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Historically, outsiders to Churches of Christ have noticed the great unity and uniformity of faith and practice that characterize our fellowship. As Frank Mead put it, in his classic *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, "Since the status of [their] institutions is unofficial, none authorized to speak for the entire church, their conformity in ideas and teachings is all the more remarkable." That is, despite the lack of institutional, denominational superstructure or adherence to a written confessional standard, Churches of Christ have traditionally maintained a surprisingly strong sense of identity. This common identity is exemplified in the common observation that, until the late twentieth century, one could walk into almost any Church of Christ and predict exactly what would be done and said.

This characteristic identity, reflected in a relative uniformity of doctrine and liturgy, has noticeably eroded over the past few decades. Now, those who enter an assembly of the Church of Christ can no longer predict with the same degree of accuracy what they will find. A variety of cultural and religious factors have further loosened the ties that once maintained the unity of belief and practice in this loose affiliation of congregations. It is important, therefore, for members of Churches of Christ to reflect on issues related to our identity—past, present, and future.

In this issue of *Christian Studies*, we have asked contributors to keep in mind the very broad but important question about the identity of Churches of Christ. This question thus serves as a general thread that runs through the various articles. In their own way, and sometimes with different results, these articles touch on this concept by indirectly addressing questions such as: What has shaped the identity of Churches of Christ in the past? How can this identity be characterized at present? What does, or should, its future look like? What beliefs and practices are, or should be, central? What is, or should be, our relationship with other denominations, with evangelicalism, and with the world? All these questions, and more, are worth our contemplation, and the articles included in this issue are intended to initiate or extend such conversations not only among Churches of Christ, but among other groups who are wrestling with similar questions.

For many reasons, the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology wishes to dedicate this issue of *Christian Studies* to David Worley. Dr. Worley has donated his time, energy, and resources to the ministry at Austin Grad, including service to the school as president (1992–2000) and as chancellor (2001–present). In addition to being a New Testament scholar, he is a model shepherd and an outstanding example of Christian devotion and piety—exhibiting unity in necessary things, charity in all things, and patient endurance in trials. More specific to the theme of this issue, as long as I have known him, David has been a tireless advocate for preserving and passing on to others what is best about Churches of Christ, and he does so in a winsome, non-sectarian way. It is our hope that this issue reflects something of his interests and integrity, that he is honored by the questions and tentative answers found here, and that all readers will find the enterprise stimulating and edifying.

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The Restoration Movement, the Habit of Schism, and a Proposal for Unity

Keith D. Stanglin

Thomas Campbell's Call for Unity

The American Restoration Movement, as many historians have reminded us, was initiated around the turn of the nineteenth century primarily as a unity movement within Protestant Christianity. Such a movement was needed, after all. For all the good that the sixteenth-century Protestant movements may have brought to the Western Church in the way of doctrinal reforms, there was at least one outcome that wrought inestimable damage—namely, schism. It is not that there were no schisms before the sixteenth century. Neither is it the case that the early Protestants desired schism; in fact, they made a fairly strong case that it was the Roman Church's doctrinal innovations and resistance to reform that caused and perpetuated the schism. It is also true, however, that Protestants, almost as soon as there were Protestants, exhibited a persistent inability to get along with one another.

From the 1520s on, Protestant history includes stories of disagreements over baptism, the Lord's Supper, liturgy, free will and predestination, the relationship of the church with civil government, and biblical interpretation, which in many cases was the source of the disagreements. It did not take long for Protestants, as well as Roman Catholics, to draw up new confessions of faith that distinguished their own particular groups. Despite the occasional, lone voices calling for unity, by the end of the sixteenth century, instead of one unified church in the West, there were now Roman Catholic, Lutheran,

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Reformed, and a number of Anabaptist and "radical" churches, each with its own confessional standard. Thus began denominations in the West.

These initial breaks were only the beginning, though, as the disputes and divisions continued. Once Pandora's box was opened, once the precedent was set that any doctrinal disagreement could justify starting a new church, the horrific *possibility* of schism that was realized in the sixteenth century evolved into the accepted *habit* of schism in the seventeenth and eighteenth. Debates ensued now over the interpretation of the new confessional standards—including what subscription meant and whether it was even necessary—all of which led to further contentions and divisions.

This habit of schism, transferred from the Old World, became compulsive in the New World. In American soil, nourished by autonomous freedom from old traditions and by optimistic visions of finally making the church what it was supposed to be, the seeds of schism proliferated, grew, and flourished. Implicated in this guilt were, among many others, the Presbyterians, whose Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism served as confessional standards. Throughout the eighteenth century, a significant number of Presbyterians had various reservations about signing on to these standards, and many simply refused to subscribe at all. Aside from the doctrinal teaching of the Westminster standards, in the wake of the evangelical revivals in England and especially the Second Great Awakening in North America, Presbyterians further divided over their openness to the revivals (so-called "Old Lights" versus "New Lights").[1]

Many Presbyterians, such as Thomas Campbell, his son Alexander Campbell, and Barton W. Stone, were fed up with the divisive spirit. This frustration is evident in Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* (1809), a sort of manifesto for unity in the church. Campbell insists

> that division among christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is anti-christian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is anti-scriptural, as

[1] For such reasons a Presbyterian acquaintance of mine characterizes Presbyterians as the "split P's."

> being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express command.[2]

As an antidote to the sin of division, Campbell's *Declaration* promotes two fundamental values: 1) the unity of Christians, and 2) restoration based on the sole authority of Scripture. The idea is simple: Christians can be unified once again if they will cast off human creeds and traditions, which have been the main cause of division, and return to Scripture as the only authority in religion. He writes:

> To cease from all such things [divisions], by simply returning to the original standard of christianity—the profession and practice of the primitive church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of New Testament scripture, is the only possible way, that we can perceive, to get rid of those evils. And we humbly think that a uniform agreement in *that* for the preservation of charity would be infinitely preferable to our contentions and divisions: nay, that such a uniformity is the very thing that the Lord requires, if the New Testament be a perfect model—a sufficient formula for the worship discipline and government of the christian church. Let *us* do, as we are there expressly told *they* did, say as *they* said: that is, profess and practise as therein expressly enjoined by precept and precedent, in every possible instance, after *their* approved example; and in so doing we shall realize, and exhibit, all that unity and uniformity, that the primitive church possessed, or that the law of Christ requires.[3]

Campbell's vision for his proposed Christian Association was not to start a new denomination, but to instill in fellow Christians a love for unity on the basis of New Testament Scripture.

It is important to understand the priority and relationship of these two fundamental values. As Campbell designates division as the "horrid evil, fraught with many evils," so the unity of God's people is the ultimate *end*, the *telos*, the primary goal. Restoration, returning to the "profession and practice of the primitive church," is the "only possible way, that we can perceive, to get rid of those evils" of division. In other words, this restoration of faith and

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[2] Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's* Declaration and Address, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollmann (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 19-20.

[3] Campbell, *Declaration*, 37.

practice is the *means*, or the way, to the goal of unity. The means to unity—doing and saying as the New Testament church did and said—may be called a "patternistic restoration," inasmuch as it seeks to "do and say" according to the definite pattern or "perfect model" revealed in the New Testament alone. In sum, for Campbell, this vision of patternistic restoration based on Scripture alone is the means to the greater goal of unity.

The following years and decades proved that people were less willing than Campbell anticipated to renounce their denominational creeds and practices that were "not as old as the New Testament."[4] In some ways analogous to how the Wesleyan revivals in the Church of England led to the unintended establishment of a distinct denomination (Methodism), the Campbells' attempt to reform from within Baptist churches led to a parting of the ways and the formation of a group with a distinct identity. Though not officially or structurally a denomination, the Restoration Movement became, by a loose sociological definition, a distinct denomination.[5]

The further, tragic irony is that this same group, a unity movement, experienced its own divisions. In addition to the doctrinal and social reasons for the eventual divisions, it should be observed that later divisions reflected an ideological tension laid out in Thomas Campbell's original vision. Unity and restoration, as an enduring pair of principles in the subsequent Restoration

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[4] Campbell, *Declaration*, 19. Alexander Campbell also used similar language: "…I commenced my career in this country under the conviction that nothing that was not as old as the New Testament should be made an article of faith, a rule of practice, or a term of communion amongst Christians." Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Public," *Christian Baptist* II/2 (Sept. 6, 1824): 40.

[5] "A denomination is an association or fellowship of congregations within a religion that have the same beliefs or creed, engage in similar practices and cooperate with each other to develop and maintain shared enterprises." D. O. Moberg, "Denominationalism," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 350. This standard definition, which fits mainstream Churches of Christ, would seem to differ from the more formal and overtly ecumenical aspects of a denomination assumed, for example, by Barry Ensign-George, "Denomination as Ecclesiological Category: Sketching an Assessment," in *Denomination: Assessing an Ecclesiological Category*, ed. Paul M. Collins and Barry Ensign-George (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 1–21. The idea, assumed by Ensign-George, that denominationalism is ecumenically friendly was certainly not the assumption of Campbell, who saw denominational reality as the corollary and culprit of continual division.

Movement, came into tension with one another. This conflict between the two values hinged on the inevitability of differing interpretations of Scripture. In other words, if even the people who were willing to follow only the Bible could agree on its interpretation and application, then unity would indeed be the inevitable result. Such uniformity of interpretation and application, however, was not to be. This problem was evident during the Reformation and was a source of Roman Catholic polemic against Protestants. Taking the responsibility for biblical interpretation out of the hands of church leaders or the pope and putting it into the hands of all Christians simply made little popes out of everyone. The outcome of endless divisions, so the Roman Church argued with some justification, was predictable.[6]

On occasions when there was not agreement on the interpretation of Scripture, which value—unity or restoration—would be emphasized in the tension? One stream of the Restoration Movement tended to sacrifice agreement on Scripture for the sake of unity, whereas another stream tended to sacrifice wider unity for a particular interpretation of Scripture. Among the former (represented especially by Disciples of Christ), doctrinal distinctions were easily overlooked and de-emphasized in the practice of open fellowship. Among the latter (represented especially by Churches of Christ), the goal of broader unity was largely effaced by the defense of a certain set of exegetical conclusions. In most Churches of Christ, the means of restoration became the end in itself, and the original end, unity, was effectively obscured.[7] In traditional Churches of Christ, when lip service is paid to unity, it is usually in terms of persuading others to that set of exegetical conclusions necessary for salvation. It is an exaggeration to say that unity and restoration are two "mutually exclusive" or "incompatible" goals,[8] but it is clear that, in

[6] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 87–96, 130–31, 202–5, 365–75, documents this trajectory, though he exaggerates the extent to which this characterizes all Protestants and the extent to which it affected modern civilization.

[7] This obfuscation is evident, anecdotally, by the common reaction of surprise when members of Churches of Christ first learn that their movement began as a unity movement.

[8] As do Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (1996; reprint, Abilene: ACU Press, 2008), 22; and M. Eugene Boring, *Disci-*

general, the dialectic was not successfully held in tension. The history of the Restoration Movement, including Churches of Christ specifically, has been racked by division. Even with a fairly standardized hermeneutic of following commands, examples, and necessary inferences, there has been much disagreement over questions of biblical interpretation and practical application in the church. Endless debates have ensued over which beliefs and practices are scriptural, which of those are necessary to salvation, and, in turn, who can be fellowshipped. Restoration, based on the Bible alone, pursued as a solution to the problem of division, has not fared much better with regard to unity than the confessional Presbyterianism from which the disenchanted founders departed.

In a fascinating passage, Campbell, without knowing the divisive path that those inspired by his restorationist vision would go on to take, left room in his treatise for another, better way. After laying out his plan for achieving unity through restoration cited above—that we should do and say as the first-century church did and said—Campbell immediately writes: "But if after all, our brethren can point out a better way to regain and preserve that christian unity and charity expressly enjoined upon the church of God, we shall thank them for the discovery, and cheerfully embrace it."[9]

This comment indicates, first, the humility of Campbell in defining his vision for unity. The assertion of openness to further instruction in the search for truth is, to be sure, a formulaic statement. Although formulaic, it does not seem to be insincere or rhetorical, but rather a sincere and commendable openness. Second, Campbell's remark shows explicitly which value he considers as the end and which value is the means. Unity is the *conditio sine qua non*, "expressly enjoined upon the church of God." Restoration of first-century practices is the means to that unity. Third, and most noteworthy, Campbell regards the means, which in this case is patternistic restoration, to be potentially dispensable. By "dispensable," I do not mean unimportant. Restoration is, to Campbell's mind, the most effective way, "the only possible way, that [he] can perceive," to achieve unity. He leaves the door open, however, in case there is, in his words, "a better way."

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ples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 112; respectively.

[9] Campbell, *Declaration*, 37.

Given the history of sectarianism and further division within the Restoration Movement, it should be safe to say that restoration has not been a perfect means to unity. Not only has it actually failed to achieve and maintain unity, but restoration, as described by Campbell, is practically untenable. In short, saying and doing what the first-century church said and did would involve the transference of cultural utility (for example, in washing feet) and cultural symbolism (wearing head coverings) that are neither useful nor appropriately symbolic today. This sort of restoration, applied as simplistically as Campbell seems to suggest, has never consistently been practiced and does not work.[10] If Campbell could see us now, he might be inclined to return to his statement and ask, "Is there 'a better way?'"

Toward a "Better Way" to Unity

With regard to Thomas Campbell's two fundamental values, where are Churches of Christ now? In an attempt to make a long and complex description shorter, I offer the following brief synopsis. Churches of Christ are increasingly diverse, but they still reflect to some degree the tension between restoration and unity. Many congregations still hold to the restoration principle of doing and saying what the first-century church did and said. Most of these congregations have given up on the prospect of broader Christian unity on the basis of this principle and its practice.

Other Churches of Christ have gradually neglected or outright rejected the ideal of patternistic restoration—sometimes, it should be observed, out of apparent embarrassment—in their embrace of the call to ecumenical unity. Such congregations tend to proceed toward this goal by engaging first with evangelical and other conservative Protestant groups, a natural and commendable move. One concern, though, is that many who have rejected the simplistic sort of restorationism have not really decided what, if anything, to

[10] To be fair, one's hermeneutical practice is often better than one's hermeneutical theory. This seems to have been the case with Campbell. In addition, there have been restorationist hermeneutical proposals sympathetic with Campbell's that provide more nuance regarding which commands and examples are to be followed and how. By and large, because they use the same approach, such attempts still fail to achieve the desired unity, and they usually fail to relieve people of the abiding impression that sound biblical application is equivalent to repeating first-century speech and practice.

put in its place. By default, restorationism and the classic distinctive practices of the Churches of Christ (especially *a cappella* singing) tend to be replaced by a sort of generic, American evangelical theology and practice, most readily noticeable in ecclesiology and worship.

For those who are moved by Campbell's, and Christ's, call to unity, is there an alternative to the simplistic restorationist hermeneutic, and can there be one that does not involve being absorbed into another denominational or evangelical identity? Is there, to use Campbell's words, "a better way"?

This better way, in order to achieve real unity among Churches of Christ and beyond, must address the problem of individualistic biblical interpretation that makes each interpreter his own pope. Such an approach has led to divisions as numerous and insidious as those caused by any creed or confession. The better way, while keeping Scripture primary, must provide a lens or an aid in interpretation that guides and limits interpretation. Since there is no purely objective reading of the text, since it is impossible to read the biblical text as if we are the first ones to read it, then it is worth asking what sort of critical theory or perspective we will bring to the text—deconstructionist, feminist, post-colonial, and so on? No. What is needed is a theory, a lens, that is distinctively and unashamedly Christian.

The better way, in order to achieve real unity among Churches of Christ and beyond, must also address the "flattening" of Scripture that makes each commandment and article of faith as important as the next. The patternistic restorationism of "doing what they did" has resulted in an unhealthy equalizing of commands and examples, as well as making possible inferences the equivalent of express commands. By this principle, for instance, the correct frequency of communion became as necessary as practicing it at all. *A cappella* singing could be thought as central a tenet of the faith as the divinity of Christ. Such thinking led to lists of the necessary articles of faith that could be lengthy and, again, based on one's own individual interpretation of Scripture. Although no true articles of faith are unimportant, the better way must provide a way to distinguish between the central and the peripheral articles of

the faith, thus enabling the church to find and maintain unity in those core beliefs and practices.[11]

In the search for this desired but elusive unity, one could take a page from the restorationist playbook and ask the following question about the first-century church: "What is it that united the early church, to the degree that those Christians were united?" Whatever it was, it was not the principle of "Scripture alone." Rather, what brought people to Christ and kept them united in him was their common belief in the content of the apostolic proclamation. Quite apart from the New Testament as such—whose contents were still being written in the first century, collected in the second, codified in the fourth, and not widely available to individual believers until the sixteenth—it was their common commitment to the faith, orally passed on and received, that gave Christians their identity and ecclesiastical unity.

The content of this faith was passed on publicly in the reading and preaching of the word in early Christian assemblies. Such knowledge was available to a person before and after baptism. It was precisely at baptism, however—which was done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—when a person confessed what is central to Christian faith: belief in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Leading up to baptism, catechumens received more specialized instruction on all three of these points. First, the Father's nature is one; he is the uncreated creator. Second, the Son's nature is explained narratively. Beginning with his divinity, he is proclaimed to be God's Son by nature, the Logos, the instrument of creation. His descent to humanity comes next, with emphasis on his physical nature and the historical verifiability of his life, suffering, and death. Then comes his glorification, described in terms of his resurrection, ascension, session at the right hand of the Father, and return. Third, the Holy Spirit's work among God's people is explained as the source of inspired prophecy and renewal, as

[11] If anyone doubts that some doctrines and commands are more important than others, carefully read, for starters, Hos 6:6; Matt 7:12; 22:35–40; 23:23; Mark 12:28–34; 1 Cor. 15:3–8. To acknowledge that there are "weightier matters of the law" implies that there are also less weighty matters; it does not, however, imply that the less weighty matters should be neglected (Matt 23:23). But to deny that there are such weightier matters would be to deny the clear meaning of these cited passages.

well as the guide of the church.[12] One owned and expressed this faith really for the first time at baptism.

This threefold expression of belief, passed down and received leading up to and at baptism, is what Irenaeus, Tertullian, and other early Christian writers refer to as the "rule of faith" or "rule of truth." It is the measure (*canon*) of the essential truths of Christian faith. Because it was handed down orally, the rule of faith varied somewhat in its exact wording. Despite the verbal variation, there is remarkable consistency in what is said and believed about Father, Son, and Spirit. This increasingly consistent wording reflected the substance of what was confessed periodically at baptism, and a standardized text became a regular part of the church's confession in worship. Eventually, the wording would be transcribed and codified as a creed, that is, a statement of belief.[13] For example, the Creed of Nicaea (325) and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol (Creed) (381) were based on the baptismal confession and the corresponding rule of faith, but were each the immediate result of an official church council and its concerns. It was the Roman statement of faith, or creed, that eventually spread in the Western church and, after some alternate wording and merging with other statements, became codified and known as the Apostles' Creed, not tied to a particular council.[14]

The rule of faith and the Apostles' Creed are simply reiterations or extensions of the baptismal confession of faith, which itself is a summary of what the apostles preached. It is no accident, then, that every article of the Apostles' Creed can be tied—and most of them verbatim—to passages in the

[12] The clearest early exposition of these three points is in Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching* 6, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 43-44. One of the best brief summaries of this content is in Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, new ed. (London: SCM Press, 2002).

[13] "Credo" (whence "creed") simply means "I believe," and is the initial Latin word in ancient statements of faith.

[14] The rule of faith and the creed (Apostles' or otherwise) are not the same thing, but they differ more in function than in content. It is the content with which we are concerned here, and so I use them more or less interchangeably. For a discussion of this distinction, as well as a fine overview of the rule of faith and its functions, see Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015). For more on the Apostles' Creed, see Keith D. Stanglin, "Apostles' Creed," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 59–60.

book of Acts, which is itself, among other things, a record of the apostles' preaching.[15] The Apostles' Creed is "biblical," so to speak, not because it was copied and pasted from the New Testament, but because, like the New Testament, it is apostolic in its content. Even Alexander Campbell, generally as anti-creedal as one can be, recognized the great value of the Apostles' Creed, calling it "a *bonafide* creed; and in every word true."[16]

What united the early church, then, was the common confession of apostolic faith summed up effectively for us in the Apostles' Creed. If one's faith reflected in the basic content of this creed was enough to unite the early church in the face of threats from within and without, then it is also worth considering whether it might provide a "better way" than the isolated biblicism that has failed to unite. How might that way look, or even be justified, in Churches of Christ?

First of all, the better way begins with appreciating the significance of the baptismal confession in Churches of Christ. What is confessed by the one being baptized, which has often been Christocentric rather than Trinitarian, reflects what is regarded as the central and most important doctrine of the faith. The initiate speaks words that are uniquely Christian, that only a Christian can genuinely confess, and that reflect a faith necessary and sufficient for full membership. That is, in Churches of Christ, since there is already a tacit acknowledgment that this confession is a statement of belief ac-

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[15] For the text of the Apostles' Creed, see "Obiter Dicta" in this issue of *Christian Studies*. One must supplement with the Gospel according to Luke to see that Mary was a "virgin," and the idea that the church is "catholic" (or universal) is implied, but not explicit, in Acts.

[16] Alexander Campbell, "Campbellism Examined," *Millennial Harbinger* (1855): 74. See also William Tabbernee, "Alexander Campbell and the Apostolic Tradition," in *The Free Church and the Early Church: Bridging the Historical and Theological Divide*, ed. D. H. Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 163-80; and the article in this issue by John Mark Hicks. Thomas Campbell was also not opposed to creeds *per se*. Campbell, *Declaration*, 26-27: "As to creeds and confessions, although we may appear to our brethren to oppose them, yet this is to be understood only in *so far* as they oppose the unity of the church, by containing sentiments not expressly revealed in the word of God; or, by the way of using them, become the instruments of a human or implicit faith: or, oppress the weak of Gods heritage: where they are liable to none of those objections, we have nothing against them. It is the *abuse* and not the *lawful use* of such compilations that we oppose."

ceptable for fellowship, there is already a mechanism in place for a common, uniting confession. The rule of faith, or creed, is the faith expressed in the Trinitarian baptismal confession, a confession that unites the people of God. For most congregations of the Church of Christ, if this baptismal confession is as important as we say it is, it will mean instituting a standardized set of words. More, not less, attention should be given, therefore, to a consistent form of confession that, like baptism itself, is Trinitarian.

Second, if faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as expressed in the Apostles' Creed, is sufficient for full union with the body of Christ at baptism, then there is no clear reason why it cannot be a sufficient form of unity in the ongoing life of the church. As such, the Apostles' Creed, or something very much like it, should be a regular part of the church's worship, as well as new members' and children's catechesis. On the question of unity, the faith confessed at baptism should be a sufficient test of fellowship. Such a standard will be easier to maintain if the first suggestion (above) is followed and attention to the fullness of justifying faith is given at the point of entry. As a result of uniting around a common confession, it would at least make it more difficult for a church to divide or to break fellowship with other churches over tertiary concerns.

Third, the rule of faith must come alongside the reading of Scripture. To recognize the importance of the rule of faith in this way is not to undermine the primacy of Scripture for the church. In fact, in this proposal, the study and application of Scripture are just as central as Thomas Campbell imagined. The difference is that the creed functions as a conscious guide and lens for biblical interpretation.[17] By itself, the rule of faith is not a sufficient hermeneutical theory or method of interpretation, but a necessary supplement to responsible exegesis and application. This suggestion runs counter to the Enlightenment-era idea, shared by most restorationists, that one should read the Bible as if it has never been read before, giving no thought to previous traditions or interpretations. Rather, the rule of faith helps to limit biblical inter-

[17] E.g., see the proposal in Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

pretation, and its focus on the core of the gospel helps to keep inferential interpretations and applications in their proper place.[18]

Conclusion

All Christians should have an interest in Christ's prayer that his followers be united. As heirs of a Christian unity movement known more for its divisiveness than its unity, the Church of Christ perhaps has a special obligation to consider the problem within its own ranks and work toward resolution. Thomas Campbell certainly felt the call to promote unity, and, to that end, he proposed going back to Scripture alone to restore first-century beliefs and practices. Interestingly, he did leave room for a "better way" to promote unity, if one could be found. Two centuries of history have shown that the paternistic hermeneutic of restoration that Campbell seems to have endorsed has not served the goal of unity as effectively as he envisioned. In light of Campbell's own concession, and in the spirit of seeking to restore the unity of the early church, we seek a better way. The better way is to allow the "great tradition" of the church, the collection of voices from Christian history, in all of their unity and even their multiplicity, to have a seat at the table in the life of the church, including in the church's interpretation and application of Scripture. The unity of this tradition, expressed well in many sources, is succinctly stated in the rule of faith.[19] As Everett Ferguson writes, the rule of faith "sustains unity in diversity and disagreement."[20]

It is a proposal for deep restoration. By deep restoration, I mean restoration that is not fixated primarily on what the first-century church said and did, but is focused more on *how* they thought and *why* they said and did thus. Such a perspective will often result in saying and doing as the first-century church, but the saying and doing will go deeper and tap into the fount from which the practices flow. This source is the gospel, the rule; this is the pattern to be followed. This pattern is revealed in the apostolic proclamation of what

[18] Thomas Campbell made clear that inferences should not be binding as tests of fellowship. Campbell, *Declaration*, 18-19.

[19] The compatibility of a restoration perspective with an appreciation for church history is discussed in Keith D. Stanglin, "Restorationism and Church History: Strange Bedfellows?" *Christian Studies* 26 (2013–14): 21-32.

[20] Ferguson, *Rule of Faith*, 84. Ferguson describes many beneficial uses of the rule of faith in today's church (ibid., 83-90).

God has done for his people in Christ, and it is summed up in the rule of faith and early creeds. This is how the early church thought, and this is how they read the Bible.

This proposal should be a welcome possibility for those who have rejected traditional "restorationism" but have yet to find anything to put in its place. It should also be considered by those who have held more firmly to the traditional patternistic way but have been discouraged by the lack of unity that it actually provides.

Opening the door to the tradition and history of the church throughout the ages will come with a new set of questions. How much influence should the tradition have? which tradition? and so on. There will be tension, and the voices of tradition often will not solve the question, but they will enhance the conversation. As an analogy, consider the function of case laws in jurisprudence. For any particular case at hand, lawyers have before them a long history and a myriad of cases relevant to the law's interpretation and application, some of which may even be contradictory. Some of these decisions are more precedent-setting than others because of their wisdom, practicality, extensive reach, and their ability to stand the test of time and to gather consensus over a long period.[21] Similarly, the church's tradition, though complex, can speak with faithful wisdom to those willing to listen. This extended conversation can enhance the church's current conversations and help unite Christians liturgically, doctrinally, and morally.

Like Thomas Campbell, we are open to and we seek a better way toward Christian unity and maturity. Whatever that way is, it will not succeed if it is simply another method. As long as humans are involved and have their way, even the best way can end in division. Rather, the help of the Holy Spirit is needed to grant knowledge, wisdom, perspective, humility, and love, all of which are necessary if Christians are to be one.

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[21] Giulio Silano provides an extended analogy between a casebook and Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. See Silano, "Introduction," in Peter Lombard, *The Sentences, Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), xix–xxvi. This seems to be a helpful way to think about the whole Christian tradition.

Theological Orientation for Churches Of Christ: Resourcing Alexander Campbell's Trinitarian *Christian System*

John Mark Hicks

> A religion not honoring God the Father of all—not relying upon the person, mission, and death of the WORD INCARNATE—not inspired, cherished, animated, and inflamed by the Holy Spirit dwelling in my soul, is a cheat, a base counterfeit.[1]

> The "Christian Religion" confesses one "divine nature" and "three persons—the FATHER, the WORD and the HOLY SPIRIT."[2]

"The Christian System" is a series of numbered paragraphs under twenty-eight chapter headings, which provide a relatively comprehensive summary of Christian theology, or, as Alexander Campbell put it, "a completeness…in reference to the present demands of society."[3] The essay first appeared in the second edition of Campbell's *Christianity Restored* when the volume was retitled *The Christian System*.[4] Campbell issued several editions, and it became one of his most frequently and widely reprinted tomes.

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[1] Alexander Campbell, "To B. W. Stone," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 5 (September 1841): 401.

[2] Alexander Campbell, "Unitarianism, or, Remarks on Christian Union. No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series 3 (July 1846): 393.

[3] Alexander Campbell, "The Christian System," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 3 (October 1839): 456.

[4] Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored* (Bethany, VA: M'Vey and Ewing, 1835) and Campbell, *Christian System* (Pittsburg: Forrester and Campbell, 1839). Campbell

I return to this classic work for several reasons. First, his essay is thoroughly Trinitarian (though this is rarely recognized), and a Trinitarian and inductive reading of Scripture shapes Campbell's presentation of the Christian system. Second, within recent years, theologians within Churches of Christ have increasingly called for rooting theology in an explicitly Trinitarian understanding of God. C. Leonard Allen, Ronald Highfield, Mark Powell, and Kelly Carter, among others, represent this trend.[5] Third, Campbell's approach to the Christian system is *catholic*, *narratival*, and *biblical*, which resonates well with my own theological interests. It is *catholic* because it locates the Stone-Campbell Movement within the "great tradition" of the Christian faith. It is *narratival* because it mimics the redemptive narrative of Scripture, epitomized in the Apostles' Creed. It is *biblical* because each chapter is replete with Scripture quotations set against the backdrop of that narrative. In this article, I tease out how Campbell's "Christian System" may help orient theological reflection within Churches of Christ in a more Trinitarian form.

The Theological Context of Campbell's *Christian System*

As every cursory reader knows, the esteemed reformer wanted to represent biblical ideas with biblical terms. Consequently, he rejected "Trinity," "Trinitarian," "Triune God," "Eternal Generation," "Eternal Procession," as "metaphysical jargon."[6] He avoided what he called "metaphysical abstrac-

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did not like the original title since he thought it a rather arrogant claim. It was published with that title in his absence (cf. Campbell, "Events of 1823 and 1827," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 2 [October 1838]: 466). The 1839 edition is available here: http://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/tcs2/TCS200A.HTM

[5] C. Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ In (and After) the Modern Age* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2004); C. Leonard Allen and Danny Gray Swick, *Participating in God's Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ* (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2001); Ron Highfield, *Great is the Lord: Theology for the Praise of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Mark E. Powell, *Centered in God: The Trinity and Christian Spirituality* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2014), and Kelly D. Carter, *The Trinity in the Stone-Campbell Movement: Restoring the Heart of Christian Faith* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2015).

[6] Alexander Campbell and N. L. Rice, *A Debate Between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. Rice* (Lexington: A. T. Skillman & Son, 1844), 863.

tions"[7] or "abstract speculation."[8] Nevertheless, by the late 1830s, Campbell grew concerned about the relationship between his reforming movement, the Unitarians of New England, and the Christian Connexion. In the 1840s this blossomed into a clear renunciation of the theological core of Unitarianism and the articulation, despite his avoidance of scholastic language, of an explicit Trinitarian theology.

The emergence of Campbell's strong Trinitarian language is directly related to the union of the "Reformers" with Barton W. Stone's "Christians" in the 1830s and the Christian Connexion's movement toward Unitarianism in the 1840s. In Campbell's eyes, Stone's theology was fundamentally Unitarian—he denied the full deity of the Son as well as the Son's role as sin-offering. In this atmosphere, Campbell invited Stone to discuss the atonement in the *Millennial Harbinger*,[9] which began in the summer of 1840 and ended in the fall of 1841.[10] When Campbell debated the Presbyterian N. L. Rice in 1844, Rice pointed out how Stone affirmed neither the eternal character of the person who became incarnate nor the efficacious nature of his death for sin.[11] In response, while Campbell did not agree with Stone, he suggested the Reformation's forbearance with Stone and like-minded individuals was a "redeeming policy."[12] From the late 1830s to the mid-1840s, Campbell conducted what amounted to a campaign to unite the movement and locate it within the "great tradition" of the Christian faith.

In 1839 Campbell published *The Christian System*. Most of the material published in the book was reprinted from his 1835 *Christianity Restored*. The major difference was the substitution of "The Christian System" for "Principles of Interpretation." Why does Campbell substitute a theological orientation for a hermeneutical one, especially when Campbell regarded hermeneu-

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[7] Alexander Campbell, "Definitions and Answers to Questions—No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 4 (February 1840): 81.

[8] Alexander Campbell, "To Brother Henry Grew," *Millennial Harbinger* 4 (April 1833): 154.

[9] Campbell, "Definitions and Answers," 82.

[10] The essays are available at http://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/bstone/mh/ATONE00.HTM.

[11] Campbell and Rice, *Debate*, 829–30, 853–54.

[12] Campbell and Rice, *Debate*, 865.

tics as such a critical tool for his restoration agenda? The persistent presence of Unitarian Christology among the "Christians" provided the occasion for his essay whose focus is not simply to summarize the Christian faith but to overturn Unitarian Christology and locate the Reform movement within the "great tradition." Campbell added this essay, as the preface to the second edition described, to correct misperceptions by outsiders who believed the movement was deficient "on some very fundamental points of the Christian System."[13]

Several particulars indicate this. First, the discussion of sin offering consumes fifteen of the essay's ninety-five pages, which is obviously out of balance with the other twenty-seven chapters.[14] Second, Campbell's essay "The Christian System," assumes the "operation of THREE DIVINE PARTICIPANTS, of one self-existent, independent, incommunicable nature" is "fundamental."[15] Indeed, Campbell's "Summary of the Christian System of Facts," which constitutes chapter twenty-three, is ordered in triune fashion.[16] A triune understanding of God is, according to Campbell, "necessary to all rational and sanctifying views of religion."[17] Third, the publication of the *Christian System* apparently precipitated the Stone-Campbell discussion on atonement as some questioned his "style as too Trinitarian."[18]

The first essay of the book, also titled "The Christian System," serves three fundamental purposes. First, it locates the Reform movement within the broad tradition of Christianity and thereby dispels misconceptions about the movement and "prevent[s] misrepresentation of their views."[19] This anticipates Campbell's enthusiastic response to the formation of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846, though he thought it was insufficiently "catholic" in spirit.[20]

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[13] Campbell, *Christian System*, xvii.

[14] Campbell, *Christian System*, 36–51.

[15] Campbell, *Christian System*, 74. Cf. Carter, *Trinity in the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 78-81.

[16] Campbell, *Christian System*, 73–75.

[17] Campbell, *Christian System*, 73.

[18] Campbell, "Definitions and Answers," 82.

[19] Alexander Campbell, "Forrester & Campbell," *Millennial Harbinger* New Series 3 (July 1839): 336.

[20] Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union.—No. X. Evangelical Alliance—No. V," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series (1847): 253. Cf. William R. Baker, "Christian Churches (Independent): Are We Evangelical?" in E*vangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell*

It also illustrates Campbell's interest in discussing the "great principles of the Christian system, which are opposed to those narrow and restricted bonds of union, which unite a few against the many."[21] Second, it provides a "connected view of the great outlines and elements of the Christian Institution," and it does so in view of the "all-absorbing question of Protestant Christendom," which is to unite "*all Christians*" into "*one great community*."[22] Consequently, Campbell provides a summary of Christian theology, which might serve as a framework for cooperation and harmony among Christians. As with the Evangelical Alliance, Campbell sought to "co-operate with them just as far and as long as they please to permit" him.[23] Third, it narrates a systematic theology of the Christian faith through a biblical-theological Trinitarian lens. Campbell seeks to re-present biblical theology through the "facts" of the Christian narrative, and the fundamental orienting "fact" is the triune personhood of the one God who is revealed in the history of Jesus the Messiah.

The Trinitarian Structure of the *Christian System*

Not surprisingly, Campbell does not use traditional language. His interest is explicitly biblical. For example, whereas relations within the Godhead before the incarnation were between "God, the word of God, and the Spirit of God," after the incarnation they are between "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[24] Campbell believes, in light of biblical terminology, the Word became Son through the incarnation, and this does not diminish the eternal personhood of the Word who was "with God" from the beginning.[25] This

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Movement, ed. William R. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 31–36.

[21] Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Waterman," *Millennial Harbinger* 5 (February 1834) 60.

[22] Campbell, *Christian System*, xvii.

[23] Campbell, "Christian Union.—No. X," 255.

[24] Campbell, *Christian System*, 25. Cf. "In *creation* it was simply GOD, the WORD of God, the SPIRIT of God. In providence and moral government it is the *Lord God*, the *Word*, and the *Holy Spirit*. In the gospel it is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Guest" (Campbell, "Christian Union.—No. VII. Evangelical Alliance—No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series 4 [February 1847]: 82).

[25] See Carter, *Trinity in the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 156–57, for an explanation of this theological move.

illustrates Campbell's fundamental principle in thinking about God: the "modus of Divine existence, as well as the modus of Divine operations in creation, providence, and redemption" are "inscrutable and incomprehensible" to "our finite minds." Consequently, we must root our theological reasoning in the reality of divine work and never "stretch our inquiries beyond the *terra firma* of revelation."[26] As a result, Campbell is more concerned with the Trinitarian persons in relation to creation (the "economic Trinity") than in eternal relations with one another (the "immanent Trinity").

Campbell, therefore, both structures theology around and limits it to the explicit facts and language of revelation. Campbell's structure is "creation, providence, and redemption." He sometimes calls them nature (creation), government (providence), and redemption, which corresponds with God's role as "Creator, Lawgiver and Redeemer."[27] The "Father, Son, and Spirit" each have their "own peculiar work and glory in the three great works of Creation, Government, and Redemption."[28] His "Summary of the Christian System of Facts" in chapter twenty-three describes the "peculiar work and glory" of each.[29] The whole redemptive story is viewed through the lens of the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

In the "economy of redemption," the Son and the Spirit are subordinate, and this is where Jehovah is "revealed in the *names* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[30] These "names" represent relations only within the economy of redemption and do not refer to the relations of the three divine participants in creation and providence as well as "before time."[31] The names reveal the relation of the Father, Son, and Spirit to each other in terms of their mode of existence and operation within the economy of redemption. In other words, the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are redemptive—Christian—terms. The work of creation and providence belongs to the Trinity before the incarnation—God, Word of God, and Spirit of God.

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[26] Campbell, "To Brother Henry Grew," 155.
[27] Campbell, *Christian System*, 20
[28] Campbell, *Christian System*, 25.
[29] Campbell, *Christian System*, 74–75.
[30] Alexander Campbell, "Grew—Part 2," *Millennial Harbinger* 4 (August 1833): 400.
[31] Campbell, *Christian System*, 25.

Given this structuring, the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are essential for the understanding and practice of Christianity, according to Campbell. The conclusion of chapter five, "The Spirit of God"—which follows chapter three "God" and chapter four "The Son of God"—summarizes the significance of these chapters as the foundation of the whole Christian system.

> The divine doctrine of these holy and incomprehensible relations in the Divinity, is so inwrought and incorporated with all the parts of the sacred books—so identified with all the dispensations of religion, and so essential to the mediatorship of Christ, that it is impossible to make any real and divine proficiency in the true knowledge of God—of man—of reconciliation—or remission of sins—of eternal life—or in the piety and divine life of Christ's religion—without a clear and distinct perception of it, as well as a firm and unshaken faith and confidence in it, as we trust still to make more evident in the sequel.[32]

Campbell's "Christian System" has a Trinitarian structure. His understanding of the Trinity is eminently orthodox except for his denial of eternal sonship (though he does not deny eternal personhood). Even in this, however, he denies it because it implies, he argues, an ontological subordination of the Son to the Father within the immanent Trinity. Campbell wants to ascribe to the Logos (and Spirit) a deity equal to God (economically the Father) as the three share the same divine nature and thus are equally divine. The danger in this construct is tritheism but Campbell avoids that by affirming their singular ontology.

Campbell's Trinitarian thought emphasizes the social dimension of the divine life. The divine nature exists in three "relations" (or "modes of existence"). Rather than thinking in mathematical terms as if God were a "mathematical unit," Campbell draws on the analogy of "*relations* in human plurality." Though all humans share the same nature, they do not share the same relations. Human relations are defined by three relations of "derivation and modes of existence"—Adam as the original creation, Eve as derived from Adam, and children as born of the two. "While Eve proceeded from Adam in one mode, and Cain proceeded from Adam and Eve in another, all the resi-

[32] Campbell, *Christian System*, 26.

due of human nature is participated without any new relation or mode of impartation." [33]

> We can find something analogous to Trinitarianism in human nature; for human nature exists in three personal relations, and in but three essential personal relations. There was Adam possessing all human nature in one form in himself. There was Eve, emanating from him, and possessing all his nature, without abstracting any thing from him, leaving Adam in full possession of both a person and a nature. He had still a nature common with Eve, and a person peculiar to himself. Again, there was a child emanating from both these, but from neither of them alone, possessing all the nature of Adam and all the nature of Eve; possessing, indeed, all human nature, and yet a person distinct from both Adam and Eve. Here, then, are three persons possessing one nature—three personal relations in one common nature.[34]

Given that humanity is created in the image of God, the analogy—recognizing, of course, the transcendent God cannot be contained by any such analogies drawn from created reality—means we should conceive God "as having plurality, relation, and society in himself." There is a "plurality of personal manifestations in the divine nature."[35] This is not a matter of "inference only" since the economic revelation of God in "the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit" is the "revealed relation of three persons." It is on this "principle"—"I send thee," "I and thou send him," and "Jehovah and his Spirit has sent me"—that the "Christian economy is arranged and developed."[36] Just as it "was not good for man to be alone," so also "God never was alone."[37]

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[33] Campbell, *Christian System*, 21.

[34] Alexander Campbell, "Unitarianism as Connected with Christian Union—No. III," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series, 3 (August 1846): 451. Campbell (452) believed his reasoning should not be dismissed because of "its novelty, its originality, or its peculiarity."

[35] Campbell, *Christian System*, 21.

[36] Campbell, "To Brother Henry Grew," 159.

[37] Alexander Campbell, "Letter from Henry Grew—Part 1," *Millennial Harbinger* 4 (July 1833): 309.

Trinitarian Theology as "Necessary" Fact

Campbell had more problems with Arian, Unitarian, and Socinian Christologies than he did the Trinitarian one because Trinitarians do not deny (1) the eternal and thus fully divine relation of God and the Word and (2) the efficacy of the death of a Jesus who is less than divine can do nothing more than any other human. Campbell could be neither Arian nor Socinian because, in those systems, the death of Jesus becomes the death of one whose person is less than divine.[38] Since a creature "owes life" and everything else to the Creator, "if my Redeemer," Campbell argued, "was never more than a creature, he never could do more than pay his own debts." If he is not divine, then if he does not share in the society of the divine nature and therefore no one owes "but a few cents more to Jesus Christ than to any of the ancient martyrs."[39] Unitarianism, Arianism, and Socinianism "undeify the second Adam" and thus deny the gospel. It cannot, therefore, be a "gospel of the grace of God." "Divinity, absolute Divinity," Campbell writes, "in all its grandeur, dwelt in him, and shall forever dwell in him."[40] This is a necessary fact for the Christian system.

In his debate with Rice, Campbell insisted that there were "but two grand principles in Christianity—two laws revealed and developed" that are the "divine constitution of remedial mercy." These "*two* ideas" envelop "the *person* of the Messiah and his *office*." To confess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, encompasses these two ideas and constitutes the "full confession of the christian [*sic*] faith." Indeed, "a clear perception, and a cordial belief of these two facts will make any man a christian."[41] It is the "central truth of the Christian system."[42] It is the "fundamental fact" of Christianity.[43] At the heart of this confession is the deity of the person whose death is a sacrificial sin offering. The divine character of the person is the root fact

[38] Campbell, "To Brother Henry Grew," 157–58.

[39] Campbell, "Grew—Part 2," 396.

[40] Alexander Campbell, "The Claims of the Messiah," *Millennial Harbinger* Fifth Series, 6 (January 1863) 11.

[41] Campbell and Rice, *Debate*, 822.

[42] Campbell, "Christian Union—No. V," 690.

[43] Alexander Campbell, "Foundations of Christian Union," in *Christianity Restored*, 118.

grounding the efficacy of the sin offering. Trinitarian theology is a presupposition of this "fundamental fact."

The importance of this for Campbell is evident in his dialogue with the Christian Connexion, who were in discussions with the American Unitarian Association of Boston in 1845–1846. Campbell insisted that "agreement in the doctrine concerning Christ, or a *declaration of our faith in the person, mission, and character of Jesus Christ*" was "essential to Christian union." The foundation of unity must be "who" and "what" Jesus is.[44] When Campbell engages Unitarianism his primary problem with its theology is this: it does not esteem the person of Jesus highly enough, and consequently it does not esteem his work highly, either. He extensively quoted the views of Unitarians on the person and work of the Son.[45] "Any theory," Campbell wrote, "that degrades my Redeemer to the rank of any mere creature, and his death to that of a distinguished martyr, expresses opinions more subversive of the Christian faith than those which Paul notices as making Christ of none effect."[46]

According to Campbell, one must affirm the "true and proper divinity or godhead of my Lord Messiah, and the real sin-expiating value and efficacy of his death, and of his death alone, based upon his peerless worth and divine majesty" which are "the rock of my salvation—the basis of all my hopes of immortality—the very anchor of my soul."[47] Part of the function of Campbell's Trinitarian theology is to secure the theological meaning of the empirical fact of Jesus' death. As a death for sin, motivated by the love of the Father, it secures the expiation of sin only on the ground that the death of Jesus was the death of the divine Son of God. This was a divine self-substitution for sinful humanity.

Campbell's rejection of Unitarianism, then, was a function of his Trinitarian theology. His response to Unitarianism in 1846 is similar to the re-

[44] Alexander Campbell, "Remarks—No. I," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series 3 (April 1846): 222.

[45] Alexander Campbell, "Unitarianism, or, Remarks on Christian Union. No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series, 3 (July 1846): 389–92.

[46] Campbell, "Christian Union—No. V," 692.

[47] Campbell, "To B. W. Stone," 401.

sponse of Trinitarians whom he finds "incomparably more rational and intelligible" than the Unitarians.[48] The Unitarians

> have *one personal God*—no *personal word of God*—no *personal Spirit of God*. They have, therefore, no society, no plurality in the divine nature. Nay, they have no divine *nature* at all, for with them *God is one person!*[49]

This, according to Campbell, denies the meaning of Christian baptism as we are baptized into the "three names of three persons" so that there is "as much personal name, glory, and honor in any one of these three as in another." This is what we confess in baptism. We confess one God in three relations—"three distinct persons entitled to the honor and reverence of every Christian convert."[50]

A Narratival Hermeneutical Orientation

On one hand, it seems rather odd that Campbell would compose such a systematic account of the Christian faith. Indeed, many sarcastically noted how the great opponent of "system-making" authored a "system." On the other hand, Campbell does not mean "system" in a scholastic sense, that is, a series of deductions from basic propositions. On the contrary, his sense of "system" excludes abstractions and speculations. Since "no system is insular and independent, no system can be understood abstractly."[51] For Campbell, the Christian "system" is a shorthand way of talking about the Christian narrative, which enumerates the facts Christians believe. These are understood inductively through reading Scripture, rather than inferred deductively from theological propositions.

Thomas Olbricht suggests Campbell, along with Walter Scott and others, embraced a narratival, biblical-theological approach to Christian theology. This is evident, according to Olbricht, in Campbell's "Christian System."[52] The Bible, Campbell writes, "is a book of facts, not of opinions, theo-

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[48] Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union—No. III," 451.

[49] Alexander Campbell, "Remarks. No. II," 392.

[50] Alexander Campbell, "Remarks. No. II," 393.

[51] Campbell, *Christian System*, 1.

[52] Thomas H. Olbricht, "Recovery of Covenantal Narratival Biblical Theology in the Restoration Movement," in *And the* WORD *Became Flesh: Studies in History, Commu-*

ries, abstract generalities, nor of verbal definitions. It is a book of awful facts, grand and sublime beyond description. These facts reveal God and man."[53]

When Campbell writes "facts" he does not mean abstracted propositions or an atomistic collection of data. On the contrary, facts are "the history of the past" or "anticipations of the future," which constitute "four-fifths" of Scripture.[54] Facts are "the alpha and the omega of both Jewish and Christian revelations."[55]

What Campbell does in the "Christian System" is draw out the facts of the redemptive narrative in order to offer a generous and unifying account of the Christian faith, which might provide a solid foundation for unity among Christians. "The work of redemption," he wrote, "is a system of work, or deeds, on the part of Heaven," and these deeds are "facts." Indeed, "fact," according to Campbell, "means something done;" it is a "deed," an historical act or event.[56] The Christian system is, essentially, a narrative of the great events of redemptive history by which God redeems.

> The gospel system is a system of redemption—a deliverance of its subjects from ignorance, guilt, and bondage. It contemplates a new creation—a transformation of man in body, soul, and spirit. It is, therefore, a great system of physical, moral, and spiritual means and ends. Hence its doctrine, its precepts, and its promises are but developments of a remedial system, originating in the benevolence of God, guided by his wisdom and perfected by his power.[57]

Within his essay, Campbell provides a summary of this narrative under the heading "The Purposes of God Concerning Man" (chapter eight). His succinct paragraphs carry us through the redemptive narrative of Scripture and suggest this brief outline, which I have constructed from the chapter:

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nication and Scripture in Memory of Michael W. Casey, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and David Fleer (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 76–77.

[53] Campbell, *Christian System*, 17.

[54] Campbell, *Christian System*, 17–18.

[55] Campbell, "Foundations of Christian Union," in *Christian System*, 113.

[56] Campbell, "Foundations of Christian Union," in *Christian System*, 113–14.

[57] Alexander Campbell, "Tracts for the People—No. XIII. Baptism—No. X. The Design of Baptism—No. I.," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series 4 (May 1847): 241–42.

- "The universe issued from the goodness of God," which expresses divine love.
- Humanity originated "moral evil in God's dominion."
- God purposed a redemptive "system," the "Christian system," before the foundation of the world to arrest the "contagion of sin" within the universe.
- This remedial system was implemented from the beginning and announced through promises to "Eve, to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, &c."
- "All the *purposes* and *promises* of God are in Christ," which means they were "consummated in and by him" and "contemplated, covenanted, and systematized in him and through him before the *foundation of the world*."
- The "whole remedial or gospel system was purposed, arranged, and established upon the basis of the revealed distinctions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."
- "Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah, was elected…and appointed to be the foundation of the new creation."
- "In consequence of these gracious promises of God…
  - "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us…
  - became a Prophet, a High Priest, and a King over men…
  - became the righteous servant of Jehovah…
  - died, was buried, and rose again…
  - ascended where he had been before—then, in union with his Father, sent the Holy Spirit
  - who proceeded forth…to consummate the sanctification of his people….
  - [enthroned as] head over all things to complete the triumphs of his cause…
  - to lead many sons to glory—to raise the dead, judge the world, and revenge Satan…
  - to create new heavens and new earth, and to establish eternal peace, and love, and joy through all the new dominions."
- "The present elect of God are, then, those who are *in Christ*."

In essence, this is an expansion or elaboration of the Apostles' Creed, consistent with Campbell's appreciation for that ancient creed.[58] The Apostles' Creed, he wrote, "contains all the prominent christian facts,"[59] and it is "a

[58] See Gary Holloway, "Both Catholic and Protestant: Alexander Campbell and Tradition," *Christian Studies* 15 (1995-1996): 46–54.

[59] Campbell, "Dialogue on Heresy," *Millennial Harbinger* 3 (August 1832): 405.

brief narrative of facts, and of all the great gospel facts."[60] Campbell's "Christian System" puts meat on the bones of the Apostles' Creed.

This system of facts, or redemptive narrative, is fundamentally expressed in a single proposition (rightly understood—which is why the larger system of facts is important). That proposition is: *Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God*. This confession includes the "facts of [the] Messiah's life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven." As such, it "is the most fundamental proposition in the moral universe. It is the foundation of the system of redemption."[61] "This is the central truth of the Christian system" upon which Christian unity is founded.[62] It encapsulates the narrative, and assumes a Trinitarian theology.

Conclusion

Campbell's "Christian System" affirms the economic Trinity as a fact. This shapes his theology, Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology. But, interestingly, it does not significantly shape his ecclesiology, which is more rooted in "positive law" than it is the social relations of the Triune God.

Significantly, the Trinitarian "Summary" (chapter twenty-three) in the "Christian System" precedes his discussion of ecclesiology and ministry, which are: "Body of Christ" (chapter twenty-four), "Christian Ministry" (chapter twenty-five), "Christian Discipline" (chapter twenty-six), "Expediency" (chapter twenty-seven), and "Heresy" (chapter twenty-eight). Ecclesiology is essentially tacked onto the "remedial system" as a structure built on the remedial foundation but constructed without Trinitarian principles. Ecclesiology, then, operates on its own theological and hermeneutical principles essentially unaffected by Trinitarian theology. This tends to generate an emphasis on form rather than relation as the theological ontology is focused on positive prescriptions rather than relationality and communion. Stan Grenz offered a similar observation in noting how Stone-Campbell ecclesiology is too "Christocentric" and needs a more robust Trinitarian flavor.[63]

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[60] Campbell, "Reply to Barnabas," *Millennial Harbinger* 3 (December 1832): 602.

[61] Alexander Campbell, "Tracts for the People. No. IV. Faith," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series 3 (February 1846): 82.

[62] Alexander Campbell, "What is a Sect?—Who is a Sectary?—Are the Baptists a Sect?," *Millennial Harbinger* Fourth Series 1 (September 1851): 523.

[63] Stanley J. Grenz, "An Evangelical Response to Ferguson, Holloway & Lowery: Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church in Practice," in *Evangelicalism*

In Campbell's rejection of Unitarianism in 1846, however, he shows hints of applying a Trinitarian theology to the kind of relation God would have with humanity. Humanity was created to have "communion and society with God." God and humanity "first dwelt together in a terrestrial heaven," but humanity rebelled and was excluded from Paradise. While in creation God dwelt with humanity, in redemption God "dwells *in*" humanity so that the redeemed may be "brought back to live in God." This sounds teasingly close to the kind of mystical mutual indwelling of the Eastern Church, but in Campbell's mind it more probably fits with the factuality of God's relationship with us as drawn from the Gospel of John. Eschatologically, Campbell believed God will dwell "in and with" humanity in a renewed earth, a regenerated new heavens and new earth.[64] The tease, however, is humanity's participation in and communion with the society of God. In some manner, Campbell believed humanity dwells in God and God dwells in them in such a way that they share the same society. This is not an ontological union, but a communion between divine and human persons. This kind of Trinitarian thinking should shape the whole of our theology, including our ecclesiology.

At the same time, Campbell's narrative of facts, epitomized in the Apostles' Creed, locates him within the "great tradition," and he is quite willing to see himself in that way. Campbell does not believe Christian unity is found in the "ancient order" (ecclesiological form), even though he would prefer the full restoration of that "ancient order" as a way forward for Christian unity and the full assurance of believers. Campbell, however, never regarded conformity to that "ancient order" a test of fellowship or necessary for unity among fellow Christians. He is quite explicit about this. Campbell "never made" compliance to the ancient order "a test of christian character or terms of christian communion."[65]

& the Stone-Campbell Movement, ed. William R. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 231–32.

[64] Alexander Campbell, "Unitarianism as Connected with Christian Union—No. IV," *Millennial Harbinger* Third Series 3 (November 1846): 637.

[65] Campbell, "Replication No. II. to Spencer Clark," *Christian Baptist* 5 (3 September 1827): 370.

On the contrary, all that was necessary for Christian communion and character was the "Christian system," that is, its narrated facts. This is a shared heritage among followers of Jesus and the common confession of believers throughout the centuries. That narrative contains all the facts, commands, and promises necessary for Christian communion and character. It is, in that sense, an ecumenical orientation.

Confessions of Faith in the New Testament

Jeffrey Peterson

Growing up in a Church of Christ near Houston, the most characteristic statement I recall hearing about "creeds" or "confessions of faith" was a negative one, that as a communion we were not guided by the Apostles' Creed or the other historic confessions of Christendom. But I also recall two positive statements. First, it was suggested that the church had "no creed but the Bible." This statement did provide a clear indication of the source of religious authority. In practice, however, the Bible makes an awkward creed, as it is too large to demand that converts have an extensive knowledge of it, and issues of interpretation quickly arise that prevent its serving the function of defining the boundaries of a communion (to mention one function creeds have historically served).

The second positive statement was a commendation of the Ethiopian eunuch's confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37 KJV), as the model for what believers should affirm in response to the gospel before being baptized and as the basis for the actual practice of baptism. It is noteworthy that even in a "non-credal" communion, value was seen in a summary of the Christian faith succinct enough to be employed in the initiation of converts so as to impress upon them the fundamental commitment they were making, to which they could presumably be recalled if the need arose (though I do not recall seeing the baptismal confession used in this way).

The use of Acts 8:37 proves awkward for Christians who seek to be guided by the New Testament once it is recognized that this passage was a scribal

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addition to the text, as indicated in all recent translations.[1] If we survey the Scriptures, however, we will find throughout the New Testament canon brief summaries of the faith employed for various purposes. Consideration of these and their use among Jesus' earliest followers may increase our appreciation for later creeds and confessions of faith and the uses which disciples after the first century found for them.

The Synoptic Gospels

We first meet such a confession of faith in the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus. The first three Gospels (called the "Synoptic" Gospels because they offer significantly parallel accounts of Jesus' ministry) all relate, as a turning point in their narrative, Jesus' questioning of his disciples about the popular opinion of him and then about their own understanding (Mark 8:27–30; Matt 16:13–20; Luke 9:18–21).[2] Jesus quizzes the disciples at the conclusion of the first phase of his public ministry, in which he has repeatedly said and done things that lead those who witness them to raise the question of his identity—as the disciples ask earlier in the Synoptic narrative, after Jesus stills the storm, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41 ESV; cf. Matt 8:27; Luke 8:22).

The answer to Jesus' question varies slightly in the three Synoptic versions, but they agree on the main point. Mark's narrative records the simplest answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29 ESV)—the "Messiah" (NRSV), the Anointed

[1] J. W. McGarvey gamely argued that "[t]he fact that it is interpolated does not prove that the eunuch did not make the confession" (*A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles, with a Revised Version of the Text* 7th ed. [Lexington: Transylvania Printing and Publishing Co., 1872], *ad loc.*; on line at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/mcgarvey/acts.ch8.html, accessed 24 March 2016).

[2] This essay gives priority to Mark among the Synoptics, noting differences in Matthew and Luke where significant, because I agree with most New Testament scholars that Mark was the first Gospel written, and that Matthew and Luke both made use of Mark's work in composing theirs. I give my reasons for holding to this conclusion in my essay "Order in the Double Tradition and the Existence of Q" in *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique*, edited by Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 28 n. 2; on line at http://austingrad.edu/images/Resources/Peterson/Order%20in%20Double%20Tradition.pdf.

One, chosen by God to rule as king over his people and inaugurate the age of blessing anticipated in the prophecies of Scripture (e.g., Isaiah 11:1–10). Peter's answer as recorded by Luke—"the Messiah of God" (Luke 9:20 NRSV), or "the one anointed [and so chosen] by God"—makes explicit what is implicit in the title "Messiah": the coming of this king and the blessings bestowed by his advent are the work of the Creator who chose the tribe of Abraham and pledged to make his descendants an instrument of blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1–3).

In Matthew's account, Peter's confession is elaborated still further: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16 NRSV). This offers further explication of the term "Messiah," whom Scripture describes as God's "son" (Psalm 2; cf. 2 Sam 7:12–14; 1 Chron 17:11–14). The Judaism of New Testament times had a creed of its own, a daily profession of faith opening with Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and known as the *Shema* after the first word of that passage in Hebrew.[3] In the form in which Matthew records it, Peter's confession incorporates the fundamental conviction defining the faith of Israel with the new revelation that Jesus is the one through whom all of Israel's hopes in God will be fulfilled.[4] As in Luke, the elaboration of the confession in Matthew draws out the implications of the simple statement recorded in Mark, "You are the Messiah." These implications would have been evident to anyone formed in a Jewish milieu, but spelling them out was necessary in the course of a mission to Gentiles, to which Matthew's Gospel looks forward (Matt 24:14; 26:13; 28:18–20).

Matthew's account also makes it clear that this confession is foundational to the community Jesus would form through his ministry, death, and resurrection. After declaring Peter blessed because of his confession, Jesus utters the much-discussed statement, "I tell you, you are Peter [*Petros*, Rock], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [death] will not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18 NRSV). Whether the "rock" to which Je-

[3] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Company, 2003), 561.

[4] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. suggest that this may represent "a redactional addition inspired by the tradition of the trial before the Sanhedrin, where Jesus is adjured 'by the living God' to say whether or not he is 'the Christ the Son of God'" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2 International Critical Commentary [New York: T&T Clark, 2004], 620).

sus refers is Peter's confession of faith or Peter himself is a famous point of dispute between Protestant and Catholic interpreters. Matthew's Gospel in fact offers some support for both interpretations.[5] But the confession is crucial, for it is only as the one who acknowledges Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God that Simon the fisherman comes to embody the new name Peter that Jesus bestows on him.

In all three Synoptic Gospels, the confession serves to summarize what is revealed about Jesus and his role in God's saving purpose in the whole story the Evangelists tell, from Jesus' anointing with the Spirit of God at his baptism (Mark 1:9–11; Matt 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–22), to his manifestation to the disciples (cf. Mark 9:2–10; Matt 17:1–8; Luke 9:28–36), to his crucifixion and resurrection (Mark 14–16; Matt 26–28; Luke 22–24). Further, the Evangelists make clear that it is only when the confession is uttered with the whole story of Jesus in mind that it can form the foundation of Jesus' new community. This is shown in the immediate sequel to the confession, in which Jesus instructs his disciples about the suffering, death, and resurrection that await "the son of the Man" in Jerusalem, where they must now go.[6]

Also in all three Synoptic Gospels, this confession as elaborated in Jesus' instruction is made the basis of the community's ethics. After instructing the disciples on his own destiny, Jesus declares that any who wish to follow him must also take up the cross and give up their lives for Christ's sake in order to find life and be vindicated at the last judgment (Mark 8:34–38; Matt 16:24–27; Luke 9:23–26). Disciples of Jesus are called to live in imitation of and tes-

[5] For the OT background supplied by Abraham's being renamed (Gen 17:1–8) and designated Israel's originating "rock" (Isa 51:1–2), see Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 623–24. Matthew presents the authority that Peter will exercise in Jesus' church (16:19, where the pronoun "you" is singular) as shared with all the apostles (18:18, where "you" is plural), and the Gospel contains no indication that Peter's role within the Twelve was one that could be transferred to another.

[6] Luke offers the briefest account of this instruction (9:21–22). In both Mark (8:31–33) and Matthew (16:21–23), Peter protests Jesus' description of his fate, so that having rightly confessed Jesus' identity as Messiah, he is rebuked in the strongest terms for failing to accept what Jesus' service as Messiah will involve. On the significance of the phrase usually translated "the Son of Man" (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*), and on "the son of the Man" as a better translation (as the former leaves untranslated the second of the definite articles that always appear in the phrase in the Gospels), see Joel Marcus, "Son of Man as Son of Adam," *Revue biblique* 110 (2003): 38–61, 370–86.

timony to the Messiah who entered into glory by way of suffering, and thus prepare to stand before God.

The Letters of Paul

In the letters of Paul, we also find Jesus designated "Messiah" and "Son of God" in summary statements of the gospel (e.g., Rom 1:3–4; 8:3–4, 32; 9:4–5; 2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:9–10). Perhaps the best known of these is Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. As Paul's introduction suggests (vv. 1–3a), and as Richard Bauckham has convincingly argued, this passage does not quote a credal statement recited by converts as part of their Christian initiation, but rather draws selectively on a summary of the message Paul himself preached in Corinth (and elsewhere), which his converts "received" (NRSV et al.) in a manner that the summary itself does not specify.[7] The subject of the main verbs in the summary is "Messiah" (*Christos*, v. 3b), and the summary itself covers much the same ground as Jesus' instruction to his disciples concerning the destiny of the messianic "son of the Man."

Yet in Paul's letters another summary appears with greater prominence. Writing to converts in Corinth, Paul sums up his missionary message in the statement, "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim *Jesus Christ as Lord* and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5 NRSV, my emphasis). In 2 Corinthians, Paul recalls his preaching under this summary formula as part of an attempt to help his converts in Corinth view his ministry in the right perspective and respond appropriately to his continuing exhortations, his aim throughout the letter.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul shows how this summary of his preaching relates to the experience of converts who hear the gospel and are called to respond. This appears in the following passage in the third major section of the letter (chaps. 9–11).[8]

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[7] See Richard Bauckham, "Kerygmatic Summaries in the Speeches of Acts," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 185–217, especially 211–12. For the confession made by those who accepted Paul's preaching, see the discussion of Rom 10:6–13 below.

[8] On the argument of Romans, see John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 449–561.

> The righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart [Deut 9:4; cf. Deut 30:12], 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" [Deut 30:12; cf. Prov 30:4]—that is, to bring Christ down—"or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" [cf. Psalm 107:26, 106:26, Greek version]—that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does [Scripture] say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" [Deut 30:14]—that is, the word of faith that we proclaim. For if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame" [Isa 28:16, Greek version]. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" [Joel 2:32, 3:5, Greek version] (Rom 10:6–13 NRSV, modified).

As the bracketed references above suggest, Paul here presents a complex interpretation of one central scriptural text (Deut 30:12–14), amplified by other biblical passages, in the manner of ancient interpreters of Jewish Scripture.[9] He finds in the Scriptures a description of the preaching of the gospel by apostles like himself and of the response that converts make to it.[10]

The response that converts made to the preaching is presented in two brief statements (Rom 10:8–10), one ("Jesus is Lord") confessed "with the mouth," the other ("God raised him from the dead") embraced "with the heart." The two statements are closely related to one another, as the confession of Jesus as "Lord" draws on early Christian interpretation of Psalm 110:1 ("The LORD says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool,'" NRSV), according to which the first "lord" mentioned in the psalm is God the Father and the second is Christ at his resurrec-

[9] For an informative introduction to ancient interpretation of Jewish Scripture, in counterpoint with modern, see James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

[10] As Romans was sent to a congregation that Paul himself did not found and had no prior contact with (cf. 1:8–15; 15:22–24), the elements of conversion that the letter presupposes its recipients to have experienced (cf. 6:3–4) must also have characterized non-Pauline missionary efforts to Gentiles. That this was the case for Jewish converts as well is suggested by 10:12.

tion.[11] Paul's contrast between confessing with the lips and believing with the heart suggests that in the process of accepting the apostles' message and being added to the community, converts would cry aloud, "Jesus is Lord," while also giving mental assent to the proclamation that God raised him from the dead; in light of the interpretation of Psalm 110:1 noted above, the former was likely understood as an indication of the latter.

Converts, thus, did not recite all they had learned and come to believe through Paul or another missionary, but they verbally affirmed Jesus' lordship and thus indicated their acceptance of the message. In his letters, Paul refers to this acclamation not only to recall in summary form the message that his converts had embraced in becoming Christians, but also to suggest the obligations that their acceptance of this teaching implied. Thus, in opening his discussion of the proper use of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian assemblies, Paul states the principle that "no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3 NASB); the Corinthians can employ this as a benchmark to evaluate the degree to which their assemblies are guided by the Spirit for the benefit of the body and all its members (cf. 12:12–31; 14:4–5).

Similarly, in introducing the main section of the letter to the Colossians, Paul recalls how the recipients initially "received Christ Jesus the Lord" and challenges them to "so live in him" (Col 2:6 RSV) before reviewing the obligations they embraced by receiving baptism into Christ (Col 2:8–4:6). Embracing Christ as "Lord" involves taking on the responsibilities of living as his "servants." In acknowledging the sovereignty of Jesus Christ the Lord, Christians anticipate the age to come, in which "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, … and … every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10–11 NASB). The confession of Jesus as Lord thus sums up the whole life of converts, from the time they hear and respond to the gospel until they enter into God's consummation of his saving purpose for them and for all creatures.

[11] See Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 135–50.

The Letters of John

In the letters of John, written a generation after Paul's letters, we see a further development in the use of summary statements of the faith suitable for confession by converts. The Christians John addresses are plagued by false teachers who have fostered schism (1 John 2:19) and "denied that Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22 NRSV). In arming them against this threat, John calls his addressees to maintain a firm grip on the message they were initially taught: "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father" (1 John 2:24 NRSV).

When he comes to specific tests for distinguishing true teaching from false, what John offers resembles the principle that Paul offered his converts in 1 Corinthians 12:3: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God" (1 John 4:2–3 NRSV).[12] Here the core of the faith is defined very much as in the passages considered above, but to counter the false teaching with which John's audience must contend, the original confession of Jesus as the Christ is specified to affirm that he truly came among us "in the flesh." This was implicit in the apostolic confession that "Christ died" (1 Cor 15:3), but now the circumstances of the community require a more precise definition of the faith that was preached and received, though still one brief enough that it can be used to determine whether to admit visiting teachers to the community or not: "Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching" (2 John 10 NRSV)—namely, the teaching "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (2 John 7 NRSV).

Conclusion

Throughout the New Testament, we see the community that was formed by Jesus' ministry and which continued after his death and resurrection employing brief summaries of the faith in preaching, the instruction and initiation of converts, the shaping of the community's life, and the opposition of

[12] Stephen S. Smalley notes the parallel with 1 Corinthians 12:3 (*1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary 51 [Dallas: Word, 1989]), 222, 224.

false teaching.[13] In the Jewish context of Jesus' earthly ministry, the confession of him as "Messiah" and "Son of God" was sufficient to define the central conviction that united his disciples, the significance of which they had yet to learn. The first converts after Jesus' death and resurrection confessed him as "Lord" and so expressed both the exalted status to which God had raised him and the claim he exercised on their lives. When still later some teachers denied the bodily reality of Jesus' life and death, the confession was elaborated to specify that the risen Jesus confessed as Messiah had "come in the flesh," so that false teaching could be recognized.

It was through the use of these confessional summaries, which reminded the first converts to the gospel of the church's fundamental convictions and obligations, that the apostles formed the earliest communities gathered in Jesus' name for faithful living in a social environment that presented daily challenges to their decision to follow him. The social environment in which we are called to live out the faith has much in common with that of the first Christian converts and those who came after them before the reign of Constantine and his embrace of the Christian Church in the fourth century AD. The development of a "proto-credal" tradition within the canon suggests that Christians who seek to be guided by the New Testament should give careful consideration to later credal formulations and the purposes for which the Christians of the second and later centuries employed them as they also sought to follow in the path marked out by Jesus and the apostles.[14]

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[13] For an overlapping consideration of this question in the New Testament and further reflections for Restorationists, see Abraham J. Malherbe, "Creeds and Their Uses: The New Testament," *Christian Studies* 14 (1994): 5–18 (online at http://austingrad.edu/Christian%20Studies/CS%2014/Creeds.pdf).

[14] As Bauckham comments, the "kerygmatic summaries" of which he finds examples in Paul, Acts, and early second-century sources resembled "the creeds and the 'rule of faith' (which were in some sense derived from them) in the later second- and third-century church" in that they "functioned in any context where a succinct summary of the kerygma was needed" ("Kerygmatic Summaries," 188). For the development of this tradition in the second and third centuries, see Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015).

Toward a New Restoration Hermeneutic: On the Hermeneutical Relevance of the Old Testament

R. Mark Shipp

Hermeneutical Theory and the Problem with Traditional Restoration Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics—the philosophy of interpretation—has, in recent decades, gone from a primarily doctrinal, historical, or literary model to an existential one. That is to say, hermeneutics has gone from the *dicta probantia* of the late medieval church (where Scripture was used mainly as proof-texts) to the *Hermeneutik* of F. Schleiermacher[1] (where Scripture must mainly be understood historically; "an idea must be interpreted from the life context from which it springs") to the literary approach of Paul Ricoeur[2] (where the text is an independent entity, to be understood almost completely within its own literary "world"), to the existential approaches of Stanley Fish,[3] Jacques Derrida,[4] and many others (where neither history nor texts hold meaning, but people who read texts bring their own meaning). In the contemporary relativistic worldview, neither history nor literature provides any necessary interpretive

[1] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977).

[2] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1976).

[3] Associated with the "Reader-Response" theory of interpretation. Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1967).

[4] Associated with "Deconstruction." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

controls, since the locus of meaning resides in the individual reading the text or studying the history.

Contemporary existential models of interpretation present a challenge to a traditional Restoration hermeneutic, which depends upon both a reliable textual tradition and a reliable reconstruction of historical events. Indeed, the Restoration approach is beside the point to existential hermeneutics, since marshaling historical and textual evidence is simply pitting one subjective approach against another.

At the same time, Restoration hermeneutics has relied upon a heavily dispensational approach to scripture and theology. Previous dispensations (especially the Mosaic) are superseded by later ones. The point is to understand scripture as a revelation in history, leading to the current Christian dispensation. What remains of scripture is the latest dispensation (a portion, or all of, the New Testament), which is used as a modified *dicta probantia* for doctrine, organization, and ordinances of the church. While this approach makes sense if one is asking "What should the practices of the church be?", the Old Testament and conceivably the Gospels as theological witnesses can be largely ignored.

Given the challenges of contemporary hermeneutical theories and the limitations inherent in a dispensational approach, it is time for a new Restoration hermeneutic. This Restoration hermeneutic will be both literary and historical, and will recognize as well the constructive criticisms of existential hermeneutics (that the reader *does* bring meaning to a text).

Restoration Hermeneutics as a Philosophy of History

A new Restoration hermeneutic will understand the importance of historical inquiry. Biblical scholarship has emerged from an era which overemphasized the importance of history, to one in which historical inquiry into the world behind the Bible is deemphasized. A new Restoration hermeneutic will realize that "God made flesh" necessarily means that God has entered into the messy realm of human history and that history requires interpretation. It will recognize that historical events have been mediated to us by writers most often long removed from the events they describe; much of Scripture is "sermonic history," taking events of the past and making applications

for the present. But God's saving acts in history must not be collapsed into "God's saving narratives in literature."

The problem with a traditional Restoration philosophy of history is the tendency to collapse "story" into "history": all narrative texts which are "history-like" are assumed to be historical reports, subject to the canons of historical analysis. The losers in this collapse are the marvelous literary masterpieces which demonstrate complex and beautiful structures, imagery, poetics, and plot and character development.[5]

The question of literary genre comes into focus here. Not all passages in the Bible are intended to be read historically. Wisdom literature, such as the book of Proverbs, is overtly composed of admonitions, proverbs, and maxims which transcend any particular historical period. They are "wisdom for the ages." Likewise, parables and many psalms and songs are difficult to analyze historically. Their primary interpretive locus is their poetics and imagery, not a putative, reconstructed history.

Other types of narrative prove more difficult to determine genre and thus the beginning point for interpretation. Is the meaning of the book of Job dependent upon the historical facticity of the characters and events? Or is Job better understood as a complex, poetic morality play in dialogue form, dealing with the suffering of the innocent?[6]

Nor should historical narratives be understood in terms of modern history-writing. For example, the synoptic histories of Joshua–2 Kings and Chronicles are selective concerning which accounts are included, and those accounts are interpreted according to the theological and literary scheme of the

[5] Take, for example, the "Primeval History" of Genesis 1–11. It is difficult to imagine historical, scientific inquiry into the Garden of Eden—a realm where God "walked about"—though many have tried! The same may be said about other texts in Genesis 1–11 (take, for example, the "sons of God and the daughters of men," Gen 6:1–4), where a purely historical approach may not be the most fruitful.

[6] One could raise a similar question about Jonah and to a lesser extent Esther. Questions about the historicity of the books of Jonah and Esther ought not to invalidate the message of the books. Does the book of Jonah make historical claims about Nineveh's conversion, or is it better understood as a theological indictment of xenophobic, post-exilic Jews, who could not understand or accept God's purposes for and mission to the Gentiles?

compilers. They are "sermonic history" and should be understood as historical sermons delivered by prophetic preachers.

The sermonic nature of Old Testament historical narratives has implications for the reconstruction of historical events. On the one hand, the narrator is writing history, and should be considered a theological historian. On the other hand, details of synoptic histories can differ remarkably (for example, was Abijah/m a good or a bad king?),[7] raising questions to many about the historicity of the event. On the other hand, the prophetic preacher is not in the business of creating history, but selecting, interpreting, and preaching it.

For a Restoration hermeneutic, historical narratives ought to be considered historical, in the sense that they are events selected for their coherence with the prophetic preacher's theological agenda, unless there is reason to believe that an account found in that narrative should be understood parabolically, allegorically, as poetic metaphor, etc. Restoration hermeneutics affirms that God revealed his will through events and people in human history, but the recording of those events and the theological reflection on them is specific to a variety of literary genres.

Furthermore, since revelation happened in history as well as literature, salvation history is necessarily progressive. This means that it was only in the fullness of time that God revealed his ultimate will and purpose in Jesus Christ, and that other events and writers along the way only revealed God's purpose "through a glass darkly." If biblical texts truly represent the cultural milieus which produced them, they will reflect the and world views of those cultures. This is what "revelation in history" means: that God spoke to real human beings in real historical settings and communicated to them in *their* idiom. This is why there are cherubim (winged lion sphinxes), the "firmament," the chaos waters, and many other time and culture-bound terms in the Bible. According to Peter Enns, who refers to this as "incarnational theology," the words and deeds of God are enfleshed in human cultures in spe-

[7] Compare 2 Kgs 14:31ff with 2 Chron 12:16ff.

cific times and places, still a stumbling-block to believers and unbelievers alike.[8]

Restoration Hermeneutics as a Philosophy of Scripture

The American Restoration Movement has always believed that Scripture is fully inspired and is the fountainhead for the church's theology and practice. How the Scriptures should be read, and the interpretive philosophy that informs that reading, are therefore critical. In this section I will discuss the Old Testament as theological witness, the relationship between the testaments, and the New Testament and doctrinal theology.

The Old Testament as Theological Witness: We have always believed that "all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable…"[9] What this has meant in practice, however, is that while "all Scripture is inspired by God," some Scriptures are "more equal than others." That is to say that the New Testament Scriptures[10] are alone the "constitution" for the church, and alone the guide to doctrine and godliness.[11] In practice, the Old Testament has often been marginalized or even deemed an unworthy theological witness to God's redemptive activity.

A new Restoration hermeneutic must begin with the re-affirmation that "*all* Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching…" In Paul's letter to Timothy, the Scripture being referred to is without question the Old Testament. The problem that immediately arises, however, has to do with which elements of the Old Testament are continuous, and which are discontinuous, with the New Testament.

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[8] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 10th anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).

[9] 2 Timothy 3:16.

[10] In its extreme form, only Acts 2 and following are allowed as authoritative witnesses to the contemporary church.

[11] Although Campbell would never say it this way, in his writings he gave primacy of place to the book of Genesis, which is foundational for some of his doctrinal formulations, but then spent the bulk of his time in the New Testament. See *Millennial Harbinger* New Series vol. 4ff, in which in the section on "Family Culture" he discusses at an ostensible family table the accounts of Genesis. In the Index volume there are more references by far to Genesis in the *Harbinger* than any other Old Testament book.

A Restoration hermeneutic should deal with the function of the Old Testament in the life of faith, but should also recognize that some Old Testament texts are contextually bound to the eras which produced them.[12] It is my contention that all texts of Scripture are theological; that is, they teach us something important about God, the community of faith, the nations, or creation. Not all Old Testament texts can be translated into our context and appropriated for church doctrine,[13] but all Old Testament texts may be understood and appropriated theologically. Perhaps it is here where the "traditional hermeneutic" applies. "Command, example, and necessary inference" is a workable hermeneutic for what it is intended to do: to sift the Scriptures for church doctrine and practices. The problem with this hermeneutic is that most texts of the Old Testament, and many of the New, slip through the interpretive sieve. How does one affirm, however, the progressive nature of revelation and its embodiment in the ever-changing panorama of history, and affirm as well that "all Scripture is inspired … and profitable"? Jesus himself addresses the issue of scriptural continuity and discontinuity in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard it said… But I say to you…" Relative to some of these antitheses Jesus reaffirms the Old Testament text, to some he adds to their force and application, and others he abrogates.[14]

The Relationship between the Testaments: Our understanding of the relationship between the testaments has everything to do with our philosophy of biblical interpretation. Most believers for the past 2000 years have accepted the canonical status of the Old Testament as well as the New. Accepting the canon, however, is not the same as understanding how the testaments relate.

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[12] This suggests, of course, something similar to Walther Eichrodt's "cross-section" method of understanding Old Testament theology (*Theology of the Old Testament* vol. 1 [Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], especially 27) or perhaps Wilhelm de Wette's "pure" (*rein*) and "true" (*wahr*) theology (*Biblischen Dogmatik: Alten und Neuen Testaments* [Berlin: G. Reimer, 1831], 2, 6, etc). The "pure" theology is not bound to a particular age or culture, as the "true," but transitory, theology is. A Restoration hermeneutic must deal with the diachronic ("across time," time bound and progressive) as well as the synchronic (doctrinal) nature of the text of Scripture.

[13] I think in this regard of Old Testament ritual texts (Leviticus 1–7 in particular), purity laws (Leviticus 11–15), many of the case laws of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, and many poetic texts which use imagery completely foreign to our cultural understanding (e.g., Psalm 114 and Psalm 82).

[14] Matt 5:21–48.

Many models have been advanced over the millennia regarding how one should read the two testaments. Something has been said already about the medieval *dicta probantia*, Scripture as doctrinal proof-texts. Another common theory is the prophetic function of Old Testament texts relative to the New, that is that the Old Testament is prophecy and the New Testament is its fulfillment. From Antiochene fathers, and more recently suggested by Gerhard von Rad, is the typological model, where the Old Testament provides types for the New Testament antitypes. Of course, the most common perspective undergirding Campbell's philosophy of interpretation is a dispensational approach. In general, Churches of Christ have adopted an "economic" dispensational model, where the various covenants are "economies" wherein God worked his will in a temporary fashion. With the advent of a new economy, the prior one is abrogated.

While there is some utility, and some truth, in this model, there are also pitfalls. There is no indication that the Noachic covenant, a covenant with all flesh, was abrogated by God's covenant with Abraham or by the covenant at Sinai.[15] Likewise, this "constitutional," economic model could not deal well with the covenant with David, an "eternal covenant," alongside of and assuming the Sinai covenant. Indeed, Christians should still affirm the validity of the Davidic covenant, since we still serve a king in the line of David! One can also make the case that in Romans 9–11 Paul affirms two kinds of Christians, Jewish and Gentile, and that Jews embody the "natural plant" and may still keep the demands and traditions of *Torah* as believers in Christ.[16] The economic model of progressive revelation through the covenants is tricky and problematic indeed.

The New Testament and Doctrinal Theology: Our focus has always been on the New Testament as the witness to the latest, and final, economy. In Campbell's constitutional model, the New Testament functions as the constitution for the church and as such includes propositions for the ordering, maintenance, and discipline of the church. In practice, however, there have always been texts which have generally been ignored or dismissed as culturally specific and not relevant to us. I think in this regard of women wearing veils, the

[15] Some have made the connection of the Noachic covenant with the instructions of the Jerusalem council to Gentiles in Acts 15.

[16] See Acts 21:20.

holy kiss, and other first century practices not observed by most churches today. Because the New Testament writers did not give us the details of each and every practice of the early church, we are bound to have differences of opinion and interpretation regarding these things.

Rather than the constitutional model, perhaps it is better to go with the New Testament's own assessment of the nature of the church: an "organic" model. The church is the body of Christ in the world. As body, we must remain in him in order to live, and we must function together with the other parts of the body in order to be healthy. Other aspects of the ordering of the body are not inconsequential, however, but must take their place behind the doctrine of Christ, succinctly given in 1 Cor 15:3–6 and embodied in the Apostles' Creed.[17]

Toward a New Restoration Hermeneutic

Given the progressive nature of biblical revelation through history, and the difficulty of extracting church doctrine from the texts of the Old and New Testaments, what should a Restoration hermeneutic look like? Let us look first at the Old Testament and then at some propositions related to the relationship between the testaments.

It is best to affirm the essential, theological nature of the Old Testament: all Old Testament Scriptures are inspired and teach us something about God. It is also best to affirm one of the basic tenets of interpretation: texts *must* mean something first to those original recipients, and secondarily to us.[18] This means all Old Testament texts, including cherished prophetic texts, must first be understood as having meaning and application in the world of the author.[19]

This affirms the theological nature of the text in the culture and thought world of the ancient author, which distances the text from us culturally and linguistically. Many texts of the Old Testament are indeed difficult and ig-

[17] See Keith Stanglin's article in this issue.

[18] See Rom 4:23–24, which affirms the temporal priority of the original writer and his audience, and secondarily its application to us. Compare also with Heb 1:1–2.

[19] This means even such famous messianic texts as Isaiah 53 must first have application in the world of the author and the exile of Judah to Babylon in the 6th century B.C.

nored in the functional canons of many church people. Most preachers do not preach, and most congregations do not dwell on, such books as Obadiah and Nahum, which call on God to smite the Edomites (Obadiah), or rejoice at the demise of the Assyrians (Nahum). On the other hand, these books are critically vital in that they record God's application of justice to evil and unjust nations, causing Israel and other oppressed nations to rejoice. Surely this is still a contemporary concern!

I commend a hermeneutic of theological recovery for those Old Testament texts which resist the immediacy of application, in that our culture, language, or historical situations may not resonate with those of the authors. Thus, even such resistant texts as the purity laws of Leviticus 11–15 deal with purification of the believer and preparation for worship, and Old Testament sacrificial laws have functional analogs in Christian worship today.[20]

Perhaps the most difficult texts for Christians to appropriate are those which deal with the specifics of corporate Israel and the laws and rituals pertaining to their national identity.[21] These texts, of course, do not immediately translate into practices of the church. On the other hand, most Pentateuchal laws are simply commentary—concrete applications—on the ten commandments, and therefore are important for individuals and governments in our day, once one has seen past the cultural specifics of kingship, sacrifices, and other culturally specific phenomena.

In terms of what the church must *do* relative to Old Testament texts, perhaps it is best to revisit Eichrodt's "cross-section" method of separating time-bound from timeless theological truths: some texts accurately portray the thought world of the ancient writer, and teach us something about God and his dealings with the covenant community, but are not "pure" theology in the sense that the stated practice does not or cannot translate into our

[20] The letter to the Hebrews already makes such a move with the sacrificial system of the Old Testament.

[21] I think of the Royal Psalms—the psalms of Davidic kingship—and their ideology (psalms 2, 72, 89, 110, 132, etc.), as resistant to immediate application in our context. Likewise, purity and sacrificial, and festival laws are foreign to the thought world of most Christians and require explanation and the application of theological principles for appropriation in the church.

churches today. This applies to the sacrificial and purity laws of Leviticus,[22] the Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17,[23] and many others. On the other hand, on some texts rest the entire "Law and the Prophets." These texts, or their principles, are assumed by or restated in the New Testament. It is difficult to imagine anyone suggesting "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength" (Deut 6:5) as no longer binding on the Christian!

The following is offered as a non-exhaustive summary of propositions related to how the Old Testament relates to the New:

1) There are no "non-theological texts" in the Old Testament. The entire Old Testament bears witness to the God of creation and covenant, some texts more directly than others.

2) The Old and New Testaments together form one Holy Bible, each incomplete without the other. We cannot do better than Hebrews 1:1:

> Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

This text does not abrogate the relevance of the Old Testament for "doctrine, reproof, correction in righteousness," but it does set the testaments in temporal and theological sequence: "God spoke" in the past through the prophets; that message is still relevant and important. "In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son": the final word of God is through Jesus the Christ, who fulfills in himself the history and prophecy embodied in Old Testament texts.

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[22] Temple sacrifice is no longer possible even for modern Jews, so the sacrifices of Leviticus 1–7 are a good example of rites which served for atonement in the ancient world, but have been subsumed into the sacrifice of Christ once for all for the Christian and the reading of *Torah* for the Jew.

[23] The same applies to laws regarding the behavior of kings. Americans do not live under a monarchical system, therefore the principles of righteous kingship in the Bible must first be filtered through our own governmental systems before they can be appropriated by most moderns.

3) There is a historical, theological, and literary continuity between the testaments; each is incomplete without the other. But this does not mean that all texts translate immediately into church doctrine. For those texts which are time-bound in terms of their imagery, or reflect laws or rituals specific to Israel's political or religious organization, a hermeneutics of theological recovery may be applied. We may recover difficult texts for church theology through the principles of analogy and functional equivalent, not unlike what the writer of Hebrews does in recovering the theology of temple sacrifice for the Christian in Christ's role as both sacrificer and sacrifice.[24]

4) The hermeneutical principles of command, example, and necessary inference are not abolished, but are relegated to their proper role: they are best suited for determining practices of the early church, information found mainly in the Epistles, and searching for grounds for visible unity based upon these practices.

5) Which applications we derive from Old Testament texts has much to do with what questions we ask of it. As I stated at the beginning of this article, many approaches have been brought to bear on the Bible over the past two thousand years: doctrinal, historical, literary, and existential, each approach yielding somewhat to substantially different applications for a given text. All of these questions are legitimate and should be employed in a new Restoration hermeneutic, but none of these should be elevated to exclusivity over the others. Perhaps these questions, and this model, may be helpful for us as we, the servants of the Word, struggle to understand and apply it: 1) What does the text say? (What is the form, movement, and structure of the passage and its literary contexts?); 2) what claim does the text have on church doctrine? (what is the theology of the passage, and how should the church respond doctrinally?); 3) what is the thought world of the author and the passage, insofar as it is possible for us to recover it? (what is the history behind the text, i.e., the historical contexts of the author and the historical setting implied by the text?); and 4)

[24] See Hebrews 10:10—Christ is the sacrifice—followed by 10:12—Christ is the sacrificer!

what claim does the text make upon the life of the Christian, and how should the Christian see the biblical story as his or her own story? What should the Christian hope for in this life and the next? (What moral and eschatological claims does the text make upon the life of the Christian?).

God in Action:
Restoring Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom

Daniel Austin Napier

By all accounts, the center of Jesus' message—his "gospel"—was an announcement of the kingdom of God. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all emphasize it. Historical-critical scholars, who as a class agree on very few things about Jesus, offer nearly unanimous assent to this bit of testimony. Oddly, the place one is least likely to hear Jesus' gospel of the kingdom expounded today may be in church.

In the churches of my youth, I was taught a different gospel—really a fragment of Paul's message—without any reference to the kingdom. A rough summary of the gospel I heard was that "Jesus died for your sins. If you believe and confess this at baptism, you will go to heaven when you die." Please don't misunderstand. Those who taught me were devout, faithful people. Moreover, that Jesus gave his life for you and me certainly is good news. If reflectively received, this message will produce significant gratitude. However, when detached from Jesus' gospel, this message leaves us in a world without God actively present. God worked *then* in Jesus' death, for which we're appreciative, but there haven't been any sightings lately.[1]

[1] The broadly Deist or, perhaps "Supernatural Rationalist," proclivities and assumptions, which the Campbell's inherited from John Locke, receive an introductory discussion in C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1988), 75–87.

My experience may or may not be representative.[2] However, in my limited experience, this absence of Jesus' teachings might be especially acute if one's home were in certain quarters of the Restoration Movement. Two related factors have tended to mute Jesus' message in Churches of Christ.

First, Jesus' "kingdom" to come was often taken as referring to the establishment of the church at Pentecost.[3] Jesus' teachings were taken largely as predictions concerning an event accomplished early in Acts. Like Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, they primarily functioned apologetically in church of Christ preaching to demonstrate God had accomplished much of his "plan of salvation."

Second, a broader misconception served as accomplice for this move. By mixing a quasi-Augustinian conflation of kingdom and church[4] with elements of dispensationalism[5], Churches of Christ rendered the gospels irrelevant for church life in the current age. Preachers declared that the "Law" had been "nailed to the cross." Ironically, they tended to fasten the teachings of Jesus there beside it. Since Jesus' teachings were delivered to people who lived prior to the crucifixion and thus "under law", they were no longer binding upon those living after his death and resurrection. Thus we were encouraged to pattern our corporate and personal lives from commands and examples found in Acts and the epistles.

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[2] John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, *Kingdom Come: Embracing the Spiritual Legacy of David Lipscomb and James Harding* (Abilene: Leafwood, 2006) tell a gripping story of an alternative ethos and approach to the kingdom within Churches of Christ.

[3] Edward C. Wharton, *The Church of Christ: A Presentation of the Distinctive Nature and Identity of the New Testament church*. (West Monroe, LA: Howard Book House, 1987), 76–83.

[4] For Augustine's more nuanced identification of the church with the kingdom of heaven on earth, see civ. Dei 20.9. An accessible translation may be found in Augustine, William S. Babcock, and Boniface Ramsey, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei) XI – XXII* (New York: New City press, 2013), 405ff.

[5] Classical dispensationalism identified the "kingdom" with the "millennial reign of Christ" rather than with the church. Nonetheless, because the "kingdom" was postponed due to the Jews' rejection of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus were addressed toward that state, his teachings refer primarily to a condition that is not "now." A good statement of this position may be found in Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), especially note his discussion of the Sermon on the Mount on pp. 96ff.

With this strange absence in mind—and recognizing the shining exceptions—I would like to offer a reexamination of the message at the heart of the gospels. I offer the following exposition in hopes that we in the Churches of Christ will incorporate it into our preaching and allow it to shape our lives.

Overview

Jesus' gospel introduces us to a different, God-saturated world. Consider this summary of Jesus' core message as found in Mark 1:14–15:

> And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

In the simplest possible terms, the "kingdom of God" refers to *what God is doing*—how God, as king, is acting to reshape the world. Jesus clues us in to the fact that God is in action right where we live. That is the core of his message. In this article, I want to show how we know this was the import of Jesus' message and then unpack what this means in terms of our experience today.

Historical-Linguistic Basis for "Kingdom of God" as God in Action

The kingdom of God was a readily understandable and frequently used phrase in Jesus' day. While the robust statements of YHWH as King in the Hebrew Bible provide a conceptual backdrop, the precise phrase "kingdom of God" was absent from earlier sections of Scripture.[6] Our best access to the range of meanings this specific phrase carried for Jesus' ordinary hearers comes by considering its occurrences in the targums for Isaiah and the Minor Prophets.

A targum is an Aramaic gloss on the Hebrew Bible. By Jesus' day most Jews could not understand classical Hebrew and needed a translation into their spoken tongue, Aramaic. So targums were originally presented orally in

[6] Two rich yet accessible discussions of this broader doctrine of God's reign may be found in John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953). Also, see John Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979).

the synagogue following a reading of the corresponding section in Hebrew.[7] Later, these traditional interpretations were committed to writing.[8] Some targums—especially those on the prophets—tended toward paraphrase and interpretive expansions. (If you are comparing these targums to English Bibles, think of *The Message* rather than the *New American Standard*.) These free expansions are helpful because they allow us to overhear ideas as they circulated at the popular, grassroots level in Jesus' day.

In terms of method, we learn what Jesus' hearers associated with the phrase "kingdom of God" by comparing its appearance in a targum to the original Hebrew passage. One can easily do this by comparing the English translation of the targumic passage to a literal English translation of the corresponding Hebrew text (the NASB is good for this purpose). For the reader's convenience, I have provided a representative set of parallel passages one may compare. Those words italicized in the targum translations below either have no corresponding word in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, or significantly differ in nuance and thus would not be expected as a literal

[7] A lector would read the Hebrew text, then an Aramaic translation would be delivered from memory by a "*meturgeman*" or interpreter. The interpreter was not permitted to look at a text while translating "so that they [the listeners] will not say the translation is written in the Torah" (Bav, 32a). The two were performed in alteration. One verse from the Torah would be followed by one verse of targum. Up to three verses of the prophets could be followed by a targum of those verses. For a basic introduction to the targums and their character, see Philip S. Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Scriptures" in M. J. Mulder and Harry Sysling, eds.. *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), 217–53.

[8] Chronology of content is a specialized issue in targum research. Recognizing tradition necessarily plays an important role in dating these texts. In particular, the way these glosses were memorized and passed on as tradition, requires a methodological distinction between various dates of (oral) composition and the eventual date of writing. There are often several layers of composition and scholars differ on the dates given. For an overview of the issues involved see Bruce D. Chilton, *Galilean Rabbi and his Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of his Time* (Wilmington, Del: Glazier, 1984), 35–147. Also, see Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: a light on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), and Alexander, "Aramaic Translations."

translation of the Hebrew original (such as from 'king' / *melek* to 'kingdom' / *malkut*).[9]

Kingdom of God: Key Targumic References Compared with the Hebrew Bible

> Is. Targum 31.4, "For the LORD said to me, As *a* lion or *a* young lion *roars* over its prey, and, when a band of shepherds *are appointed* against it, it is not *broken up* at their shouting or *checked* at their *tumult* so *the kingdom of* the LORD of hosts will *be revealed* to *settle* upon *the* Mount *of* Zion and upon its hill."[10]
>
> Is. 31:4 (NASB) "For thus says the Lord to me, 'As the lion or the young lion growls over his prey, against which a band of shepherds is called out, will not be terrified at their voice, nor disturbed at their noise, so will the Lord of hosts come down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill.'"
>
> Is. Targum 40.9-10, "Get you up to a high mountain, *prophets who* herald good tidings *to* Zion; lift up your voice with force, *you who* herald good tidings *to* Jerusalem, lift up, fear not; say to the cities *of the house* of Judah, "*The kingdom of* your God *will be revealed*!" Behold, the LORD God *will be revealed* with strength, and *the strength* of his *mighty* arm rules *before* him; behold *the* reward *of those who perform his Memra*[11] is with him, *all those whose deeds are disclosed* before him."[12]
>
> Is. 40:9-10 (NASB), "Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him."

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[9] Italics were provided in the translations cited below. I have, however, found they exaggerated the differences and I have made corrections as needed. Corrections are indicated in the footnotes.

[10] Bruce Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990).

[11] In many instances including this one, Memra may simply be equivalent to "the Word of God," however, in other cases it seems to be a circumlocution for the ineffable name of God or identified as the light which shone at the beginning. Thus it is transliterated, rather than translated, in this series. For a thorough discussion of the literature on the subject, see McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 154–166.

[12] Chilton, *Isaiah Targum.* italics and tenses corrected.

> Obad. Targum 21, "Liberators shall go up to Mount Zion to judge the *citadel* of Esau, and the kingdom of the Lord *shall be revealed over all the inhabitants of the earth.*"[13]
>
> Obad. 21 (NASB), "The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord's."
>
> Micah Targum 4.6-7, "At that *time*, says the Lord *God*, I will assemble together the *exiled*, and I will gather together *the scattered*, and those *who were* treated harshly *on account of the sins of my people*. I will make *the exiled* a remnant, and *the scattered* a mighty nation. *The kingdom of* the Lord *shall be revealed* upon them on Mount Zion from now on and forever."[14]
>
> Micah 4:6-7 (NASB), "'In that day,' declares the Lord, 'I will assemble the lame, and gather the outcasts, even those whom I have afflicted. I will make the lame a remnant, and the outcasts a strong nation, and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever.'"
>
> Zech. Targum 14.9, "*And the kingdom* of the Lord *shall be revealed* upon all *the inhabitants of* the earth; at that *time they shall serve before* the Lord *with one accord, for* his name *is established in the world; there is none apart from him.*"[15]
>
> Zech. 14:9 (NASB), "And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one."

The phrase "kingdom of God" carries a double connotation in the targums. First, the kingdom of God is an active concept. It refers to *God acting in strength.*[16] Whenever God, through mighty deeds, changes things in this world, the targum will gloss it as "kingdom of God." In the targums, this especially occurs when battle is waged and wars are won through divine power. So,

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[13] Kevin J. Cathcart and R. P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989), italics corrected.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., italics corrected.

[16] The closest arguments for this emphasis are found in the two works by Bruce Chilton: Bruce David Chilton, *God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom* (Freistadt: Plöchl, 1979) and Bruce Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum* (JSOT Press, 1982).

despite the grammatical form, one should try to think "verb" rather than "noun" when hearing Jesus say "kingdom."

Second, God's kingdom awaits *revelation or unveiling*. In other words, it has existed since before the creation of the world but is not accessible to humans until God unveils it.[17] The verb most often attached to the kingdom of God is "will be revealed" and, in the targums it is almost always future.[18] In other words, *God will show himself* and his overarching sway whenever he finally acts with power. A person's character becomes visible in his activity. Likewise, the Lord's character will be disclosed through prodigious feats whenever he acts.

Jesus assumes and retains the kernel of both these connotations, but he also modifies them in important ways. For Jesus, the kingdom of God refers to God's *activity* and God does make himself known thereby—it is a matter of revelation. However, Jesus also understands two key differences lost to the targums.

First, for Jesus the kingdom of God is here and now.[19] In the targums, the revelation of the kingdom is almost exclusively future. Jesus also acknowledges more to come of God's kingdom—how could it be otherwise given the dynamic meaning of God in action? But Jesus' emphasis was on the close proximity of God's work. God is doing something right where ordinary people live. His kingdom, which is from everlasting to everlasting, has moved into our neighborhoods. It is being revealed today. Jesus even pointed to his own compassionate works—healing and exorcism—as an indicator of God's kingdom already active (Matt 12:28). This claim also gestures toward another key difference.

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[17] For the Second Temple idea of "revelation," see e.g., 4Q427 fr. 7i.18ff; 1QpHab7.1–14, 11.1ff; 1QS 1.9, 5.4–12. David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: Qumran and Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, trans. Azzan Yadin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 293ff, notes divergent views in Second Temple Judaism concerning inquiry into "mysteries." For a solid overview of Second Temple and early Rabbinic notions of revelation, see Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 7–126.

[18] In each of the texts quoted, the verb *gly* appears in the ithpeel imperfect tense. The most natural translation into English would be in the future tense—"will be revealed."

[19] For an overview of 20th-century scholarly positions on the Kingdom as present, future, or "inaugurated," see Wendell Lee Willis, *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

Second, Jesus redefines power. When God acts, a very different sort of effectiveness marks it.[20] Let it suffice to say that Jesus emphasizes God's character as gentle and humble (Matt 11:25–30), generous and merciful (Matt 5:44–45), forgiving (Matt 18:21–35), good (Matt 19:17; 20:1–16), and seeking the wellbeing of others (Matt 5:43–48). These also are the marks of God's activity in this world. God's power comes girt in a towel, not clad with battle armor. It wields washbasins rather than swords.

So Jesus' core message amounted to this claim: "God—the rightful king—is acting here and now to remake this world. Given God's character of compassion and love, his way of making things happen could easily be missed if you expect power as humans usually wield it."

The Existential Significance of "Kingdom" as God in Action

It might help us conceptualize God's kingdom if we consider that each of us also has a kingdom. We were created with a "dominion." Recall the creation account in Genesis:

> "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. *And let them have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, *and have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:26–28, ESV, emphasis added).

Human beings reflect God, according to Genesis, through exercising dominion. In fact, this theme runs from the beginning to the end of Scripture (see for example Psalm 8; Dan 7:13-14; Mark 2:23-28; Heb 2:5ff; 1 Cor 6:2–3; Rev 22:5). The background idea is that just as God exercises dominion

[20] To explore Jesus' understanding of power would require a devoted article. Since I am not offering that article now, I suggest that George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 52–65, would provide an accessible stimulus for one wishing to think in this direction.

over the heavenly court, so human beings in partnership with God are designed to exercise dominion over this part of the created order.[21]

However, this is not just an ancient metaphor. Nor is it something one ought to believe simply because it is in the Bible. Rather, dominion is a fundamental experience we have all had as persons.[22]

Persons are created with dominion—a built-in impulse to make things happen as we see fit. This agency, aimed at the good, is so essential to human personality that we cannot imagine a person without it. Just try. Start by reflecting on yourself. Would *you* like to spend your whole life without having ever made any difference? Could you imagine anyone else really being a person if they had no impulse to effect things around them? When by catastrophic circumstance we find a human reduced to such a state, people talk about being reduced to a "vegetative" state. Dominion, or agency for the good, seems to be hardwired into human beings.

Perhaps we see this impulse in its most stark and unrefined form in little children.[23] When we are born, our dominion encompasses only our bodies—and that is more of a project than a possession. A little baby has not yet mastered her own body, but she pushes herself to gain dominion over it. So she always wants to do for herself. Sitting in her highchair, my infant daughter

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[21] For an introduction to the priestly worldview behind Genesis 1, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 101–14.

[22] Notice the primal role of agency for the "life-world" in the phenomenological descriptions of Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). This description of the "life-world" is also fruitfully developed in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002). For an adjacent approach, also emphasizing agency, see John MacMurray, *The Self as Agent* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

[23] Here I utilize an age-old philosophical strategy in service of biblical theology. Observation of infants and young children provides a clue to human nature as yet largely unshaped by social convention. For the ancient debate over what sort of human nature is seen in infancy, and the most influential Christian response, see Daniel Austin Napier, *En Route to the Confessions: The Roots and Development of Augustine's Philosophical Anthropology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), ch. 5, "Mirror of Fallen Nature." This strategy continues to be utilized in various permutations and to very different ends through the modern period as found, for instance, in Rousseau, Freud, and Merleau-Ponty.

would grab the spoon and try feeding herself. Of course, since she lacked sufficient control the food ended up in all the wrong openings. Our scrapbooks contain some delightful, and now nostalgic, pictures of her first attempts at exercising dominion.

As she grew, this impulse to effect things expanded outward from her body. We would try to tie her shoes, but she insisted, "I do it!" She entered into her "terrible twos" and readily exercised those favorite kingdom words—"No!" and "Mine!" Both words highlight the built-in human need to affect the world around us.

Over time her dominion has expanded in concentric circles from her body outward. Now she makes things happen in the house and (when properly stimulated by rewards and punishments) in the backyard. She contributes to the world of a circle of friends, our local church, and her school. Lord willing, in time her dominion will enlarge to encompass cognitive mastery of deeper subject matters, responsible work, a family, neighbors, and more.

Dominion is not just something we read about in Genesis. It is something we see around us and personally feel moved to every day. However, despite being hardwired into us, not all dominion is used well.

The human problem may be described as a choice to use my dominion or agency disregarding God's dominion. As a result, I also find my dominion not only set against God but also in hurtful competition with other's dominion. The opening chapters of Genesis recount how as a race we chose to annex our little kingdoms from God's great kingdom. Interpersonal blame and hostility, personal shame and exposure, and ultimately death followed from our choice to go it alone in this world. So Adam blames Eve. Cain kills Abel. Soon every thought of the human heart is "always evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5).

Human dominion simply does not function well apart from God. We were never designed to live—to make things happen—without any reference to God. It is built into the metaphor of "God's *image.*" Try it out. Stand in front of a mirror and gesture. What does your image do? Images act in concert with their source, not independently. We were created to exercise agency for the good *in partnership with God*.

Jesus' good news is that God has a special place for each of us in his project. His great offer is to enable us to work with God. One may yield his or her little dominion to God's greater dominion. When I do so, I learn to do what God is doing. Jesus' preferred language for co-working with God is "entering into the kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of the heavens" (see Matt 5:20; 7:21; 18:1–4; 19:23–26 // Mark 10:23–25 // Luke 18:25; John 3:5).

Submissive Synergy: The Experiential Texture of Life in the Kingdom

Life in step with God's activity or kingdom possesses a distinctive experiential texture. In order to help his apprentices gauge whether they are aligning their dominion with God's activity, Jesus supplies thick descriptions of life in the kingdom through parables or comparisons. Consider a couple of examples from the Gospel of Mark.

In Mark 4:26–29, Jesus uses the image of a farmer to describe the experience of coordinating one's activity with an unseen power. This power is beyond one's control, yet reliable. Certain intrinsic challenges arise when working with an invisible, yet living, God. One is the question, how can I know if I'm doing it?

> And Jesus was saying, "The kingdom of God is [gloss: When God is at work, it is] like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows — how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Here Jesus describes the kingdom of God—God's action—as like a man throwing seed on the ground. The farmer does not understand how the seed grows (4:27). He does, however, recognize how to time his interactions with those of the unseen power. So he does his initial part by throwing the seed. Then he sleeps. He waits as other factors work. When the harvest arrives, he acts again. Co-working with God requires timing our actions with his interventions in our world.

In Mark 4:30–32, Jesus expands on this experiential description. The emphasis in this comparison falls upon the incongruity between visible cause and effect.

> And Jesus said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade."

The kingdom of God—God's activity—is like sowing a mustard seed. What goes into the ground is the smallest of seeds. Yet, what emerges is the largest of the garden plants. When one works with God, there is a routine disproportion between one's own talents, efforts, and resources, on the one hand, and the effect of one's activity on the other.

The phrase Jesus uses in Mark 4:32, "the birds of the air can find shelter [or, take refuge] in its shade" uses a stock image from Israel's literature. The "birds of the air" are the multitude of nations or "gentiles"—people very different from his hearers. By surveying the way this image is used within Jewish literature, we can appreciate the import of Jesus' message.

In some of Israel's texts, the birds fight against those who rightfully dwell under the tree (Mid. Psalm 104:12); in other stories they are simply driven off (Dan 4:12, 14; Ezek 31:6ff). The mutual hostility between Israel and the nations was well known.[24] Jesus' disciples would have been ready for that sort of story about the birds. One could imagine a different parable in which the mustard tree grows up and the planter drives the birds away to protect his comfortable garden. Many in Jesus' day would have expected that sort of story.

However, Jesus chooses to quote Psalm 104:12, which speaks of birds that are given shelter or take refuge in what the LORD provides (see also Ezek 17:23). To take refuge or find shelter is a known metaphor for conver-

[24] Manahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (2 vols.) (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980) enables one to easily trace the relevant literary remains of this animosity in Greco-Roman literature beginning with Manetho in the 3rd century B.C. and reaching to Tacitus in the early 2nd century A.D.

sion in Second Temple literature (LXX Zech 2:11 and Joseph and Asenath 15.6).[25] It speaks of how one comes to be at home among God's people.

Here is Jesus' point: When one co-works with God, God restores his or her dominion. Our Father does things with us that we could never manage alone. The effect of our seed planting far outstrips our own talents. But God will also use us to help people whom we would not have targeted on our own. The disproportionate effect of his followers' labors will be for the benefit of the nations—not simply a special benefit for the individual worker.

Conclusion

My plea in this article coalesces with those of Stanglin and Shipp. Stanglin's article entreats Churches of Christ to attend to orthodox theological statements produced after the close of the epistles. This article, like Shipp's, suggests the riches we have missed by effectively excluding biblical material earlier than the epistles. We would like to see Jesus, and his Bible, taken seriously in Churches of Christ.

Moreover, pastoral reasons for incorporating Jesus' teaching may be particularly urgent in our day. The practical deism assumed by many Christians today—both in the Restoration movement and without—distinctly limits the possibilities for life as a disciple. We live in a world that largely assumes the truth of "naturalism"—the view that all reliable knowledge is, or eventually will be, exhausted by the "hard sciences".[26] The "new Atheists" play off these

[25] For secondary discussions see, Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 146ff, more dubiously C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 142–43, a concise discussion in Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 163–64, Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 141–42, briefly N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 241, Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 73–77. To put this concern for Gentile conversion within the larger context of Second Temple Jewish views, see John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: the Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1–89.

[26] One should note, however, that the popularity of this worldview continues despite, rather than because of, its philosophic merits. Among leading philosophers, even atheists such as Thomas Nagel now admit the intellectual bankruptcy of naturalism. See Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford, 2012). For a strong argument from a premier Christian philosopher, see Dallas Willard, "Knowledge and Natural-

faulty assumptions in their rhetorical onslaughts. Surrounded by this worldview, our members need direct and accessible teaching that enables them to live interactively with God. While philosophical counter-arguments are important, nothing counters the naturalist worldview more effectively than lived experience of God as counter-example.[27] We dare not ignore Jesus' message in our day. It alone enables us to live in an interactive, co-working relation with God and thus find the significance for which we were created.

ism", in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Naturalism: a critical analysis* (London: Routledge, 2000), 24–48. Of course, the philosophical critique of naturalism goes back to Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences.*

[27] For the role of experience in justifying belief, see William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); also David Bentley Hart. *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. (New Haven: Yale, 2013).

A Church for Ordinary People

The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History

A Review Essay

Allan J. McNicol

The decision by the editors of *Christian Studies* to give special attention in this issue to the heritage and witness of Churches of Christ provides an opportunity to discuss an important new history of our heritage. It covers a period from the origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement on the American frontier in the early nineteenth century into its current manifestation as a communion that has a worldwide presence. I refer to the fairly recent publication of what I will abbreviate throughout this essay as *A Global History*.[1]

As with an earlier publication involving some of the same editors who guided *A Global History*, editorial direction was drawn from what today is reckoned to be the three major streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement.[2] Historical works featuring significant figures or developments among particular groups within the Movement continue to appear with some regularity; but, as far as I know, nothing approximates both the span and depth of the total story of the Stone-Campbell Movement as is found in this volume.

[1] D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2013).

[2] I refer to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and Churches of Christ. The earlier publication is Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony A. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 2004).

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I write as one who has served as a participant in several multi-authored works. As a result, I have only admiration for the devoted work of the editors of *A Global History*. Although they were assisted by a large team of contributors, unless one has actually participated in a similar project, he or she has no idea about the amount of work that is needed to bring something like this to fruition. This is truly a monumental effort and I am deeply grateful for the labors of all those involved.

A work that has demanded so much labor under the direction of a talented group of people deserves to be taken seriously. Given the balance of representation of both editors and contributors one can assume this volume is indicative of mainstream views about our history. Consequently, it will probably function as one of the authoritative works on the Stone-Campbell Movement and be utilized as such by the next generation in schools and other places of research. Because I believe it will be recognized as an important work, I intend to engage some of the directions that it takes.

Procedurally, this engagement will fall into three parts. First I will provide a synopsis of the contents of *A Global History*. Also, in this section I will be concerned to determine what sort of narrative has emerged in the pages of the book. I will conclude the synopsis by raising several questions in connection with what I understand to be the basic purpose and direction of *A Global History*. In the second part, I plan to set forth an alternative narrative for telling the story of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Finally, I will give special attention to the concluding two short chapters of *A Global History* that address current and future directions. Since this volume of *Christian Studies* is especially focused on this last issue, I will assess these conclusions based on the alternative narrative I have set forth earlier.

The Narrative of *A Global History*

An introduction is important for any good book of this kind. Although the introduction is short, it does not disappoint. It is titled "A New History of the Stone-Campbell Movement."[3] The "New History" is juxtaposed over against an earlier history produced to celebrate one hundred years since Thomas Campbell's famous *Declaration and Address* of 1909. That book, W. T. Moore's *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*, was produced under the

[3] *A Global History*, 1-8.

auspices of the Disciples of Christ.[4] It reflected mainly a celebratory time for this stream of the Movement coming after several decades of major growth. Although in the more conservative segments of Stone-Campbell circles Moore had a reputation for being "progressive," it is significant that amid all the talk of "our plea for the union of all Christians" the theme of "Restoring Primitive Christianity" was still in the title.[5] Now, quite reasonably, after one hundred years the editors indicate it is time for a "New History."

As the Introduction proceeds the reader is given an insightful overview of the various currents affecting Stone-Campbell historiography throughout the second century of the Movement's history. In some ways I was reminded of the old cliché that basically goes, "You can tell whether a movement is in trouble by the number of histories that are written about it." Whether true or not, when I came to the end of the Introduction it became clear that this was not going to be another conventional production taking a designated place in the long line of Stone-Campbell histories. Rather, it would include a massive set of descriptions of what has taken place on the global scene, drawn from all three major streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement over the last two hundred years. Its trademark is comprehensiveness. But after reading the Introduction I still was left with a question: "Is there a narrative here?"

Assuming the significance of the W. T. Moore volume, what has happened since 1909? One wonders whether the divisions of the early twentieth century were so traumatic that the only narrative that historians can supply is to chronicle "what happened" during this past eventful century. In any case, this seems to be the conclusion.

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[4] W. T. Moore, *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ, Being an Account of a Century's Effort to Restore Primitive Christianity in Its Faith, Doctrine and Life* (London/Edinburgh: Fleming Revell, 1909).

[5] One of the curious features of *A Global History* is that the term "Restoration Movement" does not appear in the index. Corresponding terminology is also in short supply, although I noticed that the theme of "restoration" did get discussed in several places. I am part of several generations of family from various streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement in two continents and, although most of them would vaguely know of Campbell, and even less of Stone, they would all be very familiar with Restorationism. One wonders what the editorial basis was for this lack of attention to terminology that has played such a significant part in our history.

Consequently, the bulk of the rest of the book unfolds primarily in a descriptive way. The opening chapter is a concise and readable account of the events surrounding the work of the Campbells and others on the American frontier in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Well-known figures are discussed. The chapter appropriately ends with a winsome account of the circumstances surrounding the unification between Alexander Campbell's "Reformers" and Barton Stone's "Christians" in 1832. It is intimated that both groups had theological roots in the magisterial Reformed tradition, but this is not developed. The exact contribution of Barton Stone's "Christians" to the union may still be a lively subject, but it is clear that they added considerable numbers and geographical coverage to the work of Campbell's "Reformers" through expansion into the southern states.

Chapters two through five relate the history through the first one hundred years. Chapter five concentrates on the division between the Disciples and the Churches of Christ that takes place approximately one hundred years after Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*. Thus an ironic note is struck. There is a major cleavage in a movement to promote unity. Between the bookends of chapters two and five, however, a more welcome picture emerges. The editors have provided two fascinating chapters (with many pictures) which highlight accounts about African-American leaders and the contribution of women in the years up until 1920. I have already recommended these chapters as good source material for student papers. No doubt, in coming decades, they will function as some of the most useful resources in the book.

With chapters six, seven, and thirteen, the volume moves toward fulfilling its claim of being *A Global History*. Chapters six and thirteen narrate what happened in the United Kingdom and its dominions, while the important chapter seven, titled "The Expansion of World Missions, 1874–1929," depicts the movement into the global scene. These were the days when the British Empire was at its zenith. It should be pointed out that, rather than the American brethren, it was the British, Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian churches that were strategically involved in and responsible for most of the expansion of the Movement in India, Asia, the Pacific, and Southern Africa. The chapter does a credible job in documenting this story.

Having provided this groundwork, chapters eight through twelve detail what took place in North America during the period that the editors label "The New Century." As one would expect, considerable time and attention are given over to the factors that precipitated tensions and the ultimate division of the Stone-Campbell Movement into three major streams.

Finally, chapters fourteen through seventeen concentrate on telling the story of mission expansion on a global scale during the past century. It is an exciting story that continues. Mission efforts were established throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. The archival value of these chapters is incalculable. Those interested need to be made aware that repeated readings of these chapters are necessary to appreciate the significance of these mission efforts. Within Churches of Christ it is often stated that there are more members overseas than within North America. Given present trends the ratio may expand in multiples.[6] *A Global History* comes to an end with chapter eighteen functioning as a summary of the project.

Although the arrangement of the chapters at times proved to be challenging, in general, I found the work to be extremely informative. Nevertheless, I wish to return to an earlier point that I noted. What is the narrative of this book? What argument does it seek to make? I am disappointed that the editors appear to have settled on selectively chronicling "what happened" during the roughly two centuries of this Movement under review. Important theological issues, such as whether there is a coherent, identifiable Stone-Campbell theological tradition, are not even broached.[7] In many ways this

[6] One other feature of this history is worthy of note. Since this is *A Global History* of the entire Stone-Campbell Movement it is interesting to note the present state of many of the missionary works of Disciples of Christ. In account after account, major missions such as what took place in areas as diverse as the Caribbean and the Congo have transitioned or are moving into some form of ecumenical alliance. In these instances these alliances seem to be the fruit of a prominent feature of the Disciples' theological vision.

[7] Due to limitations of space in this article, I am unable to expand on this further here. In the past I have noted that traditions such as the Reformed, Lutheran, even the Mennonites, have developed a particular trajectory toward approaching theological questions. See Allan J. McNicol, "Is the Stone-Campbell Movement an Identifiable Theological Tradition?" *Restoration Quarterly* 41/2 (1999): 65–70; "Churches of Christ Meet the Evangelicals: A Review Essay," *Christian Studies* 19 (2003): 71–78; "My Theological Journey: A Retrospective," *Christian Studies* 24 (2010): 79–85. A

book leaves the impression that it is a lengthy encyclopedia article. Indeed, as with Winston Churchill's famous pudding, I am afraid that "this work has no theme." Have we come, if not to a dead-end, then to an imposing roadblock in attempting to explain how a small, marginalized theological movement became a global theological tradition? I would hope not.

Re-Visioning the Stone-Campbell Movement

I am reminded of a point that Morna Hooker would occasionally make when addressing tricky historical issues. She wrote, "When obvious questions … raise so many problems, it is necessary to approach them in a different way."[8] My point is this: For as long as I can remember, people within the Stone-Campbell Movement have been arguing about issues like "What was 'the Plea' of its founders and who are the ones that are loyal to their intentions?" In other words, what is our narrative? Perhaps it is time to take Hooker's advice and be open to examining our heritage in a different way. I propose that we do that.

Instead of viewing the Stone-Campbell Movement as a body based on certain pivotal events and theological axioms emerging in the early nineteenth-century American frontier, I wish to cast a much wider net. I suggest that the Stone-Campbell Movement was only one dynamic expression of a much wider series of historical and religious upheavals in the English-speaking world going back at least to the entire eighteenth century and probably well before that. Consequently, the narrative of our Movement must take into consideration the religious ethos of a considerable group of Christian dissenters who were prominent within the British realms in that era. In the title of my essay I call them "ordinary people." I wish to argue that these were the people who constituted not only the Stone-Campbell Movement of the American frontier but also provided the foot soldiers for similar "Back to the Bible" movements centering on the restoration of New Testament Christianity throughout Britain and its burgeoning empire. I simply wish to sug-

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massive work like this cannot include everything. But I was disappointed that it did not venture into this arena.

[8] Morna D. Hooker, "Christ the 'End' of the Cult," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 192.

gest that the unfolding story of these people as they settled across the world, and their impact which has persisted over the past two hundred years, provides the basis that gives structure to a narrative. Movements like that of Stone-Campbell and allied "Restoration Movements" across the globe have coalesced around a common characteristic. They seek to practice a simple and unadorned way to worship God like the earliest Christians of the New Testament era. At the center of their church life is the practice of believers' baptism for the forgiveness of sins and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. This collective global religious activity of these people is in fact the movement's narrative.

This is an observation that has not gone without comment in the book. Notice this word in *A Global History*:

> Often understood as uniquely American the Stone-Campbell Movement also had beginnings in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century.… The fact that North America became the most popular destination for British emigrants in the nineteenth century has tended to make trans-Atlantic influences seem natural. In fact, there was nothing natural or inevitable about the influence of Alexander Campbell's writings in the British Isles.[9]

This is an intriguing statement that should be nuanced. Campbell did have influence in nineteenth-century Britain, but only because there were people there who embraced and approved his theological positions. I refer to a body of people in the United Kingdom—many of the Scots-Irish and Border and Midlands people in England—who had suffered centuries of deprivation because they were dissenters of and could not claim the societal privileges given to members of the Anglican Church. These were the people who were open to what the Campbells had to say.

It would be inappropriate in this essay to move into the details of British history of the eighteenth and nineteenth century where, I believe, the real origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement can be found. But, by way of a brief synopsis, several key points need to be made. Life was difficult for the Scots-Irish and Border people of this era. Religiously speaking, most of the

[9] *A Global History*, 94. Also cf. 104.

opportunities for advancement were closed to non-conformists.[10] Even when Ulster (Northern Ireland) was opened up for settlement, loyalty to the Church of England was demanded for any significant status in society. It was under these circumstances that, when opportunities allowed, large-scale emigration out of the United Kingdom began to take place. It is from these beginnings that the narrative of the Stone-Campbell Movement begins to emerge.

With respect to America, wide-scale Scots-Irish emigration developed throughout the eighteenth century. After the American Revolution many, fed up with the problems in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, emigrated to America. Some of these came to the eastern seaboard of Canada and founded a number of fellowships seeking to follow the apostolic practice of the ancient church. However, most of the Scots-Irish and northern English immigrants began to settle on the southern section of the American frontier. It was here that the Campbells resided. This belt, stretching roughly from Virginia westward, is still overwhelmingly the center of the Stone-Campbell Movement in numbers and influence in the United States.

Of course, most of this history is well known and has often been rehearsed in histories of the Movement. A point that *A Global History* in its reconstruction of past events reveals, however, is now only coming into focus. Through the emigration of similar people from the United Kingdom to dominions and colonies of the British Empire throughout the nineteenth century, a correspondent narrative of ordinary people seeking to plant simple, unadorned New Testament Christianity took place.[11] No doubt connections were made between what was happening in America and throughout the British Empire. I wish the editors would have explored these connections more thoroughly.

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[10] It is interesting to note that Thomas Campbell's father became an Anglican. Of course, his sons were linked with various dissenting versions of Scottish Presbyterianism.

[11] To be sure, not everyone emigrated from the United Kingdom. From the early nineteenth century Churches of Christ began to be established and develop their own identity. In England, in particular, they struggled to gain traction, often in competition with other dissenting fellowships such as the Baptists, Methodists, and the Plymouth Brethren. Nevertheless, still mainly in Scotland and northern England, as *A Global History* points out, growth persisted well into the twentieth century.

Although I have argued that the story of the Stone-Campbell Movement was closely connected with the history of the Protestant Scots-Irish people, I do not wish to claim that, in any way, this was an ethnic church. The same characteristics of simple living, emphasis on moral rectitude, and demand that all religious claims be grounded in clear and rational interpretation of the Scriptures does reflect the ethos of many other emigrants. Germans and Scandinavians, in particular, also knowing the power of oppressive regimes, have also found common ground with these principles. Indeed, given their reputation for contentious argumentation, not all elements of the Scots-Irish culture can be reckoned to be admirable.[12] But for better or for worse this history and ethos as expressed religiously in movements like Stone-Campbell have produced a particular religious identity and a history that is now global. If this is not our narrative few could deny it is a major contributing factor to facilitate understanding of who we are.

A Consideration for Future Directions

The final chapter (eighteen) and the brief Conclusion of *A Global History* are significant because they touch on key issues that address both the raison d'être of the Stone-Campbell Movement and prospects for maintaining some sense of identity for the future. Do the various "streams" have enough in common to warrant calling ourselves an identifiable movement?

Chapter eighteen, "The Quest for Unity," is a description of the many attempts by concerned leaders to arrest our constant splintering into various parties and groups. Sometimes one gets the impression that this work resembles the labors of Sisyphus. Considering the number of attempts that have been put in place to orchestrate unity between different groups among us or, on a wider scale, to attempt "sinking into union with the Body of Christ at large,"[13] the results remain paltry. Speaking about an attempt by the Disciples to unite with the American Baptists sometime in the 1940s, the authors state, "Though the two churches continued to have theological differences … conversations seem to have ended primarily over anxieties about the con-

[12] If one would contest this position I would invite him or her to attempt to count the number of divisions within Presbyterianism in America.

[13] The quote is attributed to *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. See *A Global History*, 367.

tinued existence of each group's denominational institutions."[14] This counsel of despair is an appropriate epitaph to most past union efforts.

In thinking about this, I wonder whether part of the problem may be that the editors have misunderstood what most of the membership of the churches that connect with the Stone-Campbell Movement think is the heart and soul of their witness. It may be true that the desire for unity among Christians was "the polar star" of the Movement at a certain formative time.[15] Nevertheless, most people who unite with one of our voluntary communities (a local church) today, I believe, have a more restrictive understanding of what their membership entails. To put it in terms of John 15:1–17:26, they simply wish to be put to work in a place wherein they can facilitate their union with Christ.[16] Life is complicated. Being a faithful Christian in the maelstrom of modern life is about as far as most people think they can manage. Consequently, there is little energy or funding available to enable leaders to pursue unity discussions in local or wider ecumenical settings. Most believers remain relatively sanguine with the status quo of the local church. If not, they move to another congregation or fellowship.

Furthermore, one other point needs to be made on this issue of unity. In my judgment the level of force of some of these early leaders' calls for unity demands further exploration. Was this their plea? Barton Stone was a case in point. He is one of those mercurial figures whom later historians love to consider as the precursor of important later trends.[17] But was he such a champion of unity as some of the time-honored quotes from him may imply? Histor-

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[14] *A Global History*, 373.

[15] The reference to "polar star" is attributed to Barton Stone. See *A Global History*, 380.

[16] Here, of course, this is a limited reading of the real power of the Johannine message. Indeed, despite all the preaching in the Stone-Campbell Movement on John 17, I have long thought that a serious critical study of what this text is saying in its historical context is long overdue. Rightly understood, John 17:20-22 is part of a lengthy discussion that involves the destiny of Israel. Only true Israel (the community of Jesus) can come to understand God's glory reflected in the incarnation of Christ.

[17] Note the treatment of Stone in Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 92–116. For example, Stone's pessimism about the culture of that time was construed by Hughes to be an important factor in the formation of an "Apocalyptic Vision" that influenced later major sectors of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

ically, many advocates of this supposed movement for Christian unity did not join Stone in his amalgamation with the Campbell "reformers" in 1832. Instead they went off to be part of the Christian Connection. This was another unity movement that, after various transmutations, later became part of another fellowship.[18] I suggest that the degree to which this movement was primarily a unity movement is still an open question.

This brings us to some final comments on the Conclusion of *A Global History*. Clearly the twentieth century was a time of upheaval in the Stone-Campbell Movement. While it did become global, it should also be noted that, in America, it fragmented into at least three distinct streams. Meanwhile, in England, many of the historic Churches of Christ that struggled to survive after World War II eventually were incorporated into a Reformed fellowship. Given this recent history, the editors of *A Global History* were prudent not to speculate about the future but to address corresponding issues under the rubric of identity. Even though we have a common heritage, and perhaps history, do we have a common identity?[19]

The editors posit "four values" that they believe have abided throughout the history of the Movement and stand out as key marks of our common identity. In the order of presentation, these are: unity, evangelism, restoration, and peace and justice. As a member of Churches of Christ I am for peace and justice, but in no way would I list it as a characteristic of our fellowship. On the other hand, the belief that there is "one body" and all Christians should be unified in it so that the world may believe could be listed. Restoration of New Testament Christianity (although it is presented with some equivocation) is another one. However, rather than quibble about these points I would prefer to restate how the common points of our identity appear from the perspective of the narrative that I have proposed.

What is it that constitutes the most visible body of similarities between most of the people in the three streams of the Movement today? Is it not the maintenance of similar values and ways of looking at the world that carried

[18] Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 115.

[19] In a somewhat curious way the issue is stated emphatically in *A Global History*, 380. "In light of this complex global history, it is possible to speak of a common Stone-Campbell identity that transcends the differences regarding doctrine, practice, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality that have divided the movement."

the Scots-Irish dissenters of earlier generations to the end of the earth? They had the following features: A concern for moral rectitude, deep respect for the Scriptures, and an unequivocal passion to find authority for worship following the practices of the early church, linked with a disdain of carrying out ritual for its own sake. That is who we are.

Although there are many points on which we disagree, and sometimes we are too contentious about them, this, too, is part of our narrative. What is without dispute is that we are a church of ordinary folk. They have felt comfortable within this Movement. Others seeking more status, prestige, or some supposed historical or credal connections go elsewhere. This is our identity. Walk into any Midwest or Midsouth American church in one of the three major streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement and regular folk are the people you will find.

In the end the future is not in our hands. We now are moving into a more global environment where even "ordinary people" intersect with vastly different cultures and communities. Because of our ethos and understanding of the gospel, I sincerely believe that as we head in these directions this global environment will not hinder our growth. The gospel is for all! We know well the word of Matthew 28:18–20.

However, I wonder about the future in this sense. Newell Williams, Doug Foster, and Paul Blowers cared enough about our heritage to remind us that there is something valuable here that should be remembered. I am concerned whether a generation later there will be a similar group of editors and contributors to care enough to continue this project. When I consider this future possibility, I clearly see the abiding value of this book.

Apostles' Creed (expansion of the baptismal confession and second-century Old Roman Creed)

I believe in

God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in **Jesus Christ, his only Son**, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, descended to the grave, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, from there he will come to judge the living and dead;

I believe in the **Holy Spirit**, the holy catholic church, communion of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.

Compassion and Conviction

I am not allowed by Jesus to hate anyone. Our culture has accepted two huge lies: The first is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear them or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don't have to compromise convictions to be compassionate.

Rick Warren, christianitytoday.com

The Crowd Is Untruth

Many fools do not make a wise man, and the crowd is doubtful recommendation for a cause. Yes, the larger the crowd, the more probable that that which it praises is folly, and the more improbable that it is truth, and the most improbable of all that it is any eternal truth. For in eternity crowds simply do not exist. The truth is not such that it at once pleases the frivolous crowd—and at bottom it never does; to such a multitude the truth must appear as simply absurd. But the man who, conscious of himself as an individual, judges with eternal responsibility, he is slow to pass judgment upon the

unusual. For it is possible that it is falsehood and deceit and illusion and vanity. But it is also possible that it is true.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*

The Word of God Rather than the Word of Man

But now since it is so common that everyone has [the word that Christ preached] written in a book and can read it every day, no one thinks of it as anything special or precious. Yes, we grow sated and neglect it, as if it had been spoken by some shoemaker rather than the High Majesty of heaven. Therefore it is in punishment for our ingratitude and neglect that we get so little out of it and never feel nor taste what a treasure, power, and might there is in the words of Christ. But whoever has the grace to recognize it as the Word of God rather than the word of man, will also think of it more highly and dearly, and will never grow sick and tired of it.

Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*

The Evil of Divisions

Never since the first entrance of sin into the world, have there been any ages so happy as not to be disturbed by the occurrence of some evil or other; and, on the contrary, there has been no age so embittered with calamities, as not to have had a sweet admixture of some good, by the presence of the divine benevolence renewed towards mankind…. To confirm this truth, it will be abundantly sufficient to mention one very remarkable Blessing, and one Evil of great magnitude and directly opposed to that blessing. This Blessing is, that the Divine clemency irradiates our part of the world by the illustrious light of his sacred truth, and enlightens it with the knowledge of true religion, or Christianity. The Evil opposed to it is, that either human ignorance or human perversity deteriorates and corrupts the clear light of this Divine truth, by aspersing and clouding it with the blackest errors; creates separation and division among those who have devoted themselves exclusively to the service of religion; and severs them into parties, and even into shreds of parties, in direct contradiction to the nature and genius of Christianity, whose

Author is called the "Prince of peace," its doctrine "the Gospel of peace," and those who profess it "the Sons of peace."

Jacob Arminius, *On Reconciling Religious Dissensions Among Christians*

Empathy and Peacemaking

Let us place ourselves in the circumstances of an adversary, and let him in return assume the character which we sustain; since it is as possible for us, as it is for him, to hold wrong principles. When we have made this experiment, we may be brought to think, that the very person whom we had previously thought to be in error, and whose mistakes in our eyes had a destructive tendency, may perhaps have been given to us by God, that out of his mouth we may learn the truth which has hitherto been unknown to us.

Jacob Arminius, *On Reconciling Religious Dissensions Among Christians*

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