THE AMELIORATION OF SOCIETY: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING ALEXANDER CAMPBELL'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL REFORM

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ABSTRACT

Religious leaders furnished an important impetus in the movement for social reform in the antebellum era of American history. This study examines the role of Alexander Campbell, the primary founder of the Disciples of Christ religious movement, in this effort to reform American society. Whereas Campbell's achievements as a religious reformer have been well documented, his accomplishments in the social realm have been often overlooked in studies of antebellum reform. In this paper I compare Campbell to other religious leaders who were associated with social reform, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lyman Beecher, and Charles Finney, and identify his imperative for the reformation of society: an emphasis on the visible church as the agent for social reform. This imperative offered an alternative within the Protestant spectrum of religious bodies to the individualism and voluntary societies of the Emersonian and Evangelical (Revivalist) traditions. Campbell was a multidimensional figure who not only had an important influence on the American religious scene but also was one of the leading educators and reformers of the antebellum period. He was an immigrant, a westerner, and a southerner whose perspective on the movement for social reform in the antebellum era is quite different from the traditional view which predominantly focused upon northeastern reformers.

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Campbell arrived in the United States in September 1809 full of confidence, optimism, and high expectations. Having left behind "the civil and religious misrule and discord" of his native Northern Ireland, Campbell traveled through Philadelphia and on across the Alleghenies to Washington County, Pennsylvania "with new feelings of delight and an indescribable sense of relief."[1] He was in his land of liberty. Before Campbell retired to his accommodations on the eighth night of his journey, he recorded his "grateful reflections upon the goodness of Providence in bringing him to a land under the benign influence of the free institutions, the equal rights, the educational advantages, and the moral and religious elevation secured to all."[2] Campbell quickly learned, however, that his "land of enchantment" was not without evils of its own. He concluded that "sectarian bigotry and clerical intolerance" were not exclusive to the Old World and that "no government or party or people is exempt from those errors and moral delinquencies which belong to a common humanity."[3]

Campbell's early experience in the United States was a microcosm of the general mood in America during the antebellum era. It was a period in which, on one hand, Americans were brimming with optimism about the future destiny of the nation yet, on the other hand, were faced with increasing social and political problems which would culminate in civil war. It was a time of boundless hope tempered with the necessity of reform--a vision of what could be accomplished and a mission to remove the obstacles in the way. Typical of this attitude was Campbell's lofty conclusion in an 1852 address on the destiny of the American nation:

> Never before lived a people possessing such birthrights--such an unbounded horizon of greatness and glory--as that which spreads itself before the enraptured vision of every

> enlightened American citizen. . . . Let us regard ourselves . . . as God's own depository of all the great blessings of civilization and salvation for the new world.[4]

It was assumed that these "enlightened American citizens" had the ability and the responsibility to resolve any political, economic, or social problem that might cloud their horizon.

Many Americans--especially church leaders--perceived these problems in moral terms, rather than political, social, or economic ones. The disease was moral; the political and economic crises were only the symptoms. As William Gribbin argued, "most antebellum reformers fought not injustice or inequity, not oppression or social evils, neither inhumanity nor suffering, but sin."[5] God had a plan for America, but this plan required a virtuous citizenry.

One important way that Americans dealt with the tension between unbridled optimism and perplexing social problems was through efforts at social reform. "The myriad of reforms and reformers offer a meaning for much of the whirl and confusion and change that we see in America in the antebellum years," Clifford Griffin commented, and provide "valuable insights into the difficulties the Americans encountered when they tried to give concrete meaning to their cherished ideals . . . of democracy and freedom."[6] Movements to prohibit drinking, end slavery, relieve poverty, improve prisons and asylums, secure women's rights, promote peace, and educate children arose in all geographic sections and social classes of America.[7] These reformers held a common belief in human reason, perfectability, and the inevitable progress of human society and confidently held the assumption that when a sufficient number of individual Americans had seen the light, they would automatically solve America's social problems.

When Alexander Campbell referred to the "amelioration of society" in the 1830 prospectus for his monthly journal, the *Millennial Harbinger*, he sounded a familiar theme in antebellum America: the call for social reform. Although he saw social reform as secondary to

theological concerns, Campbell addressed most of the social issues of his day: slavery, war, crime, poverty, temperance, the nature of democracy, and, of course, education. In both the distinctive character of his approach to the reform of society and his widespread influence, Campbell should be viewed as an important social reformer along with the more recognized reformers in the antebellum era. Campbell's most prominent and persistent work in the arena of social reform focused upon education. While he somewhat reluctantly entered the temperance and antislavery campaigns, there was no such hesitancy in his crusade for educational reforms.

THE PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS SPECTRUM AND SOCIAL REFORM

A primary impetus for this "ferment of reform" came from the Protestant churches. Men and women within these religious institutions were confident that America was God's special achievement and that its history would soon evolve into the millennial reign of Christ. Leadership of the major reform groups was closely tied to the Protestant churches: "Clergymen inspired the . . . crusade for humanitarian reform at every stage."[8]A roll call of the leading reformers would consist mostly of ordained ministers--Beecher, Channing, Emerson, Finney, Parker, Weld, Tuckerman, and Brownson, to name but a few. One cannot understand the motives, goals, and nature of the social reform movement apart from a study of the essential role of Protestant Christianity. Sydney Ahlstrom has argued that “if the collective conscience of evangelical America is left out the movement [for social reform] as a whole is incomprehensible."[9]

Historians of antebellum social reform have traditionally identified two Protestant Christian religious influences: the Unitarianism and Transcendentalism associated with Channing and Emerson, and the revivalism of the New School Presbyterians led by Lyman

Beecher and Charles G. Finney.[10] The Wesleyan tradition which included Methodists and other "holiness" assemblies also had a revivalist emphasis and made a significant contribution to the movement for social reform. Their widespread influence as reformers, however, developed late in the antebellum era--not until the 1850s--and they generally followed the existing leadership and methodology of the voluntary societies and were especially in sympathy with Finney's perfectionist message. For this reason they may be considered an extension of the Finney style of revivalism in matters related to social reform.[11]

The Emersonian and Evangelical (Revivalist) traditions, which stood at opposite ends of the theological spectrum, shared a common emphasis on the moral regeneration of the individual and, subsequently, all of society. Both groups were advocates of a religious system that de-emphasized the role of the visible church in personal salvation and societal reform. The Emersonian tradition, for example, considered the church simply as a religious association for enlightened individuals and therefore eschewed its institutional aspects such as the sacraments and clergy. Beecher and Finney, on the other hand, encouraged adherents to join voluntary societies--seen as "auxiliaries" to the local church--as evidence of the sincerity and reality of their conversion experience.

The Emersonian tradition broadly included Unitarians, Universalists and Transcendentalists. Among the chief spokesmen of the Unitarians was William Ellery Channing, whose 1819 sermon on "Unitarian Christianity" was the classic statement of the group's doctrine. Reflecting elements of both Enlightenment and Romantic thought, Unitarians contended for a rational understanding of the Christian faith, evidenced by their appeal for "the constant exercise of reason" in one's interpretation of the scriptures. Channing affirmed the necessity of moral perfection: "We consider no part of theology so important as that which treats of God's moral

character." The purpose of faith, therefore, was chiefly the formation of moral character. The mission of Christ, according to Channing, was to lead human beings in the quest to recover Christian virtue--"true holiness"--as defined in Christ's command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The followers of Christ, according to Unitarians, also accepted this mission and saw the present world as "a place of education," where enlightened individuals--and subsequently all of society--were thus transformed.[12] James Freeman Clarke, another Unitarian and Transcendentalist leader, summarized the movement's faith as "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the progress of mankind onward and upward forever."[13]

Transcendentalism appeared in the 1830s as a response to the perceived cold, sterile rationalism of Unitarianism.[14] It offered a romantic approach to Christianity, emphasizing an intensely individualist faith, the role of intuition, and the rejection of all external authority. The foremost leader of Transcendentalism was Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose address to the Harvard Divinity School in 1838 announced the characteristic themes of the movement: the immanence and benevolence of God and the call to oneness with God through exhibiting love and justice.[15] Although Emerson rejected the Unitarian and Universalist emphasis on pure rationalism, his Transcendentalist message shared common themes with the two groups: a positive view of the nature of human beings--an emphasis on individuality, creativity, and unlimited potential--and an enthusiastic and optimistic faith in human progress, particularly the unique American destiny.

Although the Unitarians, Universalists and Transcendentalists held some differing views on theology and practice, lines between the three fellowships blurred considerably with their involvement in various voluntary societies and individual efforts for reform. For this reason the

three movements may be considered as one tradition--in this case named after Emerson because of his prominence--in relation to their role in antebellum social reform.

The Emersonian tradition inspired a host of prominent reformers in the antebellum era: general reformers such as Channing, Emerson, Thoreau, Theodore Parker and Bronson Alcott (chairman of the "Friends of Universal Reform"); those such as Joseph Tuckerman and Orestes Brownson who were concerned with the plight of the urban poor; women’s rights advocates such as Elizabeth Peabody and Margaret Fuller; antislavery crusaders such as Brownson and William Henry Channing; campaigners for prison and asylum reform such as Dorothea Dix and Samuel Gridley Howe; peace advocates such as Noah Worcester, William Ladd, and David Dodge; and educational reformers such as Horace Mann, Samuel R. Hall, Josiah Holbrook, and William H. McGuffey.[16] Their primary impulse was confidence in the perfectability of' individual human beings through the transformation of moral character. Their mission was, in Merle Curti's terms, "to harmonize their view of human nature with life around them"; they supported and led social reforms "according to their image of what man could be.”[17]

The reformers motivated by this imperative not only diminished the importance of the church in the reformation of society but often considered the church inimical to social reform. Emerson declared in 1844 that the true church had separated itself from the rival religious sects and was to be found in the various voluntary societies. Orestes Brownson was more direct in his criticism:

> The Christianity of the Church has done its work. We have had enough of that Christianity. . . . It now unmans us and hinders the growth of God's kingdom. The moral energy which is awakened it misdirects, and makes its deluded disciples believe that they have done their duty to God when they have joined the church.[18]

The Unitarian/Universalist/Transcendentalist tradition wanted to rid the Christian faith of its burdensome institutional structures which, in their view, hindered the development of the natural creative ability and progress of the individual person. Thus, it was not surprising that it rejected the church's importance to the crusade for humanitarian reform and placed its confidence in the voluntary societies.

The second major religious source of social reform was the evangelical revivalism associated with the Second Great Awakening. New School Presbyterianism, which relaxed the strict Calvinistic doctrines of human depravity and bondage of the will and adopted revivalistic methods, emerged from the New England phase of the Second Great Awakening and achieved its greatest influence in the Northeast and the Midwest. The two prominent leaders of this tradition were Lyman Beecher and Charles G. Finney. In the upper South, the Methodist/holiness groups successfully used the camp meeting revivals (the frontier phases of the Second Awakening) to foster rapid numerical growth. By mid-century the Wesleyan groups were also quite prominent in the eastern urban areas. The Northern, urban Wesleyan groups followed the leadership of Beecher and Finney and in the 1850s often constituted the rank and file membership of the voluntary societies. Like the variety of adherents within the Emersonian tradition, the evangelicals were a diverse group, but were united in a common approach toward social reform.

Lyman Beecher used revivalistic “New School” methods to stimulate enthusiasm among the Presbyterian and Congregational churches.[19] From his position at Cincinnati's Lane Seminary, Beecher played a central role in the crusade for social reform as the architect of the voluntary system. He was one of the first to connect the revivals with the voluntary societies: encouraging converts to join a moral society as a way to "follow up" the revivals by channeling

the newly generated enthusiasm into efforts at social reform. The other wing of evangelical revivalism was the movement associated with Charles Finney. Although Finney's background was Presbyterian, he eventually considered himself a "freelance" Congregationalist and developed a perfectionism that was very similar to the Wesleyan emphasis on personal holiness, which fostered a cooperative relationship with the holiness groups especially in the urban areas. In his discussion of the role of revivalism in social reform, Timothy Smith included both groups--Revivalistic Calvinists and Evangelical Arminians--as perfectionist groups who shared a common imperative for reform.[20]

Finney was the bearer of the revival method. A persuasive preacher, he was successful in spreading the "revival fires" throughout western and upstate New York and eventually into urban areas. Finney's message rested on two grand principles: "that all societal evil is the result of the selfishness of individuals," and "that the coming kingdom of God will be the result of the gradual increase of moral government in the world by the means of revival preaching.” Finney also emphasized the role of the voluntary society as proof of one's conversion experience.[21]

The leadership of the early voluntary societies came from the adherents of New School revivalism. These men and women formed associations such as the American Education Society, American Sunday School Union, American Tract Society, American Bible Society, and American Home Missionary Society to combat ignorance and to foster missionary efforts. The American Colonization Society, American Peace Society, American Temperance Society, and the American Antislavery Society were organized to further humanitarian causes and moral reform. Many of the more recognizable names in the antebellum social reform movement were associated with the revivalists: Phoebe Palmer, William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Weld, James

G. Birney, Elijah Lovejoy, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Henry Ward Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Although Beecher and Finney did not speak disparagingly of the church, they did de-emphasize its role in social reform. The "evangelical united front" minimized denominational affiliation and focused instead upon individual contributions. In practice, however, the societies were seen as necessary appendages to the church. The revivalists' imperative for social reform was personal: one who had been converted from a life of selfishness had an obligation to demonstrate the reality of that conversion through disinterested benevolence.

Both the Emersonian and the Evangelical traditions, therefore, based their impetus for social reform on individualism. For the Unitarian, participating in social reform was an important ingredient in the development of his or her moral character; for the revivalist, practical piety was seen as evidence that one had been "saved." Both shared the post-millennial view of the coming kingdom of God on earth, were convinced that the United States was a "chosen nation," and considered their efforts at evangelism and social reform as essential contributions in ushering in the golden age. Although neither group would completely discard the institutional church, it was evident that the church was secondary to their purposes.[22]

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND SOCIAL REFORM

Alexander Campbell represented yet another approach to social reform. Although Campbell shared certain aspects of theology and practice with both the Emersonian and Evangelical groups, he disagreed vehemently with their attitude toward the role of the institutional church in the reform of society. For Campbell, the church was God's primary agent on earth to usher in the kingdom of God. Society would be "ameliorated" only through the

church. Campbell thus stood as an influential third alternative, a "high church" reformer whose imperative for social reform proceeded from and concluded in the church.

Campbell's respect for the Enlightenment, especially the philosophy of John Locke and the Scottish Common Sense movement, led him to develop a very positive view toward the nature of human beings and a strong confidence in human reason very similar to the Unitarian position. Although Campbell would have disagreed with Channing's conclusions concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ, he would have appreciated Channing's use of reason in understanding scripture. Campbell placed great emphasis on "loving God and loving one's neighbor" as the chief principle of the reign of Christ, and reflected some attitudes of the Emersonian tradition: an emphasis on free thought, free will, and openness to innovation and reform.

On the other hand, Campbell remained basically Calvinistic in his theological views and in this would have held more in common with Beecher and Finney. Like the revivalists, Campbell considered personal sin to be the root of the problems in human society. In order to reform society, the sin problem must be resolved:

> Thus the Christian scheme of moralizing and felicitating the world is predicated upon the actual condition of the human family, and regards every symptom and exhibition of the complex case of human vileness. But it begins at the root of the disorder. . . . The Christian scheme of ameliorating society in this world . . . is predicated upon these leading principles.[23]

Human ignorance, guilt, and bondage to sin were the cause of the present conditions, Campbell argued, and "God's sublime and glorious scheme of ameliorating and reforming the world" dealt with this problem.[24] According to historian David Edwin Harrell, Campbell echoed Beecher and

Finney's message: he "believed that the way to reform a society was to reform the individuals who made up that society." Campbell did not agree with the methodology of these "enthusiasts," but took advantage of the evangelical fervor stimulated by the western revivals to further his own movement, especially in Kentucky and Tennessee.[25]

Where Campbell differed from both groups was in his insistence that the church was the exclusive instrument of God for the reformation of society. The emphasis upon the individual, whether from the Emersonian or the revivalist perspective, undermined the plan of God and the power of the gospel. Revivalistic preaching and the focus upon private religious experience appeared "to reduce religion to immediate spiritual experience and to render superfluous the objective life of the visible church."[26] The unique power of the Christian faith was to be found not in individual experiences but "in the common life of a visible united church, founded upon the word or testimony of the Apostles."[27] The ultimate amelioration of society was dependent upon a restored church preaching a pure gospel and uniting believers in a true fellowship based solely on the authority of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament. Thus Campbell's imperative for social reform was closely tied to his convictions concerning the reform of the church.

Campbell's primary motivation for participating in reform efforts originated in his theological views of the role of the church in the world. A proper understanding of the nature of the church and a return of the church to its pristine condition would subsequently lead to the amelioration of society. In a reference to the early Christians of the New Testament church, Campbell declared: “They viewed the church of Jesus Christ as the scheme of Heaven to ameliorate the world; as members of it, they considered themselves bound to do all they could for the glory of God and the good of men.”[28]

Campbell clearly articulated his program for ecclesiastical and social reform in frequent articles on the millennium in the *Christian Baptist* and the *Millennial Harbinger*. His millennial views were well-developed by the time he began publishing the *Christian Baptist* in 1823. He referred to the millennium in an 1825 article:

> I know it is said that all these things will be brought right when the millennium shall come. I reply that it will be by the correction of these errors that the millennial day will be ushered in. . . . All that is needed for the restoration of the church to the apostolic order, is, that Christians be Christians, and act as the disciples of Jesus Christ.[29]

This statement revealed Campbell's post-millennialism: an interpretation of Revelation 20:1-7 which seemed to claim that Christ's ultimate return to earth would be preceded by a golden age of peace and prosperity, ushered in by the preaching of and conversion to the Gospel. Campbell believed that the millennium was to commence in his own century, perhaps having already begun.[30] He divided history into three stages, or "dispensations": Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian. The millennium would be the consummation of the Christian dispensation and the pathway to the ultimate amelioration of society:

> The Millennium . . . will be a state of greatly enlarged and continuous prosperity, in which the Lord will be exalted and his divine spirit enjoyed in an unprecedented measure. All the conditions of society will be vastly improved; wars shall cease, and peace and goodwill will be vastly improved. . . . Genuine Christianity will be diffused through all nations; crimes and punishments will cease; governments will recognize human rights, and will rest on just and benevolent principles.[31]

Campbell was certainly not unusual or unique in adopting the post-millennial view. Since Jonathan Edwards constructed his vision of America as the chosen nation to introduce the

millennial reign of Christ, a majority of Christian thinkers in the United States adopted post-millennialism, including virtually all of the humanitarian reformers. Campbell went beyond most other millennialists, however, by affirming a positive role in this transformation on the part of the visible church. Whereas most preachers in the era placed emphasis upon the conversion of individuals, Campbell stressed the inclusion of converted individuals within the fellowship of the church as the means to reform the world. Campbell interpreted Revelation 20:4--"they came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years"--as referring to a spiritual resurrection, meaning the visible church reigning with Christ on earth.[32] Campbell was clear in making the point that the millennium would not come through moral instruction, revivalistic preaching, or voluntary societies; rather the millennium would come through the church.

It was Campbell's mission, therefore, to call the church to reform itself in preparation for its role in the millennium. Campbell believed that division and jealousy within the church--sectarianism--was the chief obstacle to evangelizing the world and ushering in Christ's millennial reign on earth. He argued that sectarianism could be destroyed by removing its creeds and replacing them with the scriptures alone. The first step toward the introduction of the millennial age, according to Campbell, was "to dissipate the darkness" by restoring the "'ancient gospel."[33] The "restoration of the ancient gospel" was the first and most important step in establishing a purified millennial church. A restored church would fulfill its mission by attacking atheism, infidelity, ignorance, and vice in the world.

Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger* was devoted to "the development and introduction of that political and religious order of society called the millennium. . . ."[34] In the 1830 Prospectus for the *Harbinger* Campbell promised to address nine specific topics, three of which were

devoted to social problems: "the inadequacy of all the present systems of education," "the injustice which yet remains," and "the treatment of African slaves."[35]

Campbell's conviction that the church was the characteristic institution for social reform may also be seen in his attitude toward the voluntary societies. His aversion to any kind of society may be traced to the influence of his father. Thomas Campbell had some unpleasant experiences with "secret political organizations" in Ireland which led him to isolate himself "from all political agitations." Robert Richardson stated that: "In regard to secret associations, Alexander fully adopted his father's views, and continued through life to oppose everything of this nature, as inconsistent with the Christian profession."[36] Soon after his arrival in Washington County, Pennsylvania, Alexander Campbell took note of certain "moral societies" in the community which were attempting to "suppress vice and immorality" such as sabbath-breaking, intemperance, and gambling. Campbell responded by writing an article for the local newspaper (under the name of "Candidus") condemning these societies for thinking that *"fining* men for their vices would make them moral." Suggesting that the fines would be given to the local clergymen, Campbell encouraged the immoral segment of society to continue in their misdeeds, "for the more you sin the more preachers we shall have."[37]

Campbell outlined his general approach to moral societies in response to an inquiry from England in 1837 concerning his views on this matter:

> . . . our brethren generally regard the church as the only moral or religious association which they can lawfully patronize. Hence they form not Missionary, Education, Tract, Bible, Temperance, Anti-Masonic, or Anti-slavery confederations. If these are good works, they belong to the church in her own proper character; and every member of the church is, as a Christian obliged to promote these objects as far as he has the means and

> the opportunity. The Christian institution . . . demands of all its subjects . . . to promote every benevolent, humane, and charitable object which can ameliorate the conditions of human existence.[38]

Campbell insisted that moral societies should never be compared with or placed in competition with the church. This practice not only substituted human inventions for God's design for social reform, but also reduced the effects of the church's efforts and moral example: “We are sorry to have to remark that there appears to be a great falling off from the morality of the Christian religion. . . . This is in a measure to be traced to the new bonds of union (voluntary societies) which have been adopted in different religious communities.”[39] Campbell claimed to have great respect for the motives of any society "whose object is man's rescue from ignorance, vice, and misery" but pointed out that if these societies attempted to become a substitute for the church they will end in ruin. He declared that it was improper for Christian men to join "any nominally moral society but the Christian church."[40]

He readily acknowledged that this was an unpopular position: "I must suffer for . . . opposing these associations as infringing upon, or being in competition with the Christian institution."[41] Campbell received and published many letters from individuals taking offense at his position toward societies and suggesting that the voluntary associations never claimed to be substitutes for the church, but merely auxiliaries. Campbell retorted that if the church required auxiliaries for works of benevolence, then it was a "defective" institution:

> Their philosophy is, that Christianity and Christian brotherhood have been, and still are, inadequate to the wants of human nature as the world is now constituted. Hence the necessity of these institutions and as many more as the spirit of voluntary associations

> may suggest and inspire as necessary to perfect and complete the workings of benevolence.[42]

Campbell would further contend that if one claimed that the church was defective and neglectful of its duties, why not give one's time to reforming the church rather than participating in distracting moral societies? Finally, if the societies were auxiliaries, then the church needed to organize one for every "sin, infirmity, and affliction of human society." The church is of divine origin, Campbell argued, and any addition (auxiliary) was "as redundant as a sixth finger on the hand, or two great toes on the foot." If Christians simply did their duty such associations would be wholly unnecessary and inexpedient.[43]

Campbell would agree to support voluntary societies, however, if they did not present themselves as substitutes for or auxiliaries to the church and if they met certain other criteria. He asserted that he had no difficulty assisting a moral society whose acts of benevolence do not oblige me to desecrate religion or unite the church and the world in some accredited act of devotion."[44] Campbell outlined four standards for establishing whether or not a Christian could support a particular society: Does it adopt some form of religion? Does it administer oaths? Does it accept members indiscriminately ("Jews, Turks, Atheists, and Infidels")? Does it conduct worship—pray, sing, etc.--with such groups? If so, then membership and support were forbidden. He summarized his position:

> In any matter that is purely political or educational, I will, and I do, co-operate with my fellow citizens so far as I approve their measures and their proceedings; provided only, they do not convert it into a sort of religious institution and propose a religious or Christian intercommunication as the base of our co-operation.[45]

Campbell served as president of a missionary and of a Bible society, but often cautioned his readers to ensure that these societies were not usurping the authority and mission of the local churches. He claimed that his position remained consistent. For example, he wrote in the *Christian Baptist* in 1825 concerning Bible societies:

> . . . they are the most specious and plausible of all the institutions of this age. No man who loves the Bible can restrain from rejoicing at its increasing circulation. But every Christian who understands the nature and design . . . of the institution called the Church of Jesus Christ, will lament to see its glory transferred to a human corporation. The church is robbed of its character by every institution . . . that would ape its excellence and substitute itself in its place.[46]

Campbell took essentially the same position in an article on societies in the 1848 *Millennial Harbinger,* even quoting an address published in the first volume of the *Christian Baptist*. He subsequently reflected on his earlier position:

> In the days of the *Christian Baptist* Missionary, Bible, and other societies called Christian, were composed of the world and the church, or of men not even professing Christianity, and of those who did profess it. As such I repudiated them then, and as such I still repudiate them. I never objected to the church, as such, resolving herself into either a Bible, Missionary, or any other sort of meeting connected with the duties and obligations of the church to bless the brotherhood, or to evangelize, illuminate, and sanctify the world by converting it to God. . . . What I object to is, their sending Christ a-begging to Satan for money to demolish the Devil's own kingdom.[47]

In an article on abolitionism, Campbell used the analogy of pruning a fruit tree to describe the efforts of voluntary societies in dealing with the problems of society. He said that

such organizations took great delight in "lopping off the branches" by crusading against any one "of the hundred evils that afflict society."[48] Campbell himself contended that he would rather put the "axe to the root" of the tree:

> Some join the Abolition Church. . . . Some join the Temperance Church, some the Tract, and some the Missionary Church. But for my feeble powers and efforts the Church of Christ is enough, and the gospel philanthropy co-extensive with my aspirations. . . . for my part I choose to plead that cause which in its genuine catholicity aims a mortal blow at the root of every political, every moral, every antichristian error and defect in society. . . . I say, so far as I destroy the root, so far the leaves must wither and the fruit fail.[49]

CONCLUSION

Although Campbell shared certain theological views and attitudes toward social reform with both the Emersonian and the Evangelical groups, he stood apart from them in his affirmation of the essential role of the church in the reformation of individuals and, thereby, the social order itself. The origins of this emphasis were found primarily in Campbell's millennial vision and were clearly illustrated in his attitude toward the plethora of moral societies. Whereas the Emersonian and Evangelical programs focused upon the transformation of individuals regardless of their incorporation into the institutional church. Campbell argued that God's plan for the redemption of human society was announced and completed through the visible church. His imperative for reform, therefore, was closely tied to the church.

Campbell's advocacy of social reform was always made within the context of "that ultimate amelioration of society." He entered the crusade for educational reform because it was a necessary means to convert the individual from sin to the Gospel and to prepare America for the

millennial reign of Christ. In this sense, Campbell's goal was not to alleviate unsatisfactory social conditions but rather to remedy the individual's sin problem and assimilate him or her into the visible kingdom of God on earth, the church. Morris Eames summarized Campbell's "high" view of the church thus:

> While Campbell did emphasize the role of the individual in all phases of the life of man and nature, . . . he thought that no individual stands alone in the universe. This notion applies to atoms in a natural order, to single bones in our bodies, to man in society, and to the individual church in the Christian system. It is part of Campbell's philosophy and religion that the feelings, functions, and integrity of the individual in any part of God's creation must be respected, appreciated, and loved; it is equally true, however, that an individual unit standing alone and isolated has no meaning, function, or purpose.[50]

Campbell concluded his address to the Clarksburg Education Convention in 1841 by appealing to his audience "to take a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together," in the cause of establishing common schools in western Virginia. His final remark connected this effort to his ultimate vision for American society: "we shall gain for ourselves, our country, and posterity, richer blessings, . . . the approval of conscience, the smiles of Heaven, and the thanks of a grateful, virtuous and happy posterity."[51]

[1] Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell,* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1871), 1:206.
[2] Ibid., 210.
[3] Ibid., 211.
[4] Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses* (Philadelphia: James Challen and Son, 1863), 45-46.
[5] William Gribbin, "Republicanism, Reform, and the Sense of Sin in Antebellum America," *Cithara* 14 (December 1974), 25.
[6] Clifford S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform. 1830-1860* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1967), 4.
[7] "Reform was a national preoccupation." Lorman Ratner, *Pre-Civil War Reform: Variety of Principles and Programs* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 1.
[8] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Now York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 36.
[9] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People,* 2 Vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972; Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1975), 2:83.
[10] Griffin, *Ferment*, 28; Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 2:79; Hudson, *Religion in America,* 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 198-199; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals. Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 99-100; Russel B. Nye, *Society and Culture in America. 1830-1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 34.
[11] For the connection between Finney and the Wesleyan tradition see Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform,* especially chapters on "The Holiness Revival at Oberlin" and "Revivalism and Perfectionism."
[12] H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, eds., *American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents,* 2 vole. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 1:493-495, 498.
[13]Hudson, *Religion in America*, 162.
[14]All but one of the eight original members of the Transcendental Club were Unitarians. See Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 2:36.
[15] Ahlstrom, *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices From Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 299.
[16]Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 2:79-89.
[17]Merle Curti, *Human Nature in American Thought: History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 135.
[18] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* 12 vols. (Concord Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1876), 3:251; Smith, Handy, and Loetscher, *Documents,* 2:158.
[19] For a discussion of the Old School/New School controversy in Calvinism during this period see Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 1:551-570.
[20] Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform,* 22, 169, 171.
[21] David L. Weddle, *The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finnev* (Metuchen, N.J The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985), 255, 262. "In Finney's mind, all that remained was for dedicated volunteers to pool their energies in the many charitable associations and reform societies which had sprung, like lush foliage, from the strong taproot of the revival.

The result of this concentrated effort would be the dawning of the kingdom of God, the universal rule of moral law."

[22] For a discussion of millennialism and its role in American history see Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) and Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought. 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1965), 674. "Both transcendentalism and perfectionist moral reform, then, were marked by an individualist fervor that was disruptive of American institutions. Both made heavy moral demands on church and state."

[23] Alexander Campbell, ed., *Christian Baptist,* 7 vols. (Buffalo Creek and Bethany, Va.: A. Campbell, 1823-1830), 1825: 173-174.

[24] Ibid., 246.

[25] David E. Harrell, Jr., *Quest for a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 57.

[26] Kenneth Lawrence, ed., *Classic Themes of Disciples Theology* (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1986), 33.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Campbell, *Christian Baptist,* 1823: 6.

[29] Campbell, *Christian Baptist,* 1825: 174.

[30] *The Evidences of Christianity: A Debate between Robert Owen . . . and Alexander Campbell . . . Containing an Examination of the Social System . . .* (Bethany, Va.: A. Campbell, 1829; reprints include Cincinnati: Jethro Jackson, 1852), 108.

[31] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1842: 9.

[32] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, 1834: 481-486.

[33] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1856: 132-135; Anyone who reduced the role of the church in the millennial order was called a "Bastard Millenarian"--applied by Campbell to persons such as Robert Owen ("my old dear friend"), William Miller, and the Mormons.

[34] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1830: 1.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Robert Richardson*, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell,* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. Lippincott, 1868, 1870), 1:41-43, 45.

[37] Ibid., 1:523

[38] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1837: 271.

[39] Campbell, *Christian Baptist,* 1825: 227

[40] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1845: 313, 316.

[41] Ibid., 313.

[42] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1848: 350.

[43] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1848: 351, 685-686. Campbell suggested the need for the "Sons of Chastity."

[44] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1848: 565.

[45] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1848: 407-408, 565.

[46] Campbell, *Christian Baptist,* 1825: 33.

[47] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1848: 563.

[48] Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1836: 282.

[49] Ibid., 283.

[50] S. Morris Eames, *The Philosophy of Alexander Campbell* (Bethany, Va.: Bethany College, 1966), 87-88.
[51] Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, 271.