

# CHRISTIAN STUDIES

## SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE CHURCH

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*EDITOR'S NOTE*

5

*ARTICLES*

The Israel of God  
Allan J. McNicol

7

The First Restoration Movement:  
The Chronicler's Program of Restoration and Churches  
of Christ Today  
R. Mark Shipp

21

Biblical "Restorationism":  
A Response to Mark Shipp  
Jeffrey Peterson

31

Finding a Way Past Lament:  
When God Is Absent and Thanksgiving Impossible  
Glenn Pemberton

39

Reflections on the Value of Isaiah for the Life  
of the Modern Church  
J. J. M. Roberts

57

A Written Legacy:  
A Bibliography of Paul L. Watson  
M. Todd Hall with Michael R. Weed and Allan J. McNicol

69

*OBITER DICTA*

77

*CONTRIBUTORS*

79

With this issue of *Christian Studies*, I begin the duty and privilege of serving the faculty as editor. Since its inaugural issue in 1980, this journal, known at that time simply as the “Faculty Bulletin,” has been in the capable hands of its founding editor, Michael Weed. It is with gratitude for Dr. Weed’s visionary labor and with humility for the work at hand that I assume the role of editor, with the indispensable aid of the managing editor, Todd Hall.

From its inception, this publication has sought to provide responsible and biblical theological reflection that is beneficial and accessible to the scholar as well as to the interested “layperson.” This aim is summed up well in the journal’s motto: Scholarship for the Church. I want to assure our readers, old and new alike, that we press on toward the future mindful of what has come before. As in the past, so in the future, the goal of this journal will be not merely to publish the “results of scholarly research,” but to address real issues in the faith and practice of the church and of individual believers. As in the past, it will continue to be a publication of the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology, but also with contributions from other scholars. Within these parameters, the intent is to provide readers with the best theological writing in Churches of Christ, but also with a reach that extends beyond our walls.

All issues of *Christian Studies*, including this one, are available online, via the Austin Grad website, at <http://austingrad.edu/resources/christian-studies-publication>. If you find the content beneficial, please share this journal, in its print and online forms, with others.

In that first issue of the “Faculty Bulletin” that appeared thirty-five years ago was a contribution by Paul Watson. Watson is an Old Testament scholar who taught at the Institute for Christian Studies (now Austin Grad) from 1979-1983. He had a lasting impact on his colleagues and students during his years as a professor here. He left the Institute to work in full-time congregational ministry, where he has continued to influence countless souls for God’s kingdom. This issue of *Christian Studies*, whose theme is “The Old Testament and the Life of the Church,” is dedicated to Paul Watson and to the legacy of scholarship and ministry that he has passed on—and continues

to pass on—to the church. The contributors bring this gift to him, and to us all, in the hope that it will bring honor to whom honor is due.

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# Biblical “Restorationism”: A Response to Mark Shipp

Jeffrey Peterson

Since the second century and the career of Marcion, the Christian church has faced the temptation to resolve tensions between the Scriptures of Israel (the “Old Testament,” or OT) and the specifically Christian Scriptures (the “New Testament,” or NT) by abandoning the former, whether formally or practically. Yet the OT is essential to the expression of the Christian gospel from the time of its first proclamation, and without the background it supplies, the faith is bound to be misconstrued, as it was by Marcion himself.<sup>1</sup> In the words of Austin Farrer, “The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are included under a single name [viz., ‘the Bible’] for no other reason than this, that through them the person and work of Jesus Christ are understood. The New fulfills the Old, the Old is indispensable for understanding the New.”<sup>2</sup> Students of the New Testament and Christian theology are thus indebted to those scholars who devote themselves to explicating the OT, and especially to those who do so with an eye towards exhibiting how its message is indis-

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<sup>1</sup> For interpretation of Israel’s Scriptures in the earliest period of Christian theology, see especially Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992). For Marcion, see now Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Austin Farrer, “Introduction,” in *The Core of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 7.

pensible for comprehending that of the NT, and how the former is fulfilled in the latter.<sup>3</sup>

Mark Shipp's essay invites reflection on what the books of Chronicles can teach Christians of the Restoration tradition about how we may find guidance for our future in an increasingly disorienting present by acquiring perspective on the past. In Shipp's discussion of "The First Restoration Movement," I appreciate the attention given both to the details of the scriptural text and to the larger message of the books under consideration. I believe he has rightly seen with the author of Chronicles that we are grounded in our history—whether we think of the history of Israel, the ministry of Jesus, the early church, the Protestant Reformation, the movement for unity through restoration launched in early nineteenth-century America, or our own families and formative churches or even our individual stories of discipleship. Recalling our history of response to God's saving initiatives—however narrowly or broadly we define the word "our"—is surely one way in which the people of God orient ourselves as we seek to follow him through time. But taken as a whole, the work of the Chronicler also invites us to recognize our imperfection and look to the future for God's final restoration of all things (ourselves included) in conformity with his will.

The characteristic perspective of the NT on God's consummation of his purposes is often labeled "inaugurated eschatology."<sup>4</sup> The phrase suggests that at some point in the past God has acted decisively in the history of his people and his creation so as to ensure the future that he intends for them, and that the arc from past act to future consummation determines the character and demands of our present. In the NT, the focal point of history, which

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<sup>3</sup> It is a pleasure to offer this response to the work of one such scholar associated with Austin Graduate School of Theology, Mark Shipp, in honor of the life's work of another, Paul Watson. It was not my privilege to serve as Paul's teaching colleague (when the school was known as the Institute for Christian Studies), but I have learned much from his exposition of Old Testament texts at numerous sessions of our annual Sermon Seminar since 1993, and I regard the use to which he has put his scholarly gifts in the ministry of preaching as exemplary. An earlier draft of this essay was presented as a response to the original version of Mark's essay at the AGST Friends' Day, 18 October 2014, in Austin, Texas.

<sup>4</sup> See for example J. B. Green, "Kingdom of God/Heaven," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (2d ed.; ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin; Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2013), 469.

decisively determines all that comes after and begins even now the consummation of God’s saving purpose, is of course the passion and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Strikingly, John Thompson finds “inaugurated eschatology” in the vision of God’s future for his people presented in Chronicles.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Scott Hahn, “Chronicles tells Israel’s history backwards, from the perspective of the end, the *qēṣ*, the zenith of history foretold by the prophets,” and thus achieves a “prophetic historiography that looks forward not to the end of history, but to the fullness of time and fulfillment of what is anticipated in Israel’s liturgy, which is always open to what God holds in store for the future.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, one might consider from the point of view of the various OT witnesses whether the moment at which God’s future was decisively set in motion is the founding of the Davidic dynasty, or the exodus from Egypt, or the call of Abraham, or the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, or even creation itself.<sup>8</sup>

Shipp’s identification in Chronicles of an ecumenical agenda aimed at reuniting God’s scattered and divided people to form “all Israel” is suggestive for those involved with a ministry “associated with Churches of Christ and in conversation with all who confess Jesus as Lord.”<sup>9</sup> On Shipp’s reading, the Chronicler was pained by division within God’s people, and his history indicates his longing for the time when they would all be reunited by divine power, but he also believed that the center around which God would accomplish this work was the heir of David seated on a throne restored to Zion where God’s temple would also be rebuilt; that is, the Chronicler hoped

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<sup>5</sup> See Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> See J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, New American Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1–2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 12–13.

<sup>8</sup> I have argued elsewhere that on Paul’s interpretation of Gen 1:26 in 1 Cor 15:49, God’s stated intention to “make [a] man in our image, after our likeness” is ultimately fulfilled only in the *parousia* of Christ (“‘The Image of the Man from Heaven’: Christological Exegesis in 1 Corinthians 15:45–49,” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1997, chapter 5).

<sup>9</sup> AGST mission statement (<http://austingrad.edu/about-us/mission>, accessed 13 April 2015).

for God to reunite his scattered people by restoring those who had abandoned and even rejected the visible center of unity he had established in Jerusalem.

This is reminiscent of the stance toward ecumenical conversation that Everett Ferguson has commended to Churches of Christ.<sup>10</sup> In such “distinctive” observances as believers’ baptism, weekly communion, and *a cappella* singing, Ferguson encourages us to recognize practices with deep roots in ancient Christian tradition. These observances deserve to be recognized as founding marks of the church from which Christians have departed in the course of the centuries, and which were indeed restored to a significant degree in the movement led by the Campbells and Stone and their associates.<sup>11</sup>

This recognition permits Churches of Christ to approach ecumenical endeavor as recipients and bearers of ancient Christian tradition who decline, in the words of G. K. Chesterton, “to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.”<sup>12</sup> Such a stance might not eliminate the practical obstacles that impede greater visible union between Christian churches, but it might foster an ecumenical dialogue conducted in a spirit of mutual appreciation rather than apology, as a conversation between communions that offer one another gifts vouchsafed to our possession by the providence of God.

I close with one point on which I would question Shipp and one suggestion for supplementing the proposal he offers on the basis of Chronicles. The question concerns whether the books of Chronicles ought to be read as a self-contained literary work, or whether Ezra and Nehemiah should be treated as the self-conscious continuation of the story Chronicles tells. I suggest the latter perspective commends itself; whether or not the works were composed by the same human author, the opening of Ezra clearly picks up on the conclusion of 2 Chronicles. The narrative of Chronicles ends with the decree of

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<sup>10</sup> See Everett Ferguson, “Churches of Christ: Who We Are and Who We Ought to Be,” *Christian Studies* 18 (2000–01): 41–52.

<sup>11</sup> To balance this perspective with developments in other communions, one would need to reckon with the history of the Liturgical Movement, in the course of which during the twentieth century a number of communions converged in appreciation and reappropriation of the worship practices of the ancient Christian Church. For a survey, see L. Sheppard, *The People Worship: A History of the Liturgical Movement* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York and London: John Lane, 1909), 85.

Cyrus, King of Persia, that allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of the LORD (2 Chron 36:22–23); Ezra opens with the same decree and tells us what happened next.<sup>13</sup> So even if the works were written by different authors (and even should that also be the case for the books of Ezra and Nehemiah), the editor or editors who brought them together present them as telling a continuous story.<sup>14</sup> In that story, the actions that the returning exiles take in Ezra and Nehemiah—rebuilding the temple, purifying the community, ordering the community’s life and worship under the Law of God, rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem—constitute aspects of the way Judah “sought the LORD” and prepared for the yet greater works that God would do in their future, intimated in Chronicles.

If Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah belong together, then Shipp’s point that the restoration anticipated in Chronicles was “not to be accomplished through human initiative and activity alone, although human activity is involved” needs to be received with great care, and with considerable weight placed on the final qualification. Of a certainty, unaided human effort will not finally achieve all God’s purposes for his creation or for our lives, but our actions inspired by the biblical vision of God’s coming restoration of all things to conformity with his will are indispensable to our part in this story.

This deserves attention, because many contemporary Protestants, including many in Churches of Christ, are heirs to a rediscovery of grace that scorns all human effort, actions, or “works,” the term typically employed in English when a negative connotation is present. Yet Paul, the great expositor of grace in the NT, in the letters in which he develops the subject most fully, follows these expositions with multiple chapters of exhortation (in Galatians 5–6 and Romans 12–14) to actions that are reasonably regarded as good

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<sup>13</sup> Morna Hooker compares this narrative overlap to the ascension narratives at the conclusion of Luke and the opening of Acts and regards it as an indication “that the second volume is a continuation of the story told in the first” (*Endings: Invitations to Discipleship* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003], 51–52). In the case of Acts, the parallel is strengthened by recognition that there, as in Luke, the ascension is dated on Easter Day, and the “forty days” during which Jesus “appeared” to the disciples (Acts 1:3) follow the ascension rather than preceding it; see Henk Jan de Jonge, “The Chronology of the Ascension Stories in Luke and Acts,” *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013): 151–171.

<sup>14</sup> See David Noel Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), 75–78, 83–85, 92–93, 99–100.

“works” (or “deeds” or “actions,” all translations of the one Greek noun *ergon*; cf. Rom 2:6–7, 15; 13:3; 1 Cor 3:13–15; 15:58; 2 Cor 9:8; Eph 2:10; 4:12; Col 1:10; 3:17). We cannot achieve our own standing in grace, and apart from God we can do nothing, but empowered by God’s Spirit and freely invited into the communion of his saints, we are charged with doing the good works that further God’s purposes in our little corner of creation, and that give him scope for yet greater redemptive work in the future. In Paul’s words, the church is God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10 ESV; cf. also Phil 2:12–13 on God as working [*energōn*] through the actions of believers).<sup>15</sup>

As for the concluding suggestion, it seems to me that what Shipp discovers in Chronicles can be usefully complemented with the perspective of a NT text well known to Restorationists. The book of Acts also commends to its readers a sort of “program of restoration,” in which our actions under the guidance of God’s Spirit prepare for greater acts of divine deliverance in our future. Luke urges Christians of the second generation, who form his immediate audience, to take as their model of faithfulness the church of the first Christian generation, through which God worked so powerfully.<sup>16</sup>

The story that Luke–Acts tells is focused on events between ca. AD 30 and 60, between the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and Paul’s imprisonment in Rome midway through Nero’s reign. Luke tells us, however, that he relates this story with the edification of later readers in view, represented by Theophilus in the prefaces to his two volumes (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). At points in his narrative, Luke registers his concerns regarding the church in Theophilus’ generation. Thus, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul urges them, “Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of

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<sup>15</sup> On the authorship of Ephesians, see especially Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61.

<sup>16</sup> Classes that Anthony L. Ash taught some years ago at the annual Abilene Christian University Bible Lectureship in Abilene, Texas, inspired the interpretation of Acts sketched here. Despite a recent scholarly trend to date the book in the first third of the second century, I continue to find convincing the judgment of Hans Conzelmann: “Dating the composition of Acts somewhere between 80 and 100 best fits all of the evidence” (*Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], xxxiii).

which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28 NRSV), with urgency given to this appeal by the prediction that “after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them” (Acts 20:29–30 NRSV). Alone of the Evangelists, Luke records Jesus’ question, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8 ESV). François Bovon finds here a concern for the “danger of faith cooling off” during the church’s “patient waiting for a distant end of the history of salvation.”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the question also signals Luke’s concern about the possible, or even the actual, effects of the ravenous leaders that Paul warns about in the post-apostolic era.

Throughout his Gospel and Acts, Luke commends to his readers the examples of those who waited on God’s salvation and were rewarded for their patience with the outpouring of his Spirit, which empowered them for effective witness to his Anointed One, Jesus. This pattern appears already in Luke’s infancy narrative, which shares with Chronicles a focus on the temple and an approbation of those who humbly passed their days praising God and waiting on his deliverance there. Thus, Simeon is the first figure in Luke’s narrative to perceive through the Holy Spirit that the newborn Messiah Jesus will be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles,” as well as “for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32 ESV), and the prophetess Anna joins Mary and Zechariah in speaking of Jesus as fulfilling the hopes of those “waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38 ESV).

This pattern comes to fruition in the opening chapters of Acts, as Jesus’ disciples, now relocated from Galilee to Jerusalem, “stay in the city until ... clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 ESV) and are then filled with the Spirit of God poured out on them by the risen Jesus, and thus empowered for witness. In this respect, as in others that Luke notes, their experience recapitulates Jesus’ own, as his ministry likewise began with the reception of the Spirit (Luke 3:21–22), which supplied the power by which he ministered (Luke 4:1, 14) and offered his own powerful testimony to God’s fulfillment of his saving purposes (Luke 4:16–30).

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<sup>17</sup> François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 537.

The “acts of the apostles” that Luke records are, as often noted, the acts of the Holy Spirit; but they are also the acts of the risen Christ, who bestows this Spirit on believers (Acts 2:32–33) and makes possible their extension of his ministry throughout the inhabited world and across the decades (now centuries). This is one key to the significance of Luke’s narrative, and another is found in Luke’s description of the elements of communal life that followed the Spirit’s initial outpouring and history’s first 3000 baptisms in the name of Jesus. These first Christians devoted themselves to (1) the *apostles’ teaching* on the fulfillment of God’s saving purposes for Israel and the nations, now beginning to be decisively fulfilled in Jesus’ death and resurrection and the community formed in consequence; (2) the *sharing of possessions (koinōnia)* as required to address the needs of this newly formed community’s members; (3) the breaking of bread in the presence of the risen Lord; and (4) the daily communal and individual prayers by which Christians sought God’s guidance and protection for their ministry.<sup>18</sup>

As Luke’s readers, we are invited to devote ourselves to the same practices as the first generation of believers. These practices are not ends in themselves, to be observed legalistically, but are rather means of grace by which God can restore to the church in our time the spirit and vitality that Acts describes, a movement towards restoration that every Christian should be able to support.<sup>19</sup> In adopting such a program of restoration, we take our place in a history with deep roots in the scriptural witness, as Shipp’s reflections on Chronicles show, and we ready ourselves for the future God has prepared for us and all his servants.

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<sup>18</sup> This expansive paraphrase of Acts 2:42 draws on the whole picture of Jesus and his community presented in Luke–Acts; see initially Luke 24:13–35 (the breaking of bread as the occasion for the presence of the risen Christ), 36–49 (the source of the apostles’ teaching in Jesus’ post-resurrection instruction; cf. Acts 1:3); Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–37; 6:1–7 (the sharing of possessions); 3:1; 4:23–31 (prayer in the life of the community).

<sup>19</sup> As in the prophets and elsewhere in the Bible, the danger of a merely external observance of the law of God that does not include the proper motivation is acknowledged in Luke–Acts, notably in the parable of the Good Samaritan and its introduction (Luke 10:25–37). But as is also generally true in Scripture, outright opposition between the interior disposition of the faithful and their external actions is not characteristic of Luke–Acts; indeed, Jesus tests the strength of a ruler’s desire to inherit eternal life by challenging him to undertake a stringent renunciation of material wealth (Luke 18:18–30).

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