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Reviving the Ancient Faith, Richard T. Hughes

Thomas Olbricht

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Book Reviews
Markus McDowell,
Eleanor Daniel, Editors

Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 448 pages. \$30. Reviewed by Thomas H. Olbricht.

Richard Hughes, Distinguished Professor of Church History at Pepperdine University, has written a significant interpretative history of the Churches of Christ. He approaches the history not so much anecdotally, nor socially, but from the perspective of the history of ideas—in this case, religious ideas. Hughes identifies his approach as “intellectual history” (8). In order to set forth the story of the Churches of Christ in a helpful grid, Hughes employs the eschatological categories of postmillennialism, premillennialism, and apocalypticism to explain major cultural and theological perspectives. He employs the sociological categories (the Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and H. Richard Niebuhr trajectory) of sect, denomination, and state church to map the changes in the larger Restoration Movement and, specifically, the Churches of Christ. The category of the state church, of course, is not relevant for an American religious movement.

Reviving the Ancient Faith has two parts: Part I, “Churches of Christ: The Making of a Sect”; and Part II, “Churches of Christ: The Making of a Denomination.” Part I is about one-fourth of the book; Part II comprises the remainder.

In Part I, Hughes discusses the Restoration Movement in the nineteenth century, especially from the perspective of the two significant early leaders, Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone. Hughes reports that friends encouraged him to commence with the twentieth century, since it is in this century that the story of the Churches of Christ really began. He felt compelled, however, to begin in the early part of the nineteenth century so as to set the stage through establishing trajectories that continue to be played out in Churches of Christ even at present. Hughes has creatively advanced a major and unique thread as an organizing and critical principle. Other past interpretive schemes are those of Garrison and DeGroot, who heralded the conflict between the ideal of unity and restoration;¹ James DeForest Murch, who set out to show how the Independent Christian Churches avoided both the Charybdis of the Disciples and the Scylla of the Churches of Christ;² and Earl West, who struggled over differences and departures from a vision of restoration best represented in the Churches of Christ of the 1940s and the Alexander Campbell of the *Christian Baptist*.³

Hughes’s thesis is that the perspectives of Alexander Campbell are basically juxtaposed with those of Barton W. Stone. While both Campbell and Stone may be located in a sect type of Christianity, Campbell pursued a postmillennial vision and Stone a premillennial, or at least, apocalyptic one. Hughes defines the postmillennial out-

look as one in which “human beings will usher in the millennium, or the final golden age, by virtue of human progress” (xiii). By contrast, in the premillennial vision, as represented by Stone, “God alone is capable of inaugurating the millennial age.” Because of his disposition, Alexander Campbell expended much energy making “peace with dominant culture” of America. He relished the progress of the United States in the settlement of the West, in the building of canals and railroads, and in other technological breakthroughs such the cotton gin and steam-powered boats. He was convinced that Anglo-Saxon culture was a great boon to civilization and eventually would prevail throughout the world. Hughes shows how Campbell’s outlook prevailed in the more liberal wing of the movement and provided a backdrop for the rift that eventually formed a chasm between northerly liberals and border state/southwestern conservatives, resulting in two churches: the Disciples and the Churches of Christ. Campbell not only became less sectarian through affirming the culture as he got older, he also became more accepting of other denominations. The left wing of the movement itself was rapidly moving toward denominational status before Campbell died.

Barton W. Stone, in contrast, was less optimistic about human achievement. He cared less for modern attainments or specific American contributions. He cared little for causes that excited Campbell, for example, the promotion of public school education or land speculation. He focused on the proclamation of the gospel and the advancement of the churches.

Hughes pursues this difference into the beginnings of the Churches of Christ. The outlook of Stone, he argues, continued in such leaders as David Lipscomb, James A. Harding, and J. N. Armstrong. Therefore, from 1906 until War World I, according to Hughes, the Stone vision prevailed in Churches of Christ. The perspective became more sectarian, however, since these men were more insistent than Stone upon the view that Churches of Christ constituted the kingdom of God in its entirety. For Hughes, the shift from the Stone-Lipscomb vision in its inception was propelled by Foy E. Wallace Jr. in his efforts to promote America’s involvement in World War II and by George Benson’s program to arrest the growth of government and, at the same time, boost American free enterprise. The result has been that since the 1940s, the Churches of Christ in America have moved incrementally out of a sect stance and become more and more denominational in outlook,

making peace with their surroundings and, increasingly, with other denominations.

Hughes’s thesis is an intriguing one and cannot be dismissed out of hand. Scholars from now on will be compelled to assess it in detailed monographs. My conclusion is that, though it will not stand up in a number of minor ways, Hughes’s thesis will solidly establish itself as a new and creative perspective from which to assess changes in Churches of Christ.

Hughes effectively brings to our attention a number of facets of our history that would otherwise go by the board.

Ideal types, a sociological construct of Max Weber, while suggestive, are always difficult to locate in bold relief in actual history. In the first place, it is somewhat difficult to establish that Barton W. Stone was a committed premillennialist either by current definitions or, explicitly, by that of Hughes. Stone wrote very little about a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, though some evidence suggests that he believed that would happen. But such a reign did not have a high priority with Stone as in the manner of the denominational premillennial movement after the turn of the century. The same is true in the case of David Lipscomb in his book *Civil Government*. Stone dwelt on the manner in which love reforms lives and unifies churches. Lipscomb believed that, should Christians dedicate themselves to the church and have nothing to do with government, the kingdom of God would grow and achieve worldwide influence. Both were optimistic about human achievement.

So how do we distinguish between the Campbell and Stone trajectories? Both were seeking first the kingdom of God. Both commended human effort. Both were optimistic that human efforts count. But Campbell believed that human efforts on all fronts contributed to the arrival of the kingdom, whereas in the Stone-Lipscomb trajectory, the contributions were limited to efforts among believers, that is, in the church. It is not clear that persons in either trajectory lived altogether apart from the world in simplicity or economy.

As David Edwin Harrell Jr. observed in regard to the success of Hughes’s thesis, “The Devil is in the details.”⁴

It is not conclusive, in pursuing the types, that either Campbell or Stone fit neatly into the sect/denomination delineation or that the various facets of the Restoration heritage do today, though some aspects of these typings may be located. Newton B. Fowler Jr. has raised this question in an article titled "Church and Sect Applied to Early Disciples: Limitations of Troeltsch and Niebuhr." He concludes, "The use of the Troeltsch-Niebuhr typology to interpret the early Disciples is misleading. Social historians beware! The mix of sociological factors with ecclesial traits leads to confusion."⁵ With respect to Hughes, however, it should be pointed out that he has tailored his own contours for these terms so that they may appropriately achieve the delineations he seeks in interpreting the history of the Churches of Christ.

In Part II of the book, in which Hughes focuses on Churches of Christ in the twentieth century, he shifts strategy to a degree, though he persists in pursuing the types. Any author who writes a history of an extended period must be selective. Hughes tells us that, in Part II, "I seek to tell the story of Churches of Christ in the twentieth century not from the perspective of mainstream editors but from the perspective of those sectarians who dissented from the emerging denominational mainstream. These dissenters included people active in the premillennial movement, the anti-institutional movement, African American Churches of Christ, and the youth counterculture of the 1960s." Obviously, the proposed approach is one among many that may successfully be accomplished. In my judgment, by attending to the history in this manner, Hughes effectively brings to our attention a number of facets of our history that would otherwise go by the board. Hughes proceeds to explore these left- and right-wing groups in a detailed manner while pursuing his thesis, moving painstakingly into unexplored territories. This aspect of the book alone establishes it as a new and pioneering work. These parts of the book will become a benchmark from which to write future histories in which these outlooks are covered. Neither Earl West nor, more recently, Robert Hooper have researched these groups through reading, interviewing, and gathering primary sources in the manner of Hughes.⁶ Especially groundbreaking, I believe, are the depictions of Foy Wallace Jr. and the premillennial controversy, the efforts by K. C. Moser and G. C. Brewer to promote a biblical understanding of grace, the fight over modernization, and the struggles for social justice.

It is obvious, in my view, that Hughes will take his position as a major historian of our movement for this reason alone. Having lived through and participated in aspects of these struggles, I am pleased to report that I think Hughes has surveyed the necessary materials, interviewed the right people, and concluded with insightful and judicious interpretations.

At the same time, however, I am troubled by Hughes's method of setting forth the history of the Churches of Christ. For insiders, I think what Hughes has done is incomparable. Various persons have informed me, after having read the book, that they had not known some of these fringe groups in Churches of Christ existed. They were therefore somewhat disillusioned by the highhanded politicking that sometimes went on. I do not worry so much about insiders. We, in my view, need to know the story of our brotherhood of believers—including the skeletons in the closet and the dirty linen. What concerns me more are readers of this book who know little about our movement. Let me hasten to add that I do not believe our history should be hagiography. I do not believe in withholding information so as to paint a rosy picture. But on the other hand, I do think that Hughes, in employing this methodology, sets forth an unbalanced picture. It seems to me that the uninformed might conclude that our movement is not a religious movement, but a wrangling movement.

I have not led a sheltered life. I have not been oblivious to the many seamy sides of what we are about. But I conclude that some of the major driving forces within Churches of Christ have received scant attention in *Reviving the Ancient Faith*. I have in mind the dedication to a constant study of Scripture, the burning commitment of most of our members in the 1920s and 1930s to plant churches throughout the United States and, after World War II, throughout the world. I think the genius of members of Churches of Christ in that period was their taking personal responsibility for the welfare of the church and, even with no training as preachers nor experience as church leaders, setting out to form and nurture new churches. Women often led in these matters, though not in the public assemblies of the churches. It has been my experience that many of our people have been more dedicated to the God of Scripture—to devotional lives, to the sharing of their faith, to the helping of the hurting, to the heartfelt worship of God—than to the controversial rifts that Hughes tracks in *Reviving the Ancient Faith*.

Finally, it is clear that Hughes prizes the apocalyptic lifestyle as that which best captures the biblical vision. A sectarian or denominational style, for him, leaves much to be desired. The contours of this style, however, are to an extent undefined. It is clear that to pursue the apocalyptic entails giving first allegiance to the kingdom of God, which can in some measure be equated with the church. Furthermore, it is clear that such a pursuit precludes too explicit an identification with the culture around about. But not as clear is exactly what this involves. Does it imply a Puritan-type simplicity in dress and demeanor? Does it mean to live simply and sparsely from an economic standpoint? Apparently not. What it apparently does entail is active involvement in a community of believers who are carrying out the mission of being a light to the nations and servants to the world.

Hughes finds these attributes especially in believers' churches, many of which are peace churches: the Mennonites, the Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren. Apparently, for Hughes, Churches of Christ, though bearing some of these characteristics prior to World War II, were too exclusivistic, thereby neglecting the call of the risen Christ to unity. And while members of the Churches of Christ have instigated several major relief efforts in recent years, these have been more parachurch undertakings than activities through which the Churches of Christ define themselves.

It is ironic, in an era in which mainstream Churches of Christ are becoming less exclusivistic, that Hughes is not altogether pleased with the directions the churches are moving. It seems that at present a definite mission vision among members of Churches of Christ is confused and diffused. Hughes himself apparently struggles for a clearer perspective and hopes that somehow Churches of Christ will become more of a community and will define themselves as servants to the world.

THOMAS H. OLBRICHT recently retired as Chairperson of the Religion Division and Distinguished Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University. He now resides in the state of Maine.

Notes

¹Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1948). Cf. William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister, *Journey in Faith* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975).

²James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1962). Cf. James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994).

³Earl West, *Search for the Ancient Order* (Vol. 1, Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Co., 1949; Vol. 2, Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1950; Vol. 3, Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1979; Vol. 4, 1988).

⁴David Edwin Harrell Jr., "Hughes and the Churches of Christ," *Restoration Quarterly* 38 (1996): 6.

⁵Newton B. Fowler Jr., "Church and Sect Applied to Early Disciples: Limitations of Troeltsch and Niebuhr," *Discipliana* 56 (1996): 63.

⁶Robert E. Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (West Monroe: Howard Publishing Company, 1993).

Edward Fudge, *Beyond the Sacred Page: A Testimony to the Guidance of God in the Life of One Man* (Houston: Providential Press, 1995), 182 pages. \$8.95. Reviewed by Carl F. Flynn.

I first encountered this wonderful book during the 1995 Bible Lectures at Pepperdine University. In a three-part evening series, Edward Fudge simply read selected chapters from *Beyond the Sacred Page*, which was not yet in print, and moved the few of us that attended through the gamut of emotions from overwhelming laughter to anger to bitter tears. What was it about these stories of the activity of God in the life of this man that touched us all so deeply? Through the relation of his life experience, Fudge witnessed to God, not as an idea or as someone who is there when we cannot make it on our own, but as the One who is actively present and powerful. His stories made sense out of our own experiences of God's often subtle, but evident, action in our own lives. That is the power of this moving tale of "the guidance of God in the life of one man" that will affect all who open its pages.

Beyond the Sacred Page carries the reader through the struggles of the author as he wrestles with the question of divine guidance. Through painful experiences and humorous twists of God's grace, Fudge autobiographically sketches his journey of learning to trust that "still, small

voice” that we all hear from time to time. What ground does Fudge ultimately establish for the limits of divine guidance? Contrary to his heritage, which declares that “God does not operate separate and apart from the Word” (10), the author is shown, through a moment of divine providence, that “Our God is in the heavens, and He does whatever he pleases” (Ps 115:3). For Fudge, that removes all limitations on the real, personal encounter of God with His people. Thus, through personal narratives detailing different events in his life, Fudge uses a balance of humor and seriousness to take the reader through this transition from seeing God within the written word to encountering God in the midst of everyday life “beyond the sacred page.”

Unlike his much heralded study on the doctrine of Hell (*The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment*; Houston: Providential Press, 1982), this book is written in a devotional style. The style provides a much needed break from the “heavier” books written on the topic of divine revelation. Yet the insights of the book are not simplistic. They are certainly simple, but carry with them a profundity that, as Søren Kierkegaard might say, may be logically absurd, but are experientially undeniable. The intent of the book is to call others “beyond” and into living fellowship with the One who speaks today as he spoke to his servants in the past. Fudge hopes that “this chronicle of God’s guidance in my life will inspire you to seek and expect divine direction in your own life” (11).

I highly suggest this book for ministers serving in the Restoration tradition. Fudge speaks out of and, most pointedly, to your experience, and in the light of his experiences, you may be able to understand your own situation more clearly. In addition, this autobiography is an important contribution for scholars of the Restoration Movement. In his narrative, Fudge provides a historical record of some pivotal events in the history of Churches of Christ, especially among the non-institutional Churches of Christ, of which Fudge was once a part. Finally, Fudge’s work may also be instructive for a small group study in your congregation. In whatever setting it is read, *Beyond the Sacred Page* is a delightful tome that challenges us to experience the real and powerful presence of God in even the most mundane moments of our day-to-day lives.

CARL F. FLYNN is a Ph.D. student in theology at Baylor University.

Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 120 pages. Reviewed by Greg Daum.

Abraham Malherbe explains in the opening chapter that this book “deals with Paul’s practice rather than his theology” (1). In particular, it is Paul’s pastoral care toward the Thessalonians that is given attention. Malherbe traces the way Paul established the Thessalonian church, his ongoing contact with them in order to continue nurturing the new Christians, and his instructions to them on how to care for one another. Paul’s ministry is summarized as threefold: founding, shaping, and nurturing the Thessalonian community.

Malherbe argues that Paul did not establish the church by merely preaching in the local marketplaces or on street corners. Instead, the social setting was one of seclusion provided by private homes (12). In the Greco-Roman world, the houses were not separated from the workplace. Malherbe contends that it is likely that Paul stayed in an *insula*, a type of apartment house that served the vast majority of people in the large cities of the Roman Empire. A typical *insula* was structured to have shops on the lower floor and living accommodations above or adjacent to them. For Paul, this meant that most of his time was spent working among the people, building relationships and serving as a living model for the community (20). This method was not uncommon to Paul’s world. Malherbe notes extensively that this style was similar to that of many of the philosophers of Paul’s age and appears to have been adopted by him for his missionary purposes.

Conversion to Christianity would have involved for Gentiles a radical reorientation—one that brought social, intellectual and moral transformation to the Thessalonians. The new converts would have faced confusion, bewilderment, and even despair as a result of their life-changing decision. Paul did not abandon them after their initial acceptance of the Christian gospel. Instead, he took on the role of both the caring “mother” (2:7) and the comforting “father” (2:11). Paul’s method in shaping and guiding the Thessalonian community “was to gather the converts around himself and by his own behavior demonstrate what he taught” (52). Paul’s actions were not separated from his teachings; his daily life served as an open book to the new converts. Again, Malherbe maintains that this was

not unique to Paul's social setting—this method of teaching was widely used by the moral philosophers of his day. However, Paul did not imitate the moral philosophic traditions entirely. While he did offer himself as a paradigm to the new converts, he did not abide in his own accomplishments. Contrary to the moral philosophers, Paul credited God as being the one responsible for the Thessalonians' birth and growth. Paul's gentle and humble demeanor and the example of himself in association with the Lord stood as clear dissimilarities to the philosophic traditions.

Even in his absence, Paul continued to nurture the Thessalonian Christians. The needs of the new converts were still a priority, and Paul responded in three ways: sending Timothy as his emissary, writing a letter of encouragement, and instructing the new believers to continue among themselves the nurturing he had begun (61). By urging them to continue to practice the ministry of nurturing one another, Paul attempted to duplicate himself and to provide for the Thessalonians further living models worthy of imitation. Again, Malherbe points out in detail the writing and nurturing similarities between Paul and the various philosophical groups of his day. Malherbe also successfully explains the differences between the two. Whereas the philosophers sometimes implemented harsh techniques of discipline, Paul consistently represented himself as being mild in manner and self-sacrificing in his actions.

Malherbe's work is an excellent book to help the reader grasp the social setting of the early Christians in Paul's time. The author masterfully establishes a direct link between Paul's model of pastoral care and the Greco-Roman philosophic schools of antiquity. The extent to which Paul relied upon traditions outside of his own Judaism has yet to be resolved, but it is clear that various Hellenistic influences can be detected in Paul's ministry. There are numerous ways in which the information in this book can be applied. However, as Malherbe contends in his conclusion, one should not "generalize about Paul's pastoral method on the basis of this one letter" (109). This brief study does offer a compelling and thought-provoking analysis of how Paul understood his role as a pastor to the Thessalonians.

GREG DAUM is a Master of Divinity student at Pepperdine University.

John W. Westerhoff, *Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 89 pages. Reviewed by Eleanor Daniel.

John Westerhoff has written widely about faith education in the church. But this book extends his thinking to the nature of parenthood as it relates to nurturing children in faith. It is a companion volume to *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Short as it is, the book contains five chapters plus an appendix on the historical reflections on parents' roles in Christian nurture.

The book opens with an illustration of an infant baptism in a small church in a Latin American village. Westerhoff recounts the ritual of baptism, so different from that practiced in most American churches. The priest concluded the ceremony by making the sign of the cross on the child's forehead and saying, "I brand you with the sign of Christ so that you and the world will always know who you are and to whom you belong." Westerhoff concludes, "What more brave, radical act can parents perform than to bring their child to the church to be baptized?" (4). Later, he says, "I sometimes wonder if we would bring our children to the church to be baptized if we fully understood the implication for them or us" (5).

The thesis for this book is stated in the first chapter: Children need to share their faith with their parents. That is how they learn what it means to be a follower of Christ, to carry the mark of Christ so the world knows to whom the child belongs now and later as an adult.

Westerhoff provides an interesting critique of the child psychology movement: It is as if, when we became aware of children and ceased to treat them as little adults, we also stopped treating them as full human beings. Now they are *only* children. It was a questionable gain (15).

He contends that we have ceased to value children for what they are, but value them only for what they can become. That assertion is followed by a summary of the view of children presented in the Bible. He concludes that the Bible does not romanticize children, but it does "affirm that children, like adults, are fundamentally children of God."

According to Westerhoff, it is impossible to date when faith begins in life. Rather, in Westerhoff's terms, faith grows like a tree, adding rings. Faith is a pilgrimage with ever expanding dimensions. Thus faith is directly related to a family's participation in the community's rituals, symbols, and myths.

Westerhoff presents his own “stages” of faith. He sees faith as first affiliative in nature, dependent on stories from significant people in the lives of children. Affiliative faith then becomes searching faith, experienced by many adolescents and young adults. Searching faith becomes mature faith only after the doubts, questions, and tests have been applied to one’s faith tradition. He sees mature faith beginning in middle adulthood and developing until death (at least, one hopes that it continues to death). Not until this time can the intuitive mode of affiliative faith be integrated with the intellectual mode of searching faith.

The third chapter of this treatise provides practical guidelines for parents who wish to share faith with their children (36–52).

1. Tell and retell the biblical story—the stories of faith—together.
2. Celebrate our faith and our lives. It is at this point that shared rituals, both in the family and the larger faith community, are essential to shaping faith in children.
3. Pray together.
4. Listen and talk together. Much instruction may be given when adults really listen to what the child is asking.
5. Perform faith-acts of service and witness. Children must be invited to share in that service.

Presentation of these guidelines then leads him to sharing the adolescent quest for faith. He states, “Adolescents need parents to support them in their quest, have confidence in them, and affirm them in their struggle with those beliefs, attitudes, and patterns of behavior in which they have been reared” (58). Yet, he points out, adolescents want limits in the form of norms or guidelines, and they covet the company of mature adults who share with them. He concludes the chapter by stating: “It matters what we believe. It matters how we believe. It matters what values

we hold. It matters what vision has captured our imaginations. It matters why we live and for what we live. To live our own lives faithfully day by day in the world is the best and most important gift we can give our adolescents to aim them in their struggles with the Christian faith” (67).

The final chapter on the adult pilgrimage is a powerful plea for adults to make attention to their faith a top priority. It is a call for them to live life in the Spirit—for their own development, but also to model an adult faith pilgrimage for children and adolescents. The concluding brief appendix is a review of the history of the church and the importance of parents in shaping the faith of their children. But it is equally an assertion that no family can survive without the church as the extended family. He states: “We need an extended family, the Church, to help us be faithful with our children and to support us in the nurturing of children in Christian faith. Together with the aid of God’s grace and the comfort of the Holy Spirit the future is hopeful” (89).

Westerhoff’s works always stimulate thinking. This one is no exception. The five guidelines he presents for parents to share in the faith journey of their children need to be heard by parents everywhere. His understanding of the church as a community of faith, as involved in the shaping of children as it is of parents, is a helpful corrective in an individualistic society that too often sees “Jesus and me” or “Jesus and me and my family” as adequate for the formation of faith. I find little in this book with which I would disagree. (Some of us would disagree with parts of other writings in which he works out the application of what he proposes here.) Any church educator should digest the contents of this book and the implications for contemporary Christian education practice. Some will find it helpful as a discussion guide for parenting groups.

ELEANOR DANIEL is Dean and Professor of Christian Education at Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee.