

A large image showing the silhouette of a person with their arms raised in a gesture of praise or worship. The background is a bright sunset or sunrise, with a gradient from yellow to orange to blue. The text "The D & A is part of our DNA" is overlaid in the center in a bold, black font.

The D & A is part of our DNA

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Introduction

– *Craig Brown*

Federal Coordinator, Churches of Christ in Australia

The D & A is part of our DNA is a resource that will help us reflect on the 'Declaration and Address' written by Thomas Campbell in 1809. Later in 2009 we celebrate the 200th anniversary of this document which was so influential in launching our Movement.

This resource includes two contemporary interpretations of Campbell's 13 Propositions, a series of Bible Studies and an in-depth discussion guide on the helpful resource 'One Church'.

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What is the Declaration and Address?

It's a short booklet on the importance of unity and restoring New Testament ways of worshipping – and it inspired the people who got together and formed Churches of Christ. The *Declaration and Address* **declares** that a group of people interested in unity had established the Christian Association of Washington and **addresses** the issues around Christian unity. The Christian Association of Washington disbanded after some time, but the 13 propositions of the *Declaration and Address* live on in us. Churches of Christ started because we wanted Christian unity and thought it could be achieved through restoring New Testament ways. The *Declaration and Address* is in our DNA.

Thomas Campbell wrote the *Declaration and Address*. He had been a minister in the Presbyterian church in Ireland and Washington, Pennsylvania, USA. He was remarkable in his day because he shared the Lord's Supper with people outside his church. That sort of thing was frowned upon and the church was full of argument and division. By 1809 Campbell had left the church. But he had not given up hope that someday all could share in communion. With a group of like-minded people he formed the Washington Christian Association and composed the principles for that group: the *Declaration and Address*. It was published in December 1809.

Thomas Campbell's son, Alexander, was so impressed with the message of unity through the restoration of New Testament ways that he spent his life preaching and writing about it. Thomas and Alexander's writings were read in America, England and Australia – and Churches of Christ began. But it all started with the *Declaration and Address*. It's foundational to our movement. It's in our DNA. Its bicentenary deserves our recognition and reconsideration of its message.

Kerrie Handasyde, 2009

A Contemporary Interpretation of the 13 Propositions

1. The church was always meant to be united. Two hundred years ago Thomas Campbell wrote, “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”
2. We live out our faith in different ways and in different lands, but we should be united on the essentials of Christian life.
3. Scripture tells us that everyone who declares their faith and follows Christ may belong in the church. We should not put anything in the way of belonging.
4. The New Testament contains all the essential information on how to worship, disciple and live alongside one another in the church.
5. When the Scriptures do not contain the specific advice we seek, we’re tempted to fill the silence with our own ideas. Our ideas should not become a cause of disunity or stand in the way of people who want to belong in the church.
6. Hearing the word of God is life-giving but remember we hear through human ears. When it comes to Scripture, we are always only interpreters – not authors! Our understandings should not become a cause of disunity or stand in the way of people who want to belong in the church.
7. Many people have thought deeply and written wisely about faith and theology. But these writings should not be used to decide who may belong in the church. All who declare their faith and follow Christ may belong.
8. There is so much to learn about faith and Scripture. But belonging to the church isn’t about what you’ve learnt. Through God’s grace, all who declare their faith and follow Christ may belong.
9. United in the church, we should love one another as though we were children of the one family or parts of the one body. Remember that each one of us is loved by the same divine Love.
10. Disunity among Christians is everywhere but it’s not what God intended. It’s vital that we stand united on essentials.
11. Disunity occurs in the church when we neglect the will of God or impose our own will in place of God’s.
12. We live in hope that the church will become perfect. In striving for this we need to hear the word of God in Scripture - and live it! Human opinion must not stand in the way of our essential unity.
13. Some of the customs we follow in the church are not in Scripture. We should remember that these customs are not divinely ordained – and not worth fighting over. Our unity in essentials is what matters.

Kerrie Handasyde, 2009

The D & A Is Part Of Our DNA

A series of four Bible Studies exploring themes raised by Thomas Campbell in his Declaration and Address (1809)

UNITY

Key verse: My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:21-22).

Campbell's Comment: That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one...(Proposition 1).

When you think of unity with regards to church, do your thoughts turn primarily to your own local community of believers? Or churches in your suburb/town? Or Churches Of Christ in your State? As a Movement? As we explore in this study, Jesus' views on unity will challenge the scope of where we believe unity starts and (possibly) ends.

Exploring the Text: Read John 17:6-25 Describe the relationship between the Father and the Son (as expressed by Jesus). Pay particular attention to John 17:7-12.

What strikes you about Jesus' attitude to their relationship?

In **John 17:20-26**, Jesus turns his attention from the original disciples to us ("those who will believe in me through their message" in 17:20).

What is the heart of Jesus' prayer for us? (17:22-23)

What do you think that means in practical terms for us today, particularly in reference to:

- Being brought to complete unity?
- The concept of unity being instrumental in witness?
- Our love for others being the same as the Father's love for the Son?

Jesus prayed this prayer the night before his crucifixion. In light of what he prays, what emphasis should we put on unity in both our own lives and as a broader church community?

In your own walk with God, how highly have you rated unity?

Wrestling with the Word: Can we draw a line where unity starts and ends? For example, the church down the road has some theological views that make us uncomfortable, and some practices that we think stray from the heart of biblical imperatives. Do we focus on the differences

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we have or focus on what we are united on? Is there a line we should draw with others that prevents us uniting with them?

Use the following quote for discussion: *Jesus is suggesting that rather than running around drawing lines of demarcation between those who are in the community of Christ and those who are not, we are simply to bless all those who participate with us in the work of Jesus.* (Frost & Hirsch, *ReJesus*, pg.30)

Campbell's Last Word: *Our desire...would be, that, rejecting human opinions and the inventions of men as of any authority, or as having any place in the Church of God, we might forever cease from further contentions about such things; returning to and holding fast by the original standard; taking the Divine word alone for our rule; the Holy Spirit for our teacher and guide, to lead us into all truth; and Christ alone, as exhibited in the word, for our salvation.*

For further conversation: Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-36; Ephesians 2:11-22; Psalm 133.

Action: How can you promote the idea that the Church is one?

WHO BELONGS TO THE CHURCH?

Key Verses: *Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:48-50)*

Campbell's Comment: *that...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 through 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 for admission into his church (Proposition 8).*

These two quotes paint a simple picture of belonging to a church: express faith in Christ, your need for Him and your commitment to follow him. Has that been your experience? Or have you discovered that there are unspoken 'rules of membership' in your church community? If so, what are they?

Exploring the Text: Read Luke 7:36-50 Briefly, describe the actions of the woman who had lived a sinful life (7:37) and Simon, the Pharisee towards Jesus. What do these actions show about their attitude to the person of Jesus?

What hurdles do you think the woman had to overcome to get to Jesus?

Do you think some people would view the church in the same way?

Jesus summarises their actions in 7:44-47. Obviously, the woman's actions are interpreted as an acknowledgement of Jesus as being worthy of worship. Simon, for all his religious training and experiences, snubs Jesus.

What happens to people that gets them to a point where they focus more on religion more than Jesus?

Jesus accepts this woman quickly. Why do you think in many churches membership takes a long time? How do you feel about the term 'membership'? Does your church use it?

Wrestling with the Word: Look again at the quote from Thomas Campbell. Belonging to the church is centred on a person's response to Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27 that the church is now the body of Christ. If that is the case, is your church exhibiting the characteristics of Jesus that will draw people like the woman in Luke 7? Is your church going to places where the people like that woman are likely to be found? Like Simon, do we need to have Jesus say to us: *Do you see this woman?*

(7:44).

Use the following quote for discussion: *Through table fellowship Jesus ritually acted out his insight into Abba's indiscriminate love...the inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, symbolised in table fellowship, is the most dramatic expression of the ragamuffin gospel and the merciful love of the redeeming God. (Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel, 56).*

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Campbell's Last Word: *You lovers of Jesus, and beloved of him, however scattered in this cloudy and dark day, you love the truth as it is in Jesus (if our hearts deceive us not); so do we. You desire union **in Christ with all that love him**; so do we.* (Emphasis mine).

For Further Conversation: Luke 7:1-10; 17:11-19; 19:1-10 and 23:31-43. What is required of these people to join the 'Jesus community'? Does Campbell's view of belonging fit the biblical witness?

Action: Is there anyone in your wider community you can encourage to belong to the church by responding to Jesus?

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

Key verses: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:15-16).*

Campbell's Comment: Building on the past study, we are reminded of what Campbell's view of church membership focused on: "...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..." (Proposition 1)

This study and the previous one are twins. If we decide that following Christ is the key criteria to membership in a church community, then we need to examine what the Scriptures say about Christ. As we begin, take a moment to picture in your mind an image of Christ from the Gospels that most speaks to you. You might want to share this as a group.

Exploring the Text: Read Colossians 1:15-23

What images does Paul use to describe the supremacy of Christ?

Does Campbell's quote (above) reflect any of these themes from Colossians?

In church life and practice, what other 'things' can challenge the supremacy of Christ? In our own lives, what also challenges his supremacy?

What does it mean that Jesus is the head of the body, the church?

What changes (if any) would this mean in our church life if we constantly reaffirmed this statement and acted it out?

By looking at Jesus, what can we see about God? (1:15)

By looking at the church, what assumptions do people make about Christ?

Wrestling with the Word: Every Christian, and every church, needs to go through the process of declaring the supremacy of Christ.

We sometimes feel more comfortable with things that we can see, control and predict, like church structures, governance, systems, ministry patterns and church traditions.

How do we constantly allow Jesus to take over (whom we can't see, control etc)? Is it right that this makes us feel uncomfortable at times?

CS Lewis, in his Narnia series, has some dialogue that speaks to this issue:

"'I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.'"

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“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you?

Who said anything about being safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.

He’s the King, I tell you.””

Campbell’s Last Word: 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. (emphasis mine)

For Further Conversation: John 8:48-58; 14:5-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 12:1-3

Action: Begin a daily journal for the next month, with one theme in mind: what is challenging Jesus for supremacy in my life?

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

Key verse: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

Campbell's Comment: *...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 (Proposition 4).*

Do you think of your church as a 'New Testament' church?

Exploring the Text: Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

How does Paul view the Scriptures?

Does the Campbell quote above relate to churches today? Do you think it resonates with Paul's view of the Scriptures in this passage?

What do you think it means that Scripture is God-breathed?

The New Testament documents were written to specific churches with specific issues in mind.

How can they still be relevant today?

What processes of interpretation (if any) do we need to undergo in order to see them as relevant?

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Phone 03 9488 8800
1st Floor, Heidelberg Rd
Fairfield VIC 3078
www.cofcaustralia.org