

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL ON MORAL AND QUALITY EDUCATION — SOME NEW LIGHT

Earl Eugene Eminhizer

Dr. Campbell is among the most eminent citizens of the United States, distinguished for his great learning and ability, for his successful devotion to the education of youth, for his piety and as the head of one of the most important and respectable religious communities in the United States.

Henry Clay

This tribute to Alexander Campbell by Henry Clay, in a letter of introduction given Campbell in 1843 for his tour of the British Isles, describes Campbell's life very well. His activities on behalf of church union are well-known and his religious beliefs and practices have been the subjects of many publications. The denomination, the Disciples of Christ, which emerge from his preaching, was a product of the American West. Although further study of Campbell's influence on the religion of the West, and the United States as a whole, need further investigation, his influence in other areas, such as publishing and farming, also needs study. The recovery of Campbell's manuscripts will probably aid in further understanding him and his influence.

Clay listed in his statement Campbell's devotion to the education of youth before religious concerns. This may well reflect Clay's own view of the value of Campbell's contribution. It is difficult to discern whether either concern was considered more important by him. Both seem to at least parallel each other, if they are not internally interwoven. What follows is a review of Campbell's view on education as discerned in several unpublished studies of his educational philosophy, and a look at his early concerns for education as found in his recently recovered, but unpublished, manuscripts.

The influence of Alexander Campbell on education generally, and higher education in particular, has been studied extensively in several theses and dissertations.² Unfortunately, it has not been recognized by historians of education.³

EARL EUGENE EMINHIZER TH.D is Professor of Religious Studies, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio.

¹Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1956, Vol. II, p. 548n. Also Henry King Shaw, "Alexander Campbell — Educator: An Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Alexander Campbell to Discover His Contribution in the Field of Education," unpublished M.A. in Ed. thesis, University of Akron, 1942, p. 21, with no reference to source.

²Rolla James Bennett, "History of the Founding of Educational Institutions by the Disciples of Christ in Virginia and West Virginia," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1932. Arthur B. Edwards, "Alexander Campbell's Philosophy of Education," unpublished M.A. thesis, East Tennessee State College, Johnson City. Perry Epler Gresham, "Proud Heritage," *West Virginia History*, vol. 15, 1954, pp. 99-117. John Daniel McInnis, III, "Alexander Campbell and the Two Kingdoms: the Church and the State," unpublished B.D. thesis, Lexington Theological Seminary, 1962. Mary Maxine Palmer, "A Study of Alexander Campbell's Philosophy of Education as a Life-Long Process," unpublished M.A. thesis, Texas Christian University. Shaw, *op. cit.*

His location in the northern panhandle of what is now West Virginia led him to exert a pragmatic influence on education in that state through Bethany College and in theory through his address to the Educational Convention held at Clarksburg in September, 1841.

In surveying several of the unpublished works, there seems to be a common agreement as to Campbell's thinking on educational philosophy and motivation. One is that he saw education as a "life-long process," not one which ended upon completion of formal study. Also stressed in these studies is Campbell's concern for moral education.

These emphases are supported by statements Campbell made at various times. He started Buffalo Seminary in 1818 so that he could offer "to the youth a better education than they could otherwise obtain . . .",⁴ both academically and morally.

When he addressed the College of Teachers in Cincinnati in 1836, Campbell stressed the need for moral and intellectual culture (as he then referred to it) being joined. He argued at the time:

- 1) That man's inherited moral powers are not perfected without education . . .
- 2) That it is the *exercise* only of this moral power that determines its worth . . .
- 3) That people admire intellectual worth more than moral worth is evidence of bad education . . .
- 4) That people who are cultured intellectually are not necessarily cultured morally . . .
- 5) That the popular view of religion and morality as *private* values having no place in popular education [is] wrong . . .⁵

In later years, an interpreter concluded that Campbell believed "character-building and education should function as one unit in the school and should be separated"⁶ as a subject. Campbell had stressed this failure of the schools to have moral education in the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1836.⁷ Another analyst believed that "moral culture was an essential part of national and popular education almost wholly neglected in the schools of Campbell's day; and this neglect was alarming to Campbell."⁸ As Campbell himself put it, "Alas! . . . the great majority of the

³Edwards, *op cit*, points out that although Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati is mentioned in one major study, the same study ignores Campbell who debated Purcell, as well as addressed the College of Teachers in Cincinnati in 1836

⁴Richardson, *op cit*, Vol I, p 491

⁵Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, St Louis Christian Publishing Co, 1861, pp 475ff Cited in Shaw, *op cit*, pp 26-27

⁶*Ibid*, p 27

⁷Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, vol 7, 1836, see discussion between pp 582-590

⁸Palmer, *op cit*, p 23

best educated portion of our youth are decidedly immoral, at least in the Christian acceptance of that word."⁹

In 1840, Campbell stressed these factors as reasons for the need for Bethany College. As he saw it, "The Cardinal thought in this scheme is our beau real of education, viz. --- that the formation of moral character, the culture of the heart, is the supreme end of education."¹⁰

Moral and intellectual education were the principal theses in Campbell's address to the Education Convention at Clarksburg in the late summer of 1841. In the address he argued that crime and vice were the product of ignorance caused by no or poor education, and that if the state were to protect its citizens from crime and vice, then it should eradicate the cause by providing moral and intellectual training.¹¹ He further argued that reduction of prison cost, because of the reduction in crime resulting from quality moral and intellectual education, would offset the cost of the latter.¹²

Although Campbell's views on the importance of quality moral and intellectual education are well-documented from 1836, primarily in his *Millennial Harbinger*, and in *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, we now have evidence that his thinking along these lines seems to originate as early as 1814.

Campbell married Margaret Brown in 1811 and settled with her family on the Brown farm near Buffalo, Virginia (now Bethany, West Virginia). Campbell continued his preaching in various places and served as pastor of the Brush Run Church which was located between Buffalo and Washington, Pennsylvania. He was 26 years old at the time. This church had about 24 in attendance at the Sunday service. The total membership seems to have been about 40, 15 of whom lived in Ohio. It was spread over an area 10 miles wide and 20 miles long.¹³ These distances meant that the church did not have its members in regular attendance. Campbell felt the church should correct this if possible, so on April 13, 1914, he addressed the congregation with a description of the conditions under which it existed, and suggested, as a group, it move to some more advantageous place farther West.

He argued his case forcibly that there was obviously the need for members to be closer together so that their religious activities could be regular and their spiritual development could be better carried out. In addition, they would be better able to witness Christianity to their neighbors. Campbell emphasized to his flock that, at best, they could spend only about three hours a week in "social Christian exercise."¹⁴

⁹Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 590, cited in Palmer, *ibid.*

¹⁰Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, 1840, pp. 157-158; cited in Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹¹Alexander Campbell, "An Address," *Records of Virginia*, Document no. 7, 1842, p. 33.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Alexander Campbell, "A Memorial Presented to the Church Meeting at Brush Run," Campbell Manuscript, Lecture Notes, Sermon Outlines and Index of Notes 'A' - 'L', microfilm frames 71-72.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, frame 73.

He also stressed the significance of religious education in his concern for the children who, in their present state, he said, “most resemble the asses’ colts.”¹⁵ Although they were said to be in school, he noted “the time they spend at school resembles much the time we spend in church, it is more in *name*, than in *reality*.”¹⁶ Three hours a week did not seem to him to be enough for a viable education.

In behalf of the move, he suggested that the quality of education might be improved. He asked his congregation the question, “and what do our children learn at school?” He answered, “Idleness, vice and almost the wrong way of everything. They neither acquire sound learning, good morals or useful [e]conomy. Their time, [their mental] powers and their property is spent on trifles — for no valuable consideration.”¹⁷ He then noted, “their minds resemble a wild uncultivated plain where weeds [have] been [allowed to] grow.”¹⁸

In 1814, Campbell’s concern about education, particularly moral and quality education, was deep enough to cause him to suggest that the church undertake a move which would uproot the families, many long established in the area, and one that would require a great deal of expense and much effort to accomplish. He evidently thought the sacrifice would be well worth it, since the quality and quantity of education available in western Virginia was so poor and the prospect for change remote.

Campbell’s own thinking on education as presented in his later writing, and supported by latter studies of it, indicate that his ideas of 1814 remain as basic elements in his philosophy of education throughout his life. His concern for the lack of moral education and sensitivity was indicated even earlier in a series of essays he published under the pseudonym of “Clarina” in the Washington, Pennsylvania, *Reporter*, in 1810.¹⁹ These essays were a protest against the ill treatment given the young women by the young men in the area. To a later generation of scholars, Campbell showed a “sensitiveness to the moral problems”²⁰ of the day.

Conditions in the schools which Campbell had described to the Brush Run Church in 1814 had not changed by the 1840s. By the time Bethany College had been established, colleges were faced with students who “were being educated, not in any continuous wholesome manner, but in spurts and spasms of education. The mental and moral development was hindered, and the system was not at all satisfactory.”²¹

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.* (Campbell’s emphasis).

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Alexander Campbell Manuscripts, “B Manuscript ‘C’ Newspaper cuttings of ‘Clarina,’ Lecture notes at Glasgow University, Sermon Outlines, Index of Sermons, of Text Used for Sermons from 6-18.”

²⁰McInnis, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²¹Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Although Buffalo Seminary lasted only from 1818 until 1823, it is significant that it was started primarily because of the need for a school in the area. With Campbell's description of the condition of education available in the address to the church in 1814, and with the failure of the move West to materialize, it is not surprising that he opened the school. Probably the most interesting question concerning it is, why did he take four years?

Thus Campbell's concerns with education, particularly when it emphasized moral training as well as intellectual, developed early in his life. The "Clarina" essays, written when he was 22, are a beginning sign of such interest which remains with him until his death. Campbell's address to the College of Teachers in 1836, and to the Clarksburg Education Convention in 1841, and his founding and leading Bethany College are landmark documents and contributions along the way.

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