

Unity in Diversity

by T.P. Haley

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity in diversity, highlighting the example of the Campbells' movement and the Bible Christian Reformatory Movement, and encouraging listeners to trust in faith in Christ and righteousness to heal all spiritual maladies and bring people together.

Scripture: John 17:20, Romans 15:5, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 3:14

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Doctrine"

Description

T.P. Haley delivers a sermon reflecting on the unity amidst diversity within the Disciples of Christ movement, tracing back to the teachings and reforms initiated by Father Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander. Despite differing theological views and practices, the movement emphasized unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all things. The sermon highlights the evolution of beliefs, such as the rejection of human creeds, the emphasis on the Bible as the sole rule of faith, and the acceptance of believers through confession of faith in Christ. It also explores the journey towards unity in doctrine and practice, despite initial disagreements on baptism, church government, and missionary work.

Transcript

Carnegie Hall, Saturday Morning, October 16.

Father Thomas Campbell was a minister in the Seceder Presbyterian Church when he came to the United States of America in the year of our Lord 1807. It is assumed that he was in fullest sympathy with the doctrine of that great church as it was and is. Nor indeed is there evidence to show that his son Alexander did not equally hold and believe these doctrines when he arrived in America, and entered so heartily into the plans and purposes of his distinguished father. It is more than probable that not one of those who formed the "Christian Association" for the promotion of "Christian Union" had for a moment questioned the Calvinistic doctrines which have stood so prominent in the teachings of this great historic church in which they had all been reared.

In the "Address," at page 41, Father Campbell urges the practicability of union with Arians, Socinians, Arminians, Calvinists, Antinomians, etc., etc., without declaring any change in his own convictions. There is no intimation that even after their immersion they had changed their theology. This is further manifest in the fact that, after their immersion in the year 1812, they very soon sought membership in the Baptist Church (or the Baptist Church sought them), whose standard was the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which was in substantial agreement with the Westminster Confession, under which both father and son

had [343] been brought up. Their supreme purpose was the "original constitutional unity of the Christian church." It is declared by them "a pleasing consideration that all the churches of Christ, which mutually acknowledge each other as such, are not only agreed in the great doctrines of faith and holiness, but are also materially agreed as to the positive ordinances of the gospel institution, so that our differences, at most, are about the things in which the kingdom of God does not consist--that is, about matters of private opinion."

They practically accepted the famous saying of Maldenius: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

While it is probably true that neither Thomas Campbell nor his son brought

T. P. HALEY.

to their work any new theology--that is, any new doctrine of the Godhead--it is without doubt true that they both, and especially the son, came to hold and to insist on a new anthropology; that is, a new view of man's powers and his relations to God. The sentiment so prominent in the "Declaration and Address," to wit: "That this society, formed for the sole purpose of promoting simple evangelical Christianity, shall, to the utmost of its power, countenance and support such ministers, and such only, as exhibit a manifest conformity to the original standard in conversation and doctrine, in zeal and diligence, and only such as endeavor to practice the simple original form of Christianity expressly exhibited upon the sacred page, without attempting to inculcate anything of human authority, of private opinion or invention of men, as having any place in the constitution, faith or worship of the Christian church, or anything as matters of Christian faith and duty for which there can not be expressly produced a 'Thus saith the Lord' in express terms or by approved precedent."

This sentiment so earnestly adopted led at once to the re-examination of every item of the doctrine, every article of faith heretofore held by the church, to determine whether it was in harmony with this Declaration, to determine whether there could be found a "Thus saith the Lord in express terms or by approved precedent."

This examination led to a number of radical changes in current belief and practice:

1. It led to the abandonment of infant baptism, as well as the abandonment of sprinkling and pouring for baptism.
2. It led to the abandonment of the doctrine of original sin, the doctrine of total hereditary depravity. It led to the assertion of the freedom of the human will, the freedom of choice. It rejected the doctrine of regeneration before faith in order to faith. It proclaimed conversion "a turning to the Lord." It emphasized the Scripture, "Let the wicked man forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him turn to the Lord, who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

This the sinner can do, it was affirmed, under the teaching and power of the Holy Ghost in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This led to the receiving into their fellowship every one who would confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in his heart that God hath raised him from the dead. It was affirmed that conversion was not the result of a process to reconcile God to man, that God was not the unreconciled party, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and that his ambassador said, "I pray you in Christ's stead, be ye

reconciled to God."

In the midst of the churches and associations thus united under the Campbells, there was the greatest diversity of opinion in reference to both matters of faith and practice. Perhaps it was the discovery of this fact that led Alexander Campbell to write the oft-quoted sentence: "We have among us all sorts of doctrines preached by all sorts of men." Yet in the midst of all this diversity, resulting perhaps from the abuse of their freedom, was found the [344] most solid organic unity. It was held by the fathers that the only test of soundness was their attitude towards Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God; that to be right about the Christ is to be or to become right about every other essential doctrine or practice.

But the most remarkable illustration of "unity in diversity" remains to be considered.

"The Bible Christian Reformatory Movement," led by Barton W. Stone and others, in Kentucky and parts of the South, antedated the movement of the Campbells by several years, and by the year 1830 numbered not less than ten thousand adherents, "was marked by certain anti-trinitarian tendencies, more or less pronounced." Towards Unitarianism, the Stone movement not only tended, but in nearly every particular was more or less pronounced. But the Stone movement was in accord with the movement led by the Campbells in the rejection of human creeds and the adoption of the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. They had also come to accept the immersion of penitent believers as the only New Testament baptism. With the Stone party, for a time, was associated the Reform movement, which was led by Abner Jones, Elias Smith and probably John Dunlevy, who, with their followers, became pronounced Unitarians and were called "New Light Christians." It is a well-known fact that, in spite of the differences between the Stone party and the Disciples on the important and fundamental doctrine of the divinity of Christ, influenced by the points of agreement in other matters, undoubtedly, the two parties did unite.

It is also a well-known fact that Stone would never consent to be called a Trinitarian. Furthermore, that not a minister associated with him would suffer himself to be so called.

All the hymnology that contained the doctrine was abandoned. The Long Meter Doxology,

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;

Praise him all creatures here below;

Praise him above, ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost,"

sung in all evangelical churches everywhere, was superseded by the following:

"From all that dwell below the skies,

Let the Creator's praise arise;

Let the Redeemer's name be sung

In every land by every tongue."

The Long Meter Doxology was not restored to our hymnology until the revision of the Christian Hymnal late in the seventies.

The fathers of our movement never made a prayer to the Son, nor to the Holy Ghost. They prayed to the Father, through the Son, for all blessings, and especially for the gift and graces of the Holy Ghost. The once popular hymn,

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,

With all thy quickening powers;

Kindle a flame of love and zeal

In these cold hearts of ours."

is rarely, if ever, heard in our churches, and this is not accidental.

In Missouri the greater part of the pioneers were from Kentucky, and in sympathy with Barton W. Stone on the question in hand, but a number of the stronger were from the Baptists and Presbyterians, and these were Trinitarians, and yet these preachers and their congregations were in organic connection and lived in the closest and most loving union. The bond of this union was their common faith in Jesus and implicit obedience to him. It ought to be mentioned here that, while Mr. Stone proclaimed a modified conception of God, a new theology, he was slow to accept the teaching of Mr. Campbell concerning "freewill," original sin and total depravity. Long after the Campbells were baptizing men on confession of their faith in Christ, the Stone party continued to use the mourners' bench and the enquiry-room in their revivals. They continued to teach immediate and instantaneous conversion by the direct and immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, and yet on these questions they came to agreement and lived in most loving fellowship despite their differences. They trusted to time and a better understanding of the sacred Scriptures to bring them finally to a perfect union in doctrine and practice. Nor were these reformers at the time of their union at one in regard to church government. Who of the older men does not remember the discussions about "The Ancient Order"? The Disciples and preachers coming from the [345] Baptist Church were favorable to Congregationalism--even democratic control--a government of the people, for the people and by the people, and this many of the churches practiced at the beginning.

Those who came from the Presbyterians, and this included the Stone party, were in favor of government by an eldership (presbytery). This discussion was earnest and long continued. It was found that neither extreme could prevail, and a compromise was made by agreeing to government by an eldership, but the rulings and decisions of the eldership were subject to approval, amendment or rejection by the voice and vote of the people.

Again, many held that the church should be taught and governed by the eldership, while the preachers should have no control over the faith or conduct of the membership. They should be evangelists to the world, and incidentally only teachers of the church, the teachers being limited to the setting in order the things that are wanting and ordaining elders in all the churches. Passing on to their work, viz.: the evangelization of the world, who does not recall the discussion of the "One Man Power," and the fact that it was once worth a man's reputation and standing in the church to suffer himself to be called the pastor? After awhile he might be called "one of the pastors" of a church, and with many this is still the position of a preacher who gives his entire time to teaching and caring for one congregation. And yet, notwithstanding the differences on this most important and radical question, the union so happily formed was not disturbed, and the logic of events, the necessities of the case, have brought the churches well-nigh to agreement. The same difficulty was found in regard to all co-operative movements. It was long before the

Disciples were agreed about Sunday-schools, and some thought as children were not in the kingdom, and as the right of petition belongs to the citizen or subject alone, it was not quite clear that children should be taught to pray before coming into the kingdom.

Nearly half a century passed away after the beginning of the Restoration movement before the "American Christian Missionary Society" was organized. It came up through great tribulation. It was not accidental that it was called the "American Christian Missionary Society." It was to be in America and for Americans, and while an attempt was made to do foreign missionary work under its auspices, it was a failure, and it was not until three-fourths of a century had passed that the "Foreign Christian Missionary Society" was organized, and yet these differences did not disrupt the union.

Now, it is here worthy of mention that, in all this "diversity" and these differences and the discussions consequent, there has been no actual "division." Nor has there ever been a "heresy" trial among the Disciples. There may have been, I think there have been, one or two cases in which preachers lost their pulpits and fellowship among their brethren because of heretical, or supposed heretical, teaching. A man here and there, now and then, has wandered away from the church because "he was not of us," but the instances have been rare. The number grows smaller in proportion to our number as the years go on.

Have we not indicated most clearly that "unity" has been preserved among the Disciples in the midst of all this diversity? To-day there is still great diversity in opinions and methods, but unity was never more solid in all essentials.

Is there not a lesson in all this for the Disciples of to-day in this Centennial time? There are still differences among us--differences of great moment. But are they greater or more dangerous than many of those of the past? If, in the formative and most difficult period in our history, we have survived them, tolerated them or outgrown them, may we not hope to survive and outgrow any that now are, or may arise in the future? Faith in Christ, and righteousness, may be trusted to heal all our spiritual maladies, as certainly as circulation of healthy blood may be trusted to remove all excrescences of the human body. Christ prayed that all his disciples might be one, that the world might believe that God had sent him. His prayer will be, must be, answered. [346]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/tp-haley/unity-in-diversity/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net