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The Disciples of Christ

Their Growth
Their Heritage
Their Timeliness

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These addresses were given at the Annual Convention of the Disciples of Christ of Northern California at San Jose in July, 1943.

Their Growth

The Disciples of Christ constitute the most recent and the most unique of the larger bodies of protestant faith. They originated in the United States early in the nineteenth century, and their chief characteristic from the beginning has been the advocacy of Christian union upon a non-theological basis. No denomination advocated union at that time. The Disciples have never had an official theology or a creed. There is no ecclesiastical authority over the local churches. The movement is neither trinitarian nor unitarian. The teachings are biblical, and biblical interpretation has followed the methods of "higher criticism" and common sense reasonableness. These and other important characteristics will be noted in the following pages. Three main subjects will be treated: first, the amazing growth of the Disciples; second, their great heritage; third, their unique possibilities today.

An Inside View

My own point of view in this study is that of a native son and a loyal adherent, cherishing the freedom which the Disciples allow their teachers and preachers. As a teacher and author in the field of the philosophy of religion, and as the minister of a liberal church, my personal experience has often proved this freedom.

My father was a Disciple minister. He grew up in a suburb of Boston, the child of Baptist parents. He was educated for the Baptist ministry and became the pastor of the Baptist Church in West Rupert, Vermont. There he first heard of the Disciples of Christ through W. H. Hayden, then the minister of the Disciples Church in that town. He became deeply interested in this new religious teaching and accepted it. I well remember when a boy hearing him talk with visiting Disciple ministers and others
about the “reformation” in which they were engaged. They believed that they shared in a great discovery, and in a new measure of light that had come from the Word of God. It was exciting talk to a boy of high school age.

I joined the church under my father’s preaching at a regular service in the little town of Dixon, Iowa, on a beautiful June Sunday, and was immersed by him that afternoon in the Wapsipinicon river. Some years afterward I went to Drake University. After graduation I decided to study for the ministry and had my first pastorate at Perry, Iowa, in 1890. I was ordained that year by J. B. Vawter, D. R. Dungan, and my father, in the University Church in Des Moines. From 1900 to 1940 I was pastor of the University Church of Disciples of Christ in Chicago, just across the street from the University of Chicago where I taught philosophy for thirty-five of those years. I mention these matters to indicate how intimately my religious life has been bound up with the Disciples of Christ from childhood.

An Outside View

But I also had an opportunity to look upon the Disciples from the outside, as it were. It seemed to me that if a man were going into the ministry he should gain for himself the best possible training. I was eager to have the experience of life and study in one of the greatest American universities. I therefore managed to be among the earliest dozen of Disciple students who went to the Yale Divinity School. It was a wonderful experience. I knew that the professors in such an institution must be very wise, but my faith in them was somewhat shaken when I found that they had scarcely heard of a religious body known as the Disciples of Christ, although at that time the Disciples numbered some six hundred thousand.

Since that time, however, Yale has become aware that the Disciples of Christ constitute one of the major religious bodies of this country, a numerous and virile body from which large numbers of students may be recruited for the Divinity School and for the churches in New England and elsewhere. It was something of a shock to find that the wise East knew so little about a great movement for Christian union upon the basis of New Testament teaching. It seemed there must be a mistake somewhere. Either these good professors were not well informed on some important religious matters, or the Disciples were not so important as they thought themselves to be. Many a young Disciple, since that time, and under similar circumstances, has faced that enigma, and too many of them have on that account lost their enthusiasm for the Disciples’ cause.

Numerical Growth

In the light of all the circumstances, the growth of the Disciples has been amazing. In 1812 there were 10 members of the “fellowship.” At the end of twenty years there were 20,000. In another twenty years (1850) there were 120,600. By 1870 there were 350,000. In 40 years, from 1832 to 1872, the number of Disciples had multiplied by 16 while the population of the United States had increased only three fold. From 1870 to 1900 the numbers trebled again and brought the total of members to over a million. By 1940 the membership in the United States, Canada, and foreign countries reached 1,800,000. It is to be noted that these numbers do not include young children as is the case in some denominational statistics.

Not Weird or Fantastic

How could a religious body develop so rapidly and so widely among middle class American people unless it had a vital and timely message for the day and age? The Disciples had no marks of a weird or
fantastic sect, basing their faith on an alleged latter
day mysterious revelation like that claimed by Jo-
seph Smith; nor upon some unscientific cult of heal-
ing; nor upon orgiastic emotionalism. They taught
no esoteric doctrine. They emphasized a scholarly
and common-sense interpretation of the Christian
scriptures, invited fair, critical inquiry into their
tenets, held nothing exempt from impartial study,
sought the best help from every source for their
problems, and were willing to meet their critics and
opponents in open, public debate. The Disciples, in
an unusual degree stressed sanity and reasonableness in religion and allowed great liberty of opinion.
These views, presented with conviction and skill
account in large measure for their amazing growth,
a numerical growth unparalleled in the history of
American Christianity when estimated in the light
of all the circumstances. Consider some of these
circumstances.

Place of Beginning

The place of their beginning was not promising
for popular success. It was in southwestern Pennsyl-
vania in a backwoods area. "Brushrun" was the
name of the sparse settlement where the first fellow-
ship of ten persons met. The nearby city of Pitts-
burgh, humanly speaking, would appear to have
been a better starting point. Social movements in
this country have usually been from east to west
and this was true of the Disciples. They did not
develop eastward in great numbers toward New
York or New Haven or Boston. Their expansion was
westward into Ohio, through the Mississippi Val-
ley and at length fanwise to the Pacific Coast. A
further important fact is that as a frontier, rural
people, their growth was predominantly in frontier,
rural populations rather than in the cities. The
Disciples might be called a County Seat religious
body. But the early leaders had little concern for the
importance of such accidents of time or place. They
profoundly believed in the reality and power of the
ideas they cherished and felt that these ideas had
enough vitality and persuasive force to make them
appealing wherever proclaimed.

No Old World History

Another advantage which the older denomina-
tions had and which the Disciples lacked was the
momentum and influence of an old world history
and tradition. The Methodists had an English back-
ground and a century of success among the masses.
Presbyterians and Lutherans had cultivated their
theological ideas since the sixteenth century and
were widely represented in Europe and Great Brit-
tain. Baptists, Congregationalists, and other bodies
with the familiar Calvinistic inheritance were well
known abroad and had achieved social and religious
respectability. All the major denominations in
America had the advantages of reputation, famous
leadership, and the prestige of wealth. The Disci-
ples, in contrast, started in this country without a
history, without leaders of repute, without wealth
or prestige. They were literally a new born voice
crying in the wilderness.

Outdistanced Old Denominations

In little more than a hundred years the Disciples
of Christ had, according to the United States cen-
sus outdistanced all of the great protestant bodies,
except four. That is, they had more communicants
than any of the two hundred denominations, except
the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and Luther-
ans. I am not saying that the Disciples' religious
position is proved correct or superior by this amaz-
ing growth. I am only calling attention to the fact
that these nearly two million people from the rank
and file of America's middle class population were
not gathered into some fantastic or weird sect under
emotional delusion or by unreasonable methods.
The Disciples have been a biblical people and they
have prided themselves on knowing the Book, especially the New Testament, in terms of recognized scholarship and reverent study. They have put great stress on reasonableness in religion and have called upon every man to excercise the right of private interpretation and to check his understanding of any given text by careful and faithful comparison of it with other passages relevant to the subject under consideration.

**Discarded Old Theology**

Another explanation of their growth is the fact that they have sought to make loyalty to Jesus Christ the center of their religious appeal, and have given men a clear and acceptable conception of Jesus Christ. They discarded the age old theological and metaphysical speculations concerning his nature. Men should see him now as men beheld him long ago as one who dwelt among us and revealed his glory in word and deed. His stories made known the love of God and the possibility of the return of the prodigal son to the Father's house. There were the fascinating pictures of his gracious deeds, full of healing and comfort and salvation. But most important of all was the appeal of the Disciples to men and women of all creeds and classes to proclaim this simple, vital exaltation of Christ in order to bring about the union of all Christians and thus the kingdom of heaven upon earth with the maximum of power. They saw and realized the weakness of a divided church. The conflicts and antagonisms of scores of warring sects presented to them a scandal which was a reproach and a vicious hindrance to the growth of the cause they all professed to serve. These were the teachings that brought thousands, and then hundreds of thousands of people into their ranks.

**Four Great Leaders**

The statistical growth of the Disciples could not have taken place on such a large scale if it had not involved growth in many sided religious and cultural values. There was growth of several kinds important in the development of a religious movement, throwing light upon the nature of this movement. It is of significance in estimating the Disciples to consider the place which education has had in their history. The four great leaders of the first period, up to the middle of the nineteenth century were Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott and Barton W. Stone. The first three were trained in the Universities of Scotland, Thomas Campbell and his son at the University of Glasgow, and Walter Scott at the University of Edinburgh. They were classical scholars and throughout life, at intervals, taught Greek and Latin, French and German. They read the Bible in its original languages and were able, when need arose, to take questions of interpretation to the ancient texts themselves. They were advocates of public schools and of general popular education. For them religion, to reach its fullest power, needed higher education. It was natural, therefore, that the desire to found colleges should become an absorbing interest with the early leaders. Consequently the establishment of Bacon College, in Kentucky, marked the beginning of a series of colleges which has provided in every area, where their churches have become numerous, means for the education of laymen and ministers. Bacon College specialized in the sciences and its name, after Francis Bacon, is of peculiar interest to the historian of the Disciples as indicating a direct relation to the great intellectual movement which marks the epoch in which the world of modern thought began.

**Colleges**

Bethany College, founded by Alexander Campbell, on his own estate in West Virginia, was more typical of the kind of colleges the Disciples were to establish and which were to have a decisive effect
upon their work. Bethany College while stressing science also brought Christian education into the life of all the students, and by the same courses trained men for the Disciple ministry and for educational leadership in all the schools to be founded later. It was Bethany, and colleges of its kind, which provided qualified men for both pulpits and pews.

The influence of these college men in pulpits, professorships, editorial offices and in other places of responsibility has led the way into new and larger enterprises in these last hundred years. The Disciples have loyally clung to the conviction that the truth should be sought in every field and that the truth would make men free. Sometimes the fact has been hard to believe but it continues to prove itself in experience. In a decade around 1850 nine colleges and other educational institutions were founded, including Hiram, Butler, Eureka, Oskaloosa, and Christian College at Columbia, Missouri.

Missionary Societies

Another new direction of growth was in the organization of missionary societies. Here, as in the case of the colleges, a new principle of religious authority was discovered. Some had objected to the founding of colleges on the ground that the New Testament nowhere expressly sanctioned the procedure. Likewise, it was contended that there were no specific texts for the creating of missionary societies. In both instances, however, consecrated common sense led the way, and the pragmatic, practical mind of the wiser Disciples triumphed. In a very few years it became evident that an experimental, venturesome attitude could justify itself with the great words of Jesus when applied even to such vital concerns: "By their fruits ye shall know them." There never was any serious doubt about the validity and urgency of the missionary motive itself. The real question was whether it was allow-

able to organize societies for the collection and administration of funds and for the direction of men and women on foreign and home fields. In spite of indifference, criticism, and opposition, missionary work on the part of the Disciples has expanded and developed increasing efficiency. Millions of dollars have been gathered and put to work around the world, and thousands of people of many lands and tongues have been gathered into the churches. It is too bad that this work lagged so long but the Disciples have at last come to their maturity in this respect and today are cooperating in all the great worldwide missionary enterprises of Christendom. And most important of all they have convinced themselves by the results on the mission fields and by the quickening of a deeper religious spirit in the churches at home that such work is in keeping with the divine will.

Spirit Versus Letter

This tendency away from a negative, literalistic legalism released the Disciples from the letter which kills to the spirit which gives life. It effected many changes on behalf of freedom of procedure and of experimentation. Should churches have organs and choirs in their services of worship? No scripture text authorized such things, but neither did any holy word prohibit them. Instead of continuing to regard this silence as a taboo against action, it was interpreted to mean liberty to undertake what promised good fruits. "Silence" thus became an open door, rather than a closed one, and through it many "innovations" were allowed to enter into the work and programs of the churches. Sunday schools, women's societies, organizations for young people, dramatics, pageants, forums, and entertainments of many kinds, were tried. Sometimes they failed for lack of leadership or of interest but they came to be judged on their merit rather than by some ex-
ternal authority. Interesting developments continue to illustrate this growing experimental attitude in practical activities and in doctrinal implications. The architecture of conservative churches has taken on different forms, sometimes in the total structure, and more often in the refashioning of old buildings to add a lectern beside the pulpit and conventional choir stalls. Such combinations of old and new, of simple and ornate, are naively symbolic of the churches in which they appear, for these churches are in process of transition from a simpler to a more complex stage of religious development. Ministers in gowns, liturgies moving toward the “enrichment of worship,” and more elaborate music, are parts of the same tendency. Viewed in the perspective of fifty years the contrast with the old simplicities is very striking but indicative of significant growth, however imitative and uncritical it may be.

Union and Federation

From the standpoint of the original impulse of the Disciples toward Christian union the most significant development since the last decade of the nineteenth century concerns this dominant theme of their entire history. From the beginning it had been held that union was not only desirable but that it was the definitely expressed will of Christ, and that sectarian divisions were sinful and wasteful and hindrances to the spread of the Christian religion. The Disciples believed that official theological systems embodied in creeds were the barriers to union and that the practical procedure would be to gather into a non-theological fellowship all persons who sought earnestly to promote the union of Christians. They did not think any union of denominations as such was possible or practicable. Their idea was that the New Testament provided all the norms and directions necessary to build a universal fellowship of Christians. But while the Disciples advocated union upon the basis of New Testament teaching, denominational leaders began at about the turn of the century to engage in practical cooperative enterprises through various plans and programs. Local federations and the national Federal Council of Churches brought the issue to the Disciples. The dilemma was acute. If the Disciples joined in these enterprises they were compromising their consciences by uniting with churches that still adhered to sectarian creedal positions at least in their local congregations. But if they refused to cooperate in practical ways they seemed to nullify their own will to union. They appeared to say that if they could not have the kind of union they wanted and in the way they wanted they would not unite with their religious neighbors at all. Many Disciples took precisely that attitude but others felt that any vital work in the service of God and man should be supported and extended. Missionary leaders on foreign fields were notable for the latter view and gradually the majority of Disciples were won to it, though conscientious objections were much in evidence.

F. D. Kershner On N. T. Union

The objectors held to the traditional Disciple position that the New Testament laid down a definite pattern for true churches which should be followed to the letter. That pattern included the steps necessary for entrance into a church and those who failed to take them lacked something essential to becoming full-fledged Christians. It was at this point that modern studies of the New Testament made possible a great advance in the growth of the Disciples. Dean F. D. Kershner, of the Butler School of religion, rated as a conservative leader, made a notable address on union at the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ at San Antonio, Texas, in 1935, taking the position that the New Testament
presents no uniform pattern of the Church either in regard to organization, worship or doctrine. He showed the radical differences between the Jewish and the Greek churches and maintained that the one bond between these churches was "loyalty to Jesus Christ." He made it clear that this loyalty did not rest on a doctrinal basis but was a matter of attitude and of personal devotion. He showed that the monotheistic Jewish Christians could not conceive Jesus as God but could only regard him as the Son of God, or the Messiah. The Greek Christians, on the other hand, being already polytheists, had no difficulty in accepting Jesus also as God. The one bond that held such different Christians together was their common loyalty to Jesus Christ, whatever their metaphysical conception of his nature.

Freedom of Opinion

Thus was brought into the high light of the history of doctrine a new justification of the practical basis of Christian fellowship which had always obtained among the Disciples. They had said that their confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God did not mean the acceptance of any metaphysical doctrine of his nature but was rather the fullest possible expression of personal devotion and of a desire to follow him. Certain prominent leaders in the early days were suspected of sympathy with unitarian conceptions but Alexander Campbell, when faced with the question of their right to Disciple fellowship, answered that such opinions should not debar these leaders from Christian fellowship since they showed by their faith and works that they acknowledged the one essential bond of that fellowship in their loyalty to Christ.

Now the Disciples face the opportunity for the first time in their history to go forward with full freedom and enthusiasm in wholehearted practice of Christian union without compromise of conscience or biblical teaching. They have always adhered to the right of private interpretation of scripture and to liberty of opinion concerning all religious questions so long as the individual Christian maintains loyalty to Christ as he understands that loyalty according to his best knowledge and belief. On this principle a larger fellowship becomes possible for it means welcoming into the local congregation all who sincerely seek its fellowship in loyalty to what they believe to be the conditions of genuine devotion to the will and spirit of Jesus Christ. Obviously the idea of "loyalty to Christ" is submitted to the same freedom of interpretation as any other conception and if fairly followed would allow individuals of conservative convictions as full a share in the fellowship as those who may be considered liberals. But none would have the right to dictate to another what he should believe or think. All would be under the high obligation to remember that "love is the fulfillment of the law."

Not Doctrine But Love

More than a hundred years ago the Disciples of Christ launched the first modern organized movement for the union of all Christians. Their labors have gathered to their cause nearly two million people. Today they have a considerable part in united religious work throughout the world and now they have a more vital word to offer on behalf of union than ever before. This new word has come out of their experience in advocating and pleading for union. The old appeal was in terms of certain texts and skillful arguments, but the new word is more than a minimum of doctrine such as the recent ecumenical conferences have sought. It is a word which expresses a deeper and broader basis of union among individuals and denominations. It is a word which voices an attitude and not a doctrine. Where this attitude prevails doctrines are not necessary to
fellowship, though the widest range of doctrines may be held if they are not imposed upon any one. This word is Love. Love God. Love thy neighbor. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Their Heritage

The Disciples dissented from all protestant denominations in respect to many important principles. They regarded themselves as “reformers” on behalf of a non-creedal form of Christianity on which a union of all Christians could be advocated. The existing denominations were in bitter conflict with each other, and the Disciples believed the source of their conflicts was the attempt to formulate the teaching of the scriptures into human creeds and to make salvation depend upon the acceptance of a particular creed. Since the Disciples rejected all creeds they were naturally unorthodox to every denomination, sect or party, that adhered to a creed. But they did not regard the rejection of any creed or of all the creeds as a rejection of the Christian faith. They held that this faith could be based on the New Testament itself without formulation into fixed doctrines however ancient or widely believed. This was one vital reason for their very rapid growth. Many people were tired and scandalized by the warfare of the sects and were happy to find a more tolerant and a more biblical fellowship. The Disciples taught a simple and intelligible view which appealed to practical men and women. While they thus dissented from the prevalent forms of Protestantism, they were not without profound religious convictions. As is usually true, what were accounted heresies were in reality expressions of new forms of faith. The Disciples knew themselves to be in the line of a great, new development in the history of religious thought, and to belong to a great modern spirit which had already emerged in literature, science, philosophy, government and art, and was now making itself felt in religion.
Renaissance Influence

The Disciples were more influenced by the Renaissance than by the Reformation. This influence can be identified in many of their main teachings. The Renaissance may be said to have begun with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the consequent spread of Greek culture into Europe. In the course of three hundred and fifty years it transformed science, philosophy, politics, and art, and, in principle, religion. The transformation of religion had taken place for many individual minds but the development of a religious body consonant with this new world was yet to be. It was out of the English Enlightenment represented by Bacon, Locke, Newton, and others that the "new way of ideas" was destined to influence the early Disciples leaders in the first decade of the nineteenth century. They saw and felt the force of the new learning against the scholasticism of the Middle Ages. Aristotle appeared no longer merely as the revered authority in formal logic and in the use of syllogism in sophisticated argument. He was discovered as a scientist, an interested observer of nature, and of the ways of human beings with one another and with the actual world about them. A great new world opened upon man's vision from the recovered works of the very man who had so long been almost exclusively identified with metaphysical speculation and empty dialectic. Knowledge of the Greek language and literature stirred men to an exciting, arduous quest to fathom the new spirit they expressed, and especially the new conception of the dignity and possibilities of human nature itself.

Classical Scholars

The Disciple leaders were classical scholars and were imbued with this zest for understanding the treasures and wisdom of the ancient world not only among the Greeks and Romans but also among the Hebrews and the early Christians. They mastered the biblical languages and literature and felt satisfaction in possession of the original words of scripture and of the teaching of Jesus found there. They did not find theological formulae and were convinced that the creeds of Christendom distorted and obscured the teaching and character of primitive Christianity. They therefore undertook a "reformation" for the purpose of recovering the faith and spirit of the early church with the hope of promoting union among the followers of Christ.

Accepted Higher Criticism

They thought that reformation should begin with a more intelligent and reasonable reading of the Bible. It had so long been a closed and inaccessible book to the common man that it was often approached as if it required some special gift to understand it. Now it was to be read as any other book, in any language, through the established meaning of words, by the rules of ordinary grammar and syntax. Moreover, any book of the Bible should be studied with reference to its date, authorship, environment, style, and purpose. This was the method which came to be known as the "higher criticism." When Alexander Campbell applied it to the Old and New Testaments he reached the conclusion in his famous Sermon on the Law that the two Testaments belonged to different "dispensations" and that the New Testament was peculiarly the book for Christians. It alone contained the gospel of Jesus Christ and was adequate to requirements of the religious life. Though the Mosaic books and the writings of the prophets had an important place they were not the primary source for understanding the Christian religion. This insight not only served to clarify and illuminate the significance of the teachings of Jesus and the history of the Church. It also removed the
confusion arising for many minds from the conflicting moral codes of different periods and from the bad example of good men. Great systems of theology had been built more upon the Old Testament than upon the New. This was true of Calvinism whose doctrinal conceptions underlie the teachings of the majority of protestant Christians. Those conceptions relate more to law and justice than to the Christian way of Love.

No Original Sin

The Renaissance acceptance of the Greek idea of the dignity and worth of man also is apparent in the views of these reformers. They did not believe in human depravity and original sin. Childhood was innocent and therefore was not under divine condemnation. When the individual reached the years of moral accountability then he should choose for himself whether he would become a Christian. The doctrine of predestination and election was vigorously rejected in favor of individual moral responsibility and power of choice according to the opportunities, education, and "lights" of each person. Other crucial doctrines had sprung from the assumption of original sin. If the individual were born in sin and his whole nature therefore polluted, it followed that the only hope of his redemption was through the action of supernatural grace. The soul sunk in its inherited evil could not even initiate a step toward the choice of the good life. It must wait upon some sign, a vision, dream, or mystical emotional experience. Many individuals failed to be so favored and gave up in despair. In contrast to such doctrines the Disciples held that the New Testament gave records of the life and teachings of Jesus and the requirements for those who would be his followers. Whoever accepted these in faith and desired to live by them thereby became a Christian and could rest assured of his spiritual state through the divine mercy and fidelity.

Conversion

The process of conversion was likened to that of becoming a citizen of the state. There were specified steps to be taken and vows of allegiance to be made upon the performance of which an alien became an adopted son and entered into all the rights and privileges offered. This experience might be highly charged with emotion but its validity and worth depended more upon sincerity and consistent effort to fulfill the conditions. Thus man was understood to have something important to do with his own salvation. It was an intelligible action and led into new relationships and greater incentives for living a religious life.

Whether one's past life had been deeply sinful or only careless and indifferent, the change in becoming a Christian was momentous for it gave the greatest possible purpose and meaning to a person's life and work. Whatever a man's vocation, he now had also a higher calling, that of living in every relationship so that he kept in view its bearing upon a great moral aim and destiny. He would no longer live for himself alone but also for the widest and highest service of love to God and man. Such a conception of conversion emphasizes a degree of freewill and the possibility of some self-direction in both the beginning and the pursuit of the religious life. This was a congenial message to many frontier people who were daily taking their lives in their hands to hew dwellings out of the forest and prairie, and to establish livelihoods for themselves and their children. However much they realized their dependence upon powers above and beyond themselves they had reason to cherish also the faith that God helps those who help themselves. If watchfulness and industry were essential to success in the day's work
it could scarcely be less so in things that pertain to the soul's welfare.

**Nature of Churches**

This idea of the dignity and worth of the individual had other important religious implications which the Disciples developed and which contributed to their rising influence. They regarded the Church as a voluntary association of those who desired to cultivate and extend the religious life. The right of such voluntary associations to govern themselves and to experiment in ways and methods best suited to further their ideals was guarded with great vigilance. Therefore no ecclesiastical organization could be tolerated if it sought to impose its authority or to deny local initiative and experimentation within reverent and sane effort to promote religious ends. This aversion to official control may be regarded as an expression of an extreme form of individualism but it contributes to real freedom in connection with protestant insistence on the right of private opinion and the interpretation of scripture. When carried through in the life of voluntary associations this individualism requires some basis of cooperation and fellowship which can be maintained without ecclesiastical authority and doctrinal uniformity. Such a basis could only be found in some other type of solidarity, and this was more or less consistently provided by a new venture of union upon loyalty to Jesus Christ with full liberty of opinion together with freedom of speech. Perhaps the Disciples have gone farther in this direction than others. At least they have not had real heresy trials and have never devised any method by which variations of thought on the part of ministers or laymen could be curbed unless it were by a kind of exclusion of the offender from public honors. So long as his local church tolerates him he remains within that church and also within the whole body. If differences are held in good spirit and with manifest sincerity and genuine devotion to the cause of Christ the essential unity of the faith is not broken. Too often churches preserve the appearance of peace by influencing persons with novel ideas and constructive suggestions to remain silent or to withdraw from membership. It is a possible ideal to cherish the hope of a religious fellowship in which differences are not only tolerated but actually capitalized in the interest of progress and efficiency.

**Christian Union**

This conception suggests the need for more adequate consideration of the problem of Christian union. In most pronouncements on this vital subject it seems to be taken for granted that the kind of union sought is that of organization, as if it were desired that Protestantism should be able to present as solid an institutional front to the world as does the Roman Catholic Church. That may be an unconscious expression of a tendency toward ecclesiastical "power politics." Many sayings of Jesus rebuke that conception. "My kingdom is not of this world", he said. If it were, his followers would arm and fight. His injunction to them was that they should love one another even if they were enemies! When persons really love each other they can live happily with many differences of opinions and beliefs, and may be able to make such differences contribute to the richness of their companionship. A notable instance of the finest friendship together with profoundest philosophical disagreement may be seen in the lives of Josiah Royce and William James. Each sharply rejected the other's basic ideas but each confessed that he gained much from his friend's criticisms. A warm and cordial fellowship among the members of a congregation, without doctrinal uniformity, or close institutional organization, is a better if-
Illustration of Christian union than such uniformity or organization could possibly be where love is lacking. Real love will develop enough practical agreement and machinery to further its best achievements. To act upon this conviction would bring a new and powerful dynamic into Christianity and save it from the illusions which still weaken it so long as it seeks a "minimum of doctrine" upon which to unite. The Disciples have yet to fully learn this lesson for themselves but they have given good proof through more than a hundred years that they can live and work together as a great religious body without insisting upon a single doctrinal dogma. Perhaps their position with reference to baptism comes nearest to such a dogma but they have never believed in baptismal regeneration, and they have never been willing to say that persons cannot be Christians without baptism. There is a growing tendency in many of their churches today not to require immersion and these churches do not on that account lose their Christian status.

Democracy in Religion

This procedure in religion was essentially the same as the democratic development in the American political scene. Both gave play to the new conception of the ability of man to direct his life even in the most important concerns. Both were revolutions against external authority and against the long tradition of coercion and compulsion which had been exercised by kings and priests. The conservatives in both government and religion held that such liberty for common men would lead to license and anarchy. But the statesmen of the new order, like Thomas Jefferson, imbued with the conception that all men are born free and equal, were willing to entrust the welfare of the nation to the reasonableness and co-operation of the people themselves. They could agree upon a constitution to safeguard their rights and their liberties, and they could wisely provide for amendments to that constitution when new conditions arose to require such amendments. The intellectual climate of this insurgent political democracy pervaded the American people, drawn to this country as they were to escape religious and governmental tyranny and oppression. They were accordingly predisposed by it to welcome an interpretation of religion which recognized the right and the ability of men and women to interpret the Bible for themselves and to organize religious societies free from ecclesiastical and political control. They welcomed the separation of church and state. The New Testament would be their constitution and it would be held subject to reinterpretation in the light of growing scholarship and experience.

Democratic faith in the common man operated also against the old assumption of more than the professionally specialized difference between ministers and laymen. The Disciples never have recognized any inherent or ceremonially created prerogatives possessed by the clergy. Theirs is definitely a lay movement, any member, man or woman, being considered competent to administer any ordinances or functions in the churches. Such practice for a people familiar with Paul's injunction against women speaking in a church, could only be justified upon the basis of his more important statement that there is neither male nor female in the religion of Jesus Christ. What would churches be without the devoted services of women?

Rise of Science

By nothing was this belief in the worth and power of man more strengthened than by the rise of modern science. This was one of the later most striking developments of the Renaissance. Copernicus found in the writings of the ancient Greeks the idea that
the earth is spherical and he confirmed that idea by thorough mathematical calculations. That was a profoundly startling discovery, and led to the yet more disconcerting evidence that the earth revolves on its axis and that it is not the center of the universe with the sun moving around it. Galileo added to this the evidence of his telescope. One simple observation may be drawn from the daily rotation of the earth which it would be difficult for the traditional religious thought to fit into its picture of the relation of heaven and earth. By its rotation the world would be turned upside down every twelve hours, for in that time what was above would be below, and what had been below (the depths of hell with all its fires and furies) would be in the space over man's head! Other marvels of man's new-found courage and awakening curiosity rapidly followed. The new continent of America was discovered and many courageous voyages opened passage round the world, establishing trade routes and giving men mastery of the seas.

Francis Bacon turned attention from the barren study of metaphysics and scholastic theology to the facts of nature and proclaimed confidently that man could make nature serve his wants. His inductive logic may seem crude today but there is continuity between the spirit and method of his inquiries and the marvelous discoveries and inventions of our mature scientific research. After all it is the Method of modern science which makes it so fruitful and so revolutionary. This method constantly illustrates Bacon's prophetic assertion, "Knowledge is power." Bacon saw that science offered a way by which man could provide more adequately for his needs. His vision of the utopia possible in the future was described in the New Atlantis. In that vision of what science might achieve he anticipated refrigeration, flying machines, telephones, microphones, and many other devices later achieved. But the most important implication of it all was the new sense of the power of human intelligence when applied to the actual world.

The Seventeenth Century

The Disciples accepted this view of the importance and promise of science with the general conception of the nature of man and the world which characterizes the modern age. This age is sharply marked by the great men of the scientific spirit and by events appearing in the seventeenth century which Professor Whitehead calls, The Century of Genius. That century follows the period in which the great systems of protestant theological thought were formulated. Calvinism and Lutheranism belong to the old world of thought. They were formulated in the sixteenth century and represent a return to a medieval world view. They were conceived before the revolutionary insights of modern biblical criticism and modern science were available. Alexander Campbell and his associates accepted both higher criticism and modern science and made their interpretation of religion in the light of them. The Disciples named their first college for Francis Bacon and made the natural sciences integral and central in its curriculum. Bethany College, founded a little later, also recognized the importance of the sciences, and revealed its modernism in religious matters still more emphatically by specifying in the charter of the institution that theology should never be taught there.

Rejection of Theology

This did not mean the exclusion of religion, but only the rejection of theological forms and interpretations of religion. The college was intended to train men for the ministry of the Disciples of Christ but not by means of theology. Philosophy, in keeping with the scientific spirit, was taught, and that is fur-
ther evidence that theology was very deliberately abandoned. That was because theology was bound up with scholasticism and with creedal formulations of doctrine. The philosophy taught was not the old speculative metaphysics but rather the more practical, empirical, common-sense philosophy of the Enlightenment, especially as represented by John Locke whose *Essay on the Human Understanding*, *Letters on Toleration*, and *Reasonableness of Christianity* were familiar and influential works among educated people of the time. From that day the Disciples have been largely immune to theology, preferring to deal with its problems by the freer disciplines of science and philosophy. The strength of this influence is reflected in the fact that while large numbers of Disciple students for the ministry have attended seminaries where theology is still cherished and taught, they have remained remarkably immune to its methods and conclusions.

**Loyalty to Jesus Christ**

In nothing has this renunciation of old forms of thought and speech been more significant than in understanding what loyalty to Jesus Christ involves. The predominant traditional view held that he must be conceived as divine in a supernatural and miraculous sense. But the biblical terms applied to him may be regarded as honorific, expressing devotion and the appraisal of affection, of gratitude and admiration. Wonder, awe, reverence and in a very real sense, worship, do not depend upon attributing to him a certain metaphysical nature, such as trinitarian theology assumes. Neither is the unitarian doctrine more satisfactory. Unitarianism also implies impossible metaphysical conceptions and has not been able to fulfill the honorific attitudes which a vital religious faith usually requires. A more biblical and appreciably practical interpretation is that which reverses the order of the terms involved.

Both trinitarians and unitarians start with a formulated idea of God and then demand that a conception of Jesus must be accepted which fits into that formulated idea. In contrast, the biblical and common-sense solution is to begin with the person and life of Jesus and let them determine the idea of God! Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” In this way we proceed from Christology to God, rather than from Theology to Christ. The designation, Son of Man, which Jesus applied to himself also yields illumination with reference to the nature of man, for it emphasizes a relationship which elevates man through the possibilities of attaining a fuller measure of the divine.

There was no such chasm between the human and the divine for the Disciples as there was for the Calvinistic theology. For them, in his natural state, man was not completely alienated from God; nor was God, in his holiness, completely transcendent beyond man. It was a father and son relationship. God was thought able to make his will clear to man, and man was thought able to understand that will sufficiently to be guided by it, and to follow it.

**Sacred and Secular**

Separation of the sacred and secular is another dualism of the old theology which the Disciples have never endorsed. They have regarded nature as an area of God’s creation as truly as human nature is. For them the laws of nature are just as divine as those of the “spiritual” world. The order of human society—family, business, science, government, education—is not alien or indifferent to Christianity. These realms are not perfect, it is true, but they all have value and may exemplify and further the religious life. When the churches assume a “holier than thou” attitude toward the “world” they are setting up an assumption against a fiction. The churches are themselves imperfect enough as the
quarrels and tensions in many a congregation witness. Their redeeming merit is that they do accept ideals of the Christian way of life and make serious effort to realize them. Their function is to further the good wherever it appears and to expose and defeat evils.

This contrast between the sacred and the secular in the modern world, has largely centered upon the secularism of science, often falsely understood. When taken as a method of understanding and controlling the forces of nature and human nature, science has proved to be a possible ally on the side of all the goods of life—health, food, communication, transportation, economic wealth, mental and moral strength, and religious fulfillment. More and more the scientists recognize their responsibility to society and their part in the promotion of human welfare. While, in the hands of selfish and evil men, science may be used for base purposes, the same is true of religion. Integration of the whole of life under the motivation of generous and constructive ideals is the best possible religion. Whenever that unity is broken and neglected, conflicts of special interests ensue which bring distress, disease, war, and social injustice in many forms.

Natural Goods

It is a legitimate objective of the Christian religion to bring to man the natural goods of life in abundance, thereby to provide a greater degree of comfort, happiness, and enrichment of life for all members of society. The marvelous achievements of science in recent centuries and in astonishing cumulative measure in the decades of the twentieth century have abundantly proved the value of the sciences in furthering both the practical and the spiritual interests of mankind. They have gone far to justify and exemplify the Renaissance dream of Francis Bacon and all those who have believed in the right and power of the human spirit to find and utilize for high ends the measureless resources of nature. The chasm which today so much separates religion from the most powerful forces of the great and growing stream of so-called secular life is due in large part to an outworn theology which too much segregates the churches, and especially their ministers, from full appreciation of the power for good which inheres in the intelligence and uncorrupted good will of vast numbers of educated and socially idealistic men and women. The churches need to appreciate and to share more fully the purpose of many socially motivated clubs and professional associations which are largely moulded by the modern mind. The burden of responsibility for overcoming this chasm is mainly upon religious leaders, and their most immediate obligation is to reinterpret and reconstruct religion in keeping with the wisdom and the spirit of the new world which has taken shape since the seventeenth century.
Their Timeliness

The signs of promise for the Disciples of Christ today are to be found in their growing appreciation of the importance of the spirit over the letter of New Testament teaching. They have always been insistent on loyalty to the teaching of Jesus, and in many periods of serious conflict have found their way out by remembering that the letter kills but the spirit gives life. That is an injunction difficult to follow, for in many cases the letter of scripture is plain and simple, whereas the spirit of the teaching may seem vague and inadequate for definite guidance. Illustrations of dilemmas arising from this conflict are abundant in the history of the Disciples.

The Question of Slavery

One of the most crucial concerned the question of slavery during the Civil War. Jesus gave no specific word against slavery. Paul expressed a tolerant attitude when he exhorted masters to be kind to their slaves, and slaves to be obedient to their masters. He sent back to Philemon the slave, Onesimus, and was so anxious to have Philemon receive him that he agreed to repay Philemon for whatever wrong or loss the slave might have occasioned by running away. Thomas Campbell published in The Millennial Harbinger for 1845 a collection of biblical passages approving slavery but asserted that Christians should not approve it! Alexander Campbell, in the same year, held slavery to be a matter of “opinion” and would not advocate expelling slave holders from church membership. For him, the letter of scripture did not make slavery a sin or flatly incompatible with either master or slave being a Christian. He did regard slavery as an economic evil and as inexpedient.

How does it come about, then, that slavery is regarded by Disciples and all other Christians as inconsistent with Christianity and intolerable within Christian society? The spirit of Jesus and of his followers is against it. The scriptural warrant for denunciation and rejection of slavery is found in the principles and tendencies of the teaching of the New Testament. Those principles stress the worth of human beings, the importance of freedom, the value of mutual love and respect. The acceptance of these principles has abolished slavery.

The Spirit Versus Letter

The spirit that gives life is not so easily formulated as the letter that kills. The magnitude of the difference, however, may be seen very clearly in the contrast which Jesus made between the old and the new conceptions of moral obligations. He was careful to explain that the new did not destroy the old but rather fulfilled it. The new goes beyond the outward deed to the motive and impulse from which the deed arises. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say thou shall not look on a woman to lust after her. Ye have heard it said thou shalt not forswear thyself, but I say swear not at all. . . Ye have heard it said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say resist not evil. . . Ye have heard it said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say, love your enemies. If you are sued for your coat give your cloak also, and if any one compells you to go with him a mile, go with him two miles.” The spirit of these sayings is unmistakable. It is lavishly generous, non-calculating, big-hearted, sportsman-like to the limit. He lived by that spirit himself, silent in the face of unjust accusations, forgiving toward those who crucified him, showing no patronizing attitude toward publicans and sinners, multiplying forgiveness seventy times seven.
A New Idea of God

Jesus said that is God's way. That is the “perfection” toward which man should strive. Here he set forth, both in word and example, a new idea of God. This idea goes far beyond the austere, vengeful God of the old law, and far beyond the vindictive God of Calvinism who could condemn innocent infants as well as men and women to endless torment in unspeakable suffering. The God of Jesus was a God of love, of forgiveness, of generosity, of measureless patience. It is unthinkable that such a being could insist upon the legal minutiae of a “plan of salvation” that would require meticulous observance of arbitrary forms or punish unconscious and irresponsible evil-doers with vindictive wrath.

The Disciples have not always lived by this spirit that gives life, or interpreted by it God's dealings with man. They have too often allowed the legalistic and formal letter of the New Testament to obscure the generous mind of Christ. One reason for this was their interpretation of the Letter to the Hebrews. Here they found the idea that the generous treatment of people which he practiced during his lifetime was superseded after his death by a more formal priestly system. They accepted the idea that during the life of a man he may bestow his gifts as he will, but that after his death his riches are distributed only according to the specifications of his testament or will. In effect this was to say that in his life Jesus could forgive sin and take people into his company by any word of welcome or gesture of invitation, but that after his death persons could only attain the benefits of his love by the one formal, specified pattern.

Before and After Pentecost

In other words the gospel of Christ was different after Pentecost. It was then, some taught, that the

gospel was once for all delivered which could mediate the mercies of God forevermore. Hence the importance attached to the book of Acts. There was to be found the pattern of the early Church and the steps by which persons could become members of it. This meant that the administration of the will of the testator must now be carried out in the terms laid down in that will. Hence a leading editor of a Disciple journal could recently give a lecture upon the theme: The Sermon on the Mount is Not the Gospel. His argument was that the Gospel was not in effect until after Pentecost, because it could only be in effect after the death of Christ. The forgiveness of sin depended upon that death, upon the sacrifice it involved. Thereby it became possible for Divine Grace to operate and to save those who complied with the conditions specified. Sermons were preached on the Gift of the Holy Spirit which dwelt entirely on the requirements stated, upon compliance with which a person would receive that gift. Nothing was said of the effects of having received it, of the fruits of the Spirit which should be manifest and appreciable in the behaviour and character of the individual!

Following Jesus

The view of conversion held generally by the Disciples has been a more practical and intelligible one. They have regarded the matter in terms of the living ministry of Jesus, and in terms of the available knowledge of his life and teaching today. Everywhere he came in contact with people who were attracted by his words and who arose and followed him without any formal ceremony. Zaccheus saluted him and Jesus went home to dinner with him, which was an acknowledgment to every one that Jesus received him into the fellowship of his followers. “And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting a net into the sea. And he said unto them, Follow me and I will make you
fishers of men. And they left their nets and followed him." That was conversion. It was a change of direction, of purpose, and of allegiance which held them through the long, hard way of their discipleship to the day of their death. Changes like these are profound. They are transformations of personality and character. The outlook on the world becomes different, new associations are occasioned, habits, temper, usefulness are made over. Effects like these are the marks of real conversion wherever and however they occur. There is no one formula necessary to make them valid. The significance of the experience is in what the individual is converted to. The process is much the same whether it is a change in politics, morals, or philosophy, and it is a change not once for all accomplished but one which recurs with every important advance in any field of interest.

Union Through Love

The importance of the spirit over the letter is particularly seen in the main concern of the Disciples throughout their history, that is, union. They knew from the first that it could not be attained by the letter of doctrinal authority. Every attempt in religious history to impose such uniformity has proved divisive. Union is only real where it is a matter of free fellowship, permeated by intelligence, sympathy and mutual forbearance. When these are present nothing can really disrupt a group. This fact does not mean that the union of good fellowship is easily achieved. Human nature is so much subject to misunderstanding, jealousy, envy, lack of vision, and ambition for leadership, that the affections and generous good will have to be constantly guarded and zealously cultivated. This problem can only be met by self-training in patience, piety, and regard for the greatness of the ends sought. It must be humbly felt to be the "will of God," and therefore something profound enough and valuable enough to overcome the frictions and conflicts that would thwart its realization. One hope for the triumph of the spirit is that it dwells most readily with the humble in heart and is often found in those who can boast no status of wealth or class or learning or power. But it may belong to those in high places, as in the case of Lincoln among the statesmen, Spinoza among philosophers, Francis of Assisi among those born to wealth and station, Pasteur among the scientists and numberless unnamed and unsung followers of Jesus Christ. That this quality of love may come to full flower in human life is proved by all those who manifest it, and that it is capable of being radiated and cultivated in further ranges of human life is the reasonable faith of all who believe in its value and in the susceptibility of mankind to enlightenment and refinement. It is the soul of religion and the strength of every religious movement in the degree it is present.

Practical Ways To Union

Here is the opportunity of the Disciples of Christ today (as it is in reality the opportunity of every religious body). The Disciples have so nearly freed themselves from every vestige of the old doctrines and have so clearly avowed the rejection of all doctrines as tests of fellowship, that they might conceivably set themselves to the task of deepening their own experience of union among themselves and with others by more adequate understanding and practice of the spirit of union. There are means at hand today beyond those available in any past time for the promotion of an undogmatic fellowship. There are three ways to promote this spirit of union. One is to engage more actively in the great social causes to which the churches are already pledged, such as missions, community welfare, and cooperation with organizations and forces already in oper-
Another is to cultivate appropriate attitudes and emotional conditioning within the family. In many instances parents do set themselves to cultivate for themselves and their children the homely virtues of piety, kindliness, cooperation, forgiveness, and social idealism. The Friends have succeeded to a remarkable degree in creating these qualities, and many families exemplify them under the influence of the Christian faith in its various forms. The qualities needed are precisely those which many modern systems of education profess and seek to build into the character of childhood and youth. What is yet required is more thorough determination to use all possible means—eugenics, psychology, and social incentives of high voltage. The world has seen two peoples, Russians and Germans, transformed in their individual and social objectives and attitudes, within less than a generation. If this could be done for the interests these systems represent, it is at least impressive evidence that vast numbers of people could be influenced toward nobler, greater ends.

A third means would be for each religious body to take inventory of itself to discover the elements and characteristics within it that could best be developed toward this great objective of union. It is a problem of creating the right kind of morale. The Disciples of Christ already are characterized by a high morale as to the importance of their plea for union. In spite of many cross currents this ideal has been their rallying center for more than a century. Probably with them it has been too much a theory and an argument. Would it be impossible to get them to see and feel that it must also be a matter of practice, a testing of desire and will to find the way to create an ienic spirit? Is it inconceivable that local congregations should be able to soften asperities when these arise between individuals or between groups, for the sake of the Cause they seek to serve?

Answers To Neo-Orthodoxy

The Disciples are bound by their history and by their convictions to oppose fixed theological interpretations of Christianity because those interpretations are divisive and generate discord. Their protests against the old doctrines are needed today more than at any time since the early nineteenth century, for the same old doctrines have been revived, especially in the denominations where they have only been obscured but never really discarded.

This "neo-orthodoxy" needs to be answered by the presentation of "a more excellent way." That better way is the cultivation and proclamation of a non-theological Christian faith. A weakness of neo-orthodoxy is that it asserts certain dogmas as essential to being a Christian, and one of these doctrines which is the logical root of all the rest is that of the inherent sinfulness of man. It is obviously impossible to build a united fellowship among people whose basic assumption is that they are themselves incapable of a sincere and vital fellowship of love. If they are taught that every impulse toward good will and hearty cooperation is bound to be vitiated by pride or love of power they become infected by self-distrust and fear of failure. Especially are they incapable of trusting their fellows to have pure motives and high purposes. They see the trail of the serpent over everything and despair of genuine goodness and of the possibility of real progress. So deep-seated is pessimism in this neo-orthodoxy that even the operation of supernatural divine Grace cannot be trusted to make a saint out of a sinner. For it is a theme constantly reiterated that the greater a man's assurance of conversion the greater his liability to the deadly pride which threatens to ruin him after all.
Neo-Orthodox Mythology

Theologians of this type are the victims of the paradoxes which grow out of their basic assumptions. They do not trust their own scholarship to read the scriptures intelligibly and to interpret them clearly. They accept the whole Bible as divine revelation and do not recognize that it is not a book of one level. It is for them another expression of self-defeating pride to set the Old Testament in its place as belonging to an earlier stage of human development, and to accept the New Testament as the better guide for Christians because it contains the words of Christ and the higher standards of a later and more spiritual religion. For the same reason they hesitate to apply intelligent discrimination to the contents of the scriptures, and in order to avoid following through with a reasonable interpretation they resort to the use of the concept of "mythology" to cover their confusion. But when they regard as myths the Virgin Birth, Atonement, Resurrection and Immortality, in order to affirm, in a fashion, those doctrines they thereby surrender what they wished to make secure. Accepting creeds with "mental reservations" is not really an acceptance of them but an evasion. No amount of emotional assertion of that kind meets the issue, and plain-spoken, honest people are not slow to discern this fact. The effect on many minds is to relegate the whole subject of religion to the realm of mythology.

Neo-Orthodoxy Versus Science

Neo-orthodoxy weakens its claims on intelligent people also by its attitude toward the sciences. These have achieved so much for the common good and for the very ends which Christian people cherish, as illustrated by modern medicine, that science is not felt by the average man to be an enemy of religion. If religious leaders persist in opposing science to religion they lessen the appeal of religion and not of science. The great tides of education, and the dramatic, widespread benefits of a better understanding of the secrets of nature, sweep on victoriously beyond the traditionalism and authoritarianism of a relatively sterile past. Humanitarianism becomes daily a more vivid and reasonable end of both religion and science, that is, of life itself. The fear that it may lessen interest in the supreme values is a strange and wholly unjustified fear. Humanitarianism leads to more adequate conceptions of both man and God. It was at the heart of the teaching of Jesus and increasingly captures the imagination and purposes of churches. To blame the evils of the world upon science is like blaming them on intelligence and that ultimately is a reflection on the God whom we should bless for the intelligence men have. Men are entrusted with many powerful instruments and are given responsibility for their use. These instruments serve good or evil ends according to the application made of them and they have no moral quality in themselves. This is sufficient answer to those who attribute war to the development of modern science. Wars devastated the earth before the modern era and the causes of those wars are to be sought in many conditions, some of which (economic and racial, for example) are conceivably subject to reduction and elimination. Such tasks need the alliance of constructive spiritual religion and of the most powerful ingenuity of natural and social sciences.

Education in Disciple Colleges

Education is another field in which the Disciples of Christ have an exceptional opportunity today to make a real contribution by following the unique beginning of a hundred years ago when they founded Bethany College. In that institution the whole curriculum was religiously integrated. Religion was not set apart as a separate department. It
was not left to a special teacher for undergraduates, nor put into a graduate Seminary or Bible College. All students had lectures on the Bible and other religious subjects, and Chapel services were for all. But still more indicative of the thorough integration was the fact that all courses were held to be of religious significance. The sciences dealt with the processes of nature and thus showed the ways of God in the creation and maintenance of the world. The languages furnished the means of understanding the Bible and the other great religious literatures of mankind. The study of history presented the religious and moral experience of the race. The fine arts cultivated appreciation of beauty and taught the techniques for producing it. Every student had opportunity in this way to see and feel the unity of all forms of culture and thereby to know the relation of religious values to all aspects of learning. Graduates of the Colleges were thus prepared to take their part in the churches both in the pulpit and the pew. Many served in both. No special training separated candidates for the ministry into a distinct class. Many Disciple ministers of that period had no further training, and in numerous cases found themselves equipped to attain distinguished success. The training of ministers differed from that of other students only by what is now known as “majoring” in religious courses and frequently by the experience of preaching in neighboring churches.

Evolution of Bible Colleges

The majority of Disciple colleges followed essentially the same pattern for many years. In the last decade of the nineteenth century there were beginnings of “Bible Colleges” which added a year or two of post-graduate work for ministerial students. These Bible Colleges soon aspired to provide a three year course to meet the growing tendency of Disciple students for the ministry to go to the seminaries of the great universities. With this development the pervasive influence of religious instruction in the colleges of liberal arts declined and religion became the specialty of the Bible College. In some institutions the separation became quite complete. This separation was furthered by the growth of college attendance from the general public without reference to denominational affiliation. In several instances the college was scarcely any longer a Disciples school except in terms of its history, administration, and appeals for financial support. Often the appeals for funds met more substantial response from the community, especially where the colleges were located in larger cities. The non-denominational status of the college of liberal arts was emphasized in recruiting its students, while the Disciple connection was stressed in appeals to the churches for ministerial students and for support of the Bible College. This is proving to be unwholesome and selfdefeating. Vigorous and vital religion lives in the full stream of intellectual and social interests. Reconstruction of college and ministerial education to this end is needed.

A Needed Experiment

In this day of educational experiments, the Disciples have an alluring opportunity to develop in their institutions a better integrated system in which their non-denominational form of Christianity might be made pervasive throughout the whole curriculum without raising partisan issues or giving offence. Christianity, as the Disciples teach it when they follow the spirit of it rather than the letter, emphasizes no particular dogma, but makes love the sole bond of religious fellowship. This is the supreme need in all social relationships, in the family, in the state, and a world society. Educators, statesmen, and philosophers agree in this. They call it good-will, the spirit of cooperation, the supreme value. It is the heart of religion and of morality. Without recogni-
tion of this quality in the whole of life education becomes “academic” and leaves both teachers and students without a sense of direction and without commanding “ends” of life. It is tragic to witness vast numbers of educated, cultivated, refined people, equipped with abundant “means” but with no inspiring, satisfying “ends” to serve and fulfill.

Ministerial Education

This unifying and inspiring conception of the intellectual and religious life should be continued into the graduate, professional training of the ministry. The education of ministers should be an extension and intensified development of the college course in reference to their field of work. That is precisely the case with other professional education. The physician is given graduate courses which stem from his college courses in biology, physiology, anatomy, chemistry. The lawyer goes on with specialization in certain social sciences. The teacher carries on work in psychology, history, and genetics. No radical break occurs between college and the profession school. It is only partially so with the minister. He is inducted into a theological school. The name implies, and the neo-orthodox theologians make it explicit, that the intellectual processes and methods employed in science and philosophy in college are inadequate to deal with the problems of religion. Philosophy involves the use of native intelligence, and the cultivation of natural ability in reflecting upon the facts and the problems of experience as given in personal, and social development. Theology depends upon revelation. Faith as a peculiar “faculty” or “intuition” is set over against knowledge and normal experience. Religious problems, therefore, cannot be dealt with by psychology and by the social sciences. “Science” is regarded as alien and inept where “spiritual” matters are involved. In much usage of the term, theology suggests the presence of an element as irrational as do the terms astrology and alchemy. In the nature of the case these are not subject to reasonable, scientific, or philosophical treatment.

The Disciples of Christ have had strong reasons for discarding theology from the training of their ministers. They have lived in an atmosphere of common sense and practical enterprise. For them, religious values have also been other kinds of values—social, scientific, practical. They have not regarded their ministers as an order of “clergy”, with special endowments or “calls” but rather as men deeply interested and motivated to help bring the healing and saving gospel of Christ to aimless, suffering men and women.

Distinctive and Unifying Traits

E. S. Ames
(In January 1944 Scroll)

The Fourteen Distinctive Points

No other large protestant body is distinctly of American origin and democratic temper. No other was founded and developed in the quest for Christian union. The Disciples do not interpret God in either trinitarian or unitarian terms but through the personality and teaching of the historical Jesus. They have no official creed or theology. They believe in the dignity of man, not in original sin. They observe the Lord’s Supper weekly, as a memorial and as a continuing fellowship. Their polity is entirely congregational. No essential difference is recognized between clergy and laymen. Any member may administer any ordinance. Conversion is not dependent upon visions or voices but is voluntary turning of mind and heart, in faith and penitence, to the way of Jesus Christ. The Disciples have always held to
an evolution of “dispensations” from patriarchal, and Mosaic, to the Christian. They regard the New Testament, rather than the Old Testament, as the guide and standard for Christians. They stress the right of private interpretation of scripture and individual freedom of opinion. Salvation is a process of growth in knowledge and grace. They encourage an experimental, functional attitude in ideas, forms, organizations, and cooperation. Certainly this combination of points is distinctive.

These Traits Are Unifying

On this basis the Disciples are able to practice union in their local congregations. They invite all who regard themselves as Christians to participate in the communion service and in the work of the churches. They share with other denominations the missionary spirit and enterprise. They promote federation, religious education, and great practical, social movements. They use religious literature from all sources, sing the great hymns of all churches, and cherish the devotional books of all faiths. In increasing numbers their students for the ministry are attending great universities without regard to denominational affiliation.

True Disciples Are Liberals

The fourteen points are all in the direction of liberal religious thought and practice, and they are proof that the Disciples have had the seeds of liberalism in them from the first. If they do not know that they are liberals it is because they are not informed on their own history and have shamefully neglected their birthright. If members of other churches look upon the Disciples as conservative, narrow fundamentalists, the reasons for this are to be found largely in the failure of the Disciples themselves to know and to make known the deeper and finer qualities of their own inheritance.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained from the author, 5722 Kimbark Ave., Chicago 37.


Books on the new world of thought:

J. H. RANDALL, JR.—Making of the Modern Mind.
C. E. RAVEN—Science, Religion and the Future.
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