissertation. White’s notes contain support for her positions from both biblical sources and what she claimed she saw in vision. White’s adoption of the seventh-day Sabbath occurred in 1846.

³⁴⁰ Dissemination of ideas was initially confined to the ex-Millerites due to the misconception that the door of probation had closed for Christians in 1844. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), s.v. “Open and Shut Door.”

³⁴¹ Arthur L. White, *The Early Elmshaven Years 1900-1905*, 6 vols., Ellen G. White, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 351.

³⁴² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 125. The instruction was directed to James White who followed her instructions, commencing publication of the *Present Truth* in 1849, and the *Advent Review* in 1850. The focus of each was slightly different, the former concentrating on the critical new discoveries since 1844, and the later, reprinting the articles from the 1840s. The two papers would merge into a single publication in 1850.

The combination of Sabbath conferences and publications led to significant growth in the number of Sabbath keeping Adventists, and in turn, the founding of groups of believers who met together regularly. Thus, even though there was inherent resistance to organization, and discussion of organization was largely absent in publications of this time period, necessity brought the most basic level of organization to the fledgling group of believers. George Knight correctly concludes that “by the early 1850’s the Sabbatarians had largely replicated the organizational structure of the Christian Connection from which James White and Joseph Bates had migrated.”³⁴³

A Call to Gospel Order

The first hint of concern about the topic of organization in the writings of Ellen White is found in two manuscripts dated December 1850. In a vision, her attention was drawn to the order of heaven, and instruction was given that believers were to “move in order” and follow the order in heaven where God teaches by his word and spirit and Christ is the head.³⁴⁴ If biblical order was followed the church would become “as terrible as an army.”³⁴⁵ While this appeal to heavenly order occurs in subsequent writings about organization of the church, in the original context the order in question was that of the foundational authority for faith. Christ’s authority and Scripture were to be upheld rather than unreliable sources of authority such as human wisdom or ecstatic experiences.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure*, Adventist Heritage Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 33.

³⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, “Vision at Paris, Maine,” MS 11, 1850 in *Manuscript Releases*, ed. Ellen G. White Estate (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 13:299-301.

³⁴⁵ White, “Vision at Paris, Maine,” 301. “Terrible” here takes the meaning of able to excite dread or terror, or formidable. It should not be confused with the common understanding of terrible in the twenty-first century.

³⁴⁶ Ecstatic experiences were increasingly being sought after by Advent leaders. White even noted that the vision occurred in a setting where the participants were praying for the Spirit of God to fall upon

The following year was an important year in terms of organizational changes within the Sabbatarian Advent movement, with attention given to both the need for church discipline and the need for church officers among the growing group.³⁴⁷

In late 1853, a further call to gospel order emerged from White's pen. Once again the need for order took its precedent from heavenly order. But this time the focus was organization of the church. There was a new sense of urgency to the call. Satan was trying to destroy the unity of believers through the lack of order, and in many cases was succeeding.³⁴⁸ The lack of any controls over who taught or preached in the groups was harmful and needed correction. Now was the time to act.

Six years later, after reiterating the example of order in heaven, she remarked that "God is well pleased with the efforts of His people in trying to move with system and order in His work on earth. I saw that there should be order in the church of God, and that system is needed in carrying forward successfully the last great message of mercy to the world."³⁴⁹ This time White used the idea of heavenly order to bolster support for a means to fund the travelling preachers. This approach typifies her introduction of new suggestions regarding organization in this time when members were suspicious of any suggestion of organization. Each call for a new form of order is introduced by the

them. Ibid., 299. Arthur L. White, the grandson of Ellen White, came to a similar conclusion about the purpose of this vision in his biography of his grandmother. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862*, Ellen G. White Biography (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 201-203.

³⁴⁷ See subsequent discussion on church discipline. A group of seven were set aside to take care of the needs of the poor using the example of Acts 6. Little is known of their success. However deacons would be regularly appointed and ordained by 1851. The election and ordination of elders would not occur for several more years. James White, "Notes of Travel," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1851, 52.

³⁴⁸ White, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, 15-17.

³⁴⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:191. White was actively promoting the idea of systematic benevolence, that is, the setting aside of a regular amount of money for the support of those sent out to preach and teach the truth.

principle of order as of heavenly origin, before proceeding to any practical discussion of the needs of the church. It was a brilliant strategy that won support for simple changes even from those who regarded organization as an indication of Babylon.

Discipline

Even before any church officers were appointed, the need for discipline amongst believers was evident.³⁵⁰ White noted that unless some individuals changed their course entirely, they should be disfellowshipped.³⁵¹ Her major concern was for the health and mission of the congregations involved, and in the absence of any significant level of organization outside of the local groups, it was important for the groups to take some control of their identity and health. Group members were assumed to have equal authority and interest in the church, and were encouraged to vote on actions that needed to take place, including whether someone should be excluded from their fellowship.³⁵²

Specific behaviors that called for such action included the teaching of ideas that were not in line with the truths agreed upon by the group or which led to confusion and

³⁵⁰ For instance, the recognition of the possible need to disfellowship a believer is noted in White, "A Vision Given in Oswego, New York," (MS 5, 1850) in *Manuscript Releases*, 18:11. Confirmation of the appropriateness of disfellowshipping another believer is found in White, "Vision at Paris, Maine," 300.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² This is implied by the reports from the various conferences which note that all present or nearly all present voted to disfellowship some individuals and this is also stated in some of White's letters. See for instance Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Howland, Letter H-008, November 12, 1851; Ellen G. White, "Experience and Views," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 21, 1851.

division,³⁵³ stubbornness and rebellion,³⁵⁴ and jealousy and evil surmising which negatively affected the whole group.³⁵⁵

The assignment of authority to members however came with a risk: misuse of authority. White was particularly critical of the believers in New York state for their abuse of authority. Rather than using discipline as a last resort, members had become focused in identifying those who didn't believe every little detail of a subject in the same way that they did, or those who showed evidence of the littlest fault.³⁵⁶ She described the churches as "picking at straws" and as having "strained at a gnat" while having "swallowed a camel."³⁵⁷ They had taken things to such an extreme that she suggested that they would even find fault with God.³⁵⁸

A more appropriate use of authority would occur when the following principles were remembered. First, discipline should be used to deal with difficulties in the church. Minor differences should not be magnified when they have no bearing on the health and progress of the church.³⁵⁹ Second, discipline should be used to strengthen the church, and thus, should not distract from God or the mission of the church.³⁶⁰ Third, discipline

³⁵³ Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Howlands, Letter H-008, November 12, 1851. Note that it is the *teaching* of ideas not in line with truths agreed upon by the group, not simply the holding of differing beliefs,

³⁵⁴ White, "A Vision Given in Oswego, New York," 11.

³⁵⁵ White, "Vision in Paris, Maine," 300.

³⁵⁶ White, Testimonies for the Church, 1:144-145.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 144.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 145.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 144.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

should be guided by love and compassion.³⁶¹ Finally, discipline must be done with deep humility, and mindfulness of each person's own humanity and sinfulness.³⁶²

Teachers and Preachers

The choice of someone to fulfill the roles of teacher or preacher during this time period was influenced largely by practicality, willingness, and gifting. With widely scattered groups visited only infrequently by the Whites and Joseph Bates, groups often welcomed other teachers and visiting preachers. But in the absence of any major organization, anybody could take on this role. Consequently, accepting someone who claimed to be a teacher or preacher of truth brought no guarantee of doctrinal understanding, motive, or morality.

While ordination of gospel ministers by laying hands upon them was undertaken in some locations as early as 1851, this imparting of official authority did not entirely solve the problem.³⁶³ In 1853, a secondary measure was undertaken with the issuing of a card of recommendation to some of the ministers. This card was signed by well-known leaders and thus in part guaranteed the orthodoxy of its holders.³⁶⁴

Nevertheless, there continued to be problems with those accorded the authority of teaching and preaching in the church. Ellen White drew attention to five main groups of

³⁶¹ Ibid., 164.

³⁶² Ibid., 166.

³⁶³ F. M. Simper, "To Bro White," July 30, 1851 *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 19, 1851, 15. This is the earliest report of ordination amongst the Sabbatarian Millerites. Interestingly, Brother Morse baptized six people prior to being ordained. Ordination only seems to have taken place after the baptism so that he could preside over the other ordinances. Presumably the ordination was carried out by the lay members of the church since there is no report of other leaders being present.

³⁶⁴ See J. N. Loughborough, *The Church: Its Organization, Order and Discipline* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1907), 101. White's writings present the idea to a wider audience but also show the great care needed before such verification can take place.

individuals who were still bringing confusion and disunity, and even dishonor to the church. These included gospel ministers and teachers who were: (1) Sent out too soon, with the result that their lack of wisdom, experience, and judgment results in reproach on the church; (2) Morally unqualified for the job; (3) Familiar with the theory but lacked spirituality and judgment; (4) Spiritual men who simply didn't have the knowledge or ability to argue for the truth; and (5) Not sent or qualified by God and talked boastfully of self, asserting things they could not prove.³⁶⁵

The solution to these problems involved a more rigorous approach to the appointment of those who taught the gospel whether as a roving gospel minister, or local church teacher. The church was asked to accept responsibility for examining the "lives, qualification, and general course of those who profess to be teachers." They were to look for unmistakable evidence of God's call in their lives.³⁶⁶ Having come to a conclusion, the church was then responsible for acknowledging those whom God had called by laying on of hands, while making known that those who did not pass this examination were not acknowledged teachers of the church.³⁶⁷ Although White was not explicit about who in the church has this responsibility to examine candidates, the context suggests that it was members of the local congregations that had responsibility for this task of dispensing authority.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ White, *Supplement to the Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, 15-17.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ Members were also to take upon themselves the responsibility of financial support of the ministers. White tirelessly called for members to match the self-sacrifice of the gospel workers. They were to anticipate and watch for their needs rather than waiting for a request. See for instance Ellen G. White, "Brethren and Sisters," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 21, 1856, 167. But these reminders were not enough to prevent exhausted underpaid ministers. The introduction of systematic benevolence, a program whereby members were encouraged to make regular small contributions,

In addition to the need for spirituality, knowledge, and call, White listed further qualities that are necessary in the lives of those who take on the role of teaching and preaching truth. Consistent morality and spirituality in conversation and actions were imperative. Yet the individual must also exhibit humility, being willing to confess their mistakes, and live as a servant to all. They must be willing to intercede on behalf of those entrusted to their care, and show respect for the inspired word. They must also show evidence of good judgment including the ability to stay calm in the face of opposition.³⁶⁹ On the other hand, those who exhibited doubts or infidelity, and those who had previous serious mistaken doctrinal tendencies were disqualified for the role.³⁷⁰

Gospel ministers were not allocated to an individual church, but rather took the role of travelling ministers whose main role was one of mission. While they also provided encouragement and truth by preaching to various congregations, White advised the churches not to demand much time from them so that they could devote the majority of their time and energies to entering new areas and reaching new people.³⁷¹

The nature of the authority of the teachers and ministers approved by the church is given limited attention in this time frame. However, it is clear that their authority, while delegated from the church, is also dependent on the way they live. They were called to realize that they were acting “in Christ’s stead” and therefore must set an example with their lives. Their authority would be much lessened by inappropriate

streamlined this process and improved the lot of some of the ministers. But it also highlighted the need for more organization to administer the funds as the bulk of the work fell on James White.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 19-21.

³⁷⁰ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:378; White, *Supplement to the Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, 19-21.

³⁷¹ White, *Supplement to the Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, 22.

behavior and fraternization.³⁷² Furthermore, they were to be held accountable for the authority they had been accorded. They were accountable both for those they led astray and those who they failed to appropriately reprove.³⁷³

More Extensive Organization

The push for further organization was spearheaded by Ellen's husband, James White who was motivated by practical and legal concerns.³⁷⁴ His views resulted in vigorous discussion in the pages of the *Review and Herald*, as believers grappled with the tension between necessity and their strongly held belief that organized churches were Babylon. Ellen White for the most part remained out of this battle. However, she was not completely silent. She had previously noted the necessity of order for unity of the church, but in 1860 she noted the inverse relationship was also important. There must also be "union in maintaining order."³⁷⁵ The arguments over the topic of organization could just as easily result in division and weakness of the church as the lack of order itself.³⁷⁶ Discussion over organization should not be allowed to rip the people of God apart.

³⁷² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:380-381.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1:378, 1:213-214.

³⁷⁴ For instance, White considered legal incorporation necessary to properly insure the printing presses and publishing work. This in itself required organization and an organizational name. See James White, "Making Us a Name," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 26, 1860, 180.

³⁷⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:210.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 211. While some of disunity would happen incidentally as a result of the discussion, Brother B's anti-organizational stance she considered was deliberately designed to scatter and mislead.

Nevertheless, White continued to firmly support the call for organization. The act of organizing in itself was not to be confused with the apostate Babylon.³⁷⁷ Not only was order a heavenly mandate, it was the responsibility of the church to exercise stewardship by doing everything in their power to safeguard their reputation and their property, and this demanded attention to organization.³⁷⁸ Her firm calls for organization however, were not accompanied by any specific instructions on the precise form that organization should take.³⁷⁹ This aspect was left to leaders.

The years 1860 through 1863 saw those who supported organization moving ahead with changes in spite of the reservations and frank opposition of some believers. The adoption of the name Seventh-day Adventist occurred in 1860 to the consternation of many who considered adoption of any name synonymous with becoming Babylon, and to the frustration of others who felt that no name should be taken other than that of “Church of God.”³⁸⁰ Ellen White made no comment on the name until after its adoption, but when she did so she heartily approved it, observing that it “carries the true features of our faith

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:270 In an ironic twist, White uses the linguistic meaning of the term Babel to label those resisting organization as living in Babylon.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:210-211. While White uses a theological argument to bolster the pragmatic concerns of her husband, there seems to be no doubt that the practical concerns were not far from her thinking. This statement for example shows awareness of the acute difficulties that might be experienced should property remain in private hands and legal incorporation not be undertaken. In addition, the lack of organization left James and herself shouldering most of the responsibilities for the growing group. The failing health of her husband necessitated a lightening of the load by sharing the responsibility.

³⁷⁹ Andrew Mustard similarly concluded that “at no time did Ellen White express herself before 1863 on the precise form of organization to be adopted.” Andrew Gordon Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization: Historical Development, 1844-1881*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 12 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 129.

³⁸⁰ James White and Brother Phelps, “Organization,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 1, 1861, 140-141. The article is a divided communication from Brother Phelps who favored the name Church of God, with inserted responses from James White.

in front, and will convict the inquiring mind.”³⁸¹ As a legal entity, further steps towards organization were possible. Initially local churches were simply encouraged to organize so that they could legally own property, but in 1861 organization was extended to the formation of the first district conferences which would oversee the work of the local churches and deal with resources management.

Once organization began, further changes came in quick succession, resulting in a three tier system of church authority by 1863. Consisting of local churches, district or state conferences, and a General Conference, each had a defined area of authority. While local church communities retained the authority to make many decisions related to their own welfare, including the control of membership and administration of discipline, the establishment of conferences of churches moved authority for other tasks to a new level.³⁸² The approval of pastors, the allocation of teachers and pastors, and the coordination of mission became the responsibility of the local conference which consisted of a full-time president and secretary, and delegates from the local churches.³⁸³ But while enabling a more coordinated approach to mission, it was quickly evident that there was still a need for a more centralized administrative body. The adoption of a further level of organization, that of a General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was

³⁸¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:223. The adoption of a name did more than allow for legal holding of property by the group. It cemented unity by providing a united identity that encompassed the doctrines that were considered important. Unified identity was almost as crucial for the group as the legal reasons that prompted the adoption of the name. Several small groups of believers who had already taken steps to incorporate their small bands of believers had done so with a variety of names. This had resulted in a reduced cohesion between groups.

³⁸² The limits of authority are more clearly expressed in the proposal for change found in J. H. Waggoner et al, “Conference Address,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 11, 1861, 21-22, than in the reports and proceedings of the organization of the Michigan Conference which acted on this recommendation in October 1861. The change also brought an added level of organization to the local church as, up until this time, local believers did not have clear guidelines on record keeping.

³⁸³ Ibid. See also “Proceedings of the Battle Creek Conference,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 8, 1861, 148-149.

thus undertaken in an attempt to produce a more equitable distribution of workers and to promote unity across the state conferences.³⁸⁴ The result was an organizational structure which now largely resembled the structure of the Methodist tradition from which Ellen White had come.

Between 1863 and 1888: Early Authority Structure

Authority of the Church

The formal organization of the church spurred discussion of the authority and role of the church. This was not merely a human structure to be opposed and ignored at will. Rather, the church was “Christ’s organized body on earth” possessing authority which God had delegated to it for the accomplishment of its God ordained task.³⁸⁵ This authority extended to both self-government and discipline provided that biblical principles were adhered to in process and decision making.

The church was the channel that God had chosen not only to provide knowledge of salvation, but also knowledge of himself and his will.³⁸⁶ This along with the central role of God in the establishment, role and ongoing function of the church meant that the church and its judgments are to be considered authoritative by individuals.

Consequently, White suggested that there is no place for active opposition to the opinions and judgments of the church. They do little more than divide and confuse the church.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Some of the expectations of the new General Conference are hinted at by James White, “General Conference,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 28, 1863, 172. The report from the first General Conference session contains the new constitution which elaborates on the role of the new body. See John Byington and Uriah Smith, “Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 26, 1863, 204-206.

³⁸⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:428-433.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:433.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:429.

Role of the General Conference and its President

The logical implications of this stance on church authority for the relationship between the members and the administrative structure were spelled out explicitly in 1875. Writing in response to an article on leadership written by G. I. Butler, Ellen White stated: “But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”³⁸⁸ This seemingly extraordinary statement can only be understood in the context of White’s conviction that God chooses to reveal his will through the church rather than through individuals. Thus, we also find that contrary to Butler’s opinion, the authority of the General Conference did not reside in the president or visible head of the General Conference, but rather in the judgments of the entire representative body.³⁸⁹ The elevation of one leader was contrary to biblical leadership principles, and brought with it inherent problems. A team of individuals would prevent the church from the danger of allowing the church and its work to be molded by a single mind.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 3:492. In the context of the 1888 controversy and an increasing abuse of power, White articulated the exact opposite sentiment. She wrote “The voice from Battle Creek, which has been regarded as authority in telling how the work should be done, is no longer the voice of God.” Ellen G. White to Men Who Occupy Responsible Positions in the Work, Letter B-4, July 1, 1896, in *1888 Materials*. White explained her change of position in White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9:260-261. She was particularly concerned about the lack of adequate representation and abuse of power which lead to unwise decisions. However, she was willing to attribute full authority to decisions of a General Conference properly convened with adequate representation from the world church. For a more thorough examination of White’s changing views on the authority of the General Conference see Barry Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), 91-100.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 3:492, 500-501. The combination of infrequent representative meetings and the somewhat autocratic styles of both James White and G. I. Butler who between them held the role of General Conference president for twenty-one out of the first twenty-five years of organization, made this testimony particularly important. White suggested that she and her husband are partly to blame for the misconception of the importance of the president, by consenting to take on responsibilities that should have been shared.

White readily admitted that the individuals who compose the leadership teams that administer the church are flawed human beings, who may be mistaken in their decisions, but this does not lessen or negate the authority that has been given to the church.³⁹⁰ For God has ordained the church as his representative and continues to guide and speak through it.³⁹¹

Response to Ongoing Criticism of Organization

Although the introduction of formal organization to the church resulted in church growth, criticism of the move was not extinguished by this favorable outcome.³⁹² In spite of this ongoing opposition, White did not waver from her position that order was an absolute necessity for the church. She continued to invoke the idea of heavenly order to substantiate her position, but the discussion took a new turn from her earlier writings. Rather than simply pointing to the heavenly order as an example for the church, the necessity of order was emphasized because of its impact upon the relationship between man and angels in accomplishing the mission of the church. A lack of order and unity within the church would seriously cripple the progress of the church since angels “are not authorized to bless confusion, distraction and disorganization.”³⁹³ Order was thus essential for the ongoing co-operation between the angels of God and the church.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 4:17.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 4:393.

³⁹² Organization was one of the contributing factors to the first schism the newly formed church faced. The president and secretary of the Iowa state conference, B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff, were critical of any attempts to significantly organize the church. Their views resulted in their leaving the denomination to form what has become known as the Marion Party which, ironically, would develop into an organized denomination itself. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, s.v. Marion Party.

³⁹³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:649.

The need for order was further emphasized by introducing the metaphor of war. The church as an army is engaged in the battle for souls. Working as a unit on the battle field does not happen by chance. It is the result of intense preparation, precise order, and consistent discipline. Since the stakes of Christian warfare are much higher than that of earthly battles, the church must recognize its duty in preparing itself for battle by means of careful discipline and attention to order.³⁹⁴ Ministers, as officers in the army, are called to “love order” and “discipline themselves” in preparation for their role in leading the church.³⁹⁵

Gospel Ministers

In spite of the extra levels of authority that were now in place, a significant portion of White’s writing continued to be directed at the ministers and their use of their authority.³⁹⁶ Ministers were to understand that they were Christ’s ambassadors and specifically his mouth-piece.³⁹⁷ Every aspect of their life was to reflect their consciousness of the responsibility and authority that had been given them.³⁹⁸ For responsibility is always accompanied by accountability, and the responsibility accorded ministers is no exception. The responsibility of being God’s ambassador and mouthpiece implied the need to be accountable for the words spoken, the truth presented, actions

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ White’s counsel should be read in the context of the fact that Adventist ministers were expected to be travelling rather than connected with a single church during this time frame.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 4:393; Ellen G. White, “An Appeal to the Ministers,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 8, 1878, 49. I have endeavored to use gender neutral language in this section as female pastors are now finding a place in the Seventh-day Adventist church. However, White generally uses the masculine pronoun in her discussion of the minister’s character and role.

³⁹⁸ White, “An Appeal to Ministers,” 49.

towards others, and influence exerted.³⁹⁹ To ensure that ministers represented God accurately in all these areas, they must remain connected to Christ. In this way God can work both in them and through them.⁴⁰⁰

No matter how tempting it might be, ministers were not to rely on the counsel and experience of other leaders without spending time seeking God's counsel themselves.⁴⁰¹ They must have their own personal experience with God. Ministers could not lead people to someone with whom they themselves were not acquainted.⁴⁰²

Reflecting on the state of those who were currently serving as ministers, White lamented the fact that the ranks were "corrupted by unsanctified ministers."⁴⁰³ In her mind the failure to have experienced the transformation of truth in their own lives meant that they lacked one of the most basic qualifications for ministry.⁴⁰⁴ This deficiency could only result in an increasingly powerless ministry since it meant disconnection with the source of power and authority itself. Ministers were therefore exhorted to recognize not only their role as representatives of Christ, but also their absolute dependence upon God.⁴⁰⁵ They were to nurture the relationship, spending time prayerfully searching Scriptures, so that they might know and understand God's will.⁴⁰⁶

³⁹⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:447.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 2:118.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 4:437.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 4:442.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 4:527.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 4:443.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 4:407, 443.

While the minister had significant authority and responsibility, they were not solely responsible for the welfare and mission of the church. The individual efforts of the members were also important to the prosperity of the church, and the minister was exhorted to communicate this crucial message.⁴⁰⁷ Nor was the spreading of the message of salvation confined to the minister. This too was to be shared with the members who had experienced the transforming power of God's love.⁴⁰⁸

The title of "God's mouthpiece" or "God's representative" might bring with it the temptation to elevate oneself above the rest of the membership. But the authority accorded ministers was not to put them in the position of lording it over the church.⁴⁰⁹ Nor were they to harbor selfish ambition. Rather, the attitude of the individual accorded the privilege of authority was to be one of humility, self-denial, and selfless interest.⁴¹⁰ No metaphor captured these ideas more completely than the biblically grounded metaphor of shepherd. A shepherd's first thought was not for themselves, but for the interests of their flock as they guided and protected them.⁴¹¹ In order to fulfill this role the shepherd was to cultivate tenderness, courtesy, and compassion.

Local Church Offices

White wrote little about the roles and authority of local church officers in this time period, but her counsels need to be understood in the context of elders being the primary leader in the local church. Pastors were expected to travel and spread the gospel

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:120.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 3:51.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 3:229.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 3:356, 556.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 3:229.

message to those who had not heard it rather than being absorbed with the problems of those who had already accepted the truth. Hence elders were seen to have significant local authority.

When White did discuss roles and authority in the local church she tended to include all local church officers and leaders in her counsel.⁴¹² The tendency to lump leaders together highlighted an underlying conviction that leadership regardless of its scope had core features, character requirements and responsibilities. The similarity of scriptural lists for elders and deacons, along with practical experience undergirded this conviction, and we find White combining the key qualifications of these biblical lists into a single list of biblical qualifications which she applies to ministers, elders, and deacons.⁴¹³

Together church officers are charged with the maintenance of the prosperity and spiritual interests of the church.⁴¹⁴ However, their authority is only modest, and leaders must not overstep their bounds. This is particularly true in the case of church discipline where the authority of local church officers does not extend to actions such as cutting off members from the church based on their own judgment. They are advised rather to consult with their conference presidents in such matters, and reminded that they should prayerfully and humbly deal with those charged to their care.⁴¹⁵

The same concern for local leaders is expressed as for the minister and those in higher office, that is, that they might be trying to minister out of their own wisdom rather

⁴¹² White understood the elder as the overseer of the local congregation.

⁴¹³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:692. The similarity likely also reflects the need for officers to work together as a team.

⁴¹⁴ White, Manuscript 1, 1878, in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:113; White, Manuscript 20, 1893, in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 5:448.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

than from wisdom that comes from being connected to Christ.⁴¹⁶ It is only as they remain connected to Christ that they will be able to adequately deal with the spiritual interests of the church, setting the right example with regards to character and obedience.⁴¹⁷

After 1888: Reevaluating and Dispersing Authority

The General Conference and its President

The General Conference was to oversee the work of the church in all its spheres and was seen as a means of connecting the various ministries of the church, as well as the various geographic areas in which its members were dispersed.⁴¹⁸ White described its prescribed role as one which shaped and planned the work of the church as a whole, and which was to lead the church “in straight lines, making clean, thorough records and straight laws for the methods and plans” which were to be enacted as appropriate in the various conferences.⁴¹⁹

As the church grew in size a number of problems with the structure, role and processes of the General Conference became visible. White was particularly concerned that a small number of individuals ended up making the majority of crucial decisions that affected that church. The tendency of autocratic General Conference presidents to make decisions without consultation further attenuated the issue. White was adamant that the authority that God had delegated to his church was not to be bound up in a small number

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:238, 241.

⁴¹⁸ Ellen G. White to the Brethren Assembling in General Conference, Letter B-002, October 21, 1894, in *1888 Materials*, 1286.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

of men.⁴²⁰ To sanction centralized decision making meant that the church was flirting with danger. Dangers were manifold and included distraction from looking to Christ the real source of answers,⁴²¹ which in turn would result in a lack of safe direction for the church,⁴²² the temptation to accumulate and abuse power,⁴²³ the tendency to overburden and stress those in leadership positions,⁴²⁴ and the production of incompetent spiritual cripples at lower levels of leadership.⁴²⁵ The solution was to disperse decision making and authority, and to ensure that all plans were put before groups of leaders representing all components of the church.⁴²⁶ While decisions on one or two minds were to be avoided, decisions coming from "a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field" was to be respected, and seen as having authority for the church.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁰ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:260-261.

⁴²¹ Ellen G. White, "I Will Have Mercy and Not Sacrifice," MS 40, 1899, published, in part, under the title "Receive Counsel from God," in *Manuscript Releases*, 9:159.

⁴²² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:260.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 8:216-217.

⁴²⁴ Ellen G. White, "Issues at the General Conference of 1889," November 4, 1889, MS 6, 1889, in *1888 Materials*, 472-473.

⁴²⁵ Ellen G. White, "Receive Counsel from God," in *Manuscript Releases*, 9:159.

⁴²⁶ Ellen G. White, "Kingly Power: Stenographic Report of an Address of Ellen G. White on April 1 at the General Conference of 1901" in *Spalding and Magan Collection*, ed. Ellen G. White (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn, 1985), 172. See also, Ellen G. White to Mrs. G. A. Irwin, Letter 137, May 18, 1905, published in part, with other excerpts under the title of "The Election of the General Conference President," in *Manuscript Releases* 2:199. In this letter she suggested that the work of the presidency should be divided between at least three men.

⁴²⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:260-261.

The Need for Restructuring

Concern for the increasing centralization of decision making, along with the need for more efficiency in carrying out the church's mission, led Ellen White to call for a review of the organizational structure of the church in 1901.⁴²⁸ She did not specify any particular structural form for the change but made it clear that changes were imperative. The General Conference session responded by agreeing to a number of changes which would reduce the centralization of decision making. These changes included an additional layer of administration which would locate decision making within specific geographical areas, and the enlarging of the General Conference Executive Committee so the burden of central decision making was made by a larger group of individuals.⁴²⁹

Authority and Leaders at All Levels

While structural changes dispersed the decision making of the church, White continued to be apprehensive about the increasing abuse of authority. The fact that leaders had been delegated authority by the church members did not mean that they could use the power in some arbitrary way to make themselves seem important.⁴³⁰ She repeatedly warned that there was to be no "kingly power" in the church.⁴³¹ Nor should leaders expect to control every decision that needed to be made,⁴³² expect to dictate or

⁴²⁸ Ellen G. White, "A Call to Reconsecrate, Reorganize, and Advance," April 1, 1901, MS 43, 1901, in *Manuscript Releases*, 13:192-207.

⁴²⁹ Full details of the restructuring can be found in "General Summary of Organizations and Recommendations as adopted by the General Conference, and the General Conference Committee, April 2 to May 1, 1901," *General Conference Quarterly Bulletin*, 1901, 499-506.

⁴³⁰ Ellen G. White, "Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity," (Manuscript 29, 1907) in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, Ellen G. White (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1923), 490-492.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*; Ellen G. White, "A Call to Reconsecrate, Reorganize, and Advance," April 1, 1901, MS 43, 1901, in *Manuscript Releases*, 13:192, 197; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:232-3.

⁴³² White, "Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity," 491, 493.

control the behavior of others,⁴³³ or consider themselves and their opinions infallible.⁴³⁴ The authority of leaders was not about controlling or dominating.⁴³⁵ God had not called them to rule over others, but to work in consultation and harmony with other members of the church. Therefore, White advised that "Men whom the Lord calls to important positions in His work . . . are not to seek to embrace too much authority for God has not called them to a work of ruling, but to plan and counsel with their fellow believers."⁴³⁶

In addition to a living connection with God, humility was one of the most desirable characteristics of good leaders. Humility proved that leaders recognized both their dependence upon God and their tendency as humans to err.⁴³⁷ It also showed that they remembered that they were subject to the authority of God, and individually accountable to him.⁴³⁸ Those who failed to understand this vital fact and who demonstrated self-importance were not to be chosen for responsible positions.⁴³⁹

While leaders were to counsel with others in decision making, they were not rely on human wisdom rather than seeking wisdom from God. Reliance upon human wisdom not only compromised the spiritual experience of the leaders who lost out on the

⁴³³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:282-283.

⁴³⁴Ellen G. White, "Lessons from the Vine," February 7, 1890, MS 56, 1890, published, under the title "Remarks at Bible School," in *1888 Materials*, 562. For more personally directed concerns about this feeling, see White's letter to General Conference president Butler, Ellen G. White, to G. I. Butler, October 14, 1888.

⁴³⁵ White, "Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity," 492.

⁴³⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:279.

⁴³⁷ White, "Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity," 496.

⁴³⁸ Ellen G. White, "Judge Not," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 14, 1907, 8; White, "Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods before Me," (Manuscript 15, 1895) in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 360.

⁴³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1892), 234. The instruction comes from a sermon at the 1883 General Conference.

opportunity for "growth in grace and knowledge of Christ," but also compromised the spiritual experience of the members who are taught by example to reduce their dependence upon God.⁴⁴⁰ It further promoted the exultation of self, and in doing so directed focus away from God.

Union and Local Conferences

The union conferences introduced in 1901 represented an added administrative level between the local conference and the General Conference. Their role was to make decisions affecting multiple conferences in one area and to deal with complex decisions in which local conferences sought counsel. In essence, it decentralized decision making, moving it away from the overloaded General Conference officers. White considered the introduction of union conferences as necessary, and described it as "God's arrangement" to deal with the administrative crises of the time.⁴⁴¹ White was especially pleased that union conferences reduced the administration load upon the leaders of the General Conference and prevented the accumulation of significant amounts of power by any one individual.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1892), 234. The instruction comes from a sermon at the 1883 General Conference; Ellen G. White, to G. I. Butler, May 29, 1907; Ellen G. White, to W. C. White, March 15, 1897 in *Manuscript Releases*, 21:186.

⁴⁴¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:232; White, *Remarks During Conference Proceedings in the Third Meeting on April 4*, *General Conference Bulletin*, April 5, 1901, 69-70; White, "No Kingly Authority to Be Exercised," (Manuscript 26, 1903)," in *Manuscript Releases*, 14: 279.

⁴⁴² Ellen G. White, Excerpt from "Regarding the Word of the General Conference." (MS 26, April 1903) in *Manuscript Releases*, 4:292; Ellen G. White, Excerpt from "General Conference Men Unduly Burdened," (MS 68, June 30, 1904) in *Manuscript Releases*, 2:199; Ellen G. White, *Spalding and Magan Collection of Unpublished Testimonies of Ellen G. White*, (Payson, AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn Books, 1916), 368. White also discussed other benefits of decentralization including the reduction in waiting time for decision making in distant and isolated areas. See for instance Ellen G. White, "The Southern California Conference," *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 26, 1901, 1

While spreading out the decision making and allowing the church in diverse geographical areas to make many of their own decisions, union and local conferences were not given total autonomy. Leaders must recognize that they were a part of something bigger than themselves, and thus continue to consult with their brethren especially when the issues affected the entire region or the entire church.⁴⁴³ Specific issues that White considered should be undertaken at the union conference level included the provision and management of training schools and medical institutions.⁴⁴⁴

The local or state conference had obligations to the local churches and ministers under its care. Their role was to deal with the day to day issues that arose in their territory. They were to avoid sending matters to the administrative levels above them unless the issue affected the wider church, or could not be solved after prayer and seeking out God's solution for themselves.⁴⁴⁵ To simply send minor issues to the other administrative levels without thought was irresponsible, and meant the president of the local conference failed to learn lessons of aptitude and judgment that should be learned.⁴⁴⁶ As well as learning themselves, the president and his officers were to be

⁴⁴³ Ellen G. White, "The Southern California Conference," *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 26, 1901, 1. The context of this discussion is in relation to the division of the California into two conferences, and the Southern California wanting to tackle the building of a new sanitarium. The principles expressed are more widely applicable and are consistent with her understanding of the church working harmoniously as one.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Ellen G. White, "The Work of Our Training Schools," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 15, 1903, 8; Ellen G. White, "The Intermediate School," *Christian Education*, September 1, 1909, 24. Unions were to consider training schools so that students did not have to go to Battle Creek and could obtain an education close to their homes.

⁴⁴⁵ White, *Gospel Workers*, 415; Ellen G. White, "Conference Officials," MS 17, 1896, in *Testimonies to Ministers*, 322. White was critical of the number of minor issues that were sent to the General Conference when they should have been dealt with at the local conference level. She reminded presidents that the same God was available to them as to union conference leaders and General Conference leaders.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

involved in educating the ministers concerning how to settle "difficulties and dissensions" in the local churches.⁴⁴⁷ The president was also to work with the elders and deacons of local churches to ensure that a faithful tithe was paid.⁴⁴⁸

The authority of the local and union conferences came from their constituency. The local conference officers were elected by the local churches and the union conference officers were chosen by delegates from the state conferences.⁴⁴⁹ An individual was disqualified from the position of conference president if they failed to recognize their need to depend on God, if they thought that the position of president somehow resulted in superior wisdom,⁴⁵⁰ if they wanted to use the position to get others to conform to their own ideas,⁴⁵¹ or if they planned to use it to "dictate and control the consciences of others."⁴⁵²

Gospel Ministers

Ministers were first and foremost servant leaders who were to study the life and

⁴⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, "Conference Responsibilities," Sermon, 1883, in *Gospel Workers*, 419. The ministers were then to use this information to educate the officers of the local church how to deal with disagreements amongst God's people.

⁴⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, "A Faithful Tithe," September 10, 1896, in Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers, No. 7* (1897), 20. Review and Herald Electronic Library / Libronix Digital Library System. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2002). White was concerned that many presidents were neglecting this task.

⁴⁴⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:236.

⁴⁵⁰ Ellen G. White to E. R. Palmer, Letter B-010, January 8, 1903.

⁴⁵¹ Ellen G. White to G. W. Reaser, November 11, 1907, in White, *Christian Leadership* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), 24.

⁴⁵² Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and W. C. White, December 30, 1907, in Ellen G. White, *Christian Leadership* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1923), 34.

teaching of Christ and integrate them into their own lives and ministry.⁴⁵³ Like leaders at all levels of the church, they were called to service. They were not to act as some dominating authority.⁴⁵⁴

Ministers had initially been evangelists and church planters, focusing on evangelizing those outside the church rather than nurturing those inside the church. In this latter period of White's ministry pastors were becoming increasingly settled into local church roles.⁴⁵⁵ But White warned that too much time was being devoted to the local church at the expense of those who still needed to hear the gospel.⁴⁵⁶ Ministers were "not to hover over the churches" and members were not to expect settled pastors.⁴⁵⁷ To do so not only hindered mission, but led to weak churches where members failed to use their God given gifts for the church.⁴⁵⁸

But this is not to say that White did not believe the pastor had a role in the local church. Ministers were still overseers and guides. They were to visit and strengthen the

⁴⁵³ Ellen G. White, "Preach the Word," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 24, 1888, 252-253; Ellen G. White, "Christ's Manner of Teaching," (Manuscript 104, 1898) in *Manuscript Releases*, 20: 247.

⁴⁵⁴ White, *Desire of Ages*, 550.

⁴⁵⁵ Early in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, ministers were not attached to individual churches but rather were itinerant, focusing on those outside of the church. Indications of change appear in 1883 when a suggestion was made for a church manual that included the approval of some of settled pastors. While the idea of a church manual was rejected at that time, the idea of settled pastors seemed to have become increasingly popular during the 1880's. At least in some areas there was a failure of the evangelist church planter model, which likely contributed to the popularity of settled pastors. See for instance the analysis in Denis Fortin, *Adventism in Quebec: The Dynamics of Rural Church Growth, 1830-1910* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2004), 186-187.

⁴⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, "Honesty toward Men and toward God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 1 Supplement, 1896, 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, "A Call to Service," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, August 1, 1902; Ellen G. White, "Individual Responsibility in the Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 22, 1889, 657.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:18,19.

churches,⁴⁵⁹ to teach local church officers how to deal with arguments and divisions,⁴⁶⁰ and to work with the erring to urge repentance before any disciplinary action was considered.⁴⁶¹

Local Church Offices

Since White expected that much of the focus of ministers would be outside the church, she assumed that the local church offices of elder and deacon continued to play a significant role in the oversight and running of the local church.

Elders and deacons were to be well balanced, wise, and have an active and growing relationship with God.⁴⁶² Together they were to exercise their talents in ways that would help the church grow. She outlined four specific roles for these leaders. First, they were to engage members in the mission of the church. White specifically advised elders and deacons to devise a plan in which every member of the church had a role in the mission of the church.⁴⁶³ Further, she urged their involvement with ministers at camp meetings to train members for their roles in mission. In this way churches could grow even though they only saw a minister occasionally.⁴⁶⁴ The second specific role White envisaged for elders and deacons was for the encouragement and spiritual growth of the local church members. The weak and wayward members were especially to be the focus

⁴⁵⁹ White, "Preach the Word," 252-253.

⁴⁶⁰ White, "Conference Responsibilities," 419.

⁴⁶¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:263.

⁴⁶² Ellen G. White, "The Church Must Be Quickened," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 17, 1893, 34.

⁴⁶³ Ellen G. White, "Ye are Laborers Together with God." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 2, 1890, 529; Ellen G. White, "God's Means for Diffusing Light." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 24, 1891, 177.

⁴⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, "The Church Must Be Quickened," 34.

of the elders and deacons who were to direct them to Jesus by both word and action.⁴⁶⁵ Elders were to set an example to the congregation in confession of their mistakes.⁴⁶⁶ The third specific role that White emphasized for elders and deacons was to deal with dissension and division so that the minister would not have to leave his work of mission to deal with the problem.⁴⁶⁷ And finally, they were to repeatedly highlight the theme of stewardship and work with the conference president to ensure that the church members paid a "faithful tithe."⁴⁶⁸

Authority and the Members of the Local Church

Every member of the church was seen to have a degree of authority which was specifically expressed in the choosing and appointment of officers of the church and in the disciplinary actions of the church. White outlined a democratic process for choosing officers in which the local church members elected the officers for the local or state conferences, then the delegates elected by these members choose the officers at the administrative body above them. She believed that "By this arrangement every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities in the General Conference."⁴⁶⁹

The duty of preserving order and discipline was also delegated to the church as a whole. In particular, they were responsible for the exclusion from fellowship of those

⁴⁶⁵ White, "The Holy Spirit Essential to Success," *Sabbath School Worker*, July 1, 1893, 115.

⁴⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, "The Duty of Confession." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 16, 1890, 769.

⁴⁶⁷ White, "Conference Responsibilities," 419.

⁴⁶⁸ White, "A Faithful Tithe." 20. In this role they were to be supervised by the conference presidents.

⁴⁶⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:236–237.

who "by their un-Christlike conduct would bring dishonor to the truth."⁴⁷⁰ This authority was not to be taken lightly. Great care was to be taken to ensure that the individuals had been given the opportunity to confess and repent prior to any disciplinary action. When this failed, ministers "were to submit the whole matter to the church, that there may be unity in the decision made."⁴⁷¹ Even in the event that discipline was necessary, every effort was to be made to bring the person to restoration and health. Thus, authority was not to be wielded without love and compassion for their fellow believers.

Summary

Limited thought was given to authority and organization of the church in the years immediately following the Great Disappointment of 1844, in part because of the prevailing Millerite view that organized churches constituted Babylon. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, White was willing to support a congregational form of organization for pragmatic reasons. Authority resided primarily in individual members who were to be involved in church discipline to maintain church health, and in the examination of any proposed preachers and teachers prior to their licensing.

White supported her husband's call for increased organization in the 1860s and approved of the three-tier organizational structure that was completed by 1863. She noted that God had delegated his authority to the church, and considered the General Conference to have the highest level of authority. However, she was careful to note that this high level of authority was not located in the president, but the body as a whole. Authority had also been delegated to ministers and local church officers who had defined roles. The minister was a mouth piece or ambassador of God and was not tied down to a local church. Nevertheless, he was to be accountable for his time and actions. The elders

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 7:263.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

were to maintain the local church and had a modest amount of authority to make decisions on behalf of the church.

As the church grew it became obvious that too many decisions were being handled by a small number of individuals. White was concerned about centralization and the tendency to accumulate and abuse power. She called for a restructuring that dispersed authority although she did not specify how this was to be done. The church in General Conference session responded by approving a restructuring which included an extra layer of administration and enlarged existing committees. White was pleased with the result and advised the leaders of the new union conferences as well as the local conferences that they had authority from their constituency to take care of day to day matters in their areas, but should consult when matters affected the wider church. Ministers, local church officers, and other members were to continue in their appointed roles and experienced no significant change in authority.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

When Ellen White's ministry began in the shadow of the Great Disappointment, unity was not her major focus, but the realities of ministry very quickly led White to recognize the importance of ecclesial unity for the church to function and fulfill its mission. Scripture was very early identified as playing a pivotal role in the life of the church and in the pursuit of unity. While White readily acknowledged the role of flawed humans in its production, she endorsed its divine authority on the basis that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture. Consequently, the Bible in its entirety is to be considered as God's word to us, just as surely as if God were talking to us face to face, and thus is to be considered the rule or faith and practice for the believer.

Given the importance of Scripture for every facet of Christian life, the study and interpretation of Scripture is the duty of all mankind. However, allowing all to interpret Scripture brings with it the risk of disagreement over interpretation. Although White

endorsed rational approaches to the study of Scripture, many of which were extracted from the Bible study guidelines proposed by William Miller, these were not strictly necessary for unity. Rather, White assumed that any reader would be led to understand and agree upon the major truths of Scripture if they were in connection with Christ the source of truth, prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance in their study, and came to Scripture with a heart willing to put aside personal prejudices and listen for God's truth. Her argument relies on the supposition that the Spirit which inspired the production of Scripture has the ability to communicate the same truth to the church today, but also assumes the Enlightenment certainty that humans are able to lay aside all personal prejudices to reason objectively.

Association with a church was also a non-negotiable for White, with all believers being called to be part of a historical church which fulfils God's purposes in the world. The church was not defined by its clergy or hierarchy but rather in terms of its relationship with God and its function. While White held a primarily functional understanding of the church, the consideration of both the relationship of the church to God and its function reflects the necessary connection between the church's being and its action. The biblical images of the church as a body and as a temple are used to place Christ at the center of ecclesial unity as well as the mission and function of the church.

But her views of the church were also driven by her understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist church as the eschatological remnant, and by her overarching theme of the Great Controversy. In both of these roles the church represents God. Hence, it is important that both their words and actions rightly represent his character. Further, since the remnant church is described as keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus, they not only recognize truth but faithfully live truth.

Ecclesial unity was important in preventing a misrepresentation of God's character. The function for which the church existed thus hinged upon the presence of

unity of the church. In fact, ecclesial unity was central to God's plan for the world. Consequently, Christ's prayer that his followers be one as he and the Father are one, clearly represented more than a simple wish, it was a mandate of the church. But while White acknowledged that this mandate encompassed all Christians, her writings on the topic are largely restricted to consideration of unity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church tasked with its unique mission. While unity between denominational groups was not actively encouraged by White, she did encourage individuals to join and be involved with Christian voluntary associations to accomplish goals that benefit mankind if no compromise is required to do so.

Since unity was to serve the mission of the church White recognized that ecclesial unity must be a personal lived and visible unity rather than an invisible or ideal unity. It was to be primarily expressed as harmony between members who acted with a unity of action and purpose to accomplish the mission of the church. But given the specific role of the church, as God's representatives, she also placed a high value upon truth. Unity for White thus extended beyond the simple unity of action and purpose to encompass unity in relation to faith and vital truths. This did not mean that she endorsed uniformity, nor did it preclude personal opinions or differences upon non-vital truths. Rather, it meant that there should be agreement in matters such as those related to salvation and those where there was clear evidence of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

While the New Testament models of the church highlight the concept of unity as crucial for the church, unlike most of the contemporary proponents of church unity, White did not recognize the models as implying an intrinsic essential unity of the church which is simply entered into by virtue of joining the church. Rather, unity was something to be actively strived for and could only be attained as individuals maintained a living connection with Christ.

The church's failure to achieve or even take seriously the importance of unity was attributed primarily to disconnection from Christ, an embarrassing admission for Christians who claim to be followers of Christ. Other causes of disunity flowed from disconnection from Christ and included pride, failure to love other people, an unwillingness to allow the Holy Spirit to work in the life, doubt regarding the foundations of faith, and failure to feel any responsibility for the work and mission of the church. Notably absent was any mention of doctrine as a cause for disunity. White was clearly more concerned about the attitudes underlying doctrinal disagreement, which were something for which individuals could be held accountable.

The fundamental principle for the attainment of ecclesial unity was the concept of union with Christ. Union with Christ was not however defined simply by baptism into the church. Rather, union with Christ was a dynamic relationship which must be maintained on a daily basis. When union with Christ was maintained, every area of the Christian life was impacted. Three results are particularly important for White's conception of unity. First, and most importantly, union with Christ would result in the willingness to submit to the working of the Holy Spirit in the development of a Christ-like character. This would in turn result in another key factor for unity: correct attitudes. Pride and self-centeredness, which promoted disharmony, were to be replaced with love and humility with submission to both God and fellow humans. Second, union with Christ would result in a correct relationship between the Christian and the church leading the Christian to prioritize the mission of the church in all decision making. This would in turn lead to submission to one another and harmonious joint action. Third, union with Christ would enable the recognition of truth particularly "truth as it is in Jesus."

Other keys to attaining unity included the acknowledgment of the authority of all of Scripture as the rule of faith and practice for the Christian, focusing on clear and vital truths, and the maintenance of gospel order. Upholding the Scriptures meant that a

source of authority was clearly established for those who sought unity although as we have noted, the fact that all were encouraged to interpret Scripture led to some diverse understandings of Scripture. In this context, focusing on clear and vital truths prevented distracting disagreements over non-essential and trivial matters while Christ was uplifted.

Since the church not only existed by God's will, but had been delegated authority, it was essential that order be maintained within it. Order was a principle of heaven and all of creation, and was "indispensably necessary" for unity to exist. What this meant for the church was that it needed a functional structure that served its mission and reflected principles from the New Testament Church. While initially reluctant to even consider the topic of authority structure, growth of the movement with its attendant problems, led to a repeated reassessment of need for an authority structure of the church. Beginning with a preference for no formal authority structure, she would come to endorse a congregational structure similar to that of the Restorationists, and then later still a system more closely resembling that of her Methodist background with a varying number of representative bodies operating by delegated authority from the level below them. However, while increasing levels of authority brought better organization and efficiency to a rapidly growing church, it also tended towards abuse of power which in itself was divisive. In order to maintain its value for unity while avoiding the pitfalls of abuse, White envisaged an authority structure which was not only functional and changeable, but avoided centralization with its tendency toward "kingly power." Such a structure would not only enhance mission but also enable a more visible union between congregations in various parts of the world. But changing the structure needed to be accompanied by staffing with leaders who themselves were connected to Christ and modelled the values and attitudes necessary for unity.

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDIES: ELLEN WHITE'S PRINCIPLES OF UNITY IN ACTION

The previous chapter outlined White's Christ-centered approach to church unity, and her practical approach to church structure and authority. This chapter examines whether White implemented these principles in her ministry in situations when church unity was in fact threatened. Three instances within White's ministry were chosen to represent threats from doctrinal differences, organizational changes, and personal differences. Since external threats to the unity of the Seventh-day Adventist church during the life of Ellen White were trivial in comparison to the internal threats to unity, I have not included any case studies relating to external threats to unity.

The three case studies reviewed in this section are: (1) the tensions surrounding the 1888 General Conference session where changed doctrinal emphasis resulted in dissension; (2) the Kellogg crisis which involved a complex interaction of personal differences, doctrinal variance, and concerns about organizational changes, and (3) the dissension arising from organizational changes between 1901 and 1903. Because each of these case studies could occupy an entire dissertation on their own, this review will of necessity not be exhaustive. Two major strategies have been employed to limit the scope of these case studies. First, secondary sources are frequently used to summarize the history and major issues involved in each case, while primary sources are used to examine White's input and responses. Second, I have limited the years surveyed in relation to each case. The responses of Ellen White in relation to the tensions

surrounding the 1888 General Conference are limited to the years 1887 through the end of 1889. The response to Kellogg is limited to the years between 1900 and 1907, and the response to reorganization which significantly intersects with the Kellogg case is primarily limited to the years 1901 through the end of 1903.

Case Study 1: Tensions Surrounding the 1888 General Conference

Key Issues

The 1888 General Conference meetings in Minneapolis are remembered among Seventh-day Adventists both for a renewed emphasis on righteousness by faith, and for the dissension that surrounded the issues discussed at the conference. Writing at the end of the 1888 General Conference, Ellen White described it as “the hardest and most incomprehensible tug of war we have ever had among our people.”¹

The controversy at the meetings was not unexpected. Tension had built up over several years between four individuals who would be key figures in the debates. On the side of continuity with what had been preached and taught for many years were George Butler and Uriah Smith. Butler was the General Conference president while Smith was the General Conference secretary and a leading authority on prophecy for the church.² Standing in opposition to these respected leaders were the younger, and less experienced Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner who rocked the status quo with interpretations

¹ Ellen White to Mary White, November 4, 1888.

² For more information about George I. Butler readers are referred to Daniel A. Ochs and Grace Lillian Ochs, *The Past and the Presidents: Biographies of the General Conference Presidents* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1974). For more information on Uriah Smith see Gary Land, *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014); and Eugene F. Durand, *Yours in the Blessed Hope, Uriah Smith* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980).

and emphases of Scripture that differed from what the denomination had previously taught.³

The first issue causing tension before the General Conference was the identity of the ten horns in the seventh chapter of Daniel. Adventists had traditionally preached that one of the ten horns was to be identified with the Huns, a position that Uriah Smith had advocated in his books on Daniel and Revelation.⁴ However, Jones concluded from his own study that the Alamanni better fitted the prophecy than the Huns. While Jones had asked Smith to examine his evidence, Smith indicated that he did not have time to review the matter.⁵ Certain of his facts, Jones went ahead and published his findings in the *Signs of the Times*, much to Smith's dismay.⁶ Smith then used his position as editor of another denominational magazine the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* to argue against the views of Jones. His rebuff presented little new evidence to support his longstanding

³ Both Waggoner and Jones were from the West Coast, which was not only geographically removed from the centre of Adventism, but was considered by Butler as in need of urgent revival. Butler's views appear to be colored by a moral lapse on the part of Ellet Waggoner's father, J. H. Waggoner, and then compounded by the views of the younger Waggoner and Jones. E. J. Waggoner and Jones were not only active in preaching and teaching at Healdsburg College, but in addition were co-editors of the denomination's missionary magazine *Signs of the Times*. Jones was an avid student of history and published a number of historical articles in the *Signs* during his tenure as editor. For more extensive biographical information on Jones, see George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A. T. Jones* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1987); and George R. Knight, *A. T. Jones: Point Man on Adventism's Charismatic Frontier* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011). For more extensive biographical information on Waggoner, see Woodrow W. Whidden II, *E. J. Waggoner: From the Physician of Good News to the Agent of Division* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008).

⁴ Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* (London: International Tract Society, 1886). This work was considered the standard text for the Adventist understanding of prophecy. Smith had previously articulated his view in Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Daniel*. 2nd ed. rev and enl. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1881), 63, 136.

⁵ George R. Knight, *A User Friendly Guide to the 1888 Message* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998), 34.

⁶ The series ran as a regular feature for most of 1886. The Alamanni were specifically discussed in the June 17, June 24, July 1, and July 8 issues.

view, instead arguing that a change in prophetic view which had been a mainstay of Adventist preaching, would lead to confusion and distrust of prophecy and Adventist views.⁷ But for Jones, such pragmatic views were inadequate, and would always be secondary to the discovery of truth. This was not merely morally important, but in the context of an impending Sunday law crisis, Jones argued that Adventist views must be correct in every detail.⁸ Attempts to look more closely at the evidence for each point of view quickly deteriorated into personal attacks grounded in the choice of research methods and sources that each man used.⁹ By the time of the 1888 General Conference, nearly two years of argument had caused significant animosity between the men.

A second controversy which would reach its climax during the 1888 General Conference meetings was the meaning of the word “law” in the third chapter of Galatians. Waggoner, having experienced a major revival in his life, had commenced study of the book of Galatians. During this study he concluded that the added law and school master of Galatians 3 was the Ten Commandments and not the ceremonial law as

⁷George R. Knight, *User Friendly Guide*, 34-35.

⁸ Knight, *User Friendly Guide*, 35. Jones’ concern about an impending Sabbath crisis finds its roots in the role of the Sabbath in Adventist theology. Not only was the seventh-day Sabbath central to the identity of the Seventh-day Adventists, it also figured prominently in their eschatology. They believed that the end times would be characterized by national Sunday laws which would be a test for the remnant who keep the commandments of God. See for instance Ellen White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*, 1911, repr., (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), 592. The 1880s provided fuel for this belief as Adventists were thrown into jail for violation of state Sunday laws in some states. Any hints about national Sunday laws inspired renewed concern about the impending crisis. Thus, in 1885 the sermons of Californian pastor Rev. R. W. Clark about the need for national Sunday laws gave rise to a whole series of articles by Alonzo Jones on Sunday observance and conscience. When in 1888 a national Sunday law bill was actually introduced by U.S. Senator Henry Blair and supported by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Adventist’s actively petitioned against it. Jones addressed the United States Committee on Education and Labor on their behalf just one month after the 1888 General Conference was completed. The bill was eventually defeated, but the timing was such that threat of Sabbath crisis appeared very real to those arguing at the 1888 General Conference.

⁹ Ibid.

the church had been teaching. Waggoner promoted his view at Healdsburg College where he taught, published his views in a series of nine articles in the denomination's missionary magazine the *Signs of the Times* in 1886, and even aired them in Sabbath school lessons which were used by the church in the summer of 1888.¹⁰

Waggoner's teaching caused immediate concern for both Smith and Butler. Waggoner's interpretation seemed to undermine the eternal nature of the moral law, especially its emphasis on the seventh-day Sabbath. Furthermore, his position was reminiscent of the position his father had advocated in 1856; a position which Uriah Smith claimed had already been condemned by Ellen White.¹¹ Thus, he considered Waggoner's publications as a blatant attempt to disregard both the Sabbath and what he regarded as the testimony of God through White's words and writings. Consequently, Butler considered Waggoner's views risked the faith of many converts, and was one more sign of the low spirituality in the Western United States which needed urgent attention.¹² Waggoner however, was reveling in his new understanding of the grace of

¹⁰ The Sabbath school lessons are mentioned in a letter from Butler to Ellen White dated Oct 1, 1888.

¹¹ J. H. Waggoner had published in 1854, *The Law of God: An Examination of the Testimony of Both Testaments* which took the position that the law in Galatians referred to the Ten Commandments. Smith believed that White had a vision on the subject and had written to Waggoner claiming the law was the ceremonial law. While White did remember writing to J. H. Waggoner, she was unable to remember exactly what she had written. She confidently wrote E. J. Waggoner that "I had been shown [that] his position in regard to the law was incorrect." Attempts to produce a copy of the correspondence however turned up nothing. In the absence of any distinct memory of the nature of the condemnation and without hard evidence, White made a guarded statement to Butler and Smith suggesting her message to J. H. Waggoner may have simply have been "a caution not to make his ideas prominent at that time, for there was great danger of disunion." Her comments however, did not dissuade Butler and Smith from their recollections that she had condemned J. H. Waggoner's theology. See Ellen White to Ellet. J. Waggoner, February 18, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 21; Ellen White to G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith, April 5, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 32.

¹² George I. Butler to Ellen White, October 1, 1888.

God. He was much more concerned about following what he understood to be truth than the immediate consequences of his view.

Concerns of the General Conference President

The General Conference president, G. I. Butler, penned a letter to Ellen White outlining his concerns about Waggoner's teaching but got no reply from her on the matter.¹³ Further messages from him met the same fate.¹⁴ Frustrated by her silence on what he considered was a major problem, he contemplated how to respond.¹⁵ As Waggoner's ideas became more widely disseminated, Butler decided to publish a theological response. This resulted in an eighty-five page pamphlet *The Law in the Book of Galatians: Is it the Moral Law or Does it Refer to that System of Laws Peculiarly Jewish?* which presented an opposite view to that of Waggoner.

Butler subsequently distributed the pamphlet to the delegates at the 1886 General Conference session. It generated a lot of informal discussion but the central issues were not discussed in the official meetings. Nevertheless, Butler appeared to have won when the business session of the 1886 General Conference voted that views not held by the majority of members should not be taught in denominational institutions or published in denominational papers prior to their approval by leaders of experience.¹⁶ This effectively

¹³ George I. Butler to Ellen White, June 20, 1886.

¹⁴ George I. Butler, Letters to Ellen White, August 23, 1886, and December 16, 1886.

¹⁵ Butler's frustration escalated as the year progressed. In August he wrote to White that "I am not writing in any sense to influence your mind – far from it. But I do feel that we have presented a divided front long enough on this question." Her silence to his prior letter leads him to note, "Many times I have kept quiet and not referred to Galatians while writing for print, simply because I knew these were not considered correct by some persons of high standing in the church. Now I do feel after such a course that the time has come for this question to be settled if possible . . . I feel impressed to write a brief comment on the Epistle to the Galatians with reference to the question." George I. Butler to Ellen White, August 23, 1886.

ruled out the ideas of Jones and Waggoner being taught or published, although the decision does not appear to have slowed dissemination of their ideas.

By December 1886, White still had not responded to Butler's concerns. Butler's frustration with White's silence was near boiling point. He once again laid out the history of the problem and his concerns.¹⁷ Much to his relief, White finally responded in early 1887. She attempted to mediate in the debate in order to maintain unity. She wrote to Waggoner and Jones on February 18, 1887 and sent copies to Butler.¹⁸ In the letter she criticized the choice to circulate their controversial views in church publications, especially those which were sent to the general public. "Even if you are fully convinced that your ideas of doctrines are sound, you do not show wisdom that the difference should be made apparent. . . . We must keep before the world a united front."¹⁹ She was not only critical of exposing differences to the general public. She was also critical of Jones and Waggoner's plan to bring their issues to the General Conference. She believed that many attendees were not strong Bible students and would therefore make a decision on the issues without fully understanding them.²⁰ Furthermore, she saw the issue as non-vital and distracting from what was of real importance. Waggoner and Jones were advised to focus on Jesus, show love for their brethren, and to humbly confess their sins

¹⁶ *General Conference Session Minutes*, 1886, 334. The decision was also reported in the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 14, 1886, 779.

¹⁷ George I. Butler to Ellen White, December 16, 1886. Butler's description is accompanied by the following statement. "I have written you on this subject heretofore to which you have never made reply. Very likely you do not sympathize with what I have said. But I cannot see that I ought not to refer to this on that account. I hope to do it with the Spirit of Christ and with no angry feelings."

¹⁸ Ellen White to Jones and Waggoner, February 18, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

in preparation for inevitable conflict.²¹ Both men wrote contrite responses, acknowledging their mistaken motivations and poor choices in disseminating their message.²²

Butler could not contain his excitement when he received copies of White's rebuke to Waggoner and Jones. He immediately penned a letter expressing his pleasure and agreement with her sentiments. He noted that while he loved Jones and Waggoner and had tried to befriend them, he found their editorials unnecessarily egotistical, critical, and sharp.²³ Incorrectly interpreting her rebuke as condemning Waggoner's position, he urged White to make known her view because he considered this would settle the issue once and for all.²⁴ She ignored the request.

Butler's joy was short lived, for Butler and Smith found themselves the subject of White's next censure.²⁵ White considered they had been unfair and unchristian in their handling of the conflict and she was concerned about Butler's use of the copies of the letters that she had sent him. She was also critical of the way Butler had blasted the views of Waggoner, and followed this with eighty-five pages of his own views without giving Waggoner the chance to present his own response. White considered that avoidance of the issue in print would have been prudent, but since they had embarked in that direction, consistency and fairness was essential. Butler was also rebuked for the sharp words he had uttered against Waggoner. While truth was important, it must be

²¹ Ellen White to Jones and Waggoner, February 18, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 22.

²² Alonzo T. Jones to Ellen White, March 13, 1887. Ellet J. Waggoner to Ellen White, April 1, 1887.

²³ George I. Butler to Ellen White, March 31, 1887.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ellen White to George I. Butler and Uriah Smith, April 5, 1887, in *1888 Materials*, 32-37.

“truth as it is in Jesus.” That is, truth must be accompanied by the character traits manifest in Jesus such as meekness, humility, and love.²⁶ Consequently, it was important that Butler and Smith choose to focus on Jesus.

Butler couldn’t believe what he read. It had been bad enough that White had not responded to the repeated expressions of his concerns. Now that she finally had responded, he felt his motives were misunderstood, and he had been unfairly castigated. He considered her response unjust and inconsistent.²⁷ The stress gave way to physical illness and Butler took to his bed.

White, meanwhile, was focused on preparing delegates for the upcoming General Conference session. As the date for the General Conference meetings drew nearer, White wrote a crucial letter addressed to “Those Who Shall Assemble in General Conference.”²⁸ In it, she outlined keys to a positive outcome for the debates she knew would polarize attendees at the conference. The priority was for delegates to seek the Lord, and come humbly before him to plead for the Holy Spirit. They were to examine their heart and motives. All pride, jealousy, and prejudice was to be admitted and put aside so that it did not interfere with the search for truth. Together, these things would promote harmony and unity.²⁹ Each individual was then to immerse themselves in Scripture and “let the Scripture speak for itself.” In this way they could know for themselves what was true rather than simply assenting to the ideas of another. But attendees were also warned that correct interpretation of Scripture was not enough on its

²⁶ Ibid., 36.

²⁷ George I. Butler to Ellen White, October 1, 1888.

²⁸ Ellen White to Brethren who shall assemble in General Conference, August 5, 1888 in *1888 Materials*, 38-46.

²⁹ Ibid., 41.

own. Truth must be lived – indeed, she declared that we have no assurance that our doctrine is right unless we are “daily doing the will of God” and our relationships display the “spirit of him who gave us truth.”³⁰ At the California Conference camp meeting a few weeks later she once again implored those headed to the General Conference to humble themselves, confess their sins, receive the Holy Spirit, and bring truth into their daily life and character.³¹

Minneapolis General Conference Session

The General Conference proper commenced in Minneapolis on Wednesday, October 17, 1888. However, it was preceded by a minister’s institute a week before hand. While the latter was ostensibly to discuss important practical and theological issues, this overlapped with the role of the General Conference, and in practice the two meetings merged into one another. The two meetings will thus be considered together as a single meeting.³²

The ministers’ meetings began without Butler who still remained ill. He made his presence felt however, by sending letters to the delegates prejudicing them against Jones and Waggoner. In addition, he sent a long letter of personal accusations and concerns to White.³³ Butler blamed White for his illness, and criticized her as unjust and inconsistent. He intimated that her words were sharper than his own and therefore she

³⁰ Ibid., 45.

³¹ Ellen White. “Engaging in Worldly Speculation,” MS 2, September 7, 1888, in White, *1888 Materials*, 55-58.

³² Nearly 100 ministers were in attendance at the ministers meeting according to the report in the Review and Herald, and some eighty-four delegates were seated at the General Conference proper, with others listed as present. “The General Conference Institute,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 16, 1888, 648; *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, October 19, 1888, 1.

³³ George I. Butler to Ellen White, October 1, 1888.

had no right to reprove him for his own choice of words. Considering that White sided with Waggoner, Butler laid out the entire sequence of events in detail yet again, hoping that she might still take his side. He ended his tirade by labeling Waggoner's ideas as the "opening wedge" which had allowed "a deluge" of other wrong ideas to enter the church.³⁴ By implication, White was responsible for allowing this to happen.

The meetings addressed the matter of the ten horns first. By the time of White's devotional on Thursday, October 11, accusations were flying and tempers were flaring. The formal discussion on the law and Galatians was yet to come and promised even more disagreement. White pleaded with those gathered to put truth into practice in their lives so that they could hear God speaking.³⁵ All pride and accusations were to be put aside, as they humbled themselves before God, and examined their own lives and relationship with God. Not only should the infighting and discord stop, but more time should be spent on present truth and mission.

Her words appeared to have little impact. Two days later, White preached from the text of John 3:1 and urged the delegates to focus on Jesus and his love. When these are understood and experienced there would be no evidence of the supremacy, envy, or evil speaking that she now saw amongst the delegates.³⁶

As the meetings continued White penned a letter to Butler. She was critical of his approach to leadership; in particular the arrogance underlying his attempts to control truth. His attitude and behavior meant that instead of leading the church faithfully, he was

³⁴ Ibid. Butler included the proposal of Jones on the ten horns in his list of wrong ideas which had resulted from Waggoner's doctrines.

³⁵ Ellen White, "A Living Connection with God," MS 6, October 11, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 69-70.

³⁶ Ellen White, "Sabbath Afternoon Talk," MS 7, October 13, 1888 in *1888 Materials*, 79.

standing in the way of God's work in the church.³⁷ It was crucial that he recognized that he was not infallible, and did not have all the truth. Indeed, White indicated that he held some "incorrect positions" which she could not, and would not endorse.³⁸ Butler was urged to humble himself, search the Scriptures, and cling to "truth as it is in Jesus."³⁹ As a leader it was his responsibility to lead by example, to love and encourage other workers, and prevent difference of opinion from causing disharmony and schism.⁴⁰

As the meetings continued, Jones and Smith continued presenting opposite views on the identity of the ten horns, while Waggoner and J. H. Morrison presented opposing views on the law in Galatians.⁴¹ While we do not have full scripts of many of these talks, the *General Conference Bulletin* indicates that Waggoner identified justification by faith as the key to Galatians, and thus talked about the law in Galatians in this wider context. It was a topic that the very legalistic Adventists desperately needed.⁴² But for many delegates, their prejudice against Waggoner, based on his divergent view on the identity of the law, prevented them from accepting the message of righteousness by faith. Disharmony prevailed and with it, false accusations flowed.

Both Waggoner and White pled with the attendees to "seek God, put away all spirit of prejudice and opposition, and strive to come into the unity of faith in the bonds

³⁷ Ellen White to George I. Butler, October 1888, Letter 21a-1888, in *1888 Materials*, 85-106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁹ Ellen White to George I. Butler, Letter 21, October 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 85-106 See especially pages 96-97.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴¹ J. H. Morrison was the president of the Iowa Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Convinced of the view of the law held by the majority of church members, he defended it in the physical absence of General Conference president G. I. Butler.

⁴² *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, October 19, 1888, 2.

of brotherly love.”⁴³ But the support by Ellen White, along with her geographical proximity to Jones and Waggoner was used by delegates to suggest she had been unduly influenced by Jones and Waggoner, and hence could not be trusted.⁴⁴ This in turn was used as an excuse not to listen to her testimonies. White however denied that she had conspired with Jones and Waggoner and indeed asserted that she had not heard Waggoner’s views prior to the meetings.⁴⁵

White’s remaining worships and sermons during the conference served dual purposes. On one hand they uplifted Christ, his grace, and the wonders of righteousness by faith; and on the other, they called for honest self-examination and resolution of the developing discord through connection with Jesus the source of unity and truth.⁴⁶

Hence, on October 18 she boldly proclaimed that many delegates were spiritually blind, and in need of both self-examination and humbling before God.⁴⁷ She characterized them as content with limited and superficial knowledge when what they really needed was to personally study truth, and to have a living experience with God which would move the head knowledge into their life and character.⁴⁸ The following day she reinforced her message, urging her listeners not to believe something simply because

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ White refers to these accusations in many of her letters in late 1888 and 1889. See for instance Ellen White to W. M. Healey, December 9, 1888 in White, *1888 Materials*, 186-7.

⁴⁵ Ellen White, “Looking Back at Minneapolis,” MS 24, November, 1888, in White, *1888 Materials*, 217. Presumably White means that the conference was the first time she heard the views directly from Waggoner, since she clearly was aware of the gist of Waggoner’s views from Butler’s letters.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 216. White would later profess that she had a burden at the General Conference to present Christ and his love. See Ellen White, Manuscript 24, November 1888, in *Selected Messages*. 3:171.

⁴⁷ Ellen White, “The Need of Advancement,” Morning Talk October 18, 1888 in *1888 Materials*, 117.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

someone else claimed it was true.⁴⁹ God was waiting to do greater things in their midst if they would only remain connected with the source of wisdom, and be willing to receive truth from this source.⁵⁰ Then on the weekend, White warned that those who did not accept truth which was impressed upon them risked the withdrawal of God's spirit from their lives. She urged them to recognize their true state and repent.⁵¹

The discord continued. Frustrated, White reiterated her concern about the lack of kind words and deeds at the conference, which she considered was evidence of a lack of connection with Christ.⁵² She called for pastors to maintain a closer connection with Christ, counseling them to study closely the life of Christ, using it as their pattern, and center.⁵³ This was "present truth."⁵⁴ Furthermore, she pointed to Jesus' command to love one another, and urged them to recognize this was as much truth as the doctrinal points they held dear.

As the conference progressed, Butler sent an urgent message to the conference calling delegates to "stand by the old landmarks." In a later manuscript, White made it clear that she considered the message nonsense, since in her opinion, no landmarks were

⁴⁹ Ellen White. "Have Light in Yourselves." Morning Talk, October 19, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 119.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

⁵¹ Ellen White, "Advancing in Christian Experience" Sabbath Talk, October 20, 1888 in *1888 Materials*, 124.

⁵² Ellen White, "Counsel to Ministers." MS 8a, October 21 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 132, 143. The situation was so dire that she suggested that churches were ready to die because of lack of Christlikeness.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 134-137.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

imperiled by the discussion.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, loyalty to the president contributed to the ongoing personal attacks and resistance, not only to the insignificant point about the law in Galatians, but to the vital message of righteousness by faith.

White found herself increasingly ignored and spoken against, leading her to decide to leave the meetings early. However the night following this decision she had a vision in which it was revealed that God had raised her up for precisely this time.⁵⁶ Bolstered by this experience, she continued to sound a call for unity and repentance, urging delegates to take hold of truth as it is in Jesus, as well as urging delegates to put aside their polarized opinions and search for truth themselves. She opined that “now our meeting is drawing to a close, and not one confession has been made; there has not been a single break so as to let the Spirit of God in.”⁵⁷

In the following week, White finally began to see some fruit from her repeated calls to focus on Jesus. Confessions were made, and many began to grasp the significance of what God had done for them.⁵⁸ Consequently, White was able to describe the meetings not only as “saddest experience of my life.”⁵⁹ but also as “a season of refreshing for many souls.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ellen White, “Standing by the Landmarks,” MS 13, 1889 in *1888 Materials*, 518. White lists cleansing of the sanctuary, the three angels messages, the Sabbath, and the non-immortality of the wicked as the landmarks of the Adventist church. These doctrines are the ones in which she considered the church had already received special guidance from the Holy Spirit and therefore were not to be set aside.

⁵⁶ Ellen White to the Brethren. Letter B-85, April 1889, in White, *1888 Materials*, 277.

⁵⁷ Ellen White, “Morning Talk,” MS 9, October 24, 1888, in White, *1888 Materials*, 151.

⁵⁸ There were however, many who did not respond at this time including Morrison, Smith, and the absent General Conference president Butler. There were no votes on the contentious issues of the conference, other than to recommend further study on these topics.

⁵⁹ Ellen White, “Distressing Experiences of 1888.” MS 21 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 179.

⁶⁰ Ellen White, “Looking Back at Minneapolis.” MS 24 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 207.

While White enthusiastically embraced Waggoner's views on justification by faith, considering it to be in harmony with what she already taught and believed, she was not completely in agreement with Waggoner's ideas on the law in Galatians.⁶¹ This disagreement however, did not stop her from proclaiming Jones and Waggoner as having a message for this time.⁶² Just because Waggoner was in error on one point did not mean that everything he said should be disregarded.⁶³ Indeed, White accepted that there could be differences between members on non- vital issues, and was concerned that such disagreements should not be used as an excuse to treat each other badly.⁶⁴ It was absolutely vital that Christians were Christian not simply in name, but in words and actions.⁶⁵

Continued Attempts to Maintain Unity after the Session

A week of prayer was scheduled shortly after the General Conference. White was in Battle Creek during this time, and spoke at some of the meetings. Her message for

⁶¹ White did not declare her position on the law in Galatians publically prior to the conference despite Butler urging her to do so, because she did not want to circumvent the process of personal Bible study in settling theological matters. During the conference she insisted that the answer had not been specifically revealed to her and that delegates were to study Scripture for themselves to determine truth. She also noted that she hadn't had the time to fully study the issue in the light of what she had heard presented and therefore had not yet come to a position. See Ellen White, "Morning Talk," MS 9, October 24, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 152-3. However, she did acknowledge that some of the things Waggoner said didn't seem to harmonize with her understanding. See "A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word," MS 15 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 163. For White's mature thinking on the law in Galatians after the 1888 General Conference, see "The Law in Galatians," MS 87, 1900 in White, *Selected Messages*. 1:233.

⁶² Ellen White, "Looking Back at Minneapolis." MS 24 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 217.

⁶³ The idea is further reinforced in later statements that address whether mistakes by Jones and Waggoner would nullify their message. She declared that, "It is quite possible that Elder Jones or Waggoner may be overthrown by the temptations of the enemy; but if they should be, this would not prove that they had had no message from God, or that the work that they had done was all a mistake." Ellen White to Uriah Smith, September 19, 1892, in *1888 Materials*, 1044-1045.

⁶⁴ Ellen White, "A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word." MS 15, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 163.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

Sabbath, December 15, 1888 was clearly influenced by her experience at the General Conference. It focused on the role of Scripture and the need for unity. White urged close critical reading of Scripture in order to investigate truth. The Bible was the standard by which all opinions and misunderstandings were to be judged. But she went on to claim that “the correct interpretation of the Scriptures is not all that God requires. He enjoins upon us that we should not only know the truth, but that we should practice truth as it is in Jesus.”⁶⁶ Truth is not a mere intellectual exercise. The Spirit of Christ must come into the heart and truth must be lived. Other believers are to be loved and respected not only as people with the same aim and the same master, but as people who have been “purchased by the blood of Christ”⁶⁷ Therefore, all envy and bad speaking is to be put away and the spirit of love is to prevail. Satan she noted, was delighted by the envy and evil speaking that had resulted from the meetings in Minneapolis, because it disrupted the strength that unity brings. All were urged to come into the unity that Jesus had prayed for.⁶⁸ The messages kindled revival, and with revival came confession of sin and renewal of relationships.⁶⁹ However, Butler and Smith remained unmoved.

White considered that the message of righteousness by faith needed to be taken to the churches where it could breathe new life into the church, and bring harmony again. Hence, during 1889 she actively labored with Jones to bring this message to various parts of the country including, Chicago, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Kansas. In these meetings Christ and his righteousness were upheld. At the same time,

⁶⁶ Ellen White, “The Scriptures a Sufficient Guide.” Week of Prayer Reading for Sabbath, December 15, 1888, in *1888 Materials*, 201.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Ellen White, “Experience Following the Minneapolis Conference,” MS 30, 1889, in *1888 Materials*, 352-381.

White reflected on the unchristlike behavior exhibited during the 1888 General Conference, and what God longed to do in their hearts and lives, to bring his people together in harmony.⁷⁰ She reinforced the message that the secret to unity in the church was being united with Christ and urged people to live truth as it is in Jesus.⁷¹ Despite times of discouragement during some of these meetings, revival started spreading as people began to understand the enormity of what God had done for them. And with revival the heated debates and false accusations against those who disagreed with each other began to subside.

Between her frequent speaking appointments, White also wrote to several of the major leaders who actively opposed Jones and Waggoner and rejected the message of righteousness by faith.⁷² She urged them to seek God, and search the Scriptures, while praying that they would see the error of their ways. But while revival was spreading elsewhere, these men did not experience the same joy. It would take them several more years before they would confess their inappropriate attitudes and actions at Minneapolis.⁷³

When the 1889 General Conference meetings began in October, White watched with concern, hoping that the attitudes of the 1888 session would not be repeated. She

⁷⁰ See for instance Ellen White to Children of the Household, May 12, 1889, in *1888 Materials*, 308; Ellen White, "The Secret of Unity." Sermon at Chicago, IL on April 4, 1889, in *Review and Herald* (July 2, 1889).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Her main targets were those men of influence who had a marked resistance to the message. She focused predominantly on Butler, Smith, and Morrison.

⁷³ Butler retired to Florida in bad health soon after the General Conference, although he would return to denominational employment some twelve years later. It would take five years before he would confess his mistaken attitudes and accept righteousness by faith. Smith reportedly confessed his error in 1891, and Morrison followed suit the next year. However, they all continued to hold strong opinions on the nature of the law in Galatians. See Knight, *A User Friendly Guide*, 132-143.

was particularly concerned since Jones was once again a major speaker. But to her great relief she was able to give a positive report to her daughter in law, noting that “There seems to be no dissention . . . thus far, not one voice of opposition is heard. Unity seems to prevail.”⁷⁴ Indeed, the personal accusations and discord which had characterized Minneapolis were missing, and a new spirit prevailed. Ministers now gave testimonies of the joy they found in understanding justification by faith.⁷⁵

While attitudes had improved, the disagreement over the law in Galatians, and righteousness by faith hadn’t disappeared. Indeed, the dispute would continue for some years. Butler and Smith in particular, continued to hold strong feelings especially in relation to the law in Galatians. But the threat of immediate split was clearly averted by the end of 1889.

Conclusions

The tensions surrounding the 1888 General Conference and the huge number of manuscripts, letters, and sermons that it generated provide an unprecedented window into White’s application of her ideas on unity. This case study has only examined a fraction of these documents by limiting the study to the years immediately preceding and the year immediately following the conference in question. Nevertheless, several clear ideas about White’s understanding of unity emerge.

First, while the disputes surrounding the 1888 General Conference appeared to be doctrinal in nature, White did not attribute the discord to doctrine. Rather, she consistently maintained that the disunity she witnessed was the result of something much deeper. The unchristlike attitudes and actions that flourished in the hotbed of debate were evidence that the disunity was caused by disconnection from Christ. Unity was the

⁷⁴ Ellen White to Mary White, October 29, 1889, in *1888 Materials*, 450.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*; Ellen White to Mary White, October 31, 1889, in *1888 Materials*, 469.

personal responsibility of every member of the church, and possible only when all remained connected to Christ who was both the source of truth and the source of unity. Consequently, White's message and actions were directed primarily towards encouraging a reconnection with Christ.

Second, in addition to exposing the root of the problem, White addressed the role of understanding truth in maintaining unity. She emphasized the need for prayerful personal study of the Word so that all could be convinced of the truth or error of the views presented in the meetings. Nevertheless, this call was tempered by a warning that knowing truth by itself was not all that was required of the Christian. Truth needed to be lived. This meant more than simply keeping the Sabbath and believing in the second coming of Christ. Lived truth for White reached into every corner of life. Lived truth meant that every action and every word was leavened by the work of the Spirit, and thus relationships between Christians were transformed in a way that was not seen at the conference. All jealousy, evil talk, false accusations, and rudeness between those who disagreed on various doctrinal points would not exist if truth were truly lived.

A key concept which emerged in the discussion of role of truth in unity was the concept of "truth as it is in Jesus." Initially, this concept was applied primarily to the idea of Jesus as the ultimate example of lived truth and was used to call for treatment of fellow Christians with respect and love. However, as the conference proceeded it also acquired the sense that all doctrine is to be seen in the light of the salvific work of Jesus. Jesus is thus reinforced as the center for both understanding truth and for maintaining unity of the church.

Third, White's advice to Butler, Smith, Jones, and Waggoner provides keys to understanding the role she considered church leaders should play in maintaining unity. White expected leaders first and foremost to be examples in both connection with Christ and in living "truth as it is in Jesus." Where disagreement emerged, it was their role to

prevent the differences of opinion from causing disharmony and outright schism.

Leaders, like all members of the church, were to personally and prayerfully study issues in the context of Scripture. While they should exercise caution with new interpretations of Scripture, they were not to stand in the way of truth, nor should they consider that their position meant they were infallible in their understanding, or that they alone could determine truth.

The outcome and actions of those present at the meetings however illustrate that there are some formidable obstacles to carrying out White's ideals. White's insistence that unity could be aided by submitting all new interpretations of Scripture to church leaders for further study is clearly not always feasible or helpful. Smith's lack of time and Butler's concern about the consequences of a change in belief on even a minor point, raise the question of what happens when leaders are unwilling or indifferent to reviewing the ideas presented to them. Furthermore, the sad reality of the conference demonstrates that personal prejudices and lack of experience in deep Bible study can prevent the fair evaluation of biblical evidence.

The calls to repentance and reconnection with Christ were no less problematic. The notion that someone else would dare to judge something as personal as one's relationship with Christ was threatening to individual autonomy and pride. Moreover, by the end of the conference calls to repentance seemed to be as much about repentance for rejection of the prophet's message, as it was a call to repent from unchristian treatment of others and rejection of the message of righteousness by faith.

Case Study 2: The Kellogg Crisis

John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943) was a renowned physician, hospital administrator, health educator, health reformer, and inventor.⁷⁶ At the time of crisis he was the superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium which was financed by, and run on Seventh-day Adventist principles, although it was not legally owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁷⁷ In addition to his role as the superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, Kellogg also held a number of leadership positions within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its related organizations. These included membership of the General Conference Executive Committee of 1901, membership of the Foreign Mission Board, and leadership of the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association.⁷⁸ Consequently, Kellogg had the opportunity to exert significant influence over both the decisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its associated institutions.

Major Points of Tension Between Kellogg and Ministers

Kellogg was clever and ambitious, but also very strong willed. This combination of personal traits served him well in building the size and reputation of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, but often put him in conflict with other leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Over time these conflicts became more frequent and more threatening to the

⁷⁶ Kellogg's name is most often recognized today in conjunction with the breakfast cereal cornflakes which he and his brother William Keith Kellogg are credited with inventing. But to limit his contribution to this one thing is to miss the big picture of a very complex individual who was involved in a great variety of endeavors. For a robust biography of Kellogg, see Richard W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg: Pioneering Health Reformer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006).

⁷⁷ Prior to 1901, publishing houses, sanitariums, and other institutions started by Seventh-day Adventists and largely financed by the church, existed as independent voluntary associations.

⁷⁸ This list is for illustrative purposes only, and is not intended as an exhaustive list. It is worth noting that the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Society association employed more workers than the denomination in all its levels of leadership combined. The International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association represented institutions which employed 2000 workers in comparison to the 1,500 workers employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church proper. Arthur L White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years, 1900-1905* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 73.

leaders of the church. By the beginning of the twentieth century few were unaware of the building hostility and tension between Kellogg and the ministers of the church.

Several factors contributed to this escalation. The first issue related to the role of education in leadership. For Kellogg this was non-negotiable. The credential offered to ministers did not demand any specific education and thus in his eyes lacked any credibility. Consequently, he was critical of his uneducated ministerial colleagues whom he considered “retained their influence by psychological trickery.”⁷⁹ While he was concerned about many decisions made by such uneducated individuals, his biggest concern was giving them any role in managing health institutions. He considered it unconscionable to give ministers the right to direct those with ‘real’ credentials such as physicians and other medically qualified staff.⁸⁰ When Kellogg received his medical degree in 1875 he became one of the most educated members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of the time.⁸¹ Thus, when it suited, Kellogg was able to highlight this difference to reinforce the superiority of his ideas. Such a high handed approach nurtured suspicion and animosity between Kellogg and his less educated colleagues.

A second point of contention related to money. Kellogg had no hesitation in incurring significant debt without knowing how it might be paid off. If something needed to be done, it should be done even if debt was incurred in the process. This attitude was obvious not only in Battle Creek where Kellogg undertook an almost continuous series of renovations in an effort to further boost the profile of the institution,

⁷⁹ Richard W. Schwarz, “John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer” (PhD, University of Michigan, 1964), 349.

⁸⁰ Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1979), 283.

⁸¹ He completed training at both the University of Michigan and Bellevue Hospital Medical College. This represented considerable education even for a doctor of the time. For a very brief overview of medical education in the 19th century see Ira M. Rutkow, “Medical Education in the Early 19th Century America,” *Archives of Surgery* 134, no. 4 (1999): 453.

but also in his plans to develop similar institutions in other cities and countries.⁸²

Consequently, the expansion of the health arm of the church under Kellogg resulted in the accumulation of large debts. Although not legally bound to the denomination, the church was often left to assume the debts of the health institutions. Since the Adventist church was not large, and resources were scarce, many begrudged this use of funds. Kellogg's decisions sucked up funds from its members that could have, and according to Ellen White, should have, been used elsewhere.⁸³ Ironically however, while being largely responsible for nearly crippling the church with debt, he felt free to criticize the ministers for their use of funds.⁸⁴

The third issue that catalyzed conflict was Kellogg's skewed understanding of the message of the Seventh-day Adventist church which saw health reform overpower most other aspects of the message. For Kellogg, the unique mission of the church was reduced to little more than spreading its health message.⁸⁵ Physicians who embraced health reform were medical missionaries, while anyone who did not embrace health reform he considered a backslider since they failed to live up to the 'truth.'⁸⁶ Kellogg was alarmed that many of the ministers and so called leaders of the church failed to adopt health

⁸² Kellogg came into significant conflict with General Conference president A. G. Daniells in 1902 when Kellogg wanted to build a sanitarium in England without regard to the debt it would incur. Daniells, who was mindful of the huge debt the church was already trying to pay off, refused to allow building until it could be done debt free. Descriptions of this conflict can be found in multiple sources, but the words of Daniells himself are interesting. A. G. Daniells, "How the Denomination was Saved from Pantheism, Copy A" DF 15a, EGW Research Center, Avondale College.

⁸³ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-177, January 21, 1900. White was particularly critical of Kellogg's increasing use of funds in Chicago, when the mission fields desperately needed funding.

⁸⁴ Richard W. Schwarz, "The Kellogg Schism: The Hidden Issues," *Spectrum* 1972, 25.

⁸⁵ This led Ellen White to express concern that Kellogg had made the health message of the church the "whole body" of the Adventist message instead of the "right arm" of the message. See for instance Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-177, January 21, 1900.

⁸⁶ J. H. Kellogg to W. C. White, April 12, 1875.

reform themselves. In his view they were not only responsible for their own backsliding but for the backsliding of the membership who looked to them as examples.⁸⁷

Together, the lack of education and experience, different financial approaches, a rejection of health principles, and an attitude that bespoke a lack of interest in the health message meant that ministers could not be trusted to make the best decisions with regard to the health work that Kellogg loved. Kellogg's treatment of ministers meant they in turn became suspicious and increasingly antagonistic to Kellogg's ideas and plans. And like many conflicts, the attacks became increasingly personal as both accused the other of making decisions for selfish reasons.

Controversial Decisions

In addition to these long standing differences a series of decisions by Kellogg added to the tension. Kellogg through the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association had initiated medical work amongst the slums of south Chicago in 1893. He believed that Christians had a duty to assist those in need,⁸⁸ and impressed with medical missions operated by other Christians, he enthusiastically launched into a similar work believing that Adventists with their health message could bring a special dimension to mission work amongst the down trodden.⁸⁹ The project began with a free dispensary, baths and a laundry, in part supported by a branch Sanitarium set up for the wealthy in Chicago. However, it rapidly became a much bigger project which consumed copious amounts of time, effort, and money.⁹⁰ The ongoing requirement for critical resources

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ J. H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, December 22, 1892; J. H. Kellogg "Christian Help Work" in *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 1897, 113.

⁸⁹ J. H. Kellogg, "Medical Missions," *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 1891, 47-48.

⁹⁰ Over the next decade there was the addition of a working men's home, kindergarten and nursery, boy's clubs, reading rooms, a farm, a maternity home, and the Life Boat Mission. Within the first

further strained Kellogg's already tenuous relationship with the leadership of the church. But it was his insistence that the project was run on undenominational principles that particularly angered leadership who were concerned about pouring scarce resources into something bearing no outward sign of connection to the church.⁹¹

Kellogg's concern to make medical work undenominational extended beyond the Chicago mission. He declared his newly opened American Medical Missionary College to be a non-sectarian medical school, and then in 1896 Kellogg dropped the words Seventh-day Adventist from the title of the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association which coordinated and controlled the various medical and philanthropic endeavors of the church.⁹² His next target was the Battle Creek Sanitarium. In 1897 the Battle Creek Sanitarium began operating under a new charter which specified that the Sanitarium was to be of an "undenominational, unsectarian, humanitarian and philanthropic nature."⁹³ Two significant results followed from the new charter. First, all proselytizing and evangelistic efforts were to be excluded from the hospital,⁹⁴ and second, all profits from the institution were required to stay in Michigan, thereby preventing them from being used for church needs outside of Michigan.⁹⁵

month of the operation of the work in Chicago, Kellogg was reporting approximately one hundred people per day were using the facilities. J. H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, July 14, 1893.

⁹¹ The Life Boat Mission was the only part of the Chicago work that continued to have an overt Adventist connection. I have retained the word "undenominational" as used by Kellogg, rather than changing it to the more commonly used term "non-denominational."

⁹² Arthur White, *Early Elmshaven Years*, 1590.

⁹³ The original charter for the operation of the Battle Creek Sanitarium under Michigan law expired on April 7, 1897 necessitating a complex move in which the Sanitarium was sold and repurchased under a new charter to guarantee its continued existence. A full description can be found in Schwarz, "John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer," 353-356.

⁹⁴ "First Annual Session of the Michigan Sanitarium and Benevolent Association (March 9, 1899)," *Medical Missionary Conference Bulletin*, March 9-14, 1899, 7.

⁹⁵ Schwarz, "John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer," 358-359.

Kellogg initially defended the changes in the charter as necessary: to indicate that the Sanitarium was for all people regardless of religious background, and, to allow it to be considered a charitable organization.⁹⁶ However, when Kellogg went on to exclude any evangelistic use of the Sanitarium, Adventist leaders became concerned. The health work was conceived as an evangelistic arm of the church. To prevent evangelistic activity seemed to negate its role. Consequently, suspicions arose that Kellogg was planning to separate himself and the Sanitarium from the church. Kellogg denied he had any such intentions.⁹⁷

Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century there was a marked tension between medical and ministerial components of the church's outreach that threatened to divide the church.

White's Responses to Kellogg's Decisions

Ellen White was acutely aware of the complex issues surrounding Kellogg.⁹⁸ The two were frequent correspondents even before the crisis, but the volume of correspondence increased as the crisis evolved. In 1898 White had written Kellogg 17

⁹⁶ "First Annual Session of the Michigan Sanitarium and Benevolent Association (March 9, 1899)," 5. The bid for charitable organization status failed to eventuate despite Kellogg's best efforts to get the necessary legal changes.

⁹⁷ Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg*, 72. He would later admit he had carefully planned for a possible break from the Seventh-day Adventist church. J. H. Kellogg to G. I. Butler, August 21, 1905. John Harvey Kellogg Papers, ID 00013, Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, East Lansing, Michigan.

⁹⁸ Ellen White had known Kellogg from the time he was a small child and had a long standing friendship with him. Indeed, she considered him like a son, and he in turn treated her like a mother figure. She and her husband James had encouraged him to study medicine, even contributing funds to help with the costs of his education. However, it is probable that James and Ellen White's interest in Kellogg's education was not solely based Kellogg's best interests. They were equally concerned with the state and mission of the church. Educated leaders were in short supply, and someone showing aptitude was to be encouraged to make the best of their natural talents and gifts. Furthermore, medical credentials could bring credibility to the health message that was considered to be the right arm of the gospel message. Similar conclusions are reached by Robinsons in Dores E. Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1955), 204.

letters, and in 1899 a further 26 letters, the total correspondence filling close to 350 pages.⁹⁹ The increased correspondence would continue until 1905.

While White concurred that Christians had a duty to assist those in need, she was critical of Kellogg's involvement with the Chicago clinics. Her criticism was rooted in pragmatism. There were more efficient ways to use the church's scarce resources in spreading the unique message of the church. From the human resource point of view, White boldly asserted that Kellogg was "not doing God's work."¹⁰⁰ By shouldering the responsibilities for the rapidly growing work, Kellogg was neglecting the specific role to which she believed he had been called, that was, to educate physicians to do God's work, and to do things at the Battle Creek Sanitarium that others could not do.¹⁰¹ Further, in tying up monetary resources in this project which had few overt denominational ties, Kellogg was slowing down proclamation of the "message of warning" that was the role of the church.¹⁰² Hence, while the work in Chicago could be seen as complimentary to the Adventist message, it was of low priority in comparison to the special message she considered the church had to offer the world. Kellogg had misunderstood the priorities, and made the health work "the whole body instead of only the arm and hand of the

⁹⁹ Arthur L White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years, 1891-1900*, Ellen G. White Biography (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1983), 397-398.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-005, January 1, 1900.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. White considered that new and previously unworked areas should have been prioritized instead. Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-177, January 21, 1900.

body.”¹⁰³ Other churches could and should do this work, while Adventists proclaimed to the world the specific warning message it had been given.¹⁰⁴

It is this pragmatic approach to mission which also permeates White’s concern about Kellogg’s decision to make institutions undenominational. She opined, “If institutions established are to be conducted, as is stated on the undenominational plan, what have Seventh-day [Adventists] to do with this work [?]”¹⁰⁵ Since Seventh-day Adventists were “a denominational people” and denominational funds were being used to build and run the institutions, the people had a right to expect the institutions to further the work of the denomination. If on the other hand, the institutions did not serve their evangelistic purpose, they were merely a distraction which consumed funds and resources.¹⁰⁶ Further, they were not, as Kellogg claimed, a form of missionary work, since genuine mission work was always characterized by one thing: it was “carried out in connection with the gospel.”¹⁰⁷ To work “undenominationally” thus meant that Kellogg was “repressing the truth.”¹⁰⁸

The financial implications of Kellogg’s insistence on undenominational status, further impeded mission since the money now tied up in Michigan, should have been

¹⁰³ Ibid; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-011, January 28, 1902.

¹⁰⁴ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-045, March 12, 1900; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-041, March 10, 1900

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-005, January 1, 1900. This comment seems to confuse the gospel message with the particular beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since non-denominational work does not necessarily obscure the basic gospel message.

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-045, March 12, 1900. Given the nervousness about Kellogg leaving the denomination, White insisted that the ministers should not give Kellogg “any excuse for separating himself” from the church, for God could still use him. See Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-177, January 21, 1900.

used to carry out the work of the church in the world fields where the need was great. Since White considered the Battle Creek Sanitarium a denominational institution, she considered it the church's right to be able to call on funds from the Sanitarium to use where needed, and was particularly upset when she called for money to help establish a similar hospital in Australia, and was told that the money could not be used outside of Michigan.¹⁰⁹

White's Attempts to Bring about Unity

Although White addressed these catalytic issues head on, a far greater amount of space in her letters during the year 1900 is devoted to Kellogg's attitude towards those who disagreed with his plans and ideas. In fact, White appeared to see Kellogg's criticism of ministers and his attitude towards them as presenting a far greater danger than his tendency to make inappropriate financial and administrative decisions. Kellogg's financial decisions slowed the spread of the gospel, but his personal attitudes not only threatened to tear the church apart, but also threatened the spiritual life of Kellogg and all those with who he was in contact.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the disunity which resulted from his constant criticism confirmed he was already disconnected from God because "you cannot be in harmony with God while you are not in harmony with your brethren."¹¹¹ Consequently, she suggested that his life was now controlled by someone other than God.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-041, March 10, 1900.

¹¹⁰ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-073, May, 1900.

¹¹¹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-074, May 20, 1900.

¹¹² Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-177, January 21, 1900. The accusation that Kellogg was controlled on occasion by another spirit or more specifically Satan, would become increasingly frequent in the next few years.

Kellogg's tendency however was to blame others for disunity while maintaining that he himself was standing up for principle. White was not fooled. She called upon Kellogg to shoulder responsibility for his part in the lack of harmony between himself and the ministers and other leaders.¹¹³ What Kellogg called "principle," she had no hesitation in labeling as "pride" which was comparable to that of Nebuchadnezzar.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, she described Kellogg as exacting, dictatorial, overbearing, and verbally abusive to his fellow believers.¹¹⁵ While his words and actions were directed at fellow believers White pointed out that his sharp words had in fact been made to Christ,¹¹⁶ and his criticism of his brethren was equivalent to criticism of Christ.¹¹⁷ Such behavior had put him under the "rebuke of God."¹¹⁸ Repentance accompanied by love and tenderness for his fellow believers was not only necessary, but imperative.¹¹⁹

Sensing his possible response, she counseled, "No matter how greatly we desire a certain thing, if we cannot obtain it without hurting or injuring another, let it go. It is better to suffer injustice than to commit one wrong action."¹²⁰

The constant stream of critical letters from the one person who had been like a mother to him hurt Kellogg deeply. He began to feel that he was being abandoned, and

¹¹³ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-073, May, 1900.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-045, March 12, 1900.

¹¹⁵ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-177, January 21, 1900.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-073, May, 1900.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-177, January 21, 1900.

¹¹⁹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-074, May 20, 1900; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-177, January 21, 1900.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

complained to others that he was being unfairly treated. He attributed non-existent motives to the actions of others, and imagined the General Conference President George Irwin, and Ellen White's son Willie White were conspiring against him and thus were responsible for turning Ellen White against him.¹²¹ Yet deep concern for Kellogg is evident in many of White's letters. They were not designed to destroy Kellogg, but clearly called him to repentance. But while White was determined to see Kellogg repent, other members used her writings in an attempt to destroy him.¹²²

White's calls for change largely went unheeded. Kellogg continued insisting on his own way, and showed no interest in heading counsel regarding the resources of the church or the undenominational status of the institutions.

White moved back to the United States in an effort to prevent the growing tension between the ministers and Kellogg becoming outright schism.¹²³ Three months after her arrival back in the United States, Kellogg visited White in California. Both Kellogg and White considered the meeting productive. Issues were aired and clarified and White considered that Kellogg was now receptive to God working through him.¹²⁴ Thus, we find that the beginning of 1901 gave Kellogg a relative reprieve from the onslaught of letters which criticized his behavior and spirituality. While White reminded Kellogg of

¹²¹ George Irwin to Ellen G. White, July 19, 1900. Kellogg's argument recognizes that White was in Australia and was thus dependent upon letters from these leaders to inform her of the situation in Battle Creek.

¹²² D. H. Kress to Ellen G. White, October 18, 1900. See also Arthur White, *The Early Elmshaven Years*, 42.

¹²³ General Conference president George Irwin had urged White to consider the move but she did not do so until she felt God calling her back to deal with the issues the church was facing. See for instance, Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma, Letter W-123, August 14, 1900.

¹²⁴ Ellen G. White to Brethren Farnsworth, Robinson, Starr, Palmer, Caro, and Sharp, Letter B-157, December 12, 1900. This letter also stated that "It is God's plan to solidly unite the ministry and the medical missionary work."

the great principles of unity which she identified as “love to God, and for one another;” and further counseled against making any choices that would expose him to the temptation of pride,¹²⁵ she carefully avoided any personal criticism of his choices.

There was little correspondence between the two in the next few months due to White’s travel to, and attendance at, the 1901 General Conference session in Battle Creek where she stayed with Kellogg and his wife. While this choice had the potential for significant political ramifications, she considered her presence would be an encouragement to Kellogg, reassuring him of her support, and would perhaps even be a positive influence in preventing a breach between him and the church.¹²⁶

The General Conference session was momentous. It addressed the desperate need of the growing church to reconsider its organizational structure, and also the need to heal the growing rift between the health work and the mission work of the church. White urged wider representation in the church’s ongoing planning, noting that “more than two or three men” were needed to consider the needs of a world church, and that in no circumstance should one mind be responsible for such tasks.¹²⁷ In response, a new expanded General Conference committee was proposed along with restructuring of the church’s administration. Another major recommendation was that the auxiliary organizations, which up until that time had been governed independently of the main church body, become integrated as departments of the enlarged General Conference.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-020, January 28, 1901. White considered that Kellogg’s exercise of pride was opening the way for Satan to control him.

¹²⁶ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-033, February 23, 1901.

¹²⁷ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 25.

¹²⁸ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 501-506. Such integration had already been successfully accomplished in Australia. At this stage the recommendation did not include the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association

But while a move to increase the number of people making crucial decisions was being urged at the General Conference meetings, at the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association (IMMBA) meetings held concurrently, Kellogg outlined plans to centralize control of all the sanitariums, and effectively bind them to the Battle Creek Sanitarium.¹²⁹ White was alarmed at the possibility that all the institutions might come under Kellogg's control. "God forbids this" she penned.¹³⁰ Harmony was required between the institutions, but control was to be distributed rather than tied to one place and one man. White was not only concerned about centralization of power. She was also concerned about the influence of Kellogg. Kellogg's critical and divisive attitudes, along with questionable financial decisions, must not be allowed to infect other leaders and institutions of the church.

Thus the messages of reproof to Kellogg resumed. White once again warned Kellogg about both his attitudes and his insatiable need for control.¹³¹ Instead of critiquing his behavior from the point of view of church needs, and the hurt he had caused, White focused on the problems from God's point of view. Perhaps a softer approach that reminded Kellogg of God's ultimate control would work where White's own words had failed. Using the first person for the divine, she penned "All the money, all the power, all the revenue are mine, and are to be used wholly as I shall prepare the way. No man is to control this matter." The reminder that Kellogg "was not God" was accompanied by the affirmation that God considered Kellogg was his physician and that

¹²⁹ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 312-320. See especially page 316 where Kellogg made the motion that "all the sanitariums organized and incorporated shall be incorporated on a similar plan, so that they shall be tied to this body."

¹³⁰ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-180, July 28, 1901.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

God had used him to accomplish his will.¹³² Moving away from the divine first person, but staying with the heavenly perspective, White noted that Kellogg's ways and plans were not God's, and gently suggested that "the Lord desires to give you a chance for the recovery of your weary brain and nerves, and keep you prepared to do the larger work that he has appointed you."¹³³

The change of approach made no difference. Kellogg remained determined in his course of action. Further letters from White followed, in which Kellogg's stubbornness, pride, self-exaltation, and grasping for control were once again likened to sins of Nebuchadnezzar.¹³⁴ Each was also accompanied by a call to reformation of character, and a call to acknowledge dependence on God's wisdom.¹³⁵ She advised that "kindness and genuine patience with Christlike favors" would be more influential than any centralized control.¹³⁶

Responses to New Challenges to Unity

The year 1902 brought with it three more issues that strained the relationship between Kellogg and the SDA church. The first was Kellogg's response to a fire which swept through the Battle Creek Sanitarium, the second, was the development of a major dispute between leader A. G. Daniells and Kellogg, and the third was Kellogg's views about God.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-199, October 15, 1901. Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-188, December 30, 1901.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-180, July 28, 1901.

In the early hours of the morning of February 18, 1902, fire swept through the main building of the Battle Creek Sanitarium along with an ancillary building, reducing them both to rubble. White had previously intimated that the Sanitarium should be downsized and relocated to the country. The fire offered the perfect opportunity to follow this advice, but Kellogg had no intention of moving the institution. Within the week, Kellogg was outlining ambitious plans for a grand new building which would stand “as a temple of truth.”¹³⁷ The General Conference approved rebuilding, but it came with certain caveats that reflected both the previous advice of Ellen White, and the enormous burden of debt that the church was facing. Rebuilding could commence on a smaller scale than previously and on the condition that no further debt should be incurred.¹³⁸

Largely ignoring the caveats, Kellogg ploughed ahead with his plans. Since the control of the Sanitarium remained independent of the General Conference, there was effectively no accountability for the agreement.¹³⁹ In May 1902, White cautioned that the planned Battle Creek Sanitarium was too large, and alluding to Kellogg’s term “temple of truth,” she warned that Battle Creek was not to become a center like Jerusalem.¹⁴⁰ Kellogg pushed ahead anyway, building a Sanitarium that was larger than it had been previously and incurred yet more debt.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ J. H. Kellogg, “The Battle Creek Sanitarium Fire,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1902, 125.

¹³⁸ “A Council Meeting,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 25, 1902, 192; Ellen G. White, “Report of Council Meeting, 1902.” MS 123, 1902. Valentine, 223.

¹³⁹ Valentine, 224.

¹⁴⁰ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-125, May 1, 1902.

¹⁴¹ While total costs of rebuilding are difficult to estimate, ten years after the fire, Kellogg indicated that \$750,000 had been borrowed to complete the necessary rebuilding. See Schwarz, “John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer,” 188, footnote 51.

Later in the year, a clash between General Conference president A. G. Daniells and Kellogg erupted over finances. The catalyst involved plans for a Sanitarium in the United Kingdom. Both men agreed on the need for the institution. Kellogg urged immediate action even though it would incur debt, while Daniells was reluctant to incur more debt and refused to approve plans until money was available to build it.¹⁴² Kellogg attempted to force Daniells' hand, but without success.¹⁴³ Failure to resolve their differences resulted in growing animosity between the two men.

The animosity overflowed into the November 1902 council meetings of the General Conference executive committee where Kellogg used his influence in an attempt to remove Daniells as chairman and gain control of the committee.¹⁴⁴ While the attempt failed, and Daniells reiterated his policy of not incurring further debt where possible, Kellogg's maneuvering widened the rift between the two men.

White felt duty bound to address Kellogg's attitudes, and outlined the grave danger he faced if he kept ignoring God's warnings of reproof. She considered he desperately needed conversion and submission of his will to Christ.¹⁴⁵ She urged Kellogg to pattern his life after Christ, and focus on his humility. Adding a personal note

¹⁴² Oliver, 180; Valentine, 224-225. The church was already carrying in excess of \$1.25 million in debt.

¹⁴³ Kellogg's account is described in J. H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, December, 1902. Daniel's account can be found in A. G. Daniells, "How the Church Was Saved from Pantheism," DF 15a, EGW Research Center, Avondale College of Higher Education. Both men suggest the other was unreasonable. Kellogg claimed that Daniel took an unreasonable and kingly attitude, and later misreported the event to Ellen White. Daniel's account on the other hand, suggested Kellogg was not only unreasonable but did all in his power to discredit not only Daniell's plans and principles, but also his faith in EGW.

¹⁴⁴ Schwarz, 380-381. Kellogg wanted to replace A. G. Daniells with Elder A. T. Jones

¹⁴⁵ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, November 12, 1902.

she wrote. “I love your soul, and I want you to have eternal life.”¹⁴⁶ But nothing seemed to change.

The November 1902 meetings also reconsidered Kellogg’s plans to donate profits from the publication of his recently completed manuscript entitled *The Living Temple* to the rebuilding of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. The General Conference committee had initially seen this as a means to relieve the church members of personally finding money for the rebuilding, once the contents of the manuscript were reviewed, it was evident to some of the leaders that the content included material which was overtly pantheistic.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, support for this plan was withdrawn.

Undaunted, Kellogg decided to order the book at his own expense. Kellogg saw the concerns of the committee as having no basis, and regarded Daniells’ criticism of his theology as a retribution for Kellogg’s political manoeuvring. Kellogg decided to write to White what he considered were the true facts of the matter, justifying his position and outlining the basis of his strained relationship with Daniells. His endeavor filled more

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Kellogg’s views are more strictly those of panentheism, however, his contemporaries labelled it pantheism. Hints of Kellogg’s ideas can be found much earlier in his words and writing, such as in Kellogg’s speech to the 1878 General Conference, and in his book *Harmony of Science and the Bible on the Nature of the Soul and Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1879). In these works he encouraged contemplation of nature as a way to further intellectual understanding of God. Kellogg’s ideas on God and the Trinity gradually progressed over time. See John Skrzypaszek, “Kellogg’s Concept of the Godhead,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, edited by Paul Petersen and Rob McIver (Adelaide, Australia: ATF Theology in conjunction with Avondale Academic Press, 2014). Kellogg presented more developed and more overtly pantheistic ideas in his series of presentations at the 1897 General Conference where he gave presentations entitled “God in Man and God in Nature.” In these presentations God was pictured primarily as an intelligent power or presence in everything. See *General Conference Daily Bulletin* 1897. While a manuscript in 1905 suggests that White had personally counselled Kellogg that his theories were wrong prior to James White’s death, it is surprising that White says little about these early deviations from orthodoxy in her letters to him prior to his publication of the *Living Temple*. See Ellen G. White, MS 70, 1905.

than seventy pages.¹⁴⁸ Kellogg's tome was not mailed until February, so Kellogg received no reply to his tome prior to the 1903 General Conference meetings.

When the General Conference meetings commenced in March, it was clear that a split between Kellogg and the church was likely, for in spite of Kellogg's strenuous objections, recommendations were made to place all medical institutions under denominational control, and to make the IMMBA a department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁴⁹ Kellogg refused to be bound by these recommendations and called for a twelve day emergency meeting of the IMMBA days after the general conference session ended.¹⁵⁰ To add to Kellogg's discontent, the 1903 General Conference also resulted in his bitter rival A. G. Daniells being elected to the reinstated role of General Conference president.

White once again pushed to establish harmony between the medical and other branches of the church, but she did not speak to Kellogg personally during the meetings. Entrusting her thoughts to paper, she noted that Kellogg's actions were both a manifestation of his desire for control, and evidence of his failure to allow the Holy Spirit's control in his life. She urged him to stop "exercising kingly power." The fire which burned down the Sanitarium she noted should have alerted him to the fact that he had "departed from the way of the Lord," and therefore brought him to his knees. But it was not too late; he still had a chance to experience conversion. She also noted his willingness to join forces with secular groups whose aims were opposed to God, a

¹⁴⁸ J.H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, December, 1902. DF45b. Although dated in December the letter was not sent until February, 1903. Kellogg outlined the contents to both the Battle Creek College faculty and the board of managers at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, and later claimed that the contents were "unanimously endorsed" by them. J. H. Kellogg to W. C. White, March 18, 1903.

¹⁴⁹ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1903, 216.

¹⁵⁰ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1903, 74-80. Kellogg labelled the move communistic and refused to have those who did not fully embrace the health message, have control over the health work.

somewhat ironic observation in the face of his rejection of control by the church whose mission he supposedly endorsed.¹⁵¹

Further letters followed in quick succession, each pointing out the danger of Kellogg's insatiable need for control and human praise, and each in turn calling for him to humble himself before God, to surrender unreservedly, and to experience true conversion.¹⁵² One was even hand carried by A. T. Jones in the hope that the right moment might be found to present White's message to Kellogg.

At the IMMBA meetings, an outward appearance of reconciliation with Daniells appeared to take place, and a telegram pledging harmony between Kellogg and Daniells was sent to Ellen White.¹⁵³ But White had a muted response. While she applauded Kellogg's first steps in attempting to effect reconciliation with Daniells she expressed concern that his words were not accompanied by real repentance which effected change.¹⁵⁴ Her concerns were well founded as disputes between the men would break out again some months later when Kellogg once again attempted to exert the independence of the medical missionary work from denominational control, and printed *The Living Temple* in spite of the Autumn Council decision not to support it. By the end of 1903, Daniells and the denominational leadership found themselves in the midst of a full blown battle with Kellogg and his supporters.

The beginning of 1903 also brought White's long awaited response to Kellogg's views of God. Much to the concern of some leaders, White had not explicitly addressed

¹⁵¹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-052, April 5, 1903.

¹⁵² Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-015, April 15, 1903; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter, *K-065, April 19, 1903.

¹⁵³ Valentine, 258.

¹⁵⁴ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-180, May 5/8, 1903. See also Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-080, May 8, 1903.

Kellogg's increasingly pantheistic ideas at the 1903 General Conference meetings.¹⁵⁵ In her letters however, White warned Kellogg that his ideas were confusing and dangerous¹⁵⁶ because they eradicated the personal nature of God, and in doing so, threatened the very concept of God.¹⁵⁷ She went on to suggest that the ideas that placed God in nature were "specious, scheming, representations" which appeared to provide a "charming soothing influence as a peace and safety pill" while in reality their source was Satan.¹⁵⁸ "Nature is not above God, nor is God in nature as some represent him to be."¹⁵⁹ In spite of these strong views on Kellogg's representation of God, her comments to Kellogg on the topic prior to October are little more than fleeting, and appear secondary to the priority of calling attention to Kellogg's need for humility and conversion.

While Kellogg's influence had already made some of his pantheistic ideas popular amongst many of his medical colleagues, the release of *The Living Temple* which was permeated with Kellogg's ideas about God was seen as a major threat to a much wider segment of the church. Daniells and others in leadership were not certain how to best counter the threat. They needed help and engaged Ellen White to help counter the threat.

After reading Kellogg's book, White began writing a series of messages responding to its content. The first response was not sent to Kellogg, but to the teachers at Emmanuel Missionary College who were warned that the content of *The Living*

¹⁵⁵ While there was no explicit response to Kellogg's pantheism, his ideas were likely in mind when White warned those assembled at the 1903 General Conference, that "spurious scientific theories are coming in as a thief in the night, stealing away the landmarks and undermining the pillars of our faith." *General Conference Bulletin*, 1903, 87.

¹⁵⁶ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-052, April 5, 1903.

¹⁵⁷ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-300, March 16, 1903.

¹⁵⁸ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-052, April 5, 1903.

¹⁵⁹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-253, November 20, 1903.

Temple was neither endorsed by God or in harmony with her own writings.¹⁶⁰ The vague, fanciful, and even mystical content she considered was not only unhelpful but detracted from the truth that was needed by the readers in the end times.¹⁶¹ Similarly, forthright concerns were expressed in notes sent to other prominent Adventist leaders and physicians including, Prescott, Daniells, and Paulson.¹⁶²

White also started a detailed letter to Kellogg on October 6, 1903 although it appears that she never sent it, perhaps mindful that he was not ready to hear her bold statements. In it she noted that the content of *The Living Temple* misrepresented God, and was not to be circulated because it would confuse and lead astray those not thoroughly grounded in truth.¹⁶³ Indeed, she considered its claims about the personality of God were “opposed to the truth that God has given us.”¹⁶⁴ To White’s mind they demonstrated the absence of a real or experimental knowledge of God in Kellogg’s life.¹⁶⁵ Kellogg was thus directed to look to Jesus who embodied “what God desires us to know of Him.”¹⁶⁶

While Ellen White’s letters critique the aberrant views of Kellogg, a careful reading suggests that White was most concerned about Kellogg’s approach to religion

¹⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, *Spalding and Magan Collection of Unpublished Testimonies by Ellen G. White*, Fascimile reprint. Originally published by A. W. Spalding and Percy T. Magan 1916. ed. (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn, 1985), 320.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ellen G. White to David Paulson, Letter P-220, October 14, 1903; Ellen G. White to W. W. Prescott and A.G. Daniells, Letter B-224, October 11, 1903; Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and W. W. Prescott, Letter B-223, October 14, 1903.

¹⁶³ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-232, October 6, 1903.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

and its consequences for his faith. It had become obvious to White, that Kellogg had been affected by the trends within Protestantism which urged the scientific study of the Bible and elevated the role of human reason. Kellogg's attempt at finding an immanent God through nature, White considered "a false scientific problem."¹⁶⁷ The result was that Kellogg was living in a "spiritualistic fog" and she considered he was in grave danger of shipwrecking his faith if he continued to exalt science and reason above God.¹⁶⁸ Thus, her letters continued to focus upon Kellogg's need for conversion and a real relationship with Christ. This in itself would provide the solution for Kellogg's aberrant theology for he would come to experience the personal God for himself. White therefore urged Kellogg to strengthen his faith by spending time in the Word, and holding onto the landmarks or pillars of the faith which God had revealed to the church.¹⁶⁹

White instructed that *The Living Temple* was not to be simply patched up and sold.¹⁷⁰ Kellogg's views contained subtle error that infiltrated through almost all of the theological section. Hence, she suggested that the theological section be completely removed, while the remaining physiological section which had some value could be published under a different name to avoid confusion.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-257, July 27, 1904.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid; Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg Letter K-239, October 28, 1903. White frequently uses the idea of spiritualistic and spiritualism in her discussions about Kellogg's views. This should not be confused with spiritualism as it is understood today. Her terminology refers specifically to the process of spiritualizing away the personality of God and making it mystical rather than real. It should also be noted that White does not appear to be against science in its totality, for she welcomed a scientific backing for the Adventist health message as a whole.

¹⁶⁹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K-023, December, 1903. This letter was filed under 1904.

¹⁷⁰ Kellogg was amenable to removing some of the objectionable phrases and paragraphs but was not willing to go to the extent White suggested in this letter.

¹⁷¹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-253, November 20, 1903. From a theological standpoint, White was concerned that Kellogg's views appeared to take away the personal nature of God

At the same time, White was trying to encourage reform in Kellogg, she was also writing to Kellogg's colleagues and others in leadership roles, urging them to support the General Conference rather than throwing their weight behind Kellogg's misguided ideas. This behind-the-scenes effort became more public as a new year dawned. While still holding out hope for Kellogg's repentance and urging unity between the medical work and the church as a whole, she critiqued his pantheistic teachings, and warned publically that he was not a safe leader. Parents were urged not to send their children to Battle Creek lest they be contaminated with Kellogg's damaging ideas. To reach an even larger audience she collated materials on the subject and published them.¹⁷²

Two months later at the Lake Union Conference session, White spoke openly about the *Living Temple* and Kellogg. Refuting claims that the content of the *Living Temple* was in keeping with her own writings, she argued instead that it represented a significant threat for the church.¹⁷³ White had no hesitation in declaring that "we cannot unite with Dr. Kellogg until he stands where he can be a safe leader of the flock of God."¹⁷⁴ She nevertheless continued to call for unity between the ministers and the medical work of the church, and urged the leadership to do all in their power to save Kellogg.¹⁷⁵

which she considered was crucial to salvation, the ongoing relationship between God and man, and the sanctuary doctrine. She thus described the pantheistic views as the "alpha of a train of heresies" spawning theories and speculation that undermined the very basis of the Christian faith. See Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-257, November 26, 1903.

¹⁷² The resulting collection was marketed as *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

¹⁷³ Ellen G. White, "The Foundation of Our Faith." MS 46, 1904.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and W. W. Prescott, Letter B-165, May 20, 1904. White was impressed that reconciliation should be attempted at the Lake Union Conference session meetings. Attempts were made to reach out to Kellogg in accordance with White's impression, but discussions deteriorated into personal attacks and insinuations.

The dawn of 1905 saw both Kellogg and White increase their efforts to undermine the influence of the other. Kellogg blamed White and other church leaders for holding back the progress of Battle Creek as a major educational center. He sent representatives to other medical facilities, suggesting that it was still possible for Battle Creek to become what he had envisioned if the health facilities resisted the plans to be managed by the denomination. He further undermined White by suggesting that White's son Willie not only influenced her opinions but had written many of her letters and had simply put Ellen's name to them.¹⁷⁶ Kellogg and the church were growing further and further apart.

Recognizing that schism was near, White now fought to minimize the loss to the church. She put her weight behind the push for the denomination to control as many of the Adventist founded medical institutions as possible, and produced yet more material in print that warned of the dangers of sending children to Battle Creek.¹⁷⁷ Personal correspondence with Kellogg stopped.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, it appears that she had finally given up hope of Kellogg ever changing.¹⁷⁹ By the time of the 1905 General Conference session she no longer urged reconciliation with Kellogg, instead she sadly remarked that "we are not to treat him as a man led by God."¹⁸⁰

Kellogg's push for independence from the church continued unchecked during 1905. White wrote that he was "pursing a course of falsehood" and was being helped by

¹⁷⁶ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years 1905-1915* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 58.

¹⁷⁷ These were published as *Special Testimonies Series B*, No. 6.

¹⁷⁸ White continued to write letters to Kellogg but was impressed not to send them.

¹⁷⁹ Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and W. W. Prescott, Letter B-333, December 16, 1905.

¹⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, "Message of Warning," MS 70, 1905; Arthur L. White, *Later Elmshaven Years*, 59.

Satan. She urged him to truly surrender to the will of God.¹⁸¹ Meanwhile she continued to warn his colleagues about Kellogg's "hypnotic influence," stating that he was under the control of Satan, and that those who supported him were equally guilty.¹⁸²

Kellogg had essentially removed himself from the denomination, but his relationship with the church was not formally terminated until 1907 after local church leaders engaged in a prolonged discussion with him.¹⁸³ The charismatic and persuasive nature of Kellogg meant that many supported him, and thus the removal of Kellogg meant the church not only lost Kellogg and the Battle Creek Sanitarium but also many other medical staff.

The final letter from White to Kellogg appears to be written about 1907 but like many before it, appears never to have been sent.¹⁸⁴ In it is the sad testimony from one who did all in her power to maintain unity.

I have seen no way in which we could honor God but to separate from you and your associates, and take a decided stand against your sophistries. I know where the people of God should stand, and I am sure that when you are worked by the Spirit of God you will make thorough work for repentance. You have long carried things in your own way, and your only hope is to be converted, and then try to save your associates.

¹⁸¹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter *K338, December 22, 1905. It is unclear whether this letter was sent or not. Given that her other letters to Kellogg in the previous twelve months were unsent, there is a high likelihood this letter was also unsent.

¹⁸² Ellen G. White to D. H. Kress, Letter K-258, August 1, 1906.

¹⁸³ The transcript of this discussion reveals that Kellogg had many issues with the church and its beliefs. While initially saying he did not have any problems with Ellen White, it was clear as the interview progressed that he struggled to recognize her authority and prophetic gift.

¹⁸⁴ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-100, November 21, 1911. The exact date of this letter is unknown. While a copied version is filed under November 21, 1911, it appears to have been written around the time of Kellogg's formal removal from the church. The text of the letter also appears in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 13:366-370.

Your course of action has nearly cost me my life, but my greatest sorrow is the thought of the souls that might have been saved but are lost to the cause of God.¹⁸⁵

White and the leadership of the church had clearly lost the battle not only for Kellogg, but for many of his medical colleagues and supporters who also left the church. Although the Kellogg crisis is most often remembered for Kellogg's pantheistic ideas, the overall loss to the church appears to have less to do with this theological view than it did with other factors.

Conclusions

The recurrent calls to Kellogg to surrender and humble himself before God recognizing the work of the cross, highlight the foundational nature of a personal connection with Christ in White's understanding of attaining unity. But many of these calls for repentance envision much more than simple surrender to God. In essence, the calls for repentance and humility were also appeals for Kellogg to submit to the leadership of the church, to stop working independently and non-denominationally, and to embrace White's vision of the relationship between the medical work and the church. This produced a challenging scenario for Kellogg because responding positively necessitated recognition that the messages of White came from God, as well as submission to a group of individuals whom he struggled to respect. Not surprisingly, Kellogg responded to these calls in a very defensive manner. Even when Kellogg recognized the accuracy of White's evaluation of his actions, he protested her ongoing call to surrender, considering that she willfully ignored his claims to have repented. But for White, change was not guaranteed by words alone. Genuine repentance would be accompanied by a visible change in actions and attitudes.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ The foundation of White's use of repentance as a veiled critique of his actions emerges from to her understanding of the nature of union with Christ, and will be explored further in Chapter 6.

The timing of the responses of Ellen White to the various issues causing conflict between Kellogg and the church are also of interest. While White promptly critiqued Kellogg's progressive declarations that institutions would be managed on an undenominational basis, and also quickly pointed out the high handed manner in which he interacted with his colleagues when they disagreed with him, any substantive critique of his theological deviations was long delayed. It is true that when Kellogg first expressed the ideas he was wrestling with, White was quick to note that these were not consistent with what God had revealed. But this appears to be the limit of her critique until many years later. When Kellogg finally expressed his pantheistic ideas in public fifteen years later at the General Conference session of 1897, no significant response was forthcoming.

White's reluctance to react did not stem from ignorance or indifference. Her manuscripts and letters reveal that she clearly understood the danger these ideas presented both to Kellogg and the church she loved. White defended her greatly delayed response to Kellogg's pantheistic ideas, by noting that she expected that the elected church leaders would have dealt with this issue in a timely manner as it unfolded. She expressed surprise that this did not seem to be the case. Given her understanding of the authority and role of the elected leadership of the General Conference, this is an appropriate response. White's input beyond the personal appeals to Kellogg only comes after significant dissemination of Kellogg's ideas, and a request for her involvement by the elected leadership of the church. Additionally she noted that God had prevented her from speaking on the topic on several occasions.

When White finally joined other leaders in expressing public concern over this matter, her intent is less about preventing schism in the church than it is about minimizing loss, and preventing the erosion of the very foundations of Christianity and the identity of Adventism.

Case Study 3: Conflict Associated with Reorganization

A Long Standing Controversy

Formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was controversial from the very start.¹⁸⁷ Ellen White actively supported both the initial organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and the ongoing need for church organization. Arguing from both a functional and theological viewpoint, she considered organization essential to the mission of the church and an appropriate reflection of the God of order it served.¹⁸⁸ The positive impact of the formal organization of the denomination allowed for acceptance of organization by the majority of members, but it did not silence all the critics of organization.¹⁸⁹ Others agreed with the need to organize but were not satisfied with the details of the organizational structure. Consequently, over the next few years they contributed to an undercurrent of tension regarding the role and authority of the General Conference which erupted periodically in impassioned writing and speeches.

¹⁸⁷ At the time of initial organization many considered that it made the church part of the Babylon of Revelation.

¹⁸⁸ See previous discussion in Chapter 4 on pages 303-305.

¹⁸⁹ Most notable amongst those who continued to resist formal organization were the president and secretary of the Iowa conference, B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff. The failure of the church to see eye to eye with their opinions led the men to criticize the church and its leaders, including Ellen White. While organization had been their original concern, Snook and Brinkerhoff also became increasingly critical of White's prophetic gift, and the church's understandings of passages such as Revelation 13 and 14. After two years of steady criticism and denigration of church positions, both men were removed from office. Snook and Brinkerhoff subsequently left the church with a small number of other disaffected Adventists and formed what came to be known as the Marion party, a forerunner of the Church of God (Seventh Day). A summary of the rebellion of Snook and Brinkerhoff can be found in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Progressive Years, 1863-1875* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1986), 145-151.

Issues which Exacerbated the Underlying Tensions

Concerns of those critical of organizational structure were fueled by a number of problems that emerged as the church began to grow. The first of these was the tendency of the early General Conference presidents to be autocratic in their decision making.¹⁹⁰ The second and related issue was the centralized nature of the authority and decision making, which combined with the small size of the general conference executive committee, resulted in overburdening of a handful of men,¹⁹¹ long delays in receiving responses in the field,¹⁹² and the tendency for pride and the abuse of power.

Complicating these issues was the fact that the organizational structure voted in 1863 failed to address many of the needs of a growing church which was expanding both

¹⁹⁰ George I. Butler and Ellen White's husband, James White, were both known for their autocratic decision making. Between them they occupied the presidency of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for approximately twenty-one out of the first twenty-five years of its existence. Ellen White, ever the staunch supporter of organization, found herself repeatedly needing to speak out against the penchant of leaders to bear most of the administrative load themselves. She was particularly critical of the failure of leaders to consult others in decision making, and their tendency to do work that others unnecessarily foist upon them. However, she did not place all the blame on the presidents. Those surrounding the presidents were also criticized for their failure to shoulder their share of responsibility of the work of the church. See for instance Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*. 9 vols., (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 3:500-501; Ellen White to O. A. Olson, August, 1892; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 329, 342. White attributed the tendency of some leaders to hold onto too many responsibilities to the misconception that they, by right of their job title could do it better than others. This attitude and behavior she condemned as sinful. Ellen White to Willie and Mary White, August 23, 1883. While many of the problems with leadership initially were inadvertent and resulting from the very small number of individuals chosen to administer the church, others were due to a deliberate abuse of power. The phrase "kingly power" became a hallmark of White's concerns about deliberate power gathering in the early twentieth century. John Harvey Kellogg often found himself the recipient of such calls, but this term was not limited to Kellogg, and was readily used in relation to other leaders. For instance, the *General Conference Bulletin* of 1903 reports Ellen White using this term at least seven times during talks at the 1903 General Conference.

¹⁹¹ Just five men made all the decisions prior to 1886. This was increased to seven in 1886, and then subsequently to thirteen. But many of these men did not live in Battle Creek, and most of them traveled frequently. Consequently, many decisions ended up being made by a handful of men.

¹⁹² In addition to the cultural issues, workers in countries outside of North America complained that centralization of decision making meant it took too long to get a decision and hence hampered mission. A good description of the frustrations encountered by leaders in Australia is to be found in a later speech by Daniells. See *General Conference Bulletin*, 1913, 108.

numerically and geographically.¹⁹³ While initially workable, within ten years the basic organizational structure had been supplemented with a variety of voluntary, but legally incorporated, auxiliary organizations, each largely independent of the General Conference and run by its own officers.¹⁹⁴ The duplication and independence of the auxiliary societies, while initially helpful, began to pose a problem for efficient and effective management. Furthermore, the structure was unworkable for some of the smaller and distant mission fields which simply did not have the numbers to staff so many different organizations.¹⁹⁵

Debate over the Need for a President

In the wake of these organizational problems, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones began articulating an ecclesiology in which Christ's headship precluded their being any

¹⁹³ In 1863, at the time of church organization, the membership numbered around 3500, all of whom were located in North America. See David Trim, "World Population and Membership: History and Projections." Online archives, Office of Archives, Statistics and Research of the Seventh-day Adventist Church., accessed February 12, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Other/MembershipAndPopulationEstimates2002.pdf>. But by the 1901, General Conference the membership is reported by the General Conference President as being 75,768 with a significant number living outside of North America. See the *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 18, 21.

¹⁹⁴ The list of auxiliary organizations included the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society, the General Tract and Missionary Society, the General Sabbath School Association, the Health and Temperance Society (later changed to the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association), the General Conference Association, the National Religious Liberty Association, and the Foreign Mission Board.

¹⁹⁵ New mission fields struggled with the evolving structure of the church and the demands it placed on personnel. They were only able to function by making changes to suit their own situations. For instance, a shortage of available leaders in South Africa meant that it was impossible to staff all the auxiliary organizations in addition to conference personal. A. T. Robinson, the man charged with organizing the conference in South Africa came up with a creative solution which substituted representative secretaries at the conference level instead of appointing full boards for each organization. Robinson would later introduce the same idea successfully to Australia. The Australian conferences also developed a new level of organization, a union conference to deal with the problem of the extraordinary length of time (six to nine months) it took to get decisions from North America. These changes made for functional reasons would be influential in the later denomination-wide reorganization in 1901. See Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 78-81.

human head of the church.¹⁹⁶ They considered that individuals and individual churches were independent under God's headship alone, and supported their view not only from Scripture but also by quoting a phrase from Ellen White which read "It is not wise to choose one man as president of the General Conference."¹⁹⁷ Plucked out of a context in which White suggested that the work should be divided into fields and that the president needed counsellors, it was clearly not intended to be understood in the way Waggoner and Jones used it. Indeed, White specifically disagreed with Waggoner's organizational ideas. In a letter to Jones in 1894 she wrote, "Elder Waggoner has . . . agitated strange theories. He has brought before some of the people, ideas in regard to organization that ought never to have had expression."¹⁹⁸ She further suggested that in advocating these theories Waggoner was trying to tear down the organization God had built up.¹⁹⁹

Although Waggoner and Jones had taken a statement out of context to support their views, the mere attachment of White's name to the phrase persuaded many church members that what Waggoner and Jones were espousing had her blessing. As a result,

¹⁹⁶ While the views of Jones and Waggoner were slightly different, they had in common the concern to eliminate a human head of the church. See Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 87. The pair ended up pushing for the church to adopt one of two positions, either, having more than one General Conference president, or having no president at all. While the absence of a president was more in keeping with their thinking, Waggoner and Jones appear to have been open to any step that might lead to reducing the power of a single individual over the church. Ironically, while Jones argued that "no man was the head of any other man" he was prepared to take on the role of conference president in one of the largest conferences in North America.

¹⁹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1962), 342. This testimony was originally published in *Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers* (Series A, No. 8, 1897), 27-32.

¹⁹⁸ Ellen G. White to A. T. Jones, Letter J-037, January 14, 1894.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid

the title of president was discarded by the chief executive officer the church, albeit briefly in 1897.²⁰⁰

Major Reorganization Begins

By the time of the 1901 General Conference session, it was clear that change had to happen. The growing tension between Kellogg and the leaders of the church added even more impetus for change. Ellen White met with some of the denominational leaders on the day prior to the beginning of the session. There she warned that “God calls for a decided change” in the church.²⁰¹ But organizational change alone would not solve the issues. White believed that changes to the organizational structure needed to be accompanied by a change in the attitudes of those in leadership.²⁰² Humility and a willingness to work in harmony with each other were as essential to unity and fulfillment of mission as any structural change.

While White actively preached the need for attitudinal change and humility, she left the form of organizational change to the General Conference session delegates. Nevertheless, she provided clear guidelines for their deliberations. First, the governing and decision making of the church needed a much broader base than one or even half a dozen men. Under no circumstances should one single mind be in control of any committee, institution, or area of the church’s mission. Second, committees should have

²⁰⁰ George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 90. I can find no evidence that Ellen White commented on this change.

²⁰¹ Ellen G. White, “A Call to Reconsecrate, Reorganize and Advance,” MS43, April 1, 1901, in *Manuscript Releases*, 13:192-207.

²⁰² Ibid. A significant portion of White’s speech in the library, and the majority of her speech on the first day of the General Conference, focused on the need of right attitudes and working with one another. She urged humility, love for brethren, putting away of selfishness and kingly power, restraint of speech and harmony between brethren. All were told to go home and pray and plead to be fashioned in God’s image. See also White’s response to the “President’s Address” in *General Conference Bulletin* 1901, 23-27.

representatives from all areas of God's work including publishing, education and health. Third, new people should be brought into the decision making process, rather than depending on all the same people as in the past. Fourth, the medical and ministerial arms of the church were to work together and be united in purpose. Finally, individuals chosen as leaders were to put aside any selfishness and kingly power. They were to be disciplined, true to principle, rightly representing the character of God, and open to the guiding of the Holy Spirit.²⁰³

The following day, at the opening of the General Conference session, White reiterated the urgent need for change.²⁰⁴ In response a committee was appointed to study the issue of reorganization.²⁰⁵ After several days of deliberation, the committee brought a series of recommendations back to the General Conference session, all of which passed with minimal discussion and debate. Five significant organizational changes resulted from the recommendations:

1. Most of the auxiliary organizations became departments of the conferences rather than independent and semi-independent bodies, with the exception of the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association. While this body was willing to place the international medical interests under the General Conference, it retained autonomy in North America.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ White, Response to the "President's Address," *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 23-27. White also reminded delegates that Christ was the source of all wisdom, and that delegates were to seek out God to ensure that every decision was in harmony with his will. See White, "Our Supply in Christ," *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 35-37; "General Conference Proceedings: Third Meeting, Thursday, April 4, 3pm," *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 68-69; White, "In the Regions Beyond," *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 83.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 27.

2. A new level of administration was adopted. The new union conferences would be a decision making body at a level between the state or local conferences and the General Conference.
3. The General Conference Executive was expanded to twenty-five members, which included Union Conference Presidents and an unprecedented six-member representation from the health work.
4. The chief administrator of the church would be the chairperson of the executive committee, to be appointed by the committee from amongst its members. There would no longer be an office of president.
5. The structure of the foreign mission board, and the financial base for mission was changed.²⁰⁶

The recommendations appeased both those who wanted increased levels of organization, and Jones and Waggoner who wanted to do away with the presidency.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Kellogg got to maintain, at least temporarily, the independence of the health institutions and into the bargain got a significant say on the General Conference Executive Committee with the appointment of six individuals to represent the health work of the church. It seemed like schism had been avoided. White was pleased and attributed the progress to the work of God.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Adapted from the summaries of the outcome by Barry David Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, Future*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 15 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), 173-176. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 108-109. A full list of recommendations can be found in "General Summary of Organizations and Recommendations as adopted by the General Conference and the General Conference Committee, April 2 to May 1, 1901," *General Conference Quarterly Bulletin*, 1901, 499-506.

²⁰⁷ Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 109.

²⁰⁸ Remarks by Ellen White in the "Missionary Farewell Service." *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, 463-64. See also comments in E. G. White, "Bring an Offering to the Lord." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 26, 1901. While White was happy with the structural changes, she did not see much evidence of attitudinal changes following the conference. Thus, her personal letters contain ongoing

A Short Lived Harmony

Much to the consternation of the anti-president lobby, Daniells who had been elected the chairman of the new executive committee, and who was trying to make the new structure work, began reusing the title president within only a few weeks of the decision to drop it.²⁰⁹ He argued that this was necessary for the committee to do its work, and that the move to drop the title had been unwise.²¹⁰ Daniells also found himself in the center of a bitter dispute with J. H. Kellogg over Daniells' rigid no debt financial policies.²¹¹ As a result Kellogg threw his support behind the organizational ideas of Jones and Waggoner. Given Kellogg's history, it seems likely that his sole motivation for this support was that the views of Jones and Waggoner would free him from the limitations placed on his own leadership.

The immediate outcome of the restructuring was one of improved efficiency, and increased missionary endeavor, but implementation revealed a few deficiencies in the new organizational structure.²¹² As a result, a series of small changes to the 1901 constitution were recommended to the 1903 General Conference session. The most

reproof for the exercise of kingly power and lament for the lack of progress that should have occurred. See for instance, Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and His Fellow Workers, Letter D-049, April 12, 1903; Ellen G. White to Jesse Arthur, Letter A-017, January 14, 1903. Similar thoughts are present in her talks at the 1903 General Conference.

²⁰⁹ Oliver, 189.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 189-195. Oliver discusses in detail the reason put forward for the change in the correspondence between Daniells and Willie White.

²¹¹ The dispute erupted in relation to a call to build a sanitarium in England. See Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011), 222-224. For further context of this dispute the reader is referred back to my discussion in the case study on the Kellogg Crisis.

²¹² Oliver, 176-179. Oliver identifies the dramatic increase in foreign missionaries sent out in 1901-1902 as evidence for increased missionary endeavor. The fact that the chairperson of the executive committee was to be elected by the committee rather than the General Conference in session in the new structure meant that the chairperson could be changed at the whim of the committee. This raised concerns about possible instability of leadership in the new structure.

important of these related to the role of the chairman of the General Conference Executive. It was recommended that the title president be formally reinstated, and that the president be elected by the delegates of the General Conference session rather than the members of the Executive Committee.²¹³ These changes were designed to provide more continuity and stability to leadership, and give the president a proper mandate under which to operate. Nevertheless, these recommendations were the most debated issues of the conference. Indeed, unlike the relative calm of the 1901 General Conference, the 1903 General Conference saw heated discussion over organizational matters.

Waggoner objected that the proposed changes were “fundamentally and diametrically opposed to the principles of organization as set forth in the Bible,” since they exalted one person above all others. Furthermore, the election of a human head showed the church did not have enough confidence in the leading of the Holy Spirit.²¹⁴ Jones also objected to the change believing it clashed with the advice of White, and described it as the “road towards kingly power.”²¹⁵ Along with Percy Magan, he likened the principles contained in the new constitution to those that gave rise to the papacy.²¹⁶

Arguing for the recommendations, Daniells and Willie White used Ellen White’s writings to argue that the gist of the call at the 1901 meetings was not to do away with the presidency but rather by decentralization, to reduce the burden laid upon the

²¹³ A minority report was also presented in which delegates were urged not to adopt the new constitution, but rather to continue working under the 1901 constitution with its suspension of the title president. See “Report of the Minority of the Committee on Plans and Constitution,” *General Conference Bulletin*, 1903, 146-147.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150, 154. While Kellogg is not recorded as entering this debate on the floor, his position is expressed in correspondence. He wrote that he regarded the changes as schemes to enhance the power of Daniells and Prescott. See J. H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, March 27, 1903.

president.²¹⁷ Daniells further argued that there was a difference between organization and the way it was used. Organization in itself was not evil, but rather was necessary for the unity and ongoing work of the church. Abusing the organization to build kingly power however, was to be avoided.²¹⁸ Daniells was supported by G. I. Butler and Adventist pioneer J. N. Loughborough who noted that the hand of God had been obvious from the church's earliest attempts at organization.²¹⁹ Loughborough additionally compared the progress of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to that of the First-day Adventists, and noted that there was much confusion amongst the First day Adventists that he attributed to their lack of organization.²²⁰

After long sessions of discussion, the new constitution was passed.²²¹ Principal objector Jones at least in the first instance proclaimed that "There will be no more loyal man to that constitution than I am, because that is 'the constitution.' . . . Whoever shall be elected as president, he will have no more loyal standby or cooperator than myself, because we are all brethren. Unity with my brethren is a good deal more to me than any personal convictions or opinions I may have advocated."²²² This claim was soon put to

²¹⁷ Ibid., 159-161. Ellen White, while present as a speaker, was not a delegate and therefore was not able to be part of the business sessions. It was therefore up to her son Willie to represent her interests.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 160.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 162, 163.

²²⁰ Ibid., 164.

²²¹ "General Conference Proceedings: Twentieth Meeting, Thursday, April 9, 1903, 7 pm." *General Conference Bulletin*, April 11, 1903, 173. Of 100 delegates, 85 voted for the proposed changes, and 20 against the proposed changes. Despite the significant margin between those for and those against the proposal, a seventy five percent majority was required to change the constitution. Thus, the changes only just attained the required amount of support.

²²² Ibid., 177.

the test, and Jones ultimately found himself unable to provide the support he had promised.²²³

A Fight for Control of the Battle Creek Sanitarium

In spite of the amount of time devoted to matters relating to the title, role, and election of the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during these meetings, White was not consulted in the debate, nor did she offer her own opinion on the topic in the context of either the 1901 or the 1903 meetings.

White was much more concerned about the outcome of the other organizational matter that caused heated discussion during the 1903 General Conference: the relationship between institutions and the church as a whole. A special committee on institutions recommended to the delegates that “All institutions are to be owned directly by the people, General Conference, Union Conference, State Conference, or organized mission field.” Further, it recommended that the controlling boards should be elected by the Conference, and that all institutional property be considered as a department of the Conference work.²²⁴

John Harvey Kellogg as president of the Battle Creek Sanitarium was incensed. He considered the recommendation as an excuse for others to control that which he felt entitled to control, and sarcastically suggested that the General Conference might as well take all individual property too.²²⁵ While others insisted that the move was about

²²³ While Jones may have meant to support the new president, in practice his support was short lived. Several months later he again pushed his own views on organization in a book titled, *One-Man Power*. Three years later he published another work entitled *Some History, Some Experience, and Some Facts* in which he expresses surprise that people considered he should have worked to make the changes he opposed a success. He described the 1903 changes to the constitution as opposite to the principles of light, and thus implies the changes represent a form of backsliding. See pages 20-23 especially.

²²⁴ “Report of the Committee on Institutions,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 5, 1903, 67.

²²⁵ “General Conference Proceedings: Tenth Meeting, Friday, April 3, 1903, 9.50 am.” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 6, 1903, 74-75.

ownership and not control, Kellogg responded that “ownership always means control,” and to believe otherwise was to be deceived.²²⁶ In addition to his concern about losing personal control, Kellogg was particularly bothered that those who rejected the health message and treated it with indifference would both own and control health institutions.²²⁷

One delegate responded to Kellogg’s outburst by requesting Kellogg tell him who actually owned the Sanitarium, and whether it was true that if Kellogg left the church he could take the Battle Creek Sanitarium with him.²²⁸ Kellogg gave a long winded response which he used to defend his own integrity, and to counter White’s condemnation of his use of bonds, which he saw as an attack on his character.²²⁹ He noted that he was tired of allegations that he was going to “steal the Sanitarium” and indicated he thought his ongoing presence at the General Conference sessions negated this accusation.²³⁰

Nevertheless, Kellogg was clearly concerned about his own role, and he intimated that the recommendation on the floor would likely result in a change of doctors and administrators to suit the purposes of the church leaders. He further implied the move was un-American since it fostered communistic principles rather than upholding individual rights.²³¹ Moreover, it was inconsistent since it would bind all institutions to

²²⁶ Ibid., 80.

²²⁷ Ibid., 79.

²²⁸ *General Conference Session Recording Secretary Minutes for April 3, 1903*, 50.

²²⁹ Ibid., 50-61.

²³⁰ Ibid., 50a.

²³¹ “General Conference Proceedings: Tenth Meeting,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 6, 1903, 74-75.

the General Conference when he himself was criticized for binding other institutions to the Battle Creek Sanitarium.²³² Kellogg even resorted to a flimsy eschatological argument suggesting that independence would allow the institutions to stand during the time of persecution when the church could no longer operate.

Not only was Kellogg the primary objector to the changes, he also found himself the center of a very personal interrogation about the direction and finances of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. It was clear to everyone that while the recommendation from the Committee on Institutions covered all institutions, its focus was on Kellogg and the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

Kellogg stated defiantly in relation to the recommendation, “I expect you will pass it; but I want you to know that I object to it, and do not expect to be bound by it in anything I have anything to do with.”²³³ Kellogg had little support, and the measures passed easily.

While Ellen White did not take part in the 1903 General Conference business sessions, or discuss the issues related to the title and election of president, she did allude to the issues regarding the Battle Creek Sanitarium in her sermons and talks during the General Conference Session.²³⁴ She was however most vocal about the need for unity, identifying the divisions in the church as standing in the way of the advancement of its

²³² Ibid., 76. Kellogg missed the subtle difference that control by the church would mean a wider number of minds were involved in making decisions regarding the hospital, rather than having decision making dominated by a single individual as in the case of the Sanitarium bonds.

²³³ Ibid., 78.

²³⁴ Ellen White could not take part in the 1903 business sessions since she was not listed as a delegate to the 1903 General Conference Session. She was a guest speaker however, and was able to talk on whatever topic she desired during those sessions. However, historically White rarely took part in the business sessions of such conferences. Her participation in the 1901 business sessions was unusual.

mission.²³⁵ In her opening sermon, White stated that “we have no time to dwell on little differences.” She urged the delegates learn about unity in diversity, and called her hearers to recognize how much they need people who think differently than themselves.²³⁶

This was followed two days later with a talk on lessons from Josiah, in which White emphasized the lack of progress the church had made since 1901.²³⁷ Reformation was needed in every institution and in every heart to ensure that the gospel advanced as it should. Criticism was to stop, and divisions were to be removed. White further asserted that “The gospel and the medical missionary work are one. They can not be divided. They are to be bound together.”²³⁸

As the week progressed White continued to emphasize the theme of unity. She noted that to obtain God’s blessings, we must act on God’s word by healing relationships and putting away differences.²³⁹ She called for individuals to place themselves where the Holy Spirit could work on their hearts and for recognition that love of God and

²³⁵ White, “Lessons from the Sending out of the Spies,” *General Conference Bulletin*, March 30, 1903, 11.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²³⁷ White, “Lessons from Josiah’s Reign,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 1, 1903, 29-33. White implied that the fires that had swept away the publishing house and Sanitarium were messages from God that the church had failed to heed. In addition to the message about the need for reform, White made specific comments about building smaller sanitariums and the failure to move the Sanitarium out of Battle Creek. These attracted the ire of Kellogg who hijacked the testimony meeting which followed to defend his own actions in relation to the rebuilding of the Sanitarium at Battle Creek.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²³⁹ White, “How to Receive God’s Blessings,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 2, 1903, 55.

neighbor formed the foundation of the Christian life.²⁴⁰ She urged unity of effort between all parts of God's work.²⁴¹

On the morning of the report presented by the Committee on Institutions, White spoke to the assembled group before the business meeting. Although her theme was about the need to move institutions from Battle Creek, she gave very specific advice regarding the Battle Creek Sanitarium and its director. First, everything should be done to make sure that the Battle Creek Sanitarium would not be lost to the church. Second, the Battle Creek Sanitarium needed to be placed on a "proper foundation" so that it would be obvious that it belonged to the work of God. Third, no one person was to be in total control of the Sanitarium, and finally, Dr. Kellogg was not to be pushed out of his position unless he abandoned truth.²⁴² Thus, delegates entered the business meeting with the Battle Creek Sanitarium uppermost in their minds.

Over the next few days during which the heated discussion played out in the business meetings, White continued to give talks. We have records from only two of these, but both included material relevant to our discussion. On the Sabbath, clearly concerned about unity, she called for repentance, noting that Christians "could not afford to speak hasty words, or cherish a harsh unforgiving spirit."²⁴³ Then Sunday, she once again urged that the management and finances of the Battle Creek Sanitarium be reviewed in order to make it more mission oriented, while at the same time in a veiled reference to Kellogg, she urged delegates not to "cut a man to pieces before you do

²⁴⁰ White, "Unity of Effort," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 2, 1903, 58.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

²⁴² White, "Our Duty to Leave Battle Creek," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 6, 1903, 87.

²⁴³ White, "A Call to Repentance," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 6, 1903, 90.

anything to help him.”²⁴⁴ She further noted the lack of unity amongst Seventh-day Adventists, which she unhesitatingly called “a sin which, unless God’s people repent, will withhold from them his blessing.”²⁴⁵

Continuing Mediation after the 1903 General Conference

White’s messages from both April 3 and April 5 were reprinted in the *Review and Herald* to reach a larger audience. Her other pieces in the *Review* in April, May, and June rounded out her call for repentance, avoidance of evil speaking about others, and the need for working together in unity. Selfishness she suggested was the major obstacle to fellowship, unity, and the advancement of the gospel. Thus, in order to obtain the unity that God longs to provide his people, Christians needed to put their selfishness aside, to “give up their way for his way.”²⁴⁶

The same priorities can be observed in White’s personal letters in the twelve months after the 1903 General Conference Session to those who played a central role in the debates. She made no reference in any of them to the heated discussion about the title, role, and election of the General Conference President.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, she freely used the title president for the elected leader of all levels of administration within the church.

White’s letters in this time frame did, however, address topics related to debate over the church ownership of institutions. Unity was her first priority, and unity of action

²⁴⁴ White, “The Work Before Us,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 7, 104-106. This talk was reprinted in the *Review and Herald* on April 14, 1903.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁴⁶ Ellen White, “The Ministry is Ordained of God.” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 12, 1903.

²⁴⁷ Letters White sent to Jones, Waggoner, Kellogg, Magan, Paulson, Prescott, and Daniells between April 1902 and April 1903 were examined.

was a frequent topic both in her letters, and in the testimonies which she collated for publication during 1903. Within a month of the 1903 General Conference, the General Conference leadership and the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association both received letters from White which affirmed the organizational steps already taken, but urged that unity of action was still required between the ministers of the church and the medical work.²⁴⁸

It is clear that White was not just concerned for unity of action, but also that the Battle Creek Sanitarium might be lost if Kellogg left the church. This concern resulted in Daniells receiving a letter almost as soon as the 1903 General Conference ended. It stressed how important it was that nothing be done that might “drive Dr Kellogg to desperation” or give him an excuse to “wrench himself from the faith.”²⁴⁹ In addition Jones was entrusted with a special mission “to try and save Kellogg and the medical work” and to deliver her letters of advice and warning to Kellogg when the time was right.²⁵⁰ The letters to Kellogg called for him to repent, to reconsider his course of action, and to stop exercising kingly power.²⁵¹ They also specifically addressed ownership and control of the Battle Creek Sanitarium which White considered needed to be placed in a “clear, safe position where it belongs.”²⁵² While Daniells and Jones took

²⁴⁸ Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and his Fellow Workers, Letter D-049, April 12, 1903; Ellen G. White to Those in Council at Battle Creek, Letter B-054, April 16, 1903; Ellen G. White to Brethren in Council at Battle Creek, Letter B-058, April 17, 1903; Ellen G. White to Brethren at the Medical Missionary Council, Letter *B-063, April 19, 1903; Ellen G. White, Brethren at the Medical Missionary Council, Letter B-067, April 23, 1903.

²⁴⁹ Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells and his Fellow Workers, Letter D-049, April 12, 1903.

²⁵⁰ Ellen G. White to A. T. Jones, Letter J-059, April 19, 1903.

²⁵¹ Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-055, April 15, 1903 and Letter *K-065, April 19, 1903.

²⁵² Ellen G. White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter K-055, April 15, 1903.

their task seriously, they were unable to obtain any agreement from Kellogg in relation to the ownership or control of the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

As the year progressed, the topic of the ownership of the Sanitarium was largely abandoned in White's letters to Jones, Waggoner, and Paulson as they fell more in line with the thinking and plans of Kellogg. Instead she began to warn them about the seductive nature of Kellogg's theology on the nature of God, the controlling nature of Kellogg, and their need to cut themselves loose from his control and disobedience.²⁵³

Although all new institutions and many other already existing institutions came under the umbrella of the church as a result of the 1903 General Conference decisions, Kellogg remained defiant about the ownership and control of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. It never did come under the control of the church, and White's biggest fears were realized when Kellogg disassociated himself with the church taking the Sanitarium with him.

Conclusions

It is clear from her role in the 1901 General Conference, that Ellen White considered organization a key stepping stone to unity in the church. However, it was a very specific form of organization that she had in mind. The only form of organization which could promote unity was a functional organization which both enhanced and advanced the mission of the church while avoiding inefficiency and centralization of power. Furthermore, functional organization must be supported by humble, selfless leaders who recognized their own limitations, and their need for the counsel and the help of others. This was only possible when leaders confessed their shortcomings and prayed for God to work through them.

²⁵³ See for instance, Ellen G White to A.T. Jones, Letter J-178, August 2, 1903; Ellen G. White to D. Paulson, Letter P-220, October 14, 1903; Ellen G. White to E. J. Waggoner, Letter *W-230, October 2, 1903.

What is most striking in this case study are the diametrically opposed approaches White took to the two controversial issues arising during the 1903 General Conference session. On one hand she totally ignored the heated discussion about the presidency even failing to defend against the misuse of her own writings, while on the other hand she could almost be accused of inciting disagreement in relation to the ownership of the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

White considered her role to be predominantly pastoral; hence her tendency was to stay out of debates about specific forms and structures while advocating unity. Her actions in relation to the issues surrounding the presidency therefore are quite in keeping with this understanding of her role. Further, it should also be noted that while White did wade into the debate over the ownership of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, she did not specifically address the underlying motion that caused the debate, that is, she did not explicitly state that all institutions should come under church control.²⁵⁴

Two major factors must be taken into account in assessing the actions of Ellen White in relation to these two cases. The first is the relative importance of the two issues for the mission of the church. The semantics of which title was applied to the chief executive officer and the identity of the group who elected this officer, were minor issues in comparison to those associated with the institutional discussion. The organization could still run effectively with or without these changes. Sanitariums, on the other hand, represented the tangible expression of the health message which White regarded as the “right arm” of the church. As such they were crucial to the mission of the church. Any loss of the flagship health institution of the denomination along with others tied to it via

²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it is clear from Ellen White’s previous writings that she considered institutions that took money from the Seventh-day Adventist church and its membership should be overtly Adventist in character, and should contribute to the wider mission of the church. See for instance her response to the undenominational controversy. White to J. H. Kellogg, March 10, 1900; White to J. H. Kellogg, March 12, 1900.

the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association would therefore be a significant blow for the church and its mission.

The second important factor to be considered was the likelihood of imminent schism. The reader is already familiar with the back story and other issues associated with John Harvey Kellogg from the second case study. The long history of antagonism between Kellogg and church leaders had escalated significantly by 1903. Furthermore, just prior to the 1903 General Conference, Kellogg had intimated that schism was likely. Thus, the defiance shown by Kellogg in relation to the possibility of denominational ownership of the Battle Creek Sanitarium was to be taken as a serious threat to the ongoing relationship between the hospital and the church and, based on the number of employees under Kellogg's control, to the unity of the church as a whole.

Consequently, Ellen White clearly considered the controversy surrounding the ownership of the Battle Creek Sanitarium deserving of an active response while the controversy surrounding the presidency was relatively insignificant. Her choice to talk about issues specifically related to the Battle Creek Sanitarium however, seems at first glance to stir up trouble rather than promoting harmony in that it focused the delegates on a single institution at crucial moments during the conference session.

But while White focused on the Battle Creek Sanitarium and its director, her concerns illustrated general principles in her understanding of unity of the church. Unity for White involved a unity of action and purpose with all components of the church working together in harmony to promote the mission of the church. Thus, in specifically calling for the Sanitarium to be placed on a proper foundation, she recognized the need for all institutions to have a Christian identity and mission focus, while her call for a financial review did not question the integrity of Kellogg as he imagined, but rather

illustrated the need of institutions to demonstrate the priority of the mission in their fiscal choices.²⁵⁵

The concept of union with Christ as central to unity is slightly less prominent in this case study than the two prior cases. In fact, it is rarely mentioned directly outside of her letters to Kellogg, but it is nevertheless strongly implied in Ellen White's frequent calls to repentance, and her encouragement of delegates to place themselves where they can be molded by the Holy Spirit. Unlike the previous two cases, the majority of those hearing White's calls to repentance, reform, and healing of relationships were unlikely to recognize these calls as appeals to repent of a wrong attitude towards her prophetic message. However, this was clearly still an issue for messages directed at Kellogg who questioned the role of White, and her right to dictate his course of action.

²⁵⁵ Ellen White's criticism of Kellogg's bond issue, and his accumulating debt was based on the financial needs of the world church. She did not want the money of members tied up in the Sanitarium for the long term when it might be needed for mission elsewhere. In her personal letters, White had addressed virtually every point which was aired publically during the meetings, apart from the issue of the bonds.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The preceding chapters have provided a predominantly descriptive approach to the theory and practice of Alexander Campbell and Ellen White in relation to unity of the church. The information emerging from these investigations is used in this chapter as the basis for the construction of models that integrate the views of Campbell and White on how church unity is to be attained and maintained.

Since the church exists historically in ecclesial communities, any model of Christian unity must take into account that concepts of unity are significantly influenced by beliefs about authority as well as beliefs about the nature and purpose of the church. Consequently, the integration of ideas for both Campbell and White, will have at their core a description of the identity of those amongst whom unity is desired, the authority that this group recognized, and the authority structure in which the unity is to occur. Specifics about how unity is to occur are then added to these core components. This involves both the building of the foundation upon which the core stands, as well as adding clarification and details to the core. In this way it is hoped that the relationship between unity and church authority that Campbell and White envisaged will be more clearly elucidated.

The models provide the groundwork for the comparative and evaluative analysis of Campbell's and White's views on unity that constitutes the bulk of this chapter. Similarities and differences between the two understandings of unity will be explored

first before examining the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach. The chapter ends with a few thoughts about the implications of the ideas for twenty-first century considerations of unity.

Integrating Theory and Practice into Models of Ecclesial Unity

Alexander Campbell and Ecclesial Unity

Campbell's pursuit of ecclesial unity was characterized by a fervent passion which emerged from his experience of the marked disunity of the Presbyterian Church. Starting with the principles expressed in his father's *Declaration and Address*, Campbell preached Christian unity.¹ In spite of his passion, Campbell struggled during his career to determine precisely what visible, ecclesial unity should look like, and more importantly, how it could be attained. Consequently, later writings contain a combination of maturing thought, vacillation, and at times outright inconsistency with his early thinking in relation to the means for maintaining unity.

The earliest views of Campbell were marked by bold, iconoclastic recommendations designed to release the church from the bondage of human traditions, and accompanied by simple, apparently logical steps towards unity. Creeds,² misplaced emphasis on distinctive beliefs,³ the proliferation of theological terms which had no

¹ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (Washington, PA: Brown and Sample, 1809).

² For example, Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Above" *Christian Baptist* 5, no.1 (1827):361. This strongly worded rejection of creeds was written in reply to a letter by Spencer Clack.

³ Alexander Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)." 196; Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptism: With Its Antecedents and Consequents*, 17. Campbell believed that focus should be on the essentials of salvation instead of on distinctive beliefs.

biblical basis,⁴ hierarchical authority structures,⁵ and abuse of authority by clergy were all targets for his criticism.⁶ Many of these concerns were maintained throughout his life, however some were tempered and adjusted by experience.

Figure 1 outlines the core elements of Campbell's mature views on Christian unity. Campbell presupposed that the church had an essential unity due to its intimate connection with the one and only Lord. Thus, for Campbell the attainment of unity was dependent upon Christ, not upon human beings. Nevertheless, the church had a responsibility to make essential unity visible since visible unity was necessary for the conversion of the world and the commencement of the millennium.⁷ The bulk of Campbell's writing in relation to unity focused on baptism as the entrance to essential unity, and clarification of the elements necessary for visible unity, in particular the approach to the authority which governs Christians, and the nature of the authority structure in which unity occurs.

Critical to his thinking was the idea that visible Christian unity could only occur between individual authentic Christians who believed that Christ was the Messiah, and thus repented and obeyed his will as expressed in the New Testament.⁸ Such persons he

⁴ Alexander Campbell, *Christian System*, 131-2; Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. IV," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 11 (1825), 158-160.

⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Bishops," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no 9 (1830): 427-428.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alexander Campbell, "Millennium, No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no, 2 (1830): 53-58; Alexander Campbell, "Prefatory Remarks," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no, 1 (1830): 3-7.

⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Union of Christians – No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 5 (1839): 212; Alexander Campbell, "Reply" [to J. J. Harvey's "Christian Union, No. V"], *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no 12 (1846):690. Campbell's calling for a convention of Protestant parties in 1839 has been seen by some as evidence of a softening in Campbell's view of the necessity of union occurring only between individual Christians, but his criticism of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 leaves no doubt that he had not abandoned this principle. Rather, the Protestant convention seems to have been a way to reconsider the nature of core or essential beliefs. In this context he suggested that the basis of union would be "whatever

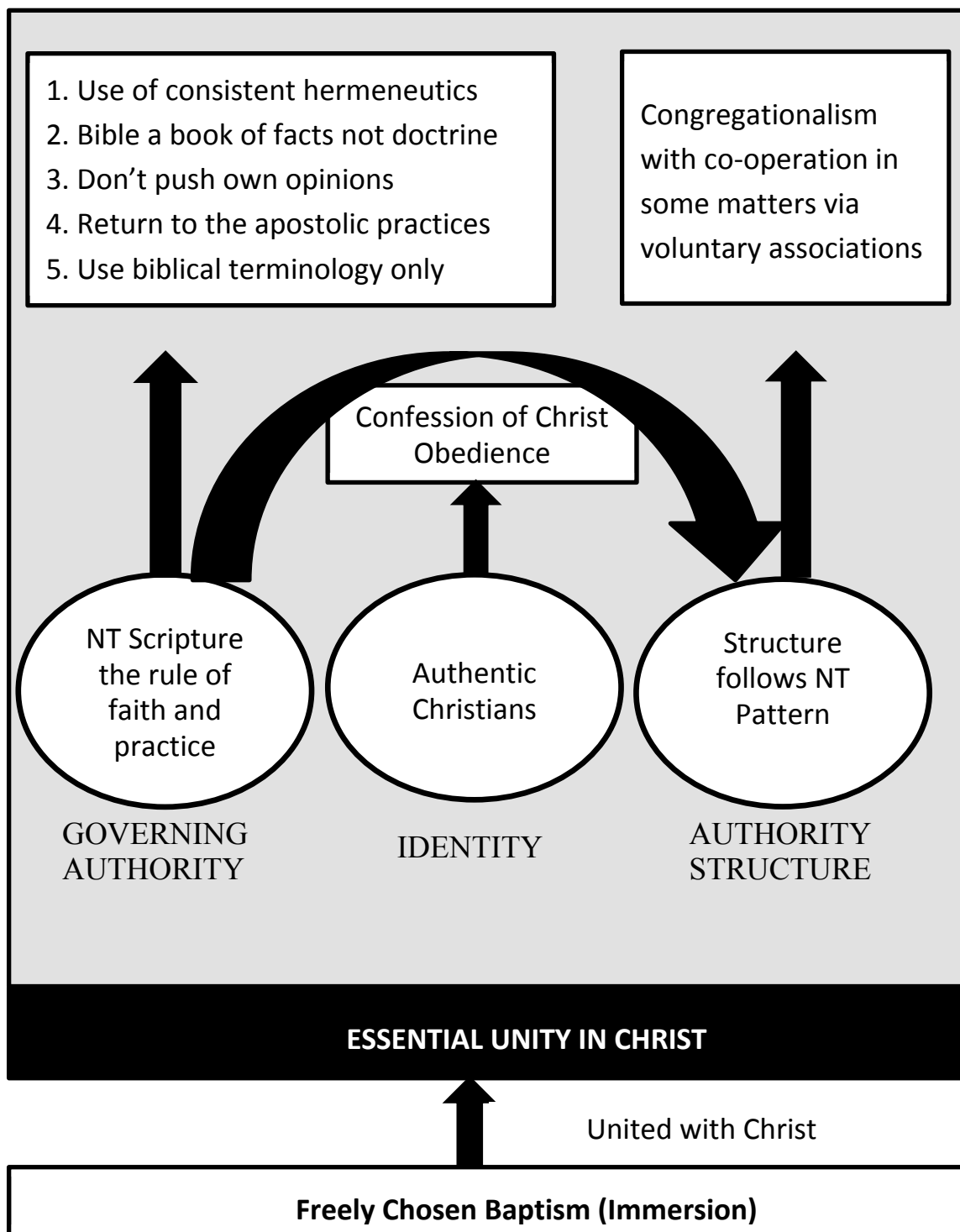


FIGURE 1: The Core Components of Alexander Campbell's Unity

assumed would willingly assent to credobaptism by immersion. While Campbell at times conceded that one could be an authentic Christian and not be baptized by immersion,⁹ this was clearly imperfect and inadequate in his thinking.¹⁰ Campbell rigidly affirmed the necessity of baptism by immersion for both remission of sins and discipleship.¹¹ Baptism by immersion was not only a necessity for salvation, but also the means by which the authentic Christian entered into the essential unity found in Christ. Consequently, visible unity could only occur between those who had been baptized by immersion.

Campbell emphasized the pivotal role of New Testament Scripture as the authority which ruled the life of united Christians. Relying on enlightenment presuppositions he believed that all who studied Scripture with similar methodology would come to the same conclusions, thus he advocated a prescribed method of biblical interpretation. In his early writings, Campbell required a “thus saith the Lord” for every

in faith, in piety, and morality is catholic, as universally admitted by all parties” and “whatever is not by all parties admitted as of divine authority, shall be rejected as schismatical and human.” Ultimately however, Campbell does not appear to have maintained this stance, as the declaration was in direct opposition to Campbell’s passionate arguments for the biblical basis of baptism by immersion.

⁹ See for instance the letter which triggered the famous Lunenburg Letter, and also Campbell’s response to the letter. Alexander Campbell, “Letters to England – No. 1.” *Millennial Harbinger* n.s. 1, no 6 (1837):272-273; Alexander Campbell, “Any Christians among Protestant Parties,” 411-414.

¹⁰ Despite at times conceding that some individuals who were not baptized by immersion could be authentic Christians, Campbell believed that if one willfully ignored the biblical injunction of baptism by immersion they could not be considered authentic Christians.

¹¹ Alexander Campbell, “Remission of Sins,” *Millennial Harbinger*, 1, Extra, (1930):16, 30-31. Roland Bainton correctly observes that the rigidity with which Campbell insisted upon baptism by immersion meant that few except the Baptists were interested in what Campbell had to say. He further asserts that Campbell’s concern for weekly communion cut off the chances of uniting with many of the interested Baptists. See Roland Bainton, *The Sage of Bethany: Pioneer in Broadcloth* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1960), 90-91. This limitation, together with the assertion that unity could only occur between individual Christians, proved to be a significant obstacle to Campbell’s goal of an ecumenical unity.

tenet of faith, and he vigorously objected to any tendency towards inference which would necessarily mix human opinion with authoritative biblical truth.¹² The boundaries of Scriptural authority were further reinforced by avoidance of any theological terminology which could not be found in Scripture. In addition, Campbell's attempt to separate the facts of Scripture from opinions, and his insistence that one need only confess the central fact of Scripture and submit to the institution of baptism, served not only to protect the boundaries of divine authority, but also to limit the areas of public disagreement.¹³

As Campbell gained leadership experience and reacted to church needs, he made some significant changes in the way he understood church relationships and the authority structure of the church. Some of the new ideas Campbell began advocating were not supported directly by a "thus saith the Lord." Thus, in order to stay true to the principle of the New Testament as the rule of faith, many of Campbell's changes were supported by extensive inference, which he had previously condemned. Nevertheless he did his best to maintain the boundaries between divine and human authority. One way he did this was to encourage a restoration of the practices of the apostolic church.¹⁴ In this way

¹² Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Pleaded in the Current Reformation* (Bethany, VA: Forrester and Campbell, 1839), 6; Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 8 (1825):134.

¹³ While diversity was embraced by Campbell, with all members being entitled to hold their own opinions, the injunction that one could not share their opinions unless asked, and further, should not preach or teach them, meant that there was no value to the diversity because there was no outlet for expression of diversity within the church.

¹⁴ See for instance: Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. VII: On the Breaking of Bread, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 2 (1825):180. Campbell's pursuit of apostolic practice initially also encompassed apostolic church structure and worship order. His assumption that the New Testament practice was uniform is problematic. First century documents reveal a considerable variation in practice between churches, although there is clearly some attempt at bringing uniformity to core practice.

unnecessary and unbiblical authority and practices could be stripped away to allow for the monarchy of Christ.¹⁵

The emphasis on apostolic practice significantly impacted the way Campbell considered church structure. He initially recognized individual and apparently autonomous churches in his study of the New Testament, and thus proposed a radical congregationalism which gave each congregation total autonomy. However, while these changes minimalized human authority, they also had the unintended consequence of providing limited expression for the visible manifestation of unity Campbell so desired.

Campbell began to modify his ideas as he was faced with a growing independent religious group that looked to him for leadership. While still attempting to protect the boundaries of Scripture and the key role of Scripture in governing the life of the church, Campbell began reinterpreting Scripture in the light of his perceived needs of the church. He focused particularly on changes which he imagined could increase the unity and mission of the church. Noticing the cooperation between churches in the New Testament, he began advocating organizational changes to engender cooperation between churches.¹⁶ While this was initially only at a local level, he went on to advocate a national voluntary organization to improve the efficiency of the church in accomplishing its goals. Where Campbell had previously categorically rejected the Jerusalem Council as a one-of-a kind council with no relevance for the modern church, it now served as a model for churches to gather together nationally to resolve issues common to all of

¹⁵ Campbell's advocacy of the apostolic practices contributed to his to emphasis on baptism by immersion, and the necessity of weekly communion. However, outside of these rites Campbell was inconsistent in his application of apostolic practices.

¹⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to 'Co-operation' by M. Winans," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (1835):120.

them.¹⁷ Campbell also began to recognize that there were times where congregationally based discipline might be unhealthy, and allowed for the sister churches to be involved in dealing with some disciplinary action.¹⁸ Such changes placed Campbell in a difficult position because he appeared to be reversing his previous position on congregational autonomy, the nature of the church, and the role of voluntary societies.

There were two keys to Campbell's Christian unity, one for essential unity, and the other for visible unity. The key to essential Christian unity was entrance by means of a freely chosen baptism by immersion. Building on this foundation, visible unity between authentic Christians demanded intentional restoration of the authority of the New Testament manifest in belief in the core facts of Scripture, unity in faith rather than opinion, and a return to the apostolic practices and church structure.

Ellen White and Ecclesial Unity

Ellen White's views on unity were not developed as a theoretical construct before being tested in the real world. Rather, they developed in response to her ministry experiences, and in the face of church crises. Consequently, like Campbell, we find her views on unity change with time and experience, reaching a mature form in the decade 1885 through 1895.

White's earliest writings about unity occurred prior to any formal organization of the Sabbatarian Adventists.¹⁹ At this time, a message of unity which emphasized both

¹⁷See for instance Campbell's series entitled "Church Organization" in the *Millennial Harbinger*, 1853, where the Jerusalem Council is used to justify the need for some co-operative action between churches.

¹⁸The apostle's appeal to Jerusalem is also used to justify sister churches being involved in disciplinary action. See the series entitled "Difficulties in the Church" in the *Millennial Harbinger* during 1840 and 1841.

¹⁹Between 1850 and 1860, several major factors contributed to the urgent need for discussion of church unity amongst the Sabbatarian Adventists. First, the lack of adequate safeguards on visiting teachers exposed the group to the possibility of conflicting ideas, deception and fanaticism. See Knight,

organization and faithfulness to biblical teachings was crucial for survival of the group, a fact which was emphasized as schisms began to arise within their midst.²⁰ White's early writings on unity were thus designed to meet specific needs. They were directed internally and identified the group amongst which unity was to occur as those with remnant characteristics, that is, those who keep the commandments and have the faith of Jesus. White's writings during this time focused primarily on maintaining unity through prayerful study of Scripture, adherence to key doctrinal truths, and obedience to the commandments of God.²¹ White was convinced that when individuals came in humility before God putting aside personal opinions and letting the Spirit illuminate their reading of Scripture, unity would occur.²² Gospel order was also recognized as necessary for

Organizing for Mission and Growth, 35-36. Second, new converts were only just beginning to be admitted to the group who had waited for Jesus to come in 1844. Sabbatarian Adventists initially held the Millerite view that at the conclusion of the 2,300 days, probation had closed, and that the door of salvation was therefore shut for those who had not accepted the final warning message in 1844. During this time they considered their work of evangelism was complete, and that all that was required of them was remaining faithful in the short period before Jesus would come. By 1850, the Sabbatarian Adventists had begun to revise their understanding of what the shut door meant, opening the way for evangelism and new converts to join those who had been disappointed in 1844. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., Commentary Reference Series Volume 10 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), s.v. Open and Shut Door. These new members who had not gone through the experiences of the previous decade meant that they were members who had not witnessed the Spirit's leading in the same way as the rest of the Sabbatarian Adventists. Third, 1854 saw the rise of two organized schisms from within the ranks of Sabbatarian Adventists. See the following footnote for details.

²⁰ The first schism was orchestrated by two pastors, H. S. Case and C. P. Russell, who were disenfranchised by the rebuke they received from White for their unchristian treatment of fellow members. Rejecting White's authority, they set out on their own, beginning by publishing a periodical called the *Messenger of Truth* which they hoped would attract other believers. They and their supporters would come to be labelled the 'Messenger Party.' The second schism occurred amongst pastors in Wisconsin who held a divergent view on the millennium. Although James White was amenable to these men retaining their positions if they were willing to refrain from preaching their opinions on the millennium, the pastors were unwilling to agree to the compromise. The two schismatic groups would later join forces. For further information See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., Commentary Reference Series Volume 10 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), s.v. Messenger Party; Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 39.

²¹ Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 3:446-449.

²² *Ibid.*

church unity, giving rise to the appointment of local church officers and a system for the identification of traveling preachers and teachers which were orthodox in their teaching. Although no formal organization beyond the local congregation was envisaged at this time, the addition of a congregational form of organization met the immediate needs of the group.²³

These early musings on unity recognized that unity occurred in Christ, but made no direct linkage of Christ's role with the core ideas of identity, authority, and authority structure. But what is most notably absent from these early musings is any significant recognition of the role of interpersonal and relational conflict in causing disunity. This would become a much more dominant theme in White's later writings as she faced the crises of the 1880s and beyond. Thus, White's earliest thinking about unity recognizes the core components of unity, but does not build a foundation upon which to consider them or integrate the relational ideas which dominate later thinking.

With the passage of time, the core components of White's definition of visible unity remain similar to her original articulations, but with some added clarifications, and notably, an extensive foundation which links the ideas specifically to Christ. Indeed, the bulk of White's discussion in relation to Christian unity is focused on setting the correct foundation for unity. This foundation along with her clarification of the core components of identity, authority, and authority structure are displayed on Figure 2.

The foundation of ecclesial unity was clearly identified as union with Christ by which White meant that individuals were in a dynamic relationship with Christ in which

²³ Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1854), 15.

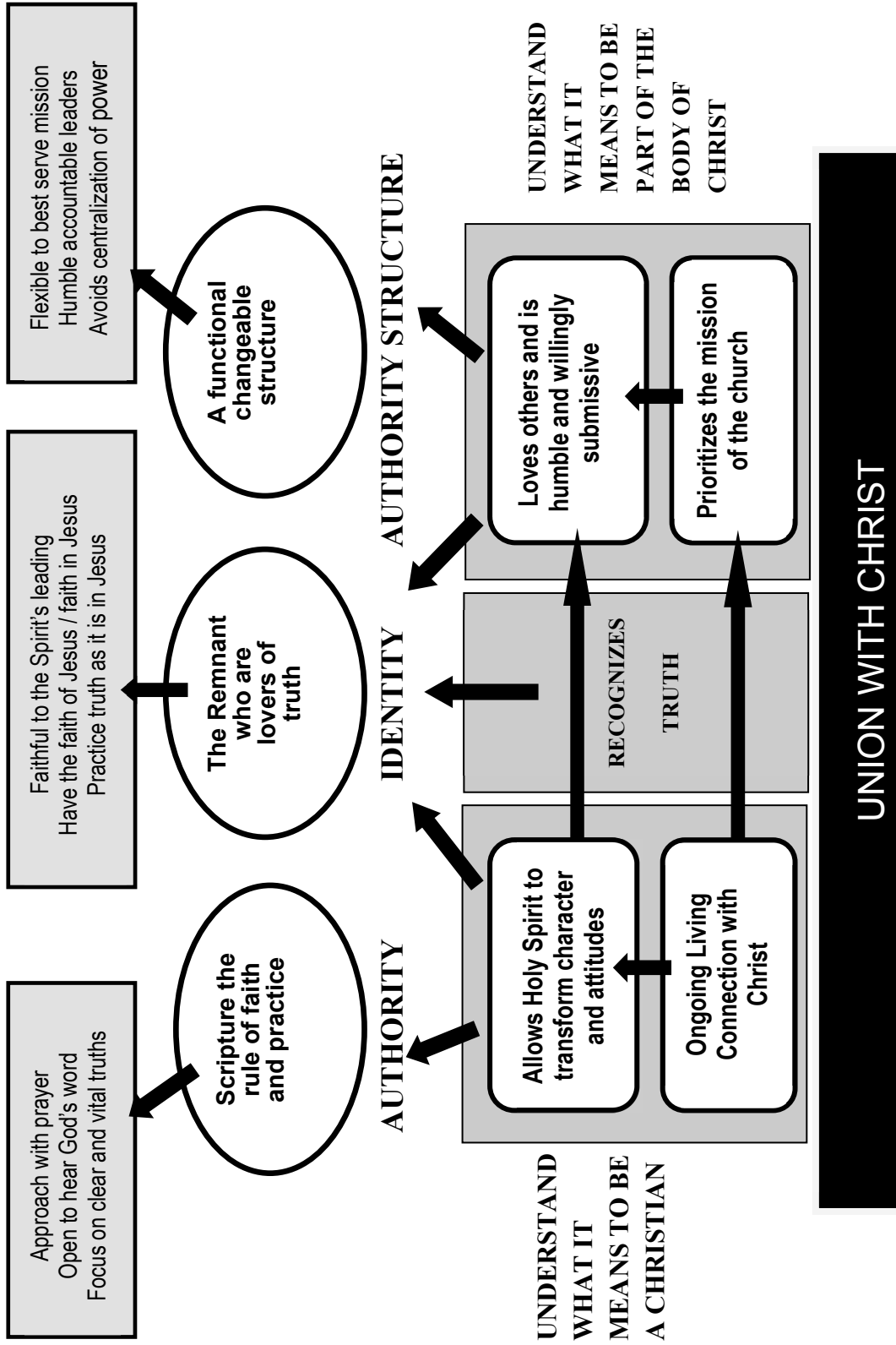


Figure 2. A Model of Ellen White's Understanding of How Unity is to be Attained.

they continued to submit themselves to his lordship.²⁴ Thus, authentic Christianity was identified as a crucial baseline to any form of ecclesial unity. White believed that when one is in this unbroken union with Christ, a number of important consequences would result which would in turn aid ecclesial unity.

The first consequence of union with Christ is that it helps the individual to understand that being a Christian is not simply about assent to truth. Rather, being a Christian is at its heart a relationship that leads to transformation of character so that the person becomes more Christlike. Consequently, individuals who are connected with Christ are expected to be humble and loving, willing to listen to and love their brethren even when they disagree on biblical interpretation, willing to work for the best interests of humanity around them, and to submit to the will of God expressed in Scripture.

Second, union with Christ helps the individual recognize their connection to the body of Christ, by which White meant the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When individuals understand what it means to be part of the church, they will prioritize its mission, display love and humility in all their interactions with others, and willingly submit to the prayerful decisions of the church.²⁵ As indicated on Figure 2, understanding what it means to be a church is impacted by the various components of what it means to be a Christian.

The third consequence of union with Christ is that it makes possible the recognition of truth. This is because Christ is *the* truth. Again White clarified that

²⁴ Ellen G. White, "The True Vine," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 20, 1881, 193-194; Ellen G. White, "The Living Vine," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 11, 1883, 577-578; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:228-229; White, *Desire of Ages*, 675.

²⁵ The expectation that individuals will submit to the decisions of the church recognized that God speaks to and through his church. However, submission was only required if decisions are made by appropriately elected representative members or leaders who are themselves in a living connection with Christ. Although it is generally possible to ascertain whether representatives have been appropriately chosen, proof that all are in living connection with Christ is much more difficult.

knowledge of truth must be accompanied by praxis, in particular she insists on practice of truth as it is in Jesus.

White then used this extensive foundation to connect union with Christ to personal responsibility for the maintenance of ecclesial unity. Notably, it allowed White to recognize the key role of relational issues in causing disunity. That is, visible unity is affected by an individual's relationship with Christ, with the Church, with each other, with truth, and with the Scriptures.

White assumed that the person who knows what it means to be a Christian will willingly submit to the Bible as the rule of faith and practice and will love truth. Likewise, she believed that the person who understands what it means to be part of a church will willingly recognize the need to humbly submit to both other Christians and appropriately made church decisions.

Unity thus occurs between authentic Christians who understand what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be part of a church, and who because of their connection with Christ, can recognize truth. With this foundation they can come to the place where they are lovers of truth, who display the remnant characteristics of keeping the commandments of God, having the faith of Jesus, and practicing truth as it is in Jesus. Scriptures are their authority, to be approached with prayer and an open mind, so that they can understand its vital truths about Jesus and recognize the Holy Spirit's leading. Such unity can only occur within a flexible authority structure which serves the mission of the church and is staffed by humble leaders who themselves recognize truth, and understand both what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be part of a church.

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church's structure mixes both Presbyterian and congregational features, White's views on unity do not conform closely to either the

forms of unity commonly associated with the Presbyterian church structure, or those associated with the congregational church structure.²⁶

A Comparative Review

The Mandate for Unity

Both Campbell and White grounded their view of unity in the prayer of consecration found in John 17 where Christ's verbalized desire for unity is identified as a mandate for the Christian church.²⁷ They also concurred that the unity Christ desired is modeled by the Godhead, and that unity is to be a witness to the transforming power of the gospel message. Nevertheless, there was a key difference in their application of the passage. Campbell included all Christians in the scope of the mandate, a position that can readily be supported from the biblical passage itself. White however paid little more than lip service to the implied extent of the mandate. While stating that the mandate applies to all who have ever confessed Christ,²⁸ her writings and practice did not address Christians as a whole, but rather focused primarily on applying the mandate to those who belonged to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

While it could be argued that White's restriction of the application of John 17 was simply due to the number of internal issues faced by the church during her ministry, this argument fails to adequately integrate her understanding of unity with other dominant

²⁶ See discussion in the introduction to this document. A Presbyterian form of church structure tends to be associated with unity based on a common confession of fundamental beliefs, preaching of the pure gospel, and participation in the sacraments. Congregational structure is more likely to be associated with the local congregation as the focus of unity, a common code of beliefs, and strict discipline. However, White's views appear to be closer to those of the Presbyterian structure than those of the congregational structure.

²⁷ White, *Selected Messages*, 3:21, White claimed Jesus' prayer "is to be our church creed." White, Manuscript 12, 1899, in *Manuscript Releases*, 5:49.

²⁸ White, "One, Even as We are One," 130.

themes in her writings, or to consider how her ideas on unity are integrated. It is likely that her discussion focused on the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of her eschatological presuppositions, in particular, her identification of the Adventist Church with the end time remnant.²⁹ Since the remnant's role is to call Christians to come out of apostate churches, joining with them would seem to be at direct odds with the remnant role and mission. Hence, Christians are called individually to unite with the remnant who faithfully upholds truth, and practice truth as it is in Jesus.

Ironically, the same eschatological passage that causes White to restrict the call to unity, is used by Campbell to support his own more ecumenical stance. The cry to come out and be separate from Babylon is seen by Campbell as a call to all Christians to throw aside their denominational differences, creeds and labels which Campbell believed competed with loyalty to Christ alone.³⁰ Once these distracting and separating issues were removed unity could occur between all Christians.

The Nature of Unity

In spite of the divided nature of the church, both Campbell and White rejected the view that unity of the church was merely an eschatological expectation. They also rejected the tendency to explain the divided nature of the church by appealing to the invisible church. The unity that Christ prayed for was to be a present and visible reality

²⁹ While White does not say explicitly that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant, this connection is easily deducible from many of her articles. See for instance her denunciation of members who were claiming the Seventh-day Adventist Church was Babylon in the following articles, all appropriately named "The Remnant Church Not Babylon", *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 22, August 29, September 5, and September 12, 1893.

³⁰ Alexander Campbell, *The Writings of Alexander Campbell*, (1896, reprinted London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 528; cf. Alexander Campbell, *A Connected View of the Principles and Rules by which the Living Oracles may be Intelligibly and Certainly Interpreted* (Bethany, VA: M'Vay and Ewing, 1835), 121.

in the historical church, for only a visible unity could testify to the reality and transforming power of the gospel.

Nevertheless, Campbell espoused an essential unity of the church which is present in the church simply due to the fact that all are baptized into the one Lord.³¹ White, on the other did not specify that the church is essentially one. This omission appears to be a calculated choice since White readily embraced models of the church which imply the oneness of the church, frequently noted that the church has one Lord and one baptism, and considered the key to unity to be connection with Christ. White's decision to avoid discussion of the essential unity of the church prevents excusing any personal behavior on the basis that unity is totally outside of human control. Instead, it focused attention on the personal responsibility of each individual believer in the pursuit of unity of the church. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Campbell's acknowledgement of an essential unity of the church does not preclude him from also seeing a need for active human choice in the attainment of a visible unity of the church. However, his approach produces a contrast and tension between the unity the church already has, and a unity which the church desires to have. Further, it forces us to question the value of essential unity if it does not have any practical expression in the church.

Unity, while impacting on groups of people, is at its heart intensely personal for both Campbell and White. Thus, while Campbell espoused a unity which involved all Christians, he did not envisage the joining together of Christian churches as whole units.³² The joining together of various churches or sects was insufficient to produce true unity since churches held specific denominational views which divided rather than

³¹ Alexander Campbell, "Union," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 4, no. 10 (1840):484. Note that the page number is misprinted as page 494.

³² Alexander Campbell, "Union of Christians – No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 5 (1939): 212.

united, and importantly, Campbell considered that not all members of churches were authentic Christians.

Campbell considered that the essence of unity was a union of Christians in faith and truth which resulted in both harmony and cooperation between them.³³ By union in truth, he understood an agreement about certain gospel facts of Scripture rather than specific doctrines.³⁴ White's emphasis on the other hand moved from an understanding of unity in terms of doctrine prior to formal church organization, to a unity of purpose and action in the wake of denominational organization. This did not mean that doctrine was no longer important, simply that it was not the center of her mature definition of unity. Since her boundaries for unity were not cross denominational, it is likely that she saw unity in doctrine had less relevance after the formal creation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her supposition that the church was a voluntary society led her to believe that anyone who joined the church already agreed with its core beliefs, therefore this did not need emphasizing. Rather, focusing on a unity of action and purpose in this context allowed the church of likeminded individuals to fulfill its missional purpose.

Notably, White and Campbell were in agreement that unity does not mean uniformity. True unity of the church not only tolerated diversity, it embraced diversity. Indeed, unity in diversity was modeled in the biblical image of the church as a body and was therefore to be expected. The crucial issue was how the church was to deal with the expected diversity. Campbell attempted to solve the problem of diversity of beliefs by differentiating between facts and opinions. While everyone was entitled to their own opinions, the teaching or imposition of those ideas upon others was actively discouraged.

³³ Alexander Campbell, "Preface," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 4, no. 1 (1840): 4; Campbell, "Reformers Not Schismatics, or 'the Baptist Register' and the Charge of Schism (Continued)," 194.

³⁴ See discussion on Campbell's view of unity and truth in Chapter 2.

Thus, by teaching and preaching only the gospel facts, it was hoped that division due to diverse opinions could be averted. White also tried to reduce the impact of diverse biblical understandings by a means of limiting what was taught and preached to those topics that she considered essential such as the gospel and salvation related topics, and truths which the church recognized had been discovered by the clear leading of the Spirit. Matters that did not fall into this category were better avoided to prevent distraction from Jesus and from the essential doctrines which are integral to the mission of the church. Like Campbell, White believed that individuals were entitled to their opinions about other matters but these were not to be brought to the forefront in public teaching.

While the teaching and preaching of a diversity of beliefs was discouraged, White believed that diversity in methods of mission and administration was to be encouraged. Multiple viewpoints in these areas were healthy for the church. They prevented one person from accumulating too much power, stimulated the intellect and spiritual life of those involved in decision making, and allowed the message of the gospel to reach a wider audience.³⁵ Campbell on the other hand, appeared to have limited expression for any form of diversity raising the question of whether there is any value to the diversity of the church.

Causes of Disunity

Divergent notions about the underlying causes of disunity of the church led Campbell and White to very different approaches to how unity is to be attained. Campbell believed that human speculation and opinions, especially the use of creeds, misplaced emphasis on what Scriptural ideas are important, and the failure of the Reformation to return to a totally scriptural position were to blame for the disunity of the church. Disunity for Campbell thus arose primarily from failure to recognize the

³⁵ White, *Counsels to Parents, Students and Teachers*, 432.

boundaries between divine instruction and human constructions of it.³⁶ Consequently, the focus of his method for attaining unity revolves primarily around the Christian's relationship to Biblical authority. Interpersonal and other relational issues were largely disregarded except for the suggestion that charismatic leaders can cause disunity.

White on the other hand, emphasized relational issues as a cause of disunity. At the heart of disunity of the church was disconnection with Christ. Relational issues with fellow humans such as stubbornness, pride, unwillingness to listen to others, and lack of love also resulted in disunity. While varying scriptural interpretations were acknowledged as being associated with disunity, relational issues and not the differing interpretations themselves were at the core of any disharmony that arose from these differences. Consequently, White's main focus for maintaining unity is one of appropriate love relationships.

Means to Maintain Unity

Unity is Christocentric of necessity in the thinking of both Campbell and White, but like many aspects of their thinking, they differ in the details of how this occurs. The views of Campbell presuppose an essential form of unity which is entered into when an individual makes the decision to follow Christ in baptism. Nevertheless, individual Christians are held responsible for making the essential unity visible by restoration of original form of Christianity. An emphasis on the core gospel facts rather than denominationally distinctive beliefs, leads Christians to examine what they have in common rather than what divides them. Likewise, by shedding denominational organizational structures and returning to the primitive church structure, nothing stands

³⁶ The problems arising from an emphasis on human opinion and interpretation were further exacerbated by the consequences of the Reformation that encouraged everyone to read and interpret Scripture, and the religious climate on the American continent which encouraged independence and innovation.

in the way of the authority of Christ for the believer. Disagreement is further reduced by concentrating on facts not opinion, and by using only terms which appear in Scripture. Thus, Campbell did not outline a constructive means for obtaining unity, but rather a method which clears the way for essential unity to become visible.

White also grounded her method of attaining unity in Christ, but she made no assumption of essential invisible unity. While there is one baptism and one Lord, and unity only occurs in Christ, Christians must strive actively for unity of the church to occur. Consequently, White needed to provide a much more constructive approach to unity than Campbell. While she made some attempt to clear away obstacles to unity in a similar fashion to Campbell, White delivered a model which demonstrates the connection between union with Christ with Christian unity, and at the same time, clearly delineates a role of humans in the process of attaining church unity.

The foundation and starting point of Christian unity for White was union with Christ. But unlike Campbell's views, White's understanding of union with Christ was not linked primarily to the moment of baptism. Although baptism is momentous, it is never a substitute for a living personal relationship with Christ which involves a daily choice to accept his lordship. Only a dynamic relationship can lead to the transformation of Christians that reevaluates and revitalizes all relationships in a way that promotes unity. In this context, White considered that union with Christ resulted in the willingness to submit to the working of the Holy Spirit in the development of a Christ-like character. This would in turn result in another key to unity: correct attitudes. Pride and self-centeredness which promoted disharmony were to be replaced with love and humility with submission to both God and fellow humans. Union with Christ was also expected to result in a correct relationship between the Christian and the church leading the Christian to prioritize the mission of the church in all decision making. This would in turn lead to submission to one another and harmonious joint action. Finally, union with

Christ would enable the correct relationship with truth through understanding of “truth as it is in Jesus.” This enabled the Christian to correctly locate the role of truth in relation to the role of relationship.

Like Campbell, White considered the recognition of the authority of Scripture as the rule of faith and practice for the Christian was essential to unity, but she highlighted the importance of all of Scripture and not simply the New Testament.³⁷ Her emphasis on the need to focus on clear and vital truths rather than minutia bears similarity to Campbell’s focus on the core facts of the gospel. Upholding Scriptures as a rule of faith meant that a source of authority was clearly established for those who sought unity, while focusing on clear and vital truths prevented distracting disagreements over non-essential and trivial matters while Christ was uplifted.

Truth and Unity

Campbell did not equate unity in truth with unity in doctrine. His philosophical background led him to define truth as the correspondence between ideas and reality.³⁸ While not all truth is composed of facts, Campbell focused particularly on facts, since all facts were truth.³⁹ This allowed him to separate doctrine from truth, since he considered that a significant proportion of what was deemed doctrine was composed of human opinion rather than Scriptural facts. Although Scripture contained many truths that one should seek, he considered that all that was required of Christians was to believe the one

³⁷ Ellen G. White, "The Value of Bible Study," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 17, 1888, 449; White, *Great Controversy*, viii.

³⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Preface to Volume VI," *Christian Baptist* 6, no. 1 (1828): 461-462.

³⁹ Alexander Campbell. *Christian System*, 116.

core truth that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, and subsequently submit to baptism by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

In the view of White, truth was not merely philosophical. Truth at its core was not a fact about Jesus Christ, but rather was embodied in Jesus Christ himself. Thus, truth could only be understood through the lens of Jesus. Christians were therefore called first and foremost to understand “truth as it is in Jesus.” By this White meant to encompass both the great gospel message of what Jesus has done for humans, and the way truth was taught and lived by him. However, White also believed that the Spirit had led the church in the rediscovery of vital truths which extended beyond the gospel story. Amongst these vital truths was the seventh-day Sabbath, to which she attributed eschatological meaning.⁴¹ Embracing the vital truths she saw as an important indicator of faithfulness to the leading of God. Thus, lovers of truth who are at the center of White’s definition of unity believe the gospel message, and are willing to recognize the ongoing leading of the Holy Spirit in the church.

Holy Spirit and Unity

Tucked into the preamble of Thomas Campbell’s Declaration and Address is a phrase that notes that “the Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide, to lead us into all truth.”⁴² But Alexander Campbell says very little about the role of the Holy Spirit, in his writings, and does not specifically include the Holy Spirit in his thinking about unity. While

⁴⁰ Alexander Campbell, “The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union,” *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (1824), 60.

⁴¹ The seventh-day Sabbath was connected by White to both the three angel’s messages in Revelation 14, and the remnant characteristic of keeping the commandments of God. With these eschatological attributions, the seventh-day Sabbath was seen as the final test of loyalty to God which will identify those who are truly willing to serve God. See for instance White, *Great Controversy*, 605.

⁴² Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (Washington, PA: Brown and Sample, 1809), 4.

Campbell insisted that the Holy Spirit gave life to the Word of God,⁴³ his rationalistic reduction of Scripture to a book of facts and his insistence that Christians need only agree on the core gospel facts ultimately left little room for the Holy Spirit to guide or teach after conversion.⁴⁴

Conversely, the Holy Spirit played a crucial role in White's thinking on the maintenance of unity. The Holy Spirit is involved in an ongoing process of elucidating truth, as well as transforming attitudes and character which are essential for pursuit of unity. This emphasis is in keeping with White's tendency to attribute importance to the Spirit's role in all aspects of salvation, in the church, and Christ's example of dependence upon the Spirit during his earthly ministry.⁴⁵

Role of Scripture and Hermeneutics

Both Campbell and White believed that the Bible constituted the rule of faith and practice for the Christian, and was to be their only creed. However, due to his dispensational thinking, Campbell, believed only the New Testament could be used as an authority for the Christians, whereas, in White's thinking, the entire Scriptures were important for Christian decision making.

Both Campbell and White were optimistic that everyone who read Scripture could come to a similar interpretation of it. Campbell's confidence lay in the enlightenment assertions about human reason. Since the Bible was written in human language, the

⁴³ Alexander Campbell and others, *A Debate between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice, on the Action, Subject, Design and Administration of Christian Baptism*, 15.

⁴⁴ Byron Lambert argues that early Stone-Campbell leaders paid limited attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit not only because of their rationalistic stance, but also because of their concern to avoid speculative theology. Furthermore, Campbell was keen to avoid the emotionalism of revivalist preaching which was commonly attributed to the Holy Spirit. See *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, s.v. "Holy Spirit, Doctrine of the."

⁴⁵ Denis Fortin, and Jerry Moon, eds, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), s.v. Holy Spirit.

consistent use of fixed principles of interpretation should lead to a uniform understanding of major points of Scripture. While White also advocated hermeneutical guidelines for scriptural interpretation, her confidence in consistent interpretation came from another quarter, that of the aid of the Holy Spirit. If one came to Scripture with an open mind, and prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance, correct interpretation should result.

Nature and Role of the Church in Relation to Unity

John 17 connects Christian unity with the evangelistic role of the church, and both Campbell and White embrace this connection. Campbell saw Christian unity as the key to transforming the world and bringing about the millennium, whereas White saw Christian unity as a key to rightly representing God in the context of the Great Controversy, and to preparing the world for the imminent second coming of Christ. Unity was therefore crucial for the remnant to complete their God-given mission.

The nature of the church also has implications for understanding the nature of Christian unity. Biblical metaphors of the church are frequent in the writings of Campbell and White, although not all are directly connected to unity. The body of Christ, which emphasizes both the central role of Christ and the indispensable role of all members, figures prominently in both their discussions as illustrating how unity can occur in spite of diversity.⁴⁶ The other key images relating to the church differ between the two founders. Campbell preferred to consider the church as a kingdom to emphasize the need for order and organization in maintaining unity.⁴⁷ White on the other hand

⁴⁶ Alexander Campbell, *Christian System*, 80-81.

⁴⁷ Campbell discusses the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven and uses the terms interchangeably.

preferred the description of the church as the remnant, to emphasize the mission of the church for which unity was required.⁴⁸

Although not highlighted explicitly in their writings, both Campbell and White also assume that the church is a voluntary society. It is likely that Campbell embraced the idea of the church as a voluntary society from his reading of Locke. He mentions the idea in passing on a couple of occasions, when considering the obligations of Christians.⁴⁹ White never explicitly described the church as a voluntary society; however, there are several pieces of evidence that suggest this was indeed her assumption. The first hint of this assumption lies in the lack of significant emphasis on doctrine in her thinking about unity when she clearly understood correct doctrine to be important for the Christian. Such an emphasis would be unnecessary if the church was a voluntary society since the mere fact of joining a voluntary society indicated you were in harmony with its beliefs and goals. The second hint that White understood the church to be a voluntary society is her assumption that those who join the church are willing to sacrifice to prioritize the mission of the church. Persons usually joined a voluntary society because they intended to be active in promoting the goals and interests of the society.

Role of Authority Structures in Maintaining Unity

Neither Campbell nor White believed that organizational structure formed the basis of church unity. This, as we have already noted, was attributed to connection with Christ. However, organizational structure still played an important role in White's understanding of the maintenance of unity. Although White was initially reluctant to consider any formal organizational structure amongst Adventist believers, dealing with

⁴⁸ See for instance, White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:19; White, *Prophets and Kings*, 678.

⁴⁹ Alexander Campbell, "The Clergy, No. I," *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 3 (1823): 21. The voluntary nature of the church is also emphasized by the need for a freely chosen adult baptism, rather than a routine infant baptism of someone who cannot profess faith.

the everyday realities of a rapidly growing church with limited resources caused her to seriously reconsider this position. The need for order was reinforced in a vision which highlighted order in heaven.⁵⁰ Subsequently, White not only claimed that organization was essential in the church, but that it was essential for unity of the church.⁵¹ However, for organization to aid unity, it had to be functional and able to be changed when the needs of the church changed. Furthermore, it needed to avoid the dangers of centralization and the tendency to place too much power on any one individual.

Campbell on the other hand railed against complex organizational structures, seeing them as divisive rather than uniting. Consequently, he argued for a simple congregational structure that followed the pattern of the New Testament church.⁵² This stripped away levels of authority which might interfere with the monarchy of Christ, avoiding the pitfalls of centralization and kingly power that White was concerned about.

But there were some inherent problems with a restoration of the primitive church structure. It did not provide for an adequate expression of church unity beyond the local congregation, and further, it bred duplication and inefficiency in mission and other services due to the lack of coordination between various congregations in a rapidly growing church. Campbell attempted to resolve these problems, by suggesting cooperative but non-authoritative para-ecclesial associations which functioned as

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, "Utterance in Vision, 1850," Ellen G. White Research Center Avondale College; Ellen G. White, "Vision at Paris, Maine," in *Manuscript Releases*, ed. Ellen G. White Estate (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 13:299-301.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1854), 18-19.

⁵² Alexander Campbell, "Essays on Ecclesiastical Characters, Councils, Creeds, and Sects, No. III," 73. The local church he claimed was the "only ecclesiastical body recognized in the New Testament."

voluntary societies at local and national levels.⁵³ The resulting structures reintroduced the likelihood of many of the problems Campbell had previously railed against. While Campbell appeared to understand the risks, he ignored them. Since the new structures were not strictly part of the church, Campbell was still able to claim that he followed the New Testament example of church structure, but this appears to be merely a technicality.

Authentic Christianity and Unity

Unity is only possible between authentic Christians. This premise meant that Campbell rejected attempts to unite sects or denominational groups. Instead he identified the subject of unity as authentic Christians who made a personal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, and who obeyed the explicit commands of God, willingly choosing to join the church by baptism.⁵⁴ White's concern for authentic Christianity permeates her entire thinking about unity. While she saw unity as occurring between those who loved truth and displayed the characteristics of the remnant, the foundation of her model requires individuals to be authentic Christians first and foremost. By implication, one cannot truly display the characteristics of the remnant without first being in authentic relationship with God.

Unity and the Religious Alliances

Both White and Campbell expressed concern and skepticism about the role of alliances between religious groups.⁵⁵ For Campbell, the skepticism was grounded in the

⁵³ So long as Campbell suggested voluntary association with other religious groups he was safe from criticism, but once he suggested voluntary associations to deal with internal problems he was subject to severe criticism for inconsistency in his theology.

⁵⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Union of Christians – No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s., 3, no. 5 (1939): 212; Alexander Campbell, "Reply" [to J. J. Harvey's "Christian Union, No. V"], *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 12 (1846): 690.

⁵⁵ For Campbell's concerns see especially Alexander Campbell, "Evangelical Alliance, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 7 (1846): 384-385; Alexander Campbell, "Evangelical Alliance, No.

underlying nature of the Evangelical Alliance that allowed individual members to maintain their own denominational loyalties within the alliance. Since Campbell was aiming for an organic union, the maintenance of doctrinal differences between members rather than commonalities was problematic. White on the other hand was only aiming for unity of purpose and action, so the underlying nature of the Evangelical Alliance should not have been seen as problematic. However, White was also apprehensive about alliances between religious groups. Her apprehension however was of an exactly opposite nature to that of Campbell. She was concerned that denominational loyalties and personal beliefs would not be tolerated within religious alliances, and hence that truth would be compromised in the process of working together. While warning against alliances between the church and other religious groups, White appears to encourage individual church members to take part in Christian-run voluntary societies for the betterment of humankind. These seemed to present less of the threat to truth convictions due to their singular aims.

Unity and Church Leadership

Since both Campbell and White advocate unity occurring at a personal level, what role then does church leadership play in their views on the maintenance of unity? This question is not explicitly addressed in the writings of Campbell, and only partially addressed by White. Therefore, we must make some assumptions by combining the information that we have from their views of unity with their descriptions of the roles of various leaders.

Since leaders are given responsibilities for prioritizing and planning the church's mission, and since unity is essential for mission, we must first surmise that leaders have a

II," *Millennial Harbinger* 3rd ser., 3, no. 8 (1846): 445-447. For White, see for example White, *Great Controversy*, 444-445.

responsibility for encouraging the factors which we have seen are essential for unity in the thinking of both leaders under consideration in this study.

Second, and more importantly, leaders play an essential role as examples. Campbell's system required leaders to be authentic Christians, upholding the Scripture as a rule of faith and practice, maintaining purity of speech, and speaking only on matters of faith unless specifically asked about their opinions.

In White's consideration of unity, the role of leaders as examples was explicitly stressed.⁵⁶ Since the very foundation of union requires connection with Christ, leaders must be themselves connected to Christ on a continuing basis. But the role of a leader takes on increased significance in White's consideration of unity, because her model involves an understanding of what it means to be a church, which encompasses not only the prioritization of mission, but also the willingness to submit to the views of fellow believers. Consequently, leaders should not only be examples for their fellow believers, but must be humble and willing to acknowledge when they are wrong. Ultimately, functional authority structures only work if staffed by leaders who themselves are connected to Christ and model the values and attitudes necessary for unity.

Evaluation of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Position

Campbell and White have many views in common; however, the contrasts which have been highlighted invite consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of each position. Evaluation is not an easy task particularly when the individual evaluating the positions is an insider with regards to one tradition, and an outsider with regards to the other. To this end evaluation has been undertaken with care. The focus of the evaluation

⁵⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:678; White, *Gospel Workers*, 416-425, 448-451.

is largely centered upon perceived problems arising from the case studies, and the inner consistency of the respective views, although other issues are also raised where relevant.

Views of Alexander Campbell

The first strength of Campbell's views on unity lies at the heart of his thinking. It is the recognition that the church possesses an essential unity. Campbell favored an interpretation of Ephesians 4:3-6 that recognized that the unity of the church grows out its foundation in one Lord, one Spirit, and one Father. God is therefore responsible for the unity between Christians which exists even when there is no apparent visible unity between Christians. Such a theory is in line with the thinking of both the early church fathers who expressed the church's oneness in creedal form, and the twenty-first century ecumenical scholars, who argue that the biblical models of the church imply that oneness is a property of the church.⁵⁷

Since Campbell's model presupposes an essential unity of the church, his suggestions for attaining and maintaining a visible unity merely uncover the God-given unity of the church. His suggestions are attractive because they are for the most part tangible. Nevertheless, the case studies have illustrated that there were significant differences between individuals in their classification of statements as either faith or opinion. Although Campbell believed his definition was clear, it did not appear to be so in the eyes of his contemporaries. A more precise definition of the difference between faith and opinions thus seems advisable, however, the other keys for making the essential unity of the church visible are logical, readily appreciated and easily followed. By contrast, White's ideas are largely intangible and therefore difficult to apply and evaluate.

⁵⁷ Harding Meyer, *That All May Be One: Perceptions and Models of Ecumenicity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 8-9. Meyer argues that 'essential unity' of the church is foundational to the ecumenical movement, and that it is presupposed by all attempts at attaining Christian unity.

While Campbell favored a form of organic union between Christians, his views differ significantly from contemporary ecumenical models of organic union in several ways. First, he rejected the union of religious denominations and sects, preferring instead the union between individual authentic Christians. Second, there is no evidence that he was willing to recognize and accept other clergy without significant discussion and debate. Third, he was unwilling to accept any baptism except that of immersion. Modern ecumenical scholars are likely to identify these differences as a weakness, however, Campbell's recognition that true unity can only occur between authentic Christians is an important insight that seems to be largely lost in the current ecumenical discussions.⁵⁸

Also to be commended is Campbell's attention to the protection of the boundaries of Scriptural authority from confusion with human wisdom. This is particularly important if the Bible is to be used as the rule for faith and practice for believers. Campbell's methodology for protecting the boundaries such as sticking to Bible facts, rejecting inference, and using only Scriptural words and terms in discussion of biblical things is both thoughtful and creative. Sadly however, these suggestions are not altogether practical. Campbell's own tendency was to make inferences from Scripture even though he didn't always recognize that he was doing so. Given the geographical and temporal distance of current readers from the actual writing of Scripture, it seems likely that some inference is necessary so that Scripture can address the multicultural nature of the contemporary church, as well as issues which did not exist in the first century. Otherwise there is a risk of protecting the boundaries of authority at the cost of it

⁵⁸ Modern ecumenical scholars argue that all true models of union must include communion in the apostolic faith, in the sacraments, in ministry, in worship life, in witness, and in service. See Meyer, *That All May Be One*, 73-74. Similar assumptions are made in the World Council of Churches document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.

becoming irrelevant as a rule of faith and practice. Moreover, even though restricting theological conversation to scriptural terms is helpful in limiting the areas for disagreement, current disputes suggest that scholars cannot even agree upon the meaning of the words that are actually used in Scripture.⁵⁹

Campbell's recognition that multilevel authority structures invite abuse of power is also a key insight. His restriction of the structure of the church to the apostolic form, while not eliminating abuse certainly would reduce the likelihood and extent of possible abuse of power by church officers and clergy. Nevertheless, Campbell seems to be blind to the potential abuses of his later recommendations on cooperative meetings at state and national level. A president being elected without having duly appointed delegates from many churches, and the ability to purchase directors rights for life certainly opened up the potential for abuse that Campbell had been so critical of in his earlier years.

A willingness to amend his ideas based on real world needs is also to be commended, but Campbell's progressive thinking in relation to authority structure resulted in some significant inconsistencies and problems. Campbell had previously been critical of voluntary societies other than the church itself. He had articulated a number of reasons to support his contention, one of which was that the church was a perfect society which needed nothing in addition to itself to accomplish its task. Thus, while the addition of a national convention in the form of a voluntary society allowed the church to maintain its New Testament structure, at least in principle, it introduced a contradiction in the understanding of the nature of the church. The national convention also resulted in some irregularities in authority. While the national convention had no binding authority on local churches – which were free to accept or reject its recommendations – the issues

⁵⁹ For instance, evangelical scholars John Piper and N. T. Wright differ significantly on the meaning of righteousness and justification, and other scholars disagree over whether the word 'head' in 1 Corinthians 11:3 means authority over, or source.

which were discussed had significant implications for the local churches. For example, Campbell suggested a national convention was needed to provide authority to evangelists who worked in the territories of multiple churches. But if the evangelist was given authority by the convention, how was the local church free to reject this? The third issue of payment for directors and voting rights has already been noted.

Also of significance in relation to authority structures is that while Campbell carefully defined the tasks and boundaries of authority and authority structures, he struggled to work within the bounds he himself had defined. This is exemplified in the Jessie Ferguson controversy where he took it upon himself to discipline Ferguson rather than waiting for the local church, sister churches, or employing body to do so. Likewise, while Campbell outlined boundaries for editors, his actions seemed to imply that he thought he himself was exempt from them.

Campbell's tendency to reduce Scripture to a book of facts, and commands to be obeyed also detracts from the reality that being a Christian involves a relationship with Christ and results in a transformation of character. This is particularly disappointing given the emphasis Campbell placed on authentic Christianity in his thinking on unity.

However, the most obvious weakness of Alexander Campbell's thinking about unity stems from his superficial understanding of the causes of disunity. As a consequence, he fails to adequately integrate strategies for dealing with the wide variety of potential causes of disunity. Apart from his identification of charismatic leaders as a potential source of disunity, Campbell significantly underestimates the role of attitudes and relational issues in causing disunity. Thus, his model leaves little room for human weakness such as pride, ego, and thirst for power. As a result, he attributes the rampant abuse of power in existing ecclesiastical bodies solely to non-biblical and overly complex authority structures, rather than laying any of the blame upon personal attitudes and

practices. Underestimation of relational issues resulted in Campbell failing to understand the complexities of many issues including the Jessie Ferguson case.

Views of Ellen White

White's mature stance on unity has much to commend it, but the case studies explored in this dissertation have also revealed that there are some significant weaknesses which need to be considered. Therefore, a careful evaluation of White's views on unity is also important.

Even a casual reader of White's writings cannot fail to be impressed with the Christological focus which is demonstrated on almost every page of her work. This focus has carried over into her consideration of ecclesial unity where union with Christ lies at the very heart of her thinking. Disconnection with Christ is the key to understanding why the church is not united as it should be. On the other hand it is union with Christ that makes possible the transformation of attitudes which facilitate a visible unity, and the ability of individuals to recognize truth. The Christocentric nature of White's stance is consistent with the biblical witness to the centrality of Christ to the Christian faith, and specifically to understanding Christ as both the foundation and the head of the church.

The Christocentric nature of the model is also apparent in the impact upon the identity of those between whom unity is desired. Although White's writings on unity are addressed primarily to those within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, her mature thinking on unity embraces an identity which is less about distinctive beliefs than it is about an identity in Christ. This identity is forged through understanding one's relationship to Christ, one's role as a member of the body of Christ, and faithfulness to truth as it is in Jesus. Consequently, it is much more inclusive than a model which focuses on distinctive truths as the primary point of identity.

There is a temptation to imagine that the move away from an identity which stresses distinctive truths, along with the call to focus on vital truths in some way

relativizes, or even trivializes the role of propositional truth. But such a conclusion is at odds with White's emphasis on faithfully upholding truth. Furthermore, while many other modern theologians were in the process of discarding revelation as propositional truth in order to sustain their ideas of inspiration, White maintained that the concept of revelation included both revelation of God himself and propositional truth.⁶⁰ Therefore, concluding that truth is trivialized in her thinking is unwarranted. A closer inspection suggests that instead of trivializing doctrine by her changed emphasis, White actually reassessed the role of doctrine for the Christian. Correct doctrine had been seen as an end in itself. But White's later writings and practice suggest that while correct doctrine is important, it is not an end in itself. Rather, the purpose of accurate doctrine is to correctly inform us about God's nature, his will, and plans in order to strengthen and transform our relationship with him and our fellow humans. Thus, looking at the why behind the doctrines is as important as understanding the doctrines themselves. Further, White's attempt to connect the role of Christ to ecclesial unity by specific changes wrought in connection with Christ, recognized the biblical principle that connection with Christ does not leave individuals unchanged.

Another strength of White's stance on ecclesial unity is its appreciation of the consequences of sin. In particular, White identifies the problems of human weakness, pride, selfishness, and thirst for power. This allows her to consider the reality of life in community rather than simply the ideal life in community. The reality is one where relationships are strained due to these sinful attitudes. As a consequence, her suggestions for achieving unity have a solid attitudinal and relational emphasis. Both the horizontal relationship with other humans and the vertical relationship with God are targeted in her

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, 95; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:300, 8:279; White, *Great Controversy*, vii-viii, 598.

proposal for achieving unity. The result is a timely reminder of the need to treat those with whom we disagree with respect and kindness.

Like the model of Campbell, White's thinking on unity is driven by mission. But the idea of mission is not consigned simply to the result of unity. Mission also figures directly in the model itself as members are expected to be involved in and prioritize the mission of the church. This provides an important benefit in the pursuit of unity. It provides focus outside of self. When focus is solely internal or upon unity alone, differences of opinion become more prominent, and there is a tendency to categorize the views of others distorting how we see each other.⁶¹ This tends to divide rather than unify. But when focus is upon a singular goal such as that of mission, similarities are emphasized, while differences are minimized. Thus, unity can occur more easily. As a result of the new found recognition of similarities, fellow believers broaden their concept of identity. Instead of focusing solely on the particulars of the remnant, they are led to focus on their common identity in Christ. This facilitates a movement from an "us and them" thinking pattern, to a recognition of our oneness in Christ.

While the emphasis on relationships has been noted as a strength of White's stance on unity, the emphasis also brings with it some complications. This is especially so when considering an individual's relationship with Christ. The intangible nature of union and disconnection from Christ leaves these ideas open to misinterpretation and judgment. Furthermore, the personal nature of one's relationship with God makes any allegations that a Christian is disconnected from Christ a sensitive area which is likely to result in a defensive response. The preceding case studies have demonstrated this clearly

⁶¹ Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013). Social psychologist Christena Cleveland explores this problem throughout her book. She suggests that our tendency to categorize is done in order to protect our identity and self-esteem. But we fail to realize that it creates division rather than furthering our attempts at unity.

in that often when White implies individuals are disconnected from God and calls them to repent, the individuals in question protest their innocence claiming to have repented.

The case studies have also highlighted that often White's judgment of an individual's status of connection or disconnection with Christ hinged upon their acceptance or rejection of a message she had delivered herself and which she considered a message from God. Thus, some of her calls to repentance are not simply calls to general repentance, but rather a call to repent from the rejection of her message. As a consequence, any evaluations of White's own practices in relation to unity are complicated by the demand that the hearer accept that her authority is from God.⁶² In reality however, White and those around her often had divergent views of her role as a messenger or prophet. For instance, Kellogg accepted that White was a friend, mother figure, and spiritual leader, but had issues with the content of some of her messages, which caused him to question her prophetic status. Some of White's statements he felt were patently false,⁶³ and others he thought were the result of the influence of other individuals upon her.⁶⁴ Butler on the other hand, expected a prophet who would instantly

⁶² The implicit demand that the hearer accept that White's authority is from God is inconsistent with the claim of White and her husband that acceptance of her role should not be used as a test of faith. See for instance White, *Testimonies for the Church* 1:327-328; 1:382.

⁶³ One testimony from White in particular convinced J. H. Kellogg that Ellen White's testimonies were unreliable. This was a testimony written in 1899 which rebuked Kellogg for building a large and expensive building in Chicago. While the American Medical Missionary College building committee had indeed planned for such a building, Kellogg who was in charge of the AMMC was travelling at the time, and was unaware of the plans. Thus, on receiving her letter he declared her statements to be "utterly false." When Kellogg returned to Michigan and heard of the plans he opposed them, and no such building took place. However, the whole incident regarding the Chicago building would later be misrepresented by Kellogg, and used in an attempt to discredit the validity of White's testimonies. White's original testimony has been lost, but for Kellogg's initial indignant reply see J. H. Kellogg to EGW, April 17, 1899. See also *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, s.v. "Chicago Building Vision."

⁶⁴ This was a frequent defensive response of J. H. Kellogg to White's criticism of his behavior.

resolve dilemmas by articulating the correct theological position or appropriate choice in similar manner to the apparent supernatural revelations about doctrine in the aftermath of the Great Disappointment. Thus, Butler was frustrated when White took a much more pastoral role which encouraged members to solve differences biblically. The problem of White's authority was further exacerbated by her tendency to blur the lines between what she wrote as a friend, leader, and prophet. Sometimes she wrote from all three perspectives in a single letter, effortlessly sliding between them. In the process she confused the reader about what should be understood simply as friendly advice, and what should be understood as a message from God.

In this context we must recognize a further difficulty, that is, lack of information on who decides what should be considered a vital or essential belief, and on what basis such a decision is made. While White was confident that God spoke through his church, especially in the framework of a properly constituted and representative General Conference session where no abuse of power was evident, this combination of factors was not always present.⁶⁵ Further, White seems to see the distinction between vital and non-essential as innately obvious if one is in proper union with Christ. Yet her own definitions of what fits in this category appear to be fluid. Lists of vital issues lacked consistency.⁶⁶ In general her lists of essential truths can be divided into two broad

⁶⁵ While White generally had faith in God speaking through his church, this was not true during the period following the 1888 General Conference through 1901 when the administration struggled with centralization of authority and the abuse of power. Instead of endorsing General Conference decisions during this time, she boldly claimed that God's leading was not present in their management and decisions. Rather than the voice of God, the General Conference had become the voice of one or two people. See for instance Ellen G. White, "Minds of Committee Members to be Worked by the Holy Spirit," 1891 in *Manuscript Releases*, 17:167; Ellen G. White, "Evil Counsels Followed at the Review and Herald and the General Conference," MS 57, 1895 in *Manuscript Releases*, 17:177-179.

⁶⁶ My review of White's understanding of vital truths included other terms that she used synonymously such as essential truths, landmarks, and pillars.

categories: those truths directly related to the person of Christ and salvation, and those in which she considered the church had received specific guidance. However, this is not specific enough to prevent disagreement. While there is likely to be general agreement about some facts related to Christ and salvation, even these areas are not immune from disagreement in the church. The identification of truths in which the Spirit is clearly leading the church is fraught with even more difficulties and, as we have seen is made more complex by disputes over whether White herself was used as a messenger of God.

Given the frequency of doctrinal disputes within the Seventh-day Adventist church we must also ask whether White's model provides an adequate guide for instances of strong doctrinal disagreement between leaders. It does provide excellent advice for individuals in such situations. It encourages personal study of Scripture with an open and teachable heart, a steering away from the idolatry of certainty, and a reevaluation of one's personal relationship with God.⁶⁷ White's stance also instructs on appropriate responses to those who disagree with each other, urging Christ-like treatment, and practice of truth as it is in Jesus. But overall, her views fail to provide a strong guide for the resolution of doctrinal disagreement. Rather, she anticipated that Christians reading Scripture would be led to understand and agree upon the major truths of Scripture if three conditions were met: they were in connection with Christ the source of truth, they prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance in their study, and they came to Scripture with a teachable spirit. Situations where leaders could not reach agreement on major truths were readily labeled as an indication of disconnection with Christ. But when such situations occur, how is it determined which group is disconnected from Christ? Will each group believe the other is disconnected?

⁶⁷ I have borrowed the phrase 'idolatry of certainty' from Gregory Boyd because it accurately describes White's criticism of those who refused to listen to ideas other than their own. This she considered reflected a disconnection from Christ.

While White's ideal for leaders was that they themselves were connected to Christ and modeled the values and attitudes necessary for unity, the integration of a multi-level authority structure in her model, along with the call to submit to the voice of the church as a whole created a scenario where abuse of power was more likely to emerge. This was demonstrated clearly in the case studies, and in the volume of her writings devoted to denouncing abuse of power. Thus, while organization aided unity by creating order and streamlined communication between diverse geographic areas, it also risked creating disunity by the exercise of kingly power.

A concerning weakness of White's model is that it provides no reason to desire interaction or a closer relationship with Christians outside of its own denominational ranks. Consequently, it fails to live up to the real challenge of Jesus' prayer in John 17 which envisages some form of unity amongst all of Christ's followers. This is a predictable weakness of a model which is targeted at internal denominational unity. However, White's emphasis of the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission further contributes to this problem. Specifically, when the church is identified as the eschatological remnant which needs to be distinguished from the Babylon of apostate churches, a strong sense of separation from other Christians is inevitable.⁶⁸ Compounding the 'them and us' mentality is White's anxiety about Protestant alliances

⁶⁸ This is of course dependent upon how one defines the difference between the remnant and Babylon. Adventists have frequently defined the remnant in terms of upholding truth while defining Babylon in terms of moving away from biblical truth. However, Denis Fortin in evaluating the concept of Babylon in the *Great Controversy*, has concluded that White's descriptions of what leads churches to become part of Babylon in the end time has more to do with worldliness, greed, and loss of humility than it does with apostasy from biblical truth. See Denis Fortin, "Coming out of Babylon and Christian Unity: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Adventist Discourse about Other Christians" (Keynote Address, annual meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies held in conjunction with the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, CA, November 17-19, 2011), 6-7, accessed April 21, 2014, http://lasierra.edu/fileadmin/documents/religion/School_of_Religion_2011-12/ASRS_2011/01_Fortin-1.pdf.

based on a suspicion that force might be exerted in relation to specific beliefs which White considered non-negotiable.

Nevertheless, while White's model of unity as a whole does not actively promote working with other Christian denominations, it must be pointed out that it does not exclude working with them. While resisting any union with other denominations, White readily lent her support to Christians working together in the context of Christian led voluntary societies for the betterment of mankind. This seeming inconsistency appears to be due to that fact that voluntary societies exist to accomplish a specific purpose for which individuals join the society, and hence the expectation is that there is little threat of being forced to compromise individual beliefs.

Implications and Contributions for the 21st Century

This study began with the goal of trying to bring clarity to the contemporary discussions of unity, particularly those within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, by a better understanding of the historical dimensions which underlie these discussions. I believe that in the course of this study a number of important points have been uncovered which have implications for the church today. These implications will be considered briefly in two sections: first, six specific implications of Ellen White's ideas in relation to unity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and second, six broader implications from the study as a whole.

Implications Specific to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The success of the church in its worldwide mission has resulted in a Seventh-day Adventist Church which is marked by great diversity in culture, values, traditions, and practices. Such diversity has the power to enrich the church, but at the same time threatens to pull it apart, as its membership reads Scripture through different cultural and experiential lenses. Even within single cultural contexts diversity is growing. Long held

beliefs and biblical principles are being challenged by the changing values of society, and members are expressing a variety of opinions on the way the church should respond to these challenges. With increasing frequency, this diversity contributes to conflicts on theological issues and church practices. Thus, a study on unity is timely, particularly through the lens of the denomination's proclaimed prophet. Numerous implications for the Adventist Church could be discussed, but this section will focus on six implications in particular.

1. Unity should not be equated with uniformity of beliefs or practices. White defined unity primarily as a unity of action and purpose. This definition appears to be very different from the working definition which is visible in the current practice of the church. Seventh-day Adventist church leaders frequently invoke the "need for unity" as a reason not to proceed with changes in church practice which might not be accepted universally. These actions suggest an underlying presumption of unity as uniformity, rather than one of action and purpose. Yet the biblical evidence and White's writings clearly indicated that true unity not only contains, but embraces diversity. The church must move past the tendency to equate unity with uniformity and recognize that while core beliefs need to be maintained, church practices may need to differ between cultures.
2. Maintaining Christian unity requires attention to all types and levels of relationships within the church. White saw connection with Christ as a starting point for the development of three major components which were essential for visible Christian unity. These components were an understanding of what it means to be a Christian, an understanding of what it means to be a church, and an understanding of what it means to practice truth as it is in Jesus. In essence these ideas recognize that unity involves a variety of relationships within the church: the relationship with God, with doctrine, with individuals, and with the church as

a whole. Emphasizing one type of relationship without the others is not sufficient to achieve a visible unity. Rather, all forms of relationship must be nurtured and developed.

3. There is a need to better understand and practice “truth as it is in Jesus.” This calls for a reconsideration of the educational approach of the church toward its members. A renewed focus on connection with Christ and discipleship is necessary. The tendency to design resources which solely emphasize the intellectual and biblical proofs of doctrines needs to be tempered with material on the practical consequences of the doctrines, and what it means to live “truth as it is in Jesus” in everyday life. Likewise, any consideration of the role of truth must recognize that truth is not the end in itself, but rather is designed to inform and transform our relationships on all levels.
4. In trying to apply what it means to be a church, consideration must be given not only to the specific descriptors and metaphors and functions White incorporates in her writings, but also to the assumption that the Adventist Church is a voluntary society. It is essential that this be understood through the lens of the nineteenth-century voluntary societies which existed to achieve a definitive goal in relation to social reform and or evangelism, and whose members only joined if they were in harmony with the goals and beliefs of the society, and planned to be actively involved in accomplishing its goals. The twenty-first century church members are much more likely to compare the voluntary society to a club such as those associated with hobbies. But such a comparison is fraught with problems for it yields markedly different expectations upon members. Clubs of the twenty-first century primarily exist for members rather than those outside of the club. Therefore, when members compare the church to a club, individual expectations

of involvement naturally focus around the maintenance of the church and its nurture, rather than on the mission of the church which White had in mind.⁶⁹

5. There is a need to better recognize the intimate tie between Adventist ecclesiology, eschatology, and unity. How the church chooses to use the terms remnant and Babylon, will inevitably impact upon how unity is understood, and in turn, how Seventh-day Adventist Christians will relate to other Christians. If Adventist identity is tied primarily to a truth-upholding remnant, a “them and us” mentality with an ongoing suspicion of others will restrict the ways in which Adventists can interact with other Christians. If however, they see themselves as having a remnant mission, but have their primary identity in Christ, Adventists are much more likely to interact with other Christians in more conciliatory terms.
6. The example of White warns against the urge to accuse others of being disconnected from Christ, or of being in need of revival when they disagree with our conclusions. While continuing to urge connection with Christ, this must not be used as a passive-aggressive means to further our own agendas, and satisfy ourselves that our own conclusions are correct.

Broader Implications of this Study

We now move to the broader implications of the study. Campbell and White represent two different strands of thinking about Christian unity: one focused primarily upon the unity of Christians as a whole, and the other focused primarily upon the internal unity of a denomination. Yet we have noted that both leaders wrestled with similar questions, as they sought to fulfill Christ’s mandate for Christian unity, and bring unique

⁶⁹ The nineteenth-century experience with voluntary societies bears witness to the fact that when individuals have the same aim and are working closely together to achieve that aim, a sense of unity and togetherness occurs without significant focus on the topic of unity itself. When the church understands itself in terms of a voluntary society in which all are actively seeking to achieve the same goals, many of the petty squabbles will cease to exist.

and important contributions to consideration of Christian unity in the twenty first century. Some of the important contributions to the wider consideration of unity include the following.

1. Recognition that unity is not established at group or denominational level but rather occurs at a personal level between authentic Christians. While each pursued separate methodologies, both Campbell and White were careful to emphasize that true unity occurred at a personal level, and recognized that true Christian unity can only emerge among authentic Christians. In the ecumenical flurry of the last fifty years, with its emphasis on official recognition between denominations, collaborative action, and a goal of more organic union, the personal side of Christian unity has frequently been lost. While collaborative events and mutual recognition of each other's baptism, and ministry may be newsworthy, they do not have the same level of impact on mission as that of individual Christians acting with love towards one another. Likewise, within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the importance of personal attitudes and actions in relation to unity is often overlooked in the rush to establish official positions or voted consensus.
2. Understanding Jesus as Truth is a way to negotiate the tension between upholding truth while at the same time maintaining unity. Truth is fundamentally exclusive in its conception, a problem made worse by the recognition that almost everyone has their own version of what constitutes truth. On the other hand unity implies some sort of inclusivity. Both White and Campbell struggled with this tension and did not solve it completely. However, the solution White presented is particularly valuable since it side-steps some of the tension by regarding Jesus as truth, and by arguing for understanding and practicing truth as it is in Jesus. Thus, White emphasized an internalized, transforming truth, rather than a list of propositional

truths to which one gives mere intellectual assent. It prioritized truth as a way of life that is defined by love of God and fellow humans, and by humility and submission. Love, humility, and submission make room for inclusivity. This is not to say that propositional truth should be ignored. However, White reminded us that these truths are not an end in themselves. Rather, they are designed to enhance and inform our relationships with God and our fellow humans. When propositional truths are regarded as an end in themselves, disagreements about what is right tend to degenerate into personal attacks where each party falls into the trap of absolute certainty about their own opinion. In the process, truth as it is found in Jesus is sacrificed. On the other hand, when propositional truth is understood in relational perspective, love, respect, and humility are not sacrificed.

3. Our focus should be less on the maintenance of unity, and more on Jesus, the center and creator of unity. Our tendency is to spend resources and energy in trying to manufacture unity rather than recognizing that unity is not created by us or our plans. While White and Campbell both believed that believers needed to strive for visible unity, they recognized that unity could only occur if one was in Christ. Hence White focused her energy in calling for repentance and reconnection with Christ, while Campbell focused his energy on baptism by immersion which he saw as the means to enter into Christ and Christian unity.
4. Identification of the need to consider how to maintain boundaries between divine and human authority. Campbell's concern for maintaining the boundaries between divine and human authority would seem to be imperative for any denomination or movement that takes the authority of Scripture seriously enough to consider that it forms the basis of faith and practice. Although Campbell's suggestions for maintaining the boundaries proved to be somewhat problematic, the concept is none the less vital. In contemporary discussions about Christian

unity, further consideration needs to be given to how best to maintain the boundaries of divine authority while at the same time recognizing the need to apply Scripture to the context of the twenty-first century.

5. Recognition that the form of authority structure within which unity is envisaged is important. Authority structures can either aid or hinder unity. Four features of authority structure were identified as important for maximizing unity. The structure needed to be functional for the mission of the church, and therefore it also needed to be changeable. Furthermore, it needed to avoid centralization and the abuse of power. This means that church structures should not simply be left to calcify, but rather be regularly reevaluated to see if they continue to best serve the mission of the church, are avoiding the tendency to centralization and abuse of power, and are aiding the church in its quest for unity.
6. The most important things Christian leaders can do to aid unity is to be connected to Christ themselves in order to model the values and attitudes necessary for unity, and to encourage connection with Christ.

Recommendations for Further Study

Many of the seminal reference books on the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Disciples of Christ, and other groups which trace their origin to Campbell, were written by leaders whose primary aim was to show God's leading in their midst. This is admirable, and has provided important information for those of us living in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, a general lack of critical engagement by professionally trained historians means that frequently Campbell and White are not understood within their full historical context. This deficiency is gradually being addressed, and several more balanced approaches to White have emerged in the last thirty years. However, there is still a need for a critical biography of Alexander Campbell.

In the course of this study it has also become apparent that there are other areas where careful study is still required. While literature on Christian unity is prolific in Christianity as a whole, there is little available research on the topic of unity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is surprising since there have been many times of crisis and frequent calls for unity. Research on current attitudes and understandings of Seventh-day Adventists in relation to the topic of unity, and the role of Ellen White in their development would be beneficial. Furthermore, there is a need for in-depth case studies of attempts at unity in times of church crisis which critically consider the effectiveness of strategies which have been employed. These studies should not be limited to the well-known crisis of the nineteenth and early twentieth century rather, they should include crises following White's death. Most literature emerging from times of crisis are focused on the development and theology of the crisis rather than the attempts at bringing unity or the non-theological factors which prevent unity.

Finally, I would suggest that since the key to White's understanding of unity is the concept of union with Christ, an in-depth theological study of this concept in her writings would be beneficial.

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Letters

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