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### Who Are The Christian Churches And What Do We Believe?

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***Who Are The Christian Churches***

AND

***What Do We Believe?***

*Cyaddor*



**R. FREDERICK WEST**

***and***

**WILLIAM GARRETT WEST**

**Who Are The Christian Churches  
And What Do We Believe?**

*Given Return to*

*James R. Crockett -  
Christian Church*

By

R. FREDERICK WEST

*and*

WILLIAM GARRETT WEST

1956

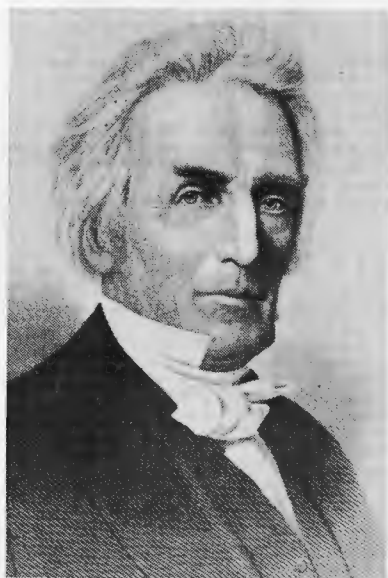
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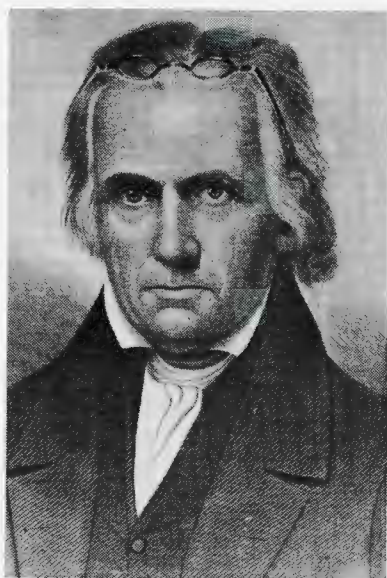
by

William Garrett West

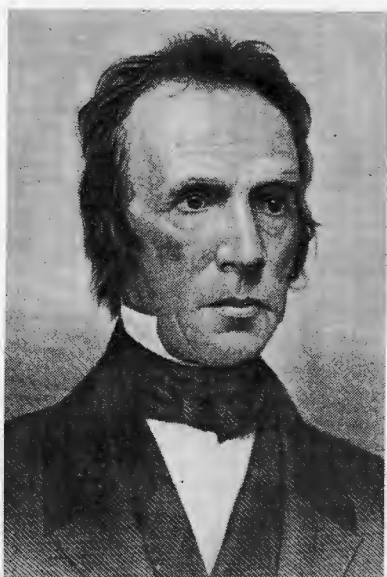
## OUTSTANDING EARLY LEADERS



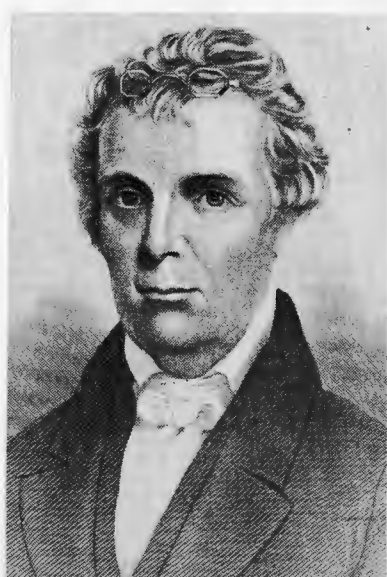
ALEXANDER CAMPBELL  
1788 — 1866



THOMAS CAMPBELL  
1763 — 1854



WALTER SCOTT  
1796 — 1861



BARTON W. STONE  
1772 — 1844



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

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Dr. William Garrett West has been Minister of the First Christian Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee since 1948. He served five years as Special Lecturer in Homiletics and Public Speaking at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* published by the Forrest Reed Publication Fund of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee in 1954.

He has received the following degrees: B. A., Lynchburg College 1937; B. D., Yale, 1940; S. T. M., Yale, 1944; Ph.D., Yale, 1949.

## INDEX

1. Who Are We?.....	<i>Preface</i> 7
2. Our Origin and History.....	9
3. Organizational Growth .....	17
4. Main Streams and Branches.....	18
5. The New Age and Hope.....	19
6. What Do We Believe and Practice?.....	26
The Bible .....	27
Jesus Christ .....	27
Unity of All Christians.....	28
The Liberty of All Christians.....	29
The Two Ordinances .....	31
Baptism .....	31
The Lord's Supper Weekly.....	33
7. Your Invitation .....	34

# P R E F A C E

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## WHO ARE WE?

Who are the "Christian Churches" or the "Disciples of Christ"? What are our main stream and branch trends? And what do we offer our generation? This pamphlet seeks to answer these questions for laymen and others who need a short sketch.

It attempts to answer such questions as these: What is the origin of our churches and our main traditions? What are our weaknesses and strength? And what do we believe? Do we offer a unique history, mission, and message for our day? And are we in line with the World Council of Churches and the need for its universal Christian hope, faith, and witness?

The "Christian Churches" or the "Disciples of Christ" are well known in parts of the U.S.A. In other areas we are little known. Our movement is often identified with other Protestant groups. This confusion comes partly from similar sounding titles, slogans, and "primitive gospel" emphasis. The outsider is all the more confused by a variety of differences among local churches of this movement even within the same city, county, or state. The spirit of these local churches may vary; their forms of worship, preaching, beliefs, and practices often differ as widely as their spirit.

In the United States, the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ are best known today among other churches through some of our outstanding leaders. These names are known through their interdenominational spirit and interests. Among these 20th century names, for example, are: Peter Ainslie, Herbert L. Willett, C. C. Morrison, W. E. Garrison, Jesse M. Bader, Harold E. Fey, Edgar DeWitt Jones, Riley B. Montgomery, Jack Finegan, Rosa Page Welch, Gaines M. Cook, Mrs. James D. Wyker, George W. Buckner, Perry E. Gresham, M. E. Sadler, Robert Tobias, Roy G. Ross, Samuel Guy Inman, Searle Bates, A. Dale Fiers, Lin D. Cartwright and Hampton Adams. In England, the best known is Principal William Robinson; in Australia, Principal A. L. Haddon, and in Canada, Oliver W. McCully.



The term "Christian Churches" or the "Disciples of Christ" is used throughout this work. This dual title is consistent with the history and this annotation may help the person who is now introduced to this religious communion for the first time. Other terms often used within this movement are: "The Brotherhood," and "our people." "Churches of Christ" is a term usually, but not always or exclusively, used by the more conservative wing of the movement. The "Christian Church" is widely used to name the entire movement as a whole, including its extreme branches.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The last two issues of the *Yearbook of the Disciples of Christ* use "Christian Churches" in parentheses. Certainly the vast majority of the local churches over the country are called Christian Churches. Perhaps four-fifths are named Christian Churches. However, in Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, they are designated as "Churches of Christ."

# Who Are the Christian Churches and What Do We Believe?

## ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The members of the "Christian Churches" in America are usually called the "Disciples of Christ." In some areas we are known as "Churches of Christ." We number about 1,800,000 members in the U. S. and Canada. Often we are wrongly confused with another body called "the Churches of Christ" which do not use instrumental music in their services. Another false idea regarding us is that we hold to baptismal regeneration — a belief that baptism into water has some almost magical effect on the person baptized.

This Christian Church or Disciples of Christ movement is best known today for its main concern for the unity of all Christendom under Christ. It is also generally noted for its weekly observance of the Lord's Supper; its emphasis upon Christian liberty of individuals and local congregations, its slogan of "no creed but Christ"; its practice of immersion; and its Christ-centered emphasis upon the New Testament for its rule of faith, order, and worship.

## Our Origin

But to understand the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ, we must trace our beginnings on American soil. These churches were seeded in strong personalities and rooted in movements urging Christian unity on a simple New Testament basis. We began about 150 years ago, and we largely came from Methodists in Virginia and North Carolina; Presbyterians in Kentucky and what is now West Virginia; and Baptists in New England and on the western frontier. In addition, large numbers were converts on the 19th century American frontier. The "big names" in the early movement were Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott.

## The O'Kelly-Haggard Movement

One movement arose in Virginia when James O'Kelly, Rice Haggard, and other Methodists in that state rebelled against the authority of Bishop Asbury in 1792. A year later, they organized the "Republican Methodist Church." Several months later, meeting in Surrey County, Virginia, they adopted as their name "The Christian Church." Taking the Bible as their creed, their main dissent from the Methodist Church was based on their belief that "primitive church government" was a republic by nature. Many Christian Churches in Virginia and

North Carolina originated from this movement. Some of them later joined forces with the people associated with Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and with Barton W. Stone. Others finally united with the Congregationalists in 1931.

### **The Christian Connection Movement**

Another movement began in New England when two young men revolted against Calvinism in the Baptist Churches there. One was Elias Smith, a Baptist who was born in 1769 in Lyme, Connecticut, but who grew up on the frontier in Vermont. The other was Abner Jones. He was born in 1772 in Royalton, Massachusetts. Like Smith he also spent his boyhood in Vermont. Both men renounced Calvinism and sought to abandon existing "ecclesiastical systems." They tried to establish a simpler faith and practice of the New Testament. Smith and Jones worked together and soon dozens of "Christian" churches, resulting from their work, sprang up in New England.

### **The Stone Movement**

Still another movement of even greater significance originated in Kentucky. Barton W. Stone, who was born in 1772 at Port Tobacco, Maryland, was its primary leader. Stone received his education in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, and at David Caldwell's famous "log" college which was located near the present city of Greensboro, North Carolina. Ordained to the Presbyterian ministry, he later followed the route of Daniel Boone's "wilderness trail" to the West and eventually accepted pastorates at Concord and Cane Ridge, Kentucky. With a few fellow Presbyterian ministers who wanted to escape from an iron-clad type of Calvinism, Stone withdrew from the jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky.

Stone and his fellow ministers, under suspension from the synod, organized an independent Springfield Presbytery in 1803. But less than a year later in 1804, they dissolved the Presbytery they had created. They published a "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery" in which they argued for more lay rule in church matters, a firmer reliance on the Bible as a guide, and union with the "Body of Christ" at large. They adopted the name "Christian" at the suggestion of Rice Haggard<sup>1</sup> who had come to Kentucky from Vir-

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<sup>1</sup>In the archives of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee, a recently discovered pamphlet written by Haggard may be found. The title is, "An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name." The pamphlet not only defends the exclusive use of the name Christian, but also attacks the pride which promotes a plurality of competing churches. The pamphlet pleads for primitive Christianity as a basis of Christian unity.



THE CANE RIDGE MEETING HOUSE IN KENTUCKY  
*Where Barton W. Stone began his ministry.*



ginia. The movement spread rapidly. It thrived especially in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee. Then it invaded Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa. Barton W. Stone published a magazine called the *Christian Messenger* in which he expressed his views and pleaded for unity of all of the followers of Christ in every church on a simple biblical basis.

Naturally, some Presbyterians opposed this "Stoneite" or "New-Light" schism. This led to tensions between the Presbyterians and Stone and his followers over doctrinal matters.

However, Stone, not much of a controversialist himself, realized that rigid Calvinism had softened in Kentucky by about 1825. And thereafter, he gave his primary emphasis to the unity of all the followers of Christ. *The basis of this unity, he always maintained, was neither doctrine nor dogmas, but love and good will.* Stone maintained that *no doctrines, however true, ought to be forced on the Christian believer.* This gentle and tolerant man *avored freedom of belief, not only in theory, but also in practice.*

He raised his voice for Christian unity in a day when few others believed in unity. The basis of unity, he taught, was Christian love. Christian unity, for him, was a "divine imperative" necessary for the conversion of the world; for effective Christian witnessing and for fulfilling the prayer of Jesus in the 17th Chapter of the Gospel of St. John, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one . . . ."\*

Stone was one of the first religious leaders in America not only to preach theoretical Christian unity, but to practice it in his own personal life as well as in contact with his fellow-Christians.

### **The Campbells, Father and Son**

The most significant other movement in behalf of Christian unity by restoring New Testament Christianity was led by Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander Campbell. Thomas Campbell was born in Ireland in 1763, and reared in the Church of England. He "schooled" at the University of Glasgow and trained for the ministry in the Seceder Divinity Hall. He became a Seceder Presbyterian minister. In 1804-05, he tried in vain to help unite the Seceder Synods of Ireland. (The union finally took place in 1820.) He came to the United States in 1807 and became the minister of several small Seceder Presbyterian Churches in Washington County, Pennsylvania.

\*John 17:20, 21.



On account of his catholicity of spirit, he invited some non-Presbyterians, who had no churches in that locality, to take part in the Communion services of his Seceder Presbyterian fellowship. He was officially accused of departing from the standards of his church, and because of the aroused feeling, he withdrew from the Seceder Synod.

Before Thomas Campbell left the Seceder Presbyterian ministry, a group of friends met with him to form the "Christian Association of Washington" on August 17, 1809. The group adopted the motto: "Where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent." And Thomas Campbell drew up an important document called the "Declaration and Address." Its most significant statement was that "the church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." The document stressed the "awful effects of division among Christians" and sounded an impassioned plea for unity. The address declared that divisions had been caused by neglect of the revealed will of God, by human opinions and the introduction of "human inventions into the faith and practice of the church." Thomas Campbell also held that faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to his word was all that was "absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his church." Also the address stated that the New Testament was a perfect constitution for the "worship, discipline and government of the New Testament Church."

Alexander Campbell arrived in America in 1809 and agreed with his father's position. When the regular Presbyterian Church rejected Thomas Campbell's application for admission, the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, organized itself into a church on May 4, 1811. A simple church was erected near Bethany, Virginia, called the Brush Run Church. Infant baptism and sprinkling were rejected by the group. This brought them close to the Baptists. The Brush Run Church was admitted into the Redstone Baptist Association in 1813.

Alexander Campbell married the daughter of a well-to-do farmer who deeded to him the farm which helped to give him considerable economic security and part of which later was donated to form the campus of Bethany College. He was a student who wanted to excel in his studies just as a modern American youth wishes to gain fame as a football player. He became a brilliant orator, writer, and scholar. In the next seventeen years, he engaged in a number of religious debates, travelled extensively, gave many addresses, and edited a religious periodical called *The Christian Baptist* which was followed by the *Millennial Harbinger*. In the former publication, Mr. Campbell attacked the authority of the clergy, the use of creeds, and "un-

scriptural organizations" such as synods, Bible societies, and Sunday Schools. He also gave much space to outlining a primitive order of faith, practice, and worship which he felt was the only one contained in the Bible. Many Baptist churches were won over to Alexander Campbell's views. However, many others regarded this young religious leader as a heretic.

Frontier preachers such as "Raccoon" John Smith, P. S. Fall, Jacob Creath, Sr., and Jacob Creath, Jr., added strength to the growing movement. These "reformers" were nick-named "Campbellites" — a term to which they objected, but which like most nick-names could not be killed. But the best known leader in this movement, allied with the Campbells, was Walter Scott.

### **Walter Scott, the Evangelist**

Walter Scott, originally a Presbyterian, was born in Edinburg in 1796. He came to New York in 1818 and later migrated to Pittsburgh. Scott developed the famous "five-finger" exercise to outline the steps of conversion. This formula is still repeated in some Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ to this day. The simple steps to conversion were these: (1) Faith, (2) Repentance, (3) Baptism, (4) Remission of sins, and (5) The gift of the Holy Spirit. Another step, Confession, was added later. Scott became a flaming evangelist on the Ohio frontier, greatly increasing the membership of the movement.

In 1829, Alexander Campbell won wide attention as a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention. In the same year he engaged in a debate with the famous British social reformer and skeptic, Robert Owen. Previously, Campbell had debated with the Reverend John Walker, a Seceder Presbyterian, in 1820, and with the Reverend William MacCalla, another Seceder Presbyterian, in 1823. Following his success in these contests, Campbell concluded that a "week's debating was worth a year's preaching."

### **Separation from the Baptists**

About this time a process of separation from the Baptists was taking place. This new group differed from the Baptists on some matters of faith and practice. The Campbells and their followers stressed the new covenant and the New Testament as the primary source of authority for Christians. They practiced baptism "for the remission of sins." They held that the Holy Spirit operated through the word alone in conversion; they rejected the Calvinistic idea held by some Baptists that Christ died only for the elect. They also re-

jected all creeds, held that any Christian could administer the Lord's Supper and Baptism, practiced the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper; denied a special call to the ministry, and rejected the idea of voting candidates into the church. It is hard to pin-point an exact date when those in the Campbellian movement separated from the Baptists, but 1830 is the date usually recognized when the split became final.

### **The Union of the Campbells and the Followers of Stone**

However, another far-reaching trend took place with the informal union of many of the followers of Barton W. Stone with those of the Campbells. Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell first met in 1824. They had many things in common, but they always had differences in spirit and message. Stone had begun editing a monthly periodical, *The Christian Messenger*, in which he pleaded for the unity of Christian people. Like Campbell, he felt that doctrinal systems were divisive. But unlike Campbell at this time, he found the primary basis of unity in Christian love at the heart of the New Testament. The point is not that Alexander Campbell rejected Christian love as a basis of unity, but he did not give it the primary emphasis Stone often gave. Campbell had developed a primitive pattern of Christianity which he interpreted from his reading of the New Testament, and he did not feel that Stone had fully grasped this system. For his part, Stone accepted the so-called primitive gospel pattern, but he did not make it as absolute and binding as Alexander Campbell did. In *The Christian Messenger*, which began in 1824, Barton W. Stone sounded the clarion call for unity. However, in his new periodical, *The Millennial Harbinger*, begun in 1830, Campbell was willing to explore the question of unity, but he was skeptical of Stone's orthodoxy on the primitive gospel pattern.

While Campbell called for discussion of the differences of the two groups, some of his followers were not inclined to wait to clarify the issues. Accordingly, in the state of Kentucky, growing sympathy between the two groups finally led to a meeting at Lexington, Kentucky, January 1, 1832. While the congregations in Lexington did not unite until 1835, the impetus was provided in this meeting for informal and unofficial mergers on the congregational level in other areas. News of this meeting did not make Alexander Campbell too happy because he felt that further discussion was necessary to resolve the differences. However, the spirit of unity was too potent to be stopped at this point. The followers of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone agreed to carry the message of unity to the individual churches since no convention or conference had binding authority to enforce unity



among the two groups. Barton W. Stone was present at the Lexington meeting, and urged the merger. His patient spirit, forbearance, and humility undoubtedly contributed greatly to the union.

This new movement of "combined movements" grew rapidly. The largest gains were made among the people moving into the new frontier states of the middle west. The movement failed to make gains in the conservative East. And today their greatest strength is in the following states: Indiana, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

Many of the Christians, especially in New England,<sup>1</sup> did not enter into the merger of the followers of Stone and of the Campbells. They suspected Alexander Campbell of being Calvinistic and orthodox. So far, few of our historians have recognized how hard Stone tried to bring this group and Alexander Campbell together. Stone failed in this attempt, however, but showed a great spirit of conciliation. Stone died in 1844. And in spite of the fact that his movement had brought great strength to the growing body of the Christians, his primary contributions were noted by few. One reason for this is that the ecumenical movement in America was still in its infancy during his lifetime. Another reason is that Stone died too soon to give leadership during this organizational period of the growing life of the Christians, or Disciples of Christ.

### **Campbell's Work**

Alexander Campbell, younger and more vigorous than Stone, made some of his finest achievements during the years following the merger. In 1839, he published *The Christian System* which was almost a full statement of his views on many religious subjects. During 1837 when the anti-Catholic agitation in our country was strong, Campbell defended Protestantism in a debate with the Roman Catholic Archbishop Purcell, of Cincinnati. Both men were urged to debate by the people who had heard their respective views in public lectures delivered in this city. The debate lasted eight days, marking the first time a Roman Catholic of this high rank had taken part in such a public discussion in this country. Campbell's last notable debate was in 1843 with a Presbyterian minister, N. L. Rice, in Lexington, Kentucky. The famous Henry Clay served as moderator of the debate which lasted eighteen days. This gave Campbell the chance to defend his views when he was at the zenith of his power. Four of the six

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<sup>1</sup>The majority of this group joined with the "Christian Connection" group in other parts of the country to unite with the Congregationalists in 1931.

propositions had to do with baptism and, doubtless, continued to center attention upon the "Christians" or the "Disciples" as primarily an "immersionist" body. Campbell defended the position of baptism by immersion only for the remission or forgiveness of past sins.

## OUR ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

### Organizational Life Begins

Beginning as an informal movement, the "Christians" or the "Disciples" soon found that their growing vitality could not be expressed alone in preaching, debates, pamphlets, and magazines. Alexander Campbell, who had a fine philosophy of education, soon saw the need for colleges to educate ministers and laymen and to make a Christian society. He, therefore, in 1840 gave the land, organized Bethany College, and served for over twenty years as its first president. Many other colleges were founded at later dates. For a long time ministers were educated in colleges, notably at Bethany. In 1865 the College of the Bible at Lexington was organized and trained many ministers.

While recognizing that the New Testament did not require organizations, the Christians or Disciples of Christ could not long escape the need to organize beyond the level of local congregations to make a fuller impact in the nation and world. The nineteenth century was "the great century," not only of missionary expansion, but of Christian faith in America expressed through many types of religious societies. Anti-slavery leagues and reform societies "mushroomed" during this period. Many of the Christians or Disciples of Christ decided that meetings of "messengers" might be held, if they did not assume authority to legislate. Alexander Campbell, who earlier had opposed such "popular schemes" now felt this need for more organizational cooperation. But since they had no organizations, he urged, for a time the support of a Baptist Missionary Society and also a Baptist Bible Society.

Organizational life began in this religious body when The American Christian Bible Society was organized by D. S. Burnet in 1845. At Cincinnati in 1849, a convention of 156 representatives from eleven states, formed the American Christian Missionary Society to do missionary work throughout the world. Alexander Campbell was elected its first president.

Many of the biblical literalists of the movement opposed any such organizational trends. They quoted Campbell's earlier *Christian Baptist* against all organized church conventions and societies. To those who still objected that missionary societies and conventions were



not approved by the New Testament, Campbell now replied that *in such matters of procedure the church is "left free and unshackled by any apostolic authority."* Criticism of conventions and societies finally died down only to flare up seriously later. Meanwhile, Alexander Campbell promoted the American Bible Society, Sunday School associations, the Evangelical Alliance, and other inter-denominational movements *as intermediate steps toward the ultimate goal of Christian unity.*

### **The Slavery Issue**

During the 1850's the slavery issue divided both the nation and many American churches. The Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians split officially. But the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ, who were nearly equal in numbers in the North and South, did not divide over the issue. All political and social questions were considered as belonging to the realm, not of necessary faith, but of opinion where people could differ without dividing the church.

Although the Christians or Disciples did not divide over slavery, they did divide after the Civil War over earlier issues which were left unsolved. Two main issues split the movement: the use of organs or musical instruments in worship services, and the acceptance of missionary societies.

## **MAIN STREAMS AND BRANCHES**

### **Division Over Instrumental Music In Worship**

Protestant opposition to instrumental music in public worship began with Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland during the early days of the 16th Century Reformation. It gave some trouble in New England churches in the 18th Century. But it seriously divided the Christians or Disciples of Christ beginning in the 1860's.

The position against the organ was stated by J. W. McGarvey who wrote that the organ was neither an aid to singing like a hymn book nor an accessory to the church building like a stove, but was a distinctively new element in public worship. All elements of public worship must be authorized in the New Testament. Since instrumental music was not authorized, therefore it was wrong to use it. Others felt that the New Testament did not attempt to enumerate all of the permissible elements of public worship. They believed that the New Testament did not try to outline an exact pattern of public worship. The debate over the "music" question was very bitter.

A violent storm also arose over missionary societies. Tolbert Fan-

ning in Nashville and Benjamin Franklin, editor of the *American Christian Review*, attacked the missionary societies. They sought in the New Testament a blueprint for all church procedures. Finding no societies mentioned in the New Testament, they rejected all missionary societies. This was a crucial period of controversy. The arguments and mounting bitterness between the groups finally resulted in the decision of the U. S. Census Bureau, in 1906, to place the disputants into two separate groups: "The Churches of Christ" and "The Disciples of Christ." The members of the conservative group are nick-named the "antis" (on account of their anti-organ and anti-organized missionary stand). And those within both the main stream and the smaller separated "antis," who oppose missionary and other organizations, are called the "non-progressives."

Through the influence of Isaac Errett, editor of the *Christian Standard*, a weekly paper, the tide was turned so that the larger group held to the more liberal position on the two above questions and other minor issues which helped to split the "Christian Churches" or the "Disciples of Christ." This division, from today's perspective, is a minor tragedy in the American religious scene. A movement which started out to unify Christians by restoring the model of the primitive church could not agree on all the details of the model. Thus, another wound of division was added to the body of Christ. Today, where the two groups exist side-by-side, outsiders still confuse them and often attribute the characteristics of one to the other.

### **Rapid Growth of the New Movement**

The Christians or the Disciples of Christ continued to grow rapidly so long as there was a 19th Century frontier. Frederick Jackson Turner, a distinguished American historian, marked the ending of the frontier at about 1890. The estimated membership of the Christians or Disciples of Christ was 400,000 in 1865; 641,000 in 1890; and 1,120,000 in 1900. Our religious communion out-ran the population increase in the country for a while as did the Baptists and Methodists. Later population shifts from rural to urban areas adversely affected the rate of growth among the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ, who were primarily a rural group.

## **THE NEW AGE AND HOPE**

### **Religious Journalism**

There were four notable constructive developments which took place in what W. E. Garrison, dean of our historians, calls the period of Renaissance, 1874-1909. One was a growth in religious journalism.

A new journal, *The Christian-Evangelist*, formed by the merger of two other periodicals, was most cooperative and helped to promote progressive policies. Many other papers also arose as the Disciples were prolific journalists.

### **Growth of Missionary Interest**

The second development led to a rebirth of missionary interest. The formation of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions in 1874, and the organization of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society in 1875 stimulated new interest in missions. The American Society began to encourage the expansion of churches in America, and in 1887 the National Benevolent Association was organized, sponsoring, at first, a single orphans' home, but later many institutions for children and old people. We now have sixteen such institutions.

### **Education**

Another important development came in the field of education. New educational institutions were founded. Others were strengthened. Following graduation from their own colleges, ministers in increasing numbers studied at many great universities and theological seminaries maintained by other religious communions or non-denominational boards. Here they came into contact with "historical criticism" and the study of the Bible through new methods. Since the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ had rooted their whole movement in the Bible, this was to have far-reaching results within the group which had held that there was a literal simple pattern of the church in the New Testament. Questions were raised which have not been settled to this date. Most great modern scholars of the Bible maintain that there was no single church pattern described in the New Testament. They stress that New Testament churches varied according to time, place, and local congregations.

Among the thirty-four colleges, universities, and seminaries of the Disciples of Christ or Christian Churches cooperating with the Board of Higher Education today are: Atlantic Christian College, Bethany College, Butler University, Chapman College, The College of the Bible, Culver-Stockton College, Disciples Divinity Houses at Chicago and Vanderbilt Universities, Drake University, Eureka College, Hiram College, Jarvis Christian College, Lynchburg College, Phillips University, Texas Christian University, Transylvania College, and William Woods College.

### **Inter-Church Cooperation**

Another very significant development was in the field of inter-church cooperation. Having preached Christian unity since their rise





ALEXANDER CAMPBELL MANSION  
BETHANY, WEST VIRGINIA

on American soil, the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ became interested early in the cooperative movement among all Christian bodies. Some opposed these unity ventures on the ground that it might imply that other churches were right. Such a position they felt would undercut the plan for restoring the New Testament pattern of the church as they saw it. They believed that this would destroy the distinctive mission of the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ. If they were robbed of their mission, they felt there would be no reason for their continued existence.

However, the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ elected representatives who helped to form the Federal Council of Churches in 1908. They also cooperated from the beginning with the Foreign Missions conference of North America in 1907 and the Home Missions Council in 1908. Ever since these dates, the main stream of the Christian or Disciples movement has been represented in some capacity at all important ecumenical or inter-church gatherings over the world. They are charter members of the National Council of the Churches of Christ organized in Cleveland in 1950. Official delegates were sent to the first World Council Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 and also to the second Assembly at Evanston in 1954. Many leaders in these cooperative movements of the followers of our Lord have come from the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ. This is one of the brightest chapters in our 150 years of history as a religious body.

### **Consolidation of Missionary Societies**

There is one other branch movement which cannot be omitted even in a brief survey. The consolidation of our missionary societies had been discussed as early as 1892, but it was not until 1919 that the home and foreign missionary societies, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and the Board of Relief and of Church Extension were merged to form the United Christian Missionary Society. The headquarters were in St. Louis until 1929 when they were moved to Indianapolis.

### **Opposition to Organized Missionary Work by the Independents**

Unfortunately, the Disciples of Christ or Christians were to embark upon another period of controversy. Some felt that the United Christian Missionary Society was not loyal to the "Old Plea" and was too "bureaucratic." The *Christian Standard*, formerly so cooperative under Isaac Errett, became the strongest critic of the new organization. So-called "independent" missionary societies or agencies arose. Some of them organized into the "Associated Free Agencies" with the organizing center in Cincinnati.



The "Free Agencies" founded a paper called *The Restoration Herald* which reported the work of the independent agencies and also attacked the United Christian Missionary Society and its supporters. Part of the controversy centered in whether or not missionaries in certain foreign fields were disloyal to "Our Plea" and had received Methodists and Presbyterians into church membership without immersing them. The North American Christian Convention appealed primarily to the so-called "independents" whose chief strength is centered in certain areas of Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, Eastern Tennessee, and Oregon. Not large in numbers, the "independents" are nevertheless scattered over the country and have been vigorously uncompromising in their positions. The bitterness caused by this controversy has dissipated the strength of many churches; and there are instances of persons, both laymen and ministers, who have entered other religious communions rather than be involved in the unfortunate struggle.

However, the "independents" have not been able to maintain unity among themselves. Many disagree over the extent to which they should denounce others engaged in Christian work. Some feel that unity must be preserved in spite of differences. Others feel that the maintenance of "independent principles" is more important than every other consideration including the unity of Christians. The bitterness and energy consumed in this fight could well have been channeled into building many new and stronger churches over the nation and world.

### **Later Religious Journalism**

The Christians or the Disciples of Christ have been strong journalists since their origin and, in 1909, through the generosity of a layman, R. A. Long, the stock of the Christian Publishing Company was purchased and the Christian Board of Publication was organized in St. Louis. All profits were given to the various cooperative missionary and educational enterprises of our religious communion or brotherhood. Control of the Standard Publishing Company passed from private ownership to the control of a non-profit foundation in January, 1955. Supplying materials to many of the independent churches, it likewise provides materials for some churches which support the United Christian Missionary Society.

The *World Call*, a monthly periodical, was established in 1919. Its purpose is summed up in the first issue which declared that it is "a channel through which the call of the world's supreme needs and the challenge of Christ's supreme leadership may reach the people of God." The magazine has achieved a high standard of excellence in

reporting the work of various missions, benevolences, church building, ecumenical, and educational enterprises. Concerned mainly with the Disciples of Christ, it also reports on the world outreach of the whole church.

### **The International Convention**

The International Convention of the Disciples of Christ grew out of the first General Convention held in Cincinnati, Ohio, October 1849. The present organization of the International Convention, which serves churches in the U. S. and Canada, began in 1917. The Convention recognizes the independence of the local church and does not seek to control congregations, missionary, educational, or benevolent agencies. Its function is advisory and it serves also as a coordinator of various commissions and committees appointed each year at the International Convention Assembly. Its major task is to organize the annual International Convention Assembly which is a kind of "religious town meeting" for the churches. Since no official delegates are appointed, the International Convention is a "mass meeting." The majority of our cooperative agencies hold membership in and make annual reports to the International Convention.

The Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ have state missionary societies which serve to coordinate the work within the state or nearby regions. These state societies have no legal control over the local churches; they exercise only advisory powers. More and more they are strengthening the local and national programs of our churches.

### **Emphasis on Laymen**

Since the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ have been loosely organized, laymen have been given a prominent place in the work of the church. A so-called "Official Board" is the governing body of each congregation and is elected in the democratic manner. This governing body is composed of deacons, elders, and deaconesses, who administer the finances of the individual church, select its pastor, and play a prominent role in the entire program. Deacons and elders share in the celebration of the Communion Service or the Lord's Supper. Women have a significant part in the missionary and welfare life of the church. Though occasionally, a dominant layman or small group of laymen may control a church autocratically, the place of laymen in the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ reinforces the Protestant belief in the "priesthood of all believers" and the equality of all Christians before God.

Here, then, is a brief sketch of the rise and growth of the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ in the U.S.A. It is a story which

reveals ups and downs, lights and shadows, with a central main stream and many off-shoot branches of the movement. But it is the story of a remarkable movement of men and ideas—the largest religious group indigenous to American soil. It is not a full-blown religious flower of America since no church can divorce itself entirely from the early beginnings of the first and second generation Christians, or the continuing historical Christian tradition. Nor is the movement simply an orthodox continuation of traditional Christianity. It has too many rebellious elements to be traditional. It is too close to other “left wing”<sup>1</sup> Protestant communions and too much a part of the rising tide of western American frontier democracy to be in the old tradition.

Today this movement contains at one extreme the humanist who tends to be man-centered. At the other extreme, it includes the legalistic fundamentalist, who believes that there is no salvation outside of his own literalistic interpretation of the Bible and who will don ecclesiastical boxing gloves to whip the millions of “denominationalists” who do not preach the “entire gospel.” Members in both of these groups are small. The main stream of Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ does not flow on extreme ground. It comprises the hundreds of thousands of folk who take pride in their church—wanting Christian love and peace with their religious neighbors—and above all, who feel that while their “founding fathers” may not have been right and adequate in every detail, nevertheless, they stressed some lasting and fresh insights which must be held and shared with priceless simplicity and conviction.

### **Place of the Church in the New Age**

This new religious movement, now beginning to achieve maturity in America, stresses five ideas: Freedom from traditional theology (which makes for adjustment to new trends of creative thinking in Christianity); a dependence upon the Bible as the norm of Christianity; (sometimes this is a legalistic norm but it is more often a creative guide for the new light which is yet to break forth from God's holy word); the exaltation of the Holy Communion service or Lord's Supper every week as a vital means of Christian growth; a strong belief and practice of individual and congregational liberty, and a burning passion for the unity of all of the children of the living God.

Even when the ideal of unity has centered in a fixed version of a

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<sup>1</sup>This is a specialized term used by church historians to describe the groups who differ from the established churches.



composite New Testament model church, the intense drive for voluntary unity and freedom has been dominant in the teaching and preaching of the church.

In our 20th century world, "Christian unity and cooperation" are a part of the religious "oxygen" we breathe. Certainly the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ have the same basic mission as all Christian communions; but in these ecumenical times, it is exciting to recall that this movement—"born and bred" in a brier patch—struggled toward freedom and the union of all Christian churches at its very inception.

Its mission is not done, however, and in the World Council of Churches—as yet imperfect and incomplete—the Christian Churches find a new challenge and a strange satisfaction in the blossoming of the flower of unity fondly cherished for a century and a half by "The Disciples."

### WHAT DO WE BELIEVE AND PRACTICE?

The central beliefs and practices of the Christian Churches are simple and few. They meet the most profound and lasting needs of all followers of Christ by stressing the lasting essentials of New Testament Christianity.

As a whole our movement is now in a new and revolutionary period of humble self-criticism and change. Most of us realize that the 20th century trends of Christendom are vastly different from those of the 19th century. Great changes and improvements in the spirit and cooperative fellowship of all major Christian bodies have already occurred.

Many of the lasting concerns of Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, Thomas and Alexander Campbell have been partially fulfilled in a growing common concern to return to the spirit, mind, and mission of Christ and His closest followers. So, we no longer stress "Our Plea" so much as a religious body, as we do *Christ's* plea as the Lord and Saviour of all mankind. We confess anew humbly and gratefully the slogan, "we are Christians only, but not the only Christians." We do not believe that we shall save the world, but we believe that *Christ* will save it from sin, fear, and human despair. And He calls our movement of free churches to share a vital witness to the lasting essentials of his mission and redemptive work on earth.

Our main beliefs as a movement of free churches are rooted in God's word, spoken and still speaking through the Bible; the supremacy of Jesus Christ in His church and in all things Christian; and the

union and liberty of all Christians in Christ. These principles will now be described briefly.

### **1. The Bible Alone As Our Rule and Guide**

We are a Bible-centered movement in Christ. As a whole, we believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God. It is our only supreme guide and authority for our faith and life in Christ. In theory, and at our best, we hold that "where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." In fact, most of us now see how prophetic Alexander Campbell was when he stressed that the most fierce disputes among Christians were about what "the Bible does *not* say rather than about what it *does* say."

Our heritage seeks to lift the Bible above all creeds and purely human traditions for the essentials of Christian faith, order, and life. Whereas some still use the Bible with legalism and literalism as though it were a static law book, the main stream of our movement views the Bible as a book of living principles through which God speaks to the conscience of those of humble Christ-like faith. The Bible, to us, is to be read, studied, and understood like any other book. Yet, the Bible is unlike other books. For through it, God reveals Himself, His Will and offers our salvation—supremely and superbly. The Bible is not a club or weapon to beat the sons of men over the head, but God's revelation to His Children to accept and share the Gospel of His Son and our Saviour.

For us, the central meaning and guide to understanding the Bible as a whole is Jesus Christ. In Him God is fully revealed and made flesh. And through Jesus Christ, the essentials of the Gospel, the Church, and Christ-like life are founded and made known. We hold, therefore, that Jesus Christ, His living spirit, mission and message are the main keys to unlock and interpret the Bible as a whole. And through Him, we learn what God really requires of His followers and church in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### **2. The Supremacy of Jesus Christ.**

Therefore, the central faith of the Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ is in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. And the supreme guide to understanding the Holy Scriptures and what is required of all Christians is rooted in the New Testament. Because of this, we often fondly call our movement, "a New Testament people." We like our timeless early slogans: "No creed but Christ"; and the New Testament as "our only Constitution" or "rule for faith, order and practice."



Thus, our movement rejects all non-biblical creeds and requirements as tests of church membership, belief, and practice. Christ alone is our Lord and Saviour, and the living and loving church is His Body of which He alone is the Head and through which His Spirit works to guide and inspire Christian life, growth, grace, and fellowship. We have not only "no creed but Christ", but also no hierarchy of human church leaders in authority, rank, and calling. As did Paul, we, too, believe in the "priesthood of all believers"—that each follower of Christ is his own high priest before God in Christ. None of us is required to obey any church leaders, but we are all expected to love God, all the followers of Christ, and all human neighbors as Jesus loved them. The only real difference between our ordained ministry and the laity is one of practical needs and functions within the church—not in nature, merit, or status. We are all equally one in Christ, as we all equally are called to obey and serve Christ, and to share His Gospel and extend His mission on earth.

Since the Christians of the New Testament did not vote upon converts who wished to become members of the church, God alone is the Judge. Since Jesus Christ and His immediate followers did not use or require creeds, we do not. Our only traditional "confession of faith" is simple—the biblical Confession of Simon Peter that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." This public confession meets the needs of the simplest person, or the most profound scholar. Almost all Christians can accept and understand this statement which allows wide freedom and permits new light to come from the past, present, and future revelation of God. As did the New Testament Christians, we have room for a wide variety of individual beliefs and opinions according to our private ability and training to think and believe.

### **3. The Unity Of All Christians In Christ**

Next to the common facts in the Bible's revelation of the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Head of the Universal Church, our movement's most vital faith and goal is the union of all Christians in Christ.

We believe that only Christ can unite the church as His living Body on earth. Our ultimate main goal is the union of all Christians everywhere in one world-wide church fellowship. We know that we as a group cannot dictate to the Christian bodies to unite a tragically divided Christendom. We cannot dominate and control the union of Christendom, but we can serve Christ and all Christendom by humble

obedience to Christ through a cooperative and timely witness to the timeless unity of a New Testament-centered Christianity.

Our movement rejects all human creeds as tests of church membership, belief, worship, and practice, not only on the premise that such a stand is biblical, but also on the premise that this will work toward unity. Christ alone is our Lord and Saviour, and the church is His Body of which He alone is the Lord and Head and through which the Holy Spirit gives Christian life, growth, and grace. All varieties of the original New Testament churches were creedless, but not Christless. They had no human creed or official hierarchy of church leaders in authority, rank, or calling. But all their churches and members were one in Christ. As did Paul, we also believe in the "priesthood of all believers"—that each follower of Christ is his own high priest before God. None of us is required to obey the commands or opinions of any church leaders. But we believe that all Christians have the equal duty to obey Christ and to love all his followers and our human neighbors as Christ loved them.

To reiterate: since the Christians of the New Testament did not vote upon admitting new members of the church, we do not. Since Jesus Christ required no creed we do not. Our only "confession of faith" is the timeless biblical confession of Peter that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of the Living God to be served as Lord and Saviour."

#### **4. The Liberty Of All Christians In Christ**

The only written guide or "Constitution" of our movement is the Bible, especially the Christ-centered New Testament. The only supreme authority which we confess is Jesus Christ. Our main goal is the union of all Christians in one universal church of Christ. But our chief watchword is the *liberty* of all Christians under Christ as the Holy Spirit gives each the light to see, understand, and obey according to his conscience and ability. Because of this Christ-centered freedom, we are a liberty loving and democratic Christian movement of free churches and individuals.

Our basis of belief, worship, and membership is entirely voluntary. We are free to serve Christ, yet are bound by His spirit and teachings. Most of us do not believe that even the New Testament was written as a blueprint to produce uniformity of belief, opinion, and program for all Christians yesterday and today. We believe that the New Testament is not a *blueprint* but an *imprint* of the spirit, word, and mission of Christ for the entire church and all His followers. And many of us now realize that there was not one uniform pattern of Christianity throughout the New Testament, but many varieties

of churches and Christians free to share and extend the unity of the church and work of Christ on earth. The main principles and practices, which they all had in common, were few, simple, and yet profoundly Christ-like enough to bind their fellowship in spite of their individual opinions and peculiar needs. The New Testament churches had and gave freedom among themselves. We, like them, feel that *what we have in common in Christ is more important and vital than our differences.*

Because of this spirit and regard for the original of New Testament examples, the Christian Church or Disciples of Christ organizations and societies are voluntary. Our local churches and individual members are "free" to decide what traditions, programs, and beliefs we will support and share. Our International Convention leaders are voluntary and advisory as far as local churches and members are concerned, as indeed, are our state and regional conventions. Program material is available, but not compulsory. Local congregational rule and individual freedom are both sacred and binding among us. Even our ministers are chosen by the local churches themselves. Not any of our ministers are "appointed" by other leaders or groups at international, national, state, or regional levels. At best, our churches are free to seek the counsel and advice for needed and suitable ministers, staff, programs, goals, and fellowship. Increasingly, the churches are seeking and finding this advice to be helpful in strengthening their work.

In the realm of freedom of choice, mind, and programs, our local congregations and individual members are as free as any in Christian history. This liberty is sometimes abused, but on the whole it has strengthened our movement. Within our membership and cooperative fellowship are almost every variety of Christian individuals and concerns. One extreme has some humanists, another extreme has biblical legalists. But the vast majority of our main stream movement has a high Christology and a solid Christian view of the Bible, God, man, sin, salvation, and the Church. Thus, they feel at home with most other Protestant bodies in regard to the common valid concerns of Christendom.

While we still have demagogic individuals and churches who imply, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," and "I am of Cephas," such tendencies are forbidding to the main stream of our brotherhood in its common love of liberty and the God-given right to make its own decisions after careful and Christ-centered considerations.

Some of our most extreme groups quibble over our main traditions and ideals as Christians or Disciples of Christ, but the lasting



principles and essentials of our movement have never truly forsaken us. And perhaps no other movement in Christendom today has a more sincere or thorough self-criticism of its own weaknesses, and yet appreciation of its Christ-centered strength to share a whole Gospel. In our day, we are seeking anew the openness, liberty, and universal church that only Christ can give and rule.

## **5. The Two Ordinances or Institutions of Our Lord**

In spite of our liberty in the details of faith, practice, and worship among individuals and local congregations, we all share a common heritage. As a whole, the Christians and Disciples seek to reform Christendom of its non-biblical and sectarian corruptions of Christ's original teachings and mission. We all seek to restore and share the lasting common principles and bonds of fellowship of the New Testament Christians. Thus, our main ideals are the union and Christ-like growth of all churches in Christ; we stress and observe His only two ordinances or institutions: baptism and the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

### **A. BAPTISM**

The Christians or Disciples of Christ seek to restore the original moral and spiritual meaning of the New Testament tradition and spirit of baptism. We practice and teach baptism by immersion only. Yet, at the center of the use of this form of baptism is a deeply spiritual meaning. Our tradition believes in neither magic nor "water regeneration" through baptism. Most of us realize that it is not the amount of water, but the degree of faith that really counts in the life of the baptismal candidate. And we all use the highly spiritual language of the New Testament accordingly. Although we differ from the majority of other Christian movements over the form of baptism, we agree with most of Christendom in stressing that a baptism by the Holy Spirit of God in Christ is necessary for salvation.

It is likely that no Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ have ever practiced sprinkling or pouring as forms of Christian baptism, for baptism by immersion has clear and vital New Testament meanings and symbols. Immersion is observed as a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. It also symbolizes the faith and experience of both the individual and local congregation in the death to the old life, without Christ, the burial of the former self, and being raised up in newness of private and public life with Christ. Baptism, thus, is for the "remission of sins" and the gift of an entirely new life in Christ through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.



Such baptism is a fulfillment of Christ's "Great Commission." At this point, the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ are thoroughgoing trinitarians. With few exceptions, our candidates are baptized in "the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Most of our members and leaders also recognize that there is an element of mystery in the experience of the candidate and the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism.

The majority of our churches will not recognize the validity of any other form of baptism than immersion. However, some of our churches or ministers will receive non-immersed members of other Christian bodies into full membership in their local congregations, if they are convinced that they have already received Christian baptism through the work of the Holy Spirit according to the believer's faith.

Some Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ have a limited practice of this "open membership."\* They, whether they publicly announce the policy or not, will receive non-immersed members of other Christian movements in order to unite families, to safeguard health, or as a matter of Christian conscience with the person who seriously considers the matter and yet feels he has already experienced Christian baptism. And others of our churches allow exceptions to the form of immersion on account of their conviction that this is an ecumenical problem of faith and action. They fear an unintended implication that we are the only Christians while they believe, in fact, that we share full fellowship with all churches on an equal basis of church membership.

So far as we know, all Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ actually practice and teach "believers' baptism" by immersion only. But our conceptions of this practice vary according to our different backgrounds and levels of faith and understanding of the Bible. Some of our Churches are *legalistic* and see immersion mainly as a stern command and law of Christ. These folk usually think that the un-immersed have less chance of being saved than the immersed. Others *share* a more *spiritual* view of baptism by immersion, not as a legal command, but as a test of obedience. And other churches within the movement hold a more *liberal* view, seeing immersion as an absolute requirement only for those who have never been baptized by any form in any church. They tend to stress that Jesus would not deny his entire ministry and mission "by making one physical act a condition of salvation."

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\*The term "open membership" has had much odium attached to it and really is not accurate, since churches practicing it require some form of baptism.

Actually, when the full act of baptism is understood in both its physical and spiritual aspects, few persons object to the time-honored practice of immersion which has been practiced by the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ. However, when it is only a physical act, it has little value for either the church, or the candidate. It is for this reason that the Disciples of Christ or Christian Churches have emphasized and will doubtless continue to stress "believers' baptism" in contrast to infant baptism. In Europe, just now, there is a questioning of infant baptism within those churches which historically have been most ardent in defending the practice. For example, a small minority in the Church of England apparently are prepared to reject infant baptism completely. Eminent theologians such as Emil Brunner and Karl Barth have also opened the way to question the practice of infant baptism.

Among the Disciples of Christ or Christian Churches there is an increasing trend to practice "infant dedication" in which the parents present the infant or child for prayer and dedication in a beautiful church ceremony. Vows are usually taken by both the parents and the congregation to help bring the child up in a Christian way of life. No water is used, and church membership is not conferred, since the child at a later date will be expected to make a Christian decision, or act of commitment, to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. After this later individual choice, baptism will be administered to the believer in Christ.

At their best the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ have stated in answer to the question "why be baptized?": Jesus was baptized. And baptism is a symbol of a believer's willingness to submit to the example and command of Jesus. Baptism is also a symbol of the beginning of a new life. Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. Finally, they look upon baptism as a rite of initiation or entrance into the church and the world-wide fellowship of Christians.

## **B. THE LORD'S SUPPER: A WEEKLY OBSERVANCE**

### **The Lord's Supper or The Service of Holy Communion**

The Christian Churches, or Disciples of Christ observe one more ordinance or sacrament: The Lord's Supper, or the Holy Communion service. Many names are given to this sacrament depending upon the practice of the congregation, but laymen usually call it "the communion service." The Lord's Supper is observed weekly in our churches. Much of the spiritual strength of the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ is found in their observance of weekly communion.

Visitors have commented on the profound sense of togetherness and religious fervor which becomes immediately apparent at the first note of the communion hymn. It is the great drama of our church, rallying the communicants around wine in "the silver chalice" and simple bread, so that faith is re-kindled and wills are re-consecrated to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian Churches or the Disciples of Christ see no magic in the bread and wine. For them the bread is not His Body; the wine is not His Blood. They are symbols of His body and His blood. They accept the Lord's Supper as containing an act of thanksgiving to God; a remembrance of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice and as a renewal of a covenant with Him. They look upon it as an act of remembrance of Jesus Christ so that He lives again with the believer; as a memorial or reminder that He lived among men and died for them; as an act of committal to His way and His spirit; as a renewal of man's kinship with his fellow-Christians all over the world; and finally as a foretelling of our Lord's death until "He comes again."

Here then is a brief sketch of the history and beliefs of the largest church which has its origin on American soil.

### YOUR INVITATION

The great main stream of our religious body still bears witness to its historic mission of eliminating denominational divisions and uniting all Christian groups. Sometimes in its history, small controversial groups have arisen. But some disagreement is unavoidable in a democratic form of church government. Only in a totalitarian type of church, as in a totalitarian state, is there relative uniformity. The strength of the Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ, as the cooperative Christian movements of our time testify, lies in their plea to unite all Christians in Jesus Christ as Lord and the Son of the living God and to give wide freedom on all doctrinal viewpoints.

Today there are 256 denominations in America, each professing to follow the Master, but often in wasteful and disgraceful competition. In their strife, they tear the seamless robe of the Christ. If the churches cannot live together in unity, how, as Norman Cousins, distinguished American literary editor has asked, can the churches appeal to the divided nations of the world to live together?

In the vanguard of every cooperative movement, you will find the name of the Disciples of Christ, never for one moment, let it be underscored, made up of the *only* Christians, but of *Christians* only.

Perhaps you, too, might find that the Christian Church of your community meets your spiritual needs. Perhaps you have recently moved and have not yet found a church home; unhappily, your family may be divided, with neither husband nor wife willing to join the other's denomination; or, perhaps the situation is simply that you are casting about for a center of renewed faith.

If you should find upon investigation that this church has the answer you seek, you may rejoice in the knowledge that you have allied yourself with a group which has played a pioneering role in the attempt to work with God in response to the prayer of Jesus "that they may all be one."

It is a thrilling heritage. Would you like to share it?



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