DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

PAST AND FUTURE

***"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery"* (Galatians 5:1 RSV).**

Dedicated to Gospel Freedom
and to those who have sacrificed so much for it.
Ad maiorem dei gloriam.

John Cunyus, Ph.D.

First Edition

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1-4" Appendix D Selected Bibliography and Resources

INTRODUCTION

In Disciples of Christ: Past and Future, Minister and author John Cunyus traces the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from its Reformation roots to the present day. Cunyus brings fresh insight into the circumstances and historic forces that combined to create the Disciples movement in the 19th Century. That movement, which spawned the present-day Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), non-denominational Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, and non-instrumental Churches of Christ, was at one point the largest Christian body born on American soil. Cunyus also traces the historic beliefs of the movement, beliefs which both gave it strength and led it ultimately to its divisions.

From their frontier origins, the Disciples of Christ grew into one of America's major denominations by the 20th Century despite their frequently espoused desire to be anything but a denomination. Cunyus shows how relentless cultural change combined with the advent of biblical "higher criticism" and the emergence of professional clergy to force fundamental changes among Disciples of Christ. He recounts the events surrounding the decision by the then International Convention of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) to restructure itself formally into a denomination in 1968. He describes the tragedy of Jim Jones, which forced the new denomination into a tighter control over its clergy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He also discusses the struggles of the post-Restructure Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as it moves into the new century.

The book is presented in brief chapters, heavily footnoted, with review questions for class and small-group discussion. The book's appendices include three significant documents in the history of the movement: "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," by Barton Stone; the Thirteen Proposition from "The Declaration and Address" of Thomas Campbell; and articles I through IV of the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Disciples of Christ: Past and Future contains a chapter outlining Cunyus' vision for the denomination in the days ahead. On its back cover are excerpts from a letter by Disciples of Christ General Minister and President Richard Hamm, responding to the work.

Whether the reader agrees with Cunyus' conclusions or not, the historical and theological information offers an excellent introduction to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Said Dr.. Alvin Jackson, Senior Minister of National City Christian Church in Washington, DC,

the book is “very well done . . . I look forward to being able to use it at National City.”

I

Historical Backgrounds

Our story begins in the year 1555 A.D., some thirty-five years after the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation under the guidance of Martin Luther. The various warring parties in Germany came to an agreement called the Peace of Augsburg, after the German city in which it was reached. Realizing they could not annihilate each other by force, both Lutherans and Catholics decided to recognize each other, however reluctantly.

The formula for deciding who could belong to which faction was quite simple: "Each prince could impose the faith of his choice on his territories (the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio).*"[1] Since Germany at the time was divided literally into hundreds of smaller states, religious dissenters had the option, when they did not agree with the religion of their ruler, to flee.

The principle of a faith imposed from the top down was nothing new. Rulers and kings had long been assumed to have responsibility over the faith of their subjects, with notable stories in Christian history of peoples converting in mass at the conversion of a ruler. This so-called "ruler's responsibility" was tempered, for most of the Middle Ages, by the Roman Catholic overlay which united to some extent all the peoples of Western Europe.

What stands out about the Peace of Augsburg is that, for the first time in 500 years, Roman Catholicism had failed to suppress a Reformation movement from within. Augsburg recognized the permanence of the division, politically if not spiritually. Not since has the Western Church regained the unity it enjoyed in the Middle Ages. Corrupt as that prior unity may have been, theologically skewed as it undoubtedly was, it had been a glue of sorts holding the peoples of "Christendom" together. It had moderated to some extent their differences. It had occasionally directed their warring energies outward, to the great consternation of the Muslims in the Holy Land who had borne the brunt of this "Christian" activism. It had withstood grave challenges, from Waldensians, Hussites, and others. After 1555, Christian unity in Western Europe was no more.

In the century and a half that followed, military efforts to reverse Augsburg largely failed. In 1598, unable to suppress Calvinist Huguenots in his own country, King Louis IV of France was forced to issue the Edict of Nantes, tolerating within strict limits Protestantism in his realm.

In 1618, the Roman Catholic tyrant Ferdinand, King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, attempted to impose Roman Catholic absolutism on the people of his realms. When his Protestant nobles rebelled, Ferdinand defeated them in battle, inadvertently triggering the Thirty Years' War. By the time the war ended, one-third of all Germans had been killed, cities and towns had been

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1 "Augsburg," The Oxford Encyclopedia of World History, Oxford, New York, 1998. Hereinafter cited as Oxford.

devastated, and economic life had come to a standstill. Troops of mercenary foreign armies had made Germany their battleground. Nevertheless, the Protestant states had survived, with help, ultimately, from a Catholic France opposed to a united Germany dominated by arch-rival Spain. England under Henry VIII had broken from Catholicism in 1534.[2] In the mid 1600s, England rebelled against Charles I, a monarch suspected of favoring Catholic restoration. Charles I ultimately paid with his life, but Oliver Cromwell's Protestant republic was short-lived. After England's ten-year experiment with a Republic ended, the Church of England which re-emerged under Charles II's reign was decidedly "middle of the road" for the day. It could be counted on only to oppose either extreme Protestantism or a Catholic restoration.

Four major denominations emerged from this period in Europe. In the West, the Roman Catholics held sway in Italy, France, Spain, Austria, and southern Germany. Lutheranism predominated in northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Calvinism, the forerunner of modern-day Presbyterianism, was the faith of much of Switzerland, Holland, and Scotland. Anglicanism, the curious Protestant-Catholic hybrid, was the state religion of England.

Each of these groups had the backing of political and military power in the states they dominated. They were "state religions." To disagree with them was not simply a matter of religious belief. It was a matter of political importance as well, most often even a violation of law. All sides created martyrs from the ranks of their opponents.

Most heavily persecuted were those groups with no political protection, Anabaptists perhaps being the supreme example. Anabaptists advocated separation of church and state, baptism of adults by immersion, and a voluntary community of committed members (as opposed to mass membership of all the baptized subjects of a ruler). They found no welcome in Continental Europe, with the limited exception of Holland. England's Puritans, after the failure of Cromwell's republic, suffered a similar fate. After Louis XIV's 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes protecting Protestants, French Huguenots suffered the same fate.[3]

For many members of these groups, the choices were harsh. In general, the Reformation and the spread of the "high technology" of the day, the printing press, had placed a Bible in their hands. Under pressure, they had to choose between giving up their faith, suffering possibly fatal persecution, or leaving for exile. Many chose exile, hoping to find the freedom to practice their faith that was denied them. And for the majority of those, the place that beckoned to them was America. These religious 'radicals' of the Reformation thus were heavily represented in the first wave of American immigration.

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2 Oxford, pg. 296

3 Oxford, pg. 458

1. What happened in 1555 A.D.?
2. What is *cuius regio, eius religio*?

3. What were the four major denominations in Europe after the Reformation?
4. What happened to those who disagreed with the religious preferences of their rulers?
5. What was the preferred destination for exiled believers?

II

Reformation Principles

By the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, Europe's age of religious wars had largely come to an end. Roman Catholic efforts to re-catholicize Western Europe by force had ultimately failed, though sporadic attempts continued. A rough balance of power between Catholic and Protestant states had emerged, allowing older, more traditional dynastic and national rivalries to again take center stage.

Nevertheless, at least two central principles had emerged from the period of religious warfare. One we shall call **The State Church Principle**. Essentially, this was the re-identification of state power with official religion, whether that religion be Protestant or Catholic. This identification was most absolute in the Catholic countries, Spain above all. There, the combination of an intrusive government, the Catholic sacrament of confession, and the institution of the Inquisition made for the emergence of arguably the first totalitarian state in history. Even the thoughts of post-Reformation Spaniards were subject to government control, through a corrupt priesthood. Yet if the identification was most extreme in Catholic Spain, it existed in varying degrees throughout Europe.

If "big corporations" are the great enemy of the present day left because of their perceived alliance with power, "big religion" came to be similarly regarded by religious and social reformers following Europe's wars of religion. Karl Marx's identification of religion as "the opiate of the masses" grew out of this situation — a powerful state manipulating a national church to maintain control of a population and power.

Side by side with this political reality was **The Reform Principle**, established at great cost by Luther, Calvin, and others. In general, Protestant reformers did not seek to introduce innovations. They sought, rather, to return to the primitive forms of the Church. Luther, for instance, translated the Bible into German, rejected the arbitrary and unscriptural power of the Pope, and scorned such Roman Catholic doctrines as trans-substantiation, indulgences, purgatory, and clerical celibacy as unbiblical.

However, the Protestant reformers themselves had to compromise with the political realities of their situations. In their visions, for the most part, church and state remained allied, if for no other reason than that the ideas of the leading reformers had been adopted by significant European governments.

Yet the Reform Principle itself, fueled by the increasing availability of the Bible in languages people understood, had been established. Reform meant moving closer to the original church. If the "mainstream" reformers were constrained in this effort by political factors, their more radical cousins were not. As previously stated, such radical groups went so far as to advocate the separation of church and state, practice believer's baptism, and reject hierarchical structures in the church. These groups, who followed the principle of reform more fully to its logical conclusions, were violently persecuted by all the state churches of the day. Through much of the second half of the 17th Century, the only country in Europe with any measure of toleration for the radicals was Holland. In the 1680s, however, events took place to make England a more hospitable place for religious dissenters as well. English suspicion of Roman Catholicism was deeply ingrained by this time. Repeated Spanish and French efforts to reimpose Catholicism by subterfuge or force did nothing to lessen that suspicion.

After years of gradual royal efforts under Charles II, son of the executed Charles I, to pave the way for Catholic restoration, Charles II's death gave the throne to his openly Catholic brother, James II. James immediately began catholicizing the government and the army, despite popular protest. When Parliament invited the Protestant monarchs of Hannover, Germany, — William and Mary — to depose him, James II attempted to organize a resistance. His army, however, refused to obey its Catholic officers and James fled. This so-called Glorious Revolution, accomplished without bloodshed, established England as a constitutional monarchy. In 1689, as part of the settlement of the crisis, Parliament passed both a Bill of Rights and an Act of Toleration. The Bill of Rights was the first of its kind.

The Act of Toleration gave certain practical freedom to so-called "Nonconformists," those Christians who were not members of the established church. Nonconformists were still barred from political participation, though in this period so was the vast majority of the population. They were granted the right to worship, though. For all but the Roman Catholics, the days of fear and persecution were over.

For this reason, the rest of the story of the eventual emergence of the Disciples of Christ will focus on events in the British Isles, first, and then on the eldest child of British colonialism, the United States.

1. What were two principles that emerged from the era of religious wars in Europe?
2. What was the overall agenda of the Reform Principle?
3. What European country gave the only measure of acceptance to the Christian radicals during the last half of the 17th Century?
4. Why was James II of England overthrown?
5. What was the Act of Toleration?

III

Enlightenment and Revival

If one hallmark of the 17th Century had been its life-and-death struggles over religion, at least one hallmark of the century that followed was the seeming exhaustion of the combatants and the relative decline in vigor of the state churches they had put in place. In England, this took the form of an increasing and widely lamented apathy toward religion in general among the population as a whole. In certain areas of continental Europe, France and Germany foremost among them, this took the form of a rising intellectual dissatisfaction with what was increasingly seen as an archaic religious world view.

The most potent and widespread intellectual development was simply called The Enlightenment. In France, "the Enlightenment was associated with the *philosophes*, the literary men, scientists and thinkers, who were united in their belief in the supremacy of reason and their desire to see practical change to combat inequality and injustice."[3]

Given the association between state churches and the often-corrupt and despotic governments they served, the Enlightenment in many areas turned against religious faith and practice as the ultimate superstition. When Enlightenment gave way to Revolution in France and subsequently throughout Europe, the existing Churches were severely battered by the storm. In fact, only in a few places would the State Church Principle survive the tumults unleashed by the "Age of Reason."

As was so often the case, though, England took a different path. Though the philosophy of the Enlightenment had a profound effect there as well, England's limited tradition of Toleration kept it from making Christian faith the "enemy," as it often was in continental Europe. In place of rejection, the British Isles experienced a revival, stemming largely from the work of John Wesley and his associates in early Methodism. When the English Church was unreceptive to his message, Wesley took it directly to the people. This revival, subsequently known as the Great Awakening, crossed the Atlantic into England's then-colonies in North America.

The Thirteen Colonies themselves witnessed a unique blending of both Enlightenment philosophy and religious revivalism. Enlightenment principles of equal justice and fair representation, though conspicuously ignored when it came to slavery, nevertheless guided the American revolutionaries in their struggle for independence. Independence was won on the battlefield by 1781 and by 1789 the new American republic had put in place an "enlightened" Constitution, containing ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights. The first of these expressly forbade the establishment of a national church by the federal government. This, in its turn, led ultimately to the disestablishment of the "state churches" left over from Colonial days. America had formally and fully rejected the State Church Principle. It would not turn to religious conformity as a way of uniting its people.

One consequence of this was the fragmentation of religious life in America on a scale impossible in Europe. If numerous new sects had been inspired by the limited toleration of dissent in England, America practically exploded with them. Already peopled with the descendants of the Reformation's

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Oxford, pg. 218

radicals, imbued thoroughly with the creed of their own uniqueness and ability to remake their society, America became the "brave new world" for religious thought. The Disciples of Christ

emerged from this brave new world.

A few salient facts stand out. America, obviously, was a nation of immigrants — in those days European, primarily British, and a minority of captive Africans. Many Europeans brought with them their state church affiliations from the Old World. Yet what had united them to their fellow citizens in the old country divided them just as profoundly in the new one.

The Reform Principle, unlike the State Church Principle, was in full flower in America. There were no practical limits on how far "back" American religious movements could go in their efforts to recover the "original church." As an example, the Baptists, who emerged from the Calvinist wing of the Reformation, would claim in America to have roots going back to John the Baptist himself[4].

The Enlightenment habit of rational thinking, of looking for first principles, of not blindly accepting customary practices, extended in many minds to Christianity and to religion in general. This attitude lay behind the Deism, a belief in an impersonal God, of many of the founders, the Unitarianism that for awhile challenged traditional Christianity in New England, even the skepticism and anti-clericalism of Thomas Jefferson.

The physical isolation and danger of the American frontier factored heavily into the early religious experience of the new nation. This isolation was compounded by the bitter denominational differences imported from the Old World. Oftentimes, Americans on the frontier could not worship with even the few neighbors they had, given the divisions they had inherited.

It is easy to see how, in this context, Christian faith in America could have gone the way of the faith in much of continental Europe — becoming less and less relevant, less and less influential. This did not happen, though. America experienced a religious awakening instead, around the turn of the 19th Century. This so-called Second Great Awakening in American history would oftentimes marry the Reform Principle inherited from the Reformation with the Enlightenment willingness to alter outdated structures. What emerged were uniquely American denominations, shaped and changed by influences here and bearing at times only a passing resembling to their European parents. The early leadership of the Disciples of Christ emerged out of this great revival, oftentimes as its leading thinkers and evangelists.

1. How did British society react to the decline in religious practice during the 18th Century?
2. What caused the Enlightenment in continental Europe to turn so forcefully against State Churches?

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4 "Baptists," Handbook of Denominations in the United States, Eighth Edition, Frank S. Mead and Samuel Hill, eds., Abingdon, Nashville, 1988, pg. 35.

3. Why did the denominational ties that united people in Europe divide them in America?
4. What was unique about American views of traditional institutions?

IV

American Beginnings

The great awakening which gave birth to the Disciples of Christ began to stir on the American frontier in 1797 under Kentucky Presbyterian minister Jacob McGready. The contemporary sources are in agreement that both morality and religious practice were at a low ebb in America at the time. On the frontier, a general lack of education combined with drunkenness and common-place violence to create lawless conditions, far removed from any controlling authority.[5]

The revival movement beginning rather unconsciously with McGready, reached a zenith of sorts in 1801 at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. There, under the leadership of Barton Stone, another Presbyterian minister, one of the first great camp meeting revivals erupted. Staggering numbers of people attended, considering the time and place. Crowds estimated at 25,000 came to hear the preaching.

So many gathered, in fact, that Stone and the Presbyterians cooperated with Methodists and others to minister to them all. Although some wags have said more souls were conceived at Cane Ridge than saved, the event became a model for a century of rural evangelism. It also landed Stone and others in the ecclesiastical doghouse with the presbytery sponsoring them.

Censured for sharing ministry with non-Presbyterians, Stone and four other Presbyterian ministers withdrew from their governing synod, initially to form their own, "independent" presbytery. A presbytery is “a court consisting of pastors and ruling elders of the Presbyterian churches of a given district.”[6] Shortly thereafter, not wishing to become yet another division in the body of Christ, they dissolved their organization in a document called "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery." (Appendix A)

Their desire, they said, was to "sink into union with the body of Christ at large." Stone, who became the movement's primary spokesmen, desired to be called only a Christian, considering sectarian names divisive. He, like so many reformers before him, appealed to the Bible as his final authority. Stone

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5 Howard Short, Doctrine and Thought of the Disciples of Christ, Christian Board of Publication, St. Louis, 1960, pgs. 4-6. Hereinafter cited as Short.

6 Arthur Hayward and John Sparkes, eds, The Concise English Dictionary, New Orchard Edition, Poole, England, 1968, pg. 898. Hereinafter cited as Dictionary.

and his companions went beyond many previous reformers, though, in refusing to recognize any church structure beyond the local congregation.[7] Though eventually three of the five founders of this Christian movement drifted either back to the Presbyterians or into other denominations, Stone's Christians took root in Kentucky and began to build a constituency.

Stone's work found an echo to the north, where newly-arrived Scots-Irish minister Thomas Campbell was also having trouble with his presbytery. Campbell, a longtime minister in his native Ireland, came to America for health reasons. Always an advocate of Protestant Christian unity in bitterly divided Ireland, he was appalled to find that American Presbyterians had imported their Old World divisions over church politics into the new land.

Campbell refused to honor the finely-honed, Old World divisions. He shared communion with all the Presbyterians who worshiped with him, rather than only those who were members of his particular Old World sect. For this, he received the same censure, and, ultimately, boot, Stone had before him. Campbell simply could not accept the absurdity of denying someone communion amid the isolation of the frontier over political issues which had no bearing in America. Life on the frontier was too difficult, times of fellowship and worship too rare, for such sentiments.

In 1809, Thomas Campbell issued his Declaration and Address, the date of which is generally considering the beginning of the Disciples of Christ movement. In it, Campbell, like Stone before him, called for **Christian unity**. "The Church of Christ on earth is essentially , intentionally, and constitutionally one," he said.[8] Beyond that, Campbell appealed to **the Bible alone as the binding authority**. He acknowledged that sharing communion with a variety of Presbyterians violated the rules of his particular denomination. It did not violate, he insisted, the Bible. Where church teaching and a careful reading the Bible clash, Campbell insisted **Christian freedom** had the right and obligation to choose the Bible.[9]

Campbell noted that many Christians were "tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of party spirit."[10] His hope, therefore, was that **Christians would be guided by love** as they distinguished between matters of opinion and matters of faith. Campbell and others quoted Rupertus Meldenius, an early reformer, to describe their position: "In faith, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, charity."[11]

Thomas Campbell was soon joined on the frontier by his family, whose arrival from Ireland had been delayed by a shipwreck. During their shipwrecked sojourn in Scotland, Thomas Campbell's son, Alexander, had studied under the Reverend Greville Ewing in Glasgow. Alexander was deeply influenced by a Christian restoration movement then under way in Scotland under the leadership of Ewing and the Haldane brothers. By the time Alexander reached his father in America, he too had

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7 D. Duane Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, Revised Edition, Chalice Press, St. Louis, 1991, pg. 2. Hereinafter cited as Cummins.

become a strong advocate of a biblically-based Christian unity, rooted in the freedom of individuals to study their Bibles for themselves. Alexander Campbell, following up on the work of his own father

[8] Cummins, pg. 3

[9] Short, pg. 8

[10] Short, pg. 9

[11] Short, pg. 9

and of Barton Stone, became the great early leader of the Disciples of Christ.[12]

1. What led Stone and others to dissolve the Springfield Presbytery?
2. Why was Thomas Campbell in trouble with his own denomination after coming to America?
3. What were four guiding principles in Thomas Campbell's reform?

V

The Disciples of Christ Emerge

In the 1820s and '30s, the Disciples of Christ emerged on the frontier as a major force in American religion. Alexander Campbell also emerged as one of the most prominent American religious leaders of his day. Through a series of highly-publicized debates, a succession of magazine editorships, numerous books, a hymnal, and a Bible translation, Campbell's prominence brought public interest to the new religious movement.

Calling the group of Christians and churches around Campbell a denomination is entirely premature at this stage. Both Campbells, Stone, and other leaders insisted that was exactly what they did **not** want to be. They saw themselves as a new reformation, as a 'brotherhood' of like-minded churches, most of all as a movement within the Church at large. They were, in the words of one of their early slogans, "Christians only, but not the only Christians."

In the early days, in fact, Alexander and Thomas Campbell tried to maintain some sort of denominational connection. Having walked away from Presbyterianism as it was practiced at the time, they sought a group more in tune with their emerging views. Increasingly, Alexander Campbell focused on the New Testament pattern for practice and organization as the precondition for any

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[12] Robert Richardson, Memoirs of A. Campbell, Vol. 1, Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1868, pgs. 147-175. Hereinafter cited as Richardson.

meaningful Christian union. This led him to advocate believer's baptism, rather than the infant baptism common in the old state churches of Europe. Campbell himself was immersed, as was his family after him. This affinity for believer's baptism led him to a decade-long affiliation with the Baptist church.

The relationship did not last. Though agreeing with the Baptists over the form of baptism, Campbell and his followers found many other points of disagreement with them. Campbell insisted that Christians were under grace, not law, contrary to Baptist doctrine at the time. He rejected the idea of a "level Bible," believing instead that the New Testament took precedence over the old. He advocated weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, in accordance with the New Testament practice. He rejected the Calvinist theology that played such a prominent role in many Baptist churches at the time. Campbell believed that an individual could make an informed, reasoned decision to accept Christ — no extraordinary signs of "election" were necessary.

As a result, Campbell and his Brush Run Church were ejected from the Redstone Baptist Association in Pennsylvania. They thereafter joined the Mahoning Baptist Association, still attempting to keep the connection alive. The Mahoning Association hired in the 1820s another newly arrived Scot, Walter Scott, as its Association Evangelist. Scott proved to be a highly-effective evangelizer, drawing thousands of new believers into the fold and giving Alexander Campbell a constituency he otherwise would not have found. Scott developed a simple "Five Finger Exercise" for presenting the Gospel: 1) Believe; 2) Repent; 3) Confess and Be Baptized; 4) Receive Forgiveness; and 5) Receive the Holy Spirit.

Campbell preferred the name "Disciples of Christ" for the movement, seeing it as the original biblical name for Christ's followers.[13] This tied in closely with the Disciples' rejection of non-biblical names for church (e.g. Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran) and non-biblical titles for church leaders (e.g. Reverend).

Through the 1820s, Campbell's Disciples and Stone's Christians were drawn closer together by their common views of a biblically-grounded Christian unity. Following the Mahoning Baptist Association's decision to disband (over Alexander Campbell's objections), the two groups began a congregation by congregation union. Neither had a formal structure to lead such a union since both groups, by design, had rejected such structures. In 1832, at Hill Street Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, the process of uniting began with a handshake between Disciples and Christians. The group was now a recognizable, as-yet-nondenominational movement on the frontier. Between the handshake in 1832 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the Disciples of Christ grew at a fantastic rate. The roughly 22,000 who came together with in the original 'merger' grew to more

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Cummins, pg. 10

than 200,000 in more than 2100 congregations.[14]

The 1830s and '40s witnessed the beginning of rudimentary cooperation between various congregations among Disciples. Having explicitly rebelled against the shackles of denominationalism, the idea of having any organization at all beyond the local church was controversial. There was no clear, biblical precedent for it. Past experience of such organizations had not been pleasant. After all, two different Presbyterian synods had ejected the Campbells and Stone and several different Baptist Associations had ejected Disciples congregations. Early Disciples came by their suspicions of such organizations naturally. Nevertheless, at the prodding of Alexander Campbell and others, Disciples did begin to come together on a larger scale, though within strict limits. By 1849, Disciples had organized the American Christian Missionary Society, with Alexander Campbell as its first President.[15]

The first meeting of that body set a long-lasting tone for the future. Originally conceived as a 'delegate convention' with elected messengers, the meeting foundered on its second day over who qualified as a delegate. Only one State, Indiana, had actually elected delegates. Others had been elected by local congregations. By far the majority of those in attendance, though, were preachers and workers who had come at their own expense. Suspicious of "ecclesiastical authority" as they were, the delegates themselves voted to dissolve their convention, then reconvene it as a "mass meeting," with all present allowed full participation. Disciples would not reconvene a delegate assembly until 1968.[16]

Larger church gatherings were for the purpose of fellowship, firstly. Only gradually would they be organized to accomplish ministries beyond the reach of individual congregations. At no point, however, did any of the founders envision such a structure having authority over congregations. Each congregation had the same rights it always had, according the prevailing Disciples view of the New Testament — to govern itself independently of any external coercion and to set apart for service its own ministers and leaders.

1. Who emerged as the most prominent leader of the early Disciples of Christ?
2. Why were the early Disciples of Christ so insistent that they were not a denomination?
3. Who was the most prominent evangelist among the early Disciples of Christ?
4. Which two major denominations were the Campbells a part of before they rejected denominationalism in general?

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14 Cummins, pgs. 4-5

15 Cummins, pg. 6

16 Lester McAllister and William E. Tucker, Journey in Faith, Chalice Press, Indianapolis, 1975, pgs. 176-77. Hereinafter cited as McAllister.

5. Why was forming the American Christian Missionary Society controversial?

VI

Beliefs of Early Disciples of Christ

It is time to take an inventory of the beliefs of mid-19th Century Disciples of Christ, to the extent those beliefs can be summarized. First of all, we examine what they were reacting against — the bitter sectarian divisions, most often left over from Europe, that had torn the body of Christ to pieces. These sectarian divisions were maintained in America by two chief factors, early Disciples' believed: 1) creeds, or formal statements of doctrine that defined the right beliefs and established boundaries for members of individual denominations; and 2) hierarchical, professional clergy, who maintained the denominational divisions and, in the views of the Campbells and many others, prevented ordinary believers from reading their Bibles for themselves.

Thomas Campbell, for one, was highly suspicious of organized clergy, despite having been ordained a minister himself. Thomas was "led, more and more, toward the conclusion that bigotry, corruption, and tyranny were qualities inherent in all clerical organizations."[17] His son Alexander pledged while still a poor, young immigrant never to accept pay for his ministerial work.

Ironically, these creeds and clergy were the very elements that led to state church unity in old Europe. They had been the instruments in defining the faith of whole peoples. In the new context, though, they had the opposite effect. For this reason, early Disciples were adamant in their rejection of both. They had "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the divine." In the name of Christian unity, which in some form is a resurrection in American clothing of the old state church ideal — one faith for one people — Disciples rejected explicitly the elements that most defined the old state churches of Europe.

Despite being anti-clerical and anti-creedal, the Disciples advocated education with especial vigor. Their objections to creeds and professional clergy rose from the suspicion, largely true, that these things prevented 'non-professionals,' ordinary Christians, from reading the Bible for themselves. All of this assumed a very high view both of the Bible — it was for early Disciples of Christ unquestionably the inspired Word of God — and of individual believers. The believers had the capacity to read the Bible for themselves and govern both their lives and their churches by it.

Thomas Campbell addressed this high view of scripture and of the Christian individual in his Declaration and Address. (Appendix B)"Where the Scriptures speak, we speak," he wrote in words

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17 Richardson, pg. 230

that became a rallying point for the movement. "Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."[18]

Thomas Campbell described further his ideal for the individual believer: "Simply, reverentially, confidingly, they would speak of Bible things in Bible words, adding nothing thereto and omitting nothing given by inspiration."[19]

The Declaration and Address countenanced supporting only those ministers who did not attempt

> to inculcate anything of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men as having any place in the constitution, faith, or worship of the Christian Church, or anything as a matter of Christian faith or duty, for which there cannot be expressly produced a 'Thus saith the Lord,' either in express terms or by approved precedent.[20]

These factors together gave early Disciples churches their distinctive shape. These churches rejected infant baptism, since no 'Thus saith the Lord' could be produced to support it. Baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins, according to the New Testament model, was the Disciple model. This was

to be a fellowship of believers, not a fellowship defined by birth.

The Lord's Supper was observed every Sunday, "in remembrance of me" as Jesus commanded. (1 Cor. 11:24 NIV) and approved precedent suggested. This meal, open to all believers, was presided over by Elders and served by Deacons, both of whom were elected from the congregation according to principles outlined in the scripture. Preaching was done perhaps by a preaching Elder or an evangelist. There was no sense among pre-Civil War Disciples of a separation between clergy and laity.

These same Elders were responsible for church discipline, again according to the New Testament model. 19th Century Christians of all persuasions seemed to have held one another to higher standards of moral accountability than most church members would tolerate today. They believed that making the Good Confession, becoming a Christian, entailed a change of life. One could not live like a pagan and expect to be unchallenged by the leadership of the congregation. All this stood in stark contrast to the previously noted moral laxity of the frontier.

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18 Richardson, pg. 236

19 Richardson, pg. 237

20 Richardson, pg. 244

If the congregation were involved in any activity beyond its own life, it probably had something to do with education. Both Thomas and Alexander Campbell had taught in Ireland and both maintained the interest in the new country. Alexander Campbell founded Bethany College in the 1840s, one of over 400 institutions of learning Disciples would establish in North America and around the world.[21]All these activities reflect the priorities of a frontier people building a new country, rooted in scripture and confident in their own capacity to make informed decisions.

1. What two things did early Disciples reject as being the causes of much division and controversy in the church?
2. What did the early Disciples believe was only sufficient ground for Christian unity?
3. Who did the early Disciples believe was responsible for reading and interpreting the Bible?
4. Why did the Disciples reject infant baptism?
5. What became a major focus for Disciples as they ministered beyond the local congregation?

VII

Civil War and a Passing Generation

In 1861, America's 'original sin' of slavery and the sectionalism and racism it spawned finally exploded in war. The impact was cataclysmic. By the time the war ended in April of 1865, over 600,000 Americans were dead and large parts of the South were in ruins. The war destroyed the institution of slavery, yet left in its wake a more embittered racism and an ongoing national divide between North and South, black and white.

The war also shattered American religious life. In the years of controversy before its outbreak, most of the major Protestant denominations fractured over the issue of slavery. Southern Baptists broke from Northern Baptists, Southern Presbyterians from Northern Presbyterians, and Southern Methodists from Northern Methodists. Some of those division took more than a century to heal after the war. In the case of the Southern Baptists, the fracture has never healed.

Disciples, on the other hand, did not divide before the war, in large part because no denominational structure existed that could divide. Much to the chagrin of later generations of social critics within the movement, Disciples' leadership at the time sought a "nondivisive position." This " led to the notion that the issue [of slavery] was a matter of 'opinion,' not 'faith,' and therefore was not a test

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21 Cummins, pg. 6

of fellowship."[22] Nevertheless, the terrible losses, economic devastation and lingering bitterness caused by the war affected Disciples just as surely as all other Americans.

This crisis point coincided with the passing of the giants of the early movement. Barton Stone died in 1844, Walter Scott in 1851, Thomas Campbell in 1854, and Alexander Campbell in 1866.[23] Still,
Disciples emerged from the war perhaps more vigorous than ever. The movement's plea for "religious unity based upon the Bible"[24] found a ready audience in a war-torn country. Between the beginning of the war in 1861 and the movement's 100th anniversary in 1909, membership increased from 200,000 to more than 1,250,000[25]

Yet the roiling controversies over church order, cooperation beyond the congregation, and professional ministry, held in check by the charisma and influence of the founding generation, boiled over during this period as well. Instrumental music in worship, strangely enough, was a frequent catalyst for the subsequent division. Just as the union between Stone's "Christians" and Campbell's "Disciples" had come about on a church by church basis, so this first fracturing of the Disciples of Christ occurred on a church by church basis.

To understand why, it's important to understand how Disciples viewed the New Testament. It was, said Thomas Campbell in his<u>Declaration and Address</u>, the "constitution" of the church, much as the US Constitution was of the American republic.[26] What it sanctioned, Alexander Campbell and others argued, the church was obligated to practice. Where it spoke, the church also must speak. Behind this was the assumption that Jesus knew what he was doing, that he intended to found the church,

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22 Cummins, pg. 7

23 Cummins, pg. 7

24 "The Churches of Christ", www.enteract.com/~mheavin/churches/church.html., DuPage County Church of Christ, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, 2001, pg. 1

25 Cummins, pg. 9

26 Richardson, pgs. 236-238

that he communicated his plans to his disciples, and that the New Testament contains those plans.[27] But what about those areas where there was no clear precedent? Was the silence of Scripture a permissive or a restrictive silence? The same questions swirled around the interpretation of the US Constitution, with "loose constructionists" interpreting its silence freely and "strict constructionists" interpreting its silence restrictively. Though Disciples debated many such issues in the postwar years, it was primarily the issue of instrumental music that brought it home to individual congregations. The reasons for that are simple. For example, there is no scriptural precedent, no 'Thus saith the Lord,' for missionary societies. The New Testament clearly portrays missionaries being sent out by individual churches. Yet the missionary societies lived at a distance from most congregations. The congregations could ignore, oppose, or support them without much internal strife. An organ, though, brought the conflict directly to the heart of the congregation's life — its worship. There is no 'Thus saith the Lord' for having musical instruments in Christian worship. Is the silence of Scripture on the subject permissive or restrictive? What had been an academic issue in regards to missionary societies has become an immediate one in regards to organs and pianos. "Strict constructionists" among Disciples, tended to view the silence of Scripture as restrictive. For them, adding instrumental music to worship introduced something not anticipated by the New Testament and therefore not acceptable in the "restored" church. Such persons and congregations tended to join the Churches of Christ, so called. "Loose constructionists," seeing that silence as permissive, saw no objection to instrumental music or missionary societies. They remained, in large measure, among the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ).

Both sides shared a reverence for scripture and a common heritage. All the same they divided over these issues in the years after the Civil War. The bond of love, so important in Thomas Campbell's original ideal, had been broken. To a large degree, the division took place along a North-South line, with the majority of Churches of Christ in the southern States and the majority of Christian Churches in the northern and Midwestern States. The division, though, cannot simply be seen as regional since Christian Churches (Disciples) remained strong in many areas of the South, particularly Texas. The United States Census Bureau recognized the Churches of Christ as a separate body from the Disciples of Christ in 1906.[28]

1. What did Disciples consider to be the "constitution" of Christianity?
2. Why did the strict-constructionists object to missionary societies and instrumental music?
3. What made instruments in worship so divisive?
4. What is your view of the "silence of Scripture?"

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27 Gaines M. Cook, "Basic Beliefs of the Disciples of Christ," UCMS, Indianapolis, undated

28 Cummins, pg. 8

VIII

Wrenching Change after the Civil War

The agrarian, Jeffersonian republic, maintained by small farmers and, in the South at least, by slave labor, vanished in the furnace of Civil War. The America that re-emerged after the War bore less and less of a resemblance to the one that preceded it. The forces of industrialization and mass immigration that had only just begun before the War became torrential afterwards. The United States evolved in the space of a few decades from a predominantly rural society into the industrial, urbanized colossus that would challenge for and eventually dominate world power in the 20th Century.

These changes had far-reaching effects on the Disciples of Christ as well. The movement had been ideally suited for the agrarian economy of old, prizing as it did individualism, self-reliance, and simplicity. It is difficult to underestimate the idealism of the American experiment in the early decades of the 19th Century. That idealism led Alexander Campbell, pre-eminently among the Disciples, to believe he could leapfrog eighteen centuries of what he considered fallen, Christian history, not just to reform the Church as he saw it but to restore the pattern he found in the New Testament. What had been, under the leadership of Thomas Campbell, a movement rejecting creeds, calling for a return to the Bible, yet possessing a wide forbearance on issues like infant baptism, narrowed considerably as the younger Campbell made restoring the ancient order more of a priority and forbearance less of one.[29]

Thus the Disciples developed into a distinctive fellowship within American Christianity. This fellowship, confronted by the wrenching changes of the post Civil War era, began to organize itself almost spontaneously to better cope with the challenges it faced. The first wave of post-war organization developed in order to send out missionaries. Concerned that other Christian sects were more active in sending missionaries to convert non-Christian peoples, Disciples of Christ women organized the Christian Women's Board of Mission (CWBM) under the leadership of Carolyn Neville Pearre in 1874. Disciples men responded by organizing a Foreign Christian Missionary Society (FCMS) in 1875[30]

In 1877, Disciples organized the National Benevolent Association (NBA) to care for the orphaned

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29 Mark G. Toulouse, Joined in Discipleship, Chalice Press, Indianapolis, 1997, pgs. 55-56. Hereinafter cited as Toulouse.

30 Cummins, pg.8.

and the elderly. This organization has grown into 39th largest charitable concern in the United States today, operating 74 facilities in 21 States.[31] All these ministries, though organized on a grass-roots

level, grew to a national, and at times, international scale to cope with the challenges of the day. The presence and pressure of such national organizations inevitably changed Disciples self-perception. The CWBM, FCMS, and NBA, together with the Disciples colleges, competed in the marketplace of local churches for funding. This competition and the lack of a unified way of promoting all these mission efforts was felt by some as a keen lack. The organizations also raised Disciples' awareness of national and international issues, helping what had been a primarily rural and self-educated movement break out of its isolation and see itself in a larger perspective.

Disciples publications were also instrumental in this process. From the beginning, Disciples of Christ leaders had also been editors. Alexander Campbell had published a magazine called The Christian Baptist up the time of the dissolution of the Mahoning Baptist Association in 1830. Thereafter, he publishedThe Millenial Harbinger, which continued to his death in 1866. Walter Scott published The Evangelist. Barton Stone founded The Christian Messenger.[32]

In the post-Civil War era, with the founders in their graves, two periodicals and two editors rose to prominence among Disciples. Isaac Errett, of Cincinnati, founded The Christian Standard in 1865, editing it until his death in 1885. This periodical still exists as the leading magazine among independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. J. H. Garrison, of St. Louis, formed The Christian-Evangelist from two previous publications in 1882. This publication, called The Disciple, was the leading periodical in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) until its demise in 2002.[33]Though the publications would take divergent paths as the years went by, both were united in the post Civil War era in building larger sense of identity among Disciples of Christ at large and in promoting Disciples' mission efforts.

All of these efforts together helped bring Disciples out of a frontier mentality and into the mainstream of American society. Through their new national organizations, Disciples made good faith efforts to address the most pressing needs of the late 19th Century. Their commitment to Jesus Christ, combined with the misery and 'lostness' they saw in the world around them, led them to unprecedented levels of cooperative effort, despite the misgivings of many. Though much good was accomplished by these

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"No. 9910, The National Benevolent Association of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" Yearbook and Directory: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2000, Office of the General Minister and President, Indianapolis, 2000, pg. 241. Hereinafter cited as 2000 Yearbook.

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Cummins, pgs. 4-5

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Toulouse, pg. 174

national organizations, Disciples would discover in the century to come that such organizations, once begun, took on a life of their own entirely apart from the intentions of their organizers.

1. What were the most profound changes between the pre-Civil War era and the post-Civil War era?
2. How did Disciples react to the immense changes they faced in post-war America?
3. What groups did Disciples organize to carry out their mission in the post war era?
4. What publications contributed to a growing sense of Disciples identity in this era?

IX

The Shaking of the Foundations

The post-Civil War era saw the emergence of national and international mission organizations among Disciples, bringing a level of cohesion to the overall movement it had lacked before. It also contained two developments which, in the long run, would prove equally profound in terms of the changes they would bring about in the movement's churches and beyond. These were the rise of a professional ministry and the advent of biblical criticism.

Thomas and Alexander Campbell's initial hostility toward professional clergy has already been documented. In keeping with the self-reliance and independent spirit of the American frontier, both Campbells insisted on the competence of individual believers to read, interpret, and live out their understanding of the Bible. Alexander Campbell, in this respect, provided an early model for Disciples ministry. He was not simply a minister. He was also a farmer, a writer, a legislator, a teacher, and a college president.

This rejection of the distinction between clergy and laity by Disciples paid rich dividends in some respects. It empowered a wider cross-section of rank and file members to do ministry, build churches, and evangelize. Carolyn Neville Pearre, founder of the Christian Women's Board of Missions — the most successful, relatively speaking — of post-Civil War Disciples organizations, was not an ordained minister[34].

At times, no doubt, the lack of an educated clergy hindered Disciples growth theologically. Yet the Disciples commitment to higher education increasingly made at least some degree of education available to persons pursuing ministry within the Disciples of Christ. Ordination, the formal act of setting persons apart for ministry, remained firmly in the hands of local churches. As a group of churches believing in the independence of local congregations, the Disciples could hardly have

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Cummins, pg. 8

adopted a different system.

The tremendous changes in the post-Civil War era impacted the ministry as well. In an age of increasing specialization, ministers naturally tended to become specialists as well. The old ideal of the "farmer-preacher" was felt to be increasingly inadequate. More and more congregations began to insist on at least some college study prior to ordination as, almost unconsciously, the old clergylaity distinction began to reemerge. Yet exceptions to the rule were many. Kenneth Teegarden, the second General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the late 20th Century, was ordained as an 18-year old youth by his local church[35]. He went on to complete both a Bachelors and a Masters degree as well as receive an honorary Doctorate, yet his ordination took place before all that.

The gradual raising of the bar, as it were, for ministers was not without resistance. Though Alexander Campbell had come to see the need for a well-educated clergy, many among the Disciples never forgot his early denunciations of "hireling clergy." When Isaac Errett, Cincinnati pastor and prominent editor of The Christian Standard, was given a plaque by admirers proclaiming him "Reverend Isaac Errett," the action was greeted with howls of protest.[36] Critics cited Jesus' saying in Matthew 23:8-10:

> But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.

The rise of a professional clergy paled somewhat in comparison to the impact of biblical criticism. Disciples founders based their "plea" for Christian unity on the assumption of the absolute truthfulness of the Bible. Creeds and denominations, symbols of division, were rejected as 'human inventions' which had been foisted on the pure church of New Testament times. Though Alexander Campbell advocated a careful study of scripture, he never questioned its basic trustworthiness.

Yet the late-19th Century experienced an explosion of questions over that basic trustworthiness. This criticism, arising in European universities from the Renaissance on, "appealed to an alternative source of authority for its findings: human reason and experimental investigation."[37]

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35 Kenneth L. Teegarden, in personal conversation with the Author.

36 McAllister, pg. 244.

37 "Biblical Criticism," The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., Westminister, Philadelphia, 1983, pg. 66. Hereinafter cited as "Westminster."

The 'higher criticism,' to use the term prevalent in the 19th Century, studied the Bible as if it were an ordinary book, relating ordinary events.[38] Because many 'higher critics' refused to acknowledge in advance the uniqueness of the Bible, many believers found their conclusions worrisome, even faith-shaking. To name just a few such conclusions, the critics determined that Moses did not write all the Pentateuch and that some of Paul's letters were perhaps written by someone else.

Barton Johnson, co-editor of The Christian Evangelist, spoke for many when he warned that the critics posed a greater threat to Christianity than avowed atheists. "To [Johnson's] mind, biblical criticism if unchecked would destroy both the integrity of scripture and the vitality of the church."[39]

Biblical criticism swept into the colleges and seminaries just as the notion of a professional clergy was gaining advocates among Disciples. Disciples national publications split over the phenomenon. J.
H. Garrison's Christian Evangelist was at least not hostile to the new thinking. The Christian Standard, under new editorship after Isaac Errett's death in 1885, opposed it unrelentingly. The deepening controversy would have dramatic consequences for the Disciples of Christ in the 20th Century[40].

1. What was the early model for ministry among Disciples? What were its strengths and weaknesses?
2. Why was 'higher criticism' viewed with such alarm by many believers? Do you view it with alarm?

X

Conservatives vs. Moderates — Disciples Style

Most contemporary Protestants are aware of the war recently waged among Southern Baptists between so-called moderates and conservatives. Few, even among Disciples, are aware that such a war was waged among Disciples of Christ in the opening decades of the 20th Century. The outcome, unlike with the Southern Baptists, was a 'victory' for the moderates rather than the conservatives.

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38 Westminster, pg. 255.

39 McAllister, pg. 366

40 McAllister, pg. 366

True theological liberals were rare among Disciples. Robert C. Cave, minister of Central Christian Church in St. Louis, Missouri, was such a liberal. After preaching a series of sermons denying, among other things, Christ's virgin birth and bodily resurrection, he was summarily dismissed by his congregation and denounced by his Disciples peers.[41]

The warfare among Disciples was waged between groups who believed in the inspiration and truthfulness of the Bible but differed in their attitude toward inerrancy, the belief in the Bible's infallibility. Isaac Errett, the great editor of The Christian Standard, opened the battle when he distinguished between inspiration and infallibility.

> Admitting the fact of inspiration, have we in the inspired Scriptures an *infallible* guide? Are they absolutely free from error? That truth is infallible needs no proof. But, is the *communication* of truth, in the inspired Scriptures, absolutely free from error? I do not see how we can answer this question affirmatively, unless we can prove that human language furnishes an absolutely certain method of communication between mind and mind. Nor do I see how this can be proved.[42]

Errett believed beyond doubt the Bible was inspired. He doubted, though, that it was infallible. Other Disciples, notably J. H. McGarvey, President of the College of the Bible at Lexington, Kentucky, objected strongly. [43]

Other factors contributed to the suspicions on both sides. The rise of professional ministry and the emergence of general organizations alarmed those who believed the Bible sanctioned neither. The growing number of Disciples ministers receiving educations in places like Yale University and the University of Chicago, noted centers of biblical criticism, compounded matters. Conservatives feared that, once the basic authority of Scripture was challenged, nothing could prevent the believer from sliding into the open denials of biblical truth advocated by out-and-out liberals like Robert C. Cave. J. H. McGarvey was determined no such slide should begin at Lexington. Indeed it was not as long as McGarvey remained alive.

Also complicating matters was the perceived need by many Disciples for a more efficient general organization. As things stood, the various Disciples organizations solicited funds directly from the congregations, oftentimes not only without cooperation but with no small degree of competition between them. The General Convention of Disciples of Christ, which had met annually since 1849, was ineffective for ending this. It had authority only to receive reports from the various agencies.

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41 McAllister, pgs. 363-364. 42 McAllister, pg. 365, emphasis in original

43 McAllister, pg. 365

Efforts to reform the General Convention began as early as 1869, but became effective only in 1912 when a constitution was approved. This constitution, calling for a delegate assembly similar to the first gathering in 1849, ran into the same problems as that first convention. Disciples were simply not ready for the overt denominationalism implied by a delegate assembly. Controversy led to revision and finally, in 1917, a new constitution forming the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ was adopted. [44]

Though initially well-received, the new Convention became a source of further alarm as it began to centralize the operations of the Disciples general agencies. The United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS), formed in 1920 to consolidate the CWBM, the FCMS, the NBA, the Board of Church Extension, and the Pension Fund, was immediately suspected of "creeping denominationalism." When controversy arose over the practice of some Disciples missionaries overseas cooperating with non-immersed Christians, the Convention itself was shaken to the core.[45]

The controversy highlighted the divides then existing among Disciples. The New Testament clearly teaches baptism by immersion. The great majority of Disciples assumed that this was the only valid practice for baptism. Yet the problem remained: how were Disciples to deal with others who saw baptism differently? Was this to be a matter of forbearance, as with Barton Stone's original Christians, or was it to be a firm boundary? Conservatives saw immersion as a boundary. Moses Lard, a 19th Century preacher and editor, went so far as to deny that Martin Luther was a Christian since he had not been immersed.[46] In large part, the congregations agreed with the conservatives. The UCMS, realizing the practical hazards of offending its financial base, instructed its missionaries to limit contacts with non-immersed Christians, whatever the difficulties of the foreign field. Still, the controversy continued.

The argument over biblical criticism finally exploded at the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky. By 1917, long-time Lexington Dean and biblical criticism opponent J.H. McGarvey was dead. Isaac Errett's old paper, The Christian Standard, had become a ruthless opponent of biblical criticism as well. After a series of stinging letters in The Christian Standard, what amounted to a heresy trial took place in Lexington. On one side were moderate faculty supporting biblical criticism. On the other side was McGarvey's ideological successor, College Dean Hall L. Calhoun. The College's board, following an investigation, found in favor of the faculty after discovering,

> no teaching in this College . . . that is out of harmony with the fundamental conceptions and

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44 McAllister, pgs. 340-342

45 McAllister, pgs. 381-383

46 McAllister, pg. 241

convictions of our brotherhood which relate to the inspiration of the Bible as the divine word of God."[47]

Calhoun subsequently resigned and joined the Churches of Christ. The Christian Standard continued its opposition to both creeping denominationalism and biblical criticism. In 1926, at the Pantages Theater in Memphis, Tennessee, disgruntled conservatives left the International Convention to form the North American Christian Convention.[48] Though in separate conventions, both groups for many years continued to call themselves Disciples and maintain a common listing in the Disciples Year Book.

1. Do you believe the Bible is inspired? Infallible? Neither? Why or why not?
2. Is the biblical form of baptism necessary to be a genuine Christian? What about those who practice otherwise?
3. Should Christians cooperate with other Christians who have very different theological understandings?

XI

Disciples of Christ and the Emerging Ecumenical Movement

Disciples commitment to Christian unity is older than the movement itself. Barton Stone explicitly stated his desire for union in "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery":

> We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.[49]

In the movement's other proto-text, "The Declaration and Address," Thomas Campbell too specifically addresses Christian union before all else: ". . . the Church of Christ upon earth is

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47 McAllister, pg. 370.

48 Cummins, pg. 10

49 Barton Stone, "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," public domain, 1801 (see Appendix A). Hereinafter cited as Last Will.

essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one".[50]

Thomas Campbell, mindful of the divisions in the church, expressed sentiments remarkably in keeping with what has become the ecumenical movement.

> . . . although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate from one another, yet there ought to be no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Jesus Christ hath also received them . . . And for this purpose they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgement.[51]

The Disciples of Christ themselves emerged from a union between two proto-denominations — Stone's Christians and the Campbells' Disciples. For Stone, unity was the "polar star" of his movement's existence.[52] Both Stone and the Campbells agreed that rejecting creeds and returning to the Bible alone offered the best hope of that unity. Yet disagreements over whether the rejection of creeds or the return to the Bible was to have precedence led to the frustration of unity of efforts among Disciples.

By 1811, Alexander Campbell had given priority to a return to the primitive gospel as he understood it, over any sort of unifying compromise. "I have set out," he said, "to follow the apostles of Christ and their Master and I will be baptized only into the primitive Christian faith."[53]

Alexander Campbell's determination that only New Testament forms were acceptable in the Church carried within it seeds for further division. Baptism provided the first occasion for division. Whereas both Stone and Thomas Campbell had been willing to see the form of baptism as a matter of forbearance initially, Alexander insisted on baptism of believers by immersion only.[54]Robert Richardson wrote, speaking for Alexander Campbell, that

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50 Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address, Proposition I," public domain, 1809 (see Appendix B). Hereinafter cited as Declaration.

51 Declaration, Proposition II

52 Cummins, pg. 39

53 Richardson, pg. 410

54 Richardson, pg. 404

> . . . it is not upon any general principle, or even by the adoption of a few particular truths, that a real Christian union can be established. This demands a willingness to receive the whole truth . . . A mere conglomeration, then, of the religious parties upon the admitted principle that the bible is the only rule of faith and practice, would by no means have secured religious peace.[55]

The young Alexander Campbell, like so many before him, was convinced that he was recovering that "whole truth."

Though Alexander never moderated his views of baptism, he did moderate considerably his views on those who believed differently about it. They too, he admitted later in life, were Christians if in all sincerity they accepted Christ.[56] His relative open-mindedness was not universally shared among Disciples.

As the 20th Century began, Disciples took a more active role in what became known as the ecumenical movement. This movement, largely a Protestant phenomenon at first, is guided by "the sense of the importance of reuniting separated churches.[57] Disciples were instrumental in founding the Federal Council of Churches in 1908.[58] This initial participation was hampered by the fact that Disciples were not a "church," as such. They were a movement of churches. No official body existed that could delegate authority to join such a Council. Disciples delegates to the Council were named by in an unofficial meeting outside the General Convention.[59]

In 1910, Peter Ainslee, Disciples minister in Baltimore, organized the Council on Christian Union as another unofficial organization to guide Disciples in ecumenical matters. The group, which become the Council on Christian Unity in 1954, still exists, now firmly "official." In 1948, still not an official

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55 Richardson, pg. 401, emphasis in the original.

56 McAllister, pg. 156ff

57 Westminster, pg. 173

58 McAllister, pg. 281

59 McAllister, pg. 281

denomination, Disciples joined the newly organized World Council of Churches.[60] As Disciples organizational structures grew, in combination with their growing involvement in the ecumenical movement, many Disciples began to reconsider the notion of denominationalism itself. The outcome of this consideration would lead to some of the most dramatic and controversial changes ever for Stone and Campbell's descendants.

XII

Disciples Embrace Denominationalism

Life did not become any simpler in the 20th Century. The unprecedented late 19th Century social changes that spawned various general Disciples organizations intensified in the new Century. America was swept into two world wars, a great economic depression, a long Cold War struggle with Communism, and a wave of technologically-driven economic globalization.

Against this backdrop, many Disciples leaders felt increasingly uncomfortable with the frontier mentality of Christian unity through restoration. Life was simply too complex, too intertwined, to talk of sweeping away the accretions of centuries and restoring the primitive church. The cumulative weight of biblical criticism eroded the sense among many Disciples that there was a "primitive church" to restore.[61]

Given the complexity of the times, the unwieldy nature of Disciples institutions, and the changing theological assumptions of the leadership, Disciples began to entertain a notion that would have been anathema to them previously — becoming a denomination. The first efforts at more rational organization had taken place with the formation of the International Convention and the United Christian Missionary Society. These two soon seemed less than adequate, however. In an effort to streamline fund-raising appeals to churches still further, the International Convention approved in 1930 Unified Promotion.[62] This organization gathered all general level giving in one purse before distributing it to the various general ministries. Naturally, opponents of a strongly centralized denominational bureaucracy objected. Thereafter, the denominational Year Books began distinguishing between 'cooperating" churches and "non-cooperating" ones.

Still, some felt the consolidation did not go far enough. Following the trauma of the Second World

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60 Toulouse, pg. 81

61 Cummins, pg. 10

62 McAllister, pg. 398

War and the beginning of the Cold War, the International Convention approved a Commission on Restructure, under the leadership of Granville T. Walker.[63] Convened initially to study ways of streamlining the International Convention, the Commission on Restructure soon moved beyond its original mandate. "There was solid agreement," Lester McAllister and William Tucker noted in their book, Journey in Faith, "that the concept of 'churches' and agencies must give way to recognition

of the *one church*."[64]

This church, of course, would be a denomination. Still, the Commission on Restructure made conscientious efforts to harmonize the new denomination with the old Disciples beliefs. The new general church, so-called because it included the United States and Canada, would exist in partnership with, not in lordship over, the existing congregations. Similarly, the regional churches, which replaced in most instances the old State missionary societies, would have specific functions in partnership with both the general and the local churches. The Commission envisioned three so-called "manifestations" of the church — each in covenant partnership with the other, each with its own sphere and responsibilities, each owning its own property and raising its own funds.[65]

Opposition to restructure was widespread among conservatives, as well as among some of the more mainstream Disciples leadership. Conservatives expressed the same reservations they had before the forming of the UCMS: ". . . that such a society would only take responsibility for missions out of the hands of local churches."[66] Since most such conservatives no longer contributed to or participated in the International Convention, their concerns were deemed more divisive than decisive.

More serious were the reservations of such prominent leaders as Winfred E. Garrison, son of J. H. Garrison and longtime Dean of the Disciples Divinity House at the University of Chicago. Winfred Garrison, then in the twilight of an illustrious career as a minister, educator, and philosopher, had supported the International Convention from its inception. He feared, though, that the decision to become a denomination represented a "fork in the road." After the decision was made, Garrison

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63 McAllister, pgs. 436-437

64 McAllister, pgs. 439-441, emphasis in the original.

65 See Appendix C, Item 2.

66 Toulouse, pg. 198

expressed fear that Disciples had chosen the wrong fork.[67]

Others, including prominent Disciples historian A. T. DeGroot, called on Disciples to maintain their status as "free association of congregations."[68] Reservations to the contrary notwithstanding, the International Convention voted in 1966 to call a delegate assembly in 1968 in order to consider the proposed Design for the new church. After two years of debate, charges and countercharges, the 1968 meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, approved the new plan. The International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a recognized denomination among all the others, with an official governing body able to speak for the Church at large in ecumenical and social matters.[69]

1. What led Disciples to embrace being a denomination after so many years of opposing that very thing?
2. What do you see as the advantages of being a denomination? How important is it to have a forum that can speak for the church?
3. What do you think of the conservative charge that general organizations would take control of missions out of the hands of local churches? Has that happened?

XIII

Disciples Rethink Mission

From the beginning of the movement, 'missionary work' among Disciples had three major emphases: to make Christians and plant churches; to educate; and to alleviate suffering. Historically, the Disciples of Christ had make significant progress in all three. By 1957, the movement counted 2,244,039 members worldwide. The following year, the number of its churches peaked worldwide at 10,139, not counting, of course, the Churches of Christ.[70]

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67 McAllister, pg. 445

68 Toulouse, pg. 230.

69 McAllister, pg. 442-443

70 1968 Year Book and Directory, Howard Dentler, ed., Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, 1968, pg. S314. Hereinafter cited as 1968 Year Book.

Disciples had founded over the years over four hundred institutions of higher learning. Though not all succeeded, many survived to make a significant impact on American higher education.[71] The success of the National Benevolent Association, formed in the late 19th Century to minister to the orphaned and elderly, has already been documented above.

The restructured Church, though, in keeping with the tenor of the time, began rethinking its mission priorities. After the Second World War, the great colonial empires of Britain and France fell apart. The missionary zeal which had so often accompanied their initial rise became increasingly suspect in many places. Wars of "national liberation" around the world called attention to the "westernizing" influence of missionaries. China, one of the most "missionized" countries in the colonial world, expelled its missionaries after the Communist Revolution in 1949 and cracked down severely on the churches they had formed. In response to these events, Disciples, like other large North American and European denominations, began reconsidering their church-planting and evangelistic plans.

Now largely free of its old conservative critics, the new Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began a much more wholehearted cooperation with other denominations in the mission field. This movement predated restructure, but took wings thereafter. At the same time, Disciples moved from the old "soul winning" emphasis to a strategy far more focused on justice and peace.[72] This change of emphasis was formalized first of all in a "Strategy of Ecumenical Concerns" issued by the then-Division of World Mission of the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS).[73] In 1981 the Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM), one of the successor organizations to the UCMS, issued a new statement of its priorities. Mission, the DOM said, "implies the unity and integrity of social action and evangelism."[74] Older concerns about immersion, open membership, soul-winning and church-planting were no longer of concern. The church, according to the DOM, had been planted around the world. It was the responsibility of Disciples to cooperate with it where it was rather than seeking to plant competitors to it. As early as the 1950s this principle of non-interference had begun to take shape. According to Virgil Sly and Harry McCormick, Disciples missionary leaders at the time, the UCMS "had no more right to tell these churches how they must conduct their affairs than

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71 Cummins, pg. 8.

72 Toulouse, pgs. 205ff.

73 Toulouse, pg. 207.

74 Toulouse, pg. 212

it had the right to tell churches at home how they must act."[75] The principle of non-interference has a sound logic to it, from a Restoration movement perspective. Yet the decision to de-emphasize overseas evangelism and favor social action was and is controversial among many Disciples. Many question whether the church indeed has been planted universally. Though most reasonable Christians would reject the old missionary strategy of "westernization," many would not simply equate 'missionary' with 'colonialist.' Changes in the way Disciples do overseas missions continue. Given severe funding limitations, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was forced to restructure its restructure in 1991, with a consolidation of agencies and ministries. In 1995, the DOM entered into a full-fledged partnership with the United Church Board of World Mission of the United Church of Christ.[76] The United Church of Christ, formed from the 1957 merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Church, is an entirely different group than the non-instrumental Churches of Christ.

Despite the ongoing definitions and redefinitions of mission, Disciples continue to have a significant involvement in overseas ministries. The combined Disciples-United Church of Christ Boards counted 246 missionaries at work in 54 countries in 1998.[77] These overseas missionaries continue to bring back to North American churches stories of their involvement with the communities they serve. Additionally, in this post-Colonial world North American Disciples have the benefit of hearing the witness of missionaries from the overseas churches. The communication is now a dialogue, rather than a monologue. Whatever differences may exist over how best to accomplish Christ's mission, this can hardly be seen as anything other than a wonderful development.

1. Do you think the purpose of missionaries is to convert Christians and plant churches? To work for justice? To do both?
2. Have you met any Disciples missionaries? If so, what was your impression? How about any missionaries from overseas churches?
3. Do you think 'missionary' and 'colonialist' are inseparable? Is it possible to be a missionary without trying to "westernize"?
4. How much of your own congregation's religious practices are culturally based, rather than faith based? How do you tell the difference?

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75 Toulouse, pgs. 205-206

76 2000 Year Book, pg. 627

77 2000 Year Book, pg. 216

XIV

Malaise and Decline in a Restructured Church

The years since the 1968 restructure have not been kind to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Immediately following the General Assembly's decision to become, officially, a Church, congregations which had remained Disciples but had opposed creeping denominationalism took formal steps to leave the fellowship. By 1971, The Year Book of American Churches listed the "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" as a separate entity, along with the new Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The numerical cost of the split was far more drastic than the economic cost. "Over the six-year period from 1967 to 1972, over thirty-five hundred congregations with combined memberships of around three quarters of a million people, withdrew from the Disciples Year Book."[78] Like an old-time State Church, Disciples had carefully defined their boundaries to the intentional exclusion of 'nonconformists.'

McAllister and Tucker, authors of Journey in Faith, point out, as if to soften the blow somewhat, that the mass withdrawals cost the Disciples annual budget less than $100,000 a year.[79] The symptoms of malaise, though, were not so easily dismissed. Total membership in the movement, which had peaked in 1957 continued to decline precipitously even after the "independents" had withdrawn. Unlike the State Churches of old, Disciples had no governmental sword to enforce consensus with the new definitions. Membership in the United States and Canada in 1968, the year of restructure, was 1,883,263 in 7,964 churches.[80]By 1999, that figure had withered to 834,037 in 3,792 congregations.[81]

The impact of the period on individual congregations was equally momentous. In 1968, East Dallas Christian Church led the "brotherhood" in its financial support of Disciples of Christ mission and reported 3,524 participating members.[82]By 1999, it had disappeared from among the

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78 Toulouse, pg. 239

79 McAllister, pg. 446

80 1968 Year Book, pg. S316

81 2000 Year Book, pg. 600-601

82 1968 Year Book, pgs. S254, S316ff.

leading contributors and had seen its participating membership decline to 500.[83] This severe decline, though aggravated by a variety of factors in different places, was widespread.

Winfred E. Garrison, who had warned the church of taking the wrong fork at restructure, was a member of the First Christian Church of Houston, Texas, at the time of his death. That congregation's history since restructure lends credence to his warning. In 1968, the congregation listed 1,052 participating members.[84] By 1999, that number had declined to 236.[85]

The era was also marked by an increasing divisiveness in the Church's General Assembly. Many of the Assembly's resolutions proved so controversial that Richard Hamm, General Minister and President of the denomination (1993-), moved to make them "Sense of the Assembly" resolutions, clarifying that the Assembly was speaking *to* the Church rather than *for* it.[86] Among the controversial issues frequently revisited by Assembly resolutions were Abortion Rights, Ecology, Homosexuality, American Military and Foreign Policy, and Peace, among others.[87]In general, the tone of the Assembly resolutions has been left-of-center politically, in contrast to the more conservative characteristics of the membership at large.

Movements to revive traditional Disciples concerns have been less than successful. A Resolution reaffirming the traditional belief in salvation through Jesus Christ alone was referred to a Commission on Theology, rather than being approved. A Resolution affirming the authority of Scripture for Disciples was defeated in 1989.[88]

Herb Miller, who became head of the National Evangelistic Association (NEA) in 1979, spearheaded efforts to revitalize the evangelistic impulse among Disciples throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

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83 2000 Year Book, pg. 538

84 1968 Year Book, pg. S260

85 2000 Year Book, pg. 538

86 2000 Year Book, pg. 625

87 2000 Year Book, pgs.623-629

88 2000 Year Book, pg. 628

Though Miller was wildly successful in reaching congregations and ministers outside the Disciples of Christ, his impact within the Church itself was less successful. NEA continues to play a role in Disciples and ecumenical church growth efforts.

In the 1980s, conservatives still remaining in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) formed Disciple Renewal, an organization dedicated to recovering the traditional beliefs of the Restoration movement. Committed to an infallible, inerrant Bible, to salvation in Christ alone, and to congregational autonomy, Disciple Renewal failed to find a large constituency within the restructured Church[89]. Its leaders, though, to their credit, refused to countenance another split in the fellowship and remain within the Disciples, albeit at its edges.

One of the most telling signs of trouble among Disciples was the defeat of Lexington Seminary Dean Michael Kinnamon's nomination for General Minister and President at the Tulsa Assembly in 1991. Kinnamon, though a genuinely warm Christian and a brilliant scholar, was seen by many Disciples as too liberal, too ecumenical, too academic, and too out of touch with the congregations. His nomination, which required a two-thirds majority to succeed, narrowly failed.[90] Michael Kinnamon spoke afterwards of the sense of "disenfranchisement" he encountered among Disciples of all theological stripes during his aborted nomination.[91] That disenfranchisement, that lack of ownership felt by conservatives, moderates and liberals, may be the most compelling legacy of the restructured Church.

1. How has your church fared in the years since restructure?
2. What are your feelings about the Disciples deciding to become a denomination?
3. Would you describe your congregation as liberal? Moderate? Conservative? What about your ministers? What about you?

XV

Tragedy and Tighter Control

In the early 1970s, the People's Temple Church in Los Angeles ranked among the fastest-growing

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89 "Disciples Heritage Information," www.disciples-heritage.org., 2/27/2001

90 Toulouse, pg. 256

91 Personal conversations between the author and Dr. Kinnamon, October 22-23, 1995, Houston, Texas.

in the denomination. Its minister, the Rev. Jim Jones, was a long-time Disciple, having served congregations in the Midwest before moving to California. By the late '70s, evidence suggests that Rev. Jones had become unhinged. He moved his flock first to San Francisco and then, when his increasing paranoia got the best of him, to Guyana, South America. In Guyana, Jones and his followers caught the attention of the world. After murdering US Congressman Leo Ryan, who had come on a fact-finding mission, Jones and his followers committed mass suicide at their Jonestown compound.[92] Disciples along with the rest of the world were shocked. Among Disciples leadership, there was an almost immediate decision to tighten control of who could officially be a minister. Before restructure, ordination of ministers had been the prerogative of congregations, though over time most churches had moved toward standard requirements for education. In 1981, the first General Assembly following the Jim Jones' tragedy revisited the question of ministerial standing with the denomination.[93] The General Assembly had already acted to standardize for all Disciples the requirements for ordination. It then made the Regional churches responsible for certifying "standing," the right of an ordained or licensed minister to be listed officially in the Year Book.[94]This Regional control is usually exercised through Committees on the Ministry, elected from clergy, laity, and academics in the areas being served. They function as gate-keepers to ordained ministry, the only office that affords ministers access to denominationally-run relocation services.

Technically, congregations still play a role in the ordination process as sponsors. A candidate for ministry will begin a relationship with a Regional Committee on the Ministry and receive official sponsorship from a recognized (Year Book listed) congregation. Then, after completing the educational requirements — at minimum a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent — the candidate will be interviewed by the Committee, which will then approve or disapprove the ordination. If approval follows, then the local church proceeds with the ordination. A local church can still ordain a candidate who has not been approved by a Committee on the Ministry, but if it does so it must recognize that its action has no standing beyond its own walls..[95] This prevents, as one denominational official put it, local churches from "foisting bad ministers on the whole church."

Regional Committees on the Ministry also control the fate of ministers from other denominations wishing to transfer their ordination to the Disciples of Christ. Transfer of standing requires that the incoming minister, naturally enough, be a member of a Disciples congregation and develop familiarity

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92 Toulouse, pg. 183

93 2000 Year Book, pg. 627

94 "Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), VI, 92-96", 2000 Year Book, pg. 622.

95 Toulouse, pgs. 181-182

with Disciples history and church government. Yet such transfers are not automatic. The longstanding quarrels between liberals and conservatives have created an inborn suspicion of candidates from conservative seminaries and denominations. The mutual recognition of ministers afforded to more liberal denominations like the United Church of Christ is not extended across the board, rightly or wrongly.

This gate-keeping process continues in the Church's relocation process. When a local congregation seeks a minister, it is still free to call whomever it wants. If it wants the assistance of the larger Church, though, it must work through the relocation system created by the General and Regional churches. Underthat system, ministers file applications, called papers, containing biographical details, education, work experience, theological positions, ministerial priorities, and references with the General, Regional or, where it exists, Area office. The Regional ministers and Area ministers then forward the papers of qualified candidates to congregational search committees. Though in the overwhelming majority of cases the system and those in it work with great integrity, there are rumors of abuses. Some allege that certain Regional Ministers keep lists of "Ministers who will never work in my Region," though, of course, such allegations are difficult to prove. Again, the Disciples seem to have come full circle from their beginnings. Those who once rejected in the strongest possible terms tightly controlled ministerial "synods" and "presbyteries" have now become exactly what they rejected. Those who affirmed in the strongest possible terms not only the individual congregation's right but its obligation to nurture, examine, and ordain its own ministers have abandoned that right.

In some sense, access to ordained ministry resembles access to a club. Those in the club — the present ordained ministers — set the standard for future admissions. Because each minister, licensed or ordained, now votes in the General Assembly, clergy have effective control of that body's deliberations. General theological and, at times, political and sociological litmus tests may be applied with relative impunity. The Committees on the Ministry themselves have the capacity, if they choose, to ignore the directives of the Regional Assemblies that supposedly govern them. In the Northeast Region of the Church, for instance, an openly-avowed homosexual was ordained to the ministry despite that Region's official opposition to such ordinations.

It is true that congregations can no longer "foist on the whole church" bad ministers. Now it is the "whole church," functioning through its self-perpetuating clergy, who can "foist" politically and theologically correct ministers on the congregations. One wonders, given the results, whether this is an improvement

1. Do you believe local churches should have the right to ordain ministers?
2. What kind of cooperation does there need to be to balance the needs of both congregation and denomination in the ordination process?
3. What, in your opinion, qualifies someone for ordained ministry?
4. What do contemporary developments in ministry say about the freedom of ministers to think for themselves?

XVI

Contemporary Developments

The crisis atmosphere in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), engendered by huge losses in membership and brought to a head by the defeat of Michael Kinnamon for General Minister and President, has spurred various efforts at reform. Following a C. William Nicholls two-year term as Interim General Minister, the General Assembly in 1993 elected Rev. Richard Hamm, then Regional Minister in Tennessee, to the Church's highest office. Hamm has pursued a vigorous policy of reconciliation and revitalization during his tenure.

Hamm has made more effective communication between the various denominational agencies and the local congregations a high priority. At his instigation, the general units began a series of "listening conferences" in the mid 1990s that helped reestablish a sense of rapport within the denomination. Hamm also reached out to constituency groups such as the National Evangelistic Association that had been pushed unwillingly into the role of loyal opposition. Under his leadership, the General Church began to reemphasize evangelism and spirituality in its programmatic planning.

Nevertheless, many deeper problems have yet to be arrested. Funding for General and Regional ministries through the Church Finance Council (CFC), the successor to Unified Promotion, declined from the $28,294,364 reported in 1988[96] to the $26,782,243 reported for 1999.[97] One does not need an economics degree to understand the implications of this in an inflationary economy. This decline forced wrenching consolidations and layoffs in the Church's general offices.[98] It also set off nasty squabbles between Regional churches dependent on their share of CFC receipts over the formula for dividing the offerings.

One positive consequence, perhaps, is that the funding crisis has forced the General and Regional Churches to be more responsive and responsible to the local congregations on whom they depend for survival. The General and Regional levels have also responded with increasing efforts to raise funds for the Christian Church Foundation, an organization founded in 1961 to provide a permanent

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96 1993 Year Book and Directory, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, pg. 559

97 2000 Year Book, pg. 605

98 Toulouse, pg. 249

endowment for general level ministries.[99] The Foundation's stated Strategic Focus is:

> By the year 2025, the Christian Church Foundation plans to support financially the ministries of the church beyond the local congregations by a level equal to that of congregational Basic Mission Finance offerings. [100]

As of 2000, that annual support had already reached $11.5 million[101] and the Foundation's fund-raising targets seem to be within reach. This growth guarantees some form of ministry for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for the foreseeable future. It also promises to make the General church less dependent on congregational giving as the years go by.

Disciples have also begun to reemphasize new church establishment, though not with the fervor and success of earlier years. At the turn on the 20th Century, Disciples were starting roughly 300 new churches per year. Despite a 1989 General Assembly goal of starting 200 congregations during the 1990s, as of 1999 the church had only started 149, only 122 of which were still operating by the 1999 General Assembly.[102] Despite the shortfall, the denomination reconfirmed its interest in new church starts, though this time without numerical goals.

There have been pockets of great vitality among Disciples also. In February, 2001, three Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations were recognized among "the best of the best" churches in the United States. The three, Ray of Hope Church in Decatur, Georgia, Mississippi Boulevard Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and Light of the World Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, are all predominantly African-American in membership. One of the three, Ray of Hope, is a relatively recent church start pastored by a woman, Rev. Cynthia Hale. All were recognized for "A joyful and nurturing spirit; innovative worship, a welcoming and accessible atmosphere, and ministry that reaches out to people's needs."[103]

Under Rev. Alvin Jackson's leadership, Mississippi Boulevard Church grew from a modest size to

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99 McAllister, pg. 438

100 2000 Year Book, pg. 139

101 DNS News Release, www.disciples.org., March 2001

102 2000 Year Book, pg. 279

103 "Disciples churches named 'excellent congregations,' www.disciples.org., Disciples News Service, 2001

become the largest congregation in the denomination. Rev. Jackson became the first AfricanAmerican Senior Minister of the denomination's most prominent congregation, National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C., in 1997. Dr. Jackson's inspirational preaching and passion for evangelism are having an increasingly wide impact among Disciples.

The Disciples are also progressing in their ecumenical efforts. Having formed the Consultation on Church Union with several other denominations in 1960[104], the Disciples are poised to enter into the Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC), a partnership of eight mainline Protestant denominations, at their 2001 General Assembly. This body, though not an organic union, commits each member denomination to mutual recognition of members and ministers. This process complements the "full communion" declared between Disciples and the United Church of Christ in 1991[105]

1. What ways do you think the Disciples can regain their vitality?
2. What is your view of Disciples ecumenical efforts?
3. What do you believe has led to the loss of membership among Disciples?

4. What do you believe is the source of the funding problems Disciples institutions have faced? How can these be remedied?

XVII

Disciples of Christ — Past . . . and Future?

There is no denying the Disciples of Christ have a momentous past. The movement unleashed on the frontier by Stone and the Campbells has spread around the world through the influence of its churches, its educational institutions, its international outreach, and its ecumenical involvements. Yet the movement, at least that part of it represented by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is in serious decline. Will there be a future to match the past?

One long-time Disciples minister and educator, seeing the huge changes that had come over the movement in his career, said "We used to be a great, broad movement of churches. Now we're narrow little denomination."[106]

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104 McAllister, pg. 458

105 2000 Year Book, pg. 629

106 Anonymous quote, conversation with the author, Indianapolis General Assembly, 1989

Because of its growing endowment, the denomination is sure to survive in some form or fashion. Yet is institutional survival itself a worthy goal? Many congregations have made survival their goal, only to discover that their resulting mind-set made it impossible. Does God call the church to simply survive? Or does God call it to give itself over for the cause of the gospel?

The supreme irony of Disciples history is that this movement has become what its founders never intended it to be — a clergy dominated denomination. Some say this development was inevitable, given the immense changes in life and thought between the 19th and 21st Centuries. Inevitable or not, there is no going back.

But how to go forward? In some sense, the way forward must involve revisiting intently our original principles. The idea of Christian unity is alive and well among Disciples today, as it should be. Though the confederation of denominations represented by the CUIC seems irrelevant to some, a collection of dying churches, who can deny that mutual recognition is an improvement over mutual recrimination? Similarly, the dialogues currently taking places with the other Stone-Campbell movement churches hold a certain promise. No "family reunion" seems likely, given the longstanding differences involved. But talking together, once again, is better than shouting.

Is there any promise, though, in revisiting the original program of the movement, which was Christian unity on the basis of the Bible? Is there any value in the Restoration idea, the drive once so strong among us to be guided by Scripture alone? True, the original impetus of the movement was in part anti-creedal. Yet anti-creedalism never meant "believe whatever you want." Contemporary Disciples have rejected in General Assembly resolutions both the idea of salvation in Jesus Christ alone and the unique authority of Scripture, both largely in the name of anti-creedalism. Is this a correct interpretation of the original impulse? Few Disciples would argue for a naive restorationism. Most understand, as the biblical critics have taught us, that the "primitive church" is at best a moving target and that the New Testament was never intended to be a "constitution" in the North American sense of that word. That being said, can we not agree that the Bible is nevertheless inspired, that it does form the backdrop of our faith and practice? Reasonable minds do differ on its interpretations. But is there now not an imperative to at least know our Bibles well enough to interpret them? Ought we not apply what Ronald Osborn called "a reverent intelligence" to the book that forms the heart of our faith?[107] The notion of letting the 'professionals' alone do our thinking for us where the Bible and theology are concerned would have horrified Stone and the Campbells. Perhaps biblical literacy needs to received renewed interest among our laity.

The congregational principle also needs revisiting. The old conservative fear that building strong agencies would weaken the missionary resolve of congregations has proven sadly prophetic. We have already cited the admitted failure of the denomination to reach even a modest goal of new church

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107 "The Disciples Mind," Ronald Osborn, Chalice Hymnal, Chalice Press, St. Louis, 1995, pg. 553

starts during the 1990s. Since this responsibility has been delegated to Regions under the Design[108], the effort has at best floundered and the number of congregations continued to dwindle rapidly. What radical step do we need to take to reawaken our congregations to their responsibility for mission? One thinks of the entrepreneurial structures that have arisen among the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ to address this issue. Are such ideas not worth at least some study and dialogue?

One step might be to return to congregations the right to ordain. Certainly there need to be guidelines. But who can better identify, nurture, and motivate future ministers than those who know them best? Returning that right to the congregations would require 'de-structuring' the Regional Committees on the Ministry. It might mean allowing ministers to apply directly to churches. Congregations could continue to use the present applications to screen candidates. But the 'middleman' would be eliminated. It would certainly be less expensive to maintain current job listings than to fund Committees on the Ministry and Regional staffs. Such changes would be radical, but would they not also be empowering? One Jim Jones in nearly two hundred years does not justify becoming a clergy club.

At the Regional and General levels, perhaps the time has come for radical change as well. We have taken our seat as Disciples in the great ecumenical councils of the day. We are members of the Churches Uniting in Christ. Do we still need the overarching structure, the General Church speaking through its General Assembly, to speak to or for us? The various general organizations are self-governing. In the coming decades, growing income from the Christian Church Foundation will make many of them self-funding as well. Why not let them sink or swim on their own, as the congregations must? An "association of free churches," gathering voluntarily for fellowship, edification, and worship, is not such a bad idea.

Disciples of Christ formed their cooperative structures originally to help us evangelize, plant churches, and alleviate suffering. These structures today do a more than passable job in many instances of alleviating suffering. They, by their own admission, do a far less than adequate job of evangelizing and planting churches. Why not do away with what doesn't work and give the congregations a free hand to rediscover (or not, of course) their own capacity for ministry. Free churches guided by biblically literate leaders have proven their abilities in the past to build churches, to devise ministries, to share resources, to solve problems and to preach the gospel. Why not let the entrepreneurial spirit flourish among our people anew? Some will not succeed. Others will. Such is life.

Radical times require radical steps. Such times moved Barton Stone and the Campbells to begin their protests two centuries ago. A movement that has surrendered 1.3 million members and over 60% of its churches in hardly more than one generation obviously faces radical times and must make radical choices. We have structured and restructured in the past century. Now, is it not time to destructure? Maybe the time has come to update "The Last Will and Testament" for a new day.

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108 2000 Year Book, pg. 618 ("Design, IV.A.61(2)")

As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), perhaps it is time

> knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, [to] make and ordain this our last Will and Testament:
>
> We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.[109]

May God give us the courage of our convictions.

Amen

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Appendix A

Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery
(Written by Barton Stone and others, 1801)

For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of the testator; for a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all, while the testator liveth. Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Whose voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised saying, yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made, that those things which can not be shaken may remain.--Scripture The Presbytery of Springfield sitting at Cane Ridge, in the county of Bourbon, [Kentucky] being, through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following, viz.:

Imprimis. We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

Item. We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.

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109 from "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery." See Appendix A

Item. We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Item. We will, that candidates for the Gospel ministry henceforth study the Holy Scriptures with fervent prayer, and obtain license from God to preach the simple Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, without any mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world. And let none henceforth take this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

Item. We will, that the church of Christ resume her native right of internal government, — try her candidates for the ministry, as to their soundness in the faith, acquaintance with experimental religion, gravity and aptness to teach; and admit no other proof of their authority but Christ speaking in them. We will, that the church of Christ look up to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest; and that she resume her primitive right of trying those who say they are apostles, and are not.

Item. We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit, choose her own preacher, and support him by a free-will offering, without a written call or subscription--admit members--remove offenses; and never henceforth delegate her right of government to any man or set of men whatever.

Item. We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.

Item. We will, that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh.

Item. We will, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future.

Item. We will, the Synod of Kentucky examine every member who may be suspected of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately, in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of Gospel liberty.

Item. We will, that Ja--- -----, the author of two letters lately published in Lexington, be encouraged in his zeal to destroy partyism. We will, moreover, that our past conduct be examined into by all who may have correct information; but let foreigners beware of speaking evil of things which they know not.

Item. Finally we will, that all our sister bodies read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

Springfield Presbytery, June 28th, 1804

Robert Marshall,}
John Dunlavy, }
Richard M'Nemar,}--Witnesses.
B. W. Stone, }
John Thompson, }
David Purviance,}

Appendix B

From the Declaration and Address

(Thirteen Propositions by Thomas Campbell, 1809)

PROP. I. That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.

2. That although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate one from another, yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God. And for this purpose they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

3. That in order to do this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God. Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.

4. That although the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the Church, and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship,

discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and government of the Old Testament Church, and the particular duties of its members.

5. That with respect to the commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the Scriptures are silent as to the express time or manner of performance, if any such there be, no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency by making laws for the Church; nor can any thing more be required of Christians in such cases, but only that they observe these commands and ordinances as will evidently answer the declared and obvious end of their institution. Much less has any human authority power to impose new commands or ordinances upon the Church, which our Lord Jesus Christ has not enjoined. Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the Church, or be made a term of communion among Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.

6. That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.

7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the Church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the Church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.

8. That as it is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge or distinct apprehension of all Divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the Church; neither should they, for this purpose, be required to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge; but that, on the contrary, their having a due measure of Scriptural self-knowledge respecting their lost and perishing condition by nature and practice, and of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, accompanied with a profession of their faith in and obedience to him, in all things, according to his word, is all that is absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his Church.

9. That all that are enabled through grace to make such a profession, and to manifest the reality of it in their tempers and conduct, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brethren, children of the same family and Father, temples of the same Spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same Divine love, bought with the same

price, and joint-heirs of the same inheritance. Whom God hath thus joined together no man should dare to put asunder.

10. That division among the Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is antichristian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is antiscriptural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express command. It is antinatural, as it excites Christians to contemn, to hate, and oppose one another, who are bound by the highest and most endearing obligations to love each other as brethren, even as Christ has loved them. In a word, it is productive of confusion and of every evil work.

11. That (in some instances) a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God, and (in others) an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions and human inventions a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship of the Church, are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged causes, of all the corruptions and divisions that ever have taken place in the Church of God.

12. That all that is necessary to the highest state of perfection and purity of the Church upon earth is, first, that none be received as members but such as having that due measure of Scriptural self-knowledge described above, do profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures; nor, secondly, that any be retained in her communion longer than they continue to manifest the reality of their profession by their temper and conduct. Thirdly, that her ministers, duly and Scripturally qualified, inculcate none other things than those very articles of faith and holiness expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God. Lastly, that in all their administrations they keep close by the observance of all Divine ordinances, after the example of the primitive Church, exhibited in the New Testament; without any additions whatsoever of human opinions or inventions of men.

13. Lastly. That if any circumstantials indispensably necessary to the observance of Divine ordinances be not found upon the page of express revelation, such, and such only, as are absolutely necessary for this purpose should be adopted under the title of human expedients, without any pretense to a more sacred origin, so that any subsequent alteration or difference in the observance of these things might produce no contention nor division in the Church.

Appendix C

THE DESIGN FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST), 1-4

Preamble

1 As members of the Christian Church,
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God,
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.
In Christ's name and by his grace
we accept our mission of witness
and service to all people.
We rejoice in God,
maker of heaven and
earth, and in the covenant
of love
which binds us to God and one another.
Through baptism into Christ
we enter into newness of life
and are made one with the whole people of God.
In the communion of the Holy Spirit
we are joined together in discipleship
and in obedience to Christ.
At the table of the Lord we
celebrate with thanksgiving the
saving acts and presence of Christ.
Within the universal church
we receive the gift of ministry
and the light of scripture.
In the bonds of Christian faith
we yield ourselves to God
that we may serve the One

whose kingdom has no end.
Blessing, glory and honor
be to God forever. Amen.

2. Within the whole family of God on earth, the church appears wherever believers in Jesus Christ are gathered in his name. Transcending all barriers within the human family such as race and culture, the church manifests itself in ordered communities of disciples bound together for worship, for fellowship and for service, and in varied structures for mission, witness and mutual discipline, and for the nurture and renewal of its members. The nature of the church, given by Christ, remains constant through the generations; yet in faithfulness to its mission it continues to adapt its structures to the needs and patterns of a changing world. All dominion in the church belongs to Jesus Christ, its Lord and head, and any exercise of authority in the church on earth stands under his judgment.

3. Within the universal body of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States of America and in Canada is identifiable by its tradition, name, institutions and relationships. Across national boundaries this church expresses itself in free and voluntary relationships in congregational, regional and general manifestations. Each manifestation, with reference to the function for which it is uniquely responsible, is characterized by its integrity, self-government, authority, rights and responsibilities. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and constantly seeks in all its actions to be obedient to his authority.

4. In order that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through free and voluntary relationships may faithfully express the ministry of Christ made known through scripture, may provide comprehensiveness in witness, mission and service, may furnish means by which congregations may fulfill their ministries with faithfulness in Christian stewardship, may assure both unity and diversity, and may advance responsible ecumenical relationships, as a response to God's covenant, we commit ourselves to one another in adopting this design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

(NOTE: Approved by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1968)

Appendix D

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