

CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Formerly the *Faculty Bulletin* of the
Institute for Christian Studies

Number 11:2

Spring, 1991

Copyright 1991

Christian Studies is a biannual publication of the Institute for Christian Studies and is indexed in *Religion Index One*.

ISSN 1050-4125

ICS is a theological college accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to offer the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science.

Institute for Christian Studies
1909 University Avenue
Austin, Texas 78705

Institute for Christian Studies CHRISTIAN STUDIES Number 11:2 Spring, 1991 ©
--



CHRISTIAN STUDIES



Spring 1991

Number 11:2

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	Editor	4
ARTICLES		
WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW: TRADITION IN THE EARLY CHURCH	James W. Thompson	5
SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION: TWO ESSENTIALS IN THE SEARCH FOR THE ANCIENT ORDER	Allan J. McNicol	15
BOTH CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT: ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND TRADITION	Gary N. Holloway	31
A TRADITION AT RISK	Michael R. Weed	41
BOOK REVIEWS		
<i>The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics are Related</i> by William H. Willimon	Bob Burgess	57
<i>The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics</i> by Michael Fishbane	Michael S. Moore	61
<i>The Church in Exile</i> by James W. Thompson	Joe Crisp	64
CONTRIBUTORS		67

FOREWORD

We live in a time when tradition is suspect, perhaps religious tradition doubly so. Easily forgotten is the truth that civilization is delicately borne on the thin threads of memory and tradition. Amid the excitement of finding new things, it is easy to forget the importance of sifting and refining the received truths--collected wisdom and insight--of the past.

The church is a community founded on a tradition and charged with the task of faithfully transmitting traditions embodying ancient wisdom and insight. The first responsibility of each generation of Christians is not the breathless pursuit of the new, the vogue, or the contemporary. It is the task of holding fast that which we have received, making it our own, and faithfully handing it to the next generation.

Today there is much confusion about tradition. The essays in this issue of *Christian Studies* are presented in order to promote reflection on the meaning of tradition in the life of the church.

I would especially like to thank Mrs. Denise James for her capable and cheerful assistance in preparing this issue of *Christian Studies*.

Michael R. Weed, *Editor*



What Every Christian Should Know: Tradition in the Early Church

James W. Thompson

Tevye's song, "Tradition," in *Fiddler on the Roof*, celebrated an idea that has seldom been appreciated in American culture. While tradition was valuable to the Jews of the *stetl* in Russia, keeping their lives from being as "shaky as a fiddler on the roof," Americans have more often regarded tradition as a matter to be overcome or jettisoned. We would be more likely to celebrate the untraditional and the modern as the foundation for our existence than the inheritance from the past.

The rejection of tradition is a fundamental feature of the American consciousness. Historians have commented on the fact that the American experiment was actually regarded by its intellectual leaders as a restoration of an ancient order which could be found in the golden age of ancient Greece. The neoclassical architecture of the public buildings in Washington reflected this attempt to return to an earlier golden age. Similarly, the democratic principles enunciated were understood as a restoration of an earlier golden age. Such a restoration was thus a rejection of centuries of tradition that had been developed in Europe. As the words on the back of the one dollar bill indicate, the American experiment was a *novus ordo seclorum*, a "new order of the ages." The rejection of the authority of tradition became a distinguishing aspect of American life.

If Americans have preferred the new and the modern over the old and the traditional, restorationists have especially resisted tradition. Indeed, the restorationist slogan of "back to the Bible" was, like the American challenge of removing the accumulated traditions of centuries, a call to return to the beginning and to reject the legacy from the intervening years. Consequently, the

word "tradition" was commonly modified by such adjectives as "mere," "human," and "just." Thus Tevye's appreciation of tradition has been scarcely intelligible to restorationists for whom tradition remains something to overcome. Tevye's culture, with its appreciation of tradition, is far removed from our own emphasis on the importance of modernity.

In this essay I wish to reconsider the place of tradition in the life of the church by reflecting on its place in earliest Christianity. Here also a community recognized that it lived in a "new order of the ages" where "the old has passed away" and the "new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). What role would tradition play in a movement which gave such emphasis on being in a "new world?" Would all tradition belong to the old world that has passed away? Or would this community distinguish carefully between the traditions that were to be discarded and those which were to be preserved? If the community found a place for tradition, what role would it play? These questions are, I believe, relevant for the life of the contemporary church, for we are confronted with questions regarding the traditions we have inherited.

Early Christianity as the Rejection of Tradition

The rejection of tradition, one may argue with some justification, is rooted in the fact that Christianity originated as a challenge to established tradition. The Pharisees objected to the fact that Jesus and his disciples did not follow the "traditions of the elders" (Matt. 15:1; cf. Mark 7:3), the oral tradition which had been passed on to provide a "fence around the law." Jesus objected to the Pharisees' appeal to tradition, indicating that they had allowed the tradition to supersede the commandment of God. "So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God" (Matt. 15:6). Unlike the Pharisees, who appealed to the tradition which had been handed on for generations in settling legal disputes, Jesus regularly appealed directly to the original will of God, and not to the tradition. He was expected by his listeners to answer legal questions in a way that was typical for rabbis, and

he took up major themes that were discussed in the Jewish tradition. When he discussed such themes as oaths, vows, purity laws, divorce, and the sabbath, he addressed topics that were discussed at length in the Jewish oral tradition. However, the distinguishing fact about Jesus' approach is that he "taught with authority and not as the scribes," who regularly appealed to the tradition.

One may also appeal to the apostle Paul for support in rejecting tradition. Paul describes the time before his conversion as the period in which he advanced beyond his contemporaries, "so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14). He then declares that the dominant influence on his life was not the inherited tradition, but the revelation which came in Jesus Christ. Indeed, he counts his advancement in the Jewish tradition as loss for the sake of knowing Christ. In his letter to the Colossians, he warns his readers against the negative influence of human tradition: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). For Paul, "human tradition" stood in opposition to the revelation in Christ.¹

The Role of Tradition in the Early Church

Although Jesus and Paul objected to human traditions which became substitutes for the word of God, the Christian movement inevitably embraced traditions of its own. Although Jesus himself rejected aspects of Jewish traditions, his own words and deeds were later preserved as traditions for the church. Such traditions reflected the church's concern to provide an accurate memory and standard for life in the kingdom.²

¹J.I.H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache* (Cambridge: University Press, 1980) 112.

²McDonald, 106.

For Paul, the formation of new churches also required traditions which served as a body of knowledge to guide the entire community. The importance of tradition is suggested in his words to the Corinthians: "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (11:2). In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul also indicated the importance of tradition for the development of the church. "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word or by letter." A similar statement of the importance of tradition is suggested later in the same epistle: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the traditions that you received from us" (2 Thess. 3:6). The formation of churches involved not only the obedience to the proclamation of Christ; it also involved the passing on of traditions that would shape the common life.

The importance of tradition for the churches of Paul is also suggested by the extensive vocabulary which he employs from his background in Pharisaic Judaism. He refers to information that he "received" (*paralambano*) and subsequently "delivered" (*paradidomi*) to the churches after their conversion (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3). This language is derived from Judaism, where traditions were "received" and "delivered" in the process of handing on the community's stories and its laws.³ On numerous occasions Paul reminds his communities of traditions which he had handed on to them in person or in his letters (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal. 1:9, 12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1). In Philippians 4:9 he refers to the instruction which the readers had received: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do." The formation of a congregation was thus not complete until it received instruction in the traditions which had been handed on.

³A. Grabner-Haider, *Paraklese und Eschatologie bei Paulus*. Muenster: Aschen-dorff, 1968) 25.

The traditions which Paul handed on to the communities were never merely human traditions. Unlike the personal advice which Paul offers in 1 Corinthians, the traditions he passes on were "not the word of men, but the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). He gives instructions in the traditions "through the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:2), and he assures his community that these instructions are "the will of God" (1 Thess. 4:3). The extensive teaching ministry which Paul conducted after his hearers "turned to God" (1 Thess. 1:9-10) attests to the importance of traditions containing a body of knowledge for the continued existence of the church. Without a body of information, contained in the traditions which Paul passed on, the formation of the community would have been impossible.

The traditions which Paul handed on to a young church in Thessalonica would not have been different from those which were passed on in other communities. Indeed, Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 4:17 that what the congregation has been taught is the same "in all the churches." Thus tradition was a unifying force among the churches.

What Every Christian Should Know: 1 Thessalonians

The significance of tradition for the life of the church is especially to be seen in 1 Thessalonians, Paul's earliest letter. This letter of friendship, written shortly after the formation of that community as a continuation of both the pastoral work first initiated by Paul at the time of the conversion of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:9-10) and Timothy's ministry (cf. 1 Thess. 3:6), continues the work which had been interrupted by Paul's sudden departure from Thessalonica. As Paul indicates in recalling the days immediately following their conversion, he had worked night and day while he "preached . . . the gospel of the kingdom of God" (1 Thess. 2:9). Then he indicates that his preaching was followed by his task of shaping the congregation. "Like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you

and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (2:11).

Paul's task of exhorting the Thessalonians is continued in the epistle. The frequent references to what the Thessalonians already know indicates the importance of traditions for the new congregation. Throughout the epistle we find the formula: "Just as you know" (1:5; 2:1, 4, 11; 3:3, 4; 4:2; 5:1ff).⁴ Paul's essential concern is that the Thessalonians remember what he said to them. The knowledge of a body of information is vital to their continued health. Indeed Paul indicates that the congregation has already been taught (1 Thess. 4:9) and that there is no need for him to repeat what they already know (cf. 5:1). Even when the Christians are already doing what they should, Paul nevertheless reminds them of the traditions which they know already. Christian communication, both in direct speech and in letters, consists of handing on a body of knowledge. Because Paul considered the ignorance of the traditions devastating for the life of the church, his letter consisted largely of the repetition of what his readers had heard already. The first obligation of the apostle vis-a-vis a community is to make the faithful remember what they have received and already know--or should know.⁵

Paul appeals to the church's traditions both in epistles which are not written in response to specific crises, as in 1 Thessalonians, and in epistles when the church faces serious new issues, as in 1 Corinthians. In both instances the formation of the community requires that the community be reminded of its heritage. Indeed, Paul states as a purpose in writing Romans that he has written "by way of reminder" (Rom. 15:15). Indeed many of the epistles, like 1 Thessalonians, serve as reminders of what the congregation knows already.⁶

⁴See Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 70-6.

⁵N. Dahl, "Memory and Commemoration," *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 15.

⁶Dahl, 16.

What was the content of the traditions which Christians were expected to know? The community's traditions involve, in the first place, a reminder of the content of the original preaching which the Christians believed at the beginning of their Christian existence (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 2:2, 5). The reference to the Thessalonians' conversion undoubtedly echoes Paul's original proclamation.⁷ His instruction on the return of Christ (4:13-18) is also probably a reminder of his early proclamation, when they were taught that they "wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). Indeed, Paul's presentation of a "word of the Lord" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 suggests that post-baptismal instruction included traditions from the words of Jesus, which were intended to guide the church in its understanding of the Christian faith.

The other epistles also indicate that the community's tradition consisted of the content of the original preaching. The importance of the community's memory of the original proclamation is especially evident in 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul confronts a community which had either abandoned or misunderstood the Christian view of the resurrection. In order to clarify the Christian understanding, Paul "reminds" the Corinthians "in what terms" he had originally preached the gospel, which they had "received" and to which they must hold fast. He employs the traditional rabbinic terminology for passing on tradition to recall that he "delivered" to the Corinthians what he had earlier "received" from his predecessors. The language suggests that Paul inherited a fixed tradition shortly after his conversion, and that the Corinthian church had learned the tradition from Paul. One may assume that Paul had taught this same tradition in all of the churches. In the absence of quotation marks, the word "that" functions to identify the precise words of the quotation:

⁷Malherbe, 60.

that Christ died for our sins
 in accordance with the Scriptures
that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day
 in accordance with the Scriptures.

The carefully-balanced words would have been appropriate for committing to memory. They formed the irreducible content of the Christian tradition, which Paul and the other apostles proclaimed (cf. 15:11). In the context of theological debates within the church, Paul appeals to the tradition, which serves as the basis for discussion because it is the common property of the whole church.

In numerous other passages in the Pauline writings, the apostle appeals to the traditions which are either the content of the gospel or the interpretation of the essential content of the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:3-4; 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:19). These traditions provide the point of orientation for the church's identity and the common property of all Christians. Because Paul had inherited the tradition from his predecessors in Jerusalem, he could assume that these traditions were authoritative for the whole church. While these traditions are known to the church already, Paul frequently appeals to them because he is certain that his communities need reminders of the content of the saving proclamation. The traditions serve as the community's reminders.

The community's traditions serve, in the second place, to provide guidance concerning different aspects of daily life. The formation of the community had only begun when the members "turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God" (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9-10). Proclamation was followed by occasions when Paul "exhorted," "encouraged," and "charged" his new converts to "lead a life worthy of God" (1 Thess. 2:12). According to 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul has already explained to his converts "how to walk and please God." In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, he indicates that "how one pleases God" involves abstaining from fornication. Inasmuch as he challenges the Thessalonians to continue "even

more" in their present conduct, one may conclude that Paul's teaching is not a response to a crisis, but moral instruction which he customarily handed on and then repeated. Similarly, in the instructions which follow, Paul proceeds to teach the community about brotherly love, and says, "You have no need to have anyone write to you" (4:9). The new Christians have already received distinct traditions involving Christian sexual morality and brotherly love.

The extent of the specific Christian moral traditions that were handed on to congregations cannot be known with certainty. From 1 Thessalonians we can ascertain that Christians received instructions on sexual morality and the brotherly love that was necessary for forming a community. In 1 Corinthians Paul appeals to traditions, not only to remind the community of its proclamation, but also to settle issues that are facing the congregation. When the Corinthians distort the Lord's Supper, Paul cites the tradition of the last supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26) and assumes that his readers already know the tradition. When Paul answers questions on divorce, he appeals to the tradition of the words of Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10). In appealing to the traditions, Paul assumes that the community recognizes that they are authoritative for the community's faith and practice.

Conclusion

The New Testament does not distinguish between tradition and the will of God, but rather between authoritative tradition and the tradition which subverts the will of God. In the formation of new churches, the missionary's task was not complete when the community responded in faith to the proclamation of Christ. In teaching the community how to please God, the apostle's work continued when he handed on traditions and continually reminded the congregations of the traditions which were normative for its life. These traditions comprised a significant body of knowledge.

If Paul held that the vitality of the church demands that it be reminded consistently of its traditions, we will do well to take

seriously the importance of the church's acquaintance with its normative traditions. While our culture places great value on what is novel and original, Paul's ministry serves as a reminder of the importance of repetition of basic traditions. To observe Paul in his task of forming a new church is to recognize the continuity between the original proclamation and the occasions when the church must be "exhorted, encouraged, and charged to lead a life worthy of God" (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13). The community's traditions comprise what every Christian should know in order to please God.

Paul provides an appropriate model for the task of every church leader in the formation of the church. The temptation of the leader is to attempt short-term answers to the problems facing the church. New and original ideas are often thought to be the key to maintaining the interest of the congregation, inasmuch as we are a society which continually looks for the new and the original in programs and educational curricula. The Pauline model is to shape a community by appealing to traditions that are well known to the community. A congregation which has heard the basic gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ does not move on to new ideas without constantly being reminded of the original proclamation. In the same way, the educational curriculum may address a variety of ideas, but it always addresses new ideas as it continues a dialogue with its tradition.



Scripture and Tradition: Two Essentials in the Search for the Ancient Order

Allan J. McNicol

What happens when principled individuals, believing that the church will be corrupted if alternative views hold sway, come to fundamental disagreements over the interpretation of the text? Is there any other option but to divide when appeals to the Bible alone fail? This problem is not entirely new in the history of Christianity--especially since the Reformation. Frequently in the past an appeal has been made to tradition (i.e., teachings, customs, and practices) in those areas of the church's life that have developed independent of being guided directly by the explicit words of Scripture.¹

The tradition is more than just a vague remembrance of a way of "doing things," or even a network of supportive structures that exist to maintain and perpetuate a fellowship. Tradition has proved to be indispensable for the existence and development of the Christian movement. Such essentials as the sequence and number of the books of the Bible, many liturgical gestures and practices in the observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, certain ways of interpreting Scripture, and the formulations of such important doctrines as the atonement, we owe to tradition.

Yet the precise relationship between Scripture and tradition is very difficult to define. This relationship between Scripture and tradition has been compared to the relationship between some married couples who have difficulty living together happily but who cannot exist apart.² Are there resources in tradition to which

¹R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 62) 7-8.

²Maurice Wiles, "The Patristic Appeal to Tradition," *Explorations in Theology* 4 (London: SCM, 1979) 45.

we can appeal when we cannot agree that something is clearly warranted or excluded by Scripture? Can tradition help us at this point?

Challenges to Tradition

The very formulation of these questions may cause many in Churches of Christ to be puzzled. For the Campbell-Stone movement, which emerged at the end of the Enlightenment era, inherited some definite ideas about tradition.

If there was one thing that was clear to the spiritual forebears of the Campbells in the Reformed Churches, it was an emphasis on the authority of Scripture, *sola scriptura*, as the only norm for the basic doctrines of the church. Traditions were the corruptions of the medieval Church. They were the modern analogue to Jesus' charges against the scribes and Pharisees for circumventing God's essential demands by their own customs and rulings (Matt. 15:6-9).

Furthermore the Enlightenment itself, in reaction to the tyranny of past traditions in politics and religion, put a premium on the power of autonomous reason as the universal standard to criticize the past. Thus, the Campbell-Stone movement placed great emphasis on the capacity of the individual fully to make his or her own judgment about the truth of the faith.

This mixture of *sola scriptura* as interpreted by each individual *apart from* the traditions of the past had been part of the Protestant heritage from the sixteenth century.³ It was intensified by the Enlightenment, and it became an essential part of the identity of the Churches of Christ. In this context appeals to tradition were highly dubious if not out of the question.

Nevertheless, the strong emphasis on *sola scriptura* in conjunction with an appeal to the absolute right of the individual to his private judgment has produced endless divisions both in the Reformed and Campbell-Stone heritages. We have discovered in

³Ralph G. Wilburn, "The Role of Tradition in the Church's Experience of Jesus as Christ," *The Reconstruction of Theology 2*, ed., R. G. Wilburn (St. Louis: Bethany, 1962) 116.

many areas that Scripture does not unmistakably bear its meaning upon the surface.⁴ There are limits to the principle of the perspicuity of Scripture. Without a community sharing a certain vision of the past and a common concept of how things ought to be (tradition) it is hard to see how in our contemporary world a faith community will hold together. Certainly not just on the principle of *sola scriptura*!

A complicating factor in the maintenance of a viable Christian community today is that any appeal to the past as normative (Scripture or tradition) has become problematic in twentieth-century Western culture. The Enlightenment program of using autonomous human reason to discover an all-encompassing rational order to the world has collapsed as the dominant cultural model in the West. There is no universal basis by which we can establish the superiority of one mode of thinking in our culture over any other. Although we may not be doomed to total relativism most things are viewed as relative.⁵ This explains why many wonder why we should look to the past for guidance at all. If we did, how could we be sure that what we found there would be permanent and true?

No longer can the Christian movement assimilate with the best of the past and expect to find ready acceptance in the West. Just as for long stretches of human history one could assume that something was true because Plato was alleged to have said it,⁶ so for centuries, Christianity considered something as true if it could be found in the Bible or early tradition. Today, Christians face a society that seeks to discover its possibilities not from the past but on the basis of what it perceives to be the future.⁷ Many, even

⁴Wiles, 44.

⁵F. W. Norris, "Apostolic, Catholic, and Sensible: The Consensus Fidelium," *Essays on New Testament Christianity*, ed., C. Robert Wetzel (Cincinnati: Standard, 1978) 27.

⁶Wiles, 50.

⁷R. Bauckham, "Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason," *Scripture Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine*, eds., R. Bauckham and B. Drewery (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1988) 134-139. As Bauckham notes

within the church, in such areas as the role of women, sexual mores, and our relationship to nature, claim to find the basis for their views not in resources drawn from the past but in future possibility.

However, we have just noted that no particular era is privileged, including the modern secular period. In our society various communities maintain strong continuity with the past. Despite changes and permutations, the Churches of Christ continue to maintain a sense of identity as a continuing tradition. Jaroslav Pelikan has registered,

Tradition is the living faith of the dead;
traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.⁸

We trust, in our case, the former is true. If so, we will continue to look to the past to find resources looking both to our own heritage and beyond to the Scripture and ancient tradition to enable us to engage creatively the challenges that emerge in our own time. In order to do this we must have an appropriate understanding of what are the resources that we can draw from the past, and this includes a defensible understanding of the function of Scripture and tradition for the life of the church.

In this essay we wish to address what we have identified as a basic problem of the Campbell-Stone heritage. How can we remain in unity, even when we disagree on particulars in reading

saliently, in our modern pluralistic society, with its basic assumption that all serious discourse must be cast in a secular mode, a case can be made that Christians are not so much another variant form of pluralism, but an anachronistic survival of something much earlier. Many (including this author) today celebrate our minority status in the West and declare solidarity with the Pre-Constantinian period of the Church. But Bauckham rightly reminds us that there is a major difference. The people of Rome in the earlier period venerated the past and found its models and norms in antiquity. Christianity could easily capitalize on this propensity by appealing to its own sacred events in the past. The modern secular era does not. How will this affect a modern apologetic?

⁸Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale, 1984) 65.

the Bible?⁹ Already we have intimated that this problem cannot be solved until we draw on the resources of both Scripture and tradition. The goal of this essay is to give a coherent explanation of the role of these entities, especially for the life of Churches of Christ.

Our basic argument will be that Scripture is normative for the church because it is the codification of the apostolic witness to the life and impact of Jesus Christ. Tradition functions in historic Christianity as a depository of the common mind as to interpretation of Scripture and practice of the Christian faith to which later Christians may appeal.

First, we will examine and briefly criticize three ways Scripture and tradition have historically been related. Second, we will set forth our own assessment of how an adequate relationship between Scripture and tradition was forged in the second century and how this may serve as a model for the church today. Third, we will argue that this proposal is more adequate than earlier models of Scripture and tradition. We will conclude by noting how this proposal can help Churches of Christ maintain unity as a fellowship even though we may not all agree on exactly what the Bible says.

Paradoxically, as a fellowship which has severely criticized tradition, Churches of Christ depend heavily on tradition. At least most historic Protestant communities are bound together confessionally through acceptance of the creeds of the patristic era and certain post-Reformation confessions. As a non-creedal communion, without a clear understanding of being a theological tradition, it is difficult to see what, besides customs and practices (tradition), holds Churches of Christ together.

⁹We presume that the old formula, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity," is outmoded because it begs many important questions, such as the determination of what is essential and what is non-essential.

Three Visions of Tradition¹⁰

The Coincidence View

A prominent view of tradition holding from the time of Irenaeus (circa 175-200 A.D.) until the mid-fifth century was the coincidence view. This view makes no distinction between the Scriptures and the oral presentation and transmission, in custom and practice, of the apostolic message. Materially, the two are locked together as a total statement of the way of salvation.¹¹

For Irenaeus and his successors there was a second important coincidence. The teachings of the bishops in those churches founded by the apostles coincided with the teaching of the apostles. Thus the bishops were, effectively, the true keepers and interpreters of the apostolic message.

The view that the truth of the faith coincides and corresponds with the teaching of a continuing line of bishops has had great appeal throughout Christian history. However, it is plagued with serious historical and theological inconsistencies. Already with the banishment of the Jews from Jerusalem by Hadrian in 135 A.D., the Jerusalem church had to be refounded under Gentile leadership. Similar historical disruptions have taken place in all churches founded by the apostles. Major theological changes wherein past beliefs were repudiated have been even more frequent.

Such a view also identifies the work of the Holy Spirit too closely with the emergence of a certain kind of leadership and decisions in certain restricted councils. How can we be sure that these men always spoke the truth and that the patristic proclamations coincided with the apostolic message? And since there are at least three competing groups who claim to be the legitimate heirs

¹⁰The terminology for these views comes from the influential article of A. N. S. Lane, "Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey," *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975) 37-55.

¹¹Bauckham, 119.

of this tradition (Rome, Canterbury, Eastern Orthodoxy) which is the one that is most loyal to apostolic teaching?

The Supplementary View

This view has had major currency in Western Christianity (especially the Roman Catholic Church) since the fourth century. The essence of this view is that Christians owe equal allegiance both to the New Testament and to the constant developing body of tradition that emerged in the church. Scripture and tradition were two distinct sources of revelation.¹² As a logical extension of the coincidence view, by the high Middle Ages, some claimed that the teaching office of the church (magisterium), through the instrumentalities of tradition and Spirit, was empowered to interpret and supplement the revelation of God in Scripture. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and especially since Newman (1845-1890), tradition, in these circles, was viewed as an unfolding in various and distinct forms of what was implicit in the original revelation. In effect, this has allowed for ideas such as the perpetual virginity of Mary and her bodily assumption into heaven to become church dogma. In order to determine how later changing doctrine is true to implicit ideas in Scripture, the magisterium took on stronger powers and basic pronouncements of the bishop of Rome were declared infallible.

A critique similar to that which was made of the coincidence view may also apply to the supplementary view. Setting aside issues concerning the personal conduct of church leaders in history, it is questionable that the hierarchical structure of later Catholicism is a valid continuation of the servant ministry of Christ and the apostles. When does doctrinal development cease and perversion begin?

¹²H. A. Obermann, 'Quo Vadis? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Genesis,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16 (1963) 232-247.

The Ancillary View

Following the Reformation, a new perspective on Scripture was set forth in Western Christianity. The Reformers believed that the church had become corrupt. They could no longer believe the claims made on the basis of tradition by the medieval Church. Many human corruptions and flaws had become intermingled with the tradition. It needed to be purged.

The Reformers found their basic standards for assessing what was normative in *sola scriptura*. The Scripture was deemed both formally and materially sufficient to give guidance for the contemporary faith community. In its essence, all of tradition must be ancillary to the norm of Scripture. Tradition was just a tool to help the church understand Scripture.¹³

The tragedy of the Reformation was that interpreters could not find in Scripture clear answers to their doctrinal problems. Since authoritative tradition had been eclipsed, a crisis of authority arose. The result was that new confessions and creeds emerged in post-Reformation Christianity both to serve as vantage points for privileged interpretations of the text and to supply a rationale for the existence of separate fellowships.¹⁴

It is one thing to claim that Scripture is sufficient as the norm for the pure doctrine of the church. It is quite another thing to have a multitude of versions of that pure doctrine--all with adherents who claim they will not associate with others not holding the same point of view. To be honest, this was a central legacy of the Reformation. The children of the Campbell-Stone movement continue to have to deal with this situation.

Thus, the long history of the church bequeaths to us the dilemma of tradition. Are we to give ourselves over to a view that places Scripture and tradition on the same level but demands a teaching office (which history reveals is flawed) to mediate to us the

¹³Bauckham, 122-123; Lane, 43.

¹⁴Albert Outler, *The Christian Tradition and the Unity We Seek* (New York: Oxford, 1957) 91.

truth? Or do we go back to an infallible book which history reveals cannot be fully agreed upon? The choice is difficult. Is there an alternative to these ways of construing Scripture and tradition?

As a way of looking for alternatives we will now study how this issue was originally formulated in the ancient church.

Scripture and Tradition in the Ancient Church

From its beginning, the story of the events which took place in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and the impact they made on the circle of followers around him, could be thought of as inaugurating a tradition. This tradition included the basic facts of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-5), words of Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15; 1 Cor. 7:10; 9-14; 11:23-25), and rules concerning conduct and practice that were appropriate for the faith (2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2; Rom. 6:17; Phil. 1:9; 2:6-7).¹⁵ Thus the proclamation of the gospel was much more than just the recitation of a few basic facts.

When Paul preached, he gave enough information about Jesus' life and mission that people could grasp intelligibly the claim that he was the fulfillment of traditional hopes for a sacrificial leader of the new Israel (the Christ who died for their sins) and that as a result of Jesus' life their lives could be transformed.

In the Gospel of John the net is spread even wider. Jesus could only be appropriately received when he was understood as the eternal Word of God, who became flesh, and in his concrete life made known the will of God. Other biblical writers (Matthew, Luke, author of Hebrews) assume similar frameworks for understanding the gospel.

Thus, from the beginning, the gospel was part of a process of tradition; it offered a peculiar way of looking at the world that invoked in the lives of the hearers both a new insight into reality and a transformation of their existence.

¹⁵F. F. Bruce, "Scripture and Tradition in the New Testament," *Holy Book and Holy Tradition*, eds., F. F. Bruce and E. G. Rupp (Manchester: Manchester University, 1968) 68-69.

About 200 A.D. most of the apostolic writings, as a collection, came to be called the New Testament. But even if they were the expression, par excellence, of the apostolic tradition, this did not mean that the continuance of additional living tradition was vitiated by their acceptance.

Papias (125-140) referred to this tradition as "a living and abiding voice." In the late second and third centuries such writers as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus attempted to formulate this tradition into extensive summaries that often went by the Latin title *regula fidei* (rule of faith).¹⁶ These summaries were thought to constitute the essential core of the tradition.

Nevertheless, there was a basic development in the understanding of tradition in the second century that was to prove to be a matter of fundamental significance for the history of the church. It pertains to the fact that the written apostolic legacy soon took on a life of its own.

In the first half of the second century the letters of Paul and the four Gospels were put into collections and began to be read in churches as the sequel to readings from the Law and the Prophets. Increasingly, as a result of their hallowed use in worship and as a basis for teaching, these writings were given a certain theological priority. Thus, by the end of the second century, the heritage of the apostles was found not in one entity but two: Scripture and tradition.

The issue now became that of the appropriate relationship between these two distinct entities. In matters of practice, which is normative and on what basis does one appeal to each of these distinct entities?

The Gnostic Issue

The Gnostic question brought these issues to the surface. At stake here were not only matters of antiquarian interest. Because

¹⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1:2; 3:4:1; 4:53:1; Tertullian, *Basic Objections [Praescriptio] Against Heretics* 13:1-6; Hippolytus, *Against Noetues* 17-18; cf. Hanson, 75-130 for translations of the texts and a full discussion.

of the way the issues were formed, precedents were set that would affect theological discussion for all time.

At the heart of the controversy were the claims of some Gnostic leaders in the church that they had received divine revelation esoterically from certain chains of witnesses who went back to such close associates of the risen Christ as Thomas (whom some claimed to be Jesus' twin brother), James, another brother of Jesus, and even Mary Magdalene. As recipients of the word of the risen Lord, the Gnostic leaders were convinced that they had a firm and unshakable warrant for their beliefs.

Of course, on the other hand, the mainstream of the church was just as convinced that Christianity stood or fell on the belief that the flesh-and-blood Son of God died on the cross for our sins and was raised bodily from the dead. Which teachers were correct? To what authority could one appeal to settle this issue?

To appeal to tradition was unsatisfactory. Both groups had very different understandings of its form, content, and process. Although they agreed that ultimately their traditions came from the same source, all they could do was to compare the merits of these different perspectives.

It was not entirely satisfactory to appeal directly to the Scriptures. The Gnostics said that they did accept the New Testament writings (especially John) as apostolic. They sought authoritative guidance from Scripture; they just read it differently. Both parties soon discovered that they were perfectly capable of finding their own particular agendas in the text. Thus the appeal to tradition alone, or Scripture alone, faltered as the basic norm for the church.

The response of the majority of believers was to adopt a version of the importance of *both* Scripture and tradition. Their crucial move, as opposed to the Gnostics, who placed great emphasis on the secret transmission of the mysteries of the faith, was an appeal to the public and open nature of the appearance of the Son of God and a similar open transmission of the tradition about him.¹⁷ The word was made flesh and appeared visibly

¹⁷Wiles, 45.

among us for all to see. The list of bishops who taught openly in the various churches founded by the apostles was something potentially all could investigate. The rule of faith was arrived at through open reading and study by leaders and prominent interpreters in the church.

The Common Mind

Here is a clue to understanding the relationship of Scripture and tradition in a manner helpful for us today. As with the second-century church, we would affirm that the New Testament constitutes the basic codification of the apostolic message. Cullmann is correct when he argues that the second-century church, *by its very action* of placing these writings in a *collection* for use in worship and teaching, established the principle that all subsequent developments of the tradition must be submitted to the control of Scripture.¹⁸ There *is* a qualitative difference between the message of the apostles and the teaching of the bishops.

Yet, Scripture is of little help unless it can be normatively interpreted. Here the principle that the authoritative message of Scripture is found through an appeal to the common mind of the church, arrived at through open and public discussion among a broad spectrum of respected leaders and interpreters, is crucial. This principle excluded the Gnostics. It also placed Scripture and tradition in proper perspective. Scripture was the codification of the apostolic message. Tradition was that body of practices and interpretation of Scripture, informed by the rule of faith (itself drawn from Scripture), that served as the basic depository of the common mind of the church as to how it should understand the apostolic witness.

To be sure, the intent of Irenaeus and his successors to go farther and create an unbroken line of bishops as the guarantor of the common mind of the church was a colossal mistake. Even in

¹⁸Oscar Cullmann, "The Tradition," *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed., A. J. B. Higgins (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 90.

his day it was a historical fiction that strained credibility. It is an impossible position for any modern person who has studied history critically.¹⁹ One of its tragic legacies was that it marked a fundamental step along the way toward the dominance of the bishop of Rome.

But, as Wiles points out, although Irenaeus was wrong materially in framing his lists of bishops, formally, his appeal to the understanding of tradition as the common mind of the church was basically sound.²⁰

Scripture, Tradition, and the Churches of Christ

Unfortunately, the promising model of Scripture and tradition that emerged at the end of the second century was replaced by others in the successive centuries of the history of the church. However, the appeal to the common mind of the church, as a model for tradition, is both superior to the other prominent models and is compatible with theological argumentation frequently carried on within Churches of Christ.

The Appeal to the Common Mind of the Church and Later Models of Tradition

The common-mind view is very different from the supplementary view. The former takes the position that it was the decision of the church to subordinate itself to Scripture as the only normative account of God's revelation in history. It thus continues to stress that the time and events of salvation history have absolute priority. The latter argues either flatly that revelation can be supplemented by tradition or equivocally claims that Scripture and tradition are two sources of revelation. In either case the finality

¹⁹A. J. McNicol, "A Hierarchy or Mere Functional Leadership," *ICS Faculty Bulletin* 7 (1986) 40-47 traces the dubious arguments made on behalf of this position in the Western medieval Church.

²⁰Wiles, 46.

of the time and account of salvation history in Scripture is compromised.

With respect to the ancillary view, the principle of *sola scriptura* makes it very attractive. Likewise, the view that tradition is a tool that helps us interpret Scripture is plausible. Nevertheless, as it has worked out in practice, the ancillary view has opened a Pandora's box of private interpretations of Scripture, which, in turn have legitimized a plethora of distortions and sectarian divisions within historic Christianity. That is its fundamental flaw. Conversely, the appeal to the common mind of the church calls for more intensity in ecumenical endeavor and, in principle, curbs the emphasis that has been placed in some circles on eccentric and privileged interpretations.

The common-mind-of-the-church position both materially and formally comes close to the coincidence view of tradition. Indeed the slogan of the fifth-century leader, Vincentius of Lerinum, "what was believed everywhere, always, by everyone," although a classical statement of the coincidence view, sounds very much like the common-mind position. But, as we have noted, appeals like those of Vincent were not to the common mind of great interpreters and consecrated leaders but to lists of bishops and decisions of certain councils, who took it upon themselves to define the material content of the tradition. Our model appeals to the common mind of the church catholic, not to one or another of the various traditions which claim infallibility. The total sum of all wisdom does not rest in one segment of the patristic church any more than it does in the modern church.

The Common Mind of the Church and Churches of Christ

As a movement that sought to proclaim the gospel in its total purity and to restore the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) to their appropriate role as places where the divine benefits are mediated, the Campbell-Stone heritage has a major stake in a view of tradition that appeals to the common mind of the church. Indeed, if this movement is ever to become anything more than

just another footnote in the history of sectarianism it had better take note of how its best interpreters have incorporated this vision of tradition into their exegesis.

Thus, when Alexander Campbell set out to defend the practice of believer's baptism for the remission of sins, he repeatedly sought to justify the various aspects of the procedure and meaning of baptism by making appeals, not only to Scripture, but also to the works of prominent teachers of the church throughout history.²¹

Many other examples of this argumentation could be given. A pertinent modern example is the work of Everett Ferguson who seeks to make the case for *a cappella* music in the church on the grounds that vocal singing has been universally approved as the acceptable form of music for Christian worship.²² Ferguson makes a lengthy appeal to the common mind of the great teachers of the church universal in support of this position.²³

In an important article that comes out of the Campbell-Stone movement, Frederick Norris states:

If our movement actually is not concerned with Scripture as the apostolic witness to the creative period of Christianity, if it does not search for the catholic interpretation of Scripture offered by qualified interpreters of each age, . . . then I must go elsewhere.²⁴

²¹A. Campbell, *Christian Baptism with its Antecedents and Consequents* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company 1951 reprint; original edition N. D.). Note especially pp. 209-210 where he gives lengthy quotes on the purpose of baptism from Luther and Calvin, cf. F. D. Kershner, *The Christian Union Overture: An Interpretation of the Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1923) 44-45, who traces the appeal to a common mind to Thomas Campbell.

²²E. Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, revised edition (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research, 1972).

²³Ferguson, 47-83.

²⁴Norris, 27.

We concur with his point. Without an understanding of Scripture as the codification of the apostolic witness, and a view of tradition as the depository of the common mind of the church in matters of practice and interpretation of Scripture, Churches of Christ will be doomed to a legacy of continued fragmentation.

Conclusion

The focus of this essay has been an analysis of the role of tradition in the historic Christian faith. We have noted not only past controversies, but have also endeavored to call to attention the challenge of many in the modern era who seek to invalidate any appeal to the past as normative.

As a restorationist fellowship, the Churches of Christ have a considerable stake in developing a coherent view of tradition. We must appeal to the past as setting the basic patterns and precedents for our faith. But some ways are more effective than others. Churches of Christ should be more conversant with the different approaches in Christian history toward tradition. There is a need to reclaim that view of tradition which is most congruent with our fellowship: the appeal to the common mind of the church. It will only be after careful and consistent application of this principle that we will have any chance of stopping the movement towards fragmentation besetting Churches of Christ. We trust that this essay will make a small contribution in the direction of clearer thinking on these matters.



Both Catholic and Protestant: Alexander Campbell and Tradition

Gary N. Holloway

What was Alexander Campbell's attitude toward tradition? This question must be answered if Campbell is to be brought into current discussions of faith and practice in Churches of Christ. However, to use Campbell's thought as our model creates many difficulties. For one, he probably would not approve. On many occasions he protested that he was not founding a new sect, but simply teaching the common faith believed by all Christians, the faith found in the New Testament.

To follow Campbell also tempts us to commit the "great man" fallacy of historical assessment, the mistake of reducing complex events or structures, such as a religious movement, to simple reflections of one significant leader. But just as one cannot explain Lutheranism by looking solely at Luther, or Presbyterianism by Calvin, so Churches of Christ cannot be explained merely by quoting Campbell.

A third difficulty is that Campbell, like Luther and John Wesley, wrote so much. For over 40 years he edited a monthly religious paper, most of which he wrote himself. Adding to this his sermons, lectures, debates, and other writings produces a significant body of material written over a long period of time. It is difficult then to say with finality what Campbell's position was on any subject. Through the years he wrote under many different circumstances and (like all good scholars) changed his mind on many matters.

With these caveats in mind, this paper will attempt to synthesize Campbell's thought on historical Christian traditions. Four terms he used are particularly important: "creeds," "tradition," "theology," and "catholic." Campbell can have a significant,

though not a final role in determining how we view these terms today.

Campbell as an Opponent of Theological Tradition

Alexander Campbell was an iconoclast who wanted to cut away all the underbrush of religious traditions so that the "pure gospel" would shine through. He contrasted "human traditions" (which he identified with theological systems) with the apostles' traditions that are found in the New Testament. Typical of Campbell's writing on tradition is the following:

Let human philosophy and human tradition, as any part of the Christian institution, be thrown overboard into the sea, and then the ship of the church will make a prosperous, safe, and happy voyage across the ocean of time, and finally, under the triumphant flag of Immanuel, gain a safe anchorage in the haven of eternal rest.¹

Why did Alexander Campbell object so strongly to theological tradition? Partially because he saw it as unnecessary, contradictory, and divisive. However, his primary objection was that tradition was not a sure guide in religious matters. The genius of Campbell's restoration was that it gave a sure basis for faith and practice. Any reasonable person, thought Campbell, could agree on the plain teachings of Scripture. If those teachings alone were followed, the purity and unity of the primitive church would be restored. Theological tradition, however, was mere human speculation on the teachings of Scripture. As such, it shared in human sinfulness and thus was an unsure guide. Campbell called tradition "doubtful and dangerous," and "a commingling of truth and error" that "could not serve as a firm basis for a divine faith."²

¹*The Christian System*, (Bethany: A. Campbell, 1839) 105-106.

²*Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 19; (1843), 35.

Campbell was particularly incensed by creeds as embodiments of theological tradition. Again, he objected that they were dangerous speculation and were divisive:

All creeds are mere theories of Christian doctrine, discipline, and government exhibited as a basis of church union. Being speculative, they have always proved themselves to be "apples of discord," or "roots of bitterness," amongst the Christian profession.³

If creeds could be accepted for what they are, mere human summaries of Scripture, then fine and good. But when creeds become authoritative and are used as tests of fellowship, they take the place of the Bible, which is the only sure guide in religion.

Interestingly, Campbell believed his new version of the Bible, the Living Oracles, would curb the use of speculative theology and creeds by restoring "a more evangelical diction." By calling things by Bible names and not by theological terms, creeds with their "heathenish terminology" would be supplanted.⁴

Campbell also had no use for "theology" as an academic discipline. When proposing the establishment of Bethany College, he said plainly, "We want no scholastic or traditional theology."⁵ This wish was formalized in the final section of the college charter:

And be it further enacted, that nothing herein contained shall be so construed as at any time to authorize the establishment of a Theological Professorship in the said College.⁶

³*Millennial Harbinger* (1847), 485.

⁴*Millennial Harbinger* (1854), 368.

⁵*Millennial Harbinger* (1839), 448.

⁶*Millennial Harbinger* (1840), 179. See also *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1863) 485-491.

Campbell was most proud that Bethany College was not a "theological school," but "the only College known to us in the civilized world, founded on the Bible."⁷ His objection to theology was the same as his disgust with tradition and creeds: theology was human speculation, not divine revelation. All that was needed was the Bible.

Campbell's opposition to the term "theology" had a lasting impact. In 1933, when A.T. DeGroot compiled the first book-length bibliography of Disciple literature, he could not find a single volume that professed to be a systematic theology.⁸ That situation has changed among the Disciples; but even today, to my knowledge, no member of the Churches of Christ has written a systematic theology. Church periodicals and schools still by and large take great pains to avoid the term.

From the information cited above, one would be justified in seeing Campbell as a thorough-going iconoclast. His method was to cut down traditional theological systems root and branch, so that the true gospel could flower. One following in his footsteps today would be expected to fight all religious tradition, even (or especially) Church of Christ traditions, in order for the truth of God in Scripture to triumph. However, this view of Campbell is both a one-sided and a short-sighted one. Though Campbell had a reputation as an iconoclast, he actually built a religious movement that survived with its own traditions. He also was not always critical of tradition, creeds, and theology, but at times had surprisingly good words to say about all three.

Campbell as a Defender of Theological Tradition

Even though Alexander Campbell was a strong critic of "Protestant orthodoxy," he thought of himself as a Protestant in the tradition of the historic reformers Luther and Calvin. On many

⁷*Millennial Harbinger* (1850), 291.

⁸A. T. DeGroot, *Disciple Thought: A History* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1965), 22.

occasions he called himself a Protestant.⁹ He said clearly there were Christians in the Protestant sects.¹⁰ He called his own movement a "reformation" and compared it to the Protestant Reformation, even calling Luther and Calvin "God's chosen vessels."¹¹ After an extensive examination of Campbell's writings, Richard L. Harrison, Jr. concludes, "For Campbell, the Protestant tradition held a position of authority second only to scripture."¹²

Indeed, at one point Campbell even chided his followers for their objections to joining Protestants in supporting the interdenominational Sunday School union. He warned, "Our greatest error, Protestants themselves being judges, is that we are too Protestant in our aversions to the doctrines and commandments of men."¹³ Campbell realized that the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* could be taken too far. Just because an organization such as the Sunday School Union is not found in the Bible does not mean it is necessarily to be avoided. By making this admission, Campbell shows much more balance on the topic of "speaking where the Bible speaks" than have some of his spiritual descendants.

But how does such a positive view of Protestantism square with Campbell's strong condemnations of tradition, including Protestant tradition? One could simply admit that Campbell was inconsistent in his statements as anyone might be who wrote so extensively. However, many times Campbell has both positive and negative statements about tradition in the same document. Surely as careful a thinker as he would not be so obviously self-contradictory. One could see his opposing views on Protestantism as development in his thought, perhaps as another example of the

⁹For example, see *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, 309.

¹⁰*Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 411.

¹¹*Campbell-Rice Debate*, 587.

¹²Richard L. Harrison, Jr. "Alexander Campbell on Luther and the Reformation," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 19 (October 1984), 124.

¹³*Millennial Harbinger* (1847), 201.

early iconoclastic Campbell versus the later irenic reformer. However, both his praise for and his criticism of Protestantism occur throughout his career.

So how does one account for this apparent contradiction? One can do so only by taking seriously Campbell's contention that his protests were not against the Protestant tradition itself, but against Protestantism's "degeneracy from the standard of Christian excellence."¹⁴ As Harrison says:

The few references in which Campbell tried to establish some distance between himself and the reformers were always in the context of his affirming the ultimate authority of scripture and the necessity for the church to look to the Bible and to tradition for guidance. This is reinforced in his praise of the Biblicism of the reformers and his claim to be in continuity with Luther and Calvin.¹⁵

Harrison's conclusion may be hard to accept in light of the vehemence of Campbell's language against tradition. However, Campbell's strong language may be viewed as rhetoric, that is, language used to persuade. In struggling against the abuses of Protestantism, Campbell employed language that sounded as if he wished to destroy it. Such was not the case. Such language was simply the noise of battle, as Campbell himself makes clear by his positive assessments of the Protestant faith. In spite of Campbell's rhetoric, we are forced to agree with Harrison: "The Stone-Campbell movement is surely a part of and in continuity with the Protestant heritage."¹⁶

Campbell could even acknowledge the value of traditions preceding Protestantism. On many occasions, Campbell claimed

¹⁴*Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 319.

¹⁵Harrison, 149.

¹⁶Harrison, 149.

that he and his movement were "catholic."¹⁷ By this he meant not Roman Catholic but that he and his followers believed only what "is universally admitted by all denominations."¹⁸ What is universally believed by all Christians at all times in all places is the essence of catholicity. However, Campbell opposed the Roman Catholic Church precisely because it was not catholic but had its own peculiar teachings. He even argued that "Protestantism must purify itself from Popery" on "broad catholic and evangelical principles."¹⁹ By using the word "catholic" in this way, he places himself squarely in the stream of the larger Christian tradition.

In spite of his opposition to Roman Catholic tradition, Campbell could quote the church fathers when it suited his purpose to do so. For example, in *The Christian System* he gives extensive quotations from patristic sources on baptism.²⁰ In a later article he ridicules the Roman Catholic view that "the unanimous consent of the Fathers" was as authoritative as Scripture, since the fathers contradict each other. He goes on to say:

If there be any consent at all among the Fathers, it is in recommending upon all, and to all, the necessity, utility, and importance of reading the sacred Scriptures, as the true and only faithful source of faith and morals.²¹

Campbell follows this statement with several pages of quotations from Clement, Polycarp, Tertullian, Basil, Cyril, Chrysostom, Athanasius, and Augustine on the authority of the Bible.

¹⁷*Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 112; (1839), 212; (1847), 7; (1851), 522. Three times in *The Declaration and Address*, Thomas Campbell used the term "catholic" to describe his proposals for the church.

¹⁸*Millennial Harbinger* (1850), 292.

¹⁹*Millennial Harbinger* (1853), 564.

²⁰*The Christian System*, 189-196.

²¹*Millennial Harbinger* (1837), 20.

These quotations make it clear that Campbell knew the work of the church fathers and found their work helpful. He was not therefore opposed to "catholic" tradition. What he opposed was placing patristic teaching on the same authoritative level as the Bible. One must remember that the Catholic Church of his day was strongly Tridentine in its theology and certainly did place tradition on a par with Scripture.

Amazingly, Campbell even commended one of the historic Christian creeds. In all his criticism of creeds, he makes an exception for one, the Apostles' Creed. In 1832, Campbell quoted the creed and said, "I believe every word of it." Why this exception? Campbell claimed that the Apostles' Creed, while not written by the apostles, is not a collection of human opinions, but "a brief narrative of all the great gospel facts; . . . the Apostles' doctrine authorizes every proposition, or statement of fact, in this creed."²²

Fourteen years later, after years of rhetoric against creeds, he says, "We never objected to a creed properly so called. We have a creed--an apostolic creed. A luminous, comprehensive, soul-stirring creed . . ."²³ He then quotes the Apostles' Creed, which he interestingly traces back not to the first century, but to the third. However, Campbell is not content to leave the creed in its historical form. To the sixteen "facts" of the creed he adds nine others, including baptism for the remission of sins, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, and contributions for Christian purposes. These twenty-five articles of belief, he calls "the materials of Christian faith, piety and humanity."

So Campbell, the great foe of creeds, wrote a creed himself. It is particularly significant that the items he added to the Apostles' Creed--his views on baptism and the Lord's Supper--became the teachings that gave a peculiar identity to his later followers, particularly in Churches of Christ. Campbell's use of the creed is not inconsistent with his attacks on creedalism. As with Protestant

²²*Millennial Harbinger* (1832), 602-603.

²³*Millennial Harbinger* (1856), 701.

and Catholic tradition, he objected to creeds only when they claim equal authority with Scripture.

Campbell's faith in the Apostles' Creed, with his appended nine articles, does raise questions about the consistency of his view on biblical interpretation. If everyone can understand the Bible alike upon reading it as if for the first time, then why is there a need for summaries of the Bible such as Campbell's extended Apostles' Creed? Is not Campbell here admitting the need for a broad "catholic" tradition in interpreting Scripture? This does not place tradition on the same level as the Bible, but it does value the role of tradition in deciding what "gospel facts" are most significant.

Finally, Campbell could even use the term "theology" in a positive way. In *The Christian System*, he quotes with approval Luther's "favorite maxim": "One well acquainted with the scriptures makes a good theologian."²⁴ Although he usually disapproved of the term, Campbell was beyond a doubt a theologian himself. His quotation from Luther shows again that his quarrel was not with a biblically based theology but with speculative, authoritative theological systems that placed themselves above or alongside the Bible.

Conclusion

Alexander Campbell was a child of tradition. It has almost become a cliché to point out that Campbell's anti-traditionalism was itself part of a long tradition of iconoclasm going back to the Reformation. This essay has argued that Campbell was much more positive about the role of tradition, particularly the Protestant view of tradition, than he has been portrayed to be by some. True, Campbell had a strong rhetoric against tradition, creeds, and theology. But that is what it is--strong rhetoric used to fight abuses and apostasies in Protestantism. To expand his own

²⁴*The Christian System*, 263.

statement on creeds, Campbell never objected to tradition "properly so-called," but only to traditionalism, to granting authority to tradition above Scripture.



A Tradition At Risk*

Michael R. Weed

But we shall surely never learn where we ought to be going or how we ought to get there if we do not learn how we have come to be where we are.

Jeffrey Stout

I have been asked to address two questions: Are we (Restoration Movement/Churches of Christ) a theological tradition? What is our present situation? I have attempted to frame an argument which I think both has some plausibility, and may also be fruitful for discussion purposes. At the outset I confess to using and conflating sociological, theological, and historical categories.

Tradition

Unlike nonsentient objects and other animal forms, humans not only exist in history but exist historically; humans are uniquely constituted by an awareness of existing in time. Human existence is marked by the experience of change and by the manner in which one relates both to past and to future. As historical beings, humans both experience history and make history.

Tradition is an inescapable and necessary structural entailment of human existence as historical existence. Tradition designates aspects of continuity with the human past which survive the process of change. Tradition is the continuation of the human past in the present. Tradition is necessary for human identity to survive the flux of change.

*This paper was presented at a conference on "The Church and the Postmodern World" held at the Disciples Historical Society in Nashville in July of 1991.

It is customary and helpful for analytic purposes to distinguish between *traditum* and *traditio*; the former designates the content of beliefs or wisdom passed down while the latter designates the means of maintaining and transmitting *traditum* (e.g., rites, procedures, institutions, etc.). Obviously the distinction is not absolute. Not only do means of transmission tend to become "traditional" and thus become included in *traditum*; means of transmission may otherwise alter the content itself (a fact not insignificant for reflection on theological traditions).

In an inclusive sense, however, tradition not only links us with our own individual pasts; it locates us within transpersonal realities and relationships which precede and shape our individual histories. Tradition also links us to communities of others whose individual lives are located within and receive their identity from the same traditions. Tradition thus locates us within structures of historical existence (e.g., language) which not only link past and present but also significantly determine the future.

In providing continuity with the past, however, tradition is not antithetical to human freedom. Tradition provides us with a depth and breadth of accumulated wisdom from the past with which we may meet and shape the in-breaking future.

Theological Traditions

Tradition lies at the heart of the Christian faith. The Christian movement not only develops traditions as it exists in time, but it is founded on an authoritative body of tradition (1 Cor. 15:3). The early church understood itself as called to transmit faithfully the received traditions (2 Thess. 2:15). These apparently included both dominical and apostolic sayings and instructions dealing with morality (1 Thess. 4:1f.) and even church order (1 Cor. 14:33). The charge to "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions" itself gives rise to traditions for doing just this. Clearly this process is one in which *traditum* and *traditio* converge in the life of the early church. In fact, through the apostolic office and the Holy Spirit, the resurrected Lord is viewed as responsible for the transmission

of the tradition (*paradosis*).¹ The principle of canon only further strengthens (and complicates) this process by separating apostolic tradition from ecclesiastical tradition which, while capable of illustrating and even illuminating the former, is ultimately subordinate to Scripture as both norm and guide.

Christian theological traditions emerge as the Christian movement exists in time and pursues the theological task. That task is, in the first instance, disciplined reflection on the Christian faith by the faithful with a view toward comprehension, clarity, and faithfulness. Nor is this task pursued in a vacuum; the terms, concepts, and methods employed in theological reflection are taken not only from Scripture but also from the surrounding society and culture in which the church is embedded. And theology pursues its task in part by bringing the historic faith into conjunction with challenges (dogmatic and pastoral) arising out of the church's life in particular historical situations. In this struggle for both fidelity and intelligibility, over generations, theological formulations (confessions, creeds, metaphors, images, practices, etc.) and processes of transmission develop, interact, and are refined and enriched.

A Christian theological tradition may be defined as a distinct body of beliefs, creedal formulae, rites, images, and practices (e.g., liturgical, institutional, ethical) which has been developed and transmitted over an extended period of time. In a qualified sense, each theological tradition is a particular "arrangement of the theological furniture" (i.e., *traditum* and *traditio*) which has proven itself capable of surviving.

Understanding and Assessing Theological Traditions

Theoretically, representatives of a theological tradition would be those who are fundamentally and consciously shaped by a particular theological tradition in forming their own beliefs and

¹Oscar Cullmann, "The Tradition: The Exegetical, Historical and Theological Problem," *The Early Church* (London: SCM, 1956) 73. Cullmann's classic article is still instructive on this issue.

practices. They may also be assumed to be committed to the transmission of the received traditions. Although broad distinctions are possible (e.g., Roman Catholic and Protestant), in practice it may become quite difficult to identify precise contours and boundaries of many contemporary American representatives of the Christian tradition(s), much less comprehend their internal dynamics.

Accordingly, the task of adequately understanding and assessing theological traditions poses numerous methodological difficulties. Among the most common errors appear to be various reductionist tendencies. These no doubt arise in part out of difficulties in locating adequate sources. In this regard the "great man" theory of history and various intellectualist approaches should be avoided. A theological tradition cannot be explained solely on the basis of the insights and personality of a single individual and it is reductionistic to explain longstanding traditions (theological, intellectual, etc.) on such grounds.²

Further, treating a religious tradition simply as an intellectual tradition may be seriously misleading. One must not only "listen to the soloists but also to the chorus."³ Reconstruction drawing simply on written and/or intellectual sources may construct a drastic distortion of the actual spirit and practice of a tradition (e.g., the student-archaeologist assuming ancients employed themselves breaking pottery). Not infrequently theological traditions demonstrate considerable variance between the voices of official spokespersons and laypersons, and between dogma, practice, and piety. And, although lay practice and piety are difficult to study, they are not irrelevant in discussing theological traditions.

A somewhat different version of reductionism is that of "morphological" comparisons. While it may be useful to compare structural or organizational components of traditions--and perhaps

²To understand Augustine is not to explain either the lasting effect or the attractiveness of Augustinianism; nor can understanding Augustine be equated with understanding the mind of a sixth-century Augustinian (much less that of a sixteenth-century Augustinian).

³See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale, 1984) 17.

inviting to do so given the difficulty posed by the less tangible components--it may also be seriously misleading. Structural parallels do not necessarily indicate common origins or common functions within different traditions. For example, to speak of paedobaptists as a group may be useful; but to speak of the "paedobaptist tradition" obscures quite different understandings of the practice among those so designated.⁴

Among the most common methodological errors is that of combining reductionist tendencies with the so-called "genetic fallacy." The operative assumption here is that one may satisfactorily describe, understand, and even explain a theological tradition simply by marking off the intellectual, social, and cultural climate in which it emerged. While it is clearly difficult to isolate such source components with sufficient precision, it is even more problematic to identify how the tradition itself is born out of the rich interplay of various components with one another (e.g., historical circumstances and personal faith) which imprints the tradition with its own uniqueness.⁵ The genius of a theological tradition is always more than the sum of the identifiable parts (great men, psychological and intellectual components, cultural setting, etc.).

If identifying and understanding a theological tradition is problematic, an evaluative assessment is perhaps even more difficult. Before addressing this, however, it should be noted that implicit (if not covert) assessment may be carried by certain of the methodological approaches/errors already discussed. There may be implicit invalidation (intentional or unintentional) carried in reductionist tendencies to identify and explain historical phenomena solely with regard to their historical/intellectual location. Thus, for example, one reads "Jesus was one of several Jewish reformers and messiah

⁴A similar point could be made about the rather casual use of the term "free church tradition."

⁵Thus, for example, however interesting Luther's *Anfechtungen* experiences, his Augustinianism, his introduction to the *via moderna* at Erfurt, and the German political situation of his time, one does not completely understand (much less explain) Luther's theology (and certainly not Lutheranism) on the basis of these.

types that appeared in the era 150 BC to AD 70," or, "Christianity was one of several religions entering the Empire from the East whose spread coincided with the demise of the Emperor cult and the failure of the old gods;" etc. Similarly, in dealing with theological traditions, the statement that "tradition X is one of several 14th-century movements" may have the effect of conveying that tradition X is *merely* or *just* one of several such movements. Such information may cast light on certain conditions of origin but not explain (much less invalidate) a theological tradition.

To avoid the subtleties of implicit evaluation, some clearly specifiable criteria are needed in identifying and evaluating theological traditions. It is apparent that in order for a tradition to exist, it must endure in time.

However, a Christian theological tradition must not survive in name only; it must be fundamentally committed to and capable of transmitting the historic Christian faith. And it must do so in a manner congruent with the content of that faith. That is, it must develop methods adequate to the task of transmission of the faith. *Traditio* must not diminish, distort, or otherwise alter the fundamental content of that transmitted. Further, a theological tradition should be able to draw on the resources provided by its own arrangement of the "theological furniture" and be fundamentally shaped by theological commitments, practices, and attitudes from its own past. (Here it might be observed that the term "eclectic tradition" is something of an oxymoron.)

Based on these reflections, the following criteria are suggested as providing minimal criteria for evaluating theological traditions. A Christian theological tradition should

- 1) intend to maintain and reflect faithfulness to Christian Scripture and to the historic Christian faith;
- 2) demonstrate the capacity for transmitting the Christian faith and enabling faithful Christian lives; and
- 3) have an identifiable character and style (a way of approaching and understanding Scripture, a way of reflecting on

theological issues, a way of "doing church," and a way of "being Christian").

Additional "instrumental entailments" of the above appear to be the necessity of developing

- 1) a capacity for on-going reflection, self-correction, and self-criticism drawing on and refining the basic theological commitments of the tradition (i.e., an openness to reviewing practice and belief in light of Scripture, tradition, experience, etc.);
- 2) some means for discussing controversial issues and arriving at some functional resolution of doctrinal conflicts; and
- 3) the capability of critical engagement with the issues, ideologies, and gods of the age.

Does the Restoration Movement Constitute a Theological Tradition?

In attempting to assess the Restoration Movement and Churches of Christ in particular as a "theological tradition," general comparisons with recognized theological traditions may be instructive. Churches of Christ have no "officially" recognized summaries or statements of faith similar to the *Augsburg Confession* (Lutheran, 1520), *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Reformed, 1646), or the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (Church of England, 1563), which formally shape and guide reflection on faith and practice in a distinct manner. Alexander Campbell himself not only rejected the role of such statements (as divisive and scripturally unauthorized) but also opposed "theology" per se (e.g., Bethany College charter).

Further, Churches of Christ have no governing body for the church at large. They have no official or standardized catechetical procedure through which a recognized and systematic body of teachings and beliefs is consciously transmitted. They have no officially recognized schools or seminaries, nor do they have

procedures for examining and ordaining ministers to insure that they know the "historic faith" and are capable of and committed to its transmission. Thus the initial impression left by a very general comparison of the Restoration Movement/Churches of Christ with other theological traditions is quite simply that the former does not constitute a theological tradition.

On closer examination, however, this initial impression appears less conclusive. In spite of the apparent absence of so many features associated with older and recognized theological traditions, Churches of Christ, until recently, have had a distinct character and style and have maintained a remarkable continuity in practice and uniformity in beliefs. While this identity has been highly indebted to a friendly environment or "supportive ethos," it has also been made possible by virtue of the development of "unofficial" versions of many of the structures and practices which sustain theological traditions. Although without official creeds, Restoration churches have had charter documents (e.g., "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*, Alexander Campbell's "Sermon on the Law," etc.). Campbell's objections to "theology" notwithstanding, his own *The Christian System* and other works (e.g., Robert Milligan's *The Scheme of Redemption*) provided theological underpinning to the movement regarding foundational matters such as the authority of Scripture, principles of interpretation, and biblical doctrines. Likewise, countless published debates and sermons addressed matters of doctrine and shaped Church of Christ belief and practice.

Para-ecclesiastical institutions and organizations also evolved which, however unofficially, nonetheless with considerable effectiveness performed the function of maintaining and transmitting central and distinctive beliefs and practices. "Lay leaders" and ministers were educated in church-related colleges which also were instrumental in offering initial training to a number of biblical scholars (some of whom have gained international recognition in their respective areas).

Sunday school materials and other publications were produced by "brotherhood publishing houses," and various brotherhood periodicals addressed perceived issues. Perhaps more importantly these publications evoked in readers a sense of belonging to "the church" beyond their own local congregations.

Further, regional and doctrinal disagreements notwithstanding, Churches of Christ reflected a common way of reading the Bible, common practices of worship (e.g., congregational a cappella singing, weekly communion), and liturgy (order of worship, hymns, and prayer phrases), and a common style and content in preaching. Church of Christ members were generally characterized by a high level of biblical knowledge and commitment to a clearly defined and tenaciously held set of theological and moral distinctives. Underlying and supporting all of this was a common vocabulary which offered a sense of identity if not also uniqueness and even exclusiveness (e.g., "auditorium," not "sanctuary"; "gospel meeting," not "revival"; "added to," not "join"; "obey the gospel," not "receive Jesus"; etc.). From Bainbridge, Georgia, to Lompoc, California, members of large and small congregations self-consciously referred to each other as "brother and sister," as "members of the church," and to themselves collectively as "the brotherhood."

Thus an attempt to assess the Restoration Movement in terms of recognized theological traditions, while methodologically and theologically problematic and inconclusive, is instructive. Perhaps the most obvious fact is that Churches of Christ have, in some ways contrary to many of their own stated intentions, nonetheless developed unofficial versions of supporting traditions (institutions and practices) roughly parallel to those developed in the recognized theological traditions. Further, there are clearly certain "strengths" (sociologically and theologically) to this approach to "doing Christianity." The more obvious include

- 1) a seriousness about the Bible and an earnestness about biblical faith;
- 2) a high level of biblical knowledge among laypersons;
- 3) a high level of lay participation in the life of the church;

- 4) a clear and practical approach to Christian faith and life; and
- 5) freedom from the burden of an unwieldy ecclesiastical bureaucracy and dependence upon clergy.

There are also definite weaknesses in the Restoration model that has evolved especially among Churches of Christ. These include

- 1) a tendency to divide over minute points of interpretation;
- 2) a tendency to emphasize "theological distinctives" to the neglect of the "common faith";
- 3) a tendency for doctrines to be anchored in a view about the Bible rather than integrated into a framework of biblical theology;
- 4) a juridical model of the Christian life tending toward legalism and works righteousness; and
- 5) an ignorance of the Christian movement in general and of their own history in particular.

These are real difficulties and ones that are extremely damaging to Christian faith and life. Nonetheless, with the possible exception of number 5 (and I suspect it could be included), they are not substantively unique to the Churches of Christ or even to the Restoration Movement. Although all might to some degree be regarded as reflections of human finitude and sinfulness, it may also be argued that all of the above-mentioned "weaknesses" are endemic to Protestantism.

Doctrinal disputes, divisions, rationalism, individualism, and a host of related plagues were unleashed by Protestantism's view of Scripture.⁶ Unless these various tendencies, however lamentable,

⁶Although Martin Luther had a highly nuanced understanding of Scripture, internal disputes and struggles with Roman Catholicism quickly drove Lutheranism (as early as the Formula of Concord, 1577) to demonstrate a formal view of Scripture as "a law book" containing "a comprehensive system of doctrine." Likewise Calvin, as a second-generation reformer and with legal training, emphasized even more the

are taken somehow to invalidate the Lutheran and Reformed traditions as theological traditions, I can see no basis for using them as grounds to invalidate the Restoration tradition.

Preoccupation with scriptural authority, concern with inspiration, viewing the Bible as containing a system of doctrine, concern for purity of doctrine, and consequent divisions over theological distinctives which these perpetrate--all these coalesce in Protestant scholasticism but appear implicit within Protestantism's cry of *sola scriptura* from the outset.⁷

In fact, in terms of such comparison, Churches of Christ are perhaps best understood theologically not as part of the "free church tradition" (morphological comparison), much less as historically related to the Anabaptists, but rather as a post-Enlightenment religious tradition with deep roots in the Reformed tradition. While the Enlightenment and frontierism strongly color the Restoration Movement, its substantive theological commitments (view of Scripture, hermeneutic, concern for church government, etc.) lie in the Reformed tradition.⁸ Not surprisingly, most of the

authority of Scripture and especially a concern with restoring the "order which Christ instituted." See Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 218ff.

⁷Both Lutheran and Reformed traditions addressed these inherent tendencies in various ways. Confessional statements give a false impression of unity and mask the divisions and level of discord present within these respective traditions.

⁸This was no doubt carried through English Puritanism and Campbell's own upbringing in Scottish Presbyterianism, but it was also "in the air." One can find in Campbell echoes of Calvin's own pre-Enlightenment rationalism, of his view of Scripture as offering a "unique pattern" (*Institutes* IV.iv.1), his hermeneutic (commands of Jesus, apostolic example, practice of the ancient church, and what may be inferred as necessary to maintain "decency and order"), his preference for weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (IV.xvi.43; xvii.46), and even his opposition to the use of organ music in worship ("spiritual songs can only be sung from the heart"). See John Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 177.

problems which appear in Restoration Movement are inherent in the Reformed tradition.⁹

Still, numerous difficulties do appear. Rather than address these serially, however, they all may in large part be traced to a major, persistent, and underlying problem for the Restoration Movement, viz., the inability to construct a theological framework fully adequate to the tasks of faithfully sustaining and transmitting Christian faith. This inadequacy is illustrated by two closely related problems.

First, Churches of Christ have failed to devolve an adequate approach or system for resolving doctrinal conflicts and addressing significant issues. We are not, contrary to impressions, more disputatious than other groups. We simply have no adequate way of dealing with controversies or finding functional solutions. More fundamentally, serious theological reflection is not done in any coordinated, responsible, and representative fashion. The church is thus deprived of the theological resources necessary for nurturing faithful lives (and doubly vulnerable to irresponsible voices from both within and outside).

Second, Churches of Christ have been unable to legitimate and deploy transmission apparatus (colleges, seminaries, publishers, periodicals, etc.) in a theologically coherent, coordinated, and consistent manner. Quasi-legitimation has taken the negative form of "licit by virtue of not being excluded in Scripture." This has meant that, good will and good intentions notwithstanding, there

⁹Recently much has been made of the fact that the Restoration Movement in general and Churches of Christ in particular possess an "anti-tradition tradition" with the implication that this not only demonstrates our Enlightenment roots but also catches us in an inherent contradiction. It should be noted that the Protestant Reformation itself launched an "anti-tradition tradition" under the battle cry *sola scriptura*. Luther and Calvin were both caught in the irony of developing practices and traditions to maintain their anti-tradition stances (Calvin more consciously than Luther). The practice of developing functional or secondary traditions to maintain foundational traditions is hardly surprising, unique, or particularly significant. Nor is the confusion of instrumental and substantive traditions particularly surprising, however problematic.

has been minimal coordination among these structures and no coherent theology guiding their roles in the life of the church.

Still, it must be admitted, set within the context of a "character and style" of doing Christianity, all of this somehow avoided fragmentation and helped hold "the brotherhood" together surprisingly well under the circumstances. At least this has been the case until recently.

Where Are We? What Are the Prospects?

It is my impression that, along with other religious groups, we have suffered greatly from the process of change that has blown through our society over the last several decades. Especially the accelerated rate of change has offered churches little time to understand and adjust to the new situation. It has also exposed and exploited the weaknesses of many branches of the Christian movement.

For Churches of Christ this has meant the loss of the quasi-Christian supportive ethos (Bible Belt, etc.) on which we had become so heavily dependent. This friendly climate had permitted us to neglect transmission of the common faith and allowed us to concentrate on our theological distinctives (narrowly defined) and to engage in fierce internecine arguments.

Unfortunately for Churches of Christ, the changes in our social setting coincided with certain internal developments with devastating effects. Many leaders in Churches of Christ, reacting against longstanding tendencies toward legalism and sectarianism and drawn by desire for acceptance, success, and sophistication (the lures of upward mobility), became increasingly open to a society which was simultaneously becoming increasingly hostile to basic tenets of the Christian faith.

Further, the rapid disintegration of the friendly environment has meant the erosion of the "character and style" which provided an identity and offered some shape (if little theology) to the array of transmission apparati we had spawned. Thus the very problems that required the need for a theologically responsible (coherent,

coordinated, and consistent) supportive framework simultaneously weakened the already fractured "structure" that had evolved and exposed a fundamental weakness in the Restoration "tradition."

Whether or not the situation today is substantially different from that of forty years ago, various components are now left to pursue their own institutional needs and the interests of influential individuals or groups. The role of "brotherhood publishers" and Christian colleges illustrates the problem this poses. For both, theological accountability and responsibility is minimal or nonexistent in any formal sense. Publishers may appoint recognized names to editorial boards but practice is far more subject to commercial, political, and institutional concerns than to theological accountability.¹⁰

Christian colleges have had little vision of what it means to integrate Christian faith with modern education in any significant fashion.¹¹ For colleges, facing the demands of an increasingly secular constituency, the canons of academic excellence, and mounting financial difficulties, any concern with "theology" is passed on to Bible department and/or public relations people.

Moreover, faculty highly trained in methods and procedures of their respective disciplines (many antithetical to the Christian tradition) are not particularly knowledgeable of the Christian faith. Few have any sense of the relationship of their particular discipline to the Christian faith.¹²

¹⁰This has recently been illustrated by long-standing "brotherhood" publishers courting the so-called "evangelical market" and virtually abandoning attention to Restoration concerns.

¹¹See Michael R. Weed, "Christian Education: Convention or Commitment?" *Faculty Bulletin* of The Institute for Christian Studies, No. 9, 23-35.

¹²Even Bible or Religion faculties appear to be unable to function consciously as a faculty, much less as John Calvin's "doctors of the church." Little or no serious theological conversation occurs among faculty members, certainly not in any formal sense (e.g., colloquies, common projects, etc.). Scholars, isolated in their own areas of expertise, are more subject to the canons of the academy and professional societies than to the life of the church.

Perhaps the real test for a theological tradition is to be seen in terms of the local congregation and the individual Christian life. Is there a clear understanding and faithful practice of the Christian faith? Is the faith being passed on? It is here that a number of the processes we have described converge with destructive results. Churches of Christ are increasingly unable to transmit the historic Christian faith, let alone their own theological distinctives.

There can be little question that we are in a period of major changes within the church. "Continuity of practice and uniformity of belief" are in serious jeopardy. The sense of belonging to a "brotherhood" is rapidly disappearing and with it any sense of loyalty or obligation to "the church." The once high level of biblical literacy and common way of reading the Bible are fast being displaced by a common way of not reading the Bible and biblical illiteracy. The once shared vocabulary is no longer functional ("Brother" Smith sounds quaint and slightly embarrassing). A common liturgy is giving way to an assortment of experiments due in part to confusion regarding the meaning of worship.¹³

Not surprisingly, with the loss of biblical knowledge and any clear understanding of what the church is, the divisiveness that once characterized Churches of Christ is disappearing. This disappearance, however, is due as much to indifference as to tolerance.¹⁴

In all of this, the gods of the age (individualism, pragmatism, and hedonism) are increasingly evident and the Christian faith is not being responsibly transmitted. Shallow preaching and "pop psych" classes and seminars are prevalent. In a society facing fundamental moral issues, the church is increasingly unable to confer Christian moral identity, to engage in moral discourse, or to give moral direction. Christian lives are being placed at risk.

¹³Michael R. Weed, "Amusing the Saints: Edification Without Transcendence," *Faculty Bulletin* of the Institute for Christian Studies, No. 8, 46-58.

¹⁴People who believe less and are tentative about the little they do believe are more likely to become exercised over protocol at the church's annual talent show than over doctrine.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Restoration Movement/Churches of Christ is a development of post-Enlightenment Reformed theology. While much of its methodology is indebted to the Enlightenment, its fundamental theological commitments are Reformed.

Further, a basic and endemic (if not inherent) problem is that fundamental theological reflection is short-circuited in a manner which curtails not only the recovery of biblical theology but also the ability to deploy a theological framework adequate to the task of giving coherence, coordination, and direction to the supportive apparati (institutions, practices, etc.) necessary for maintaining and transmitting Christian faith. This problem is only heightened as the church finds itself in an increasingly hostile environment.

I have not argued that Churches of Christ are faring any worse in the struggle with modernity than are other traditions. It is my impression that others are also in considerable difficulty. However, I do not take their plight to invalidate their respective traditions, much less invalidate the inescapability and necessity of theological traditions. Rather, their difficulties serve to punctuate the fact that the modern temper is fiercely and seductively antithetical to the Christian faith. For Churches of Christ, two related tasks appear to be of critical importance. First, there is the need to recover a biblical theology and to deploy a theological framework fully congruent with biblical faith.

Second, there is need to develop and deploy methods of transmitting the Christian faith which are "theologically legitimated" by being fully congruent with and appropriate to a biblical-theological framework. Clearly this would also enable and entail close scrutiny and correction of the present transmission apparati (not to mention the countless techniques and methods presenting themselves as "value neutral").

It is my impression, and hope, that this project is in keeping with the best intentions of the Restoration tradition.



BOOK REVIEWS

William H. Willimon, *The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics are Related*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1983. 204 pp.

In his introduction Willimon reveals something of his seminary days in the 1960s. On those rare occasions, when he and his fellow seminarians were in chapel, they were urged to "get out there [in the real world] and do something." They sang hymns of protest and celebrated symbols of radical change. *Avant-garde* theologians talked about "religionless Christianity." Worship was thought irrelevant to the religious social activism of the day. But almost three decades later,

. . . older, if not wiser . . . when much of the so-called social action has run out of steam and become little more than a bland parroting of whatever liberal values the culture considers adequate, I [Willimon] ponder what a rather tame, introverted, acculturated church can learn from a reconsideration of its worship.

His pondering has resulted in this book, a Biblical reflection on the relationship between worship and ethics.

The notion is rejected that what Christians do on Sunday morning in the sanctuary and how they act Monday through Saturday in the "real world" is in some way different. Both worship and ethics are the "real world." Both have the same Lord. The Hebrew word, *'abad* (to serve), was used for either work or worship. The Greek word, *leitourgia* (service), was applied to Zechariah's duties in the temple (Lk. 1:23), to worship (Heb. 8:6), to the collection for the saints at Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9:12) and to Paul's death (Phil. 2:30). Far from being unrelated to each other, worship and ethics interpenetrate and inform one another.

This book asks, "*Does Christian worship make any difference to Christian moral life?*" Until recently American ethicists have been preoccupied with the practical question of how to make good decisions, but now the issue is becoming, "Who ought I to be?" rather than, "What ought I to do?" Ethics is becoming more interested in character-formation than in how to make the right decision. Willimon reflects on *how* worship and ethics contribute to character-formation--not only of individuals but also of churches.

To use worship for any human purpose other than to glorify God is to abuse it. Worship is not a resource in the bag of tricks for making people more loving or just. On the other hand, worshipping God from the heart has the power to transform the church more fully into the image of God. There are many "byproducts" of worship. It is a complex act of self-protection from immoral, destructive and unintelligible forces. We are reminded of how we are expected to behave. Without the regular attendance of sustaining gatherings, the community quickly loses identity, breaks into subparts and cliques, and confuses its own story with lesser stories. Willimon admits (correctly, I think) that on significant moral issues the world has led in revealing the gospel to the church rather than vice versa (e.g., racism). He then warns (equally correctly, I think) that when the church begins looking to the world to set its agenda, it can easily forget why it comes to the meeting.

Worship creates a vision of God's involvement in the world. The criticism that worship represents an exclusive effort to conserve older values fails to recognize the transcending power of religious experience. Worship brings self knowledge vis-a-vis the Transcendent One, which brings the church face to face with its sin (Isa. 6:1-5), but it also inspires it to attain the fruition of its possibilities (Isa. 6:6-8, Eph. 1:15-23). Ultimately, worshipping God from the heart sets the community free from self-preoccupation, which is idolatry.

Willimon includes chapters on prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the sermon, marriage and children.

One marvels--in our time of cheap grace, warm fuzzies Madison Avenue strategies for church growth and the promiscuous baptism of everything--at the continual attempt of the early church to define itself, particularly in its worship, as over against the world so that it might be truly for the world.

Baptism is no less than the translation into a new kingdom. It is a baptism of repentance--a death of the old and dying. If baptism is once for all, the Supper makes the church share continually in the reality of Christ. Zwingli favored quarterly celebration of the Supper because he feared that a weekly celebration would make the Supper commonplace. Willimon, a Methodist, finds this rationale odd because it is clear that churches which commune less frequently take it less seriously. He also finds it odd based on the biblical and historical evidence of the early church's weekly celebrations of the Supper.

Willimon has a lot to say about character formation, and he criticizes the highly privatized religion so typical of Protestantism today. He has much to say about the church's contribution to character-formation; he rejects the idea of the lonely, Promethean search for God by the individual Christian as realistically productive of Christian character. The book also contains brief critiques of some contemporary ethical theories (Natural Law, Contextualism [situation ethics], Barthian "command-obedience" ethics, Existentialism, etc.) and many other worthwhile discussions not mentioned here for lack of space.

While it was outside the scope of the book, I would like to have seen Willimon reflect on the question of the nature of God. Who is this One that we worship? To explore who He has revealed himself to be, just reaching for the hem of the garment, would constrain us to worship Him more in love, Spirit and truth. Without meditating on the question of who He is and discovering him by keeping the commandments, our worship will be tired, and the temptation will be to "jazz it up" to make worship interesting or to compete with the world on its own terms.

Finally, it is ironic that some thoughtful denominational scholars like Willimon are moving away from trendy theologies of worship and life and cheap grace to a rediscovery of the life-giving character of the Word, while many in our own movement seem to be flirting with relegating the Word to a revered but minor role in the life of the church. Playing with the light switches and offering cafeteria-style productions to meet perceived needs will never prepare the church to love God and one another, evangelize, and take up the cross daily. Willimon's pondering on worship and ethics could make a solid contribution to our meditations on what it means to continue becoming a people shaped in the image of God in this world.

Bob Burgess
Austin, Texas

Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1989. Pp. xi + 155.

Michael Fishbane is gifted with one of the most fertile minds in biblical scholarship today, particularly in the field of biblical hermeneutics. His *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), for example, is a brilliantly thorough analysis of the various techniques by which later biblical texts dynamically and methodically interpret earlier biblical texts--a process he calls "inner-biblical exegesis." A milestone in the study of Scripture, this is one of those rare books which comes along every generation or so--forcing scholars to sit up, pay attention, and take notes. No serious discussion of biblical hermeneutics can legitimately avoid it.

The Garments of Torah is largely an abbreviated, popularized version of this earlier work. The title comes from a Spanish text steeped in kabbalistic mysticism, a passage which attempts to defend the sacrality of Scripture against any attempt to profane it:

Rabbi Simeon said: If a man looks upon the Torah as merely a book presenting narratives and everyday matters, alas for him! . . . [Indeed,] it is the Torah that created the worlds and through Torah are all sustained. The world could not endure the Torah if she had not garbed herself in garments of this world. Thus the tales related in Torah are simply her outer garments, and woe to the man who regards that outer garb as the Torah itself ! (*Zohar* III.152, cited on p. 34).

As a post-Enlightenment scholar, Fishbane admits that he finds this view of Scripture hopelessly mythological and tendentious. Still, the metaphor itself compels him; i.e., that the Hebrew Bible might best be described as a multi-layered phenomenon whose outer

layers, like outer garments on a person (cf. Isa. 6:1!) are most easily seen and analyzed, but whose ever-deepening internal layers "conceal deeper and less-refracted aspects of divine truth," the core of which is "God himself" (p. 35).

Also layered in sections, this book proceeds from the inside out; i.e., from the inner recesses of Scripture to the outer limits of contemporary reflection on it. Part I, "The Hermeneutics of Scripture in Formation," has three chapters: (1) Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel, (2) Extra-Biblical Exegesis: The Sense of Not Reading in Rabbinic Midrash, and (3) The Garments of Torah--Or, To What May Scripture be Compared?

Part II, "Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Forms of Culture," consists of two chapters: (4) Israel and the "Mothers," and (5) From Scribalism to Rabbinism: Perspectives on the Emergence of Classical Judaism.

Part III is called "Hermeneutics, Scripture, and the Present Hour," and comprises four chapters: (6) The Biblical Dialogue of Martin Buber, (7) Martin Buber's *Moses*, (8) Speech and Scripture: The Grammatical Thinking and Theology of Franz Rosenzweig, and (9) The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task: A Reinterpretation of Medieval Exegesis.

Fishbane believes that all religions, including the biblical ones, renew and regenerate themselves via a "paradoxically dynamic" process. This process is *dynamic* because the imagination animating it is enormously creative and flexible. Yet it is *paradoxical* because all of this creativity, however innovative, is grounded solely in earlier tradition--thus placing it, for him, in the category of exegesis.

This paradoxical dynamism is widely recognized to be operative in the Qumran commentaries, the rewritten biblical histories of *Jubilees* and *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and the Bibles of Alexandria (LXX) and Mt. Gerizim (Sam). Fishbane, however, pushes us a step further by asking us to recognize it in the Hebrew Bible itself.

Several examples are cited to prove his point. Among legal texts, he sees the process in the way earlier laws are repeatedly updated and expanded (e.g., not the careful definition of what a "field" is in Deut. 22:9-11, updating Lev. 19:19; or the lawyerly reexamination of Exod. 23:10-11a in Lev. 25:3-7). Among historical texts, he notes how Moses' speech to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:7-8 is exegetically transformed into a paean to the law in Joshua 1:7-8. Among prophetic texts, the prophets often cited earlier tradition (note the way in which Jer. 23 updates and applies Exod. 19:5-6 to a radically new situation).

Yet Fishbane sometimes goes too far. Indeed, to compare the politicized polemic driving Qumran's Habakkuk peshet with what goes on within Scripture itself seems a dangerous enterprise, if left unqualified. Yet surely Scripture cannot be as static and lifeless as William Larkin, for example, would have us believe (*Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988]). Fishbane is right to insist on its inherent dynamism and helpful in pointing out its consistency in this regard.

Fishbane is not the only scholar working in this area of biblical study (see, e.g., the important dissertation of Gerhard Langer, *Von Gott erwählt--Jerusalem: Die Rezeption von Dtn 12 in Frühen Judentum* [Klosterneuberg, Austria: Oesterreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989]). But he is one of the most prolific and thorough. For those who find it impossible to sit through an entire meal of *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, perhaps *The Garments of Torah* will provide enough appetizer to whet the palate.

Michael S. Moore
Phoenix, Arizona

James Thompson, *The Church in Exile: God's Counter Culture in a Non-Christian World*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1990. 139 pp.

James Thompson, the author of *The Church in Exile*, believes that "we who live near the end of the twentieth century are experiencing changes in our culture that will cause us to be exiles in our own land." Gone are the days when Christians could expect society to support Christian morality and values. We live in an increasingly secular world in which Christians will find themselves relegated to the periphery of society, as they were in the first century. To hold to the Christian story, and to live by Christian standards, will become more and more unusual. We are becoming exiles in our own land.

There are at least two ways in which the church has responded to the crisis of secularization. One is the way of accommodation, in which the language of the gospel is replaced by the language of modernity, with its twin offspring, psychology and psychotherapy. Accommodation has resulted in a sort of "consumer Christianity" in which the mission of the churches is defined by the perceived needs of the public. The other response has been a militant attempt to restore religion to the place which it once enjoyed in public life. Groups such as the Moral Majority call for a return to "traditional values," but they often fail to recognize that many such values are really cultural norms only a few decades old. Thompson believes that both the accommodative and the militant response are doomed to failure, the former because it betrays the story of the gospel, and the latter because it assumes a religious public which no longer exists.

The Church in Exile explores a third option. By careful exposition of 1 Peter, Thompson resurrects a vital biblical image: that of the community in exile. As a book written to "exiles in the

dispersion," 1 Peter can provide guidance and encouragement to Christians today who find themselves exiles in their own land.

The agenda of *The Church in Exile* is set by 1 Peter itself. The book reads like a leisurely tour of the ancient letter, with Thompson as the able guide. However, Thompson's interest is not strictly antiquarian. One is continually astonished at the contemporary relevance of the biblical text. The relevance of 1 Peter is underlined by the frequent allusions to modern literature, which are a hallmark of Thompson's style.

However, relevance is not accommodation. Much of what Thompson discovers in 1 Peter will not be very palatable to the tastes of modern society. Building on the premise that "the Christian lifestyle grows out of the Christian story," Thompson finds in the story of the cross a call for holiness, submission, and service. Such words are not only foreign to the modern ethos, they have virtually disappeared from many churches. "The language of discipleship," Thompson observes, "has been turned over to fanatics who do not fit into 'mainstream' Christianity."

However, Thompson maintains that holiness, being set apart for God and from the world, is crucial to the identity of the church. The church is nothing less than a counter culture which sets itself against the world at many points. As the church lives out its holiness, it will find the key to effective evangelism, for "what could be more powerful and more compelling than communities which present an alternative lifestyle . . . to the prevailing norms?"

The holiness which is essential for the identity of the church comes about through the story of the cross. Thus, the lifestyle of the church in exile is a lifestyle based on a story. Christians are to know the story and to base their lives on it. The story of the suffering and serving Son of God has implications for every aspect of life. Slaves, for example, are to view the adversity and degradation of their position as an opportunity to fulfill God's calling. As Christ suffered, so they can expect to suffer. Similarly, "husbands and wives demonstrate selfless care toward each other." Such words as submission and selflessness, whether on the part of slaves, wives, or husbands, will grate harshly on modern ears, but it is in

such circumstances that God's grace is truly experienced. As Thompson observes, ". . . 1 Peter challenges our easy assumptions about faithful Christian commitment, for the epistle rings with the assurance that grace is found where we lose ourselves and even suffer for the faith."

At some points, one might wish that Thompson had addressed some pertinent modern questions. There are legitimate tensions between the language of the gospel story and the insights of modern psychology. How, for example, does one sound the call to servanthood without exacerbating the pathological self-denial of codependents? In other words, how does one become a servant without being servile? Or, in another vein, how does a church in exile build institutions, such as universities, which make scholarly investigation of the text possible? How does an exilic church participate responsibly in public affairs?

But this is probably asking too much of a book which, above all, concerns itself with the text. Allan McNicol suggested in *Christian Studies* 11:1 (Fall 1990) that our hermeneutical models often "ask more of the texts than they are capable of delivering." The same may be true of our sociological and psychological models. Perhaps questions such as those raised above cannot be answered without first asking the question, "What do the ancient texts say?"

Because Thompson concerns himself with the meaning of the text, *The Church in Exile* will be an eminently useful book for the church. While it is informed by the best scholarship, it is readable and accessible to those without technical training. Its arrangement in thirteen chapters suits it for use as a resource for adult Bible classes. The thirteen chapters cover logical thought units sequentially, so that by the end the reader has surveyed all the major themes of 1 Peter in the order in which they occur.

Those who have appreciated Thompson's previous books will not be disappointed with *The Church in Exile*.

Joe Crisp
Victoria, Texas



CONTRIBUTORS

Articles

James W. Thompson is President of the Institute for Christian Studies where he is also Professor of New Testament and Homiletics.

Allan J. McNicol is Professor of New Testament at the Institute for Christian Studies.

Gary N. Holloway is Associate Professor of Church History and Librarian at the Institute for Christian Studies. He currently serves as Faculty Chairman.

Michael R. Weed is Professor of Theology and Ethics at the Institute for Christian Studies.

Book Reviews

Bob Burgess serves as a deacon for the Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ in Austin, Texas.

Joe Crisp is the preaching minister at College Church of Christ in Victoria, Texas.

Michael S. Moore is the preaching minister at the Tatum Boulevard Church of Christ in Phoenix, Arizona.