

RESTORATION APPRECIATION
WEEK 2020

KATE A. K. BLAKELY & LARRY CARTER

Edited by John C. Nugent



Great Lakes
Christian College

Pamphlet #5

Restoration Appreciation Week 2020

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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 fifth annual Restoration Appreciation Week, October 20-23, 2020. Our celebration kicked off during Tuesday chapel with an engaging address by GLCC's Cross-Cultural Ministries professor, Kate A.K. Blakely, titled "The Fruit of Humility: Alexander Campbell on Reading Scripture Rightly." Drawing on the keen insights of Alexander Campbell, she argued powerfully that Christian unity requires a certain kind of approach to Scripture, a humble approach. On Friday, Larry Carter, President of Great Lakes Christian College, expanded our imaginations of what it might mean to restore the pattern of the early Church by introducing us to one of the earliest Christian writings not included in Scripture, the Didache. Together these presentations highlight the twin themes of the Restoration Movement: unifying around the Scriptures and restoring early church practice. We are pleased to include in this pamphlet 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.greatlakeschristiancollege.edu/restoration>.

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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 2021. We invite you to join us during chapel on the 19th and 22nd (whether live or streaming online) as well as in your own congregations on Sunday, October 24, 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 Fruit of Humility

Alexander Campbell on Reading Scripture Rightly

Kate A.K. Blakely

INTRODUCTION

WHAT I have for you today is rather modest. I hope that this is in keeping with both the spirit and the substance of this address. If you know only one thing about the Restoration Movement, you might know that its founders saw disunity as a problem for God's people. If you know another thing about the Movement, you probably know that its way of addressing that problem is by refocusing Christians around the Bible so they would form their faith by actually reading the Scriptures. Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the Movement, saw that the people of God could not fellowship together around the Table—the Lord's Supper—as Jesus asked us to do because of differences in creed and confession. He lamented this broken reality, this lack of obedience, and the lack of fruit that it showed the world. In this essay, I submit a third thing to know about the Restoration Movement: Alexander Campbell emphasized that reading the Scriptures well requires humility.¹ This third thing is quite simple. Yet that simplicity is mighty. Reading the Scriptures well requires humility.

1. Alexander Campbell emphasized the necessity not just of reading the

It might surprise some of you to learn that a humble hermeneutic was once a central tenet of the Restoration Movement. There are several reasonable reasons this might be so. For one, Alexander Campbell was wildly successful as a public debater. It seems unlikely that someone capable of winning high-profile debates, where one must be forceful and energetic, might consider humility key to knowing things. It sounds almost impossible because when we read Campbell's writings, his tone is often strident, angry, frustrated, and upset.

Maybe you don't know anything about Campbell, about his debates, about the tone in his writings. But you do see the church. In it, you see strong divisions. Perhaps, to you, the centrality and even essentiality of unity seems unlikely because if we know a fourth thing about the Restoration Movement, it's that it has several branches. For decades, it seemed to us that the Movement had divided cleanly into three branches. Yet more recently we are coming to recognize an additional branch—one which many of us in predominantly white churches are just now starting to appreciate—the branch that our African-American family has known existed for a long time, a church within a church.² In short, this unity movement does not seem to be very unified.

This last piece, that this unity movement does not seem very unified, sends a message. It suggests that perhaps the way of

Scriptures, but reading the Scriptures *well*. He was a recognized biblical scholar, providing a translation of the New Testament called *The Oracles of God*. See M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis, MS: Chalice Press, 1997), 58–59. Cf. Kate A.K. Blakely, “Toward a Humbler Hermeneutic: What Karl Barth and Alexander Campbell Have in Common,” *The Stone-Campbell Journal* 21.1 (Spring 2018): 41–57.

2. See especially Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013), and *Slavery's Long Shadow*, edited by James L. Gorman, Jeff W. Childers, and Mark W. Hamilton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 133–189. See also *Reconciliation Reconsidered: Advancing the National Conversation on Race in Churches of Christ*, edited by Tanya Smith Brice (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2016).

achieving unity that Restoration Movement folks try to practice—by reading the Scriptures well—is not all that great a method for achieving unity. After all, it doesn't seem to have worked.

Perhaps because of this real and meaningful concern people look back to Restoration Movement founders for reasons why a unity movement is *not* as successful as might be wished. Some of the things they find are connections to Baconian and Scottish Common Sense philosophy.³ Folks who see these connections—between Baconian and Scottish Common Sense philosophy and Restoration Movement founders—often conclude, “Ah. That must be it. That’s where this whole thing goes wrong. It is built on a philosophical foundation that has long been discredited. It’s a nice idea to say that just reading the Scriptures well and together as God’s people is the way towards unity. But ultimately it doesn’t quite work because that way of being unified is too naïve, too incomplete, too simplistic, and maybe even too arrogant.”

I am not suggesting that there are no connections between Baconian and Scottish Common Sense philosophy and the Movement’s founders,⁴ but I would like to highlight three elements

3. For example, see C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), ch. 7, and also *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630–1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 158–159; Morris S. Eames, *Philosophy of Alexander Campbell* (New Brunswick, NJ: Standard Press, 1966), 23; C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, and E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 297. For a nuanced engagement of this incomplete engagement, see John C. Nugent, “Was Alexander Campbell Enslaved to Scottish Baconianism,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 12 (2009), 15–30.

4. Nugent notes that Walter Scott, who served as president of Bacon College, the Movement’s first institution of higher education, named after Francis Bacon, reviewed Bacon’s philosophical project in “glowing” terms in an address at the school. Scott employs Bacon’s philosophical project for educational purposes but does not connect it to his vision for the church. See Nugent, “Alexander Campbell,” 16, n. 6. See also Richard Harrison, “Bacon College,” in *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (ed. Douglas Foster et al., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 55; and Walter Scott, “The State-System,” in

of Campbell's hermeneutics—his guidance for reading well in order to interpret well what we read. I do this because I have become convinced that Campbell has insights that can still help us be more faithful Christians. These insights can help us read Scripture and bear better fruit, in keeping with repentance, and can point us toward the way of Christ Jesus to which we are called. Following after Campbell, I'm suggesting that the fundamental rule for reading the Scriptures fruitfully is Christian humility. The centrality of humility in Christian hermeneutics is the first element of Campbell's hermeneutics that I describe below.

Before I go further, I need to clarify what I do not mean by humility. I am not suggesting that Christians should practice the kind of relativism that pretends at humility while actually making rather arrogant assertions about what can and cannot be. As Christians, we confess that God's being and work in reconciling all things is real, ontologically so. And in order to match up what we confess as real with how we confess it, we do so with hermeneutical humility. We confess ontological certainty with epistemological humility. This epistemological humility is what I'm talking about, as a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit.

READING LIKE CHILDREN: WITHIN “UNDERSTANDING DISTANCE”

We do not have to dig to find the centrality of humility in Campbell's work. Humility frames Campbell's project precisely because it grounds his hermeneutics, which appear explicitly in two essays: “Foundations of Christian Union” and “Principles of Interpretation.”⁵ I will walk through Campbell's explanation to

The Christian: A Monthly Publication Devoted to the Union of Protestants upon the Foundation of the Original Gospel and the Apostolic Order of the Primitive Church 1 (Georgetown, KY: Stuart & Stark, 1837), 25–72.

5. Both discussions can be found in *The Christian System*, reprint (Cincinnati: Bosworth, Chase & Hall, 1871) 105–127 and 16–17 respectively. Additional citations from both sections will use page numbers from *The Christian System* reprint. “Principles of Interpretation” was originally published in

focus on how humility orients the reader towards God and makes space for an important fruit of reading well: Christian unity. Let me start with his principles for interpretation.

Campbell sets forth seven rules for interpretation. The first six are, even today, pretty standard:

1. Consider the book's original context and history.
2. Pay attention to when in the story of salvation this particular book appears.
3. Apply to the Bible the same linguistic rules of interpretation used for other books.
4. Use common meanings when trying to determine a word's meaning; then allow scope, context, or parallel passages to further refine it.
5. Use context rather than fanciful guesswork to interpret figures of speech.
6. For allegorical texts, use only those points that the passages intend to illustrate to determine their meaning.

These first six rules help make the seventh rule concrete:

7. We have to get within an "understanding distance" of the text.

This "understanding distance," Campbell says, is like getting within "hearing distance" when you are speaking with a friend. To read well, we have to get close enough to understand. The way to bridge the distance, to get close enough to understand, is by being humble.

Millennial Harbinger 6 (1856): 109–112, and is also available in Alexander Campbell, "Principles of Interpretation," *Christianity Restored: The Principle Extras of the Millennial Harbinger*, Revised and Corrected (Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 96–97. "Foundations of Christian Union" was originally published in *Millennial Harbinger* 6 (1856): 109–113, and is also available in *Christianity Restored*, 101–128.

Campbell further describes this understanding distance as a circle “the circumference of which is unfeigned humility, and the center of which is God himself.” God speaks through the events of the Scriptures in order to act. But for that action to bear fruit, the believer must approach the Scriptures with humility.

Humility of mind, or what is in effect the same, contempt for all earth-born pre-eminence, prepares the mind for the reception of this light, or what is virtually the same, opens the ears to hear the voice of God. . . . He, then, that would interpret the Oracles of God to the salvation of his soul, must approach this volume with the humility and docility of a child.⁶

In his day, Campbell saw another kind of hermeneutic at work in Christian thinking. That hermeneutic tried to create a system of “orthodox opinions,” enshrined in creeds, that serves as the standard by which fellowship could occur. He saw a direct connection between the use of creeds and the divisions that had splintered the church. Campbell’s hermeneutic thus requires commitment to a specific posture—humility—with regard to both God and Scripture. Believing that the dependence on creeds compromises the Church’s unity, Campbell sought to identify a hermeneutic that would instead foster unity. The power to read the Scriptures well does not come from ontological certainty or even exegetical skill (although exegetical skill is also significant!). It comes, rather, from an attitude and posture of humility and a receptivity not unlike that of a child.

HUMILITY’S RESTRAINT: TESTS OF FELLOWSHIP

The first part of Campbell’s hermeneutic, which we just examined, is easy to see, if not so easy to practice. I would like to suss out another piece of Campbell’s hermeneutic that might not be so obvious: a four-fold framework that includes facts, testimony, faith, and feeling. When scholars read “facts” in Campbell’s writing, they often assume incorrectly that he means Baconian facts. Campbell’s

6. Campbell, “Principles of Interpretation,” 18.

“facts” are something like our common way of using that term, but they are also different.

Let me speak for just a moment about Bacon. Francis Bacon was focused on the physical world. His project did much to help Western folks work out the scientific method, by which we empirically verify data. We can affirm that certain information is really real because we’ve touched it, smelled it, seen it with our senses. Then, after we’ve confirmed this information scientifically, we build on that foundation toward abstract “truths” or propositions about the way the world is. The test for validity, for Bacon, begins with human senses and builds on the information discovered through the senses. You figure out more information that can be trusted because it arises inductively or deductively from something that has been proven true. For Bacon’s system, the term “facts” applies both to the direct information you discover by using the senses and the indirect truths you can glean by building on that information using induction and deduction.

These are a different kind of facts than what Campbell means. Campbell does not start with the human senses by way of the scientific method. Instead, he clearly defines *facts* as the specific actions and words of God, the starting point for our faith.⁷ These facts are divine acts that break into human reality as revelation. Nor does Campbell suggest that we should build on established scientific facts to discover additional truths with regard to the essentials of our faith. On the contrary, we should exercise restraint in making opinions tests of fellowship, no matter how biblically founded. This is precisely where the creeds can get off track—not because they are incorrect, but because they are human deductions that build upon the facts of Scripture and then become tests of fellowship.

In the Baconian method, knowledge comes from us and our practice of the scientific method. In Campbell’s, knowledge requires, again, humility. To be faithful is to respond positively to

7. Campbell, “Foundations,” in *The Christian System*, 110.

the Scriptures' testimony about the actions and words of God. We hear about the words and actions of God through the testimony of the Scriptures. When we respond to the gracious invitation and good news that God has been working to redeem and reconcile all things, we do so with *faith* in Scripture's testimony to God's work. We must therefore practice restraint in declaring something essential. If it is not something that God has done or said—a fact, in other words—it ought not be considered essential. A creed, as accurate as it might be, builds new truths with the facts of Scriptures and then makes these buildings the test of fellowship.

According to Campbell, we should submit to and accept God's actions, confessing them as what we believe.⁸ We should not confess anything with confidence on the basis of our own ability to know things or confirm their validity. We confess with confidence only that which we have received as testimony with faith. In order to confess with confidence, we must first *receive* from God through the testimony of others. Faithful Christian practice—and faithful Christian reading—requires receptivity and submission at the beginning. It requires consistent restraint in making deductions central or giving them equal weight to what God has done and said. Christian reading thus requires hermeneutical humility from beginning to end.

FEELING: THE FRUIT OF READING

One more piece of Campbell's hermeneutics requires unpacking. It is the finale of the process of interpretation and the natural fruit of reading the Scriptures well. Campbell described this fruit as “feeling.” As we've established, Campbell understood that our process

8. Campbell's discussion of “system” at the opening of *The Christian System* illuminates this point. Here, he draws a parallel between a human thinking about the world and a finger or bone thinking about the body. To accurately describe the whole body, one must see it all. Likewise, to accurately describe the universe, one must have complete and perfect knowledge of it and all its interconnected parts. The implication for epistemological humility is clear. See Campbell, *The Christian System*, 13.

of understanding begins with facts, defined as that which God has said or done. The *testimony* to what God has said or done is contained within the Scriptures. As we access those facts through Scripture by believing that its testimony is true, we respond with *faith*. We certainly could build upon those facts by making deductions or inductions. Those built ideas might even be truthful. But they are not as trustworthy as the facts of what God has said and done. Nor should they be made essential because, even if they are accurate or truthful, they are human constructions. Only those facts of God, testified to in the Scriptures, should be deemed essential. The process of interpretation is completed with *feeling*. I suspect this is the place where we struggle most to see God's work alive in the church. Yet it is the site where God's glorious work can be made most evident. It is, in fact, the finale, the point of reading the Scriptures and reading them well.

When we think of feelings, we often think of emotions. In some ways, that's not far off. Even our physiological responses, our emotions, can be so shaped by God's actions and words that we "feel" the things of God, responding to stimuli in the way God invites us to respond. Campbell meant something more concrete and less influenced by things like whether we've had enough to eat today or acquired enough sleep. By "feeling," Campbell meant obedience lived out in our lives. Reading the Scriptures well really and truly bears fruit in our lives—in the ways we treat one another, the decisions we make, perhaps even the ways we respond to situations. It impacts how we are reconciled to one another as a foretaste of the fullness of God's kingdom, when all things are fully reconciled to God and to one another.

This process of being reshaped, of being changed, of being formed into the fullness of Christ, of practicing our faith consistently is the last part of Campbell's humbler hermeneutic. While we might be tempted to see him as coldly cognitive, all up in his head, this process gives us a glimpse of a depth and wholeness that involves the entirety of a person. To read Scripture well is to bear

fruit and demonstrate that the actions and words of God have been received and that we have been shaped by what we confess as true. Reading Scripture well bears the fruit of Christian unity. Reading like children with humility and docility opens us up to receive God's truths in Scriptures. Demonstrating humility's restraint in emphasizing only the facts of what God has said and done keeps us focused on the true essentials. And living out responsiveness to God's actions by loving one another, being of one heart and mind bound together in love, helps the world know what God has done in Christ (cf. John 17:21). In short, the fruit of reading rightly is Christian unity itself, a glimpse into the world that God is bringing which the current world desperately needs to see.

CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of how faithfully later Campbellites, or even Campbell himself, may have lived out this humbler hermeneutic, it has much to teach believers as they seek Christian unity and participate in family conversations across diverse Christian traditions. The Spirit of God has the power to inform reading, shape discussion, and make Christians one as Jesus prayed in John 17. The task of believers involves submitting to the work of God in Christ by exercising *restraint* in making assertions about what counts as Christian faith. For Campbell, Christians must exercise restraint and humility in obedience and response to God's actions and words. Founding hermeneutics on biblical facts and limiting all ecclesial teaching to such facts requires a humble orientation throughout the entire process of interpretation and a demonstration of that humility as its conclusion and culmination.⁹

9. Cf. James S. Lamar, *Organon of Scripture: of the Inductive Method of Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1860). In contrast to Campbell, Lamar's hermeneutics are fraught with Scottish-Common Sense philosophy and thus fail to demonstrate the kind of humble restraint for which Campbell called. Thus already in the second generation, one of Campbell's pupils began undermining this humbler hermeneutic.

Throughout his time teaching at Bethany College, Campbell spent hours each morning in class, talking and studying through the entire Bible.¹⁰ The students at Bethany would listen and interact as he taught. “The word is the power of God,” Campbell says in one of these morning lectures, “It manifests his power by words. We communicate our ideas by words; God manifests his power.”¹¹ The message of God’s work shows up in the world through the reconciliation of God’s people with one another, especially, it seems, in the ways we talk with and to one another. The fruit of reading the Scriptures well is born in the conversations and interactions we have as we move throughout life, proclaiming the gospel before a world that desperately needs Good News.

We need this kind of behavior today. We need to confess our ontological certainty with hermeneutical humility. We need to have eyes that can see the work of the Spirit in the people around us and to get within an understanding distance of the actions and words of God. That understanding distance requires not the shouts and arrogance of worldly confidence like the powers of this world but a different kind of power that is found at the foot of the table, a power exemplified in Jesus the Christ that reveals him as Lord of all.

Those steps of humility in our reading shape our interactions with one another. The fruit of God’s work in walking this humbler walk, reading through this humble hermeneutic, should be a hallmark of the Restoration Movement. It should be something we are known for. Humility with one another and towards the Scriptures that we hold so dear—that is the path we must walk.

10. Carisse Mickey Berryhill notes that graduates of Bethany College usually had followed the annual cycle through the Bible at least three times because of these morning classes. See “From Facts to Feeling: The Rhetoric of Moral Formation in Alexander Campbell’s Morning Lectures at Bethany College” in *The Word Became Flesh, Festschrift for Michael W. Casey*, edited by Thomas H. Olbricht and David Fleer (Pickwick, 2009), 21–34.

11. As quoted in Berryhill. Originally from H. Pangburn’s manuscript journal, dated 1855.

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As members of the Restoration Movement, a deep and mighty humility is doubly our heritage. As John Nugent reminded us earlier in this pamphlet series, all we really have to offer is our commitment to the Scriptures, that simple and humble testimony to the facts testified to in the Scriptures, what God has said and what God has done.¹² May we read and speak and live by walking in the footsteps of the Humble King, and in doing so, by God's grace, read the Scriptures fruitfully.

12. Cf. John C. Nugent, "Why We Need a New Wave of Restorationism," Pamphlet #1, *Restoration Appreciation Week 2016*, Great Lakes Christian College, 23–41.

The Didache and the Restoration Movement

President Larry Carter

GREAT LAKES Christian College was founded in 1949 by a group of churches and individuals who were affiliated with what is known as the Restoration Movement. Historically, this Movement's sustaining purpose was to work toward the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the church of the New Testament. Now, you might think that that ideal was somewhat unrealistic given the church's propensity to bicker, argue, and fight over the slightest difference in opinion or tradition, but the idea of unity was so powerful that committed men and women decided to sublimate their own preferences and presumptions to work toward making unification a reality. It was from churches founded on that ideal that Great Lakes Christian College was born. The original goal for the College was to prepare men and women for effective service in the Kingdom of God. After 70 years of existence that goal remains. And our affiliation with the Restoration Movement remains, as well. As such, it might be helpful to begin this lecture with a review of some of the principles related to the Restoration Movement.

In the early 19th century, there were Christians who had grown weary of the sectarian squabbles that divided the church. These Christians, who had become frustrated with the institution-

al church of their day, saw the division, even the enmity, exhibited toward one another as contrary to the very purpose of God. They had read the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20–23 and despaired of seeing that prayer ever come to fruition. Jesus prayed,

I pray . . . for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.¹³

The church of the early 19th century seemed to care more for their creedal traditions and opinions than they did in being an answer to Jesus' prayer so that the world would believe that God had sent him. They cherished their own positions to the point that they took precedence over the very prayer of Christ. Many Christians became disgusted with the spiritual blindness and arrogance of that era and began to speak and write about the possibility of being a different kind of church – a church that was simple, focused, and unified. It wasn't long before these Christians found others who felt the same way. They, too, wanted to be the answer to Jesus' prayer. These same Christians had also read the inspired words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians about what Jesus came to do through the shedding of His blood on the cross. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:13–16 (speaking about the division that existed between Jews and Gentiles),

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both

13. All Scripture citations are from the NIV.

of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

The blood of Jesus was shed so that he could create one new humanity. His blood was so precious, so powerful, that man-made divisions and barriers, even those built and then held in good conscience, were destroyed once and for all on the cross. As a result, Paul continues in 4:2–6, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Simply put, these early 19th century Christians longed for the day when Christ’s prayer would be fulfilled and His blood honored. So, they put aside their creeds, traditions, and long-held opinions to join other Christians in a movement to carry out the will of God. The thinking of the day was that if we could go back far enough – back beyond sectarian strife and theological camps – back to a time when the church was in its infancy – we could find our purpose again – we could find unity once again. We could put Christ’s prayer and His blood back in its proper place as the guiding principle behind everything the church should be and could be. The place to recover or restore the church to its original intention was to rediscover how the first Christians, in the first century, understood their role in the kingdom of God. What was their fellowship like when the church was just beginning? If we could just restore what they had then perhaps we could heal divisions and evangelize the world. From those thoughts and desires came the Restoration Movement. As stated earlier, these Christians sought the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the church of the New Testament. Some of the early sayings of this Restoration Movement reflected their intent:

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- The church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and institutionally one.
- We are Christians only, but not the only Christians.
- No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible.
- Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, where the Scripture is silent, we are silent.
- In essentials unity, in opinions liberty, in all things love.

This Movement started out as a spiritual fire that spread across the United States. Thousands of Christians, tired of being hyphenated believers, exhausted by the inimical struggle with those who should be their brothers, frustrated by church leaders who cared more about being right than being righteous, flocked to this new church that honored God's will and Christ's blood above their own brand of Christianity.

Those first years of the Restoration Movement were marked by a fresh move of the Holy Spirit that brought thousands to the feet of Jesus and the church closer to the heart of God. But within a few decades, while the principles were still espoused, the unity desired fell by the wayside as regional disputes arose around the Civil War and the question of slavery, around economic disparities, and around various interpretations of the practices of those first century Christians. As a result, the Restoration Movement, the unity movement, lost its momentum and eventually divided into three distinct groups. This is where we are today. While all three groups acknowledge their common heritage, the issues separating us appear to be too closely held to overcome the spirit of division within our ranks. Some of those issues are serious, like questions regarding the inspiration of the Bible; others are less so. Currently, we have churches within our own branch of the Restoration Movement who are separating themselves over things like women's role in the church and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Unity, to those brothers and sisters, means agreeing with them even in the realm

of opinion. Their motto is, “In essentials unity, and everything we believe is essential, even our opinions.”

The current state of the Restoration Movement, especially in our tristate region, led me to delve more deeply into early church documents to see if we could rediscover a common ground from which to reclaim or even restore a sense of what it was like to be a part of the first century church. Perhaps if we could get a glimpse of what the church was like from a historical point of view, we could get back to some semblance of the unity the church once enjoyed.

One such document was a book commonly referred to as “The Didache” or “The Teachings” or “The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles.” This first century document was lost to posterity for hundreds of years as the church had moved away from a simple communal form of Christianity to a more ritualistic, autocratic, institutionalized religion that demanded uniformity rather than unity. The Didache was deemed unimportant by the powers-that-be because it described a church that bore little resemblance to what became the church of Rome or Constantinople. But, in 1873, a scholar was studying an ancient text when he discovered an older manuscript that turned out to be a copy of the Didache. This was an immensely important discovery because this manuscript was the earliest account, outside of Scripture, of what the church looked like and how various believers lived in community. Church historians had known of this book for centuries. Second and third century church leaders like Eusebius, Athanasius, and Clement all considered it to be authentic and considered it a useful manual or catechism for those desiring to be Christians and as a reflection of the earliest practices of the church. As time went on, however, the backward look at the body of Christ wasn’t deemed as important as adhering to the current ecclesiastical version of the church. But, if we are to recapture or restore the practices of the early New Testament church – if we are to conform to the principles that guided those first believers – if we are to reclaim the ideas of the

simple church – if we are to find a common thread that helps to bind us together in Christian purpose and love – then a look at this ancient book could help us to move beyond sectarianism and division to become a unity movement once again.

What you first notice about the Didache is that it is descriptive of how Christians operated in community. The book is church-centered, not Christian centered. Many today view being a Christian as an individualized religion where our salvation is assured and the blessed life is realized. It is the kind of faith where individuals can pick and choose the teachings of the Bible they like and ignore the rest. Bottom line, many think that when they accept Christ, it is simply a personal decision to follow a personal God. Any greater connection or responsibility to the body of Christ is made according to one's personal prerogatives. But that is not how the first century church viewed the faith. They believed that Jesus came to form a new people, to establish a fellowship, a community that was to show how people could and should live together in response to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Being a believer meant joining a community, not simply adopting a new philosophy or adhering to a new set of teachings. The Didache confirms this. It is a book that provides basic information about how individual Christians come to share life together. It's a book about community life. It's a book about our oneness in Christ. It's a book about unity.

This early church manual is only 16 chapters long. The first part of the book describes the "Two Paths of Life and Death." It details the kind of behavior expected of one who has become a Christian and what should be avoided. But, it is more than an individualized rule book for Christian living. Thomas O'Loughlin, in *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians*, writes,

This (book) is not a challenge that is offered to an individual or a group of individuals; it is offered to a community, a single reality, "the people." The individual had to accept the way as a member of the people, but it was the whole community that

had to choose to set out on this way of life. Moreover, when individuals abandoned the commandments then the whole community was in jeopardy.¹⁴

These early believers understood that being a Christian meant having an allegiance not just to the Lord in heaven but also to the body of Christ on earth. They understood that how they lived out their faith impacted both their own souls and the soul of the church. To be a Christian meant to work toward a common life with other brothers and sisters. This was not a legalistic, stifling adherence to a new set of laws but a desire to join with others in presenting to the world a new way of life. A life that brings people together, that values the worth of all others, that breaks down the walls of prejudice and strife.

Included in this first section are admonitions like, “Do not create division, but bring peace to those who are at odds” (4:3). This emphasizes each believer’s responsibility to maintain unity in the Body of Christ. Another passage focuses on our common awareness of the needs of others in the church. It says, “Do not shun a person in need, but share all things with your brother and do not say that anything is your own. For if you are partners in what is immortal, how much more in what is mortal?” (4:8). Later, in describing the behavior of those outside of Christ, those on the Way of Death, the Didache states,

For they love what is vain and pursue a reward, showing no mercy to the poor nor toiling for the oppressed nor knowing the one who made them; murderers of children and corruptors of what God has fashioned, who turn their backs on the needy, oppress the afflicted, and support the wealthy. They are lawless judges of the impoverished, altogether sinful. Be delivered, children, from all such people (5:2).

Christians must be different. Living out one’s faith isn’t simply choosing a moral code that avoids certain sins, it is also having a

14. Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 30.

concern for others, especially the poor and oppressed. It is, in fact, more than a simple concern; the Christian, and the church, should be actively showing mercy and deliberately working on behalf of the oppressed.

This first half of the Didache focuses on the characteristics of a life lived in community with other Christians. The second half focuses on the practices of the early church. In particular, it speaks about baptism, fasting, prayer, and the thanksgiving meal. What is interesting about this section of the Didache is its adherence to the idea that even rituals should be viewed from a communal perspective. The emphasis is one of unity. For instance, in 7:1 it says,

But with respect to baptism, baptize as follows. Having said all these things in advance, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if you do not have running water, baptize in some other water. And if you cannot baptize in cold water, use warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Baptism is recognized as an essential part of one's faith response to enter the family of God. We of the Restoration Movement have always pointed out the necessity of being immersed in a body of water because the Greek word *baptizo* in the New Testament literally means to dip or to plunge and because this action best simulated the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. But, it appears that the early church didn't insist on only one way to perform this rite. There appears to be a "good, better, best" approach to baptism. Now, we understand that the Middle East is rather arid and there could be times when finding a stream or body of water would prove to be a problem. But, notice that there is no insistence that baptism should wait until the right conditions were available. The one being baptized wasn't told to go to another location or to wait until Sunday when the tub or pool would be filled. The important thing was to have water available, whether it was in a stream, pool, or jug, and that the ritual be performed in the name of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit within a communal context. The best way mentioned is to baptize in running water. Kurt Niederwimmer, in his commentary on the *Didache*, writes, “We may suspect that at an earlier stage of Jewish-Christian praxis that peeks through here flowing water was required, without exception, for the performance of baptism, because only this kind of water was supposed to have the necessary power of lustration (purification).”¹⁵

This practice was soon replaced by the later part of the first century with a more flexible approach that included not only pools of cold or warm water, but pouring, as well. One could imagine that the issue of water in baptism could’ve been divisive for the church. There could have been the running water advocates who rejected those who didn’t take the time or make the effort to baptize the “right” way. There could have been those who sneered at the legalism of those who wouldn’t accept the pool or pourers among them. But, this doesn’t seem to be an issue here. Yes, there is a better way to be baptized, but the early church recognized at least three other ways to be acceptable, too. The important thing here is that a person must be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now, understand that I am not promoting the idea that we should move away from a position that insists on baptism by immersion. Why change from a practice that is viewed by even those early Christians as the better way to perform the ritual? But, I find it interesting that those of the Restoration Movement who are strict in their understanding and observance of first century practice do not adopt the best way to baptize – in cold running water.

What is mentioned next about the baptismal rite should interest us even more. In 7:4 it states, “But both the one baptizing and the one being baptized should fast before the baptism, along with some others if they can. But command the one being baptized to fast one or two days in advance.” The first thing to notice

15. Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 127

is that baptism is a serious matter that shouldn't be entered into lightly. It should include a period of fasting. Fasting is a practice that accompanies repentance or a petition to God. It also is done to prepare for a particular encounter with God. Notice, though, that the candidate for baptism isn't the only one encouraged to fast. The baptizer and members of the congregation are all encouraged to enter into a common fast. The whole community, by fasting, was helping the new believer with his or her preparation in becoming the newest member of the family of God. Perhaps the current attitude towards baptism, that it is mostly an individual or even private matter, should move more toward a communal event where a sense of oneness and unity is promoted as we fast together for the well-being of the new Christian and the whole church.

The Didache continues to detail the early church practice in 8:1, "And do not keep your fasts with the hypocrites. For they fast on Monday and Thursday; but you should fast on Wednesday and Friday." We don't have the time to identify who these hypocrites were and why Mondays and Thursdays were taboo. Simply notice that it was a common practice for the church to participate in a common fast two days a week – on Wednesdays and Fridays. It was a fast meant to emphasize a unity of practice and purpose. Each Christian was joining with others to break from traditional food or meals in order to focus on the common good of the kingdom of God. Fasting, in the early church, wasn't simply about exhibiting personal piety; it was the body of Christ, coming together to spiritually undergird the work and ministry of the Church. These believers weren't Sunday, go-to-meeting Christians who felt attendance at services was the mark of the faithful. Their involvement as the church wasn't relegated to what was done only on the first day of the week. There was a consciousness about their fellowship that extended throughout the week. There was a recognition that each person, as a part the church, was responsible to do all he or she could to carry out God's will on earth.

This awareness also involved how they prayed. In 8:2–3 it states,

Nor should you pray like the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in His gospel, you should pray as follows: “Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy; may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the Evil One. For the power and the glory are yours forever.” Pray like this three times a day.

It appears that the early church felt it was important to pray the Lord’s Prayer. Now, the version that is included in the Didache differs from the exact wording we find in the Gospels. But the wording of the Lord’s Prayer differs even between the books of Matthew and Luke. So, the exact wording of the prayer doesn’t appear to be the issue. The content and context were most important. The content of the prayer should reflect the things that were on the Lord’s heart when he talked with the Father. The context of the prayer is that it was done three times a day – by the church. Not only did the church fast two times a week, they also joined together in prayer three times a day! The idea was that the body of Christ, whether they were together in physical fellowship or spiritual fellowship, was unified in purpose and in practice to do the Lord’s will on earth. They fasted as one – they prayed as one.

They also came together as one to share in a thanksgiving meal. Chapters 9–10 speak to how they should partake of the meal and how they should pray. It appears that this thanksgiving meal was a communal meal meant to include what we know as the Lord’s Supper. There is a prayer accompanying the sharing of the “cup” and the sharing of a “fragment of bread.” In 9:1–4 it states,

And with respect to the thanksgiving meal, you should give thanks as follows. First, with respect to the cup: “We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your child, which you made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever.” And with respect to the fragment of bread: “We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowl-

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edge that you made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever. As this fragment of bread was scattered upon the mountains and was gathered to become one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. For the glory and the power are yours through Jesus Christ forever.”

This thanksgiving meal appears to be the same meal mentioned in 14:1, which says, “On the Lord’s own day, when you gather together, break bread and give thanks.” The early church felt that gathering to celebrate who they were in Christ and to acknowledge the love of their heavenly Father stood at the center of their fellowship. It was something done on a weekly basis on the Lord’s Day to reaffirm what was accomplished through the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ and to emphasize their oneness in him. As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share one loaf.” O’Loughlin writes, “The meal celebrates the communion of the gathering with one another, communion with all other Christians, communion with Christ and communion with the Father.”¹⁶ The Lord’s Supper has been the central event of the gathered church not only because of its focus on the death and resurrection of Christ, but also because it reconfirms our oneness in him. It took His sacrifice on the cross both to save us *and* to make us one.

In 1983 I had the privilege of going on a tour of the Holy Land. Walking where Jesus walked was an incredible blessing to me. But the highlight of the trip was when our group met in what is purported to be the Upper Room in order to partake of the Lord’s Supper. We had purchased juice and bread and so were prepared to share with our group of 20 or so. But as we were beginning the service other groups came into the room until it was filled

16. O’Loughlin, *Didache*, 99.

to capacity. What was meant to be an experience shared just by our group became something larger and deeper. As I was leading the service, I asked the other groups where they were from and they said from France, Germany, the Netherlands, and England. I asked if they would like to join us in the sharing of the Lord's Supper. They said, "Absolutely, yes!" What followed was a spiritual and emotional experience that united us as one. As we sang together, prayed together, and ate together, we all felt the presence of the Lord. It was powerful. Afterward we were all somewhat stunned by what we had experienced. The unity we felt, the oneness we shared, was life changing. As we ended the service there were tears and hugs shared by people who understood that even though we may be separated by geography and language we were one people through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We didn't know if any of those people agreed with us on every point of doctrine. What we did know was that they cherished what was done on the cross and believed in what happened in the grave. In that moment we shared a unity of spirit and purpose. We weren't strangers anymore. We found it hard to distinguish our differences when we were standing in the shadow of the cross. How I long for the day when the entire church can experience the same thing.

The idea behind the Restoration Movement was to bring unity to the body of Christ. It was a big idea. Whether that idea is still realistic after 200 years is up for debate. But the idea is still worthy to pursue. Any movement toward unity would bring us closer to being the answer to our Lord's prayer. It would bring honor to the Lord's shed blood.

The Didache provides us with a glance back at the early days of the church. It shows us how important unity was in the body of Christ. Perhaps we can allow this look back to help us move forward in a greater awareness of our oneness in Jesus. Being in community was important to those early believers. If unity was important then, shouldn't it be now? Can't we put aside the comparatively lesser issues of division and focus on the much larger

intentions of Christ? He prayed that we might be one. Shouldn't we do everything we can to answer that prayer?