

An Impartial Inquiry Into the True Position and Policy of the Christian Church

by Solomon Apple

The sermon calls for a candid and impartial inquiry into the position and policy of the Christian Church, with the goal of identifying areas for improvement and growth.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:7, 1 Corinthians 14:33, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 2:8, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Church Government", "Christian Doctrine"

Description

Rev. Solomon Apple, a dedicated preacher, reflects on the history and evolution of the Christian Church, emphasizing the importance of sound principles, wisdom, and experience in guiding the church's progress. He discusses the challenges faced by the church in terms of organization, doctrine, and government, highlighting the need for moderation, careful interpretation of Scripture, and a balance between tradition and innovation. Solomon Apple urges for a candid and impartial inquiry into the church's position and policy, advocating for a middle course that ensures progress while maintaining the core principles of the faith.

Transcript

REV. SOLOMON APPLE was born in Guilford county, North Carolina, January 2, 1813, and died in Caswell county, March 4, 1901, in the eighty-ninth year of his age. He began preaching in the year 1833, being licensed by the General Meeting at Kedar (Mt. Auburn), in Warren county, when he was about twenty-one years old. In 1834, he was at the General Meeting at New Providence, and was assigned with Rev. E. T. Berryman to Neuse River circuit. At the General Meeting at Pleasant Grove, Virginia, he was assigned to the Neuse River circuit with Rev. A. Iseley. He was ordained at the General Meeting at O'Kelly's chapel, in 1836, by Revs. J. Fuller, J. Hanks and D. W. Kerr as presbytery.

In 1838, he was at the General Meeting at Pope's chapel, and was assigned with Rev. G. G. Walker to Neuse River circuit. At the North Carolina and Virginia Conference, held at Union meeting house, Orange (now Alamance) county, in 1840, Rev. Solomon Apple was in attendance and took part in the transaction of the business. Near the close of this year, December 16, 1840, he married Agnes D. Farmer, daughter of Henry and Mary Farmer, of Halifax county, Virginia. He settled in Caswell county, North Carolina, but during the years 1858 and 1859, he was living at Graham, for the purpose of giving his children the advantages of Graham College. [158]

He attended the Conference at Apple's chapel, in Guilford county, in 1841. (At this Conference messengers were sent to the North Carolina Conference, with an invitation for it to send messengers in return.) At the Conference at the same place in 1845, he served on the committee on itinerancy and on that of education. He attended the Conference at Pope's chapel, in Granville county, in 1847, and at New Providence in 1848, serving on committee of religious exercises. In 1849, at Hanks' chapel he was chosen moderator of the Conference, and at the Conference at Union chapel in Alamance county, in 1850, he was chairman of the committee on Sabbath schools and chosen a delegate to the Southern Christian Association. At Apple's chapel in 1851, he delivered the address before Conference. He was at the Conference at Mt. Pleasant in Randolph county, in 1853, and at O'Kelly's chapel, Wake county, in 1854, and was elected a delegate to the Southern Christian Association. At New Providence in 1855, he served on the committee of ordination. In 1856, he was a delegate from the North Carolina and Virginia Conference to the Southern Christian Convention, which met at Union chapel, Alamance county, North Carolina. At the Conference, at Bethlehem, Alamance county, in 1867, he served on the educational committee with Rev. B. N. Hopkins, and favored the resolution to devise a course of study to be taken by those wishing to enter the Christian ministry. He was appointed a fraternal messenger to the Eastern Virginia Christian Conference, and a delegate to the Southern Christian Convention to meet at Cypress chapel, in Nansemond county, Virginia, in 1858. At his Conference this year he also advocated the Christian Sun in these words: "We most earnestly recommend to all our ministers and lay-brethren to renew their efforts in its behalf; and we heartily recommend it as an able exponent of the principles of the Christian Church, [159] and sympathize with Elder Wellons in his efforts to sustain it."

At the Conference at Pope's chapel, in Granville county, in 1858, he was chairman of the Conference committee. During the year 1859 he had the pastoral charge of Pleasant Grove, Virginia. This year Conference met at Union chapel, Alamance county, and he served on the committee on ordination and chairman of the committees on periodicals, memoirs, and examination of candidates for licensure. He was one of the presbytery that ordained John N. Manning, P. W. Allen, and H. Gant. In the report on periodicals, he says, "We are happy to state that we have in the Christian Sun an able exponent of the principles of the Christian Church, bold and outspoken upon all subjects peculiar to ourselves as a religious denomination, and prompt to rebuke those who misrepresent or slander us." He also served on the committee to arrange ministerial supply for Newbern church for the next Conference year. At the Conference at Pleasant Hill, in 1860, he was elected secretary, and served on the Conference executive committee.

In 1862, he was elected President of the Conference at Damascus, in Orange county, North Carolina. And in 1864, at the Conference at Antioch, in Chatham county, he was chairman of the committee on ministerial supply. During these years he had pastoral charge of Lebanon church.

In 1865, at Oak Level, in Franklin county, he was President of the Conference. He was chosen a delegate to the Southern Christian Convention, and to deliver the annual address before the next Conference. He was also elected President of the Home Missionary Society of the North Carolina and Virginia Conference.

The Southern Christian Convention met at Mt. Auburn, in Warren county, North Carolina, in 1866, to which Rev. Solomon Apple was a delegate. At this [160] Convention the revised "Principles and Government of the Christian Church" were submitted for adoption. He introduced the following: "Resolved, That the action of the committee appointed to revise the Declaration of Principles, Improved Form of Government, and Directory of Religious Worship, adopted by the Convention, shall be final, and that the work, when so revised, shall be considered as the act of this body, and shall bear with it all the binding force which this

Convention may have the authority to bestow." The committee of revision was composed of W. B. Wellons, chairman, J. N. Manning, Solomon Apple, Alfred Moring, Thomas J. Kilby. The Convention met the following year in extraordinary session at Mt. Auburn, and Rev. S. Apple was appointed chairman of the standing committee on Home Missions.

At O'Kelly's chapel, in 1866, he was re-elected President of the North Carolina and Virginia Conference. The annual address was deferred until the second day, Thursday, October 11th, when it was delivered by Rev. Solomon Apple. The Secretary, Rev. J. N. Manning, says in reference to the address that it was "one of the most interesting and instructive addresses ever delivered before this body." It was requested for publication, and will claim further attention.

In 1867, at the Conference at Union chapel, in Alamance county, he served on the committees on Education and Home Missions. And at the Conference at Wake chapel, in Wake county, in 1869, he was again elected President and added to the committee on Education.

In 1870, he attended the General Convention at Suffolk, Virginia, of which he was elected Vice-President. He submitted the report of the Home Mission committee, extracts from which will appear later. This year at the Conference at Union chapel, Halifax county, [161] Virginia, he preached the annual sermon from I. Cor. 14:40. Here the committee on Home Missions report him to preach at Pleasant Grove, in Virginia, Lebanon, and Mt. Pisgah, for the ensuing year. He also served on the committee on Education. In 1871, he was elected President of the North Carolina and Virginia Conference, at Mt. Zion, in Orange county and was appointed a fraternal messenger to the Eastern Virginia Conference. At the Conference at Shallow Well, in Moore county, in 1872, he preached from Matt. 24:14, and was appointed on the standing committees on Home Missions and on Temperance, on the latter as chairman. In his report to the Conference at New Providence, in 1873, he says, "Intemperance still prevails to an alarming extent, bearing down in its onward course hosts of victims to temporal and eternal ruin. And what is greatly to be deplored is the fact that this evil is suffered to exist with so few to oppose its progress." He preached regularly during the year.

The General Convention met at Graham, North Carolina, in 1874, and Rev. Solomon Apple was re-elected Vice-President, and was also appointed on the committee on Publications. At the Conference at Hanks' chapel, Chatham county, this same year, he served on the committee on Memoirs. During the year he had attended the Cincinnati Convention, of which he gave an account at this Conference.

In 1875, at Pope's chapel the Conference was opened with religious services by Rev. S. Apple, and he was chairman of a special committee on Home Mission Societies, which presented a constitution for the organization of such societies to meet in connection with the Conference as formerly. He was continued on this committee as long as he was able to do service. In 1876, at Salem chapel, Forsyth county, he was chairman of the committee on Memoirs to Rev. A. Iseley, and of the [162] committee on Periodicals. In 1877, at the Conference at Pleasant Grove, Virginia, he was on the presbytery that ordained David F. Jones, the first missionary of the Christian Church to Japan.

At the General Christian Convention, at Lebanon, in Caswell county, North Carolina, in 1878, he was appointed chairman of the committee on Religious Services. He also served on the committee on Publications and was elected a member of the Revision committee from the North Carolina and Virginia Conference. He was continued on the Publication committee. At the Conference at Damascus, in 1878, he preached from Matt. 10:17.

In 1880, at Bethlehem, Alamance county, he was on a committee to consider the propriety of erecting a church in Raleigh, North Carolina. In 1882, he was a delegate from the North Carolina and Virginia Conference to the General Convention at Morrisville, North Carolina, and was appointed chairman of the Executive committee. In 1884, he attended the Conference at Union, Alamance county, and served on the committee on the Standing of the Ministry, and in 1885, on a like committee at Hayes' chapel, in Wake county. At New Providence, in Alamance county, in 1886, Conference was adjourned with prayer by Rev. S. Apple. At Bethlehem, in Alamance county, in 1894, he was chosen President of the Conference. The last Conference he attended met at Hebron, in Mecklenburg county, Virginia, in 1898.

The committee on Memoirs reported that "The temporal misfortunes and bodily infirmities of our brother were of such a nature that he greatly needed, for several years before his death, assistance and sympathy. For every token of love and every gift for his comfort he showed grateful appreciation. He found no occasion for complaint, but rather for thankfulness; because as [163] the end approached, he saw more distinctly revealed the better life beyond. His dying benedictions rest on all who kindly ministered to his last earthly wants." He was buried in the cemetery at Lebanon, Caswell county, North Carolina.

As President, he delivered the following address, entitled, "AN IMPARTIAL INQUIRY INTO THE TRUE POSITION AND POLICY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH," before the Forty-fifth Annual Session of the North Carolina and Virginia Christian Conference in 1866:

BRETHREN OF THE CONFERENCE:

In executing the task which you have assigned me, it is my purpose to treat of such practical questions as are of common interest to us all. Sound principles alone can ensure the success of any great enterprise. Actual progress must ever be the result of those laws which are dictated by wisdom, and which are founded in experience. If we would attain real prosperity, we should ever bear in mind that injunction of Scripture, which bids us "prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good." To learn from the history of past events, and to gather instruction by tracing the causes and effects of such things as have already transpired should be the aim of every candid enquirer after truth. Nor can we hope ever to arrive at any safe conclusion, unless we are able to reason from premises which are already understood. He who neglects this precaution, will, perhaps too late; reap that repentance which is the just recompense of those whose minds are blinded by obstinacy and self-conceit.

A thorough investigation of every mode of action is equally opposed to blind reverence for established usage, and to that spirit which is carried away with every innovation, merely because it differs from the customs and teachings of the past. [164]

It becomes every man, therefore, frequently to review the ground he occupies, and, by careful reflection, to seek out and correct those errors into which he may have been led by the caprices of passion or the folly of prejudice.

It is hardly necessary to point to the history of our race, in order to prove that this may be true as well of collective bodies as of individuals. Vanity itself, then, will not venture to assert that what is true of other human beings may not also be true of ourselves. We cannot, therefore, refuse to pursue that course which universal testimony has pointed out as the best, and without which success is not to be expected.

Let us then, my brethren, enter into a candid and impartial inquiry as to the position which we have hitherto occupied, that we may see how far we have been guided by reason in the policy which has

characterized our action.--There can be no just cause for dreading such an investigation. That man alone fears an examination, who doubts the validity of his principles. The honest man fears no exposure; and it is left for the dissembler and the hypocrite to conceal from themselves and the world that which cannot bear the trial of a just criticism.

Nor should an over-weening attachment for the examples which have been left us by our predecessors, and which we ourselves have followed, lead us to suppose that there is no improvement for us in the future. I would by no means lessen the respect which we so justly feel for the pioneers of the church. But our respect for our leaders--especially in matters of opinion--is too often unconsciously mingled with a tender regard for ourselves. For when we imbibe the views of others, we make them our own; and in the persistent attachment which we feel for those opinions, we pay an indirect compliment to our own sagacity. Thus zeal for leaders is not unfrequently another form of zeal for self; and we [165] can never think the pioneer of a doctrine to which we are opposed so great a man as him whose views are the foundation of our own.

I have no doubt that James O'Kelly and his coadjutors were truly great men, and that they inaugurated a system, destined sooner or later to revolutionize the Christian world. But I cannot admit that they had that perfection of wisdom which one of the fundamental principles of our church and our religion teaches us to believe can never be attained by mortal man. They instituted, but did not, and could not perfect the system. Among the last words of O'Kelly, were, "I have begun the work which I leave my successors to finish." He was too wise a man not to see his own imperfections. I do not pretend to affirm that any of us are wiser than was O'Kelly. But we have seen what he could not see. We have seen for half a century the workings of that system which he has promulgated. It is no difficult matter to see after a thing has been done, how it might have been done better. The shoe-Maker who criticised the painting of the Grecian artist could see its defects, though he could not have painted the picture.

In fact, O'Kelly fell into the common error of those who lead in revolutions; he went too far. Luther before him, and many others, as is now generally acknowledged, had done the same thing. This disposition seems to be characteristic of human nature everywhere, both in civil and religious affairs. The Puritans of 1642, disgusted with the real or supposed licentiousness and idolatry of Charles the first and his adherents, set up what they termed a reign of saints, with a form of government and laws as odious in its hypocrisy as their language was ridiculous in its phraseology.--The Cavaliers, on the restoration of Charles the second, tired of the restraints which they had suffered, and of the pious cant which they had heard, indulged such a looseness of [166] morals and such an obscenity of language as was shocking to every principle of decency and common sense. The French people, in the last century, goaded into desperation by the cruel exactions of monarchy and of priest-craft, dethroned and destroyed their oppressors, and rushed headlong to the opposite extreme of bidding defiance to all law and to all religion. It remained for our Saviour alone, the founder of a system, new and strange to the time-servers of this world, to check the excessive zeal of his disciples, and to point them in the only safe path, that of mildness and moderation.--Thus is shown the wisdom of that middle course which all should seek to follow, but which few, it any of our race have ever seemed entirely capable of pursuing.

I have said that James O'Kelly fell into this error. If he had not done so, he would have constituted an almost solitary exception to the general rule. When we reflect that, in almost every undertaking of a like character, light only dawns by degrees, we shall not wonder that he took some steps in the wrong direction. When Martin Luther began to preach against indulgences, he probably had no idea of that great Protestant reformation which had the effect of totally changing the face of Europe and of the world. Had

the abuse against which he inveighed been corrected, and some smaller concessions made, it is possible that the whole Christian world might now be in the bosom of the mother church, and under the spiritual control of the Sovereign pontiff who sways the sceptre of Rome.

James O'Kelly, disgusted with the exactions and usurpations of Coke and Asbury, fled not from the doctrines of Wesley, but from the tyranny and oppression of those who claimed to be Wesley's followers. That system of prelacy which for centuries had been one of the strongest bulwarks of arbitrary power in Monarchical Europe, was to his mind an insidious foe to the civil and [167] religious freedom of Republican America. He saw with a jealous eye and a righteous indignation the germ of that system of bigotry and intolerance which had in England sent Baptists to prison, and which in Scotland had sent Presbyterians to the stake.

His first aim then was to be rid of episcopacy. He and his compeers formed themselves into a separate organization and took the name of Republican Methodists. Opposition did not stop here. If Coke and Asbury had made those concessions which O'Kelly and his followers demanded, the breach might have been repaired. But maligned, traduced, and evil spoken of, the O'Kellyite faction, as it was called, stung by the bitterness of their adversaries, endeavored in every point of Government to be as unlike as possible to their late oppressors.

The result was, in some measure, as might have been expected. I say in some measure, for, under the circumstances, we can only wonder that the extremity to which they were driven was no greater. The hand of Providence must have controlled and guided them. In the pursuance, doubtless of their design of cutting loose from their old associates, they concluded to drop the name and prestige of Methodism, and to form themselves into a body of a more original and marked character than that of Republican Methodists, which they had hitherto constituted.

The search after a name was long and anxious; until at last--happy thought!--some one proposed that they should drop all badges of party distinction and choose one upon which all could unite,--the name "Christian." The proposition was hailed with delight. Here was a distinction indeed, and one to which no true lover of Christ could object. Then came the subject of doctrines. "Let us," said they, "drop those man-made creeds which have sown dissension and strife, and let us have a creed which will exclude no good man from our communion,--let us make the Bible our only confession, [168] of faith."

This language seemed to those honest men, as if one had inquired of the oracle of God. The subject of government then came under review; and there it was that the weakness of human nature appeared. So deeply rooted was their opposition to episcopacy, that they came well nigh going to the other extreme of anarchy and confusion. Nor are they entirely without excuse. They were led, into the error by what was apparently the best of reason. "The Bible," said they, "is a sufficient rule of government".

Who could gainsay the Bible? Here a very important consideration was overlooked. Though the outlines of government are given in the Bible, yet many of the details are left--and no doubt wisely; as God knows best--to the discretion of His people. Even the doctrine of episcopacy, their great dread, was believed by more than half the religious world to be taught in the Scriptures, and to be ordained of God. Here, if they carried out their first design, they were obliged to assume, to some extent, sectarian ground.

True, they held, in spite of all opposition that the Bible discountenanced anything like a prelatical form of church government and they pointed to the evil effects of the system as incontrovertible proof of their assertions. But the abuse of a system does not always prove the system to be wrong. On the contrary

even religion itself has often been perverted to answer the ends of selfish and designing men. Nor is the Bible more clear with regard to episcopacy, than it is with regard to the doctrine of Calvin or of Arminius. These last points they very properly agreed to leave undecided.

But the question of government was not so easily disposed of. A decision must be made. Congregationalism was the opposite of Episcopacy. But Congregationalism savored of sectarianism. It would have been well, perhaps, if they had adopted a mean between these [169] two; for such is the dilemma that every man must take one horn or the other, unless a compromise can be made between them. If two contending parties unite, both must make concessions. But the fathers of the church; and there they acted inconsistently--could never make any compromise with Episcopacy. Congregationalism partook of the nature of party spirit, and they finally ended with having no government at all, except those general directions which are laid down in the Scriptures. The result, as might be anticipated, was, with regard to many important affairs of the church, a state of weakness bordering upon absolute chaos. The Church was kept as pure, perhaps, from moral contamination as any in the land. But here its efficiency in a great measure ceased. That capacity for progress, which is founded in true regularity and order, was almost entirely wanting. This was seriously felt during the life-time of O'Kelly, and various were the expedients resorted to; but after his death, the want became painfully apparent. The reason of this is obvious. Without some degree of systematic order no church can long continue to exist. While O'Kelly lived, his own tact and fertility of resource supplied, to a good degree, the want of a more perfect form of organization. But he died, and his knowledge and experience died with him. Raving left nothing in his writings which the broadest interpretation could construe into a system, his successors found themselves with no better guide than the uncertain authority of confused tradition. Nor was this all. The spirit of their leader had apparently been opposed to the formation of such a system.--They thought it best therefore, (if I may use the common expression,) to run the machine as they found it. Difficulties met them at every step. New and unforeseen emergencies arose for which no provision had been made. New combinations had to be formed, and new obstacles had to be overcome. With them, [170] as with others, there was a strong party which obstinately opposed every measure tending to improvement. Not an effort was made in that direction, but was looked upon as an overture friendly to sectarianism, and as a departure from those principles of which James O'Kelly had been the champion. But in spite of every opposition, necessity, with that stern and convincing logic which is certain of a final triumph over error, led them with steps, slow indeed, but sure, into the great highway of constitutional reform.

The "General Meetings" gave place to the Conferences, and the Conferences were united in the Southern Christian Association. Here was a tacit acknowledgment that their former plan of operations was insufficient. But they went no farther than the most urgent necessity compelled them to go.--Such a thing as a thorough and complete written form of organization was totally unheard of; and had it been proposed would have raised a torrent of opposition so overwhelming, that the hapless innovator must have been carried away by its violence. Such a statement, with some of us, may perhaps excite a smile. But this state of things was not altogether productive of evil. God had chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. As out of chaos, earth, sun, moon, and stars sprang into living existence and beauty, so in this medley of confusion, were implanted the principles of a system, destined like all truth for a season to be crushed to the earth, that in the end it might rise from the ashes of its purification in resplendent lustre, and eternal as the years of God!

But the hour of its triumph had not yet come. Long is the strife, and fierce the battle, when great is the victory to be achieved. An organization similar in its origin and first principles had sprung up at the North.

A correspondence was opened. On examination it was [171] found that the leading features of the doctrine of James O'Kelly were held by many in the North-Western, Middle, and Eastern States. Their form of government was almost identically the same. Let us unite said they of the North, and many honest hearts at the South, warmed with that catholic spirit which has ever distinguished them, responded with an earnest Amen! A "union of correspondence" was accordingly formed, and it gave high promise of being a profitable one. The Northern church, with no better government than the Southern, had entered upon a career of material prosperity which bade fair to overcome every obstacle. The South might emulate her example. Her cry to her Northern brethren was, "come over into Macedonia, and help us." The cry was not disregarded. Northern ministers came among us, and endeavored to infuse into Southern minds that restless spirit by which they had been impelled in their efforts for the advancement of their own cause in their own country. But the Northern people had an element of prosperity which the South did not possess. Both had lost that advantage which proceeds from systematic regularity. But the place of this had been supplied at the North by an element certain indeed of ultimate failure,--but which, for a time, is often the strongest weapon which any party can wield,--that of continual and restless agitation. Desirous of differing from the rest of the world, and of presenting something new and striking to the minds of the people, they were led into the wildest vagaries and delusions. Unitarianism, Campbellism, Abolitionism, and other extravagances spread like a fearful epidemic among them. The consequence was that in the South, their efforts were attended with failure. The "high pressure" principle in morals was not indigenous to the Southern soil, and like a foreign exotic, as it was, it drooped and died for want of nourishment. A very few weak constitutions [172] took the infection, which had carried such intellectual havoc throughout the Northern portion of the Union. But the disease was in a mild form, and under the influence of a pure air and healthy climate, they speedily recovered. That spirit of conservatism, which, when carried too far, is always hurtful, interposed in this instance to save the Church. And here, my brethren, I speak to those who are the advocates of reform, let us not be too hard upon those old fashioned notions, which, when urged with obstinacy, have often thrown difficulties in our way, but which, in their proper application, have wrought out for us so mighty a deliverance.

Thinking men began to see that a radical and irreconcilable difference existed between the whole Southern and a great majority of the Northern Church. The South, refusing to submit to the rash and hot-headed dictation of the North, was openly insulted in the General Convention. 1 A separation, necessary and inevitable, immediately took place. But now that this separation was accomplished, something more must be done. That element of prosperity which they had looked for from the North had vanished like a shadow into thin air, and where were they to look for the elements of a real and substantial prosperity?

A Convention of the Southern Christians was called. It would, perhaps, have been well if that body had not followed in the beaten track. But it has ever been our misfortune hastily to devise some expedient to meet the present necessity. Long before the Convention met evils had been felt and temporary remedies had been provided. Had the body gone into a radical investigation of their condition they might, no doubt, have found radical cure for the ills with which the church was afflicted.

But they did nothing of the kind. They only patched up the old machine, [173] that it might run a little while longer.--They adopted a manifesto, setting forth one reason for separation from the North, but the great principle which underlay the surface was entirely ignored. And so far as they said anything to the contrary, the world might have supposed they believed in Unitarianism, Campbellism, Universalism, and every other "ism," but Abolitionism. Two or three brief reports were made upon the subject of church government.

They put forth no religious directory, form of judicatory, or ceremonies for the celebration of matrimony, funeral rites, ordination of Elders and Deacons, or for the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. Imperfect, indeed, must seem that work, when we find that the whole, including the title page, the motions, resolutions, reports, an outline of the debates, together with an address of the President at the close, is comprehended in a little pamphlet of less than twenty-four pages!

Nor do I say this in order to hold that body up to ridicule; far from it. For their action, meagre and incomplete as it was, was yet better than no action at all. As such it is entitled to respect. But to claim for it anything like perfection would be the acme of folly. It was only one among the many steps which had to be taken in the onward career of improvement. Its imperfection was indeed very soon made manifest. The world knew nothing,--and in fact, how could it know anything?--of the internal principles and policy of the Church.

We had separated from the North, and those who knew there had been any separation at all, concluded, not without some show of reason, that our only ground of quarrel was the subject of slavery. They had little cause to believe that any other reason for difference existed. The licentious opinions which were held at the North, were matters of too great notoriety to be concealed. The consequence was, that like the innocent Spaniel, in the fable which every child has read, we, [174] were beaten because we had been found in bad company.

Serious charges, affecting our interests and standing as a denomination, were made by those whose real or willful ignorance of our principles seemed to give them some color of excuse. By individuals these imputations were indignantly denied. But the accusers, unwilling to be so easily put down, sought in vain among our records for any official refutation of the charges, and returned with confidence to the attack. So insupportable did this grievance become that, at the session of the Convention which met in May, 1858, a minister proposed that a declaration should be adopted, setting forth the principles, sentiments, and government of the Church, which would put the matter forever at rest.

But he went too far. Instead of confining himself to the legitimate object of such a work, he went on to take ground on matters which the wisest and best of men universally so acknowledged, have confessed themselves utterly unable to decide. His plan did not faithfully represent the Church as it was. On the contrary, he would have violated one of the most cherished principles, by making a test of fellowship of those points about which it is agreed that the wisest of men and the best of Christians may differ.

The consequence was that his views were disapproved with scarcely a single exception. In fact if the sentiments, which he advocated, had conflicted with no established principle of the Church, he was, as yet, premature. Time alone could subdue and soften the force of old and cherished prejudices, and open the way for the exercise of a candid and impartial judgment. The want, which an ineffectual attempt had thus been made to meet, soon recurred. Several resolutions of Conferences were added to the testimony of individuals. But no general action was had. In consequence of the late war, the Convention failed to assemble at its regular time. What had not been done was necessarily left undone. [175]

With the return of peace matters of religion began to flow back again into their accustomed channels. Our wants, as a denomination, began again to be felt. It was under the influence of these wants, that our Convention met in May last. All agreed that the interests of our cause were suffering, and that unless something could be done, they must suffer yet more. On every hand were the evidences that unless we could by some means set ourselves in our proper light before the world, we must be content with a place

among those small and justly proscribed sects, whom all evangelical Christians regard as schismatics and heretics.--Already some of these had been assuming our name and character, and claiming that we are one and the same with themselves. To these assertions we had made no official denial, which was generally known to the world. We saw that men were fast ripening for the adoption of those principles, which are in reality our own, but which as such are known only to ourselves. Others had professed to have no creed but the Bible; yet one party had made baptism, equally with repentance and faith, an essential of salvation, and another had ridiculed the atonement, asserting that Christ was a mere man. Everywhere we were classed with one or another of these false teachers. Moderate Christians could not but shun those whom they considered of that number of whom the apostle Peter declared they wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction, and to whom our Saviour has said, "go ye not after them."

The truth is, my brethren, that, as in everything else, there must be some limit to the interpretation of Scripture. Every so called Christian sect professes to draw its doctrines from the Bible, and yet many of them teach doctrines which, if taught by any minister of our church, we should not hesitate to condemn. But with the fundamental principles of what are usually termed [176] the evangelical denominations we have no quarrel. Yet we do know that there is such a thing in the world as licentiousness of opinion, and that many of that class of men who have delighted to call themselves freethinkers, are little better than atheists. What then could be done? We did the only thing which seemed to us consistent with reason and with the principles of our organization.--We adopted a declaration showing what and who we are.--It contains nothing new to ourselves, but is a plain and simple definition of the Christian Church, expressed as nearly as possible in Scripture language. It does not do away with the Bible, but reiterates the pre-eminent esteem which we feel for that blessed book, and declares to the world that we endeavor to interpret its sacred teachings with careful moderation and Christian meekness. To be brief, I can declare to you, my brethren, as one who has long and fondly loved the Christian Church, that, if there be one line there, which conflicts with the true spirit of our old established faith, I have yet to be made aware of its existence. As to the form of organization it is unnecessary to weary you by lengthened remarks. It collects what was scattered, reduces to written form that which was merely traditional, and renders the whole tangible and comprehensive. Nothing new is introduced which can be considered prejudicial to the spirit of our ancient practice. If in anything it be wanting, it is, perhaps, in the fact that it does not go far enough.--But that question time and experience alone can determine.

The religious directory, forms, and ceremonies, are designed to supply a want which has long been felt and against which there can be no serious objection.

My brethren, the work of the Convention is before you, and I doubt not that when you have examined it for yourselves by the light of a just and impartial criticism, you will say with a venerable, tried, and trusted [177] minister of our Church that it is just what we need, and are compelled to have.

A few words more, and I have done. The policy which, in this discourse, I have endeavored to defend and to illustrate, was not entered upon by me without mature reflection. It has been the subject of many misgivings and of many prayers for the Divine guidance. It is well known that I am no innovator. On the contrary, I have often been charged with an overweening attachment for the antiquated notions of the past. You may well be assured then, that none but sincere motives have induced me to follow a course, which we have received from our fathers. God knows that I love the Christian Church. Under the influence of her teachings, I was born and reared, and at her altar I was made acquainted with that salvation which is in Christ Jesus. For more than thirty years have I been an humble minister in her pulpit, and an humble advocate of the glorious cause which she had espoused. In the early years of my course, I was familiar

with many of the pioneers of the Church.--Their day is past, and they have gone, I believe, to reap the rich reward of their labors and trials on earth. The frosts of more than fifty winters admonish me that, perhaps, ere long, I, with some of my early associates whom I see around me, will be called, if found worthy, to strike glad hands with the lamented Kerr, the sainted Craven, the beloved Walker, and many others who have gone before us to that land, where parting is felt and feared no more! How then can I betray the Christian Church? Voices from a host of the departed would come from the realms of the spirit land, and rising from the graves of early friendship would condemn the treason, and call their wandering brother back, that he might yet follow the old faith which was once delivered to the saints. No, my brethren, in the Christian Church,--the church of O'Kelly and Kerr,--have I lived, [178] and in that church I expect to die. But while I do live, let me see her following in that middle course, which is the only path of safety, and which alone can invoke the smiles and the approbation of Heaven.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/solomon-apple/an-impartial-inquiry-into-the-true-position-and-policy-of-the-christian-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net