

ADDRESS

To all that love our Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity, throughout all the Churches, the following Address is most respectfully submitted.¹

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

THAT it is the grand design, and native tendency, of our holy religion, to reconcile and unite men to God, and to each other, in truth and love, to the glory of God, and their own present and eternal good, will not, we presume, be denied, by any of the genuine subjects of christianity. The nativity of its Divine Author was announced from heaven, by an host of angels, with high acclamations of “glory to God in the highest, and, on earth, peace and good will towards men.” The whole tenor of that divine book which contains its institutes, in all its gracious declarations, precepts, ordinances, and holy examples, most expressly and powerfully inculcates this. In so far, then, as this holy unity and unanimity in faith and love is attained; just in the same degree, is the glory of God, and the happiness of men, promoted and secured. Impressed with those sentiments, and at the same time grievously affected with those sad divisions which have so awfully interfered with the benign and gracious intention of our holy religion, by exciting its professed subjects to bite and devour one another; we cannot suppose ourselves justifiable, in withholding the mite of our sincere and humble endeavours, to heal and remove them. . . .

The cause that we advocate is not our own peculiar, nor the cause of any party, considered as such; it is a common cause, the cause of Christ and our brethren of all denominations. All that we presume, then, is to do, what we humbly conceive to be *our* duty, in connexion with our brethren; to each of whom it equally belongs, as to us, to exert themselves for this blessed purpose. And as we have no just reason to doubt the concurrence of our brethren,

¹ This address is the main body of the document and follows an introductory declaration.

to accomplish an object so desirable in itself, and fraught with such happy consequences, so neither can we look forward to that happy event, which will forever put an end to our hapless divisions, and restore to the church its primitive unity, purity and prosperity; but, in the pleasing prospect of their hearty and dutiful concurrence. . . .

Let none imagine that the subjoined propositions are at all intended as an overture towards a new creed, or standard, for the church; or, as in any wise designed to be made a term of communion;—nothing can be farther from our intention. They are merely designed for opening up the way, that we may come fairly and firmly to original ground: upon clear and certain premises: and take up things just as the Apostles left them.²—That thus disentangled from the accruing embarrassments of intervening ages, we may stand with evidence upon the same ground on which the church stood at the beginning—Having said so much to solicit attention and prevent mistake, we submit as follows.

PROP[OSITION] 1. THAT the church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else, as none else can be truly and properly called christians.

2. That although the church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate one from another; yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them to the glory of God. And for this purpose, they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

² This desire, expressed throughout this document, to return to the faith and practice not merely of the ancient church, but specifically of the first-century apostolic church, is sometimes labeled “restorationism.”

3. That in order to this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God. Nor ought any thing be admitted, as of divine obligation, in their church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles upon the New Testament church; either in express terms, or by approved precedent.

4. That although the scriptures of the Old and New Testament are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the church; and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline and government of the New Testament church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members; as the Old Testament was for the worship discipline and government of the Old Testament church, and the particular duties of its members.

5. That with respect to the commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the scriptures are silent, as to the express time or manner of performance, if any such there be; no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency, by making laws for the church; nor can any thing more be required of christians in such cases, but only that they so observe these commands and ordinances, as will evidently answer the declared and obvious end of their institution. Much less has any human authority power to impose new commands or ordinances upon the church, which our Lord Jesus Christ has not enjoined. Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church; or be made a term of communion amongst christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.

6. That although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word: yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men; but in the power and veracity of God—therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church's confession.

7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient; and the more full and explicit they be, for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of christian communion: unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment; or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.

8. That as it is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge or distinct apprehension of all divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the church; neither should they, for this purpose, be required to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge: but that, on the contrary, their having a due measure of scriptural self-knowledge respecting their lost and perishing condition by nature and practice; and of the way of salvation thro' Jesus Christ, accompanied with a profession of their faith in, and obedience to him, in all things according to his word, is all that is absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his church.

9. That all that are enabled, thro' grace, to make such a profession, and to manifest the reality of it in their tempers and conduct, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brethren, children of the same family and father, temples of the same spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same divine love, bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance. Whom God hath thus joined together no man should dare to put asunder.³

10. That division among christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is anti-christian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is anti-scriptural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express command. It is anti-natural, as it excites christians to contemn, to hate and oppose one another, who are bound by the highest and most endearing obligations to love each other as brethren, even as Christ has loved them. In a word, it is productive of confusion, and of every evil work.

11. That, (in some instances,) a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God; and, (in others,) an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions, and human inventions, a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship, of the church; are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged causes, of all the corruptions and divisions that ever have taken place in the church of God.

12. That all that is necessary to the highest state of perfection and purity of the church upon earth is, first, that none be received as members, but such as having that due measure of scriptural self-knowledge described above, do profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the scriptures; nor, 2dly, that any be retained in her communion longer than they continue to manifest the reality of their profession by their tempers and conduct. 3dly,

³ Cf. Matt. 19:6.

that her ministers, duly and scripturally qualified, inculcate none other things than those very articles of faith and holiness expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God. Lastly, that in all their administrations they keep close by the observance of all divine ordinances, after the example of the primitive church, exhibited in the New Testament; without any additions whatsoever of human opinions or inventions of men.

13. Lastly. That if any circumstantial indispensable necessary to the observance of divine ordinances be not found upon the page of express revelation, such, and such only, as are absolutely necessary for this purpose, should be adopted, under the title of human expedients, without any pretence to a more sacred origin—so that any subsequent alteration or difference in the observance of these things might produce no contention nor division in the church. . . .⁴

APPENDIX

TO prevent mistakes, we beg leave to subjoin the following explanations. As to what we have done—our reasons for so doing—and the grand object we would desire to see accomplished—all these, we presume, are sufficiently declared in the foregoing pages. As to what we intend to do in our associate capacity, and the ground we have taken in that capacity, tho' expressly and definitely declared; yet, these, perhaps, might be liable to some misconstruction.—First, then, we beg leave to assure our brethren, that we have no intention to interfere, either directly, or indirectly, with the peace and order of the settled churches, by directing any ministerial assistance, with which the Lord may please to favour us, to make inroads upon such; or, by endeavouring to erect churches out of churches—to distract and divide congregations. We have no nostrum, no peculiar discovery of our own to propose to fellow-christians, for the fancied importance of which, they should become followers of us. We propose

⁴ It is clear that Campbell's primary concern is anything that undermines or threatens the unity of the church.

to patronize nothing but the inculcation of the express word of God—either as to matter of faith or practice;—but every one that has a Bible, and can read it, can read this for himself.—

Therefore we have nothing new. Neither do we pretend to acknowledge persons to be ministers of Christ, and, at the same time, consider it our duty to forbid, or discourage people to go to hear them, merely because they may hold some things disagreeable to us; much less to encourage their people to leave them on that account;—and such do we esteem all, who preach a free unconstitutional salvation through the blood of Jesus to perishing sinners of every description; and who manifestly connect with this a life of holiness, and pastoral diligence in the performance of all the duties of their sacred office according to the scriptures; even all, of whom, as to all appearance, it may be truly said to the objects of their charge, “they seek not *yours*, but *you*.” May the good Lord prosper all such, by whatever name they are called; and fast hasten that happy period, when Zion’s watchmen shall see eye to eye, and all be called by the same name. . .

Thus have we briefly endeavored to shew our brethren, what evidently appears to us to be the heinous nature and dreadful consequences of that truly latitudinarian principle and practice, which is the bitter root of almost all our divisions; namely, the imposing of our private opinions upon each other, as articles of faith or duty; introducing them into the public profession and practice of the church, and acting upon them, as if they were the express law of Christ, by judging and rejecting our brethren that differ with us in those things; or, at least, by *so* retaining them in our public profession and practice, that our brethren cannot join with us, or we with them, without becoming actually partakers in those things, which they, or we, cannot, in conscience approve; and which the word of God no where expressly enjoins upon us. To cease from all such things, by simply returning to the original standard of christianity—the profession

and practice of the primitive church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of New Testament scripture, is the only possible way, that we can perceive, to get rid of those evils. And we humbly think that a uniform agreement in *that* for the preservation of charity would be infinitely preferable to our contentions and divisions: nay, that such a uniformity is the very thing that the Lord requires, if the New Testament be a perfect model—a sufficient formula for the worship discipline and government of the christian church. Let *us* do, as we are there expressly told *they* did, say as *they* said: that is, profess and practise as therein expressly enjoined by precept and precedent, in every possible instance, after *their* approved example; and in so doing we shall realize, and exhibit, all that unity and uniformity, that the primitive church possessed, or that the law of Christ requires. But if after all, our brethren can point out a better way to regain and preserve that christian unity and charity expressly enjoined upon the church of God, we shall thank them for the discovery, and cheerfully embrace it. . . .⁵

[*The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address*, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollmann (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), pp. 8, 12, 17–20, 26, 37]

⁵ The fact that Campbell is open to “a better way” indicates that restoring the New Testament model is simply a proposed means to a greater end (unity) but not the end itself.