

Abilene Christian University

Digital Commons @ ACU

Stone-Campbell Books

Stone-Campbell Resources

1948

The Report of the Commission on Restudy of the Disciples of Christ

Commission on Restudy of the Disciples of Christ

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Commission on Restudy of the Disciples of Christ, "The Report of the Commission on Restudy of the Disciples of Christ" (1948). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 148.
https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books/148

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Stone-Campbell Resources at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Stone-Campbell Books by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

The Report
of the
Commission on Restudy
of the Disciples of Christ

Authorized by
The International Convention
of the
Disciples of Christ
San Francisco, 1948

[[PRINTED
IN U.S.A.]]

Personnel of Commission

The Commission was created by the 1934 convention, but members were not appointed until the next convention.

The names marked "*" constitute the present membership. The service of the others has been terminated either by resignation or death.

ORIGINAL APPOINTEES

1935

*F. W. Burnham
*A. E. Cory
*C. E. Lemmon
*R. H. Miller
*E. S. Ames
*P. H. Welshimer
*W. E. Sweeney
*F. D. Kershner
*Homer W. Carpenter
*L. D. Anderson
*C. C. Morrison
*Wm. F. Rothenburger
Willard Shelton
George A. Campbell
Edwin Errett
Graham Frank
C. M. Chilton
A. W. Fortune
L. N. D. Wells
Edgar DeWitt Jones
H. C. Armstrong
George H. Stewart

1936

*W. E. Garrison
*Dean E. Walker

1939

*Claude E. Hill
*Robert S. Tuck

1942

*Virgil Elliott
*Stephen J. England
*Eugene C. Beach
*R. M. Bell
*James DeForest Murch
*G. Gerald Sias
*O. L. Shelton
*J. J. Whitehouse
*J. H. Dampier
Henry G. Harmon
Hugh B. Kilgour
M. E. Sadler
Orval Morgan

OFFICERS

F. D. Kershner, Chairman	1935-1943
R. H. Miller, Chairman	1943-1946
O. L. Shelton, Chairman	1946-1949
T. K. Smith, Vice-Chairman	1946-1949
Wm. F. Rothenburger, Secretary	1935-1949
Wm. F. Rothenburger, Treasurer	1935-1945
Dean E. Walker, Treasurer	1945-1949

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Personnel of Commission	3
Preface	7
Introduction	9
1946 Convention	11
1947 Convention	18
1948 Convention	21
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	28

Preface

Three successive annual reports of the Commission on Restudy of Disciples of Christ are published here under one cover. Demand for them in this form has grown out of a desire that the circle of this restudy should be greatly enlarged. Hope is entertained that the material may be useful as an index to the investigation already made and also, perhaps, of value as expressing the judgment of a diversified group of men who have found in this Commission a forum for free expression and increasing fellowship.

Back of the Reports lie a dozen years of association and study. The Commission met first in strangeness and tension. Members required introduction to other members. Numerous ideas of the nature of the work before them were advanced. Skepticism as to the value of the effort was freely expressed by those who seemed to agree on little else. Clashes of personalities had to be faced. Some issues found difficulty in gaining consideration. Other matters appeared to the consciousness of the Commissioners only after much mutual exploration and discovery. The fact that the Commission worked through this early period of tension to an understanding fellowship evidences the genius for unity inherent in our movement. Any group entering into such discussions should anticipate similar problems before constructive achievement.

Back of both the Reports and the study is a fundamental question. Just what is the Mission and the Witness of Disciples of Christ? It was found that the best approach to an answer to this question was through their history. Here agreements were concluded with substantial unanimity. It is agreed that as a matter of history our movement originated in a plea to Christians to unite by a restoration of the New Testament Church unto the conversion of the world to Christ. Tensions arise out of the different views of present positions, programs, and emphases in relation to this Mission and Witness. These tensions are serious. What seems very important to some, seems unimportant to others. What some consider essential to this Mission and Witness, others deem of minor importance or irrelevant.

These tensions cannot be classified in simple patterns. It would be erroneous to think of them as all pulling in the same direction.

They cannot be labeled "conservative—liberal"; "organized—independent," and the like. Some of the tensions may be placed within one of these categories. However, the Reports seek to affix no labels and to pass no judgments. The Commission has had one purpose in mind: to discover, sift, and report the essential facts in the problem. The agreement we report is on the fact of tensions, but we have not endeavored to pass judgment upon the divergent views out of which these tensions arise.

In the light of our experience as a Commission, however, we offer some suggestions. We have found that close fellowship has not blunted, but on the contrary has sharpened our understanding of each other, of our convictions, and of our knowledge of the problems we face. We have come to what Alexander Campbell called "an understanding distance" of one another. This is a necessary factor in a prelude to unity. Particular variant or diverse positions, drawn from the common holdings of Disciples can be held within a common fellowship, if we hold them for what they are—special or particular and not general to the Mission and Witness of Disciples of Christ.

In any case, much is to be gained by enlisting the whole body of Disciples in studies similar to that which has engaged the Commission. Meetings small enough to grant full exchange of information and conviction, and serious enough to demand careful preparation by the participants, free from *ex parte* sponsorship, are essential to significant results. Truth is found not in reiteration of our understandings in friendly audiences, so much as in submission to mutual criticism. Division among Disciples of Christ would weaken our testimony for the unity of the Church. We must be united ourselves, if our advocacy of Christian unity is to be taken seriously by other Christians.

Therefore, this pamphlet is issued in the hope that it may contribute to a resolution of the misunderstandings and tensions now hampering our work. It is our conviction that our agreements are larger than our differences, provided we are able to discern and value them in their proper perspectives. The Reports are sent to enlist our brethren in this task. We think the method of approach above outlined will bear fruit.

Introduction

The Commission on Restudy was authorized at the International Convention held in Des Moines, October, 1934, organized at the San Antonio Convention, October, 1935, and held its first discussion meeting in January, 1936, at Indianapolis.

The following resolution, which has given guidance to the Commission, was adopted at the Des Moines Convention:

"In view of the passion for unity which gave birth to the brotherhood of the Disciples of Christ; in view of the irenic spirit which characterized our early movement; in view of the many union movements arising in Protestant Christianity; in view of the need of an aroused passion for unity among ourselves, and in further view of the new frontiers and challenges which the world is giving to the church for a deeper spiritual interpretation of God and the Gospel, faced not only by Disciples of Christ but by all other communions;

"It is hereby recommended that after a century and a quarter of history, the convention, by its regularly constituted methods, appoint a commission to restudy the origin, history, slogans, methods, successes and failures of the movement of Disciples of Christ, and with the purpose of a more effective and more united program and a closer Christian fellowship among us."

The Commission has held three meetings annually, one of them for business during the International Convention. Two study meetings have been held each year in which papers carefully prepared have been submitted as a basis for critical analysis of the problems involved. The resultant discussions have been frank and comprehensive. Not infrequently serious differences in points of information and of understanding are brought to light. Upon disclosure of such differences, the Commission has re-committed the question to study at a subsequent time in the effort to arrive at a community of information and understanding. Only upon achieving substantially this common mind did the Commission attempt to formulate a report to the brotherhood. The only extensive report of discussions made by the Commission was in the SHANE QUARTERLY, published by the School of Religion, Butler University, which devoted the entire issue of April-July, 1941, to a number of representative papers read and discussed by the Commissioners over a period of several years.

As an indication of the seriousness with which the Commission has faced its task, and of the scope of the discussions in which it has engaged, the following is a list of subjects upon which papers have been presented:

Thomas Campbell; Walter Scott; Our Inheritance from the Scotch Baptists; The Contribution of the Disciples to the Present Status of Christian Unity; Toward a Better Understanding with the Church of Christ Group; The Relation of Organized Missions to Our Closer Unity; The Disciples Putting Christ in Religion; The History of Journalism Among the Disciples; Traditional Beliefs and Practices in the Light of Present-day Facts; The American Background of the Disciples; Mystical Conversion and the Disciples; Worship and Architecture Among the Disciples; The Disciples' Conception of Christian Unity; Holding Our Young People; The Call of Unity; Survey of Disciples' Contacts with the Baptists and the Federal Council; The Church's Message to the World; The Disciples' Conception of the Ministry; The Nature of the Church; The Church's Common Confession of Faith; The Sacraments of the Church; The Unity of Christendom in Relation to Existing Churches; The Autonomy of the Local Church (3 times); The United Church of Canada and the Disciples Organized Missions and Their Relation to the Unity of the Disciples; Relation of the Disciples to the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences and the World Council of Churches; The Relation of the Disciples to Future Union Movements; Christian Unity Conference Among the Disciples and the Church of Christ Group; Functions of Disciples' Agencies; The Significance of the Disciples of Christ; Social and Economic Sources of Our Divisions; Preserving Our Protestant Heritage; Roman Catholic Propaganda and Growth; Contrast Between the Congregational Centralized Forms of Church Government and the Future of Free Churches; Disciple Statistics on Ministers' Salaries, Budgets, etc.; Relation of Disciples to Madras; How Roomy Is the Disciples Fellowship?; The Co-operational Life and the Convention of the Disciples; Missions Among Disciples—Both Organized and Independent; Essential Factors in Unity; Unity of the Disciples in Relation to World Christianity; Just What Is the Plea?; Well-defined Groups Among Us; Fellowship, the Neglected Phase of Our Plea; Can the Disciples Have a Comprehensive Convention?; Is the Restoration Movement a Workable Approach to Unity?; How Can Divergencies Best Be Reconciled or Made Non-divisive?; Higher Education—Its Bearing on Disciple Unity; What Are the Disciples' Fundamental Bases of Unity and Tests of Fellowship?; Associational Freedom Among the Disciples; The Word "Brotherhood"—Views and Implications Leading to Unity; Brotherhood Causes and Organizations; Journalism and Our Solidarity; The Brotherhood and Interdenominational Movements; The Proposed Volume on the Studies and Findings of the Commission; The Ministry—Enlistment, Training and Placement; Conventions—Their Place in the Brotherhood Life.

1946 Convention

I. 1946—REPORT OF THE COMMISSION COLUMBUS CONVENTION

Our Commission has at various times reported to the convention that we were actively engaged in the task committed to us and has recommended that our work be continued. But we have not regarded it as opportune to report specific results. However, we believe that, at this time, it will be helpful to the brotherhood and to our work as a Commission to set forth the matters which we have found to be the chief causes of unrest and dissension among our people. This we do without any expression of opinion, but simply as an objective and impartial statement of fact. We find that the chief causes of unrest in our brotherhood center around the following differences:

A. DENOMINATION OR MOVEMENT? It is agreed that in our inception we were a movement rather than a denomination; that historically we have endeavored to avoid denominational status; and that to be content with occupying a status as one among many denominations is to abandon our attempt to realize unsectarian Christianity.

Some of us hold that we must therefore refuse to accept any denominational status, and rather seek to occupy non-partisan and ultimate ground in all points of faith and order.

Others hold that we are compelled by the existing order of Protestant denominationalism to be a denomination, while at the same time testifying against denominationalism and exploring all possibilities of finding common ground on which all Christians may stand.

Still others, in the judgment of this commission few in number, hold that we have in the processes of history become a denomination, possessing peculiarities and identity in a manner similar to the denominations round about us.

B. LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY. We are agreed that from the beginning we have emphasized the autonomy of the local church.

Some among us hold that there is a tendency on the part of agencies and conventions to assume and to exercise authority over the local churches.

Others interpret the utterances and policies of the agencies and conventions as, in the main, the exercise of the responsibility of leadership which the churches desire them to undertake and to which the churches respond voluntarily with no sense of constraint by official authority.

C. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH. We are agreed that the New Testament affords the sufficient basis and norm of evangelism and church life. But there are differences of understanding at certain points as to what the New Testament requires. The differences arise largely from two considerations. The first has to do with the bearing of the New Testament upon the structure of the local church.

Some among us find in the New Testament the divinely authoritative pattern for the form and organization of the local church, and affirm that, historically, we set out to restore this New Testament pattern and that our local churches essentially represent its restoration.

Others among us recognize in the New Testament certain *principles* which inherently belong to any local church that calls itself Christian, but they do not find any evidence that the particular *forms* of organization or procedure prevailing in the primitive church, were authoritatively prescribed as a pattern which the Christian church is obligated to reproduce in detail, everywhere and throughout all time.

The second consideration has to do with the relations among local churches. We are agreed that the New Testament distinctly discloses a clear conception of the *Church* as distinguished from the local churches and a profound sense of interdependence among all the churches. But the New Testament gives no clear evidence of an organization of local churches in a general or connexional relationship. From these facts two alternative conclusions are drawn.

Some believe that our churches would therefore deviate from the New Testament norm should they (1) recognize such a relationship, or (2) consent to create a recognized agency as their exclusive instrument for the united administration of their missionary or benevolent enterprises, or (3) create a single representative convention or council for the formation and expression of their united convictions on (a) matters which concern the church and their agencies, or (b) our witness to Christian unity, or (c) our witness to the Gospel in relation to the moral and human problems of our

time. But they would leave to the brethren freedom to create any number of agencies for the expression of any or all of these above ends, as may seem to them expedient.

Others believe that the absence of an authoritative pattern leaves the churches free, and their relation to each other in the *Church* renders it their duty, (a) to create such agencies or organs as may be needed in order unitedly to carry on their missionary and benevolent enterprises and their plea for Christian unity in the most adequate and responsible manner; and (b) to constitute a genuinely representative convention or council through which the united voice of the brotherhood may be expressed—provided, always, that such agencies or organs and such convention or council shall not be clothed with nor allowed to assume any independent authority over the churches, but shall operate only under the consent of the churches whose rightful duty it is to participate in the democratic process by which their consent is enlisted and expressed.

D. CONVENTIONS. We are agreed that our conventions have a highly important place in the life of our churches. As occasions for fellowship and witness-bearing, they have served to enlarge the vision of the local churches by exchange of views and experience and by keeping the churches conscious of belonging to one another. We are also agreed that our people have not yet found a type of convention which fully satisfies their tradition, their convictions, and their sense of obligation to give united expression to the interests of Christ's kingdom. The dissatisfaction which we all share has, however, in recent years, found expression in the holding of other conventions sponsored by those who desire to protest against certain features of the existing International Convention, as well as to exemplify, by contrast, a convention of a different type.

This development is an expression of the dissatisfaction and is also a cause of tension and of possible peril to the unity of our brotherhood. We believe that the sponsors of the North American Convention deplore what seemed to them, in good conscience, the necessity of holding another type of assemblage. In view of the dissatisfaction, not only on the part of dissenters, but of supporters also, it seems evident that the brotherhood has a clear call to provide itself with a convention that will unite our people wholeheartedly, instead of tending to divide them.

E. UNITY AND RESTORATION. We are agreed that from our beginning we have cherished no purpose more steadfastly than to

exercise a potent influence on behalf of Christian unity. Our movement began under this impulsion, and the passion for the unity of the whole church has never been lost. We are agreed, however, that we stand in need of Christ's forgiveness that our witness on behalf of this great consummation has not been more consistently proclaimed and, especially, more appealingly exemplified. We are embarrassed in our testimony and humbled in our hearts by the divisions that have already occurred in our own fellowship, and by the present tensions which gave rise to the creation of our commission.

Our study of the history and ideals of our people has led us to the conclusion that a basic cause of our divisions and our more serious dissensions, both past and present, lies in a difference of understanding with respect to the fundamental purpose of our movement.

Our commission agrees that the two concepts of unity and restoration have been from the beginning, held together in a parity of mutual dependence. The fathers believed that they had discovered in the New Testament the pattern of the true church, that this pattern was authoritative for the Church of Christ in all time, and that Christian unity could be attained only by its restoration. Throughout our history this conception of our plea has persisted. During the past half century, however, in the thinking of a considerable section of our people, the ideals of union and restoration have tended to fall apart as two concepts that are not co-ordinate or mutually dependent. This, the commission believes, is a principal cause of the major dissensions which disturb us.

Some among us maintain that these two conceptions of union and restoration must be held together, essentially unchanged, in the form in which we traditionally conceived them. It is affirmed that Christian unity is possible only on the basis of the restoration of the primitive church in this form.

Others among us are content to abandon the concept of the restoration of the primitive church and center our emphasis upon union.

Still others believe that a new synthesis of these two concepts of unity and restoration is possible which would avoid, on the one hand, the too dogmatic claim that we alone have restored the New Testament church and, on the other hand, the indifferentism that regards the restoration concept as irrelevant to Christian unity.

F. BAPTISM. Our churches have from the beginning administered the ordinance of baptism by the immersion in water of a penitent believer. Our study discloses no appreciable tendency among our churches to abandon or modify this practice. It has also been our practice, in the case of unimmersed members of other churches who sought membership with us, to receive them only on condition of their acceptance of immersion. A considerable number of our churches have, however, modified our traditional procedure at this point by receiving such applicants into membership without raising the question of baptism. This practice, commonly called "open membership," is one of the causes of tension among us.

Some hold that, under the authority of Christ, we have no right to receive any who have not been Scripturally baptized, and that we are bound to apply this principle to the penitent believer and the unimmersed Christian without discrimination. It is maintained that any such discrimination is a surrender of the witness which we have been called to bear with respect to the Scriptural action of baptism.

Others hold that in making the distinction between a penitent believer and one who brings credentials from a sister church of Christ, they are acting under the authority of Christ. They believe that inasmuch as Christ has received such a person into the membership of His church, they would be disloyal to Christ in not recognizing the full status of such a person as a Christian, a member of the Church of Christ, and receiving him as such without rebaptism, unless he desires to be rebaptized.

Among those who hold this view and practice it, are many who testify that, instead of surrendering or weakening our witness to immersion, it enhances it.

G. IN FAITH, UNITY. Our brotherhood has from the beginning rested upon a broad basis. It represented a revolt against the divisive use of human creeds as terms of admittance into the church and as authoritatively bound upon its ministers and members. In place of such creeds, there was adopted a simple, Scriptural, and truly catholic creed, namely, faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and man's Saviour. A declaration of faith in the divine Lordship of Christ was the only confession required for membership in the Church or for ordination to the ministry. This faith represented not a belief about Him in terms of the historic creeds, but was a simple acceptance of the fact of His divinity and a spiritual and moral attitude toward Him. In our study of contemporary thought

among our people, we have found two tendencies in the matter of faith which are a cause of tension and a peril to our unity.

Some among us seem to have abandoned the theological implications in the simple confession of Christ, and have come to regard His Lordship chiefly and essentially in ethical terms. He is the supreme moral and spiritual leader of mankind, and the confession of faith in Him is essentially a decision to follow His way of life.

Others go to the other extreme and seem to confound faith with doctrine. They insist that the Lordship of Christ must be interpreted theologically, and that their particular interpretation must be made explicit in the confession as the basis of our fellowship and unity.

Thus the traditional simple formula of faith which was to guarantee our unity as a people is challenged from two sides. From one side, by those who would abandon its implicit theological connotation; from the other, by those who would make their own particular theological connotation explicit as a basis of unity. Between these two schools of thought the main body of our people continue to use the Scriptural confession without specific interpretation.

H. IN OPINIONS, LIBERTY. The breadth of our conception of unity on the basis of the Lordship of Christ left a large place for diversity in the realm of opinion—both as to creedal opinion and practical or procedural opinion. In this field, the fathers hoped that a common loyalty to Christ would produce such “Charity in all things” that disagreements and diversity of opinion would not impair the unity and complete fellowship of our churches. Our study of the past and the present has led us to the unhappy conclusion that we have, in practice, fallen far below their high hopes and the standard under which they summoned us to march together.

Our Commission is unanimous in affirming the soundness of the two principles of unity in faith and liberty in opinion. That these principles were wrong or mistaken is, to us, unthinkable. But the divisions that have already taken place, and the dissension that exists among us today, plainly call for a re-examination of the principles upon which our movement was launched and of the spirit in which we have proclaimed and exemplified them. Such a re-examination we have been making in the deliberations of our Commission.

CONCLUSION. In view of the situation as thus analyzed and summarized in this report, we recommend to the International Con-

vention that our Commission be continued in order that it may further explore the matters referred to herein and extend its studies into other areas in which the unity of our people may be threatened. We recommend also that the commission be authorized to incorporate the results of its study in an extended report, the precise nature and form of which would be determined by the commission in the light of its further study.

We also recommend, and invite a general and open discussion in our press, on our convention platforms and in the boards of our agencies, of the questions indicated in our present report, and any other questions relevant to our unity. We wish the brotherhood to know that the spirit of mutual consideration, respect and brotherly trust has drawn the members of our Commission, representing the diversities of opinion existing among us, into an exceedingly precious fellowship. It is our highest desire and our prayer that the spirit which characterizes the fellowship within our Commission might be spread throughout the entire brotherhood as it pursues the discussion of these matters to which we have given, and if so ordered, will continue to give, our best thought and devotion.

1947 Convention

II. 1947—REPORT OF THE COMMISSION BUFFALO CONVENTION

The Commission on Restudy of Disciples of Christ is gratified with the interest and discussion generated by its Report of 1946 to the International Convention. In the light of this discussion we believe that the statement stands as a factual description of convictions, opinions, and attitudes of Disciples of Christ.

Since the 1946 Report is concerned chiefly with points of difference, it would seem well here to record our belief that unity does not demand uniformity in all things. The Commission is conscious of an obligation to seek to develop a sense of fellowship and of community. Both by conviction and as a sense of strategy, the Commission is committed to a positive program of emphasis upon those things concerning which Disciples of Christ are agreed.

We find that the great body of Disciples agree that:

1. The acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is the sole affirmation of faith necessary to the fellowship of Christians.

2. The New Testament is the primary source of our knowledge concerning the will of God and the revelation of God in Christ, and is the authoritative Scripture by which the will of God is conveyed to men.

3. Each local church is, under Christ, a self-governing unit; that organizations and agencies are in no sense governing bodies but may be useful instruments in carrying on Christian work and in fostering and expressing fellowship; that likewise congregations and individuals have the inherent right to initiate and carry on Christian work through directly supported enterprises without breach of the wider fellowship; and that the unity of the whole church in faith, fellowship, and service is to be earnestly sought.

4. In the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ as the message of salvation to the affection and intelligence of men, we have found our largest unity. The Great Commission demands that to make this "one world" we must first make it God's world, by the universal acceptance of Christ as Saviour. This acceptance of Christ can be

attained only by the recovery of the apostolic passion for the proclamation of the message, regarding the method as incidental. "That the world may be saved" is our only hope of unity. The message of salvation in Christ is the only business of the Church.

5. The unity of Christians according to the program and prayer of our Lord, with Christ Himself the center of that unity, by the restoration of New Testament Christianity, is necessary to the realization of God's program for human redemption.

6. Their historical position has given them practical insight into the New Testament fellowship which they desire to share with the whole divided body of Christ.

In the light of this body of unifying principles and sentiments of faith and practice, the Commission has come to the conclusion that we ought to take courage, and address ourselves to active endeavors to magnify our unity and rally our people to ardent advocacy of these central agreements. *The Commission therefore proposes:*

1. That, recognizing that the unity of the Church must be maintained by constant care, all who occupy positions of trust in both congregation and general work, might well examine their work in the light of the above unifying center.

2. That we all seek opportunities of expressing our conviction that diversity of methods in Christian activities is no barrier to the fellowship of Christian men.

3. That we all magnify our agreement in belief of the Gospel—"in faith unity": here there must be unity; and all grant freedom in opinions and methods—"in opinions liberty": here there must be liberty; and in charity and Christian love each must seek to excel the other.

4. That, since the Word of God transmitted to us in the New Testament is of primary significance to the Church, we all give ourselves to a continuous study of the New Testament Church in respect to its origin and nature, its structure and function, its mission and hope.

In loyalty to Jesus Christ, we believe, lies the hope of unity for the whole Church of Christ. To accept, let alone advocate division, would be, we believe, supreme disloyalty to our Lord. To give ourselves to advocacy of unity as encompassed above is, we believe, our mission in loyalty to our Lord.

In Conclusion: The Commission, with deep concern for our fellowship and our mission, has prayed and worked that we might assist our people to solve some of the problems of our Christian life and witness. We are persuaded that we, as a people, should confess ourselves negligent in our development of the practice, the theory, and the propagation of the conviction which we have received from our fathers. The path we have found is not yet cut through the forest. It seems, however, to lie in the direction sought. We work not only for our immediate fellowship, but for the whole Church. Solution of our problems in these matters may be of much moment in the ultimate triumph of the Church over the ills of division. Should such be the desire of this Convention, the Commission stands ready to continue its exploration of ways to accomplish this end.

We submit this Report with the fervent prayer that God may use this work of our minds and hearts to the accomplishment of His will among men, approaching the throne of His grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1948 Convention

III. 1948—REPORT OF THE COMMISSION SAN FRANCISCO CONVENTION

The Commission on Restudy of Disciples of Christ, from an extended investigation and in profound conviction that the message and mission of the Churches of Christ has made a significant contribution to the recovery of the Church unto the conversion of the world, and has yet to make still more significant contribution to the same end, presents now a call to our brotherhood to a resurgent emphasis upon that message and mission.

Introduction. We desire to preface this report by directing attention to the essential relation between the Reports of 1946 and 1947. The former summarized the experience of Disciples in the historical development of our basic commitments. In this history we observed that in implementing these commitments, we have developed divergencies in attitude and program which have been allowed to overshadow our agreements concerning the center of our endeavors. This is to say that we have failed to realize in our history the possibilities in our ideals. For this failure, we are penitent. And, confident of human ability to profit by past mistakes—nay, sins—we express ourselves as confident of God's grace in extending to us a time of restitution.

The report of 1947 analyzed our brotherhood from the vantage point of doctrine. Here we found agreements striking and significant. We are conscious of differences, in this doctrinal sphere, of emphasis, of implication, and of application. Nevertheless, these differences do not invalidate the basic doctrines, nor do they break the underlying body of agreement. This is to say that we are at present experiencing from our history less profit than we ought.

It will be noted, upon examination of these two reports, that they are so meshed together that each supplements the other. While we deplore our failures, we are profoundly grateful to our heavenly Father for the possession of doctrine through which we may be able to write a better history.

OUR PRESENT PROBLEMS

The Commission would record its judgment that the most immediate problems requiring our attention in order to the preservation and development of our unity may be reduced to the following statements:

Our first major problem is to distinguish carefully the nature of our agreements and differences.

We are forced to recognize in the analyses of 1946 and 1947, that our differences deal with matters of relative emphasis, and our agreements with matters of basic importance. The differences lie in the realm of history, of theology, of application of principles to the problems of the church, of methods in labor and co-operation. The agreements are in the area of fact, of faith, and of doctrine. The differences touch only the periphery of the Christian life, but the agreements are at its center.

We hold that the divisive differences are obstacles to be overcome, while our agreements are foundations on which to build. These agreements speak of the person of Jesus Christ, confession of whom as Son of God, Lord and Saviour, is the sole affirmation of faith necessary to the fellowship of Christians; of the definitive place which the New Testament holds in our personal religious lives and in the work of the Church; of the Church itself as Christ's body, making a reality on earth of the fellowship of those who are Christ's; of the unfinished business before the Church in the persons of those who have not heard or have not heeded the Gospel of Christ; and of the absolute necessity of unity among Christians as a condition to the answer to Christ's prayer that the world may believe. These matters of agreement are neither few nor trivial. They lie at the center of the faith that constitutes us a people, and a people of God.

Our second major problem is to discover, maintain and enjoy fellowship.

The discord, hatred and bitterness which evidences the alienation of this age from God, the desolation of this present world, would seem to be warning enough that God abandons to their destruction those who live in strife. We would, therefore, that our brethren seize quickly upon whatever fellowship we may have, that by cultivation we may enrich it; and that under the healing rays of the light of Christ it may be purified; so that we may exemplify the reconciled community of Him whose ministry was the breaking of the walls of partition among men.

Fellowship among Christians is based on the relation they sustain to Christ. It is, therefore, personal, not organizational; religious—personal commitment to Christ—not theological; moral, not legal. The sole element of constraint is the love of Christ. Nothing must be permitted to obscure this high view of fellowship. At the same time, we may rightly appropriate all practical means of expressing this fellowship. Among such means we may note the various agencies for Christian work; direct participation by the local church in work beyond its own community; and attempts to make Christianity “one community” in fact, such as the “ecumenical movement.” Each such activity may be interpreted on a sub-personal level, and so be evil; each may express an extension to personality, and so be Christian.

Our third major problem lies in educating our people to the realization, intellectually and practically, of the nature of our movement.

We cannot think of our brotherhood as a sect, but think of it rather as a demonstration of that unity to which Christ has called His whole Church. The historic distinctiveness of our people is not of our will, but has been made necessary in order that we may appropriate unto salvation the instruments of Christ’s appointment for His Church. To these appointments, of belief, of ordinance, of doctrine, of polity, we lay no exclusive claim. Within these appointments we seek the unity of His Church and the salvation of men.

When we plead for the unity of the Church, it is not alone unity for unity’s sake; when we plead for the Good Confession of Christ as the sole creedal requirement, it is not merely for the abolition of human creeds; but this plea for unity in faith is in order that Christ may be unobscured and that the world may believe in Him, and be saved.

We are therefore persuaded that at no time has the demand been more imperative than now for a demonstration of the sufficiency and catholicity of the New Testament Church as the divine agent in human redemption.

WE THEREFORE SOUND A CALL TO ALL DISCIPLES

THAT we sink into oblivion the particularisms which divide us as a people, and rally ourselves to a supreme and common effort for the realization of Christian unity, beginning each one with himself. Let each examine himself in the light of his relationship to

Christ, as the center of that unity. Let each examine himself in respect to the teachings of the New Testament in his personal and corporate life. Let each one hear again the Gospel, and judge again his attitudes and sentiments, his programs and procedures, his thoughts and deeds—whether these things flow from the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. Let us be no less concerned that our co-operative life shall relate itself to these same standards. Let each agency and congregation examine its stewardship, and so form and declare its policies and activities that all may rejoice in their manifest loyalty to the spirit and mandate of Christ's New Covenant.

THAT we evaluate our differences by treating them for what they really are, opinions which are subjects for free and open discussion, and which all are free to accept or to reject, answering only to Christ. To make these divergences from our central agreements more than this is to fall into the sin of sectarianism, and by over-valuing, actually devalue the silences of the Bible wherein we find liberty.

THAT we rise to a new sense of our mission to the Church and our mission to the world, noting their essential interdependence; for only if the Churches hear our Lord's prayer for unity may we expect the world to believe. Let us remember the holy purpose calling our movement into existence—the nations must wait in ignorance and destruction for Christians to unite. How can we today, standing under the impending world tragedy, do less than throw ourselves unreservedly into the one divinely commissioned business of the Church—and, using whatever means and methods may commend themselves to our Christian intelligence, seek to reach all this generation's unreached with the Gospel of our blessed Lord: We mean not alone the first proclamation of the Gospel to those who have not heard—but the continued preaching to those who have not heeded. We would reach with the Gospel those in the Church "who having ears, hear not"; we would reach the architects of our social order; we would reach all the people in all affairs, that they may all pass under the judgment of the Gospel. Let us not be pre-occupied with the dangers of disunity, but lift our eyes from the deadly concern we have for our particularistic preferences, and take to a desperate world the Gospel of its redemption! We live in this hour as men on borrowed time. Can we expend it, under God, on less than the most urgent work? Cannot we as a people point the way by our agreements to the unity of a Church resurgent, consecrated only to the Gospel of reconciliation with God through Christ

Jesus, furnished in the grace of God with power to win the whole world? To do less, as we judge, is to forfeit our heritage as Disciples; nay, is to be found false stewards of the mystery of the faith.

In a time of sectarian strife, we were called into being as a people to bear witness to the unity of the Church without which its divine task could not be accomplished. Now again in a critical time of confusion we see the Church recognizing the impotency of division and seeking the power of unity. The Church will hear us now, and be restored to her might, if we but give clear voice to that plea to "unite for the conversion of the world." This is the dynamic of our mission.

We close with a fervent prayer, that God may grant us the grace of His Providence that our concern for lost men may so burden our souls that we shall find no rest until the Church is united for the world's redemption, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament.

Conclusion

The Commission has found rich reward in the apparently universal acceptance of these reports as given annually, and now presents them in this booklet in the hope that they may find widespread use as the basis for study and discussion. In the *Preface* the Commission states that it has found increasing understanding and fellowship as its members have grappled with the tensions and problems herein set forth. Any group will need, as did the Commission, to take time for serious and constructive consideration to the end that beneficial results may be achieved. "Any group entering into such discussions should anticipate similar problems," as we have pointed out in the *Preface*.

The Commission suggests the following avenues through which study and discussion groups may be organized and developed: Study group within a church, Ministerial Associations, State Ministers' Meetings, Conventions, Colleges and Seminaries, Fellowships of study on voluntary basis, Conferences, Rallies, and similar groups. The Commission suggests that discussion groups be well planned, and thoroughly prepared. Constructive results will lie in discussion, understanding, and presentation of various views.

The Commission calls attention to emphasis in the reports on the principle of autonomy of the local church, in matters of policy and method, and urges that, in the interest of unity, agencies and organizations serving the churches, refrain from practices and attitudes which cause dissension and threaten to divide the Brotherhood, and address themselves "to active endeavors to magnify our unity and rally our people to ardent advocacy of these central agreements."

We would point out that from the beginning of our movement, we have stressed the restoration of New Testament Christianity to the end that Christ's followers may be one, that the world may be saved. New Testament Christianity, however, involves two features: first, the Gospel and, second, the Church. The Gospel preceded the Church which was called into existence in order to proclaim it. Jesus styles His way of life as the way of the Divine Agape (Christian Love), or, as it is best rendered in English, "intelligent good will." It is right that we should seek to restore the New Testament Church, but it is equally important that we should restore the

New Testament Gospel. We must insist upon the restoration of the Gospel along with the church, the instrument of its proclamation.

The Commission has recognized certain basic principles which it believes would be helpful. The following are quoted from our several reports to illustrate these principles. We have kept within "understanding distance" of one another. "We have not endeavored to pass judgment upon the divergent views out of which these tensions arise." "It would seem well here to record our belief that unity does not demand uniformity in all things." "In the light of this body of unifying principles and sentiments of faith and practice, the Commission has come to the conclusion that we ought . . . to magnify our unity." "To accept, let alone advocate division, would be, we believe, supreme disloyalty to our Lord." "We have developed divergencies in attitude and program which have been allowed to overshadow our agreements concerning the center of our endeavors." "These differences do not invalidate the basic doctrines, nor do they break the underlying body of agreement." "Our differences deal with matters of relative emphasis, and our agreements with matters of basic importance." "We would that our brethren seize quickly upon whatever fellowship we may have, that by cultivation we may enrich it." These statements, which indicate the spirit running like a thread through Reports formulated over a period of three years, and coming out of discussions running over a dozen years, ought to provide the underlying spirit for all study and fellowship.

Finally, the Commission would cite its own experience as a testimony to the great good that can come from serious and constructive discussion of the tensions and problems that are among us, and express the prayerful hope that comparable good may come to any group, small or large, which may be guided by this booklet for the sake of the movement to which we give our devotion.

Bibliography

- Abbott, B. A., *The Disciples: An Interpretation*
Ainslie, Peter, *The Message of the Disciples for the Union of the Church*
Aylesworth, N. J., *Moral and Spiritual Aspects of Baptism*
Baxter, William, *Life of Walter Scott*
Briney, J. B., *The Form of Baptism*
Brown, A., *Conversion to God*
Campbell, A., *Christian Baptism*
Campbell, A., *The Christian System*
Campbell, A., *Debate with Owen*
Campbell, A., *Debate with Purcell*
Campbell, A., *Debate with Rice*
Campbell, A., *Essay on Regeneration*
Campbell, T., *Declaration and Address*
England, Stephen J., *The Disciples*
Errett, I., *Our Position*
Fortune, A. W., *Origin and Development of the Disciples of Christ*
Franklin, J. and Headington, *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*
Garrison, J. H., *The Reformation of the Nineteenth Century*
Garrison, W. E. and DeGroot, A. T., *The Disciples of Christ*
Garrison, W. E., *Whence and Whither—The Disciples of Christ*
Gray, J., *Discipleship in the Church*
Goodnight, Cloyd and Stevenson, Dwight, *Home to Bethphage*
Green, F. M., *Life of James A. Garfield*
Hanna, W. H., *Thomas Campbell*
Hodgson, L., *Convictions*
Jennings, W. W., *Origin and Early History of the Disciples of Christ*
Kellems, Jesse, *Alexander Campbell and the Disciples*
Kershner, F. D., *Christian Baptism*
Kershner, F. D., *The Christian Union Overture*
Kershner, F. D., *How to Promote Christian Union*
Kershner, F. D., *The Religion of Christ*
Kershner, F. D., *Restoration Handbook*
King, Mrs. L. S., *Memoirs of David King*
Lamar, J. S., *First Principles and Perfection*
Lamar, J. S., *Memoirs of Isaac Errett*
Milligan, R., *Reason and Revelation*
Milligan, R., *Scheme of Redemption*
Moore, W. T., *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*
Morrison, C. C., *The Meaning of Baptism*
Oliver, L., *New Testament Christianity*
Phillips, T. W., *The Church of Christ*
Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*

Robinson, William, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*
 Robinson, W., *What the Churches of Christ Stand For*
 Rogers, J., *Biography of J. T. Johnson*
 Rogers, Samuel, *Autobiography*
 Rogers, W. C., *Recollections of Men of Faith*
 Rotherham, J. B., *Christian Ministry*
 Scott, W., *The Messiahship*
 Snodgrass, R. C., *That for Which We Stand*
 Stevenson, D. E., *Walter Scott: Voice of the Golden Oracle*
 Stone, B. W., *Autobiography*
 Tyler, B. B., *Concerning the Disciples*
 Tyler, B. B., *History of the Disciples of Christ*
 Walker, D. E., *Adventuring Toward Christian Unity*
 Walker, W. R., *A Functioning Eldership*
 Walker, W. R., *A Ministering Ministry*
 Ware, C. C., *Life of Barton Warren Stone*
 Welshimer, P. H., *Concerning the Disciples*
 Welshimer, P. H., *Facts Concerning the New Testament Church*
 West, Fred, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Theology*
 Williams, J. A., *Life of Elder John Smith*
 Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Pres-
 bytery
 Shane Quarterly, April-July, 1941

World Conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne, 1927. Statements received from churches on the report of the Edinburgh Conference (Second series). Issued by the Continuation Committee, December, 1940.

Churches of Christ. Great Britain and Ireland. Reports of the World Conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne, Aug. 3-21, 1927. Together with the reply prepared by the Union Committee and the Special Committee . . . passed by the Annual Conference held at Wigan, Aug. 5-8, 1929.

