

CHRISTIAN STUDIES

SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE CHURCH

A PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF AUSTIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 26 / 2013-2014

Michael R. Weed
Founding Editor

M. Todd Hall
Managing Editor

Christian Studies (ISSN-4125) is a publication of the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology. *Christian Studies* is funded by gifts from readers and friends of the graduate school. Subscription is free upon request. Back issues are available for \$3.00 each, plus postage. Correspondence should be addressed to M. Todd Hall, Austin Graduate School of Theology, 7640 Guadalupe Street, Austin, Texas 78752. *Christian Studies* is indexed in ATLA Religion Database. Copyright Institute for Christian Studies. FAX: (512) 476-3919. Web Site: www.austingrad.edu. Email: christianstudiespress@austingrad.edu.

CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Volume 26

2013-2014

FOREWORD 5

ARTICLES

Ressentiment 7

Michael R. Weed

Restorationism and Church History:
Strange Bedfellows? 21
Keith D. Stanglin

Redeeming the Time

The Christian Year and Life in the Risen Christ 33

Jeffrey Peterson

A Sound Beginning:

Retrieving an Ancient Model of Christian Conversion 47

Daniel Austin Napier

“Smash them Against the Rocks”?

The Christian Appropriation of Difficult Psalms 65

R. Mark Shipp

A Peaceable Hope: Contesting Violent Eschatology in New

Testament Narratives

A Review Essay 75

Allan J. McNicol

OBITER DICTA 85

CONTRIBUTORS 87

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

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

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

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

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

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

M. Todd Hall
Managing Editor
thall@austingrad.edu

Restorationism and Church History: Strange Bedfellows?

Keith D. Stanglin

Church history has suffered neglect in the Restoration tradition. The American Restoration Movement, or Stone-Campbell Movement, was motivated by the desire to unite all Christians on the basis of restoration founded on the Bible only. This is the genius of the movement, and it is articulated in Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* in 1809, which has been called "the founding document of the Campbell movement."¹ The ideal was to restore the New Testament church and be New Testament Christians. Those who

¹ Lester G. McAllister, "Campbell, Thomas," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 140. On the intellectual and social contexts of the *Declaration and Address*, see the essays in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollmann (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2000); and Clinton J. Holloway, "Essentially, Intentionally, and Constitutionally One: A Brief History of Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*," in *One Church: A Bicentennial Celebration of Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address*, ed. Glenn Thomas Carson, et al. (Abilene: Leafwood, 2008), 15–38. For the reception of this document among Disciples of Christ, see Paul M. Blowers, "Restoring the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Appeal of the *Declaration and Address* as Interpreted by Frederick Doyle Kershner and William Robinson," in *Quest for Christian Unity*, 365–88; Mark Toulouse, "'A Holy Sameness': The *Declaration and Address*: Lingering Influences Afflicting Disciples," *Discipliana* 70/2 (2011): 5–18. For its reception history in Churches of Christ, see Douglas A. Foster, "The Understanding and Impact of the *Declaration and Address* among Churches of Christ," in *Quest for Christian Unity*, 389–409; Gary Holloway, "Restoration, Unity, and Freedom: How Churches of Christ (A Cappella) Have Interpreted the *Declaration and Address*," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 12 (2009): 163–75.

still belong to this movement generally acknowledge the return to New Testament Christianity as surely a noble ideal.

Emphasis on being the New Testament church, however, has its consequences. Two of these consequences are worth noting. First, in proposition 4 of *Declaration and Address*, Thomas Campbell writes,

That although the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the divine will, for the edification and salvation of the church, and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline and government of the New Testament church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members; as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline and government of the Old Testament church, and the particular duties of its members.²

In other words, although the Old Testament is still Scripture, it is not directly relevant to the task of restoring the New Testament church. Here we see steps toward the marginalization of the Old Testament in the Stone-Campbell Movement, an idea that Thomas' son Alexander would amplify seven years later in his "Sermon on the Law" (1816), explicitly abrogating the regulative character of the Old Testament in the New Testament church.³ Even if the marginalization of the Old Testament was not the intention of the

² Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, in *Quest for Christian Unity*, 18.

³ See Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law," *Millennial Harbinger* 3/9 (September 1846): 494–521. The main point of his sermon was to reject the distinction of moral, ceremonial, and civil laws in the Old Testament and to spell out the implications of abrogating the whole. Note two examples of claims that would prove to be influential in the movement: "The law or ten commandments is not a rule of life to Christians any further than it is enjoined by Christ; so that reading the precepts in Moses' words, or hearing him utter them, does not oblige us to observe them: it is only what Christ says we must observe" (510); "there is no necessity for preaching the law in order to prepare men for receiving the gospel" (513). Even if Alexander Campbell himself treasured and taught from the Old Testament, it is not difficult to understand how statements such as these led his followers to marginalize the Old Testament.

Campbells, the subsequent history of the movement reflects this interpretation, sometimes based directly on these documents.⁴

In addition to the marginalization of the Old Testament, there has been another consequence of being the “New Testament church,” one which will be the focus of this article. Returning to *Declaration and Address*, in the very next proposition (prop. 5), after stating that only the commands and ordinances of the New Testament will be binding on the church, Thomas Campbell writes, “Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church; or be made a term of communion amongst Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.”⁵ Let us call this the “dictum.” Just as the emphasis on the New Testament church marginalizes the Old Testament on the more remote end of the story of God’s people, this same emphasis also marginalizes church history on the more proximate end of this same story. According to this rule, just as we should not consult Mosaic faith or tabernacle worship in the restoration project, neither should we consult Nicene faith or its liturgy.

Happily, for the Old Testament, even the radical discontinuity preached in the younger Campbell’s “Sermon on the Law” cannot de-canonize the Old Testament. As Thomas Campbell admits, it is, after all, still Scripture and worth the effort of our study, even if we are not exactly sure what to do with it. In most printings of the New Testament, the Old Testament comes along for the ride, and, everywhere one looks in the New Testament, the New Testament writers keep bringing up the Old Testament. As a corpus, the Old Testament is therefore hard to ignore completely or for very long. Regrettably, church history cannot similarly ride the coattails of the New Testament and is easily marginalized. Although there are notable exceptions, the study of church history in the Restoration Movement often means going back to 1809 and its antecedents; the rest is esoteric. The restorationist model of studying church history, which is simply an extension of the Protestant im-

⁴ E.g., see Foster, “Understanding and Impact,” 401, citing L. L. Brigance’s commentary on Proposition 4 that “the Old Testament was nailed to the cross, its authority ended.” Cf. M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 25, commenting on *Declaration and Address*: “The logic would seem to be that the Old Testament should no longer be cited as an authority for Christian doctrine.”

⁵ T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 19.

pulse, is to see when and where things went wrong, how bad things could really get, and what things should be avoided. All Protestants recognized apostasy at some point in the institutional church's history, though Restoration Movement leaders have tended to date that apostasy comparatively early. The result is that church history has been depicted as one long drama of apostasy that is best skipped.⁶ It would seem, then, that restorationism and church history are strange bedfellows. The result is that, in the Restoration Movement, church history has often been regarded as a subject that can safely be ignored.

To the degree that the sentiment, if not the verbatim language, of Thomas Campbell's dictum has been influential in the Restoration Movement,⁷ it has resulted in the demotion of church history as a beneficial theological discipline. Even if the Campbells had a certain respect for some aspects of early church tradition in general and the Apostles' Creed in particular, "for them, however, 'nothing not as old as the New Testament' had the final word."⁸ In addition to its past influence, it is also hard to deny the dictum's rhetorical force, appeal, and apparent utility as an ecumenical starting point for the church today. For these reasons, it is appropriate to ask some critical questions about the dictum, "Nothing not as old as the New Testament." For the sake of the present discussion, let us grant that nothing should be positively *obligatory* in the church that is not as old as the New Testament. But Campbell also says, "Nothing ought to be *received* into the faith or worship of the Church...that is not as old as the New Testament" (emphasis added). In other words, there is apparently no place in the church for anything not as old as the New Testament.

This dictum is not without its problems. First, the dictum is self-referentially incoherent; that is, it is self-contradictory because it fails to

⁶ E.g., Alexander Campbell, "A Sin against Orthodoxy," *Millennial Harbinger* n.s. 4/12 (Dec. 1840): 530–31: "The history of the church is, indeed, little else but the history of reformations and apostacies [*sic*—of the conflicting wars and tumults of rival tenets—always orthodox while in power, always heterodox while out of power."

⁷ The importance of the sentiment of this dictum in Churches of Christ is evident in the survey by G. Holloway, "Restoration, Unity, and Freedom," and he points out the direct citation of this dictum by Raymond Kelcy (166).

⁸ William Tabbernee, "Theology and Tradition," in *Chalice Introduction to Disciples Theology*, ed. Peter Goodwin Heltzel (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 47–48.

meet its own criterion. More familiar examples of self-referential incoherence abound in popular culture: The confident assertion that “there is no such thing as truth,” or, “You must only believe propositions that can be empirically proved”—these are instances of clichéd nonsense that suffer from self-referential incoherence. Each fails to meet its own criterion. Unfortunately, Campbell’s dictum suffers from the same ailment, for the dictum “nothing not as old as the New Testament” is itself, of course, not as old as the New Testament. It fails to meet its own criterion. This is a problem of logic.

Second, even if we were to grant that the spirit, if not the letter, of this dictum is contained in the New Testament—let’s say, on a generous interpretation, that Jesus’ reminder that people “should not live by bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” somehow means “nothing not as old as the New Testament”—there is yet another problem with the dictum. This is a problem of definition. What does Campbell mean when he says “the New Testament”? If the New Testament is defined as the codification of the list of 27 books, no more and no less, then the earliest we can date this is to Athanasius’ Easter letter of AD 367. In this case, Campbell means to say, “Nothing not as old as the fourth century.” If so, then we can at least “receive into the faith and worship of the church”—to name some things at random—the monepiscopacy, stand-alone church buildings, and the consubstantiality of the Son as articulated by Nicaea (second-, third-, and fourth-century developments, respectively), for these and other such things would be as old as the defined 27-book New Testament canon (per Athanasius).

One suspects, however, that this is not what Campbell meant. When he said, “Nothing not as old as the New Testament,” he meant when the books were actually written—that is, roughly, the extent of the first century. If this is his intention, and we can be sure that it is, let me offer this gloss of the dictum: “Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church that was not believed or practiced in the first century.” Now what is the problem with this? One glaring problem is that the idea of a 27-book New Testament canon, so central to our faith and to Campbell’s, was neither believed nor known at the end of the first century. Now, one may readily admit that the idea of authoritative apostolic writing is present in the first century, that the apostolic consciousness of recording the gospel for a wide audience is also present, and that there was probably a collection of Paul’s letters by the

turn of the second century. But there is simply no such thing as a 27-book New Testament or even an idea of a closed New Testament canon by the end of the first century. In other words, the New Testament canon is not as old as the New Testament (as defined above); ergo, on Campbell's rule, because it is not part of the faith or worship of the first-century church, the 27-book canon ought not to be received into the faith and worship of the church. According to the dictum, the Old Testament should suffice as the written canon. Not unlike the first problem, this is a problem of simple consistency for someone who would both hold to the dictum and retain a 66-book canon. It is for similar reasons that we also cannot give anything more than passing consideration to slogans such as, "No creed but Christ," and "No creed but the Bible." Whatever these slogans and the dictum possess in rhetorical force they lack in coherence and meaning.

What is the purpose in pointing this out? Without meaning to detract from the success of Campbell in articulating his bold and still inspiring vision, we cannot be reluctant in observing that there is a real problem with the dictum, which is an important and oft-quoted phrase in what is increasingly considered to be a foundational or at least representative document in Churches of Christ, particularly on this point.⁹ Taking the dictum at face value, it is impossible to contend for or bind on the church the 27-book canon, which was defined and recognized by the church in the late fourth century. Most believers are probably not willing to toss the New Testament canon and the criteria for canonicity that helped shape it. So they make an exception to the dictum. But if this one exception is made, what prevents us from making other exceptions with regard to developments in the early church or in its subsequent history?

Here is the simple point: The present-day church should listen to the wisdom of the church through the ages. If we give the fourth-century, post-Nicene, post-Constantinian church a pass on its acceptance of the New Testament canon, why can't we also attend to its Christology and ecclesiology, its biblical interpretation and piety? The suggestion is not to "slavishly follow," but "attend to," "listen to." That means letting the church fathers and

⁹ In light of scholarly and popular publications in the last fifteen years on this document, the *Declaration and Address* is perhaps more widely read in Churches of Christ now than ever before, and therefore warrants a critical study.

mothers, the medieval scholastics and mystics, the reformers and restorers all have a seat at the table. It means hearing the voice of the past with discernment. It means having a “critical reverence” for the historic Christian tradition.¹⁰

Whether we mean to invite them to the table or not, we are inevitably influenced and shaped by the developments in church history in ways we often fail to acknowledge. We fail to acknowledge such developments mostly because we take them for granted. For instance, the New Testament table of contents page is taken for granted as an unquestionable truth, as if it comes from the first century. *Like* Campbell, we make an exception to his dictum. *Unlike* Campbell, I contend for making such exceptions with clear eyes and full awareness.

Consider briefly the many ways in which the tradition of the church, from the second-century church on, shapes our faith and worship in ways we often fail to acknowledge. In other words, here are practices not as old as the New Testament that are received usually without question. The separation of the Lord’s Supper from an actual meal took place probably in the second century. The language of Trinity came from the second century. To ponder the correct method of interpreting the Bible is to engage in an exercise first articulated in the third century. The confession of one God existing in three co-equal persons was ratified in the fourth century. The idea of translating the Old Testament from the original Hebrew instead of Greek came from the third, but mostly the fourth, century. Congregational singing in harmony and the use of unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper only became the norm in the medieval period. These are all innovations not as old as the New Testament, yet, rather than jettison them, we take them for granted in our faith and worship.

And then there are the practices that *are* as old as the New Testament, but are currently not practiced because of the impact of tradition. It is unnecessary to rehearse all the commands that are commonly dismissed as “cultural.” Rather, in order to demonstrate our frequently unwitting deference to the

¹⁰ This is how Jaroslav Pelikan describes the attitude of Luther and his colleagues toward the patristic tradition. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 55.

tradition, let us limit our consideration to the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

First, to see how the historic tradition still shapes the theology and practice of baptism, consider the practice of baptism for the dead that Paul mentions in 1 Cor 15:29. Whatever this practice was, we do not practice or endorse it. Why don't we practice it? It is not because Paul expresses disapproval, because he does not. In fact, he raises the issue to show the Corinthians how, though they deny resurrection, their practices are undergirded by a belief in the resurrection. Far from being negative about baptism for the dead, Paul is neutral or perhaps positive. So why doesn't the church now baptize for the dead? The reason we do not baptize for the dead is because the historic church has not baptized for the dead.¹¹ Hypothetically, if the biblical evidence were to remain the same (that is, were we to have no more or no less than what we in fact have in 1 Corinthians 15), but if the historical record were different (that is, if there was a ritual attested and approved in the second and third centuries of baptizing for the dead), then we would

¹¹ There is no scholarly consensus regarding baptism for the dead. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1240–49, alludes to more than forty different explanations. Most patristic interpreters (e.g., Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose) regarded it as vicarious or proxy baptism and assumed it was not to be practiced. Since Paul does not condemn the practice, however, others have thought the practice could not refer to proxy baptism. E.g., John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, trans. John Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 34–38, supposes that Paul means those who delay baptism until their deathbeds. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1248–49, and a few modern interpreters advocate the phrase, baptism “for (the sake of) the dead,” as a description of motivation to please the dead or that the candidate wishes to be saved in order to be reunited with already dead loved ones. But if this minority position is correct, and if the church today regards this as a proper motivation for baptism, the fact remains that such a motivation, if biblically based at all, is based not on 1 Cor 15:29 but on passages about the redeemed eschatological community (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13–18; Heb 12:22–23). The historic church has never looked to 1 Corinthians 15 to ground the orthodox practice of baptism or its motivations. Moreover, the fact that scholars are uncertain about the nature of this practice also reflects how the subsequent tradition, not first-century Corinth, omitted the practice. Interpreters such as Calvin who reject that the reference is to proxy baptism are arguably less motivated by linguistic concerns than by the presupposition that proxy baptism cannot be an acceptable practice; and it is regarded as an aberrant practice because it has no support in the catholic tradition.

probably also practice it. Even if the reference is to proxy baptism for the dead, one could interpret the practice as consistent with other Scriptures on baptism and one could regard it as more biblical than infant baptism, for the souls of dead adults as well as their proxy at least can have personal, conscious faith, unlike infants. But, on the contrary, with the possible exception of some second-century Marcionites,¹² and the well-known exception of Latter-Day Saints, no one in the history of Christianity has practiced baptism for the dead. Consequently, we interpret the ritual mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 as an aberrant practice, and we just know that if Paul had been writing a sacramental theology, he would have condemned the practice in no uncertain terms. Thus, Sunday school students have many questions when they study 1 Corinthians, but they never seriously entertain the thought of restoring this practice. Only Mormons, a restorationist sect with the greatest contempt for the historic catholic tradition, would make baptism for the dead an integral part of their faith. And so, analogous to our acceptance of the 27-book canon—an addition to first-century faith and practice—we take the omission of the biblically attested first-century practice of baptism for the dead for granted, all based on church history.

Let one more example drive the point home. As noted above, the current practice of the Lord's Supper, for better or for worse, bears the unmistakable marks of historical development in its separation from the evening table meal and the use of unleavened bread.¹³ But there are other Lord's Supper practices mentioned in Scripture, some of which we omit and others of which we practice. Note the issue of time and space in the New Testament observance of the Supper. The relevant texts are few, but, with regard to timing, there is a mixed report. According to Acts 20:7, the church in Troas met on the first day of the week to break bread. With the exception of Luke 24:30–35—

¹² See the comment by Didymus the Blind, cited in *1–2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VII, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 166.

¹³ The use of unleavened bread at the Last Supper was based on the requirements of the Passover meal. The absence of yeast in the bread was not regarded by the early church as prescriptive, for the same reason that the Lord's Supper need not include bitter herbs, lamb, and multiple cups of wine. One stated reason for the eleventh-century schism between the Eastern and Western Churches was that the Roman Church had broken apostolic tradition by introducing unleavened bread in the Eucharist.

which probably should be interpreted as the paradigmatic Lord's Supper, taking place on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1, 13)—there is no other mention of the Lord's Supper occurring on a Sunday. The Last Supper took place in the middle of the week, the Jerusalem disciples met daily and broke bread (Acts 2:46), and Paul implies only that it is a recurring practice in Corinth (1 Cor. 11:26). On the other hand, there is a more consistent witness regarding space or location. The Last Supper was eaten in an "upper room" (Mk. 14:15). The only New Testament narration of the early church's celebration of the Supper is set in an upper room (Acts 20:8).

Why then does the church regard the time but not the place as important in the celebration of the Supper? Based on the New Testament alone, it is not clear that the timing of the Lord's Supper is any more or less important than the location. If anything, there is more—and more consistent—testimony about the location than the time. If one is tempted to argue that location was important in the Old Testament but no longer in the New (based on John 4:21-24), the same argument could be made about timing (based on Gal 4:10). A theological case could also be made for upper room worship, given its symbolism of proximity to God above, confirmed by the approved examples that we find in Acts of the early disciples gathering in an upper room to pray and, in Peter's case, praying on the roof, where he received divine revelation (Acts 1:13; 10:9).

Therefore, limited to the evidence presented in the Bible alone, the case for communion in an elevated location can be just as powerful as the case for partaking on one special day each week. Why, then, do we dismiss the Lord's Supper's location (and any argument for it) as irrelevant, while searching long and hard in Scripture to validate the significance of the first day? Tradition—a tradition that extends unbroken back to the second century—repeatedly attests to the importance of the day, not the location. The historic tradition supports the theological case for the importance of resurrection day and, therefore, the possibility of celebrating other significant times and seasons. Celebrating the Supper in an upper room has always been, according to this same tradition, an indifferent matter, as it rightly is for us. But despite all the vast changes in the theology and practice of communion, a Lord's Day never passed in the first fifteen centuries without celebration of

the Lord's Supper. Whether we realize it or not, the church's history is a decisive factor that influences our faith and practice.

But if the church cannot escape its past, and if the church is influenced in negative as well as positive ways by its history, it seems prudent to examine and embrace this history. Therefore, besides the negative reasons for studying church history (namely, to avoid its negative examples, and so on), there are a number of positive reasons why even restorationists should engage in this study.

The study of church history gives the church identity, for knowing our past helps us know who we are. This study offers wisdom. The theological resources at our disposal from the church's history are more than one person could absorb in one lifetime. Yet, as a group, we ignore most of these resources. Most of the questions, debates, and problems faced in the church today have been handled or anticipated at some point in the church's history. Yet, as a group, we try to re-invent the wheel. Instead, we ought to engage in what many have called "retrieval theology." This is not a call to re-create or ape the faith and practice of a specific time or place from the past; not every thought or practice in church history is equally good or relevant for us. It means learning from the wisdom of our ancestors and appropriating the best that it has to offer for the sake of the church today.

In addition to wisdom, the student of church history may also gain perspective. The study of church history is a call for balance. First, we begin to recognize the swing of the pendulum over time. Then we begin to get a good idea of the pendulum's present position, direction, and momentum. And so we are better equipped to take the pendulum where it needs to go, or, more likely, to stand in its way and push back before it goes too far.

The study of church history can corroborate or challenge our interpretation of Scripture. For example, with many distinctive practices of Churches of Christ, it is not a slam-dunk biblical argument or a perspicuous Scripture that wins the day, despite what some of our forebears have claimed. Rather, it is the argument from history, the historic norm, what Everett Ferguson has

called “historical foreground,” that confirms practices such as frequent communion and a *cappella* worship.¹⁴

This study can help shape proper Christian attitudes as we learn from the positive examples of virtue, not to mention the negative examples of wrongdoing. Knowing what actually happened can also be useful for apologetics in a day when secularists view this history simplistically as a cover-up or as nothing but a detriment to culture. Finally, such a study can strengthen faith when one sees how God has preserved his people in the past and will continue to preserve them in the future.

Restorationism and church history need not be an odd couple, but can be more like the dynamic duo. I personally applaud and support the genius of Thomas Campbell’s restoration vision: The unity of all Christians by means of restoration based on Scripture. Thus articulated, I stand behind the restoration vision. But I must take leave of any interpretation and application of Scripture in the church that seeks to bypass nearly two millennia of church history, or that tries to read the Bible as if no one has read it before, or tries to do theology and worship as if they have not been done for the last 1,900 years. The “Bible only,” in this sense, has never worked. Just as none of us would seek to interpret and apply Scripture on our own, just as none of us would do theology and engage in moral discourse apart from our community, and just as we seek the wisdom of our community as we attempt, through God’s Spirit, to restore and unify his people, let us remember that the community of Christians includes those who are now dead. G. K. Chesterton said, “Tradition is only democracy extended through time ... an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Everett Ferguson, “Using Historical Foreground in New Testament Interpretation,” in *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practice*, ed. F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 254–263.

¹⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 205.

Contributors

Allan J. McNicol is A.B. Cox Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Daniel Austin Napier is Assistant Professor of Theology at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Jeffrey Peterson is Jack C. and Ruth Wright Professor of New Testament at Austin Graduate School of Theology

R. Mark Shipp is Pat E. Harrell Professor of Old Testament at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Keith D. Stanglin is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Michael R. Weed is Billy Gunn Hocott Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics at Austin Graduate School of Theology