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From its beginnings under founding editor Michael R. Weed, *Christian Studies* has sought to offer "Scholarship for the Church," as stated in the journal's motto since 2008. We are pleased with this volume to introduce to our readers two new Austin Graduate School of Theology faculty members, Keith Stanglin and Daniel Napier, and we look forward to their years of service to the church with us.

Christians in America face new challenges today. We are living in what David Bentley Hart has called a post-Christian world. Churches must consider how to adjust to new realities and a cultural environment that appears in some respects less hospitable to the open proclamation and practice of historic Christian faith, while in other respects offering unprecedented opportunities for authentic and powerful Christian witness. How do we communicate the gospel by word and deed to a culture that believes it has already heard and rejected it, but which may never have seen faith working through love? How do we foster authentic transformation into the image of Christ, both in ourselves and in others?

One vital function of scholarship for the church is to raise questions and promote discussion that allows churches to evaluate options for ministry and service. This aim ties together the essays on various topics contributed to this issue by AGST faculty and emeriti. Building on the analysis of Max Scheler, Michael Weed explores the phenomena of *ressentiment*, the toxic engagement of apostates with the traditions in which they were formed. Keith Stanglin asks what use followers of Thomas Campbell have for church history, and how those impressed by Campbell's vision might need to refine the terms in which it was originally expressed. Jeffrey Peterson explores how the liturgical calendar of the ancient church might help Christians and churches live through the year in the power of the resurrected Christ. Daniel Napier considers how revivalist approaches to conversion may actually thwart true conformity to the image of Christ and reflects on what contemporary churches might learn from ancient catechetical practices. Mark Shipp discusses the challenges of appropriating especially difficult Psalms for use in the church of Jesus Christ. Allan McNicol offers a substantive review of a recent book

on the difficult question of eschatological violence and its implications for our understanding of God's nature.

While each author speaks for himself, the reader of this issue is invited to join the ongoing discussion—and the occasional charitable argument—pursued at the faculty lunch table. We offer this collection to our readers in hopes of spurring productive discussion toward the growth of faith, understanding, and discipleship.

Finally, some changes are coming soon to *Christian Studies*, and we want our readers to be a part. Please go, right now, to your computer, type **austingrad.edu/survey** in the browser window and take our *Reader Survey*! Make your wishes for the journal known!

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Redeeming the Time:
The Christian Year and Life in the Risen Christ

Jeffrey Peterson

The Christian Year—the liturgical calendar of feasts, fasts, and seasons observed with variations by Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and many Protestant churches—is largely foreign to Churches of Christ and other "free churches." As Robert Webber observes, churches of the Restoration Movement "have historically avoided the Christian year as one of the unscriptural practices creating division between denominations."[1] In this avoidance—indeed, rejection—of the liturgical calendar, Restorationist churches preserve an ethos that can be traced to the New England Puritans, who, as David Hackett Fisher notes, "[i]n place of the liturgical calendar, … created their own annual rhythm of regional festivals, including Election Day, Commencement Day, Thanksgiving, and Training Day."[2]

That Puritan calendar was the ancestor of the contemporary American civic calendar, from which most of the days regularly noted in the course of a year in Churches of Christ and other non-liturgical churches are drawn. In many congregations, the year begins with a sermon taking its theme from New Year's Day, preached on the Sunday nearest. In recent years, a number of churches have taken some note of Palm Sunday, Easter Day, and Christmas Day (sometimes with a nod to their prominence "in the religious world at large"), but less controversial in many churches is Sunday recognition of Mother's Day, Graduation Sunday, Father's Day, Memorial Day, Independ-

[1] Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Services of the Christian Year* (The Complete Library of Christian Worship, vol. 5; Nashville: Star Song, 1994), 18. The statement appears in the unsigned entry on "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ"; in my judgment it also accurately describes *a cappella* Churches of Christ.

[2] David Hackett Fisher, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York and Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989), 164.

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ence Day, Veterans Day, and Thanksgiving. Indeed, in some congregations, failure to observe some of these days—perhaps especially Mother's Day—would result in considerable criticism of the leadership.

This development perhaps serves to invite a reconsideration of the Christian Year. If the reason for abandoning the ecclesiastical calendar that developed in its outlines in the first four centuries of the church's history was the lack of apostolic precedent, much less can the *de facto* adoption of an American calendar developed in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries be justified. Further, there is a real danger that the keeping of "special days" chosen from the American civic calendar as the primary observances of the congregational year encourages in American Christians an identity more American than Christian.

The question of the Christian Year might be considered in comparison with that of church buildings. In the apostolic age—indeed, well into the second century—churches met in the homes of members (cf. Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2).[3] Buildings devoted to the church's worship and fellowship arose only in the second and third centuries, as Christians renovated houses that members donated and willed to the church. Not until the fourth century and the imperial patronage of the church did buildings constructed for the purpose of accommodating the church's worship become common.[4] Yet most Restorationist churches have not abandoned the purpose-built church building and restored the apostolic practice of meeting in homes, but have rather retained the post-apostolic development as an expedient facilitating the worship and life of the church.

On reflection a parallel case might be made for judicious use of the Christian Year as facilitating congregational and individual formation in the truths of the Gospel and the spiritual growth of church members.[5] This ex-

[3] R. Alastair Campbell offers an informative, accessible survey of the church's life in this era, with an emphasis on church leadership, in *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

[4] For a detailed study, see L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 1: *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press, 1996).

[5] Keith Stanglin's essay in this volume, identifying some difficulties in a "strict construction" of Thomas Campbell's restoration plea while retaining sympathy with its general aims, coheres with the approach taken in this proposal.

ploratory essay has the modest aim of identifying a few considerations, mainly historical and theological, relevant to such a case in hopes of fostering informed consideration of this question.

The Lord's Day as the Foundation of the Christian Year

The history of Christian time-reckoning begins with the most consistent observance of Christians, that of Sunday as the "Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10).[6] Scholars in recent decades have been reluctant to claim that Sunday observance originated as a commemoration of the day of Jesus' resurrection or to trace its origins to the apostolic era.[7] In fact, however, a rather strong case can be made for this from familiar New Testament evidence. In the middle 50s of the first century, Paul appears to assume that the Corinthians met each first day of the week, making it an appropriate day for them to be laying aside contributions for the collection he is gathering for Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1–2). Presumably the first day is specified because Christians regularly met on that day and so could receive regular reminders in advance of Paul's eventual visit.[8]

Luke suggests the same practice in recounting Paul's seven-day sojourn in Troas, which concluded with a worship assembly "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). In the context of Luke-Acts, this rare reference to a specific day of the week also implies an explanation why the first day was observed as a day of corporate Christian worship. Luke's only other use of the

[6] See Richard Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 236–238.

[7] See Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: SPCK/Liturgical Press, 2011), 3–13. Bauckham traces Sunday observance to Palestinian Jewish churches and acknowledges that gathering on this day "was soon associated with the Resurrection, and that only this can really account for the fact that worship *on Sunday* acquired normative status throughout the Christian world" ("The Lord's Day," 240), but he hesitates to affirm commemoration of the resurrection as either the origin of the practice or as attested by the Gospels at the time of their composition (235). Such reticence appears to date to the publication of Samuele Bacchiochi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977).

[8] See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1321–1323.

phrase "the first day of the week" comes at the opening of the Empty Tomb passage (Luke 24:1), introducing the gospel's concluding narrative of the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Christ to his disciples. One feature of Luke's panoramic view of the first generation of Jesus' disciples is an economy of words; his statement that the risen Jesus was revealed to his disciples "in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35) prepares the reader to recognize the presence of the risen Lord when disciples break bread in Luke's second volume (Acts 2:42,46; 20:7, 11; 27:35). In the same way, the mention in Acts of "the first day of the week" as the day on which Christians gathered "to break bread" recalls the first day of the week on which Jesus rose and was revealed to his disciples "in the breaking of the bread" at the conclusion of the Gospel.

Luke is joined by all the other Evangelists in dating the discovery of the empty tomb explicitly "on the first day of the week." The persistence of this phrase in a Gospel narrative otherwise characterized by remarkable diversity of expression among the Evangelists, suggests that the phrase held special significance.[9] Matthew (28:9–10) and John (20:11–18, 19–23) also record appearances of the risen Christ to disciples on the same day, and John on the Sunday following (20:26–29).[10] Luke records as well that the first communities of Jesus' post-resurrection followers in Jerusalem initially met "daily" in the temple and at home (Acts 2:46), and that they remained devoted to the practice of the Law of Moses throughout the apostolic era, with "many thousands … among the Jews of those who believed … all zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20 ESV). It is reasonable to conclude that these first Christians continued to keep Sabbath as other Jews did, while also gathering in memory and celebration of Christ's resurrection after the close of Sabbath on the first day of the week, distinguishing themselves from other Jews by this ob-

[9] Bauckham holds that the phrase may signify merely that Jesus rose "on the third day" ("The Lord's Day," 235). In that case one might expect some variation in the wording, with at least one Evangelist enumerating the days (e.g., "on the second day the disciples rested; on the third day, Mary came to the tomb" following John 19:42), or introducing the Empty Tomb narrative simply with "on the next day" (cf. John 1:29, 35, 43).

[10] For "after eight days" in John 20:26 as indicating by inclusive reckoning the first Sunday after Easter, see J. Ramsey Michaels, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 350

servance. The evidence of Paul and Luke suggests that Christian missionaries to the gentiles inculcated the latter practice in their converts.

Thus, the weekly Lord's Day is the most ancient and significant day in the Christian calendar, "the day Christ has claimed and hallowed by escaping from the dominion of death," in Laurence Hull Stookey's apt phrase.[11] As Stookey observes elsewhere, "the chief festival [of the Church] occurs weekly, and from it all else is derived, including those annual festivities that may be more visible and certainly are the more popular cultural occasions" (44). He also observes that contemporary American Christians "have been acculturated to regard Sunday as the last day of the weekend, not the first day of the week" (46) and encourages a recovery of the significance of Sunday, for example by beginning preparation for the Lord's Day gathering on the evening before (48). Whereas many churches now practice home meetings on Sunday evening, gathering for a meal and spiritual fellowship on Saturday evening in anticipation of our weekly corporate celebration of Christ's death and resurrection could well serve to prepare our hearts and minds for worship on Sunday morning.

Annual Observance in the Apostolic Church

In addition to weekly Sunday observance, there is also good New Testament evidence for the annual apostolic observance of Easter, better designated "Pasch" or Passover, as in European languages other than English and German.[12] In the earliest Christian textual reference to Passover, Paul de-

[11] Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 40. All parenthetical citations in the text refer to this volume, the best introduction to the theology and practice of the Christian Year with which I am familiar.

[12] As Stookey notes, "'Easter' is an unfortunate term because apart from popular associations it has no obvious Christian meaning, but may be a variation of 'Œstre' or 'Eastre,' a Teutonic goddess of springtime and hence of fertility. The word may relate well to those secondary indicators of the season: rise, eggs (obvious signs of fertility), and—in the north temperate zone—the tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths of early spring. But 'Easter' as a name fails to say anything about Jesus Christ and is possibly a remnant of a polytheistic nature cult. The best to be said (and this is an obvious rationalization) is that by the power of the resurrection Christ has fulfilled and displaced the longing for the life that goddess of springtime once represented" (53). "While English-speaking Christians will never abandon the term 'Easter,' the

clares that "Christ our paschal lamb has been slaughtered" (1 Cor 5:7) and urges that Christians "celebrate the festival" by purging the leaven of malice and evil from their midst and living lives of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:8). The passage presupposes that the Corinthians have received considerable prior instruction on the Jewish festival of Passover, including the removal of leaven from the home as an element of its observance, and on its eschatological fulfillment in Christ.[13] More to our point here, the most natural way to read Paul's exhortation is as an appeal to practice community discipline and the shunning of evil in order to properly observe an approaching festival, rather than as a call to observe a purely metaphorical celebration; if Paul's readers anticipate no literal paschal festival, his introduction of the image is likely only to confuse them in the discussion of the letter that presumably followed its reading (cf. 1 Cor 14:35).

This observation is not outweighed by the fact that v. 7 refers to the death of Christ as an event of the past, a quarter-century before Paul writes. It is in the nature of Jewish festal celebrations that they make the worshipers contemporaries of God's saving deeds of the past. The classic Torah text, addressed to the children of the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness, reads, "Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today" (Deut 5:3). Paul reflects such an understanding of a specifically Christian rite in his treatment of the Lord's Supper as an event in which his converts in Corinth as well as in Ephesus (where he writes the letter, 16:8) all partake of the "one loaf" (10:17) that Christ broke and gave thanks over "on the night in which he was handed over" (11:23–24). In the letter's conclusion, Paul anticipates the Jewish festival of Pentecost as a somewhat distant date (16:8). This is consistent with his having dispatched the letter in the expectation that its initial reading to the Corinthians would come in the weeks preceding their annual celebration of the Christian Pasch and would awaken them to the moral implications of living in fellow-

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increased use of 'Pasch' and 'Paschal' needs to be encouraged … to assert the unique Christian meaning of the observance" (54).

[13] See my essay, "Christ Our Pasch," in *Renewing the Tradition: Studies in Honor of James W. Thompson* (ed. Mark W. Hamilton, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Jeffrey Peterson; Princeton Theological Monograph Series 65; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 133–144.

ship with the crucified and resurrected Christ.[14] The annual celebration of "the Passover of the Lord" was firmly established by the middle of the second century, when Christians in Asia Minor and Rome first disagreed over the date on which it should be observed.[15]

Living in the Paschal Mystery

Recognition that the apostolic church observed an annual Paschal celebration invites Christians who have inherited the Puritans' suspicion of the liturgical calendar to reconsider whether an annual cycle of observance might prove a helpful aid in the attempt to live our lives in the power of Christ's resurrection. This has in practice begun in many churches with the observance of Easter Day and the Sunday nearest Christmas Day.

The developed liturgical calendar is often explained as opening with the season of Advent, beginning four Sundays before Christmas Day, then proceeding through the season of Lent to Easter Day and Pentecost, followed by many weeks of "Ordinary Time" until Advent returns. Stookey makes a compelling case that the calendar is better approached as in the ancient church by beginning with the focal point of Easter, understood as the "great Sunday" of the year, an annual celebration of the victory over sin and death God has won for us through Christ's death and resurrection (49). Considered from this point of view, the liturgical calendar thus invites Christians (and all people) to live out the year (and the whole of our life) in the transforming power of Christ's resurrection and enter into God's redemption of creation.

As early as the third century, Christians have prepared for the celebration of Easter by fasting and observances recalling the climax of Christ's earthly ministry in crucifixion and resurrection.[16] This "Holy Week" or "Great Week," beginning with the day traditionally celebrated as Palm Sunday but better observed as Passion Sunday (88–90), continuing in many churches with "Maundy Thursday" (in which Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet is reenacted), and culminating in the services of Good Friday and Easter consti-

[14] Philip Carrington goes so far as to describe 1 Corinthians as "a Paschal letter" (*The Primitive Christian Calendar* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952], 42). For others who have seen the Passover season as suggesting themes in the letter, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 407–408.

[15] See Bradshaw and Johnson, *Origins*, 39–59.

[16] See Bradshaw and Johnson, *Origins*, 91.

tutes the high point of the Christian Year, the evangelical center of the proclamation and life of churches that observe it.

In the contemporary ecumenical lectionary, the result of more than a century of scholarship on the worship of the ancient Church, the eight Sundays following Easter are designated the first, second, third (etc.) Sunday "*of* Easter" rather than merely the Sundays numbered "after Easter." This observance of the "Great Fifty Days" is attested from the end of the second century.[17] It has the effect of making Easter Day the beginning of "an extended season, whose essential character is shared by all of its parts" (56) The festival of Pentecost concludes the Easter season with a focus on the "community called together by the Spirit of the Risen One" in the history between Christ's resurrection and his return, and "participation in the Body of Christ [as] inherent in being Christian" (76), from the day of Pentecost and the first preaching of Christ's resurrection until now.

The season of Lent, forty weekdays of fasting plus the six Sundays preceding Easter, developed in the fourth century from a number of practices, including the Holy Week fast by which Christians prepared for the Paschal celebration, as well as the practice of preparing catechumens for baptism on Easter Day.[18] The period of forty days recalls the biblical accounts of Moses and Elijah fasting in connection with their encounters with God on Mount Horeb, and especially of Jesus fasting and being tested in the wilderness before his ministry (79). The practice of fasting to some degree during Lent represents a way to honor Jesus' teaching that his disciples would fast following his departure (Matt 14:15//Mark 2:20; cf. "whenever you fast," Matt 6:16 NRSV; Acts 13:2–3). Stookey describes Lenten observance as an ellipse with two foci of reflection: "our human condition, including sin and its deadly consequences for both individuals and society" and "the new possibilities offered to us in Jesus Christ and their implications for practical living" (80). Rather than a season whose meaning is exhausted by displaying the tokens of our mortality in the shape of a cross on Ash Wednesday (84–86), by "giving something up" (chocolate, movies, etc.) or by "taking something on" (visitation of the sick, increased contribution, etc.) for the duration of the

[17] See Bradshaw and Johnson, *Origins*, 69–70.

[18] See Bradshaw and Johnson, *Origins*, 89–108, as well as Daniel Napier's contribution to this volume.

seven weeks, Lent can be a season of "self-examination that seeks greater conformity to the mind of Christ, and more effective ministry on behalf of the world" (82–83).

With the 46 days of Lent preceding the annual Paschal celebration and the 50 days of the Easter season following it and culminating in Pentecost, the "Easter cycle" occupies more than a quarter of the Christian year. The other major cycle of the liturgical year is anchored by Christmas. The seasonal song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" serves as a reminder that Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are properly the beginning of a season celebrating the coming of God among us in the form of the Christ child. The Puritans objected to the revelry characteristic of Christmas and regarded the feast as redolent of Romanism, but Christmas observance has continually increased among American Protestants since the seventeenth century, when it was outlawed in Massachusetts from 1659 to 1681 (107).

Stookey's reflections on the significance of the Christmas season are worth quoting in full:

> The season's familiarity and its immense popular appeal obscure the fact that Christmas is a mystery comparable to that of the Pasch and fully dependent on faith in the Paschal victory. The wonder of Christmas is not, as might be supposed, "How can a virgin bear a child?" The virginal conception of Jesus is not in itself the mystery but is rather one way of pointing to the mystery, of indicating that what occurred at Bethlehem is outside the bounds of both human experience and explanation. The marvel is that the creator of the cosmos comes as creature for the purpose of setting right all that has gone wrong on this tiny planet. The wonder is that the Eternal One who can be neither created nor destroyed willingly becomes subject both to birth and to death (105).
>
> Christmas is the enfleshment of God, the humiliation of the Most High, and divine participation in all that is painful, ugly, frustrating, and limited. Divinity takes on humanity, to restore the image of God implanted at creation but sullied by sin. Here is the great exchange Christmas ponders, that God became like us so that we might become like God (106).

Manger and shepherds of course have a place in the symbolism of the season, warranted by Scripture, though the Christmas tree and Santa Claus in his popular guise are best reserved for domestic observance rather than brought to church. Traditionally, the conclusion of the Twelve Days is marked by observance of the "Epiphany" (the "appearance" or "manifestation" of Christ to the world) on January 6, historically focusing on the visit of the Magi in Western churches, though in recent years the Eastern focus on Christ's baptism has also been celebrated in the Sundays following Christmas Day (111). The theme uniting Christmas Day, Epiphany, and the Baptism of the Lord is the identification of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God and Messiah, the emphasis falling not on the Child's sweetness but on his divine nature and mission (112–114).

The four Lord's Days before Christmas Day make up the season of Advent ("coming, arrival"), the traditional beginning of the liturgical year. Advent is often treated as the prelude to Christmas, an occasion to break into carols early. Historically and theologically, however, its focus is on Christ's second coming rather than his first. The season is "the celebration of the promise that Christ will bring an end to all that is contrary to the ways of God" (121). Isaiah's visions of redemption, John the Baptist's call to repentance, and the hymn "Come, thou long-expected Jesus, … now thy gracious kingdom bring" are more appropriate to the season than "Away in a Manger." The light that is characteristic of Advent symbolizes the eschatological light shining on our world from the dawning day of the Lord (Romans 12:11–14; 1 Thess 5:2–8) and illuminating "the people who walked in darkness" (Isa 9:2 ESV; cf. Luke 1:79), ourselves among them. Christians can thus begin the liturgical year by looking forward in time to the "end" of all things, the purpose for which God has created all things and toward which he works through Christ for the redemption of creation (121).

There are two series of Lord's Days that fall outside the Paschal cycle and the Christmas cycle: a shorter series between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent, and a longer one between Pentecost and the beginning of Advent. These Sundays are often referred to as "Ordinary Time." This designation was not chosen to suggest that these days are "unexceptional" or "mundane"; after all, every Lord's Day is a celebration of God's extraordinary work of redemption in Christ's death and resurrection. "Ordinary" was origi-

nally used rather in the sense of "ordinal," as these Sundays are designated the first, second, third (etc.) Sunday "after Epiphany" or "after Pentecost." As Stookey suggests, however, the more common meaning of "ordinary" may still inform worshipers on these Sundays, reminding us that even when our circumstances appear mundane to us, "Christ has sanctified all of time, bringing us and the whole of our experience into the orbit of resurrection. What we deem ordinary God has transformed into the extraordinary by the power of divine grace" (134).

The Christian Year in Restoration Churches?

This essay represents not an attempt to mandate observance of the Christian Year in churches unaccustomed to it but rather an invitation to become familiar with it and an appeal to consider ways in which its judicious use might aid congregational worship and individual devotion. A Christian or congregation unprepared to embrace the Christian Year fully, in the manner encouraged by Stookey, might yet benefit from it in a variety of ways. Individual Christians might employ the *Revised Common Lectionary*, the Sunday lectionary most widely used in various forms by liturgical churches, as a guide to their prayer and meditation.[19]

Further, ministers might also find benefit in use of the lectionary. All preaching on Scripture must proceed according to some plan; the approaches most commonly taken in Churches of Christ and other free churches involve some combination of *lectio continua* ("continuous reading" of a biblical book or series of books) and selection of individual passages, often on a topical basis or to address perceived needs of the congregation. For each Sunday of the year, the lectionary appoints a Psalm, a passage from elsewhere in the Old Testament ("the prophet"), a passage from Acts through Revelation ("the epistle"), and a passage selected from a Gospel ("the Lord"). Ironically, use of the lectionary means that the members of liturgical churches typically hear more Scripture read in the course of a year's Sundays than many who attend churches ostensibly devoted to the Bible. Minimally, one text could be selected from the four appointed for each week as the basis for the sermon or

[19] *The Revised Common Lectionary: Includes Complete List of Lections for Years A, B, and C* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992; available online at http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/).

the focus of the service, thus relieving the minister of the burden of weekly selection (or quarterly, for those who preach in series) and ensuring that the congregation hears at least one coherent paragraph, or "pericope," of Scripture each Sunday. One might also employ the Psalm alongside the text chosen, or incorporate two or more of the texts into the service.

One might, however, make full use of the lectionary with three scriptural texts and a Psalm read to (or sung by) the congregation each week in the course of the worship service. Among other things, this could serve to strengthen the sense that the reading of Scripture is an important act of worship in its own right, and not merely a prelude to the sermon; after all, Paul urges Timothy, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). Several commentaries by leading biblical scholars designed specifically to aid in preaching the lectionary are available, which will assist the preacher in identifying themes common to the texts for a given Sunday.[20]

Churches of the Restoration Movement have long lived in a dialectical relationship with other communions; while assuming a largely sectarian posture in relation to others for much of the 20th century, we also found our communion enriched by contributions to congregational life offered by those outside our fellowship. This was notably the case in the songs our churches sang and the evangelistic methods our members and ministers employed, but also in other, less obvious respects, as the illustration of the church building with which we began suggests. Without abandoning any of the practices that have been foundational to the life of our churches or, more importantly, the

[20] These include Fred B. Craddock, John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, and Gene M. Tucker, *Preaching Through the Christian Year* (3 vols., Nashville: Abingdon, 1984–7); Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, and James D. Newsome, Jr., *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993–5); David L. Bartlett and Barbra Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* (12 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008–11); Roger E. Van Harn, ed., *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts* (3 vols.; New York: Continuum, 2001); Roger E. Van Harn, Brent A. Strawn, and Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Reginald H. Fuller and Daniel Westberg, eds., *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (3d ed.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2006).

aim to recover what was most vital and central in the faith and devotion of the earliest Christians, it is my conviction that Churches of Christ can enhance our faith, devotion, and ministry by taking guidance from the liturgical calendar, as many churches are already doing piecemeal. I offer this essay for prayerful consideration in the hope that the Christian Year will be evaluated on the basis of an informed theological understanding of its structure and nature, and of the possibilities it offers for encouraging Christians to live the whole of our life in Christ, from one Easter to another.

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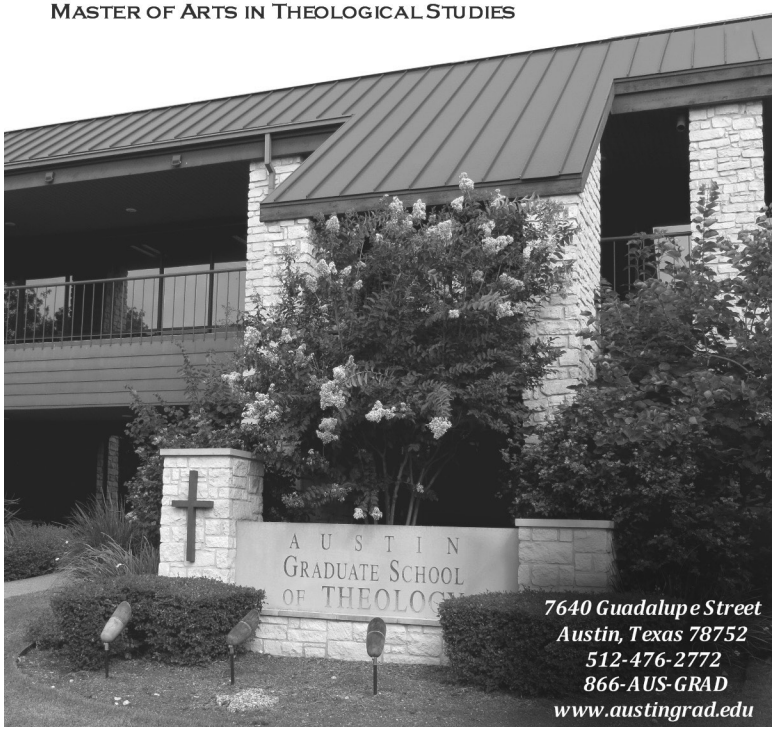

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