

# Alexander Campbell's Contributions to Hymnody

Jim Mankin



Times must have been lively in the early part of the nineteenth century. America was still largely a frontier, and the spirit of freedom was viewed as a divine privilege. It was the time of Thomas Jefferson and his renowned Louisiana Purchase and of Andrew Jackson and his government by the common folk. By Jackson's time, one-third of Americans lived west of the Appalachian Mountains. Most Americans had a utopian dream that their country would usher in the golden age.<sup>1</sup>

It was also a time for camp meetings, such as the one at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801, and for revivals in many parts of the country.<sup>2</sup> Such diverse religious leaders as Peter Cartright, Mother Ann Lee, Joseph Smith, and Alexander Campbell were active during this period.<sup>3</sup>

Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) immigrated from Ireland to America in September 1809. With his mother and younger brothers and sisters, Campbell re-joined his father, Thomas Campbell, in Washington, Pennsylvania. The elder Campbell, who had come to America two years earlier, had been a Presbyterian pastor at Rich Hill, 30 miles from Belfast, Ireland, and in America, he was serving churches in western Pennsylvania.

Earlier that year (1809), Thomas Campbell had authored "The Declaration and Address" of the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, encouraging all Christians to recognize each other as people who believe in and follow the "clear precepts" of scripture. Alexander Campbell carried his father's precepts further, using the ideas of unity and restoration to launch the American Restoration Movement.

Today, three strands of the Restoration Movement exist: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); the Christian Churches (often called the "independent" or "conservative" Christian Churches); and the Churches of Christ (distinguished by their cappella singing in worship). Often this religious movement is known as the Stone-Campbell movement in recognition of the two "founding" leaders, Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) in Kentucky and Alexander Campbell in Bethany, (West) Virginia.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). Chapter 27 is titled "The Great Revival in the West and the Growth of the Popular Denominations," pp. 521-550. For specifics on the Disciples Movement, see pp. 540-548.

<sup>2</sup>James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 171-174. White refers to this period in American church history as "frontier worship," and specifically mentions the revival at Cane Ridge, Bourbon County, Kentucky, with Barton W. Stone.

<sup>3</sup>Lenard C. Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ*. (Abilene: ACU Press, 1988).

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Campbell was an extraordinary man; he had both the personality and the wealth to promote apostolic Christianity. The wealth derived from an estate he built, over a thousand acres, where he farmed and raised prize sheep. In 1840 he founded Bethany College on his land, and he served as both president and Bible professor at the college for a number of years. Campbell edited *The Christian Baptist* from 1823 to 1830, then the *Millennial Harbinger* from 1830 through the rest of his life.

During this time, he also served as postmaster for the small village of Bethany, Virginia, near Wheeling. He held religious debates in 1829 with Robert Owen, socialist from Scotland, in 1837 with John B. Purcell, Roman Catholic bishop of Cincinnati, and with N. L. Rice, Presbyterian minister, in 1844. In addition, Campbell served in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829 with James Madison.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bill Humble, *The Story of the Restoration* (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing, 1969), pp. 7-36. Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (Joplin: College Press, 1981), pp. 99-200.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Cochran, *The Fool of God* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1958). This is a novel based on the life of Alexander Campbell.

<sup>6</sup> Enos Dowling, "The Alexander Campbell Hymn Book (1828-1865)," *Restoration Quarterly* (Second/Third Quarter 1988), p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> Alger M. Fitch, "Alexander Campbell and the Hymnbook," *Christian Standard* 100 (June 26, 1965), p. 408.

<sup>8</sup> Fitch, "Alexander Campbell and the Hymnbook," *Christian Standard* 100 (July 31, 1965), p. 491.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Richardson, *Memories of Alexander Campbell* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1870), ii, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> Published in Bethany, Virginia, 1828. All hymnals mentioned in this article are housed in the Special Collections, Brown Library, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas.

<sup>11</sup> "The Christian Psalmist," *Millennial Harbinger*, Third Series, 3 (March 1847), p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> "The Christian Psalmody—No. III," *Millennial Harbinger*, Third Series, 1, (July 1844), p. 290.

<sup>13</sup> Published in Georgetown, Kentucky, by N.L. Finnell, Printer, 1829.

<sup>14</sup> Forrest McCann, "Hymnals of the Restoration Movement," *Restoration Quarterly* 19 (First Quarter 1976), p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> "Perhaps the most colorful character of the Restoration Movement was John Smith of Kentucky." The sobriquet "Raccoon" was given to him after a sermon he delivered at Tate's Creek Baptist Association at Crab Orchard, Kentucky, around 1815. In his introduction, Smith said, "I am John Smith from Stockton's Valley. In more recent years, I have lived in Wayne, among the rocks and hills of the Cumberland. Down there, saltpeter caves abound, and raccoons make their home. On that wild frontier we never had good schools, nor many books; consequently, I stand before you as a man without an education." The nickname stuck with him. Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order: A History of the Restoration Movement 1849-1906*, Vol. I (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1949), pp. 240-241.

<sup>16</sup> Winifred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ, A History*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), pp. 212-213.

## The Hymnal

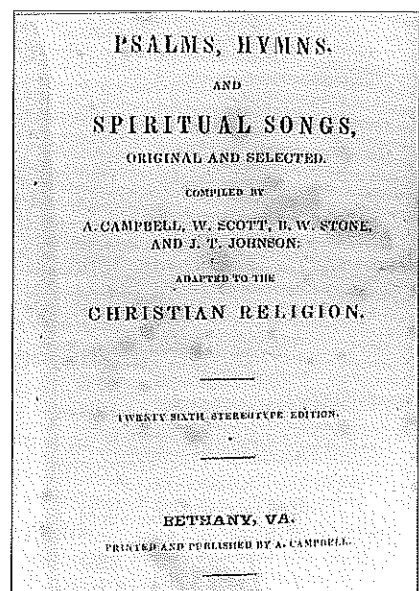
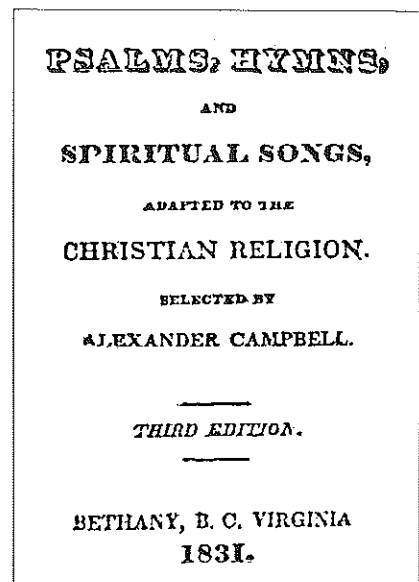
One of Campbell's most important contributions to the Restoration Movement was his hymnal. He felt strongly that there should be "one people, one Bible, and one hymn book."<sup>6</sup> Concerning this hymnal's importance, Alger M. Fitch asserted that "next to the Bible the hymn book was the most popular reading material of the Christian. What was not read was sung. Much of the hymnal was stored in the memory and most of its hymns were embedded in the heart."<sup>7</sup>

Campbell's hymnal, first issued in 1828, was a small volume (3 by 5 inches) that could fit in a pocket or a lady's purse. Containing 125 hymn texts, it was intended to be used for private, family, and congregational worship.<sup>8</sup> Campbell made sure his hymnal was free from unscriptural sentiments; he saw that religious poetry needed pure speech and that the reformation he had helped launch needed music as an aid. He also made sure that the theology of Calvinism was not reflected in his hymns.<sup>9</sup>

Using Paul's classification of songs in Ephesians 5:19, Campbell titled his hymnal *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Adapted to the Christian Religion*.<sup>10</sup> In his lifetime, the hymnal went through 45 editions. The hymnal only had the printed words; Campbell contended that printed musical notations detracted from worship because individuals would fix their eyes on "the notes of a tune" while engaged in the praise of God.<sup>11</sup> The hymn book's only musical aid is meter markings: C.M. for common meter, L.M. for long meter, and P.M. for particular meter. Further, he believed that "the subject must be scriptural... and the versification must be grave, chaste, and natural."<sup>12</sup>

Barton Stone, assisted by Thomas Adams, published *The Christian Hymn Book* at the request of the Miami Christian Conference the following year. This book contained 340 hymns.<sup>13</sup> Three years later another Kentucky preacher, John T. Johnson, collaborated with Stone in publishing a new edition that sold 3,000 copies.<sup>14</sup>

The need for one hymn book became evident with the handshake of "Raccoon" John Smith<sup>15</sup> and Barton W. Stone on January 1, 1832, in Lexington, Kentucky. This event signaled a union between many of Campbell's Disciples and Stone's Christians. It was "a union of what had been competing congregations in particular communities and the development of the same sense of the brotherhood and common cause throughout the two groups that had previously existed in each separately."<sup>16</sup>



Campbell initiated the move to combine song books so that the newly formed body would have a common hymnal. The result was *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, issued in 1834. Though the title page lists Campbell, Walter Scott, J.T. Johnson, and B.W. Stone as the editors, the editing is clearly the work of Campbell alone. He and Scott wrote introductory materials for the hymn book. "Campbell presumed that his supposed collaborators would automatically endorse his efforts. They did not."<sup>17</sup> Stone felt slighted in Campbell's efforts to publish the hymnal without much consultation. Yet to keep unity, Stone acquiesced, and this hymnal became "the" hymnal of the restoration.

This hymnal went through a number of revisions but served as a way of keeping people united over the next 30 years. The 1834 version had 250 pages, divided into 32 psalms, 35 hymns, and 179 spiritual songs. An index of first lines was printed in the back. Spiritual songs were organized into 13 categories, such as "Christian Immersion," "The Lord's Supper," and the "Bible."<sup>18</sup> The book sold for 37 and 1/2 cents.

In 1835 Campbell became sole owner of the hymnal, though he continued to list Scott, Johnson, and Stone as editors. In 1843 he issued a new edition of *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Psalms; Original and Selected, Adapted to the Christian Religion* with a "Part II" containing 217 new hymns. By 1848 Campbell could write that 100,000 copies of the hymnal had been issued from his press.<sup>19</sup> From 1851 to 1864 the hymnal continued to be expanded and grew to over 500 pages.

In 1864 (two years before his death), Campbell gave the rights to the hymnal to the American Christian Missionary Society. The following year, the society issued *The Christian Hymn Book: A Compilation of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Original and Selected*. The editors, who were actually revisers, are listed as Alexander Campbell, Isaac Errett, W.K. Pendleton, W.T. Moore, T.M. Allen, and A.S. Hayden. Ironically, after Campbell died in 1866, the committee revised *The Christian Hymnal* (in 1871) and added musical notation.<sup>20</sup>

## Campbell's Hymn Texts

Selina Huntington Campbell, Alexander's second wife, wrote that though Campbell was "a lover of good music," he was, in his own words, "born tuneless." She added that it did not keep him from singing and making a "joyful noise" as he rode over the hills and vales of Bethany.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore even more curious that Campbell wrote five hymn texts, all of them included in the 1834 edition of *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.

"On Tabor's top the Savior stood" is a hymn text that Campbell wrote as a psalm in common meter about the transfiguration. It has nine stanzas, the first of which is as follows:

On Tabor's top the Savior stood  
With Peter, James, and John;  
And while he talk'd of Calv'ry there  
His face resplendent shone.<sup>22</sup>

Before his debate with the Catholic bishop John B. Purcell, Campbell wrote the hymn "The fall of Babylon," a text with eight stanzas. He expressed the feelings of most Protestants of his day, and he became their champion in the debate. He began the hymn with these lines:

Come, let us sing the coming fate  
Of mystic Babylon the Great,  
Her doom is drawing near:  
Jesus now comes on earth to reign,  
His cause and people to maintain,  
For them he'll soon appear.

In the fifth and sixth stanzas he continued this thought:

The day of recompense has come.  
His people all are gath'ring home,  
With joy they hear his voice:  
The promis'd curse, the threaten'd woes,  
Combin'd, now fall upon his foes,  
The martyrs all rejoice.

She who the twelve Apostles griev'd  
And by her sorceries deceiv'd  
All nations of the world,  
Now looks with anguish at their bliss,  
That sinks into the vast abyss,  
To endless ruin hurl'd.<sup>23</sup>

In 1828 Campbell wrote that no man can receive the Holy Spirit except by "immersion into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>24</sup> His belief in baptism by immersion led him to write a song about John's baptism and its effect upon us.

Upon the banks of Jordan stood  
The great reformer, John,  
And pointed to the Lamb of God,  
The long expected one.

He loud proclaim'd the coming reign,  
And told them to reform;  
If they God's favor would obtain  
And shun the gathering storm.

He bade all those who did repent,  
Forthwith to be immers'd,  
Assuring them that God had sent  
The message be rehears'd.

Forsake your sins, the Baptist said,  
That you may be forgiv'n;  
Forsake them now, and be immers'd  
For near's the reign of heaven.

Thus did the man of God prepare  
A people for the Lord;  
To him did all the Jews despair  
Who trusted in his word.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Morgan, "Disciples Hymnbooks: A Continuing Quest for Harmony," *Discipliana* 55 (Summer 1995), pp. 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Our Hymn Book," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series, 5 (December 1848), p. 710.

<sup>20</sup> McCann, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Home Life and Reminiscences of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: John Burns, 1879), p. 500.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Campbell, et al., *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. Psalms 12, p. 21. In *Home Life and Reminiscences*, Selina identifies the texts Alexander Campbell wrote.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Song 151—Particular Meter, p. 223.

<sup>24</sup> "Ancient Gospel—No. V," *Christian Baptist* 5 (May 5, 1828), p. 231.

<sup>25</sup> *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Song 149—Common Meter, pp. 220-221.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things," No. VI, *Christian Baptist* 3 (August 1, 1825), p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Song 131—Long Meter, p. 228.

<sup>28</sup> Fitch, "Alexander Campbell and the Hymnbook," *Christian Standard* 100 (July 17, 1965), p. 458.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, "The Christian Psalmody—No. I," *Millennial Harbinger*, Third Series, 1 (January 1844), pp. 37-38.

But now the reign of God has come,  
The reign of grace below,  
And Jesus reigns upon God's throne  
Remission to bestow.

He bids all nations look to him,  
As Prince of Life and Peace,  
And offers pardon to all them  
Who now accept his grace.<sup>25</sup>

Campbell felt strongly about communion in the worship service. He was persuaded that "the primitive disciples did, in all their meetings on the first day of the week, attend to the breaking of bread as an essential part of the worship due their Lord."<sup>26</sup> The Lord's Supper is still vital to worship in Restoration Movement churches, and communion is observed weekly. Campbell's belief that the Lord's Supper is a focal point in Christian unity led him to write the communion hymn "Jesus is gone above the skies" (six stanzas). The heart of his thought is found in stanzas two, three and five.

He knows what wand'ring hearts we have,  
Apt to forget his lovely face,  
And to refresh our minds he gave  
These kind memorials of his grace.

The Lord of life his table spread  
With his own flesh and dying blood;  
We on the rich provision feed,  
We taste the wine and bless our God.

While he is absent from our sight,  
'Tis to prepare for us a place;  
That we may dwell in heav'nly light,  
And live for ever near his face.<sup>27</sup>

The other hymn that Campbell wrote, "'Tis darkness there, but Jesus smiles," has 11 stanzas and deals with Paul and Silas's experience in a Philippian jail (Acts 16).

After the American Christian Missionary Society got the rights to publish the hymn book, they omitted all of Campbell's hymns. Fitch admits that Campbell's great strength was "in editing a hymn book suitable for worship and compatible with the Bible," not as a hymn writer.<sup>28</sup>

## Campbell's Philosophy of a Hymnal

Campbell was both a product of his times and a prophetic voice. One example of his influence came in 1844 when he wrote six articles in the *Millennial Harbinger* entitled "Christian Psalmody." Here, as in the preface to *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, he gave his philosophy of church music in general and of the hymnal in particular. He listed what he deemed to be "qualities of a good hymn book."

- Hymns intended for devotional purposes should express joyful emotion (James 5: 13).
- Instruction and admonition should be continued in hymns we use for social worship (Col. 3: 16).
- The words and the music should breathe one

spirit—the spirit of a fervent, humble worshipper of God, in sincerity and truth.

- A good hymn possesses unity. It treats one subject only from the opening to the close.
- Each hymn should be complete, having a beginning, a middle, and an end. Every verse should add something to the preceding, in both thought and imagery.
- The sentences should be brief, and the sense should not be carried from one verse to another.
- The style should be simple, the words generally short and easy to understand. The accent should be uniformly on the same syllable in each verse.
- A profusion of ornament and the blending of distinct images should be avoided.
- A sounding epithet should never be used merely to furnish the requisite number of syllables.
- The whole hymn should be adapted to singing. Many good poetical compositions contain correct statements and may be read with profit, but should not be sung.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps these standards explain Campbell's preference for Isaac Watts's hymns. He included these by Watts: "O God, our help in ages past," "Lo, what a glorious light appears," "Am I a soldier of the cross?" "I'll praise my maker while I've breath," "There is a land of pure delight," "When

## 692 Upon the Banks of Jordan Stood

Alexander Campbell, 1834  
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1. Up - on the banks of Jor - dan stood The great re - form - er, John;  
2. He bade all those who did re - pent Forth - with to be im - mersed;  
3. But now the reign of God has come, The reign of grace be - low;  
4. He bids all na - tions look to Him, As Prince of life and peace,

And point - ed to the Lamb of God, The long ex - spect - ed One.  
As - sur - ing them that God had sent The mes - sage he re - heard.  
And Je - sus reigns up - on God's throne Re - mis - sion to be - stow.  
And of - fers par - don to all them Who now ac - cept His grace.

REFRAIN

Now I see the blood of the Lamb, Now I see the blood of the Lamb; 'Tis the  
blood of Je - sus the cru - ci - fied One; Now I see the blood of the Lamb.

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I survey the wondrous cross," and "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord."

Campbell insisted that Christ be the focus in the hymnal and in congregational singing. He wrote that "the first and most striking peculiarity of Christian psalmody is that Messiah, in his fullness of grace and glory, is the all commanding and soul subduing theme."<sup>30</sup> He was disturbed that in some hymn books texts expressed "wrong and unscriptural views," have "unworthy subjects," "may represent improper emotion and feelings," or have poetry that was "defective in gravity, in chasteness, in harmony, and good taste."<sup>31</sup> He then gave examples from the *Psalmist*, a new collection of hymns for use in Baptist churches, by Baron Stow and S.F. Smith.

Campbell believed that everyone should sing: "For my part, I vote that every Christian man, woman, and child...should open his mouth and make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our Salvation."<sup>32</sup> Even so, he did not approve of singing schools conducted in churches to teach music. He felt that teaching music was no more the business of the church than teaching reading and that singing schools were social occasions and thus a sign of worldliness.<sup>33</sup> Campbell also disparaged city churches with choirs and organ music, questioning whether they were more intent on pleasing themselves or on worshiping God. He regarded instrumental music in worship as inappropriate as "a cow bell in a concert."<sup>34</sup> In his opposition to instrumental music in worship, Campbell was not alone.<sup>35</sup>

Campbell believed that the "general design of all religious worship is to praise God and edify men"; further, "No exercise is more delightful, solemn, or sublime, than singing the praises of the Lord."<sup>36</sup> The hymnal, as conceived by Campbell, would bring about unity to the churches, based on the New Testament. To this idea he devoted his life and resources.

## Conclusion

The hymnal became a major source of income for Campbell. He used the profits for educating ministerial students at Bethany College. His main objection to other compilers of hymn books was they didn't use the profits for the benefit of the brotherhood, and he feared division in the congregations over which hymnal to use.<sup>37</sup> He wrote, "The Christian hymn book, next to the Bible,...wields the largest and mightiest formative influences upon young or old, upon the saint and sinner, of any book in the world."<sup>38</sup> We agree with the assessment of Fitch, "If a man's 'creed' is a statement of his beliefs, Alexander Campbell, the believer, had a creed; and his hymnal is a testimony of that faith."<sup>39</sup>

In the *Chalice Hymnal*, issued by the Disciples of Christ in 1995, Alexander Campbell gets his due. David L. Edwards adapted Campbell's words in a beautiful communion hymn and affir-

mation so that his legacy will live on in the minds and hearts of another generation.

You my friend, a stranger once, do now  
belong to heaven.  
Once far away, you are brought home into  
God's family.  
"When you do this, remember me."

Now my Lord is also yours, my people are  
your own;  
embraced together in God's arms, I enfold  
you now in mine.  
"When you do this, remember me."

All your sorrows shall be mine, your joy  
shall be my joy;  
indebted to God's love in Christ, we die  
and reign with him.  
"When you do this, remember me."

So let us renew our faith, remembering our  
Lord;  
to our strong hope we will hold fast,  
unshaken to the end.  
"When you do this, remember me."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Campbell, "The Christian Psalmody—No. II," *Millennial Harbinger*, Third Series, 1 (February 1844), pp. 37-38.

<sup>31</sup> Campbell, "The Christian Psalmody—No. III," *Millennial Harbinger*, Third Series, 1 (July 1844), p. 290.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>33</sup> *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Preface, xvii. "There is a school called a 'singing school,' or a school devoted to 'sacred music,' composed of all the young gentlemen and ladies of the vicinity; many of whom neither fear God nor regard man. Their school is filled with all the mirth, folly, and vanity, that is in their hearts."

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, "Instrumental Music," *Millennial Harbinger*, Fourth Series, 1 (October 1851), pp. 581-582.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Cartwright said to a Boston preacher in 1852, "There's your old wooden god, the organ, bellowing up in the gallery, and a few dandified singers lead in the singing, and really do it all. The congregation won't sing, and when you pray, they sit instead of kneeling. We don't worship God in the west by proxy or substitution." Quoted in Ellen Jane Lorenz Porter, *Glory, Hallelujah! The Story of the Camp Meeting Spiritual* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Preface, iv, v.

<sup>37</sup> Campbell did have several rival publishers of hymnals during 1832 to 1882. See Claude E. Spencer, "The Campbell Hymn Book: A Bibliographical Study," *V Disciplina* 9:4 (January 1950), pp. 43-44.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, "Psalmody," *Millennial Harbinger*, Second Series, 7 (March 1843), p. 131.

<sup>39</sup> Fitch, "Alexander Campbell and the Hymnbook," *Christian Standard* 100:40 (October 2, 1965), p. 645.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel B. Merrick, ed. *Chalice Hymnal* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995), #400. Music and text adapted by David L. Edwards, music arranged by Jane Marshall.