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The Great Communion Service of October 4, 2009¹

University Church of Christ, Malibu, California

Welcome and Introductory Remarks: W. David Baird, Elder, University Church of Christ

The Declaration and Address, Thomas Campbell (1809): Rendered in modern English by Doug Foster, Abilene Christian University.

Introduction: Ron Highfield, Elder, University Church of Christ

The following propositions are by no means intended to be a creed or something to be imposed on believers—nothing could be further from the truth. They are designed, rather, to focus our hearts and minds on the great question of what it means to be followers of Christ. Too often we seem to have forgotten what is central to our identity as Christians and as Christ's church. It is our hope that these ideas will stimulate serious consideration of who we are and who we ought to be.

1. Christ established one church—just one. This church is made up of everyone who has faith in Christ and is trying to follow him in the ways God's Spirit in scripture has told us, and who others can see are being transformed into his likeness by the way they act. No one else has a right to be called a Christian. (Daniel A. Rodriguez, University Church of Christ)
2. It is physically impossible for all Christians to be together in one place to worship and work, so there have to be local groups of Christians that reflect the culture, language, and context of each place. These groups will not all look, think or act alike, yet they are all part of Christ's church and ought to recognize it. They must accept and embrace each other just as Christ accepted each of us. This will happen when Christians have the mind of Christ—that is, when they are willing to give themselves for those Christ died to redeem. This is the rule of Christ. This and this alone will join them perfectly. (Larry C. Keene, Mission Hills Christian Church)
3. Therefore, nothing should be required to recognize, fellowship, embrace, work, worship, and be in full visible unity with all Christians that is not specifically made a requirement by God through his word. Nothing should be required by Christ and his apostles for the church. Furthermore, the chief requirements for full fellowship that God has decreed are our love for God and for people. This love is formed by our understanding of God's love for us shown through Christ. (David L. Matson, First Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], Torrance, California)

1. The text includes several corrections and minor changes in accordance to *Leaven's* standards and style.—*Copy Ed.*

4. Both the Old and New Testaments are essential parts of the revelation of God's nature and work. They cannot be separated. While it is true that the practices required in the Old Testament (sacrifices, temple worship, priesthood, etc.) are not in force for Christians and that the good news of God's saving work is found fully in the New Testament, both testaments teach us about God's nature and work. The Bible is not primarily a constitution that functions as a legal document to consult in legal disputes. It is, instead, the sword of the Spirit; it is a place where we encounter God's Spirit and are transformed increasingly into the likeness of Christ. Being in scripture is essential to the visible unity of Christ's church. (Tabatha Jones, Woodland Hills Church of Christ)
5. The Bible does not spell out in detail everything Christians are supposed to think, do or be—that is just not the nature of scripture. When there are specific actions Christians are told to take, there is almost never a set of detailed requirements for how to do it. Humans often want more detail and try to expand on the specifics, often making them requirements for accepting other Christians or groups of Christians. That is wrong. Again, Christians are those who say they are Christians and who show that they are by the way they live. No one should be allowed to require anything for recognition and fellowship that is outside of scripture and its work of transformation. (Darryl Tippens, University Church of Christ)
6. God gave us our ability to think and reason—that is a good thing. If, however, in the process of using our reason we come to conclusions that other Christians do not reach, and that causes us to reject them, we have been deceived by the evil one. Our pride has taken over and stopped our continued growth into the mind of Christ—a mind of complete humility and self-sacrifice. Human reason is not the ultimate standard for truth. Christians ought to be growing constantly in their understandings of the profound truths of the gospel—that's part of our spiritual growth as communities. But requiring or even expecting others to be where you are is not conducive of the visible unity Christ so much wants. (Darlene Rivas, Conejo Valley Church of Christ)
7. Again, it is a good thing to use the intellectual abilities God has given us to plumb the depths and marvelous truths of God. It is a good thing to think and struggle and write about these matters. Individual Christians and Christian communities can and should draw great benefit in their spiritual growth from such efforts. Statements of belief can be very helpful in drawing our minds to the unspeakable riches and blessings we have been given and of which we can and should tell others. However, we must realize that such statements are the product of our human reasoning which, like everything else human, is not perfect. Even when we reach a mature level of doctrinal understanding, we need to remind ourselves constantly that there will always be Christians at all maturity levels—but they are still Christians! (Rick Marrs, Conejo Valley Church of Christ)
8. Once again, having an understanding of every Christian truth is not a requirement to be a Christian, a part of Christ's church. None who are trying to follow Christ ought to be forced to confess any belief beyond what they understand and know. All people need to know to be part of Christ's church is that they are lost and that salvation is through Christ. When they confess that they believe in Christ and that they want to obey him fully according to his word—nothing else can be required. (Susan Gonzales Dewey, Disciples of Christ, Pacific Southwest Region)
9. All who can make the confession of belief in Christ and commitment to obey him, and who show the reality of their commitment by the way they live, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as sisters and brothers, children of the same family and father, temples of the same spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same divine love, bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance. Whoever God has joined together this way, no one should dare divide. (Otis W. Baskin, Culver Palms Church of Christ)

10. Division among Christians is a sickening evil, filled with many evils. It is anti-Christian because it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ. It is as if Christ were cutting off parts of himself and throwing them away from the rest of his body! What a ludicrous picture! Division is anti-scriptural, since Christ himself specifically prohibited it, making it a direct violation of Christ's will. It is anti-natural, because it makes Christians condemn, hate and oppose one another—people who are actually obligated in the strongest way to love each other as sisters and brothers, just like Christ loved them. In other words, division repudiates everything Christianity is supposed to stand for. (Greg Daum, Woodland Hills Christian Church [Disciples of Christ])
11. Two things are responsible for all the divisions and corruptions in Christ's church through the centuries. One is a neglect or even fundamental misunderstanding of God's will for us in scripture—that we have the mind of Christ and be transformed into his likeness. The other comes from the first. Assuming they are “right,” that they have gotten the “facts” perfectly, some have assumed the authority to impose their conclusions on others as terms of recognition and fellowship. (Ken Durham, University Church of Christ)
12. In reality, everything needed for the church to reach the highest state of perfection and purity on earth is first to receive as members only those who have understood their lostness and confessed their faith in Christ and commitment to follow him according to scripture; second, to keep as members only those who show those commitments in their everyday lives; and third, to see that ministers who reflect these ideas preach only what is clearly taught in scripture. Finally, they must stick close to what scripture makes primary, seen in the example of the early church in the New Testament, without being distracted or corrupted by human tendencies toward pride and control. (Andrew Benton, University Church of Christ)
13. Finally, in every body of Christians decisions must be made about precisely how to conduct its work and worship. Scripture does not dictate such details. Whatever is the best way of doing things for the local context should be adopted. These procedures, however, should always be understood as expedients or conveniences for that time and place. Others who do things differently should never be denigrated or condemned for such things, and when decisions are made to do things differently in the future, such changes should never be an issue of fighting or division. (Carolyn Hunter, University Church of Christ)

Conclusion: Ron Highfield

Thomas Campbell ended these statements with the following:

The nature of these propositions is a call—a call to all followers of Christ today to be what Christ wants us to be. Christ's church does not reflect the reality of the one body. We have not maintained the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It is easy to be complacent about our divisions because they seem to work. Yet the fractured nature of the body is a scandal—it hinders the world from believing, it dissipates the efforts of Christians to serve, and distracts believers from their own spiritual development. We are impelled to say these things. We have heard again the admonition from Isaiah 57.14—“Remove every obstruction from my people's way.” It is the sincere intention of these propositions and of the essays that follow to bring to the attention of Christians fundamental truths and first principles that will lead us toward a permanent unity. How far that goal is reached now remains with the readers.

Response: The congregation sings “The Church's One Foundation,” led by Milton Pullen, Simi Valley Church of Christ.

Call to Worship: Psalm 94.1–7, read by Linda Truschke, University Church of Christ.

Songs of Praise: “Come Let Us Worship and Bow Down”; “We Are Standing on Holy Ground”; and “Praise the Lord Ye Heavens Adore Him,” led by Chris Stivers, Conejo Valley Church of Christ.

Reading of the Word: Hear the word of our Lord, according to the Gospel of John (Chapter 17), read by D’Esta Love, University Church of Christ.

Hear the word of the Apostle Paul (Phil 2.2–11), read by Jerry Rushford, Conejo Valley Church of Christ.

Hymn: “Oh Sacred Head Now Wounded,” led by Milton Pullen.

Meditation: Written by Robert Richardson, Alexander Campbell’s biographer (1847), read by Stuart Love, Elder, University Church of Christ.

When the Patriarch arose from his dreamy slumbers in the field of Luz, he exclaimed, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!” How many thus entered into the sanctuary of God, without any realizing sense of the divine presence! Yet the Lord is in his holy temple, and will there reveal himself to his people. How fitting that we should enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise! How proper that we should here repress each worldly thought, and yield our hearts up to that sacred communing in which the Father lifts a ladder to the skies, that angels may descend to earth, and God himself confirm his promises of grace! Surely, with the lonely wanderer of Bethel, we may exclaim: How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven! Here, indeed, we have no earthly holy place, framed and adorned by human hands; no inner temple veiled in mysterious sanctity; no golden emblems of the regalia of heaven; but we have the assembly of saints; the congregation of the Lord; the body of Christ animated by his Spirit; the holy privilege of drawing near to God in concert with those who have obtained like precious faith with us. In the deep stillness of the heart let every anxious care be hushed. Let the sorrows of the mind be banished from this place. To him we bring no bleeding victim from the flock, but we offer in incense of praise, the deep devotion of the soul, the living sacrifice of the body, acceptable through the precious blood of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Behold these emblems! They speak to the heart. They tell of God’s love. They tell of sorrows borne for us—of humiliation, pain, and death. Let us consider them. We come to Jesus, and he meets us here. In the awful mysteries of life and death we hold communion. Into the dwelling of the Most High we enter to take the copy of salvation—and to pay our vows in the presence of his people.

The Lord’s Supper: Blessing of the bread and the cup: Timothy Perrin, University Church of Christ
Table hosts: Milton and Nancy Shatzer; Stephen and Corleen Parmelee;
Ron and Marty Highfield; and Tim and Lucy Perrin

Songs during communion: “By Christ Redeemed, In Christ Restored”; “Beneath the Cross of Jesus”; and “In Christ Alone.”

Song: “We Are One in the Spirit,” led by Chris Stivers.

Benediction: David Baird

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