

## FOUR PLANS FOR CHRISTIAN UNION.

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There is a strong sentiment in favor of Christian union. For this fact let us thank God. Great progress has been made within a few years. When the grand men, who in the early part of the present century, began to urge that sectarianism is sinful, and that the disciples of Christ ought to be one as the Father and the Son are one, it was necessary to argue the first point. Sectarianism was not thought to be sinful. Good men failed to see that denominational divisions were inimical to the conversion of the world to Christ. Christian men sometimes thanked God for the division of His people into parties. Such is not the case at the present time. There are a few belated souls, it is true, who do not see that sects are sinful, but it is now generally agreed that they are not well pleasing to the Head of the body, and that union is desirable. Now the query is, How can Christians unite? What is the basis of union?

This is the question now before the minds of intelligent men who believe on the Son of God—both Romanists and Protestants. Four plans of union have recently come to my notice in the religious papers of the day.

## I. The Roman Catholic plan.

The following are Cardinal Gibbon's views: "I cannot conceive," he says, "any practical plan for the ecclesiastical union of all who bear the Christian name which does not recognize: 1. Some authority, living and acting, that can definitely say what is or is not divine revealed truth, since upon Christ's revelation His church must be grounded. 2. The obligation, strict and essential, of receiving in its entirety, Christian revelation, since Christ's work in giving a revelation would be, to say the least, useless, if each individual were left free to accept or reject that revelation, or any part of it, as his whim might dictate. 3. That since Christ left a revelation he must have left some authorized interpreter of it, otherwise it would be but a puzzle given to unaided ignorance, something which 'the unlearned and unstable' might wrest to their own destruction." 4. That since the mission of Christ's church is 'to teach all nations,' 'to observe all things, whatsoever He has commanded,' there must be some teacher teaching in Christ's name, and 'as one having authority,' to guide His people unerringly in the way of truth. In the Roman Catholic Church of the sixteenth century, when Luther went out from her, these great requisites of Christian unity were found, and they are found as well in the Roman Catholic Church of today, elsewhere I fail to find them. In separation from the See of St. Peter, the centre of Catholic unity, I can see only discord. In all this broad land there is no one who longs for truly Christian union more than I do, no one who would labor more earnestly to bring about so happy a result. May the Father of mercies grant that those 'other sheep,' for whose sake His Divine Son died, that are not yet of His fold, may speedily come home to it, that henceforth there may be 'one fold and one shepherd.'"

II. The plan of the Protestant Episcopal Church as presented in a "Declaration by the Bishops in Council assembled," in the city of Chicago, October 20, 1886.

They say that: "We, bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in council assembled as bishops of the Church of God, do hereby solemnly declare to all to whom it may concern, and especially to our fellow Christians of the different communions in this land, who, in their several spheres, have contended for the religion of Christ:

"1. Our earnest desire that our Saviour's prayer, 'that we all may be one,' may, in its deepest and truest sense, be speedily fulfilled:

"2. That we believe that all who have been duly baptized with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, are members of the Holy Catholic Church:

"3. That in all things of human ordering or human choice, relating to modes of worship and discipline, or to traditional customs, this Church is ready in the

spirit of love and humility to forego all preferences of her own:

"That this Church does not seek to absorb other communions, but rather, co-operating with them on the basis of a common Faith and Order, to discountenance schism, to heal the wounds of the Body of Christ, and to promote the charity which is the chief of Christian graces and the visible manifestation of Christ to the world."

The paragraph marked (3) is worthy of especial attention, as intimating what the Episcopalians are willing to surrender for the sake of unity. John Henry Hopkins, D. D., said plainly in the American Congress of Churches last May in Cleveland, that he and a large number of Churchmen are ready to surrender the name Protestant Episcopal Church. The bishops preface in the address from which I have quoted the following basis of union:

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the revealed word of God:

2. The Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith:

3. The two sacraments—baptism and the Supper of the Lord, ministered with unflinching use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by Him:

4. The Historic Episcopate locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying need of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.

The declaration closes in the words following:

"Deeply grieved by the sad divisions which afflict the Christian Church in our own land, we hereby declare our desire and readiness, so soon as there shall be any authorized response to this declaration, to enter into brotherly conference with all or any Christian bodies seeking the restoration of the organic unity of the church, with a view to the earnest study of the condition under which so priceless a blessing might happily be brought to pass."

III. In the American Christian Convention, representing the people known in the United States as the Christian Connection, and numbering about 100,000 members, the subject of union with other Christians came up. The following was put forth as the platform on which they are willing to stand with other believers on the Lord Jesus Christ:

"1. The Bible our only rule of faith and practice.

"2. Christ the only Head of the Church.

"3. Christian character the only test of fellowship.

"4. Individual interpretation of Scripture the right and duty of all.

"5. The union of all the followers of Christ without controversy.

"6. Each local church govern itself."

The New York *Tribune* says:

"This looks a little simpler than the Episcopal platform, but the probabilities are that it would occasion quite as much controversy, and general as it is, it would exclude many who sincerely try to be Christians, and are anxious for Christian unity. The more this question of organic Christian union is looked at, the less practicable it seems to be, until human nature is made over again."

IV. In the *Christian Evangelist*, published in the interest of the Disciples of Christ, or Christians, I find the following ringing words on the subject of the hour:

"No union is possible until the various denominations consent to lay aside all that is denominational, and to return to the ground, faith and practice of the apostolic church.

"We suppose that there are few bodies who would not be just as hospitable as the Episcopal in urging all reputable Christian people to come in and make their home with them. Baptists would rejoice to have all become Baptists; Methodists have hearts large enough to cheerfully consent that all should become Methodists; Presbyterians, despite their rigid views of election, would not have a word of disapprobation if all should elect to become Presbyterians, and even the Catholics would consent to pack away their thumb screws and shut up their inquisitions forever if all would only flock to Rome. This can never be. The Christian world

will never become Episcopal, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Presbyterian, or Catholic. It will never consent to take a party name, accept a party creed, or bind itself by party rules and practices. Only one thing commends itself to the enlightened judgment of Christian men and women, and that is to be *Christian and Christian alone*. No proposal for union will ever meet with acceptance, or even serious consideration which does not embrace the following principles:

"1. All saints must take their stand on the Bible, and the Bible alone. It must be the only book of authority. It must determine the faith and practice of the united church. It must be the book of appeal on every question. Authority must rest, not in the ecclesiastical body, or in the church or the church tradition, or in the 'commandments of men,' but in the Word of God."

"2. Everything of a party character must give way to what is universally recognized as apostolic and universal. Party names, party creeds and party practices must be sacrificed on the altar of union.

"3. There must be a universal purpose to follow Christ as the great leader, and the apostles as they follow Christ. It must be conceded by all that Christ is Christianity, and that to be a Christian is to hear and follow Christ. Whenever all Christian people determine to retire Luther, or Calvin, or Wesley, or even Campbell, or any other uninspired man, or set of men, to the background, and to look to, to listen to, and follow Christ alone, then the very fact that they follow the same leader will bring them in one fold under one Shepherd."

This represents well the position of the Disciples—the position maintained, as I understand it, by this paper.

There is no space remaining for comments. Reader, peruse well these plans of Christian union. Study them prayerfully in the light of God's most holy word. I have no doubt that ultimately Christians will unite on the basis last suggested, for it is the Divine plan. Be simply and only Christians.

## FACTS ABROAD.

During the session of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, held on Thursday afternoon, October 28, at Kansas City, the regular order of business was suspended, and Bro. B. J. Radford stepped on the platform, and in a neat and highly complimentary address presented Bro. Isaac Errett, President of the Society, with a well-filled purse of over \$1,200. Bro. Errett, on rising to respond, was greeted with long and hearty applause. The donations to the purse had been made by some of his most intimate friends in order that he may take a vacation and rest from his editorial and other duties. Bro. Errett has been President of the Society since its organization.

Bro. J. H. Garrison, of the Boston Church, has tendered his resignation, and will return to St. Louis to take charge of the *Christian Evangelist*. His two years of faithful service in Boston has exceeded his expectations. His report to the Missionary Board shows an increase of fifty per cent on the membership—numbering 151—twenty-one having been added during the last quarter. There are 130 names on the Sunday-school roll. The cause has now a footing in Boston. The Missionary Board have selected Bro. George Darsie, of Frankfort, Kentucky, to be his successor, and will begin his labor on December 1st.

The following extract from the report of the Christian Missionary Board we clip from the *Christian Standard* of October 30:

"We have contributed more or less to the support of thirty two preachers, whose reports aggregate as follows:—No. days of labor, 7,584; No. of sermons, 3,705; No. of baptisms, 770; No. of other accessions, 779; total number of accessions, 1,549; No. of churches organized, 19; No. of churches visited and assisted, 87; No. of new and unorganized places visited, 38."

At the Convention recently held in Kansas City,