

THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

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Alexander Campbell (born September 12, 1788) was recognized during his lifetime as one of the most eminent men in our young nation. He earned his way to the forefront by his prodigious study and untiring effort. He was one of the founders of the Christian Church (this group now exists in three main parts: Church of Christ, Non-instrumental; Christian Church/Church of Christ, Independent; and Christian Church, Disciples of Christ—the name Campbell preferred) along with his father Thomas and others. The foundation for the Campbell movement was Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*:

In fact, in writing the *Declaration and Address*, which really started our movement, Thomas Campbell was writing America's religious declaration of independence, a new charter of unity and liberty for the church. And quite consciously doing so.

For just as Thomas Jefferson, a few years before, had challenged the people of the new republic to a new adventure in self-government, so Thomas Campbell was challenging them to a life adventure in Christian thinking.

This group is also known as the Restoration movement because of their plea to restore "simple evangelical Christianity."¹

Alexander was a scholar, teacher, author, editor, college president, debater, reformer, statesman, preacher, farmer and postmaster.² As he practiced these occupations he was a professional who engaged in each in the true spirit of that word with time-consuming effort. As with any man of his magnitude many stories and legends have grown up about him.³ But very soon after his death a shroud of silence closed about him and his thought that exists in the scholarly world yet today.⁴

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¹E. J. Wrather, *Alexander Campbell and His Relevance for Today* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1955) 6.

²For a good biography of Alexander Campbell see R. Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1956). Cf. also B. L. Smith, *Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1930); L. Cochran, *The Fool of God: A Novel Based Upon the Life of Alexander Campbell* (New York: Duell, Sloan, 1958); "The Private Life of Alexander Campbell," *Christian Standard* (July 1967).

³For example the story, judged to be fictional by most scholars, that Mark Twain tells of meeting the "great debater"; cf. L. G. McAllister, "Fact and Fiction in Disciples History," *Discipliana* 39 (Winter 1979) 52.

⁴My own experience is an example of this: Even though I graduated from a Bible college in Campbell's heritage with a bachelor of arts degree (they offered one course in "The History of the Restoration Movement"), I did not begin to appreciate his genius until I had completed a doctorate in philosophy from Saint Louis University and was teaching a class in "Religion in American Culture" at that same university and spent one third of the class on Alexander Campbell's theology and influence.

Every aspect of Campbell's life was interesting. He fathered fourteen children. He was a great orator who never spoke less than two hours, and very often for a much longer time. Yet stories abound about how his audiences never tired of his eloquence.⁵ Alexander the college president and teacher said to his students:

You must take some side in the great controversies of the age. Survey the battleground before you. On the one side are ranged antiquated error, superstition, despotism and misanthropy; on the other, truth, intelligence, liberty, religion and humanity, in such a war no good man can be neutral. . . . The weapons of this our warfare are not swords and spears, but reason, truth, persuasion.⁶

Yet he sometimes failed to take sides as we will see later. His failure, however, was never because he was squeamish or weak but as a result of his overriding concern for the unity of the Church, the body of Christ.

If Alexander Campbell had accomplished nothing else, two contributions were of eternal value to the Church universal. (1) We find in his theology a very high doctrine of the Church itself as the body of Christ. "They also held a high doctrine of the sacraments, not just as a text of obedience, or some memorial rite, but as real channels of grace." This has the potential of a mediating and reconciling position between Catholic and Protestant churches, "between the high and low groups within the church." (2) Campbell also felt "that we should unite the church by a 'restoration of primitive Christianity'" and all that entails.⁷

The Restoration movement quickly developed some very simple slogans that became thumbnail sketches of its theology: "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the Divine"; "we are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only"; "in matters of doctrine unity, in matters of opinion liberty, in all things love"; etc. It was Campbell's own view that, unless there was a direct command of Christ on a particular issue, we should allow in these matters of opinion freedom to differ among believers. In fact no matter of opinion should be made a test of fellowship in the Church.

Perhaps Campbell's greatest contributions to humanity were in the fields of theology and Biblical interpretation. Yet, as Eva Jean Wrather points out,

like Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, whom he so greatly admired, he was, in a sense, a Nineteenth Century embodiment of the Renaissance ideal of "the whole man," Shakespeare's "man of sovereign parts." A true "citizen of the world," he was equally at home in a frontier cabin or pulpit, or in the halls of Congress, or chatting with a queen's lady-in-waiting at the American embassy in London. Quite convinced that a free church could rise only on the firm foundation of a free society, from both lecture platforms and his editor's chair he turned his far-

⁵See A. McLean, *Alexander Campbell as a Preacher* (Athens: C.E.I., 1955); G. Walker, *Preaching in the Thought of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1954).

⁶P. E. Gresham, *Campbell*.

⁷For good examples of Campbell's theology see A. Campbell, *The Christian System* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1956); W. E. Garrison, *Alexander Campbell and the Disciples* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930).

questing mind on every concern of man—political, economic, and social, as well as religious.⁸

Alexander Campbell was truly a theological genius and a remarkable human being. On December 10, 1868, after Campbell's death General Robert E. Lee, the former Confederate commander-in-chief (then president of Washington College, Lexington, Virginia), in a letter to a friend said of Campbell:

As Dr. Symonds said of the great Milton, so may I say of the late president of Bethany College, that "he was a man in whom were illustriously combined all the qualities that could adorn or elevate the nature to which he belonged . . . a man who, if he had been delegated as the representative of his species to one of the superior worlds, would have suggested a grand idea of the human race. Such a man was President Campbell!"⁹

But as interesting as Campbell's background, life and development are, our purpose here is to explore his social ethics. A definition of the term itself might be helpful:

Social Ethics is that part of Christian Ethics concerned with man's social relationships judged by standards implicit in the Christian faith. In this general sense S. E. has been a perennial concern of Christian theologians from the very beginnings of the Christian Church, for they have reflected on such matters as marriage and divorce, sexuality, the family, economic life, war, slavery, the function of courts, work and vocation, the theater, the aims of the state, etc.¹⁰

During this bicentennial anniversary of Alexander Campbell's birth, I would like to discuss his social ethics in relation to moral law (Biblical and natural), government and the political order, war, and education.

I. ON MORAL LAW: BIBLICAL AND NATURAL

Alexander Campbell was known in his day as an apologist for the Christian faith. His tombstone at Bethany, West Virginia, is inscribed "Defender of the faith." He was committed, as strongly as any person could be, to Biblical, churchly tradition. Royal Humbert says of Campbell:

Our theologian's concept of revelation may be called a rational supernaturalism. It is rational in the sense that the content of revelation, as a distinctive kind of information, is no more a scandal for reason than is secular knowledge. It is supernatural in the sense that the information given in the saving events recorded in Scripture could not have been discovered by reason.¹¹

Campbell thought of revelation as the communication of information in the form of supernatural truths, but he did not accept the idea that reason has to undergo a change from its fallen state in order to accept the truth. Of the

⁸Wrather, *Campbell* 7.

⁹Cochran, "Private" 10.

¹⁰V. A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) 87.

¹¹*A Compend of Alexander Campbell's Theology* (ed. R. Humbert; St. Louis: Bethany, 1961) 12.

process of believing Alexander said, "Reason deciding that the testimony is true, is believing; reason deciding that the testimony is false, is disbelieving; reason unable to decide is scepticism."¹² Robert Richardson, biographer and personal physician of Alexander Campbell, summarized Campbell's view: "No distinction between knowledge and faith . . . should . . . be permitted. They are distinguishable only by the sources from whence they are derived" (*Millennial Harbinger* [1840] 460).¹³ Thus while holding that the Bible was the inspired Word of God, Campbell believed that God had given it to man. As God had given man the ability to reason, so man had the ability to understand, interpret and obey the will of God as found in his revealed Word.

Campbell's view of the moral law, although influenced by certain philosophers, differed from many prevalent interpretations:

Campbell was greatly influenced by the works of John Locke, especially in insisting that knowledge must be based upon experience. But Campbell's system of psychology shows also the influence of Thomas Reid and his philosophy of common sense. Campbell disagreed with Locke that the mind was a *tabula rasa*. It is true that Locke himself got away from this idea of the passive mind. Campbell agrees with Reid that the mind has power to arrest the flow of sensations and mold experience into intelligible form. With Reid and Kant he holds to the distinction between the "irrational part" and the "intelligible principles," between our "external senses" and "internal faculties," between the "world of the senses" and the "world of spirits." He even makes a distinction between sensation and consciousness.¹⁴

Alexander held that the intellectual pleasures of man are superior to those of bodily appetites. He believed that man's desire for knowledge is an innate craving of every human being. "This innate desire is found as assuredly in a child when the child delights in his desire for knowledge." He thought that man was different from other animals because he possesses a spirit of peculiar sacredness. God created man in his own image and gave him dominion over the earth. Man is by nature a moral being, able to choose between alternatives. "The moral life," says Campbell, "involves an understanding of the origin, the nature, the relations, the obligations, and the destiny of man."¹⁵

For Campbell the law of love was the supreme law of "religion, morality, and expediency. No code of laws, without it, could make or keep any people. We cannot love by law, but we can walk in love with no other law but that of love."¹⁶ For Campbell an example of the moral law as both Biblical and natural was man's ability to love: Man cannot be made to love by commands and threats. He loves because God created him in such a way as to make it

¹²A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1834) 76-78.

¹³*Compend* (ed. Humbert) 18.

¹⁴C. R. Athearn, *The Religious Education of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1928) 180-181.

¹⁵A. Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing, 1863) 99. See also S. M. Eames, *The Philosophy of Alexander Campbell* (Bethany: Bethany College, 1966) 67.

¹⁶*Compend* (ed. Humbert) 236.

natural for man to love, but we learn of God's gift when we read Scripture. It tells us that "we love him because he first loved us."¹⁷ He felt that the "rudiments of Christianity . . . are comprehended in one sentence: 'God is love.'"¹⁸

Campbell believed that divine commandments or ordinances fall into two categories:

By some [divine commandments or ordinances are] called moral natural, and moral positive; by others, merely moral and positive. When these distinctions are explained in the following sense . . . we consider them scripturally correct. By moral positive, or positive, we understand those that depend entirely for their moral obligation, upon some express precept of the Deity; the propriety of which, nature, in its most perfect state, could not discover.¹⁹

Thus Campbell held to a rather Thomistic view of faith and reason, at least in regard to knowledge of moral law. Certain moral laws, called moral positive, could only be known by direct revelation.

Others, called moral natural, were deducible from nature. An example of a "moral natural" law was the "law of expediency":

There are many things left to the law of expediency concerning which no precepts are found in the apostolic writings. . . . They are . . . those things, or forms of action, which it was impossible or unnecessary to reduce to special precepts. . . . The law of expedience . . . has no place in determining the articles of faith, acts of worship, nor principles of morality. All these require a "*thus saith the Lord*" in express statements. . . . But in other matters that may be called the circumstantialia of the gospel and of the church of Christ, the people of God are left to their own discretion and to the facilities and exigencies of society.²⁰

Campbell felt that the "law of expediency is the law of adopting the best present means of attaining any given end. But this is a matter which the wisdom and good sense of individuals and communities must decide. This is not, this cannot be, a matter of standing revelation."²¹

Here again in "moral natural" law we see Campbell's strong commitment to the place of reason in ethics or theology. This is quite consistent with Paul's prayer for the Philippians that their "love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and discernment" (Phil 1:9-11). It is through knowledge and discernment that a Christian's love becomes plentiful or wealthy in its fullness. The word here used for "knowledge" was almost a technical term that indicated knowledge of God, directed to God.

The word "discernment" or "insight" means intellectual understanding. In Paul's day this word had an established meaning having to do with the perception of good and evil in particular instances. Intellectual understanding

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸A. Campbell, *Christian Baptist* (1826) 226. See also *Compend* (ed. Humbert) 244.

¹⁹*Compend* (ed. Humbert) 240-241.

²⁰Campbell, *System* 72-73; cf. *Compend* (ed. Humbert) 244.

²¹Campbell, *Christian* 74.

is necessary for the Christian's ethical choices. God's will in particular instances is finally "a matter for the Christian himself to discern and decide, a matter of 'insight' into the given situation." For Paul this is not a vague moral instinct. Paul does not divorce "insight" from "knowledge." They always go hand in hand. And both are nurtured by living in the community of believers.²²

This is quite consistent with Alexander Campbell's view of the importance of the knowledge and the ability to reason in both understanding God's revelation and in using the "law of expediency" to decide what was the best present means of attaining any given end. Thus reason in man, which he has because he was created in the image of God, has an undoubtedly important function: (1) It is necessary, as God planned it, for man to use his reason to understand and decipher the moral law revealed by God in his written Word, and (2) it is necessary for man to use his reasoning ability to make particular judgments and applications of God's guidelines in actual human circumstances.

II. ON GOVERNMENT AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

Soon after Alexander came to America he wrote to his uncle Archibald in Scotland about his feelings in regard to the new spirit in government he found:

I cannot speak too highly of the advantages that the people in this country enjoy in being delivered from a proud and lordly aristocracy. . . . I have had my horse shod by a legislator, my horse saddled, my boots cleaned, my stirrup held by a senator. Here is no nobility but virtue, and knowledge. . . . I would not exchange the honor . . . of being an American citizen for the position of your king.²³

Yet Campbell was not an unreserved democrat. He believed that freedom always involved responsibility.²⁴

Campbell was elected a delegate, in the fall of 1829, to the Constitutional Convention of Virginia. Andrew Jackson was the president of the United States, and Virginians called a convention to rewrite their state constitution. But this was no usual state convention. There assembled were some of America's great: two ex-presidents of the United States, Madison and Monroe, and one who would be president, John Tyler. John Marshall, chief justice of the Supreme Court, was there, as was "that perhaps most feared wit who ever sat in the United States Congress, John Randolph of Roanoke."²⁵

Alexander participated strongly in the convention. He clearly demonstrated that he could have been one of the great statesmen of the day had he chosen

²²T. L. Miethe, "The Christian's Need to Know," *Faith and Reason* 3 (Spring 1977) 8-9; see also A *Christian's Guide to Faith and Reason* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1987) 40-41.

²³Richardson, *Memoirs*, 1. 465-466.

²⁴D. R. Lindley, *Apostle of Freedom* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1957) 92.

²⁵Wrather, *Campbell* 10. Cf. also W. E. Garrison and A. T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948) 199-200.

that course of action. "He advocated free public schools, the direct election of judges, the enlargement of suffrage rights, and the gradual compensated emancipation of the slaves." Many historians feel that his suggestion on the slavery issue was possibly the only alternative that might have avoided the Civil War had it been heeded and put into practice soon after he suggested it in 1829.²⁶

Campbell held quite strongly to the principle of separation of Church and state. Important to this decision was his view of individual liberty and his concept of the NT Church. He viewed the Church in the NT as a voluntary and autonomous society.²⁷ He was convinced that religious liberty was a natural right and a much higher one than the rights of any government:

The mere asking for toleration recognizes a right which no civil government possesses, and establishes a principle of calamitous consequences, viz., that opinions contrary to the majority, or the national creed, are a public injury, which it is in the power of government to punish or tolerate, according to their intelligence and forbearance. Civil rulers have no right to tolerate nor punish men on account of their opinions in matters of religion.²⁸

Campbell agreed with Locke that one of the primary functions of government was to protect the life, liberty, reputation and property of every citizen in the community.²⁹ One of the weakest and perhaps most inconsistent elements of Campbell's ethics was his view of the Christian's responsibility to the government. In relation to the question as to whether a Christian should take active part in politics Campbell said:

Ought Christians to take an active part in politics—in the present politics of this country? . . . I am decidedly of the opinion that they ought not. One of my reasons is, American politics are full of avarice and ambition. They are national and mammoth forms of pride and cupidity; or they are a concentration of selfishness in its most repulsive attributes. . . . Now can there be any thing in its spirit and genius of Christianity than the cultivation and display of concentrated selfishness?

And again:

The spirit of politicians and the spirit of God are as antagonistic as flesh and spirit, as hatred and love, as heaven and hell; and he that would faithfully and truly serve the one, must abjure all allegiance to the other. "*You cannot serve God and Mammon.*" This is but one of many reasons why Christians cannot take an active part in the politics of the present day.³⁰

²⁶Cochran, "Private" 9.

²⁷H. L. Lunger, *The Political Ethics of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1954) 38; see the whole of chap. 3, "Separation of Church and State," pp. 38-52.

²⁸A. Campbell, *Christian Baptist* (1826) 230.

²⁹Lunger, *Political* 51-52, 191.

³⁰A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1840) 413-415.

Campbell did think a Christian should vote, but he seldom urged him to do so. "For Campbell there was no basis or motivation for what is known today as Christian social action."³¹

It is indeed strange and inconsistent because Campbell himself was involved with government at different times in his life. He made statements about taking sides on the great issues, and he felt that American democracy was very important. One would think he would see the need to supply good government and the Christian's responsibility here. While his pessimism in regard to the nature of politics is quite understandable, his lack of insight as to a Christian's responsibility to affect our political system is not.

Campbell's views and remarks about forms of government after the Virginia Constitutional Convention are rather different from his earlier praise of American democracy:

The most approved theory of human nature and of human government now current wherever the English language is spoken, either in the Old World or in the New, is, that a monarchy would be always the best government, because [it is] the cheapest, the most efficient, and the most dignified; provided only, that the crown was placed on the wisest head and sceptre wielded by the purest hands. Could we always secure this we would always be monarchists; because we cannot, we are all republicans.³²

Campbell made statements to the effect that although republics are the most natural or the most rational forms of government, they are good. He felt that "republican officers" were better than kings because we can get rid of them sooner. He seems to go back and forth in his thinking as to whether men are good enough to work government well. This is perhaps the closest point in Campbell's ethics—that is, his pessimism about government—to a very negative view of the nature of man. It would be interesting to see what caused him to be so positive about the potential of man.

Overall Campbell often stated that "God, having prescribed no form of political government, has equally sanctioned every form which society chooses to assume." Because the Bible prescribes no form of government, he felt that the best form was the one that could be adapted to a given people's "views, wants, wishes, and even prejudices." Thus no one form of human government could suit all countries and people.³³

III. ON WAR

Campbell was very much against war and was, during his entire life, a consistent pacifist. He was by nature, morally and religiously, a man of peace. Even if he were not a Christian, Campbell would still have pleaded for peace "on the ground of political economy." He felt that war was such a great waste

³¹Lunger, *Political* 63.

³²Campbell, *System* 122-125.

³³*Ibid.*

and was impressed by the good that could be done if all the effort and money spent on war was in fact used for building up society in peace:

Beat your swords into ploughshares, your spears into pruninghooks; convert your warships into missionary packets; your arsenals and munitions of war into Bibles, school-books, teachers, and professors of literature, science, and art; and then ask, what would be wanting on the part of man to "make the wilderness and solitary place glad"; to cause the "desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose."³⁴

He was greatly influenced in his pacifism by the writings of one Soame Jenyns and quoted long passages from Jenyns on such "pagan" virtues as valor and patriotism in his debate with Robert Owen.³⁵

Campbell thought that Jesus' statement in John 18:36 "ought to settle the question forever." Jesus had stopped his servant from fighting over him because his kingdom was not of this world. Campbell felt that the sermon on the mount showed the Savior's mind on the subject of war. People were not to render evil for evil, and Jesus pronounced the highest blessings on the peacemakers; therefore he could not be a "patron of war."³⁶

Yet Campbell realized that he had not addressed all the questions involved in the discussion of war: Could a Christian go to war to defend his country or in obedience to the powers that be? In other words, even though as Christians we should not go to war for our own sake or for the sake of religion, could we for the maintenance of our rights, or in compliance with the law of the land?³⁷

Campbell was discussing this very issue during the heat of the war with Mexico in 1846, so his answers to the questions about going to war to defend the country or to obey the state were put off. But Campbell did not return to the question until eighteen months later in his famous "Address on War," a thoroughly pacifist address before the Wheeling Lyceum on May 11, 1848. He felt that it had become a "party question," so he determined not to treat the subject until the war was over. Of this Harold Lunger says:

This is a grave weakness in Campbell's policy in regard to controversial political issues. Like the Arkansas traveler, when it was raining, he was unable to patch the roof, and when the storm was over, there was no urgency for him to do so. He deferred discussion of war when the issue was a live one, and returned to it only when the crisis was past.³⁸

But Campbell himself was not satisfied with what he had done on the matter. In his 1848 address he says that he is sorry and ashamed to think that he had not spoken out on the subject sooner. "Probably even this much

³⁴A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1848) 384.

³⁵R. Owen and A. Campbell, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity* (Cincinnati: Robinson and Fairbank, 1829), 2, 116.

³⁶A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1846) 640-641.

³⁷Lunger, *Political* 249.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

published by me some three years, or even two years ago, might have saved some lives that have been thrown away in the desert.”³⁹

Campbell’s “Address on War” had eight points. The first point was that war was not valid because it seldom reaches the guilty and always involves the slaughter of the innocent. The second point was that while he granted that the wars of the OT were right because they were commanded by God, that issue had no binding authority now. Lunger points out:

In his discussions of these other issues he recognized no significant departure in the N. T. from the commands and usages of the O. T. But in the case of war he found complete reversal which laid the basis for his radical pacifism and set him off from the traditional natural law acceptance of the just war.⁴⁰

As he had done earlier, Campbell refused to admit any distinction between aggressive and defensive war. All defensive wars become aggressive wars.

Points three through six are rather quick discussions of the inconsistencies between war and the regulations of the “present Monarch of the Universe.” Point seven treated the question from a pragmatic point of view. War is folly because “it can never be a satisfactory end of the controversy,” and “peace is always the result of negotiation,” not really of the war. Point eight is an argument of the wickedness of war because most often those who do the killing have no personal cause of provocation. They seldom understand the real reasons of the war, and thus the innocent are punished with the guilty. In war the soldier is used to do for the state that which, if he did it on his own, he would be condemned to death for by the state, and wars are the “pioneers” of all of society’s other evils, “both moral and physical.”⁴¹

Then Alexander says that with Franklin he concludes: “There never was a good war, or a bad peace.” He goes on to say that the first two to three centuries of Christianity the believers understood this and refused to go to war. “No wonder then, that for two or three centuries after Christ all Christians refused to bear arms. So depose Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, etc.”⁴² At least in this regard Campbell obviously feels that the Church historically understood Christ’s teaching and correctly practiced it for centuries. Even after Campbell had effectively retired from the editorship of the *Millennial Harbinger* during the Civil War and before his death in 1866, the editorial policy of the journal was thoroughly pacifist.⁴³

Lunger makes two very interesting comments at the end of his discussion of Campbell’s position on war. First, he says that there were other reasons besides Campbell’s strict biblicism that were factors in his pacifism:

³⁹A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1848) 385.

⁴⁰Campbell, *Popular* 342-366.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 364.

⁴³Lunger, *Political* 258-259.

His Enlightenment faith in the inherent rationality of man, his view of war as supremely foolish and irrational, his belief in the obvious superiority and practicability of the way of reason and arbitration, and his faith that wars would cease if men refused to fight. . . . It is interesting to speculate what his position would have been on the whole subject of war if he had lived in the middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁴

Second, he says:

His views on war represent the most consistent and pronounced left-wing strand in all of Campbell's practical tendencies in regard to economic ethics, slavery, and capital punishment. In the matter of war he adhered to the characteristic radical sect position even to the end. This was due largely to the seeds planted in his mind by his reading of Soame Jenyns and perhaps William Godwin, to his own pacifist temperament, and to the influence of the literature of the peace crusade. *Another important subconscious influence was the fact that, throughout his lifetime, the United States was never in serious danger of attack from without.*⁴⁵

One last point of interest in relation to Campbell's ideas in relation to war and dealings with other nations: He was one of the first, as in his 1848 address, to plead that man stop the stupidity of war by the formation of "a congress of nations and a high court of nations":

Why not have a *by-law-established umpire*? Could not a united national court be made as feasible and as practicable as a United States court? Why not, as often proposed, and as eloquently, ably and humanely argued, by the advocates of peace, have a congress of nations and a high court of nations for adjudication and termination of all international misunderstandings and complaints, re-dressing and remedying all wrongs and grievances?⁴⁶

IV. ON EDUCATION

The battle for public education in the United States was raging between 1825 and 1850. There were several areas of struggle: "for tax support, to eliminate the pauper-school idea, to make the schools entirely free, to establish school supervision, to eliminate sectarianism, to establish the American high school, and to establish the state university as the crown to the whole system."⁴⁷ Alexander Campbell was vitally involved in this battle.

Apart from his influence as a man of the Church and a theologian, Campbell's greatest contribution to America was certainly in the field of public education. He campaigned vigorously for free schools. This set him off from the narrow sectarianism that characterized many of the religious of his day.⁴⁸ He felt that education was essential for civilization:

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 263.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 262 (italics mine).

⁴⁶Campbell, *Popular* 363.

⁴⁷Lunger, *Political* 168.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 167.

Educated men must rule the world. But for that purpose it is not necessary that every scholar should be either a General or a Statesman. A Bacon or a Locke, an Aristotle or a Plato, a Faustus or a Columbus, a Franklin or a Fulton, a Luther or a Calvin, a Prophet or an Apostle, governs the world much more than any living Emperor or King. A hermit like Peter, or a preacher like Melancthon, a scholar like Erasmus, or a writer like Addison or Cowper, makes a deeper and more enduring impression upon the minds of millions than the achievements of the greatest statesman in America or in the world.⁴⁹

Education was more important and more powerful than armies or governments, more far-reaching than anything in society or the world.

Many of Campbell's practical proposals in education are very modern when seen in light of their time and place in history. He wanted the schools to be free to all children, tax-supported by the entire community, and he desired that the teachers be certified. Teachers should be either university trained or, if self-educated, examined for competency. He felt the schools should be located so that children would have convenient access to them.⁵⁰

It is important to realize that Alexander Campbell did not think that the mere acquisition of knowledge was very important in and of itself. Everything that a student learned should serve as a tool to enable him to do two things: (1) act wisely in a matter, and/or (2) provide insight for further inquiry. "He would have been in hearty sympathy with the remark of President Wilson who said, 'The mind is not a prolix gut to be stuffed.'"⁵¹

Campbell wrote: "With me, education and the formation of moral character are identical expressions." Disciple scholars have said that the most fundamental part of the Christian Church plea is "sanctified intelligence."⁵² For Campbell the most important part of education, the essential character of a college man, was moral excellence. Campbell believed that virtue could be learned. Education is the sole basis of morality. In his thinking Biblical education and instruction was to safeguard ethics for the individual and for society. He believed that moral education could change lives and was essential to intelligent living. He was not negative or legalistic in this. As Gresham says:

Matters of individual propriety, however, occupied very little space in the writings of Campbell. This is truly amazing when one considers that the majority of frontier preaching was directed against dancing, card playing, smoking, drinking, swearing, and sexual vice, all of which were subsumed under the phrase, "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Campbell himself smoked a pipe and drank wine. The Disciple colleges were never subjected to the emotional appeals for the students to repent which characterized this period even at Yale in staid old New England. Campbell's position is more reminiscent of Locke, who said, "The only fence against the world is knowledge."⁵³

⁴⁹Gresham, *Campbell* 44.

⁵⁰Eames, *Philosophy* 81.

⁵¹Gresham, *Campbell* 43.

⁵²Garrison and DeGroot, *Disciples* 372.

⁵³Gresham, *Campbell* 55-56.

While many Disciples of the early period believed that the chief justification for Bethany College was the advancement of the Restoration movement, that was not Campbell's view. He believed that a college should exist to enrich the lives of the students, to improve society, but not to be "prostituted to the advancement of any particular sect."⁵⁴

Education for Alexander was broader than the traditional reading, writing and arithmetic and included all the arts and sciences as well as Bible study and the basic facts of what he called "our common Christianity."⁵⁵ In light of his extreme views on separation of Church and state, some are surprised to hear Campbell in 1835 urge governors to decree reading and study of the Bible in the common schools.⁵⁶ In fact, later that year he refers to a resolution passed at the October meeting of the College of Teachers: "That, in the judgement of the College, the Bible should be introduced into every school, from the lowest to the highest, as a school-book; *only without denominational or sectarian comment.*" He noted that the italicized part was unanimously adopted, as was his amendment. Lunger says this was the same formula that Horace Mann had established in the Massachusetts public schools.⁵⁷

Campbell wanted the Bible to be used as a textbook in the public schools because he was convinced that in a democracy the people must be virtuous as well as intelligent. Further, he felt that the only sound morality was found in the Bible.⁵⁸ The purpose of such education was to develop the powers of man to make right choices and to make possible more effective action personally and socially.⁵⁹

Education . . . is teaching a person to think, to reason, to act for himself, and from himself, in harmony with the constitution of the universe; or in unison with himself and with all the relations in which he stands to God and man—to things past, present, and future. Such is a rational and moral education.⁶⁰

In the year 1836 Campbell issued an extra edition of the *Millennial Harbinger* on education ideas that still have great value today.

No subject more deeply interested Campbell than education. He developed a fourfold plan for the complete education of a person. The plan was to begin at the nursery and to have family, school, college and church education adapted to meet the physical, intellectual, moral and religious makeup of man. He proposed first a "family institution" to provide accommodations for the primary school, for the development of family character, and to provide a model of family government and economy. The students were to be taught

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 51.

⁵⁵Lunger, *Political* 172.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 175-176.

⁵⁷A. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (1837) 568.

⁵⁸Lunger, *Political* 178.

⁵⁹Campbell, *Popular* 230-246.

⁶⁰Lindley, *Apostle* 93.

family discipline, “carefully instructed in the facts, precepts and promises of the Bible,” and in morality and religion.

The second phase was called the “school” and was to work on the same general principles: to prepare the student for college and constantly emphasize moral character. The third, the “college,” was to have a liberal course of studies with much importance on the physical sciences and to prepare the student for the learned professions. Also taught were moral and religious training. The Bible was to be made one of the regular textbooks, not for systems of doctrine but for Bible facts and institutions. No one was to receive honors at the school without being thoroughly acquainted with the sacred oracles. The fourth and last phase, the “church,” should provide the living laboratory that exemplifies the truth and excellence of the gospel of Christ. Richardson says of the plan:

This grand scheme of education was no sooner presented than it was hailed with delight by well-wishers to humanity and by eminent educators of various creeds, who were struck with its completeness and its novelty, and who had learned to anticipate the success of every enterprise undertaken by Mr. Campbell.⁶¹

Campbell tried to have the first two institutions at Bethany, but they were closed because of lack of students.

Alexander Campbell believed very strongly in the education of women and was one of the first in his day to do so. He felt that women were indeed central to the family, to the teaching of the children, and were pillars of society as a whole. Their education was a very important factor for the family and the society.⁶²

In 1866, the year of Campbell’s death, Bethany College reported the vocational diversity of its students as follows: Of the 331 graduates, 15 were medical doctors, 34 were teachers, 13 were college professors, 15 were principals of seminaries, 35 were lawyers, 50 were “planters,” 2 were college presidents, and 118 were ministers. The scheme of the curriculum was much like that of the University of Virginia. Campbell was an admirer of Thomas Jefferson and patterned his school in part after Jefferson’s great institution. The fact that Bethany College so strongly emphasized liberal arts and the sciences (it had one of the best-equipped science labs of its day) and non-sectarian education and yet produced so many ministers shows that Christian values and Christian truth can be taught in a nonsectarian academic setting and commitment be maintained.⁶³

One last fact in regard to Campbell’s educational philosophy: He not only believed in liberal arts and science education and the Bible to be taught in a nonsectarian way but also held that it was far better to have one or two good

⁶¹Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2. 463–465.

⁶²Gresham, *Campbell* 57.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 47.

schools than a multitude of ineffective institutions.⁶⁴ This fact is mentioned because of the unfortunate proliferation of colleges (so many of them ineffective as educational institutions) associated with the Christian Church in all its three major divisions today.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 60.