

Union of the Churches.

A STATEMENT FURNISHED BY THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

To the Editor of The Globe :

At the last Annual Convention of the co operation of the Disciples of Christ in Ontario, held in Owen Sound, June 6-10, 1890, the undersigned committee was appointed to prepare for publication a paper on Christian Union from the standpoint of the Disciples. The appointment of the committee is due directly to the fact that at the convention the possibility of a union between the Baptists and the Disciples and between the Christian Church and the Disciples engaged attention. It is needful, also, to state that the Disciples recognize no ecclesiastical authority over the conscience of Christians and the liberty of the churches in faith and discipline. They are not a church in the ecclesiastical sense. Their churches are churches of Christ and the convention is composed of delegates from churches and of life and annual members, and its object is simply co operation in mission, educational and benevolent work. This paper is, therefore, authoritative only in that we believe it represents the position of the Disciples as a people.

I.—UNION TENDENCIES.

The Disciples hail with pleasure the growing tendencies toward union and the consequent inquiry for common union ground. Their work began in a union movement, and stands, as they believe, on the only practicable and possible union foundation. It had its origin in the firm conviction both of the inefficiency of denominational organizations for the enlightenment and salvation of the world, and of the sinfulness of sectarianism as testified in the Scriptures and in its experienced fruits. It was not intended to add another party to those in existence, but was a movement within the Presbyterian and Baptist Churches to get clear of the cause of the divisions; but so decided was the opposition that separation became necessary. Now after four score years, when the number of Disciples have increased to about a million and all religious bodies have felt their influence, they have increased reason for confidence in their position against creeds, and rejoice in every step towards a breaking down of the partition walls.

ALLIANCES AND CONGRESSSES.

They watch with interest the movements of "alliances" and "congresses" to abate the evils of sect and to seek common ground for more effectual religious work. They rejoice in the growing conviction that a united church is needful for work in pagan lands, and that the maintaining of sectarian institutions for the mere propagation of theological distinctions involves a vast waste of strength that should be devoted to furthering the real Kingdom of Christ. But while Disciples are opposed to sectism they recognize the fact that modern denominationalism, though un-Scriptural and anti Scriptural, had its origin in reformatory movements in attempting to come out of Babylon. "Still they insist that the return from Babylon cannot be complete so long as rival and jarring sects are found in place of the one Catholic Apostolic Church of primitive times." (Our position.)

As to union between Disciples and Baptists the committee sees no reason to hope for a near union, though approaches have been made and the desire for union expressed by many. Disciples cannot entertain any conditions of fellowship more exclusive than those existing in the original constitution of the church as found in the New Testa-

ment. The prevailing Baptist position is that Disciples do not teach regeneration and that they are not a regenerate people. This is not because of the absence of the fruits of righteousness in their lives, but because they do not teach the Baptist theory of regeneration which is erected into a test of orthodoxy.

BAPTIST THEORY OF CONVERSION.

Disciples understand the Baptist theory of conversion to rest fundamentally on the doctrine of total hereditary depravity. Logically this demands the doctrine of miraculous regeneration. Faith is the result of regeneration and is consequently miraculous. The knowledge of forgiveness is attested experimentally in the feelings of the individual. Baptism is "because of the remission of sins." As long as this theory, instead of faith in Jesus, is made a test of regeneration and of fitness for baptism, and as long as Baptists hold this theory between them and Disciples as a test of Disciple orthodoxy, there can be no union. Disciples reject all theories as non essential to salvation and as barriers to union. They would rather be right with the Word of God, though condemned by the creeds, than be orthodox with the creeds and condemned by the Word.

Disciples hold with the Scriptures that all men are sinners, that the Word of God is the instrument of regeneration—"Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever"; that the Word must be heard and be believed in the heart; that quickened and convicted by the Word as the instrument of the Spirit they must turn and seek forgiveness; that forgiveness is the act of God in view of the sinner's turning; but that the change of heart and purpose wrought in the individual is not the evidence of forgiveness, and that he is not instructed in the Word of God to look for it within himself but in the definite promise of the Word of God—"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Changed and repentant and trusting in the blood of cleansing, he appropriates in baptism the promised forgiveness, making the promise his evidence. The apostle Peter in opening the kingdom of heaven on the day of Pentecost, when multitudes were "pierced to the heart" by the preached word, said to those who were turning and seeking pardon for their sins: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," Acts ii. 38. Disciples do not teach baptismal regeneration as Baptists represent them, but that baptism is for remission, or is the seal of remission in the divine promise to Him in whom regeneration has already accomplished a change of heart and purpose. If the heart be not given up in faith and penitence baptism is a meaningless form. "He does not merit it (pardon), nor procure it, nor earn it, but appropriates what the mercy of God offers in the gospel." (Our position.) Being "born again of water and of the Spirit," Disciples expect to see the fruits of regeneration in the life. Baptism is nowhere said to be because of the remission of sins. When Baptists make faith in Christ, and repentance, a sufficient fitness for baptism, one of the barriers to union will be removed.

UNION WITH THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

As to union with the Christian Church, Disciples hold with them the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice to the conclusion of creeds, but in accordance with that rule must reject the practice of admitting all to fellowship on the uncertain term of Christian character. It is liable to admit more than the Scriptures admit,

because it exacts less. The baptized and the unbaptized, or the immersed and the sprinkled, and he who rejects the water entirely may all be admitted to fellowship; and we see no reason why the Unitarian as well as he who bows before the deity of Jesus may not enter also. The sinner in coming to Christ is not supposed to have a Christian character. His test is faith in Jesus and obedience by the Gospel. Christian character belongs to those in Christ, and they are to be retained and received everywhere so long as they are loyal to Him. With, as we believe, an un-Scriptural basis of fellowship we do not see our way to union.

II.—UNION GROUNDS.

We "believe" union of all is possible, but it cannot be secured by a federation of sects, as some want, nor on a theological basis, as others want. Neither of these would be Christian union but sectarian, preserving in its constitution the original cause of division. When the temple of God arises in her reconstructed beauty from the ruin of centuries it will be on a foundation eternal as the years of God and purged from the cause of her present shame. Sectarianism must not only be felt to have evils within it, but itself must be seen to be a sin to be repented of and put away before the church can be restored to her original place and power.

The Church of the New Testament was not denominational nor was it held together by ecclesiastical power, nor did it stand on a basis of theological doctrine; but it was a spiritual brotherhood in living union with Christ. The individuals were one among themselves because they were one with Christ. This was called "the unity of the spirit," consisting of "one body," animated by "one spirit," and looking to "one hope," unity, "one Lord," confessing "one faith," and acknowledging "one baptism" and over all was the "one Father," Eph. iv. Life flowing from the living head through the spirit, which dwelt within the body, to every member held them in a glorious fellowship. The prayer of Jesus was to this end: "That they all may be one as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee, that they all may be one in us," John xvii. 21.

When the barriers of creed are removed and the spirit of party cast out by the spirit of Christ there will be oneness of fellowship.

HOW UNITY CAN BE RESTORED.

(1) The Disciples insist that, as human creeds have destroyed unity, unity can be restored only by destroying human creeds and confessions as symbols of faith and tests of fellowship, and restoring to its rightful place the Word of God as an all-sufficient and alone-sufficient rule of faith and practice and revelation of the divine character and will. This sufficiency is affirmed by the Scriptures itself, and being the voice of God should be accepted. "They are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work," II. Tim. iii. 15-17. This is the fundamental position of Protestantism. "The Bible, I say—the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants," says Chillingworth. "The Scriptures as the revealed will of God," is the first essential of unity as set forth in the declaration adopted by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in 1887. To this they add the Nicene Creed and the historical episcopate, which destroys the value of the first essential. The Westminster Confession affirms the Scriptures as

"the whole counsel of God . . . unto which nothing is at any time to be added whether by new revelation of the Spirit or by tradition of men." The New Hampshire Confession, which contains the Baptist faith, declares the same sufficiency. Here then is catholic ground as regards a rule and standard of faith. Disciples insist that a creed, whether Nicene, Westminster, New Hampshire or other, as a symbol of faith and test of fellowship, becomes of equal, if not paramount, authority with the Word, and by becoming an exponent of the Word the right of private judgment is destroyed and the ability of the Scriptures to interpret themselves is practically denied. Disciples insist on going back of all creeds to Jesus and the Apostles "and taking up things as the Apostles left them, that we may stand with evidence on the same ground on which the Church stood at the beginning." Disciples do not affirm that ecclesiastical history and the developed theology of the schools have no value, but they insist that they have no authority in determining a basis of union.

ORIGINAL CREED OF THE CHURCH.

(2) Guided by the clear authority of the Scriptures, we learn that the original creed of the church was not doctrinal but personal, and that it had but one article—that "Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God." That Jesus is the object of faith for salvation, He Himself declares: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" "Unless ye believe that I am He ye shall die in your sins." "I am the way and the truth and the life." "Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest." "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto Me." "What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He?" was the question He pressed upon men, and affirmed that the Old Testament Scriptures testified of Him. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." When Peter confessed, in reply to the question of Jesus as to who He was, that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared that He would build His church on this Rock of His divinity.

The Gospels were written to prove this fact of His divinity. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name."—John xx. 31. When the Apostles were sent to preach they went not with a system of doctrinal statements for men to believe, but they preached a personal Saviour, and asked faith in Him. "That is the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."—Rom. x. 8-9.

Those who believed and confessed this faith in Jesus were without any questioning as to doctrinal fitness admitted to baptism, and they who rejected it were themselves rejected. If it be objected that this one article is not enough we answer: (a) that it was counted enough by the Apostles; (b) that no human creed ever constructed was sufficient to exclude error. If bad men wish to creep in they will do so under any creed. They crept in under the eyes of the Apostles. (c) It is the straightest and yet most comprehensive creed ever framed. Men may assent to theological opinions with degrees of allowance, but there is no room for doubt in confessing to the divine Sonship of Jesus. It is to believe in His divine personality as the Son of God, and in His redemptive work as the Christ, the only teacher in our ignorance, the only priest to atone for our

sins, and the only King to rule in our lives. This creed is thus not only a divine creed in its formula, but in character. We trust in and bring our sins to a divine Person. Faith in Him trusts Him for all that He is, all that He has done, and all that He promises to do. This is a creed that will never wear out or change—"The same yesterday, to-day and forever." On this all the sinful race can gather into a brotherhood of peace and love and grow up into perfect men. Says a distinguished writer: "Get men right about Christ, and Christ will get them right about everything else." It is true that the divinity of Jesus is held in all the evangelical creeds, but no one of them gives it the prominence it had in the primitive church, and which the Disciples give to it. This divine creed must be restored to its original place and power in order to union.

CHURCH BAPTISM.

(3) In the New Testament church baptism was, along with the one Lord and one faith, an essential element of the unity of the spirit, and this must be restored to its New Testament place and meaning. That this was the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Lord is evident (a) from the New Testament itself, which makes it a burial of the believer into the death of Christ. Now Testament baptism is an act of faith setting forth impressively the believer's "putting on of Christ," in whose death he seeks remission of sins. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father so we also should walk in newness of life." Baptism testifies of a separation from the past life, of remission of sins in Christ's death, and is thus the seal of forgiveness in Christ's name; (b) from baptizo, the Greek word from which "baptizo" comes, which according to lexicographers means immerse; (c) from the testimony of the ablest writers and commentators, as Wesley, Luther, Calvin, Mogheim, Schaff, Meyer, Conybeare and Houston, Geike and others. Disciples, therefore, insist that any other teaching and practice than the believer's immersion is a departure from the original institution which in order to union must be restored to its original place in the gospel. As all concede the Scripturalness of this baptism, here is catholic ground which can be occupied by all without surrender of conscience by any.

TEST OF FELLOWSHIP.

(4) The word of God, the divine creed and the believer's baptism restored to their rightful place and authority, continued loyalty to Jesus or Christ as the only character should be the only test of fellowship within the body as it was in the beginning. Erroneous views and opinions may be held by some subject to correction and instruction as in the New Testament church, but they should not be made a test of remaining in the body. Liberty of opinion, as long as it is held subordinate to faith, may be allowed on the old maxim: "In faith, unity; in opinion, liberty; and in all things, charity." With respect to the Lord's Supper little need be said. In the primitive church it formed no essential in "the unity of the spirit," and no doctrinal standing was a test to its privilege. It was not a sacrament under restriction of the church, but was a loving feast open to all disciples who stood in fellowship with Christ, and was kept every Lord's day in memory of the absent Lord and looking for His return, I Cor. xi. The unity of the spirit being restored the