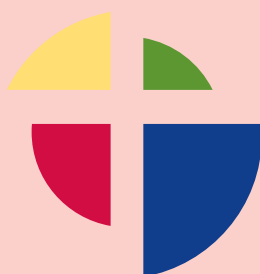


RESTORATION APPRECIATION WEEK 2019

RON PETERS & KEITH KEERAN

Edited by John C. Nugent



Great Lakes
Christian College

Pamphlet #4

Restoration Appreciation
Week 2019

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Preface

GREAT LAKES CHRISTIAN COLLEGE proudly embraces our heritage in the Restoration Movement and celebrates that heritage with our constituent churches. To foster greater appreciation for our rich heritage among our students, staff, and affiliated churches we launched GLCC's first annual "Restoration Appreciation Week" back in 2016.

We were pleased to host our fourth annual Restoration Appreciation Week, October 15–18, 2019. The celebration kicked off during Tuesday chapel with a thought-provoking address by GLCC New Testament professor, Ronald D. Peters, titled "The End of Christian Colleges and the Future of the Restoration Movement." He informed us of the Restoration Movement's distinct vision for higher education and challenged us to continue its legacy of fostering advanced biblical literacy not only among professional clergy, but all throughout each congregation. This emphasis on every-member biblical proficiency was central to P.H. Welshimer's fruitful and highly influential ministry in Canton, OH. So, on Friday of Restoration Appreciation Week, Keith P. Keeran, Former President and current Chancellor of Kentucky Christian University, blessed us with an engaging introduction to Welshimer's distinguished life and work. Dr. Keeran draws upon his extensive research and expertise to give us a preview of his forthcoming book *P.H. Welshimer: The Conscience of a Movement*. This pamphlet contains essays based on both of these fine presentations.

These two presentations were also live streamed, recorded, and made available to watch on GLCC's website at <https://www.glcc.edu>.

Preface

glcc.edu/advancement/restoration-appreciation-week. Also available online are resources and pamphlets related to prior Restoration Appreciation Week celebrations.

GLCC is continuing this tradition by hosting Restoration Appreciation Week in October of 2020. We invite you to join us during chapel on the 20th and 23rd (whether live or streaming online) as well as in your own congregations on Sunday, October 25, which is Restoration Appreciation Sunday. For the most up-to-date information and congregational resources for past and future events, frequent us online at <https://www.glcc.edu/advancement/restoration-appreciation-week/>.

The End of Christian Colleges and the Future of the Restoration Movement

RONALD D. PETERS

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS of the Restoration Movement, beginning with Alexander Campbell, education has been central to our movement's identity. It was inevitable, then, that colleges would spring from its fertile soil. They have since enjoyed a rich and fruitful legacy, but more recently as one after another of our college closes its doors, some people are beginning to wonder whether the collegiate dimension of our movement will soon face its end.

Though a comprehensive study of the history of Stone-Campbell colleges would be illuminating, this essay briefly explores only one aspect: the educational philosophy of Alexander Campbell and how his ideals echo today. Campbell believed that strong churches require strong education. He also believed that biblical interpretation is not something that should be left to a small body of professionals. Rather, it is a task for the entire church. In order to rise to this task, congregations need to be educated in both the content of the Bible and the best methods for its interpretation.

I approach this subject as someone who came to the Restoration Movement by choice. I was raised in a denominational tradition. Yet, when I was exposed to the leaders and ideals of the early the Restoration Movement, I found them irresistible. I remember

saying as a student in my Restoration History class, “If I had lived back then, I would have hung out with those guys.”

Having examined the early educational ideals of the movement, my initial response has been reaffirmed. I’m proud to say that here at GLCC the same spirit lives on. I’m excited to share what I’ve learned with you so that we can celebrate not only our history, but also our present and future.

The End of Christian Colleges

The title of this essay could understandably be interpreted as apocalyptic (in the popular sense of that term). It suggests that I am contemplating the demise of Christian colleges. Based on the current climate in higher education, with numerous colleges across the country struggling to keep their doors open, it is understandable to interpret the title that way.

What I mean by “end,” however, is more akin to the Greek word for “end,” which is *telos*. This word doesn’t mean to cease to exist. Rather, it means goal or objective. Over the last few years, I’ve invested considerable time and effort into researching the objectives of higher education in general and Christian higher education specifically. As a result, I’ve formulated a philosophy of Christian higher education that I’ve had the privilege of sharing multiple times.

In this essay, I refine that philosophy even more. I begin to explore a distinctly Restorationist view of Christian higher education and how GLCC as a Bible college fits into that view. It defines our function within the larger Restoration tradition—a tradition I believe is worth celebrating and embracing. It’s a view that has far reaching implications for the future and, ultimately, for the sustainability of our churches.

In fact, I believe it positions the churches of the Stone-Campbell tradition to be an example for other church traditions. We have the opportunity to model a way of thinking about the vital role education might play in the health, strength, and vigor of churches that can shine like a beacon to other churches.

Alexander Campbell and Education

Alexander Campbell so valued education that in 1840 he founded Bethany College in Virginia (now West Virginia). He envisioned a communal, family-in-residency institution that provided education from the age of seven through college.

While his primary emphasis was on biblical education, he also examined its bearing on the arts and sciences. Literature, art, and nature were studied in conversation with Scripture. With regard to the end, the *telos* of education, Campbell engaged the development of the whole person in terms of physical, mental, and moral powers.

His overarching concern was the moral development of students. In his own words, “*The formation of moral character, the culture of the heart, is the supreme end of education, or rather is education itself. With me education and the formation of moral character are identical expressions.*”¹ To this end, the study of the Bible was central and complemented by the study of what we would call the liberal arts: literature, art, and nature.

Campbell did not merely resist, but rejected the creation of curriculum for training ministers. He believed that a thorough education in the Bible combined with what we would call the liberal arts was enough training for preachers. Additionally, he did not restrict education to clergy only. He believed in educating all Christians.

This curricular emphasis was grounded in Campbell’s hostility toward the idea of a professional class of clergy. This hostility likely arose, in part, from the same resistance he had toward creeds. Both the creeds and an elite class of clergy represented entrenched dogmas that compromised unity and the restoration of the early church. Such hostility also aligned well with his congregational philosophy of church organization. Interpretation of the Bible was not something that should reside in the hands of a specialized class. Instead, Campbell was confident that the so-called “ordinary

1. Quote taken from Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2003), 178.

church member” was fully capable of interpreting Scripture. In his view, the meaning of Scripture was found in the context of preaching, teaching, and discussing within congregational settings.²

Campbell understood that education and training was necessary for the “ordinary church member” to properly interpret Scripture. In the words of Eugene Boring, “Campbell’s populism did not mean a kind of condescending reduction of the substantial intellectual level necessary to understand some of the difficult elements in the Bible but more often meant a bringing up of the laypeople up to the level of the material [of study].”³

Campbell didn’t naively assume that any person could simply open the Bible and interpret it correctly. Training was necessary. To this end, the *telos* of biblical education was to prepare “ordinary church members” for this task, to “bring *them* up” to the level of the material they would study (that is, the Bible), not just the specialists.

Later generations of the Stone-Campbell Movement tempered Campbell’s hostility toward a professional clergy. Over time, curricula specifically designed for professional clergy were developed and implemented in the Bible colleges. These programs exist to this very day. As a result, there are indeed sectors where interpretation has been handed over to a small class of professionals. Nevertheless, I would also argue that Campbell’s populist, congregational vision of higher education lives on in the curricula of many of our colleges, including GLCC.

The End of Christian Colleges Today

Professional ministry degrees are ubiquitous among the colleges of the Stone-Campbell tradition. However, the echo of Campbell’s original vision and philosophy still resonates.

2. M. Eugene Boring, “Bible, Interpretation of the,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 86.

3. Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 61.

Let me be clear: there are Christian colleges and there are Christian colleges. I've reviewed the curricula of a lot of schools. For many, courses on the Bible represent the smallest fraction of their curriculum. In fact, many don't even have Bible classes. They require a couple of courses on Christian doctrine or something to that effect.

By contrast, we and many other schools in the Restoration tradition still value biblical education. Nearly a full third of our curriculum is dedicated to the Bible. Every student who attends GLCC graduates with a Bible/Theology major in addition to a professional major or minor.

At the same time, our core general education curriculum reflects Campbell's commitment to the liberal arts, what he called "literature, art, and nature." Just as he did, our faculty explore literature, history, science, and humanity in conversation with God's revelation in Scripture.

We, like Alexander Campbell, value congregations that are populated with literate people who possess detailed knowledge of the Bible and the best practices of interpretation. That's why it's not just our ministry bound students who graduate with a Bible/Theology major. Bible interpretation should not be the purview of only a small, elite class of professionals. The Church as a whole and individual congregations are strongest when the community practices interpretation together.

Like Campbell, we believe that we best serve our churches by providing their students with both professional and biblical training. Obviously, individual students receive the competitive advantage that higher education brings to their future work prospects and earning potential. Yet students also receive the personal benefit of a worldview grounded in and shaped by the lordship of Jesus Christ. They learn how to make decisions and prioritize their lives both in and outside the church through the lens of God's kingdom and his righteousness.

This benefits churches greatly. If we have done our job well, graduates will love God's Church and, in particular, the spirit of the Restoration Movement. After college, our goal is that they will

embrace serving the church as well-equipped interpreters of the Bible, people who add to the strength of their local congregations.

The Future of the Restoration Movement

In the Restoration tradition, churches and colleges have a strong symbiotic relationship. Our schools are not merely a training ground for a ministerial professional class. Rather, they are a training ground for our congregations. This, I think, is a distinctly Restorationist spirit. Most denominational Bible colleges are just committed to training up leaders. I suspect that, in theory, they also want a well-trained laity. For Campbell, however, there was a much stronger impulse to break down the clergy-laity divide. Likewise, we at GLCC overtly and intentionally embrace training up strong congregations.

I'm frequently asked by prospective students and parents, "What kind of job can a GLCC graduate get with their degree?" Their unspoken assumption is that the choice of one's major must directly correlate with future job prospects. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While it's true that there are certain fields that require specialized training (STEM: science, technology, engineering, math), higher education done properly prepares young men and women for a wide variety of careers.

The true benefit of higher education is not realized in occupation specific training. It is in competencies such as critical thinking, written communication, interpersonal communication, self-understanding, and others. These competencies are developed and honed throughout the curriculum by way of general education, Bible/Theology, and professional training courses.

You've likely heard people talk about how they ended up getting a job in a field outside of their college major. Some naively conclude that this makes their education a waste of time and money. Little do they realize that the competencies they developed pay immediate dividends by providing them a competitive advantage in the job market as well as their job performance. This is to say nothing of other crucial areas of life that can't be measured in

economic terms. In the 21st century, these competencies will be even more crucial to long term opportunities and success. Campbell believed in value of a broad education. We share that belief.

What sets GLCC apart is one particular competency: kingdom mission. The same spirit that compelled Campbell to train congregations and not merely professional ministers still moves us today. Our graduates possess many of the same competencies as graduates from other colleges. What sets them apart is what sets the Restoration Movement apart and defines our history and tradition. Our students graduate with a strong, foundational understanding of the contents of the Bible and best practices for interpreting it. We instill in them a love for God, his kingdom, and the church.

Students who graduate from GLCC don't view their faith as something merely personal and private. They graduate with a love for God's kingdom and its people. They are the future elders, deacons, ministry team leaders, small group leaders, and servants in the church. They are equipped to fully participate in the interpretation Scripture and its application in the life of the church. Their strength becomes the strength of our churches.

The end, the *telos* of our Christian colleges is to preserve and promote the spirit behind the Restoration Movement. Our desire is to ensure that it survives and thrives well into the 21st century. The "end" of our Christian colleges is thus the same now as it was in Alexander Campbell's time: to partner with our churches in order to build strong congregations and secure a sustainable future for our movement and its unique witness to God's kingdom in this world.

P.H. Welshimer: The Conscience of a Movement

KEITH P. KEERAN

THE FIRST TRUE MEGA-CHURCH among the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ was not built on the foundation of slick marketing techniques, but on an unflappable commitment to quality Bible instruction for each and every member of the Body of Christ. Championing this cause was P.H. Welshimer who was arguably the most influential leader within the Restoration Movement in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, Welshimer is far from a household name among our people, so this essay seeks to raise some much needed historical awareness.

For those unfamiliar with P.H. Welshimer, I provide a basic introduction that establishes his place of significance in the modern history of the Restoration Movement. We begin with a backward glance to see Welshimer through the eyes and words of his peers. Then, we examine some of the influences that shaped his life to see how God worked through them to shape him into a formidable leader within the American Restoration Movement during a pivotal time in its history.

This study moves beyond other biographical sources to include a more intimate view of Welshimer based on conversations with those who knew him best, including his family, peers, and members of the congregation he loved and served for 55 years.

Here you will find clues to his effectiveness as a leader and as an agent of transformational change in the church. Welshimer believed that the church in every generation must reconsider its outreach strategies to reach the existing culture effectively. At the same time, he was resolute that the church must remain fully submissive to the unchanging authority and sufficiency of the Bible alone for instruction in all matters pertaining to faith, practice, and godliness. Welshimer found the historic principles of the Restoration Movement to be a refreshing and insightful response to Christ's prayer for unity among all believers, and to that end he was more than a vocal advocate. His life and ministry clearly demonstrate the timeless relevance of the New Testament church in any era and across every culture.

Much could be said about the preachers, teachers, and institutional leaders who recognized and encouraged Welshimer's unique gifting. It would also be appropriate to emphasize the key role he played in the open membership controversy that contributed to the eventual split between the Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ. Yet this essay must content itself with merely introducing this man's remarkable accomplishments, acknowledging his dependence upon a remarkable woman, highlighting his commitment to widespread biblical education, and naming his devotion to core Restoration principles. Such an introduction, I hope, will garner deep appreciation for this significant forbear in the faith and stir a curiosity to learn more about his highly distinguished legacy.

A Distinguished Place within the Restoration Movement

An examination of preaching in the Restoration Movement during the first half of the twentieth century reveals Pearl Howard Welshimer of Canton, Ohio as one of the most significant pulpit orators and Christian leaders of that period. Joseph Dampier, professor of Church History at the Emmanuel School of Religion (Johnson City, TN), called Welshimer "one of the greatest leaders

of the Restoration Movement,” and then added, “His is the outstanding pastorate among the churches of Christ and one of the outstanding pastorates of American Protestantism.”¹

In 1935, Welshimer was selected by his colleagues as the leading conservative preacher among the Christian Churches and was subsequently chosen by the *Christian Century Pulpit* to present a sermon for publication in its pages.²

One year before Welshimer’s death, Perry Epler Gresham, president of Bethany College (Bethany, WV), cited P. H. Welshimer as one of two men within the Christian churches “whose preaching had meant the most to the cause of the Restoration” during the twentieth century (the other being Edgar Dewitt Jones). He mentioned Welshimer as “the man who had established a filter and let the influence trickle out to the world.”³

On the advent of Welshimer’s fortieth anniversary with the Canton Church, T. K. Smith, the respected minister of the Tabernacle Church of Christ (Columbus, IN), wrote in the *Christian Standard*, “In the modern history of the church, no man has stood out more distinctly in the realm of Christian achievement. . . . He is the real leader of our conservative brotherhood and has earned the affection, as well as respect, of all church people of America.”⁴

In 1942 Edgar Dewitt Jones, well-known author, lecturer, and minister of the Central Woodward Christian Church (Detroit, MI) said that he could not recall any other minister among all the Churches of Christ whose success in soul-winning could approximate Welshimer’s. He called Welshimer’s ministry “a perennial Pentecost” and added that Welshimer would “go down in history

1. Joseph H. Dampier, “Forty-Three Hundred Sermons,” *Christian Standard* (Jan 3, 1942): 6.

2. Edwin R. Errett, ed., “Welshimer Gives Doctrine,” *Christian Standard* (Mar 16, 1935): 4.

3. Perry Epler Gresham letter to P.H. Welshimer, July 16, 1956.

4. T. K. Smith, “The Real Leader of Our Conservative Brotherhood,” *Christian Standard* (Jan 3, 1942): 6.

as a faithful servant of God and an ardent evangelist of the everlasting Gospel.”⁵

Welshimer achieved his wide reputation through eloquent preaching, but was also known as “the world’s foremost authority on Bible schools.”⁶ His devout personal life and tireless devotion to ministry as well as his leadership from the pulpit gave him incredible credibility in Canton, Ohio and across the nation. Under his leadership, First Christian Church became the first mega-church in the Restoration Movement, and Welshimer became the “Conscience of the Movement.”⁷

P.H. Welshimer was the minister of First Christian Church in Canton, Ohio from 1902 until his death in 1957. When he arrived in Canton, the church had nearly 200 hundred members, though less than a hundred attended regularly. At the close of his ministry, the membership numbered more than seven thousand and was the largest local congregation in the history of the Restoration Movement. By 1925, the congregation under Welshimer’s leadership had relocated to new facilities twice. Welshimer’s final building construction was dedicated in 1912 and was enlarged three times to accommodate the large crowds that gathered to hear his preaching and Bible school lessons. The structure occupied an entire city block. The largest attendance on record for any American congregation was established at First Christian Church in Canton on June 28, 1914, when 7,716 persons were present.

Welshimer had gone to the Canton church with little reputation, but within seven years he was invited to deliver an address at the 1909 Centennial Convention of Disciples of Christ held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.⁸ After this initial address, Welshimer was a regular speaker at this annual convention.

5. Edgar Dewitt Jones, “A Perennial Pentecost,” *Christian Standard* (Jan 3, 1942): 8.

6. *Canton Repository* (Aug 16, 1957): 1, sec. 1.

7. *P.H. Welshimer: The Conscience of a Movement* is the title of the author’s soon to be released book on Welshimer.

8. The annual convention of Disciples of Christ in 1909 was called the Centennial Convention because it marked the 100th Anniversary of the *Declaration and Address*.

Welshimer's reputation for preaching excellence was not restricted to Canton or even the Midwest region of the United States. By the 1920's, he was recognized as one of the foremost pulpit orators among the Christian Churches in America.⁹ In 1938, he was chosen to represent the American congregations at the annual convention of Christian Churches convening in Manchester, England.¹⁰ He spent 31 days in the British Isles and spoke 33 times achieving international acclaim. This tour, along with his earlier appointment as president of the North American Christian Convention, distinguished him for the rest of his life as "a man of a larger mold."¹¹

Welshimer was also known to a large nationwide audience numbering in the tens of thousands who read his weekly Bible school lesson in the *Lookout*, a non-denominational Bible school publication. The first lesson appeared in the January 1, 1911 issue and continued weekly without interruption until his death in 1957.¹² He received thousands of letters from all over the world thanking him for this contribution.

Recognition of Welshimer's pulpit eloquence and breadth of ministry was not limited to Christian Church circles. In 1952, *The Christian Herald*, a widely distributed evangelical publication, carried a feature article on Welshimer entitled "Godfather of a City."¹³ The article provided an overview of various aspects Welshimer's extensive ministry and influence in Canton and focused on the impact of his life and service to the community.

9. *Christian Standard* (Dec 4, 1926): 655.

10. *Christian-Evangelist* (Nov 4, 1937): 1405.

11. Francis M. Arant, "P.H."— *The Welshimer Story* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1958), 91.

12. The *Lookout* began publication in 1888 under the title *Young People's Standard*. It was devoted to short stories and poetry that depicted Christian values. The Sunday School lesson by Welshimer was one of its most attractive features and was headlined each week as "P.H. Welshimer's Bible Class." The subheading read, "By the Pastor-Superintendent of the largest Christian Church Bible School in the World."

13. Kenneth L. Wilson, "Godfather of a City," *Christian Herald* (Jan 1952): 21–22, 70.

Although some critics have commented that he brought little that was fresh or new into the pulpit, others have testified that Welshimer had the ability to make old and orthodox subjects come alive. Guy Leavitt, editor of the *Lookout*, recalled that at the state convention in Portland, Indiana, in 1943, the high school auditorium overflowed when people heard that 70-year-old Welshimer would preach. The audience was quiet and attentive for an hour. At the close of the sermon, Leavitt said he overheard two young preachers discussing Welshimer's message, "I declare," said one, "I can't understand why so many people want to hear him. I listened carefully, and I never heard him say a single thing that was new." When told of the remark, P.H. said, "Of course I didn't say anything new. It was all nearly two thousand years old. It was the gospel and as old as the New Testament." Then after a short pause, he added, "and as new as the day after tomorrow."¹⁴

Welshimer was conscious of his audience and tailored his messages appropriately to fit the occasion. By the time he was in his early sixties, he could look across the audience at First Christian Church and recognize almost all of those gathered. He had brought them to Christ and had accompanied them on their spiritual journey. To most of the adults in the audience, he was both their Sunday school teacher and their preacher. V.C. Finney, an elder of the congregation, heard him every Sunday for decades and recalled the simplicity of Welshimer's preaching in a verse of poetic tribute honoring the preacher on his sixty-first birthday, "The sermon wasn't flowery, 'twas simple Gospel truth. It fitted poor old folk like me, it fitted hopeful youth. Full of consolation for weary hearts that bleed, and full of invitation to CHRIST and not to creed."¹⁵

Welshimer did not shy away from working with ministers of various denominations. He recognized them as allies against moral corruption in the city and labored together with them to meet the unmet needs of the poor. Welshimer regarded his influence among

14. Guy P. Leavitt, letter to Francis Arant, January 28, 1958.

15. *Memento of a Birthday Celebration* (Canton, Ohio: The Bethany Class of First Christian Church, 1934), 18.

other ministers in Canton as an important part of his ministry to the city. He was an authentic friend to struggling ministers and he became a spiritual guide and mentor to many. Welshimer believed, “You have to earn the right to be heard. People have to know you are genuine before they will give you their ears.” Preachers representing many denominations, although often disagreeing with aspects his theologically conservative position, admired him for his humble spirit and well-reasoned doctrinal convictions. During the celebration of Welshimer’s fortieth year with the Canton Church, the Canton and Stark County Ministerial Association offered this tribute to his work among them,

We all feel a sense of pride in your achievements. You have been and continue to be, an influence for good in our city and in all the surrounding community. You have kept the flames of evangelism burning upon the altar and, in that way, you have ministered not only directly to those who were under your good preaching, but you have also served indirectly by being a stimulating influence upon your brethren in the ministry.¹⁶

Mrs. William A. “Billy” Sunday, whose husband was a world-renown traveling evangelist famous for his sensationalism and bombastic platform presence, cited the great admiration and high regard that “Billy” had for Welshimer. Mrs. Sunday wrote an article about Welshimer for the *Christian Standard* shortly after her husband’s death. She said that “Billy” greatly respected and admired Welshimer. The two men had a very fond relationship and spent time together in each other’s homes. Sunday, who knew literally thousands of ministers of all religious beliefs, said that “Of all the numberless ministers I know, Dr. Welshimer stands head and shoulders above them all.”¹⁷

Welshimer’s personal effects, papers, articles, and extensive library have been distributed between the P.H. Welshimer

16. Edwin R. Errett, Editorial, “Community Recognition for a Doctrinal Preacher,” *Christian Standard* (Jan 31, 1942), 9.

17. Mrs. W. A. Sunday, “Grand Leader and Humble Follower of the Nazarene,” *Christian Standard* (Jan 31, 1942): 7.

Memorial Library located on the campus of Milligan College in northeast Tennessee—which received the major portion of the collection, about 7000 volumes—the P.H. Welshimer Library at First Christian Church in Canton, and the William McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, also in Canton.

During Welshimer's long and busy public ministry, he wrote four volumes for publication, including *A Bible School Vision* (1909), *Welshimer's Sermons* (1927), *Concerning the Disciples* (1935), and *The Great Salvation* (1954). In addition, a volume of Welshimer's sermon outlines were collected and published by his daughter, Mildred Welshimer Philips, in 1969. Standard Publishing Company published all of these volumes. Many of Welshimer's sermons have also been published in various sermon collections and anthologies. He frequently contributed to religious publications and much of his work is preserved in the *Christian Standard* and *Christian Evangelist*, weekly publications of the independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ.

Welshimer also published a weekly Bible school lesson in *Lookout* magazine under the heading, "P.H. Welshimer's Bible Class." His Bible lessons ran each week uninterrupted for 46 years, ending at his death in 1957. They covered the entire Bible. Welshimer produced no less than 7,176 pages of published lesson commentary during his ministry, the equivalent of thirty-six 200-page volumes. This doesn't include nearly 10 years of unpublished lesson material written for his Canton Bible school teachers prior to catching the eye of the editorial staff at *Lookout* magazine. Welshimer's column was the most popular feature of the magazine and was used by preachers, Bible school teachers, and their students around the world.

Communication with members and friends of First Christian Church was a priority for Welshimer and, in January 1903, he began publishing and circulating the *Canton Christian*. He kept the Church and its ministry constantly before the eyes of the community. In each weekly issue, Welshimer published a brief message for the congregation along with regular church announcements and local promotions. Other than his regular preaching and Bible

school teaching, print was the only means of public communication available in 1903. Welshimer used every kind of print medium available to get his message out. In addition to the *Canton Christian*, newspapers, billboards, and tracts were the most common.¹⁸ Commercial radio broadcasting didn't exist until the 1920s, and then only in the largest cities in the nation. When radio broadcasting eventually came to Canton, Welshimer was first to use the medium for religious broadcasting.

P.H. Welshimer was a man of many accomplishments and virtues, but his reputation and success resulted largely from his tireless devotion to building up the Body of Christ. His first love was preaching the gospel and leading and loving the people he was called to serve. "Welshimer exemplified for a whole generation the critical importance of evangelistic ministry as a congregationally based initiative. His legacy continues today in a growing number of so-called 'mega-churches' that have grown to 3,000 and more members within the fellowship of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ."¹⁹

A Distinguished Maternal Pedigree

Pearl Howard Welshimer was born April 6, 1873, on a farm near York Center in Union County, Ohio.²⁰ York Center was a small crossroads community that boasted only a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a tiny Methodist church. He was the son of Samuel Welshimer, whose ancestors had come to America from Germany before the Revolutionary War. Samuel Welshimer was a farmer

18. *Facts Concerning the New Testament Church* was Welshimer's most widely circulated tract. It was first published by Standard Publishing in 1925 and is still available today through Amazon.com and as a printable download from Christian Standard Media.

19. Douglas Foster, (et.al.), *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 2004), 321.

20. Much of the biographical information that follows is based on Keith P. Keeran, "A Critical Evaluation of Rhetorical Processes in the Preaching of Pearl Howard Welshimer through an Evaluation of Representative Sermons" (Master's thesis, Abilene Christian University, 1976).

and also operated a sawmill and lumber operation. Pearl's mother, Louisa Jane Wilson, was of Scottish descent. Her paternal great grandfather, James Wilson, was elected to the Continental Congress in 1775 and was the thirty-third signer of the Declaration of Independence. President George Washington appointed him as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1791.

Louisa Jane Wilson was teaching school in Logan County, Ohio, when she met Samuel Welshimer. They were married in 1872 and made their home on a farm two miles east of York Center. Louisa Jane gave birth to three sons: Pearl, Herbert, and William.

Life around York Center was hard, and a name like "Pearl," which at the time was considered mostly a girl's name, didn't make his life any easier. In adulthood, few people knew his name was Pearl and it was something he did not publish. He was known across the country only by the initials "P.H." The origin of the name Pearl is traceable to Matthew 7:6 where the kingdom of Heaven is compared to a "pearl of great price." The ancients regarded the pearl to be among the most precious of gems and they were widely sought and treasured. In the modern era, a single pearl has sold for as much as \$300,000. The term is also used metaphorically for anything of value. Statements that are regarded as wise sayings are said to be pearls of wisdom. Perhaps it is only coincidental that Welshimer was born in the month of April, which is considered to be the best month for pearl fishing. Welshimer may not have liked his first name, but he more than lived up to it in the value of his lifetime accomplishments.

When P.H. arrived in 1873, there was great joy in the Welshimer home, but hard and challenging days would soon follow. By September of that year, the entire country fell on difficult times. Historians call it the first Great Depression. Known as the Panic of 1873, the financial crash, which began in Europe, quickly spread to the United States. The crash was brought on by a combination of political corruption during the Grant presidency and unscrupulous speculation in an unregulated U.S. bond market. More than any other event, the collapse of America's premier investment banking company and the unregulated growth of the

railroad industry were to blame. Banks all across America closed their doors; eighty-nine railroads defaulted on their bonds; three million wage earners lost their jobs; and farmers like Samuel Welshimer could not sell their wheat and corn. Worst of all, mortgages were foreclosed. For the young Welshimer family this meant losing their home and starting over someplace else. For five years, the struggle continued as did the loss of confidence in the government to solve America's problems. Though there were early signs of economic recovery by 1878, the road back to stability was slow and painful, especially for the American farmer. Many had lost everything.

Samuel Welshimer, hoping to recover his losses and create greater stability for his wife and children, moved his family from York Center to West Mansfield, Ohio when P.H. was nine years old. There he attended a one room public school and, despite the distress of hard economic times for the Welshimer family, he graduated in 1889 as the valedictorian of his class. He was 16 years old.

Welshimer credited the example and expectations of his parents for the lessons he learned during the lean years of his youth. During these years of scarcity, he developed those aspects of his character that would surface later in his resilience, determination, and stubborn persistence to continue when pressure mounted in his ministry. He developed a deeper sense of self-purpose and an even greater appreciation and love for his family. The obstacles and hardships during his early years gave him an increased capacity to empathize and act for the greater good of others. These times forced Welshimer to confront the important questions about what really matters in life. "What do I want my life to be about? Why am I here? How can I benefit others?"

Welshimer's strong work ethic was cultivated early in life. Nothing came easy for Samuel and Louisa Welshimer. They worked hard to make a living for their family, and they instilled the virtues of honesty and hard work into the lives of their young sons. P.H. started his first job when he was only eleven years old. A local merchant employed him to clerk at the town's grocery store after school and on Saturdays. Then, after a short time, he drove

a horse drawn huckster wagon and went up and down the streets calling out his wares to local residents. As a huckster he learned to rely on a strong voice and the powers of persuasion to gain a hearing and convince customers. Most people had little money and made their purchases by bartering for the items on his wagon, exchanging their home-churned butter and eggs for his needles, thread, and flour.

Young P.H. didn't make much money and quickly learned the value of a dime. Once, after he had worked hard all day for a farmer, he was given ten cents for his labor. He didn't bemoan the small wage, but rather walked to town and bought a copy of the *Life of James A. Garfield*, by Russell Conwell. This book proved providential in its influence on Welshimer's life. He was impressed that Garfield was a man of faith, a member of the Christian Church, and that he had worked his way through Hiram College to become a lawyer and a preacher. Later, Garfield returned to Hiram to become President of the College and soon after won election as the 20th President of the United States. The book so influenced Welshimer that he resolved in his heart to one day become a lawyer like Garfield and maybe even a preacher.

The stories told to him by his mother about her great-grandfather James Wilson were not lost on him. P.H. knew he was from good stock and that part of James Wilson was inside him. Wilson was a Revolutionary War hero and Supreme Court justice and, to this boy living on the edge of poverty in a little-known Ohio hamlet, that meant he descended from American royalty and much would be expected.

The influence of Louisa Jane Welshimer on her young son was profound and influenced his life in ways that would not be fully realized until adulthood. P.H. was introduced to the Christian faith through Bible stories read to him by his mother at bedtime. She was a deeply devout woman and the early inspiration of her children. Louisa Jane became a member of the Christian Church when she was sixteen, but after her marriage to Samuel Welshimer and relocation to York Center, she attended the Methodist church where he was a member because there was no Christian Church in

the small community. Though the Methodist church was not her preference, she wanted her children to know the importance of having a church home, and so P.H. attended the Methodist church for several years following his birth.

After the Welshimer family moved to West Mansfield, Ohio, they attended the Methodist Episcopal Church in that community. Then, within only a few months, a new congregation of the Church of Christ was planted in the village and his mother became a charter member. It wasn't long before Samuel Welshimer was also baptized and became a member of the church. Several years later, in a letter to his daughter Mildred, P.H. recalled the unforgettable day his father was immersed:

I walked from West Mansfield seven miles down to my grandfather's and carried some oranges to my grandmother Welshimer, who was very ill. At a little before eleven a.m. I stood by her bed and saw her die. How well I remember it all. She was only sixty-four years of age. I was then coming thirteen. That day my father was baptized by W. J. Lhamon in the creek out beyond the farm I used to own. When he returned from his baptism I was at home and told him of grandma's death.

After Samuel's conversion, he remained a strong supporter of the church for the rest of his life. He served as superintendent of the Bible school for 40 years and was a member of the board of officers for 47 years, until his death.

While P.H. loved and respected his father, he credited his mother with being the leading influence in his decision to enter the ministry. He always claimed that she was the best teacher of English and the Bible that he ever had. As he wrote his weekly Bible school lesson for *Lookout* magazine or when he was preparing a sermon about a Bible character or event, he would find himself going back to those familiar word pictures and descriptions his mother had so vividly embedded in his mind. She loved to hear him preach, and he always enjoyed opportunities to preach where she was in attendance. When his mother died in 1923, Welshimer spoke of her influence in a tribute to her life: "She was a plain,

old-fashioned God-fearing mother, and the inspiration of her son.” Clearly, Louisa Jane Welshimer loved her son deeply and believed in his abilities. It was her many expressions of love and encouragement that gave him the strength and confidence to become the effective leader and speaker that he was. He absorbed her example and great faith. Moreover, her constant encouragement to preach and serve Jesus left an indelible imprint on his heart. The power of a mother’s influence can stir passion and possibility into the heart of a child. We would have more young men and women entering the ministry today if there were more mothers with Louisa Jane Welshimer’s patient persistence, prayers, and heavenly vision.

While Welshimer’s mother had the greatest influence on his life, many others contributed significantly, including preachers, professors, and college presidents. It has been said that the most important influences we have in life are to be found in the people we meet, the experiences we have, and the books we read. Those influences can be for our good or they can lead us to choose a less noble path. If we are fortunate, we will have a mentor—a spiritual guide to help us on the journey. Welshimer found such mentoring in his mother’s quiet prayers, loving conversations, and gentle prodding.

A Distinguished Legacy of Bible Preaching and Teaching

P.H. Welshimer regarded teaching and preaching the Bible to be his most important priorities, and he devoted considerable time preparing for both the pulpit and the classroom. He had a high view of preaching for the edification of the church and evangelization of the community. He called preaching the “divine imperative” and was convinced that by “the foolishness of preaching” the way and means of salvation was to be announced to the world. The authority of the Bible and its sufficiency as the source of ultimate truth was clear, and he wanted to make sure that the human element in the presentation did nothing to obscure that clarity. Both

content and presentation were critical aspects of Welshimer's sermon preparation.

As a youth in the church at West Mansfield, Ohio, Welshimer was greatly influenced by the preaching he experienced. The manner in which the Scriptures were opened and the clarity with which they were proclaimed made a lasting impression. The preachers he heard relied on the Scriptures for their material, and their presentations exhibited trust in the reliability and authority of the Bible. When they preached, it was with a sense of urgency and importance.

O. A. Trinkle was one of Welshimer's close ministerial colleagues and heard him preach often. Trinkle commented during an interview, "I never heard Welshimer when he was not at his best. He approached the pulpit without a note in hand. He laid his Bible open on the pulpit, but without reading from it, cited and quoted accurately several passages and referred to others. On one occasion, I counted and noted that he had quoted flawlessly 14 passages from the New Testament without the aid of printed text. His voice resonated as one of the prophets of old."

Though Welshimer achieved wide acclaim through preaching, he also became known as the world's foremost authority on Bible schools. When Welshimer arrived in the city of Canton in 1901, First Christian Church had regular church attendance under 100 and its faltering Bible school program was struggling to survive. Welshimer took on the challenge of transforming a congregation whose people were discouraged and disengaged from the community.

After assessing the situation, Welshimer defined the need for change, created a new and hopeful vision, mobilized commitment to the vision, and ultimately transformed the church into the largest and most dynamic congregation among the Christian churches in America and its Bible school into the largest in the world. Scores of people arrived each week, including many from other countries, to discover Welshimer's secret—but there was no secret. It was, as Welshimer put it, simple gospel truth. The gospel is the power of God. It just needs to be preached with passion and taught with

resolute care by a tribe of mobilized, trained, and committed teachers. God will do the rest.

It could be argued that Welshimer's leading strategy for church growth was the Bible school and not the pulpit, though he regarded both as essential to defining and revitalizing the growth trajectory of the church. The Bible school was key to the effectiveness of the pulpit. There has to be a foundation of knowledge and understanding before an appeal for action and a decision for Christ can be made effectively. During Welshimer's long ministry at First Christian Church, over 17,000 persons were baptized, and the record shows that seventy-five percent of additions to membership came through the Bible school program. Welshimer's revitalization of the Canton Church came by way of his vision for the Bible school. In 1909, he wrote *A Bible School Vision*—and the “secret” was out.

The problem with any strategy is in the execution. Welshimer was adamant about the need for disciplined, well-informed, and trained teachers, and constant assessment of the program's success. He was so convinced of the importance of Bible school as the teaching arm of the church that he would not turn its leadership over to anyone else. From its inception, Welshimer retained control as superintendent of the Bible school.

Welshimer's priority was to win humanity to Christ. He was convinced that if the church tomorrow was to have strong men and women, they needed to be reached today while they were still boys and girls. The place to reach them was the Bible school. He called this “the new evangelism” and the only sane and logical solution.

A Distinguished Devotion to the Restoration Vision

In 1909, P.H. Welshimer was invited to deliver an afternoon keynote address for the Centennial Convention of the Disciples of Christ. Main sessions of the convention were held at Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the event marked the 100th Anniversary of the writing of “The Declaration and Address” by Thomas Campbell.

Welshimer chose as the theme of his convention address the critical place of pastoral leadership in the life and growth of the local congregation. Under the title, “The Pastor, the Pivotal Man,” Welshimer called attention to the leading voices that shaped the Restoration Movement at the beginning, and then built his case around the idea that “the church in our time” must have leaders that will continue to call the church “back to the pattern found in the New Testament.” He contended that every generation has to renew the same commitments and raise up leaders that are knowledgeable and committed to the same kind of principled leadership that existed at the start of the Movement. Welshimer reminded his audience that “apostasy does not come in a day, or a year, but through the march of many years.” It is a gradual drawing away of the church from the New Testament pattern.

When Welshimer called attention to “principled leadership,” he was referring to leaders that hold true to biblical doctrine. He reminded his audience that the New Testament church accepted the Word of God to be its only rule of faith and practice and then said, “We honor the Campbells and their co-laborers on the occasion of this convention because of their initiative, their vision and their ability to search the Scriptures and give direction to all those that seek the biblical pattern for the church and desire to honor the authority of God and His Word.”

Without much elaboration, Welshimer gave reference to the 13 proposals or propositions contained in Thomas Campbell’s “Declaration and Address”; though he reminded his audience that these statements are not to be looked upon as a creed, but as useful expedients to eliminate divisions and promote the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17. Welshimer had very high regard for these guiding principles. They were formative to his development and had a profound and lasting influence on the way he conducted his ministry.

In keeping with the “Pivotal Man” theme of his convention message, Welshimer made specific reference only to Proposition 12 of Campbell’s address, which relates specifically to those called to preach and lead the local church. The proposition expects the

church to demonstrate Christlike character and maturity and conduct itself in a manner that honors God. The proposition further states that the church must have qualified preachers that teach nothing other than what is clearly expressed in the Word of God. Furthermore, those preachers must observe all the divine ordinances which the church in the New Testament books observed—in the way that the church observed them.

Proposition 12 became especially significant to Welshimer in the years leading up to the climax of the “open membership” controversy in 1926—a controversy of such magnitude that it fractured and ultimately split the Restoration Movement. This proposition was embedded in his conscience from years past and would prove a guiding force when many were troubled and looked to him to lead and take a stand against liberalism within the Movement.

Welshimer believed that knowing the history of the Restoration Movement was important not for the sake of history itself, but for the lessons emerging from the faith experiences of the pioneers of the movement and for the ideas contained in the massive amount of literature they produced. There is something about learning the lessons that history has to teach that is invaluable to those who come later. Some have argued that if you don’t remember the past, you will struggle with the future. If you’ve ever forgotten your keys or couldn’t remember where you parked your car, you will recall the confusion and maybe the panic you experienced. In that moment, you clearly understood the importance of remembering the past.

To that end, Welshimer wrote a history of the Restoration Movement. He published *Concerning the Disciples* in 1935, during a time when the Movement was still reverberating from division—a division that occurred because history was ignored, reinterpreted, or forgotten. He called the book “a brief resume of the movement to restore the New Testament church” and wrote it originally as a text and study guide for his own congregation. It was later picked up by the Standard Press and published for the benefit of all the churches.

Welshimer was hopeful about the future. He believed that people were losing interest in denominationalism and starting to view division as unnecessary. He believed that it was incumbent upon the heirs of the restoration ideal to make the simplicity of the plea for unity known to the religious world, but he also feared that many of the heirs of the movement were unacquainted with their own history and the promise that its “Scripture only” position holds for the church.

As early as 1897, soon after Welshimer arrived in Millersburg, Ohio, and began his second ministry, he realized that publishing and distributing information in the community was necessary to help people understand what makes the Christian Church different from the other churches in town. He wanted people within the church and community to know why the church exists and what it believes. Soon after, he wrote the content for a 16-page tract under the title, “Facts Concerning the New Testament Church.” He began the tract with an answer to the question, “Why do we exist?” Welshimer wrote, “Our aim is the restoration of primitive Christianity and consequent union of all the followers of Christ in one body (John 17:21); to exalt Christ above party and His Word above all human creeds; to build a church of Christ without denominational name, man written creed or other barrier to Christian unity, whose terms of fellowship shall be as broad as the conditions of salvation and identical with them; and to lead sinners to Christ in the clear light of the New Testament teaching.” He closed the opening section with these commitments: “On non-essentials we admit the largest liberty; on the essentials we appeal to the New Testament. ‘Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.’”

The tract’s appeal was in its simplicity and clear organizational style, and it was exceptionally well received. Not only did it effectively answer common questions, but it created a lot of talk in the community when it was delivered to every home in town. Welshimer contended throughout his ministry that both the gospel plan of salvation and the plea for unity were simple biblical concepts that could be easily understood by the man and woman

on the street. The problem was not with the plan or the plea, but with the reaction from other ministers in the community when some of their members started to attend services at the Christian Church and many were baptized.

Not long after its first distribution in Millersburg, Standard Publishing Company saw the tract and wanted to give it a much larger circulation. Welshimer sold the publishing rights for \$5 and, to this day, “Facts Concerning the New Testament Church” has enjoyed the greatest longevity of any of Standard Publishing’s thousands of products. Millions of copies have been sold to churches and individuals for distribution across the U.S. and around the world. It remains available today from the publisher in both printed and electronic formats.

From an early age, Welshimer was exposed to the Bible. His earliest recollection was hearing it read by his mother in the evening. Exposure to the ideas concerning the Restoration Movement came later, but while he was still young. Again, it was his mother that first introduced him to the idea that all he needed to know about God’s will for his life and that God’s plan and pattern for the church could be found in the Bible. She called the Bible the most important book in the world and the one he should read and keep close to his heart, and he always did.

At age 84, during the final days of his losing battle with throat cancer, those by his bedside heard him pray repeatedly, “Lord, let me keep my voice so I can preach the gospel. It’s so simple, so simple.”

