

**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 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 A mixture of published and unpublished material is utilized to maximize the value of the case studies.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 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.