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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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 
dresses 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of published and unpublished material is utilized to maximize the value of 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.