

The Declaration and Address

In 1809, the Christian Association commissioned Thomas Campbell to write a document outlining the purpose of the organization and its plan for unity among Christians. This *Declaration and Address* (a reference to the freedom proclaimed by the American *Declaration of Independence*) made a clear call back to the freedom found in the New Testament as a basis for Christian unity.

One can get lost in the 19th century language of the *Declaration and Address*, but its main points include:

1. *A fervent call to Christian unity.* “That the Church of Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.” It is one in essence because Christians are “subjects of the same grace, objects of the same divine love, bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance.” God intends the church to be one, evidenced by Jesus’ fervent prayer for unity in John 17. The “constitution” that makes the church one is the New Testament.
2. *A strong condemnation of division among Christians.* “That division among Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils.” Thus, there should “be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them.”
3. *Doctrinal differences not based on the express teachings of the New Testament are the causes of division.* More than sixty times in the *Declaration and Address*, Campbell uses phrases like “expressly exhibited,” “plain,” and “clear” to describe the binding teachings of Scripture. Where the Bible is unclear or silent, no disagreement should divide Christians. Thomas Campbell never spelled out exactly what those “express teachings” are. Neither does he address the difficulty of Christians strongly disagreeing over what the Bible “expressly” teaches. This would be a significant problem later in the Campbell Movement.
4. *A simple confession of faith in Jesus, not agreement with an elaborate creed, is all that is necessary for admission to the church.* Thus, creeds, even if true and helpful, should not be used to exclude Christians who disagree with them from full acceptance as children of God.
5. *A desire to return to the purity of the first century church.* By removing items that have divided Christians and obscured the beauty of the church, God’s people can experience personal and corporate holiness and purity.
6. *An appeal for love and understanding among Christians.* Those who confess faith in Christ “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...”

Thomas Campbell never intended the principles of the *Declaration and Address* to be the basis of a new religious group. Instead, it was a call to unity among Christians of all denominations. “The cause that we advocate is not our own peculiar cause, nor the cause of any party, considered as such; it is a common cause, the cause of Christ and our brethren of all denominations.”