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The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine

 A Brief Analysis of the
Contribution to the His-
tory of Doctrine of the
Denomination Known
as the Christian Church. 

20

Simon Addison Bennett

Written originally in 1923 as a part of
Dr. Bennett's study while at the Univer-
sity of Chicago School of Divinity.

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by the Christian Publishing Association
of Dayton, Ohio.

Recopied in November, 1966, by the Old
Union United Church of Christ and their
pastor, Dr. Clyde K. Hunter, Edinburg,
Indiana.

PAGE OF DEDICATION

Dr. Simon A. Bennett was such a help, encouragement, and inspiration to the Old Union Church of Edinburg and Rev. Clyde K. Hunter during the years of 1933 to 1955 that they asked him to speak at the Old Union Homecoming service for their 150th Anniversary, September 11, 1966. His address on the background of the Christian Churches was so impressive that the church regretted that it did not have a recorder to preserve the content.

When it was learned that Dr. Bennett had written a book years ago containing many of the facts he presented, plans were made to have it recopied in order that the membership could have copies and that this history could be preserved and distributed because of its value and to honor Dr. Bennett.

Five hundred copies of the book were made: one hundred were kept by Rev. Hunter and the Old Union Church and the remainder were presented to Dr. Bennett and the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ for distribution wherever they felt they would be of most service.

"Lives of all great men remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us,
Footprints in the sands of time.
Footprints that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn & shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again."

DR. BENNETT'S LIFE

Simon Addison Bennett was born at Lebanon, Ohio, March 7, 1889 to Rev. Samuel D. and Zerilda Moon Bennett. From the second grade he attended the public schools in classes with his brother, Clarence Summerbell Bennett, with whom he has graduated five times: South Solon, Ohio, High School 1906; Wittenberg Academy in 1908; Union Christian College, Merom, Indiana 1911; University of Illinois 1912; and the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he received the Bachelor of Divinity and the Master of Arts Degrees. He also received the honorary degree, Doctor of Divinity, from Defiance College, Defiance, Ohio.

He was married to Rita Story of Atwood, Illinois, August 27, 1912. They have two children: Otho Lee Bennett of South Solon, Ohio, and Laræ Bennett Hambenné, Tucson, Arizona---also four grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Dr. Bennett was licensed by the Central Illinois Christian Conference in 1910 and ordained at Bismarck, Illinois, in 1913. He held student and resident pastorates in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Colorado and Alabama.

He made a survey of the churches and communities of Madison County, Ohio, for the Interchurch World Movement, and served nearly two years in promotional and educational work with the Forward Movement of the Christian Churches.

Dr. Bennett taught Religion and Social Science for twenty years at: Union Christian College, Merom, Indiana; Elon College in North Carolina; and Southern Union College, Wadley, Alabama. He was State Supt.

DR. BENNETT'S LIFE (Cont'd)

of the Indiana Conference of Congregational Christian Churches from 1933 to 1955.

His work as a high school lad (part time) for the Christian Publishing Association, Dayton, Ohio, helped to develop an interest in all the churches of the fellowship. He later became interested in Interdenominational Cooperation and Organic Church Union.

Dr. Bennett shared very actively in developing the Union of the Congregational and the Christian Churches. He served on the National Commission On Interchurch Relations and Christian Unity and on the Special Committee that drafted the Basis of Union to bring into being the United Church of Christ.

Dr. Bennett was the Official Representative of Congregational Christian Churches at the 150th Anniversary Celebration at the Cane Ridge Meeting House near Paris, Kentucky, in June 1954. Here he analyzed some of the issues arising during the past 160 years among Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Christian, and Disciples of Christ Churches. He suggested the Union of all of these churches as the best solution of our confusion, misunderstanding, earlier Union attempts, and hopes for Christian Unity. "It is more important to cooperate and to magnify our oneness than to enlarge upon our distinctive differences," "That they all may be one."

The Bennetts reside during the summers at the Bennett Farms near South Solon, O. and during the winters at Pine Hill Cabin Madley, Ala., or with the daughter's family, 3249 East Pima St., Tucson, Arizona.

INTRODUCTION

As a rule Church Historians in America have not been greatly interested in the Church History of America. This is to be regretted because of the fact that it might have been possible to have gathered the material from some of the originators of religious movements. It is, therefore, gratifying to see the appearance of any study dealing with some particular religious groups.

It is a mistake to think that the diversification of religious life in America is simply sectarianism. Any real student of religious movements can discover in the rise of religious denominations, the process by which religious liberty came to a war distracted Christendom. The Reformation had not given religious liberty but a number of state churches free from the church of Rome. On the continent of America there sprang up a number of independent religious movements, many of which represented the persecuted minorities of these state churches. It is easy for such persons to praise and demand toleration but it is more difficult for them when in possession of political power, to grant liberties to those who differ with them. The development of such liberty in America was largely due to the fact that there was room for independent religious groups and such variety of dissent as to make mutual concessions imperative. So religious liberty was born less of Christian principle than of political practice.

It was this freedom that made possible the diversified grouping and the organization of religious movements emphasizing religious elements neglected by others. Thus the diversification of American religious life contributed to its enrichment. Not only does it

express independence but also the emphasis upon truths and attitudes which supplement each other. Only the detailed history of these various groups will enable us to realize these important facts.

For this reason, as well as for its own historical excellence, I welcome the study of Professor Bennett. It makes plain the fundamental contribution made by a group of Christians to the total of American Christianity. I trust that it will be followed by other studies of similar character.

Shailer Mathews.

The Divinity School,
University of Chicago.

PREFACE

While studying in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago the author became interested in the social origins of doctrine. Under the instruction and guidance of Dean Shailer Mathews, this research was planned and carried out; and the resultant material was presented as a Master of Arts thesis in the Department of Systematic Theology.

This book undertakes to show the contribution made by the Christian Church as a movement in American Church life, especially in its influence upon doctrine. To this end a brief introduction to the method of doctrinal development is given and followed by a study of the historic situation in the period that produced the Christian Church. The origin of the movement is then traced and attention is called to the principles inherent in the development and early growth. Relationships with other bodies and movements are traced, and there is added a closing summary of the main elements contributed by the Christian Church.

At the request of friends the author submits his conclusions to the public, wishing to acknowledge his indebtedness to others, who have worked in this field, and especially to Dean Mathews, who, as instructor gave such valuable guidance and kindly wrote the introduction.

Simon A. Bennett.

Elon College, North Carolina.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	5
Chapter I	7
Preliminary survey and general description of the period of the American Revolution. Introduction to the method of doctrinal development. Transition to modern Christianity. Conditions at the time of the Revolutionary War.	
Chapter II	13
The rise and distinctive principles of the body of people known simply as Christians. The movement among the Methodists in Virginia under James O'Kelley and others. Among the Baptists in New England, Abner Jones, Elias Smith. Among the Presbyterians in Kentucky, Barton W. Stone. Unification, religious Journalism, growth, early conferences and conventions. Principles.	
Chapter III	30
The relation of the Christians with other religious bodies. Various interpretations put upon the movement. Relation to the Reform movement of Thomas and Alexander Campbell. Union of part of the Christian and Disciples of Christ. Relation in the work of education with the Unitarians, Antioch College, Horace Mann. Other relations.	
Chapter IV	44
Summary. Presentation of the main contributions of the Christian Church. An American movement embodying the spirit of liberty. The right of the individual. Christian character, the ultimate test. A non-divisive name. Back to the Bible and to Jesus as the head of the church. The spirit of union, a broader fellowship.	
Bibliography	50

CHAPTER I

Preliminary Survey and General Description of the Period of the American Revolution

Christianity had its birth and its first accessions among people with a strong Jewish background in their conceptions of religious practice. The Jew thought of religion in the terms of politics with a union of church and state, and the church dominant. Pagan religions also carried political concepts of authority and power. Jesus taught the way of life and revealed God as a loving Father whose will is to be done in the human brotherhood, founded on love and justice. The apostles and early Christians could not throw off the Jewish ideals entirely but carried some of them into the practices of the early church. When non-Jews, people who were Greek and Roman in their culture, became the leading element we find them carrying their concepts into the practice of Christianity. Roman imperialism fastened itself upon the church and for over a thousand years held almost undisputed sway in the management of the church in the West.

A study of church history and the history of doctrine shows very clearly that every age legitimatizes its faith in doctrines that reflect the thinking and social customs of that age. As social conditions change, old doctrines naturally cease to function and a new interpretation develops or a new doctrine emerges in keeping with the social mind of the period. The purpose of this book is to set forth the contribution of the Christian Church, as a denomination, to the history of doctrine. In the first chapter we undertake a preliminary survey and general study of the period that produced the early leaders of the Christian Church.

While doctrinal interpretations have constantly been changing it must not be understood that the church has been blown about by "every wind of doctrine." In

fact, the other extreme is nearer the truth. In religion we are conservative and are reluctant to change our religious customs or alter our doctrines. Only when social customs have so changed that a doctrine cannot function with us will we change it, and even then the old forms and customs generally remain for a long time as a vestige that is held sacred. At any given period, then, we will likely find the doctrinal forms that have been carried over from the past and are being altered by the social life of that period. The transition is gradual and one cannot divide the history of development into so many clean-cut and separate periods. Nevertheless, certain crises may be observed that rather clearly mark the epochs in the development of doctrine.

The Reformation stands out as a period that ushered in the beginnings of modern Christianity. The revival of learning renewed the study of the classics and gave a new interest in the worth and authority of man. The Reformation broke the dominance of the sacramental system which had controlled Christianity east and west since the second century. The foundation was laid for the beginnings of modern science and philosophy which were destined to have such an important influence in the development of doctrine. While the Reformation broke the authority of Rome and granted relief from many grievances, it in no sense gave religious liberty as we know it today. The church still sought the aid and protection of the state and developed the great nationalistic churches.

The rise of the middle classes and the newer conceptions of science and philosophy had their influence upon religious life. Men commenced to question the authority of the state churches and to insist on a more rational interpretation of religious values. Non-conformists, Dissenters, Friends, and Deists appear. During this period our early colonies were formed. A

study of this colonial period shocks us with its religious intolerance and the insistence that civil law should protect the religious monopoly of a given class. However, they were only carrying over as a vestige a small part of the religious intolerance of the systems that had nourished them. Each colony wished to preserve the dominant group's religion as the established religion for the colony. They resorted to cruel persecution to carry their points. The Quakers and Baptists were especially regarded as dangerous and were punished severely, even to the taking of life. Nevertheless, intolerance was on the decline and the right of men to think for themselves was gaining favor, and gradually the laws and customs of the early colonies became more tolerant.

The struggle for American independence and national problems absorbed the attention and interest of the colonists for nearly two decades and the close of the eighteenth century found the churches depleted and ravished. Up to this period all of the denominations in America owed their origin to the old world and some of them were dependent upon the ecclesiastical authority of bishops in Europe. The revolution necessitated a period of readjustment in the church. The Roman Catholic, Protestant Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal churches were dependent on bishops from abroad and, after passing through a period of abuse and losses, readjusted themselves but carried over the same system of episcopal authority.

The German Reformed, Moravians, and Quakers remained for years to come in a relation of subordination to foreign centers of organization. The Reformed Dutch and Presbyterian had already organized themselves as independent of foreign spiritual jurisdiction. The Congregationalists and Baptists were of such elastic policy that it required no effort for them to adjust themselves.

None of these bodies breathed the full breath of liberty and tolerance. They all carried some of their inheritance of intolerance over, except the Baptists and Quakers. All were "Orthodox" in most of their tenets except the Quakers. To this body belongs much credit, for they have a long and honorable history and suffered much slander and persecution. Rationalism in its influence on the churches had developed Unitarianism and Universalism as a protest against Calvinism, and by the close of the eighteenth century their influence was strongly felt in America, especially in New England. Deism and atheism had a large influence among some of the leading men in America. The roots of this denominational rivalry and the "liberalizing" influences just mentioned had a large influence in winning liberty for church and state alike, but with the gains were also suffered some losses.

Regarding this period, L. W. Bacon makes the following statement:

"The closing years of the eighteenth century show the lowest low-water mark of the lowest ebb-tide of spiritual life in the history of the American church. The demoralization of army life, the fury of political factions, the catch-penny materialist morality of Franklin, the philosophic deism of men like Jefferson, and the popular ribaldry of Tom Paine, had wrought, together with other untoward influences, to bring about a condition of things which to the eye of little faith seemed almost desperate."¹

These were times of general unrest and the moral and religious condition of the country was very discouraging. The ranks of the clergy had been depleted; property of churches had suffered many abuses during the war; liberty, even to the point of license, was in the air; and the churches, divided, antagonistic and many of them facing internal problems of reconstruction, were ill prepared to cope with the great task before them. The westward shift of population added

1. L. W. Bacon, American Church History, Vol. XIII, p. 230.

greatly to the difficulties and importance of a religious awakening.

Many of the ministers and leaders of the various churches sensed the great need and gave themselves heroically to the task. One of the greatest triumphs of church history is recorded in this period—the tremendous achievements of the Methodists as they adjusted their system to the new world and sent their itinerant ministers and lay-preachers out with a zeal and piety that won thousands to the faith. The Baptists likewise were very mobile and succeeded in using many ministers of little education in this period of great need. Congregationalists and Presbyterians were also very active in the revival efforts but were not quite as elastic in their methods of church work and recruiting the ministry. These four denominations figured most prominently in the great religious revival that began with the opening of the nineteenth century.

Earnest religious souls in the East, South, and West alike sensed the great need and went forth to proclaim Christ as the way of salvation. Many of them insisted on narrow, sectarian interpretations. Many forgot some of their differences as the larger appeal of a gigantic task drove them on in their ministry. Great revivals were characteristic; the camp meeting was instituted, and a general period of religious enthusiasm was experienced that is the outstanding feature in the church history of the first half of the nineteenth century.

With such political, social and economic changes as confronted our nation, we also would expect religious developments. We have already seen how many of the denominations were forced to make adjustments. Let us analyze more closely. The colonics threw off the yoke of servitude and authority but they realized that they must have government and authority for their own preservation. Politically the great quest was for

the realities of free democratic government that would bind the colonies together and respect the liberties of all. In the pursuance of this quest, our fathers dared to try a new experiment, contrary to the orthodoxy of European government.

The forces of the church in America had helped to create this situation and then found itself engulfed in the stream. Until this time the religious impulses of America had been imported from Europe. Denominationalism had budded in the old world but had taken root and was to blossom and bear fruit in the new world. Each sect brought with it a list of traditions and sought to perpetuate them, some using the same iron heel of intolerance that had driven them out for freedom. The Orthodox churches held as closely to their traditions as they could and only made adjustments as the absolute necessity for such arose.

Let us look at the main elements in this religious mass as we find it in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. There is the conservative ritualistic episcopal element, the freer creed-bound churches, the congregational element but holding to the dogmas of Calvinism, the "liberal" wing of Unitarian and Universalist thought, and the Quakers who used no sacraments or rituals. Seeing these various conflicting ideals and the struggling of denominational rivalries and quarrels, is it any wonder that some one should have cried out and asked for the realities of the Christian religion? Yes, there were those religious souls who asked this very question. There were devout and earnest men who even dared to say that sectarianism was wrong and Christians could unite to carry on the work of human redemption.

Out of this period, 1792-1804, arose the body of people known as Christians, their church the Christian Church. The origin and principles of the Christians will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II

The Rise and Distinctive Principles of the Body of People Known Simply as Christians

In this chapter the writer will undertake a brief statement setting forth the facts about the origin and principles of the religious body of people who are known simply as Christians. Complete and more exhaustive treatment may be found in books listed in the bibliography, so that for our purpose only a concise statement is necessary.

In the history of most denominations the name of some particular leader or founder is clearly distinguishable in the history of each. The Christian Church, however, traces its origin neither to one man nor to a single spot. Neither can an exact date be given as a time when the church was founded. The origin of the church was by a process of development. From widely separate localities, at about the same time, various leaders came to similar conclusions, and performed their part in the process.

This movement had its origin in the troubled times of readjustment in state and church during the last decade of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth—the period following the American Revolution when men breathed the air of national liberty and freedom, and the churches were readjusting themselves to the new conditions. The earliest movement crystalizing in the formation of the Christian Church took place among the Methodists of Virginia and North Carolina. The Revolution made necessary a severance of dependence upon English ecclesiastical

authority in the Methodist Church of America. In this re-organization, James O'Kelley

"saw that the trend of Methodism was toward a hierarchy, and that he wished to avoid—quoting Mr. Wesley's will for the American societies as follows: 'They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they stand fast in the liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.'"¹

James O'Kelley was an untiring itinerant preacher of great influence. Abel Stevens speaks of the early Methodist ministers as follows:

"The Methodist preachers, with very few exceptions, were emancipationists and they had an almost irresistible moral power among the people. Many of them, besides Coke and Asbury, preached bravely against slavery. O'Kelley especially, the most influential itinerant in Virginia, opposed it energetically."²

This Methodist source credits O'Kelley as a man of influence, moral power, and conviction.

At the famous Christmas Conference, convened at Baltimore in 1784, where the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized independent of the Church of England, Francis Asbury was ordained deacon, elder, and superintendent, and thirteen other elders were also ordained.

"James O'Kelley went back to his circuit in North Carolina and Virginia dissatisfied and began to agitate against episcopacy among Methodists. He was now a presiding elder and second to no man in the conference in influence."³

"The famous General Conference of 1792 held in Baltimore, Maryland, was largely attended and fraught with grave consequences. For years O'Kelley and others desired such a conference, hoping that it might check the Bishop's power. Francis Asbury is said to have caucused with certain preachers for several days before Conference opened. From the first session matters took a distinctly Asburian trend. During the pro-

1. Milo T. Morrill *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, p. 88.

2. Abel Stevens. *History of the M. E. Church in the U. S. A.*, Vol. II, p. 251.

3. Milo T. Morrill, *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, p. 88.

ceedings, James O'Kelley introduced a resolution embodying the 'right of appeal', so that a minister thinking himself aggrieved by the Bishop's appointment, might appeal to Conference and secure a different station. After long debate, by parliamentary tactics, the question was divided. Debate was protracted to wearisome length and finally the 'right of appeal' was lost. Again, while the revision of discipline was going on, O'Kelley arose and said, 'Brethren, hearken unto me. Put away all other books and forms, and let this (holding up the New Testament) be the only criterion, and that will satisfy me.' This was opposed and lost. The next morning O'Kelley and thirty others withdrew from Conference and departed for home."¹

For some time negotiations were pending to narrow the breach and adjust the differences but failing in this O'Kelley, and those with him, organized their conference on democratic principles and took up the cause of religious liberty. They assumed the name "Republican Methodist Church."

"In August, of 1794, the second conference of Republican Methodists was held in Surrey County, Virginia. The work of the previous meeting had not been satisfactory, and a committee appointed to formulate a church government in this meeting was unable to reach an agreement. It was suggested that the Bible be searched for light on the subject of government. And first as to name: What name should the new church wear? Rev. Rice Haggard, standing with open New Testament in hand, said, 'Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.' This motion carried without dissent. Whereupon Rev. Mr. Haferty, of North Carolina, made a motion 'to take the Bible itself as their only creed, and this, too, was carried.' . . . Readers will have observed that the O'Kelley secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church was due solely to the form of government adopted, which was unsatisfactory to Virginia ministers. The story of heretical doctrine, and of O'Kelley's disappointment at not being made bishop, could not possibly be true. To this day the southern section of the Christian

1. Milo T. Morrill, *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, p. 69.

Church preaches Methodist doctrines. Had Methodism been launched with a liberal policy, in all likelihood, no Christian Church would have been formed on the Southern Atlantic Slope."¹

There has been a continuous history of the Christian Church as a distinct movement with the name Christian as the only recognized name for the followers of Jesus, and the Bible as a sufficient rule of faith and practice, the creed of the church from the year 1794 to the present time. In this effort, for liberty and individualism the current has not always run smoothly, but for more than a century and a quarter the Christian Church in the South, born of its sturdy Methodist parentage, has stood for these broad principles of Christian liberty.

During this same period a similar movement developed among the Baptists in New England. Dr. Abner Jones and Elias Smith were its early leaders. Dr. Milo T. Morrill has so clearly and concisely recorded this that I quote him as follows :

"As a boy and youth Abner Jones came under Calvinist Baptist teaching and influence. Over the doctrine of election he stumbled when but a lad; but the matter of doctrines he settled with himself considerably later in life. However, about 1793, he had decided that Baptist church polity was unscriptural, as was the name Baptist, and had decided also to be called simply a Christian. Having mentioned his views to some of the brethren, he found himself entirely out of fellowship, and abandoned that church.

"He had seized upon the casual remark of a Baptist preacher who said that he would have nothing for which he could not find authority in the Bible, and put it to work with inexorable fidelity. While teaching school he had time to study the Bible, and declared that he found nothing in that book about church covenants, ordaining and installing councils, associations, and other ecclesiastical machinery, and refused to have anything to do with them. It will be noticed that there was no violent wrenching or straining of his relations with the Baptist people; but that by a natural process he reached a position of his own which did not accord with

1. Milo T. Morrill, *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, pp. 91, 92.

what he had been taught, and he chose, so deep were his convictions, to stand by himself rather than compromise his conscience. For several years he was practically without a church.

"While living in the town of Lyndon, Vermont, practicing medicine, he was providentially led to preach, and then to quit the medical practice. He organized a "Christian Church" in Lyndon, in 1801, with thirteen members, there beginning his work as a religious reformer. The next year he formed two churches in western New Hampshire, one at Hanover, the other at Piermont; and then influenced Rev. Elias Smith, pastor in Portsmouth, to drop the cumbersome plans of organization used there and to adopt the simple plan that Jones had been using. From this time forward Jones traveled and preached almost incessantly, first at all the points near Boston, a church being organized in that city, then in those near by, and then in ever-widening circles, into Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and all of eastern Massachusetts.

"His work was mainly constructive, and less given to tearing down the work of the other denominations. And yet the leaven had its effect, and Jones was cordially hated by devoted sectarians whose track he crossed.

"Elias Smith's career was stormy; and his break with the Calvinist Baptists was almost violent. He, too, had grown up under Baptist influences and had become prejudiced against some of their practices and doctrines, because they had given him personal distress. His struggles with hard doctrines had been soul-racking. He hated infant baptism; he hated the prevalent stereotyped ecclesiasticism, whether in the Baptist, Congregational, or Episcopalian churches; he could not preach election, although he had mentally subscribed to it; he was in the habit of rupturing his pastorates suddenly because they galled him; he found solace in brushing aside all traditions, forms, dogmas, and such like encumbrances, and resorting to the Scriptures for doctrine, polity, and authority.

"In 1802 he came to believe that Christ's followers should have no name but 'Christians,' to the exclusion of all popular sectarian designations. He was one of the dozen Baptist ministers in New Hampshire who determined to exercise their liberty in exhortation and otherwise, contrary to wishes of the older men, and who organized 'The Christian Conference', agreeing to forsake names, doctrines, and practices not found in the New Testament. He was furthered in an-

tagonism to established churches and ecclesiasticism by his experience when he first preached in Portsmouth. The ministers of that city were alarmed, and sent vile slanders after him, temporarily shutting the doors of the city to him . . .

"Smith's work in Portsmouth grew. Soon a great revival broke out and in March, 1803, he organized a church with a few less than twenty members. Then he composed 'The History of Anti-Christ', roundly scoring the Episcopalian clergy and prayer-book. Never did the old mythical heroes attempt their prodigious labors with rashness exceeding Smith's assaults upon his supposed enemies. He was hounded from place to place. The Baptist ministers of Boston made life a burden to him; a mob nearly hooted him out of meeting at Roxbury, following him to Boston courthouse. He was even forbidden to enter Boston churches.

"Then, when he was cited to answer charges before the Woburn Baptist Church, of which he was a member and had been pastor, he answered the challenge by declaring himself no longer a member of that church because of their unchristian treatment of him (this church had stripped him of possessions), because he disbelieved their confession of faith, because their name was unscriptural, and because of their anti-Christian fellowship in 'association.' The Gordian Knot was cut.

"If you wish to know what denomination I belong to, I tell you, as a professor of religion, I am a Christian; as a preacher, a minister of Christ; calling no man father or master, holding as abominable in the sight of God everything highly esteemed among men, such as Calvinism, Arminianism, free-willism, Universalism, reverend, parsons, chaplains, doctors of divinity, clergy, bands, surplices, notes, creeds, covenants, platforms, with the spirit of slander which those who hold to these things are too often in possession of.

(Autobiography, pp. 341, 342.)

This was a tremendous deliverance

"The movement under Jones and Smith gathered headway, ministers were raised up, churches organized, the new unsectarian doctrines were everywhere proclaimed, until the whole amounted to a veritable upheaval in church circles in New England, forming a part of the larger movement for religious liberty and abolition of Calvinistic tyranny. Smith's em-

bracing Universalism only tended to rip open the crust still more.

"Smith traveled all over New England and into the South, and results like those recited followed him. He not only did some excellent constructive work, but he was a mighty destructive engine also."¹

This movement shows the same underlying current as the movement in the South. It was a search beneath the forms, rituals, creeds, and organizations for the realities of religion. Doctrine played a more prominent part in the New England movement than in that of the South, but the first cause for break was the desire for liberty of conscience and conduct; unbound by the authority of ecclesiasticism. To this there was much opposition from the regular "Orthodox" denominations, and the early leaders of the Christian Church in New England suffered some violent persecution and much unjustifiable slander. It was a radical departure even from the traditions of such a liberty loving people as the Baptists. However severely some might condemn, scorn, and slander, there were others who believed in the movement. Churches were organized, the work has been maintained and the "Christians," as an organized movement, have a continuous history in New England from the first year of the nineteenth century to the present time.

While these readjustments were taking place in New England and in the South, a great revival impulse in religion was transforming life in the frontier sections of the West. Any place west of the mountains was regarded as the frontier in those days. Following the Revolution an ebb tide in religion was prevalent and earnest religious men yearned for a revival of religion that would grip the life of the people. The closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening of the nineteenth, are marked as the great revival period in

1. Milo T. Morrill. *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, pp. 93-96.

the West. At this time there developed among the Presbyterians, a revival movement of great significance to the Christian Church. Regarding the early life of the great leader in this movement, I quote from a little booklet written by J. F. Burnett, D. D. These facts can be verified from the writings and records of Stone himself.

"Barton Warren Stone was born near Port Tobacco, Maryland, December 24, 1772. In 1793 he became a candidate for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Orange County, North Carolina. The subject of his trial sermon, as assigned by the Presbytery was, 'The Being and Attributes of God and the Trinity.' His examination was satisfactory, but he did not accept license at that time. He went to his brother's home in Georgia, and while there was chosen Professor of Languages in the Methodist Academy, near Washington. After a year he returned to North Carolina, and attended the next session of the Orange Presbytery, and received license to preach. When the license was granted a venerable father in Israel gave him a Bible and said, 'Go ye into all the world and preach my gospel to every creature.'

"He commenced his public ministry at Cane Ridge and Concord, in Bourbon County, Kentucky. In 1798 these churches extended him a formal call to become their pastor, which call he accepted, and a day was set for his ordination. Of his ordination he says, 'I went into Presbytery, and when the question was propounded—Do you receive and adopt the Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible, I answered aloud—So far as I see it consistent with the word of God. No objection being made, I was ordained.'"¹

Stone had much uneasiness of spirit and mind because of the doctrines as taught by the confession. However, he gave himself to careful study and hard incessant labor and in his later life refused to speak of doctrines except to affirm or deny in the language of the Scriptures. Stone heard of the revivals in the south of Kentucky and Tennessee held under the leadership of Rev. James McGready and other Presbyterian

¹ J. F. Burnett, Rev. Barton Warren Stone, the Man Who Studied and Taught, pp. 6, 7.

ministers and was anxious to be among them. In the spring of 1801 he made the visit to Logan County, Kentucky. These were very unusual meetings. Stone returned to his parish and in August, 1801, upon his return, the same type of revival zeal broke out at Concord and Cane Ridge. The Cane Ridge meeting was perhaps the greatest revival meeting of the period. It was marked with many irregularities and excesses like the other similar meetings, but was also fraught with great influence in the lives of men. Reliable testimony confirms the statements that these revivals transformed the whole life of the West in a remarkable degree. Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists all co-operated and people came great distances to witness and experience the influence of these meetings. Many from Ohio attended. A free gospel was preached, a zeal for the salvation of men was manifest, and little regard was had for "confessions of faith" and doctrinal "orthodoxy."

As to the doctrines preached, let us see Stone's words quoted from his biography.

"The distinguishing doctrine preached by us was that God loved the world, the whole world, and sent his Son to save them on condition that they believed in him—that the gospel was the means of salvation—but that this means would never be effectual to this end until believed and obeyed by us—that God required us to believe in his Son, and had given us sufficient evidence in his Word to produce faith in us, if attended to by us—that sinners were capable of understanding and believing this testimony and of acting upon it by coming to the Savior and obeying him, and from him obtaining salvation and the Holy Spirit. We urged upon the sinner to believe now, and receive salvation—that in vain they looked for the Spirit to be given them, while they remained in unbelief—they must believe before the Spirit or salvation would be given them—that God was as willing to save them now as he ever was, or ever would be—that no previous qualification was required or necessary in order to believe in Jesus, and come to him—that if they were sinners, this was their divine warrant to believe in him, and to come to him for

salvation—that Jesus died for all, and all things were now ready. When we began first to preach these things the people appeared as just awakened from the sleep of ages—they seemed to see for the first time that they were responsible beings, and that a refusal to use the means appointed was a damning sin.

The sticklers for orthodoxy among us writhed under these doctrines but seeing their mighty effects on the people, they winked at the supposed errors and, through fear or other motives, they did not at first publicly oppose us. They plainly saw their Confession of Faith neglected in the daily ministrations by the preachers of the revival, and murmured at the neglect. In truth, that book had been gathering dust from the commencement of the excitement, and would have been completely covered from view had not its friends interposed to prevent it. At first, they were pleased to see the Methodists and Baptists so cordially uniting with us in worship; no doubt, hoping they would become Presbyterians. But as soon as they saw sects drawing away disciples after them, they raised the tocsin of alarm—the confession is in danger!—the church is in danger! O Israel to your tents!"¹

The friends of the confession determined to stop this procedure and brought Richard McNemar, one of Stone's co-workers "through their fiery ordeal, for preaching these anti-Calvinistic doctrines." Five ministers withdrew from the authority of the Synod and organized themselves into a Presbytery, which they called the Springfield Presbytery.

A committee of the Synod had tried to reclaim the dissenters.

"Old father David Rice . . . urged one argument worthy of record, it was this—that every departure from Calvinism was an advance to atheism. The grades named by him were from Calvinism to Arminianism, from Arminianism to Pelagianism, from Pelagianism to deism, from deism to atheism. This was his principal argument, which could have no effect on minds ardent in the search for truth."²

1. Biography of Barton W. Stone written by himself, with additions and reflections by John Rogers, pp. 44-46.
2. Biography of Barton W. Stone written by himself, with additions and reflections by John Rogers, p. 47.

These five, Marshall, Dunlevy, McNemar, Stone, and Thompson, "wrote a letter to their congregations informing them of what had transpired," and promised an explanation. Stone proceeds:

"This book we soon after published, called *The Apology of Springfield Presbytery*. In this book we stated our objections at length to the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, and against all authoritative confessions and creeds formed by fallible men. We expressed our total abandonment of all authoritative creeds, but the Bible alone, as the only rule of our faith and practice The presses were employed, and teemed forth pamphlets against us, full of misrepresentation and invective, and the pulpits everywhere uttered their contents Soon after our separation, I called together my congregations and informed them that I could no longer conscientiously preach to support the Presbyterian church—that my labors should henceforth be directed to advance the Redeemer's kingdom, irrespective of party—that I absolved them from all obligations in a pecuniary point of view, and then in their presence tore up their salary obligation to me, in order to free their minds from all fear of being called upon hereafter for aid. Never had a pastor and churches lived together more harmoniously than we had for about six years. Never have I found a more loving, kind, and orderly people in any country, and never have I felt a more cordial attachment to any others. I told them that I should continue to preach among them, but not in the relation that had previously existed between us. This was truly a day of sorrow, and the impressions of it are indelible.

"Thus to the cause of truth I sacrificed the friendship of two large congregations, and an abundant salary for the support of myself and family. I preferred the truth to the friendship and kindness of my associates in the Presbyterian ministry, who were dear to me, and tenderly united in the bonds of love. I preferred honesty and a good conscience to all these things. Having emancipated my slaves, I turned my attention cheerfully, though awkwardly, to labor on my little farm. Though fatigued in body, my mind was happy, and 'calm as summer evenings be.' I relaxed not in my ministerial labors, preaching almost every night, and often in the daytime to the people around Under the name of Springfield Presbytery we went forward preaching and constituting churches; but we had

not worn our name more than one year before we saw it savored of a party spirit. With the man-made creeds we threw it overboard, and took the name Christian—the name given to the disciples by divine appointment first at Antioch. We published a pamphlet on this name, written by Elder Rice Haggard, who had lately united with us. Having divested ourselves of all party creeds and party names, and trusting alone in God, and the word of his grace, we became a by-word and laughing stock to the sects around; all prophesying our speedy annihilation. Yet from this period I date the commencement of that reformation, which has progressed to this day. Through much tribulation and opposition, we advanced, and churches and preachers were multiplied.”¹

Among the very first to join the new movement in Kentucky was David Purviance. He had been ruling elder in the Cane Ridge Church and imbibed the free salvation ideas preached by the seceders. Purviance withdrew from the Presbytery by letter and joined the newly organized Springfield Presbytery.

“At this time Purviance opposed that national and popular sin, slavery, maintaining the rights of the oppressed downtrodden African. He never had owned slaves, but both his father and father-in-law had. Under his influence, both men liberated their slaves, and the majority of Cane Ridge Church members did likewise.

“With great zeal David Purviance entered upon his ministry Night and day he preached, exhorted, sang, and prayed, convincing many by his demeanor that he was very enthusiastic He traveled in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Ohio, preaching the Gospel.”²

The Christian Church as a movement in the West met with many reverses. Of the original five ministers coming out of the Presbyterian Church all but Stone soon forsook the movement. He and Purviance were undaunted and the movement grew. “A conference had been organized in Kentucky in 1804, the records of

1. Biography of Barton W. Stone written by himself, with additions and reflections by John Rogers, pp. 49, 50.

2. Milo T. Morrill, *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, p. 56.

which are still extant."1 The Deer Creek Conference in Ohio was organized in 1807 or 1808 and rapid growth and expansion took place. In the West the Christian Church has a continuous history from the year 1804 to the present time.

We have seen how the desire for freedom of mind and expression was crystallized in three widely separated sections among three denominations at almost the same time. The earliest movement developed among the Methodists in Virginia and North Carolina; just a little later a similar movement developed among the Baptists of New England and only a little later among the Presbyterians in Kentucky. In fact the development of these movements was almost simultaneous and each independent of the others in its inception. We shall now trace the rise of a most important factor in the co-ordination of those three groups.

In 1805, Rev. Elias Smith published "The Christian's Magazine" which he issued quarterly and in which he treated religious subjects. There were some magazines that dealt with religious themes, and many tracts and pamphlets had been printed but no religious newspapers. September 1, 1808, Elias Smith issued the first religious newspaper in the world under the title "Herald of Gospel Liberty." He selected the name for his paper with a good deal of care and issued a paper true to the title it bore. We shall look at a few quotations from the first copy, issued at Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

"Address to the public. To the subscribers for this paper, and to all who may hereafter read its contents—

"Brethren and Fellow-Citizens: The age in which we live may certainly be distinguished from others in the history of man, and particularly as it respects the people of these United States; the increase of knowledge is very great in different parts of the world, and of course

1. Milo T. Morrill, History of the Christian Denomination in America, p. 122.

there is an increase of Liberty among the people, and an increasing desire among certain individuals, accompanied with their fruitless exertions, to prevent them from enjoying what they have been taught belongs to them, as a right given by their Creator, and guaranteed by the government of the country in which we live A member of Congress said to me not long ago (while speaking upon the state of the people in this country, as it respects religious liberty) to this amount: "The people in this country are in general free, as to political matters; but in the things of religion, multitudes of them are apparently ignorant of what liberty is." This is true. Many who appear to know what belongs to them as citizens, and who will contend for their rights, when they talk or act upon things of the highest importance, appear to be guided wholly by the opinions of designing men, who would bind them in the chains of ignorance all their days and entail the same on all their posterity. The design of this paper is to show the liberty which belongs to men, as it respects their duty to God, and each other

"A religious newspaper is almost a new thing under the sun. I know not but this is the first ever published to the world.

"The Utility of such a paper has been suggested to me, from the great use other papers are to the community at large. In this way almost the whole state of the world is presented to us at once If we are profited in political affairs in this way, I do not see why the knowledge of the Redeemer's kingdom may not be promoted or increased in the same way. It appears to me best to make the trial.

"It may be that some may wish to know why this paper should be named 'The Herald of Gospel Liberty.' This kind of liberty is the only one which can make us happy, being the glorious liberty of the sons of God which Christ proclaimed, and which all who have are exhorted to stand fast in, being that which is given and enjoined by the law of liberty; which is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes free from the law of sin and death."¹

This religious newspaper founded by Elias Smith in 1808 has been a medium of religious knowledge and a means of co-ordination and mutual understanding in the Christian Church. It early became the official organ

1. J. P. Barrett, Centennial of Religious Journalism, pp. 29 ff.

of the denomination and continues to the present as a vital force in the work of the church. It was through correspondence, itinerant ministers, and *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* that the three groups of Christians became acquainted, found they were on the same platform and recognized each other. This publication has had more to do with this than any other agency.

Denominational consciousness has come only through a gradual process of development. It is impossible to set any given date when the various groups became united into a body and felt themselves a part of a denomination. However, a few dates and occurrences will be given to show the trend in this respect. In the South the ministers seem to have held conferences from the beginning but many of the records were destroyed after the meetings lest they be used as established precedents in future conferences. There has been organized activity in the South since 1794. The early conferences were without authority and the members were careful not to compromise their liberty or the independence of the churches. The first regularly organized local conference, records of which are extant, was in Kentucky in 1804. The next was in Virginia in 1814 and the third was in New York in 1818, composed of elders and of delegates sent by churches.¹ The first delegated United States Christian Conference was held at Windham, Connecticut, in 1820. It was loosely organized and had no continuous life between sessions. In 1826 the United States General Christian Conference limited the number of delegates from local conferences to three and state conferences were restricted to one vote.

At the conference held in New York in 1831 a resolution was adopted stating that measures adopted by the General Christian Conference should be considered as

1. Milo T. Morrill, *History of the Christian Denomination in America*, p. 139.

advisory only. At Milan, New York, in 1832, the General Conference was dissolved "forever," but the delegates soon saw the mistake of this and a call was issued to reorganize. This was done the following year. Gradually the sense of solidarity grew and in 1850, when the denominational consciousness had been quite generally realized, the Christian Church undertook the founding of a college. This was a great step. With departments of the church already set up and many signs of denominational solidarity in evidence, the establishing and endowing of institutions of learning guaranteed the permanency and perpetuation of the denomination. Delegates had been coming together from all sections of the church and had gradually been assuming a larger sense of interdependence and co-operation.

The main principles for which the Christian Church has stood may be quite clearly discerned in the early history of the movement. We shall only enumerate them here, reserving their elaboration for a later chapter. The principles which stand out most clearly are:

- (1) **The right of the individual** to interpret God's truth for himself.
- (2) **Christian Character** as the only vital test of fellowship.
- (3) The use of the name **Christian** to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
- (4) **The Bible** as a sufficient creed and rule of faith and practice.
- (5) **Christ** as the head of the church, (the early leaders thought they were answerable to God in the light of Christ's leadership, and not dependent on ecclesiastical authorities).
- (6) The union of all Christians.

In the troubled times following the American Revolution when churches were feeling the urge of new adjustments and when men were breathing the free air of new found political liberty, there arose among the churches men of sturdy faith and determination. We have seen how some of these great religious souls, troubled by the conflicting efforts of sectarian strife and puzzled with the doctrinal content of creeds and confessions, sought the realities of vital religion freed from the ecclesiastical authority of human organizations and creeds. They had no intention of seceding or forming a new denomination but only wished that liberty of faith and conduct which seemed vital to them. To procure it they were led to break with the organizations that had nourished them; and to perpetuate and give to others the same liberty which was dear to them they had to organize and build up institutions for furthering their purposes. In this process the movement became the denomination known as the Christian Church.

The writer does not affirm that we have always been true to the principles of our early leaders; many of us have almost unconsciously carried over a part of the same narrowness from which they fled; some of us have mistaken license for liberty and have failed to give that co-operation that is necessary for united achievement; many worthy undertakings have been launched and abandoned for lack of united support; we have made many mistakes and failures; but even through them all or in face of them all the Christian Church has made a large contribution to the achievements of Christianity in the last century and a quarter. These items we shall consider later.

CHAPTER III

The Relation of the Christians With Other Religious Bodies

The proper evaluation of a religious movement is a most difficult task. Bias and prejudice are soon manifest when traditional doctrines and customs of religion are disturbed. This is quite prominent in the historical records regarding the Christian Church. It is most interesting to observe the description of the origin and work of the Christians as recorded for us in Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian sources. The early attitude branded the movement as the work of headstrong individualists with poor judgment and misguided enthusiasm. The leaders were classed with whatever forces had proved troublesome in the past. Favorite expressions were used such as Arians, Arminians, Seceders, heretics, New Lights, and Unitarians. These charges are intelligible in the light of the times. A proper interpretation takes all these things into consideration.

An understanding of the contribution of the Christian Church to American church life can be had only by due consideration of the relationships of the Christian Church to other bodies. As has been seen, the church arose simultaneously out of three great denominations in three separated sections of territory. The Christian Church in the South had a Methodist background and carried over quite completely Methodist doctrines, except in the matter of church government and statement of creed. To this day the more general doctrines of the Methodist Church are quite largely held by the people of the Christian Church in the South.

In New England the ancestry was good Baptist stock, the break arising about Calvinistic doctrines, creed, and name. To the present in New England and

Canada the Christian Churches are almost a unit in the use of immersion as the mode of baptism. They have not been regarded as "orthodox" on such doctrines as Trinity, atonement, original sin, and election. The revolt of the early leaders against such doctrines made them worthy in the thinking of orthodox leaders of being classed with the Unitarians.

The break was most complete in Kentucky and the West. Here the previous associations were Presbyterian. Barton W. Stone was a well-educated man and scrupulously honest in his thinking and practice. His first perplexities were over doctrines. He wanted to believe the confession and the accepted doctrines of Presbyterianism. When he and his fellow ministers organized the Springfield Presbytery they were only trying to be honest with themselves and their fellowmen. They made a careful study of the confession and the Bible, and accepted the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, and Christian as the God-given name. A careful study of the Bible convinced the leaders of the Christian Church in Kentucky that immersion was the proper mode of baptism but each one had liberty on this point. Immersion was not made a test of membership in the church. Stone and other early leaders in Kentucky and Ohio were untiring workers. They preached far and near, and soon had churches scattered over Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Immigration from the East and South brought a few Christian preachers from the New England and southern section into the West. The movement prospered, churches multiplied, ministers were ordained, and thousands of people professed conversion under the stimulus of the work. There were some churches from Baptists that came over to the Christians and some ministers from other denominations, but for the most part the gains were by the legitimate fruit of evangelism

among the unchurches. The movement of the Christians or the Christian Church was well established in the East, South, and West.

About this time another movement developed in the West. Thomas Campbell reached America in 1807. His son, Alexander, arrived in 1809. Under the Campbells a "Reformers" movement grew up which the Disciples of Christ date from the issuance of the "Declaration and Address" in 1809.¹ The origin of this movement is quite similar to that of the Christians. Thomas and Alexander Campbell were puzzled by conditions similar to those that had previously confronted Stone and those associated with him. In 1813 they decided that immersion was the New Testament mode of baptism and were baptized by a Baptist minister. From this time until 1830 the movement of the Campbells was a "Reformers" movement among the Baptists. Being excluded from the Baptists in 1830, the Reformers were forced to seek independent organization and became a separate denomination. Since the name Christian had already been taken by another body, the name Disciples of Christ was taken by the Reformers as their new name.

For several years the "Reformers" among the Baptists, led by Alexander Campbell, had been working side by side in Kentucky and Ohio with the Christians. They were much alike in belief and practice and each influenced the other. The Christians had not made baptism a test of fellowship but received converts on their confession of faith and extended them the "hand of fellowship" on receiving them into the church. Baptism was left to the conscience of the individual, although some of the ministers were quite strong in the advocacy of immersion as the proper mode. Many of the Christians and Reformers were so near together

1. E. Gates, *The Disciples of Christ*.

that it seemed useless to quarrel and perpetuate strife. The desire for the union of all followers of Christ advocated by both parties led to a so-called union that has been much misunderstood. This took place January 1, 1832. It must be understood that this was in the early period of both movements. The Disciples were only beginning a separate existence and the Christians had no adequate machinery to consummate union. What took place at Lexington, Kentucky, in 1832, cannot be called a union in the sense we use the term today. It was more accurately a working agreement among certain leaders in both movements. Very important results have taken place because of this agreement, and in fact it resulted in the union of a large section of the Christians with the Disciples. On this much disputed and misunderstood point, I shall quote at length from authentic Disciples of Christ sources.

William T. Moore writes,

"As regards the 'Christians' they also had some able men associated with them. Of course, Stone himself was everywhere recognized as the leader of their forces; but associated with him were such men as John Rogers, T. M. Allen, John Allen Gano, B. F. Hall, and others of almost equal ability and earnestness; but perhaps those mentioned were chiefly instrumental in leading the forces in Kentucky. Gano was a great evangelist, second only to John T. Johnson to whom reference has already been made, and Hall was a rising young man with great promise, while T. M. Allen was already a preacher of much influence. As these respective brethren operated largely in the same districts of country, they constantly came in contact with one another, and in this way they came to understand that they were all aiming at practically the same thing, namely, the overthrow of sectarianism and the union of God's people on a Scriptural platform.

"This feeling of substantial unity was accelerated by the publication of the 'Christian Messenger', at Georgetown, Kentucky, edited by B. W. Stone. This periodical was started in 1826, and a careful examination of its pages will show that it advocated very generally the same things for which Mr. Campbell was contending in the 'Millennial Harbinger', and much for what he

contended in the 'Christian Baptist', which was circulating in Kentucky at the time Mr. Stone began the publication of the 'Christian Messenger.'

"The chief differences between the two bodies were with respect to baptism and the doctrine of the Godhead, or 'Trinity', to use the popular term of theology. While the 'Christians', as has already been remarked, for the most part, practised believers' immersion, at the same time they allowed considerable liberty on this question, and consequently among them were some who practised infant baptism, and not a few who had simply been sprinkled. The other point of difference was purely theoretical, and consequently the very principles of both movements rejected this as a test of Christian fellowship. Mr. Campbell and Mr. Stone held to somewhat different views with respect to this matter, but neither was willing to make his views a barrier in the way of Christian union, while each view was held simply as a private opinion. This was the situation at the beginning of the year 1832 when a meeting was convened at Lexington, Kentucky, of both parties, with a view to a permanent union.

"At this point it is well to give the testimony of Dr. Richardson with respect to the Stone movement, in contrast to the work of the Reformation, as this is found in his 'Memoirs of Alexander Campbell', Volume II, pages 198, 199:

'While the features of this organization were thus, in a good measure, similar to those of the reformation in which Mr. Campbell was engaged, there were some characteristic differences. With the former, the idea of uniting all men under Christ was predominant; with the latter, the desire of an exact conformity to the primitive faith and practice. The one occupied itself chiefly in casting abroad the sweep-net of the Gospel, which gathers fishes of all kinds; the other was more intent upon collecting 'the good into vessels' and casting 'the bad away.' Hence, the former engaged more in preaching, the latter in teaching. The revivalist machinery of protracted meetings, warm exhortations, personal entreaty, earnest prayers for conversion and union, accompanied by a belief in special spiritual operations and the use of the mourner's seat, existed with the one, while with the other the matters of chief interest were the

disentanglement of the Christian faith from modern corruptions of it and the recovery of the gospel ordinances and ancient order of things. There had, indeed, been an almost entire neglect of evangelization on the part of the few churches which were originally connected with Mr. Campbell in his reformatory efforts. They had not a single itinerant preacher, and, although they made great progress in Biblical knowledge, they gained comparatively few converts. The churches of the 'Christian Connection,' on the other hand, less inimical to speculative theories, granting membership to the unimmersed and free communion to all, and imperfectly acquainted with the order, discipline, and institutions of the churches, made, through an efficient itinerancy, large accessions everywhere, and increased with surprising rapidity. They were characterized by a simplicity of belief and manners and a liberality of spirit highly captivating, and possessed, in general, a striking and praiseworthy readiness to receive additional light from the Bible. They gained over, consequently, from the religious community many of the pious and peace-loving, who groaned under the evils of sectarianism, while the earnest exhortations of zealous preachers and their direct personal appeals to sinners obtained large accessions from the world.'

"This extract will show at once the value of the union of these two bodies. The 'Christians' brought into the movement a new evangelistic element, while the 'Reformers' brought into it an earnest study of the Scriptures, and an equally earnest plea for conformity to all the Scriptures enjoined."¹

Speaking of the "Christians," Moore writes:

"They were intensely evangelistic, and they contributed to the union a valuable asset in this respect, especially in Kentucky, where the 'Reformers' had largely confined their propaganda to the Baptist Churches, rather than to the conversion of the world."²

1. William T. Moore, *History of the Disciples of Christ*, pp. 252-255.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

"As has already been seen, they gained also in the ministry that came in with the 'Christians.' Some of the ablest men of the Reformation movement belonged to the 'Christian body.'"¹

THE BASIS OF UNION

Dr. J. H. Garrison speaks of this union as follows:

"The two sides did not come to an entire agreement on certain points that had hitherto divided them. Alexander Campbell and those with him who had come from the Baptists were very decided in their views on the divinity of Christ, the three persons in the Godhead, and the atonement. B. W. Stone had held a position on these important subjects that in the judgment of the religious community savored of Unitarianism. It was found, however, on a full exchange of views, that the Stone men had a much sounder conception of the divinity of Christ and the atonement than had been attributed to them. They had been, as was quite natural, the object of intense prejudice and consequent misrepresentation by the denominations, especially the one from which they had gone forth. They had experienced the common lot of reformers. It is not unlikely that A. Campbell himself had been influenced to some extent by this general tide of hostile sentiment that assailed these reformers. At a later day he freely expressed his better appreciation of them and their doctrinal position.

"In Kentucky and the Southwest generally," he wrote, "this (i. e. speculating about the modus of the divine existence) is getting out of fashion, and many of the congregations called 'Christians' are just as sound in the faith of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, in the plain import of these words, as any congregations with which I am acquainted.

"What decided the reformers who stood with A. Campbell to enter into this union with the 'Christians'? This is certainly a question of deep interest to us.

"Let me give the answer briefly, based on a careful study of the case.

1. As already stated, these 'Christians' were earnest Biblical reformers, resolved to stand on the Bible alone.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

They had rejected all creeds, had adopted the immersion of penitent believers as the only scriptural baptism. They were most reverent of Jesus Christ as the Lord of life and glory and as the Savior and Redeemer of men by his death on the cross.

2. They were ready and zealous to learn the way of life more perfectly; there was with them no 'hitherto and no farther' in Bible knowledge, as with men bound by creeds.
3. Like the brethren of the other side, they were resolved to keep aloof from all speculations on matters of faith and duty, and to teach only the Word, in the thoughts and language of Christ and the apostles.
4. Finally—and this was a capital matter—Stone and his brethren were noted for their noble manliness of character, their piety and religious zeal. They were men worthy of the highest confidence. A. Campbell repeatedly bore strong witness to this.

"And now as to the results of this union. This is a very instructive history and of the greatest moment to the proper appreciation of the principles of Christian union proposed by this reformation.

"First of all, and most evident, is the fact that by means of this alliance an immense force, in the numbers and the character of the people brought into the union, was added to the army of New Testament reformers. It is not easy to calculate with any sort of accuracy the additional strength thus acquired. There must be taken into account not only the 'Christian' Churches, but eminently also the not inconsiderable company of preachers, not a few of them strong men, that was united with the other body of able ministers of the Word advocating a return to primitive Christianity, together now constituting a mighty host of valiant reformers. This new increase of strength extended especially over the important territory of Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and later of Missouri, a vast field especially favorable to religious reform. That this accession gave our reformation a mighty impulse is beyond all question. Who, acquainted with our history, does not know what was gained by winning to our cause such men as Samuel and John Rogers, J. A. Gano, T. M. Allen, Henry D. and

Francis R. Palmer, and others that might be named, besides B. W. Stone himself? A long list of younger men, who became great preachers, might be named, who were brought to us by this union. Much of the marvelous advance our plea has made in the states above named and in the great West generally, is beyond doubt largely owing to the union of the 'Christians' with the 'Disciples.'

The facts of history continuously demonstrated for the past ninety years prove that there was a union of the Reformers or Disciples of Christ and a part of the Christians. To say that Barton W. Stone and the others associated with him joined the Disciples of Christ Church would be a misstatement of the case. It would be equally untrue to say that Alexander Campbell and those associated with him joined the Christian Church. Nor was there an organic union of the two denominations. The facts indicate a flowing together of two streams. One stream, a part of the Christian movement; the other stream, the Reform movement headed by Alexander Campbell and just emerging from the Baptists. The streams blended, each influencing the other and giving a result quite different from either.

On this matter, Gates writes as follows:

"The contributions of the Christians to the joint movement were by no means unimportant. The biographer of John Smith estimates the number of Christians who came into the union in Kentucky alone at 8,000. The number must have reached a third or a half more in other States. They contributed besides Stone several other preachers of superior talent and character"

"Stone and his followers were primarily Christian unionists, as had been Thomas Campbell and the Christian Association of Washington. There was emphasis upon reformation of faith and practice in their advocacy, as a preparation for union, but the union of the children of God was ever the end before them. As a consequence, their basis of fellowship was broader, and larger liberty was allowed to the individual conscience. They did not insist upon baptism as a condition

1. J. H. Garrison, *The Reformation of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 92-96.

of fellowship in their churches. Stone's conception of union was more spiritual than that of Campbell. He looked to a diffusion of the spirit of holiness and love among Christians to unite them, while Campbell rested his hope of union upon an agreement in New Testament faith and practice. Campbell and many of his followers held aloof from the Christians at first on account of their supposed departure from sound doctrine, and it was not until the Christians had practically signified their acceptance of the teaching of the Reformers upon the subject of baptism and the Lord's Supper, that union with them was deemed advisable. Union came because the two parties found themselves upon the same ground of faith and practice. The Stone movement was born out of a religious revival and the preachers of that connection were primarily winners of souls. They were all evangelists; and it was due to this fact that the movement spread so rapidly and widely. Alexander Campbell was not an evangelist. He was essentially a teacher and set for his aim the transformation of the minds of Christian people with respect to the doctrines of Christianity. The Campbell movement started as a propaganda among the churches and would have resulted in a proselytism when separated from the Baptists had it not been leavened by the evangelism of Walter Scott and the Stone Movement. These two elements, a proselytism and an evangelism, have survived side by side throughout the history of the Disciples, and have contributed more than all other elements to their growth."¹

This analysis shows that the Christian Church has had a very large influence in the work of the Disciples of Christ. The stream of the Christians that merged with Disciples has been a very formative part in the great achievements of that body of people. The great emphasis of the early Disciples movement was "back to the primitive church," back to the "apostolic practice," back to the "ancient order." Their great emphasis in preaching has been on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, taking their start from Pentecost. Among the Christians the emphasis was turned more to Jesus and the Gospels. The burden of preaching has

1. E. Gates, *The Disciples of Christ*, pp. 203, 211.

centered more upon Jesus, his love and spirit, than upon the apostles.

✱ Let us return to the study of another epoch making event in the history of the Christian Church—the launching of their first educational institution of collegiate rank. Some of the early leaders were educated, scholarly men. The education of the growing ministry of the church presented a serious problem. It became more and more apparent that schools would need to be established for the unsectarian training of a ministry. In the church papers of the denomination and in the conventions and conferences the matter was discussed and agitated. Finally the building of Antioch College and the outline of its character were decided on at a convention held in Marion, Wayne County, New York, in October, 1850. At this point, let us see the estimate of Dr. Edward Everett Hale, a trustee of Antioch College and one of her staunchest friends and supporters. These quotations are selected from an article on Antioch College prepared by Dr. Hale, and appearing in Harwood's Life and Letters of A. Craig.

"Antioch College had been founded by the Christian denomination in the year 1850. They determined to establish a college, which would outstrip from the start anything in the western country, if not in the United States. They resolved not only that education should be thorough and high, but also universal, and to this end they embraced in their scheme of academic education, young women as well as young men. They resolved on knowing no more distinction in education than in religion." (Henry W. Bellows.)

"Seeking to 'get the best' as our fine American proverb says, the trustees of Antioch College called Horace Mann to be its first president In September, 1852, the trustees of Antioch College distinguished their new institution by offering to him its presidency.

"He accepted this offer, assuming the very difficult task, which came before an institution so broad and generous in its plans, and removed to Yellow Springs where he remained till his death.

He gave to the new college a reputation which it has never lost, for he taught the community that its work was closely allied with the great national system of free public education

"Antioch College had erected three admirable buildings at very considerable cost. Few colleges in the country could at that time boast such a building as the college proper. There was a large dormitory for men, and another for women, providing larger accommodations for students than Harvard College had at that time. An elegant campus was laid out for the students, and a large and convenient house was built for the president. All this required money, and the most of this money had been raised by loyal subscriptions from the congregations of the Christian denomination. The promise had been made to all subscribers that if any person subscribed one hundred dollars he should be permitted to name a student who might go through his course without other charge

"From this unfortunate provision, it befell that, while from the very first Antioch College had always a large assembly of students, it had almost no income. The dormitories were full, the instruction was admirable, the esprit de corps was well-nigh perfect, but from year to year there was almost nothing received in the treasury. The corporation which founded the college had assumed obligations which it could not discharge. Not unnaturally the founders of the college and the friends of Mr. Mann in New England appealed to a larger public to provide permanent funds for carrying out the magnificent purpose which they had in hand. At that time every college west of New England with the single exception of Antioch College was under the control of some ecclesiastical body. Even what were called the State Universities would receive no teacher or professor who was not considered sound in old-fashioned orthodoxy. An appeal was, therefore, made to the Unitarian Church to come to the rescue of an institution which had opened its doors with such courage to all sorts and conditions of men and women."¹

This action led to a new corporation that put Antioch College under the joint control of the Christians and Unitarians, but from its charter it is hindered from ever becoming sectarian in its teaching. The purpose plan and the early achievement of Antioch College

1. W. S. Harwood, *Life and Letters of Austin Craig*, pp. 268, 269.

make a chapter of which the Christian Church may well be proud. The lack of business management and the bigotry and narrowness of many of the Christians should cause shame to every lover of the principles of the Christian Church. Could the whole Christian brotherhood have been true to the principles we had espoused, and loyally supported the noble work of Horace Mann, Thomas Hill, Austin Craig, and J. B. Weston, how glowing might have been the record of our first college! Recognizing some of our failures, we still claim the honored distinction of opening the first college in America that threw its doors open to men and women on full equality in every department and without distinction as to creed or race.

Oberlin College has a worthy record on the matter of co-education. A Female Department was in the original plan and young ladies have been connected with the school from the beginning in 1833. Their charter provides:

"The Female Department, under the supervision of a lady, will furnish instruction in the useful branches taught in the best female seminaries, and its higher classes will be permitted to enjoy the privileges of such professorships in the Teachers', Collegiate, and Theological Departments, as shall best suit their sex and prospective employment."¹

This modified plan worked out quite well and, as a matter of fact, three young ladies were graduated from Oberlin in 1841—the first ladies to receive literary degrees in this country. Antioch, however, made no distinction from the beginning and gave complete recognition to co-education.

Nicholas Murray Butler writes:

"In 1853 Antioch College, also of Ohio, was opened and admitted from the beginning men and women on equal terms. Its first president, Horace Mann, was one of the most brilliant and

1. J. H. Fairchild, *Oberlin—Its Origin, Progress and Results*. (Address for Alumni of Oberlin College.)

energetic educational leaders in the United States, and his ardent advocacy of co-education, based on his own practical experience, had great weight with the public. From this time on it became a custom, as state universities were opened in the far West, to admit women."²

The regular educational policy of the Christian Church has made no distinction as to sex, race, or creed. Women have been among the student body of the various colleges from the beginning. In fact, the Christians have always taken a liberal attitude on the question of "woman's sphere." Women have been among the licensed ministers of the church from the days of James O'Kelley. Some of the early churches were founded by women and a goodly number of very successful ministers were converted and led to the ministry under the efforts of women preachers.¹

The influence of the Christian Church has had effect in the Christian Endeavor movement. The third society formed was in a Christian Church. This gave the movement an interdenominational character.²

In this chapter the writer has dwelt at considerable length upon the relationship of the Christian Church with the Disciples of Christ, because it is a matter of Church history that is not generally understood but is important for a correct understanding of the movements. Considerable attention is given to Antioch College because of its unique position and the relations with the Unitarians that grew out of it.

Other relations with various denominations may be found in Morrill's History, but are not so vital to the subject of this book.

2. Nicholas Murray Butler, *Education in the United States*, p. 324.

1. J. F. Burnett, *Early Women of the Christian Church*.

2. Francis E. Clark, *World Wide Christian Endeavor*.

CHAPTER IV

Summary

In this conclusion we undertake to summarize the contribution of the Christian Church to the history of doctrine and to the practice of church life in America. We have seen how the church arose out of the political and social situation following the American Revolution which gave us political liberty. The church owes its origin to no one leader nor to a single locality but to the expression of similar desires on the part of three widely separated groups of people. In the troubled times following the Revolution, when political liberty had been won, when churches were readjusting themselves to meet the needs of the time, when denominational rivalries were high, earnest souls sought the realities of the Christian life. In this great quest a group came out from the Methodist Church in the South, another group emerged from the Baptists in New England, a third from the Presbyterians in the West. These were earnest men of deep conviction and true piety. Coming from different denominational parentage and inspired by the same spirit of liberty; engaged in the same great quest for truth and reality, they arrived at similar conclusions and gave to American church life a new denomination known simply as the Christian Church.

The attainment of freedom and liberty in the churches has been a long process to which many agencies and individuals have made their contributions. Without the foundations of the past the achievements of the present would not be possible. The Christian Church did not come by chance or as the result of a single leader—it developed out of the total situation of an epoch-making period. The Christian Church is the first distinct American Church. Born on American soil, breathing the full breath of freedom, the Christian

Church offered the complete democracy of liberty in matters of the Christian religion. Baptists and Quakers had purchased much by their earnest efforts. Unitarianism was making a contribution. But to the Christians belongs the credit of heralding out the broad principle of union in a common faith and loyalty, and liberty in doctrinal and speculative matters.

Let us examine more closely the items that have frequently been regarded as the principles inherent in the early movement of the church we are studying.

First:—The right of the individual to interpret God's truth for himself. Liberty was the most outstanding element in the thought of the day. The air was vibrant with the impulse of liberty; why should men not be allowed to exercise it in religion? This has its dangers and those who have been most familiar with the work of the Christian Church are well aware of them. Nevertheless, we cherish the right even if it may be abused. The writer would call attention to the following statement from a doctor's thesis on "The Great Revival in the West."

"It is probable, too, that the great freedom in religious thinking, prevalent at the present day, owes something to the demand made by many of the revivalists that each individual be allowed to interpret the Scriptures for himself. Though their logical interpretation of the Scriptures was decidedly dogmatic in its expression, and is far removed from the idea which prevails at the beginning of the twentieth century, the latter is seen to be linked to the former when the evolutionary process is carefully considered.

"Although the fervor of the revival movement abated about the year 1805, the influences it brought to bear upon the individual and the community were of a more lasting character. The forces set in motion must be reckoned with as important factors in the development of western society in the years that followed."¹

Second:—Christian character the test of fellowship. After all, this is the ultimate test—the good life. Theological and doctrinal tests are not the ones that count

1. Catharine Cleveland, *The Great Revival in the West*.

in the practical affairs of life. If an individual is living a good upright life who cares what his speculative opinions may be? The Christians were cast out as heretics, some of them suffered vile slander at the mouth of the orthodox, but history pays tribute to their piety and earnest Christian character.

The Christian Church leaders have been active in social reform. Their emphasis upon character as the test of fellowship can be shown to have produced practical results. Examine the work of O'Kelley, Stone, Purviance, and Kinkade. They were advocates of human liberty, opposing the institution of slavery. From the days of these leaders, down to the present, the Christian Church has emphasized human freedom, temperance, moral and social reform.²

Third:—Christian is the name recognized as undivisive, unsectarian and expressive. Christian, Christians, and Christian Church are the only names that have been recognized as proper in the church. Christian Connection has sometimes been used but when so used Connection was equivalent to Church and was in no way a distinctive part of the name. We find the literature of the same period speaks of the Methodist Connection or the Baptist Connection. The name Christian was not appropriated in any narrow sense and it was not the desire of the early leaders to establish a denomination. They really tried to avoid such. We are a denomination by the logic of fact not by the intent of the early leaders.

Fourth:—The Bible is the creed and rule of faith and practice. Efforts were made in some of the early conferences to draw up a creed or confession but the committee invariably reported the Bible or the New Testament as the creed. It was believed that it could be bet-

2. Milo T. Morrill. History of the Christian Denomination in America, p. 362.

ter understood and would be of larger use thus taken, than if interpreted or limited by a confession or creedal statement.

Fifth:—Christ himself the head of the Church. The authority of bishops and conferences was questioned and rejected. The authority of church councils and traditional decisions was also cast aside. The early church and the apostles were also subordinated to Jesus. The larger emphasis was put on Jesus and his gospel, rather than the ancient apostolic order. His simple faith and message were more to be trusted than the authority of delegated bodies or individuals. The Christian Church has no creedal formula on the person of Christ other than a general acceptance of the Scriptural statements. Orthodox bodies have sometimes regarded the Christians as Unitarians. This has largely been due to the fact that Christian ministers have generally regarded the Trinity as a product of speculation arising outside the Bible itself. This fact and the relation with the Unitarians in Meadville Seminary and Antioch College have furnished the grounds for the charge. However, the Christian Church has always given Jesus the exalted position of leader. He delivered the gospel and is the supreme head of the Church.

Sixth:—The union of all Christians. The aim of the movement centered on finding a basis for the recognition of all Christians and uniting all in a broad Christian fellowship. The zeal of the Christian Church has not centered on proselyting but on evangelizing and demonstrating the broad principles for which the church stood.

The contribution of the Christians has not been in giving another large denomination to American church life. As an organization, the movement has never become noted for its size. The great contribution has been the practical advocacy of a broader fellowship, recognizing the worth and freedom of the individual

and the supreme value of Christian character, looking to Jesus as the leader of our faith and the head of the church, and the Bible as the rule of faith and practice. Since 1794 the Christian Church has advocated these broad principles and has been a contributing agency to American life. To this end it gave to the world the first religious newspaper, *The Herald of Gospel Liberty*, founded September 1, 1808, and still published at Dayton, Ohio, as the official organ of the Christian Church.

Other organizations have taken up in large part the principles thus first advocated by the Christians; for this we should thank God and take courage. As has been seen, the Disciples of Christ owe a large measure of their phenomenal success to the tolerance, breadth of fellowship, and evangelistic zeal that the Christian stream contributed to the total current of their movement.

The great interdenominational movements have embodied the principles of the Christians—such movements as the Sunday-school, Christian Endeavor, Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., Federal Council of Churches of Christ, and the Community Church. Some outstanding leaders in these movements were reared and trained in the Christian Church; for example, Marion Lawrance and W. C. Pearce. Dr. Charles McFarland was never a member of the Christian Church but in his childhood days was cared for in the home of a Christian minister. Large numbers of people, trained in the fellowship of the Christian Church, have felt at liberty to enter other denominations and have become leaders and ministers in other churches.

Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, the first college founded by the Christians was the first to give women equality in all matters, courses, diplomas, graduation, faculty positions. Horace Mann, Antioch's first president, was a member of the Christian Church and

made a large contribution to the educational system of America. The Christian Church was the first in modern times to ordain women and place them on equality with men in pulpit, in conferences, conventions, and all Christian gatherings. They have always had equal privileges in voting in the churches, conferences, etc.

The Christian Church has never formulated any creed, nor has it become a great denomination widely known for its influence. Nevertheless, the origin, principles, and life of the movement have had a far-reaching and permanent influence on the doctrines and practices of the church life of America. The principles inherent in the movement have gained a large acceptance, and today many agencies are assisting to carry on the same principles for which the Christian Church has labored since 1794.

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