

A Critical Review of *Illusions of Innocence*

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Introduction

The following quotations tell the reader all he needs to know about the theological agenda of the book under review:

To confine themselves to Bible words without explanation would be to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent and, in so doing, to identify with the Christian primordium in the fullest sense possible. Or so it seemed. But in accepting this seductive posture, the “Christians” engaged in a profound but subtle transformation that would have lasting and even devastating effects. In the first place, restoration became no longer a means to an end – that end being freedom – but rather an end in itself.... At this point, it perhaps was inevitable that some would claim that the Church of Christ had fully restored the ancient order and now was the one true church outside of which there was no salvation. These claims would come in due time. (Hughes and Allen, 118–19 [all subsequent citations are from the same source, unless otherwise indicated]).

[Speaking of those influenced by Campbell]: Their church belonged to the first age, not to time or tradition. Those who adopted this posture turned a critical corner in their movement as they relinquished the original ideal of restoration as process. Instead, restoration became for them an accomplished fact. In this way the “Christians” developed a tradition whose very substance was a denial of their tradition and a history that, ironically, would be characterized for many years by a keen sense of having no history at all (125).

Some continued to struggle against the forces of history to keep alive the original ideal of restoration as process, grounded in hope. But for many “Christians,” restoration became an accomplished fact. For them, history emerged victorious, leaving only the rhetorical husks of a grand vision of liberty and union for all (132).

Illusions of Innocence is the title of a book written by Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen. It is subtitled, *Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630–1875*, and was originally published and copyrighted in 1988 by University of Chicago Press. In 2008, the copyright and publication rights were assigned to Abilene Christian University (ACU) Press for the paperback edition.

Dr. Hughes is the Boyer Fellow/Distinguished Professor of Religion at Messiah College (“rooted in the Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan traditions of the Christian Church” [Messiah College]) in Grantham, Pennsylvania. Before assuming his post at Messiah, he was a Distinguished Professor in the Religion Division at Pepperdine University and directed its Center for Faith and Learning. He has authored and/or co-authored several other books, including *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (1996) and *The American Origins of Churches of Christ* (2002).

Dr. C. Leonard Allen has held professorial posts at Biola University (an interdenominational, faith-only, dispensational premillennial, “Evangelical” school that requires its faculty to adhere to its doctrinal platform [see Biola]), Fuller Theological Seminary (an almost doctrinal twin of Biola University, requires the same [see Fuller]), and Abilene Christian University (not far behind either of the above). He has authored and/or co-authored several books besides the one under review, including *The Cruciform Church* (1990) and *Distant Voices: Uncovering a Forgotten Past for a Changing Church* (1993). Dr. Allen is Editorial Director of Leafwood Publishers, which is apparently a close ally with ACU Press. He presides over an advisory board that includes such notable liberals as Lynn Anderson, Max Lucado, Darryl Tippens, John Allen Chalk, and Leroy Garrett.

Some Preliminary Impressions

Both Hughes and Allen are obviously intelligent and scholarly men, and both are able wordsmiths. They bear well-earned reputations as doctrinal apostates, not “liberal” in the “classic theological” sense of “modernism,” but most certainly in the Biblical sense. They appear to be historians who have read and researched widely. The titles of most of their books demonstrate their penchant for “restoration” history. If *Illusions of Innocence* is exemplary of the others, their persistent agenda is evident: to so interpret and/or revise history as to depict the Lord’s church as just one more man-originated denomination in the larger religious cesspool of denominationalism.

The authors lay out the subject matter of this book in the following divisions:

- Restoring First Times in the Anglo-American Experience
- The Constraints of “True Antiquity”: John Cotton and the New England Way
- The Quest for “Soul Liberty”: Roger Williams and Puritan Dissent
- The Ancient Landmarks: Baptist Primitivism from the Separates to James R. Graves
- From Freedom to Constraint: The Transformation of the “Christians in the West”
- Soaring with the Gods: Early Mormons and the Eclipse of Religious Pluralism
- Freedom from Dogma: James S. Lamar and the Disciples of Christ
- From Primitive Church to Protestant Nation: The Millennial Odyssey of Alexander Campbell
- A Civic Theology for the South: The Case of Benjamin M. Palmer
- Nature, Innocence, and Illusion in American Life
- Epilogue: Beyond Innocence and Illusion in American Life

The book contains a considerable amount of American church history, from colonial times and well into the nineteenth century, as the subtitle indicates. While I find this history

interesting, I do not at all agree with some of the interpretations placed upon it or the conclusions drawn from it.¹ Hughes and Allen express themselves in clear and readable style. The authors copiously annotated the 296-page book with 698 endnotes (55 pages), many of which are information/comment notes besides the documentation notes. A thorough index completes the volume.

The Thesis of the Book

The aim of the authors is to convince the reader that men can never **achieve restoration** of any original entity that has been abandoned or corrupted with the passing of time. To Allen and Hughes, all such efforts must be ever in **process**, impossible of **realization**. All restorers who claim their efforts as a *fait accompli* are doomed thereby to become that which they set out to oppose and escape—the shackles and barnacles of religious creedalism and self-righteousness. As one would expect such liberals to do, they principally aim their postulation at the early nineteenth-century endeavors in our nation to restore the New Testament church—and to those who continue to herald that plea and who believe the church has been restored.

The book title implies both their thesis and their conclusion: Restoration is a mere illusion, and only the innocent (read “naïve”) attempt it or believe they can accomplish it. They thus sit upon their thrones of superior knowledge and wisdom, and from elitist ivory towers of academe look with condescension on those of us who deny both their thesis and conclusion. To them, we are the simple, gullible, benighted hoi polloi, striving in vain for an unattainable goal (in this attitude they echo the “ruling class” that holds the reins of government in Washington, DC). How they must shake their heads from side to side and cluck with their tongues as they view the sad spectacle of members of the restored church Jesus established, still showing ourselves willing to defend her against assaults from without and (as in the case of Hughes and Allen) from within.

Some Major Emphases of the Authors

Two Puritans Provide “Paradigms”

Early in the book, the authors review some history of seventeenth-century New England Puritanism, especially through the careers of John Cotton and Roger Williams. Cotton, even before fleeing from church authorities across the Atlantic to Boston in 1634, eschewed the ceremonies, polity, and oppression of the Church of England and vowed to follow a course of restoration of the primitive church (33–37). Cotton, failing to distinguish between the covenants, mistakenly sought to combine civil and sacred authority in his approach, largely after the model

of the Hebrew theocracy (40–46). Despite teaching several Scriptural concepts for the church, the application Hughes and Allen disparagingly make of Cotton’s restoration effort is that the restoration impulse causes one to be blinded to his own finitude and leads to “denying legitimacy to others” (i.e., recognizing Scriptural boundaries of fellowship) (52). Cotton’s opposition to instrumental music in worship would likely have been enough to cause Hughes and Allen to disavow his yearning for primitive purity, had nothing else done so (39–40).

Contrariwise, they laud Roger Williams’ (Cotton’s contemporary) approach to “primitivism” (i.e., restoration), which involved incessant calls for toleration and freedom of conscience (54). He believed that all human attempts at reformation in religion are fallible and that his contemporaries who sought such reformation were as subject to errors and judgment limitations as their predecessors (70–71). Hughes and Allen agree with Williams’ opinion that men often naively and inflexibly claim a smug “certitude in religious matters,” which often becomes a “cloak for self-serving ends and a justification for mistreating others” (77). Compared to the rigid and narrow Cotton (as Hughes and Cotton judged him), Williams’ belief that restoration must ever be “an open-ended concept” make him the authors’ hero (77).

Cotton admittedly “did not get it right” in failing to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments, combining church and civil functions, and perhaps in other ways, but it does not follow that all men who pursue restoration must fail to “get it right.” In discrediting Cotton’s efforts, they violated a basic hermeneutical principle: One cannot justly use the abuse or misapplication of a principle to oppose the principle itself. To attempt such is to employ the Fallacy of Diversion. The principle of restoration must be judged on its actual merits, rather than upon abuses or misapplications of it. Cotton’s **aim** of restoration was not at fault, but his misapplication of it was.

It was Roger Williams (not Jesus or Paul) who declared, based on his observations, that all restoration attempts must be flawed because all men are fallible. While all men are fallible (Rom. 3:23), it does not necessarily follow that all efforts in the grand work of restoration must thereby be flawed.

Not surprisingly, our authors praise Williams’ criticism of those who evince “certitude in religious matters,” for they are of the liberal, relativist, perhaps even postmodern set that despises doctrinal “certitude,” despite incessant Scriptural emphasis upon it (Mat. 7:15–23; 15:6–9; Luke 8:11; Acts 20:28–31; Rom. 6:17–18; 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:17; Gal. 1:6–9; Eph. 4:4–6; Phi. 1:16–17; 1 Tim. 1:3–4; et al.). It appears that they agree with one of their fellow-liberals (and

Allen's former fellow professor at Abilene Christian University), Carroll D. Osburn, and his brand of doctrinal "certitude":

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who differ on whether more than one cup in communion is acceptable, whether the communion bread is to be pinched or snapped, whether one can eat in the church building, whether funds can be used from the church treasury to support orphan homes, whether the Lord's Supper must be taken every Sunday, or whether instrumental music is used in worship. There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiological matters such as congregational organization, or soteriological matters such as whether baptism is "for" or "because of" the remission of sins (90-91).

Likely, Hughes, Allen, and Osburn (and many of their associates) would all have fit in well with Roger Williams had they lived in Colonial times.

Our authors manifestly agree with Williams' idea that "doctrinal certitude" often covers self-justifying agendas that sanction mistreating others. First, we see in this statement the accusation of self-righteousness. Second, we see the charge of mistreating others, likely a reference to refusing to fellowship those who are not in fellowship with Deity. Hughes and Allen just cannot imagine that there might be some folk who seek only to be righteous (not self-righteous) as the New Testament defines *righteousness*.

Neither can they abide the idea that to be righteous by New Testament definition involves honoring the limits of fellowship set by the Holy Spirit. Not everyone who merely claims or wishes to be in the church of Christ is in it, but only those whom the Lord adds to it when they are saved (Acts 2:47). Those who are in the church are not to be "unequally yoked" (i.e., involved in fellowship) with unbelievers, those in iniquity, or those in darkness, but we are to be separate from them (2 Cor. 6:14-17). We are not to partake of or have any fellowship with "unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:7, 11). Righteousness involves our refusing fellowship even to brethren who cause division through false doctrine (Rom. 16:17-18) or who become involved in immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-11). We cannot remain righteous while bidding Godspeed to false teachers, for their error then becomes our error (2 John 9-11).

Hughes and Allen represent a large coterie of "progressive" brethren who disdain and ignore such heavenly mandates, thereby allowing them to embrace denominational associates in their irenic ecumenism. They clearly feel far more affinity with them than they do with us. Outright liberals are by no means alone in disdaining and disrespecting these and similar Biblical injunctions.²

Identifying Original Aims of Campbell and Stone

According to Hughes and Allen, the principal aim of the early nineteenth-century restorers was not the restoration of the original church (as if this were an untoward ambition), but it was the pruning of human creeds and practices that burdened Protestantism and the unification of all of the churches (107). The “restoration” idea developed only as a means of reaching that two-fold goal, they proffer. Only later, they aver, did restoration become the end, rather than a means to the end (119). The factors that produced this new priority had “lasting and even devastating effects,” according to Hughes and Allen (118).

Admittedly, Alexander Campbell’s writings in the 1820s and early 1830s reveal that his expectation of the millennium involved the denominations’ disavowing their sectarian creeds and names and uniting in a “purified” church to preach the Gospel. The resultant conversion of most of mankind would be the dominance of the Lord’s law among men for a thousand years. Campbell apparently believed that through his unification effort—by means of restoration—the Gospel would eventually end civil governments and the millennial rule of Christ would prevail (172–73). This millennial concept explains the name of the second periodical he founded—*The Millennial Harbinger*.

Let us grant that the original aims of these men were purification (i.e., freedom from creedalism) and unification of religion. Let us grant also that the restoration concept was originally secondary. Granting both invalidates neither the restoration aim nor principle. Those early pioneers did not abruptly recognize and depart from all of the errors that had so long bound them and generations before them. As they studied the Bible, they arrived bit by bit at true conclusions regarding new Testament doctrine and practice. They were as men in the deep darkness of a cavern who only gradually begin to see their way illuminated as they approach its entrance. We should then not be surprised that the concept of restoration as an end did not occur to those spiritual trailblazers immediately.

Nor should it surprise us that the dual aims of purification of and unity in religion would naturally produce in these men the ideal and pursuit of restoration. After all, peeling away all of the layers of unauthorized, man-produced names, creeds, and practices would (and did and still does) render restored New Testament churches. Likewise, only when congregations are content to exist apart from man-imposed dogmas can they enjoy Biblical unity (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1–6). The significant point is that, wherever these men began in their spiritual pilgrimage, they ended with the noble and Scriptural plea to restore primitive Christianity.

As one would expect of liberals, Hughes and Allen are not big fans of the hermeneutical principles the restorers so laboriously hammered out – particularly those influentially enunciated by Campbell. He viewed the New Testament alone as the law or “constitution” for the church (terms and concepts that infuriate liberals to this day). From this premise, our authors note, he logically deduced that its approved examples are as binding as its explicit commands and that Scriptural silence “was always prohibitive.” Further, he declared that the Bible is a book of facts, rather than one of mere “opinions, theories, [or] abstract generalities.” One therefore only need gather all the Bible says on a given subject inductively to ascertain completely what the Bible teaches thereon (117).

Hughes and Allen aver that the inductive approach to arriving at Biblical Truth the restorers took, led by Campbell, came from two sources: (1) Scottish “Common Sense Realism” (117, 153–156, et al.) and (2) the “Baconian Method” of scientific investigation, named for the English philosopher, Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) (124, 153–159). The former incorporated Baconian principles in its premise that all men are possessed of sufficient “common sense,” enabling them to deduce correct conclusions when they had inducted sufficient evidence. The application of these principles to Bible study proved almost revolutionary, particularly in breaking the shackles of Calvinism. By them, Walter Scott, the evangelist and close associate of Campbell, was able to deduce the Scriptural and logical progression of the elements of the “plan of salvation” (his so-called “five-finger” plan) (159–60). Liberals of our time enjoy ridiculing as “five-steppers” those who still preach this imminently Scriptural five-point plan. By the same logical and Biblical approach, those brethren deduced the five acts of worship in our assemblies.

When change agents began issuing the call in the 1980s for a “new hermeneutic,” it was not because they had something better to offer – as they still do not. No, their effort was only an assault on and effort to demolish the “old hermeneutic.” They knew they had to dispense with it to advance their agenda of moving the restored church into the fullness of denominational identity. Thus, they have steadily attacked, mainly through appeals to emotional factors and elitist scorn, the familiar Command, Example, Necessary Inference (CENI) approach to Bible hermeneutics, exegesis, and interpretation. In recent years, brethren have more precisely identified these same basic tools for arriving at authorized practices as Direct Statement, Accounts of Approved Action, and Implication (DSAAAI). Additionally, liberals hold especially repugnant the principle of the prohibitive nature of Scriptural silence, first voiced among the

restorers in 1809 by Thomas Campbell in the western Pennsylvania farmhouse of Abraham Altars. As we shall see, in despising and ridiculing the hermeneutics of the restorers, liberals such as Hughes and Allen (and their liberal cohorts) are actually deriding the Bible and its inspired writers themselves (not that it matters to them).

The inductive method: Perhaps 2,500 years before Bacon, the inspired psalmist stated the basis of the “inductive method” of Bible study: “The **sum** of thy word is truth; And **every one** of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever” (Psa. 119:160, *emph. DM*). Paul made essentially the same point when he wrote:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17, KJV, *emph. DM*).

Paul further advocated the inductive/deductive approach to Scripture in his admonition to the Thessalonian saints: “Prove **all** things; hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21, *emph. DM*). Only by examination of “all scripture” is one able to possess its various facets that will provide the understanding and instruction to make him “perfect” (“complete,” ASV) before God. Only by the induction of the totality of the Word on a subject may one deduce the fullness of Scripture teaching on that subject. This rule is the essential preventive of arraying one passage against another and refusing to harmonize all of them on a given subject, resulting in “proof texting” and the consequent doctrinal errors of that practice. From this very failure have come such horrendous perversions as “grace-only” and “faith-only” salvation errors.

Direct statements and approved accounts of action: Neither Campbell nor his fellow-restorers “invented” or “borrowed” the concept of heeding New Testament commands or responding properly to its direct statements, for its words clearly require such of us (e.g., Mat. 7:1-4, 15, 28:19-20; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Phi. 2:12; et al.). Nor was the need to follow examples or accounts of approved action that span the ages in their application part of a man-made system of interpretation (e.g., John 13:14-15; Acts 5:29; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 10:1; 2 Cor. 9:1-2; Phi. 2:5-7; Jam. 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6; et al.).

Implication: Moreover, if Biblical obligations are not established by implication as well as by explication, then none of the Bible’s explicit statements applies to us today. This statement is true because none of the Bible’s statements were spoken or written explicitly to us, but only to those who lived when they were spoken or written. **Only by implication** are we able to know that such things as the following (among many others) apply through the age:

1. Everyone living today is under the anathema of God if he preaches any “other” Gospel (Gal. 1:8-9)
2. We still have the obligation to preach the Gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15)
3. Baptism is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16)
4. If we bid Godspeed to false teachers we share in their guilt (2 John 10-11)
5. We are to all “speak the same things” and be of the “same mind” and “the same judgment” in obligatory matters (1 Cor. 1:10)

Those who insist upon explicit statements alone for Biblical authority fall into a trap of their own creation: There is no explicit statement that says those living since the first century are accountable only to explicit statements in the Bible.

Saul of Tarsus doubtless understood **by implication** from the words of Ananias that his sins had not been forgiven before he was baptized to wash them away, although Ananias did not say so **explicitly** (Acts 22:16).

Hebrews 8:4 correctly concludes that Jesus Christ, our High Priest in Heaven, could not be a priest on earth. However, the writer did not thus conclude from an explicit iteration of Scripture, but he inferred as much from the fact he had earlier noted: “For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests” (7:14). Campbell and his cohorts correctly concluded that Jesus words, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16), excluded **by implication** infant “baptism” — and they gave it up. So it went with various other human traditions and sectarian practices. The simple fact is that to deny the force of implication is to advocate irrationality.

Speaking out on Scriptural silence: Change agent liberals seem all but obsessed with their detestation of the “silence principle” (“silerephobia”?) involved in Biblical hermeneutics. The Bible authorizes only by what it says, never by what it does not say — by its statement, not by its silence. Therefore, Biblical silence has a prohibitive force. Liberal brethren have turned this principle on its head, joining the denominations in their cry that Biblical silence grants permission and freedom to speak and act in religion: “Liberty begins where Scripture stops.” Their credo is, “If the Bible doesn’t explicitly forbid it, we can teach or practice it.”

The same liberals who wish us all to abandon this rational and Biblical principle in our study of the Bible expect their doctor to employ it when he writes them a prescription and their pharmacist to use it every time he fills a prescription. A liberal, after listing his book order by phone, would judge the phone-order person to be irrational if then asked, “Please list all of the

books you are **not** ordering.” The liberal’s judgment of that person would be right, and we are right thus to judge liberals as “irrational” who demand of God that He explicitly list everything He has **not** ordered or authorized.

Inspired writers revered the silence of the Bible, even as they did its statement. At the conclusion of the Jerusalem confrontation of faithful brethren with the Judaizers, the apostles and Jerusalem elders composed an inspired letter to go to the Gentile churches. In that letter they stated that those who had gone forth, binding circumcision on Gentile saints, did so without authority. The ground upon which they so stated was not “because we forbade them to thus go forth and teach,” but because “we gave them no commandment” (Acts 15:24). Their silence was neither liberating nor permissive but constituted a forceful prohibition.

Jehovah apparently expected Aaron and his sons to understand the significance of His silence. When He rained fire upon Nadab and Abihu because they “offered strange fire” before Him, it was not because they violated an explicit injunction against that sort or source of fire. Their sin was in offering fire “which he had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1-2). It was a fire unauthorized because God **had not spoken** concerning it. These men presumed upon God’s silence, and He was not pleased. The Hebrews letter argues from silence in more than one instance. In its first chapter, the writer used God’s silence twice to establish the superiority of the Christ to any of the angels (vv. 5, 13). The passages referring to the Lord’s tribal membership and His lack of qualification for earthly priesthood (7:14; 8:4) mentioned earlier illustrate not only the principle of implication as noted. They also forcefully demonstrate the significance inspired men attributed to the prohibitive force of Biblical silence.³ Jesus’ lack of qualification for the earthly Aaronic high priesthood (8:4) lay not in any explicit proscription by the Holy Spirit. Contrariwise, He was disqualified on the simple ground of Mosaic silence. Note it again: “For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe **Moses spake nothing concerning priests**” (7:14, emph. DM). Silence most certainly equals interdiction in this case.

If God expected men to respect His silence (as seen in the case of Nadab and Abihu), if inspired men respected the prohibitive force of Scriptural silence, and if they established obligatory prohibitions based on that silence, we ignore this emphasis in our approach to the Bible at our own eternal peril. The dirty little secret is that liberals well know that only when men respect the silence of the Bible as much as they do its statement can the church of our Lord be reproduced in its purity when it becomes corrupt. They further know that it can it be

maintained in its purity of doctrine and practice once it is restored only by continued adherence to this principle. By destroying respect for Biblical silence, liberals know they will be getting rid of the principal key to any restoration. Herein lies the concerted assault of liberals against this Scripture-based principle of hermeneutics over the years.

Is Restoration Possible?

As earlier discussed, the Hughes-Allen thesis affirms that restoration of pristine Christianity is an exercise in futility (they and their liberal comrades apparently do not even believe it is desirable, much less possible). They mock the idea that “restoration” can ever be anything more than a process or a pursuit – always an unattainable ideal at best. (Their averment in this regard parallels their contention that the Truth of God’s Word is something for which we must always be searching, but at which we can never arrive. To claim otherwise is “presumptuous” in their view.) They assert, therefore, that those who are not only confident that the church can be restored, but that it has been restored and continues in a restored state, labor under an illusion. To all such “progressives,” the moment men avow the attainment of restoration, they thereupon degenerate into a judgmental, self-righteous, narrow, exclusivist, creed-bound sect. Hughes and Allen are by no means alone in this sentiment, as all who follow to any degree the liberal network of the numerous speechmakers and writers can testify. Were one to poll the change agent elitist liberals in the church, **I aver that the results would reveal that all of them condescendingly judge in the same way all of us who still diligently contend for the “old paths.”** To them we are merely the naïve, innocent, and unsophisticated religious proletariat that labors under a grand, but groundless dream.

Contrary to the anti-restoration fulminations of the authors of *Illusions of Innocence*, the Word of God not only affirms the **desirability** of restoration in the face of religious corruption, but the **necessity** of it. This Divine mandate implies the **possibility** of restoring the purity of doctrine and practice when men have abandoned it and of maintaining the pure state when men have restored it. Statements and/or narratives in both Testaments demonstrate the certitude of the foregoing assertions.

The Function of the Mosaic Prophets

When God gave the law to and through Moses, He demanded that Israel comply fully with it (He gave ten commandments, not ten recommendations or suggestions). Had He not so demanded, there would have been little or no purpose for delivering it. The following statement

by Moses is representative of scores, if not hundreds of similar statements that illustrate the reverence God expected of Israel for His law:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you (Deu. 4:2).

Moses strictly charged the Hebrew parents to constantly and diligently teach their children to obey the law of God (6:6–9). Moses warned Israel repeatedly concerning apostasy after they settled in Canaan. As Joshua neared his appointment with death, he warned God’s people “to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left” (Jos. 23:6). They followed Joshua’s charge, but only for a while before apostasy became the norm:

And the people served Jehovah all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of Jehovah that he had wrought for Israel....

And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, that knew not Jehovah, nor yet the work which he had wrought for Israel (Jud. 2:7, 10).

Israel went through numerous cycles of apostasy, repentance, and rescue by God-ordained judges, until they demanded (and God gave them) a king. With few exceptions (none in the northern kingdom), either before or after the kingdom divided, the kings led the people deeper into idolatrous and immoral corruption.

God stated the following to Jeremiah:

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff: they did worse than their fathers (Jer. 7:25–26).

For what purpose did God send prophet upon prophet to His people, unless to call them back to His law – to admonish them to **restore** God’s way from which they had departed? It is evident that God believed in the **desirability**, **essentiality**, and therefore the **attainability** of restoring His Old Testament religion.

God Delighted in Josiah’s Restoration (2 Kin. 21:24–23:30; 2 Chr. 34:1–35:27)

Had Hughes and Allen been alive in the reign of Josiah, the young restorer king of Judah, they would have had occasion to make great sport of his efforts, even as they and their ilk do concerning those who are determined to maintain the church in its purity at present. It is not difficult to imagine the way they would have ridiculed righteous Josiah:

Attack and destroy the false religions, publicly commit yourself to obeying God's Word, clean up and repair the temple, and reinstitute the Passover? Who do you think you are to do what your fathers never attempted? Don't you know you will be opposing almost the whole nation? Don't you see how the religions around us will ridicule us as "narrow" and "judgmental" in your declaring that there is only one true religion? Don't you realize you cannot actually restore true religion in Judah, and that any restoration you think you accomplish will only be a mirage?

Josiah knew no better than to believe he could restore worship and service to God in Judah just as God had established His religion from the time He gave the law to Moses and strictly commanded their fathers to obey it.

Rather than seeking to dissuade Josiah, God delighted in the restoration he wrought, narrow and exclusive though his efforts were. At the beginning of his reign, inspiration provides the following preview assessment of his restoration efforts:

And he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left (2 Kin. 22:2).

Well into his restoration work, the inspired writer further evaluated Josiah:

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him (2 Kin. 23:25).

Josiah's work of restoration was manifestly "right in the eyes of Jehovah," as has been the same effort of Godly men and women in every age and as it continues to be to this moment. It involves steering a steady course in the way of Truth, alert to avoid the errors of anti-ism on one hand or of liberalism on the other. It involves constantly asking, "Is this according to — authorized by — the law of God" (Col. 3:17)? The two accounts of Josiah's efforts conclusively demonstrate that he wrought a **real restoration** in Judah, not merely the illusion of one. If true religion could be (and was) restored almost nine centuries after God gave the law through Moses, then true religion, according to the will of Christ, can also be restored centuries after His church has fallen victim to the corruptions, philosophies, and traditions of men — and God will always have it so.

God Is a God of Patterns

Perhaps the only thing liberals despise as much as being called "narrow-minded" by their denominational buddies is for us to insist that God is a God of patterns. In making sport of "patternism" and "patternists," however, they make sport of God's Word, which contains numerous God-given patterns. In the final analysis, all such outcries constitute rebellion against

God's limitations of human behavior, whether in religion or morals, which all liberals find odious. They are, in fact, protests against God Himself.

He had a pattern of behavior for Adam and Eve in Eden. He had a pattern of worship for Cain and Abel and the other patriarchs. He gave Noah a pattern for the ark. The Mosaic system is a manifold pattern composed of numerous sub-patterns. The writer of Hebrews asserts this truth in calling attention to the typical nature of the Mosaic priesthood and tabernacle. Those priests, he said

... serve that which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses is warned of God when he is about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount (Heb. 8:5).

This passage refers to the very detailed "blueprint" God gave Moses for building the tabernacle, its furniture, and its appurtenances (Exo. 25-27). Not once, but twice, God ordered Moses to build all things "according to the pattern" He supplied (Exo. 25:40; 26:30).

The mention of the tabernacle by the Hebrews writer was not to urge the Hebrew saints to revert to that Old Testament pattern and rebuild (restore) the tabernacle. Contrariwise, he mentioned it to further his argument to these Jewish brethren **against** reverting to the obsolete Mosaic system that centered first on the tabernacle and then on the temple.

Throughout most of this epistle one finds the running argument that Christ and His New Testament are vastly superior to the Mosaic system out of which they came, and in Christ alone—not in Moses—is there salvation. The statement in Hebrews 8:5 is an important part of the author's argument, which may be framed in the familiar "if-then" formula:

If God had a pattern for the inferior institution (the tabernacle) of the law of Moses (which He did [Heb. 8:5]), **then** it follows that He has a pattern for the superior institution (the church) of the law of His Son.

It is neither logical nor Biblical to conclude that, while God had an unalterable pattern for the tabernacle, when it came to His church, Jesus allowed men to construct and include in it whatever pleased them.

That the aim of the inspired writer is to argue from the lesser to the greater is not a matter of speculation, for he immediately tells us so. In reference to Christ, as the head of His New Testament religion (summed up in the church) he stated:

But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises (v. 6).

The Hebrews letter also emphasizes the fact that God demands strict adherence to the patterns of the law of His Son, just as He did to the patterns of the law of Moses:

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation...? (2:2-3a).

A man that hath set at nought Moses law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (10:28-29).

Again, the “if-then” formula serves to apply the foregoing passages:

If God was so concerned about strict adherence to His pattern for the inferior law of Moses and its institutions (which He was [Heb. 2:2-3a; 10:28]), **then** He is even more concerned about strict adherence to His pattern for the superior law of His son (including the church) (Heb. 10:29).

That God has a pattern for the church as surely as he had a pattern for the tabernacle is undeniable. As one traces the establishment of various congregations and the descriptions of their identity from Pentecost through the epistles, one sees a pattern of the terms upon which men became members of the church, when the church assembled, the way the church worshiped in its assemblies, and the way the congregations were organized.

Liberals find the *pattern* concept embedded in Scripture to be particularly irksome concerning the church, and the reason is obvious. They understand that if they admit the existence of a pattern, they thereby admit the possibility of following such to restore the church when apostasy corrupts it. After all, the fundamental purpose of a pattern is to provide the means to duplicate the original. Furthermore, if a pattern for the church exists and the church is restored, once restored, faithful saints can maintain it in its restored state by persistent adherence to the pattern. Therefore, the very thesis of Hughes and Allen in *Illusions of Innocence* constitutes a tacit denial that God has a pattern for His church—that He cares about entrance requirements, worship (acts and/or day of assembly), organization, or any other element pertaining to it. While they do not care about such matters, God most certainly does care because **He is the ultimate “patternist.”**

Implications of Individual Restorations

When brethren stray from the Lord’s way, is it desirable, necessary, or possible to restore such? Does not the call for repentance imply the call for restoration? Unless one adheres to a *once an apostate, always an apostate* doctrine (a peculiar twist on Calvin’s *perseverance of the*

saints error), one must give an affirmative answer to the foregoing questions. Restoring fallen brethren is **desirable** for many reasons (e.g., the Lord loves them and died for their salvation, we love their souls and want them to be saved, their abilities, influence, and resources need to be claimed for the kingdom, etc.). Restoring the fallen is **necessary** if they are to be saved (Jam. 5:19–20; Jude 22–23) and because we are commanded to do our best to restore them (Gal. 6:1). Restoring the brethren who sin is **possible**, at least in some cases (Gal. 6:1), although not all can be persuaded to repent (Heb. 6:4–6).

If one brother who strays can be restored, can two be restored to original faithfulness (not merely an “illusion” of it)? What if a church of two hundred members has apostatized? Is it desirable and necessary to seek its restoration? Is it possible to achieve its restoration? Does not the possibility of the restoration of one or two apostate brethren imply the possibility of the restoration of an entire congregation that goes astray? If all religion becomes apostate, cannot true religion be restored even as the individual apostate brother or congregation can be restored? If not, why not?

Implications of New Testament Demands for Doctrinal Purity

The fact that original Christianity can be restored is not that difficult to grasp, except for those who are determined that it can/shall not be so. To deny that men can take the New Testament and reproduce the New Testament church in any age is to deny the fact that men who originally possessed the New Testament (in the persons of inspired men first, then gradually in print) did so in the first century. What they did then, men can do now or ten thousand years from now if the Lord delays his return.

If restoration is not possible, what is the purpose of the relentless emphasis of the profusion of passages that call men to revere and submit to the will of God delivered through His Son? The many appeals to repent aimed at wayward saints and churches all imply the possibility of restoration. Numerous passages warn of the eternal wrath that will come upon those who enter, but then depart from the way of Christ and never repent, all of which imply the desirability and possibility of restoration.

The Master intended that the one Gospel be proclaimed throughout the world, resulting in the baptism and salvation of sinners (Mark 16:15–16). Those baptized were to be taught all of the Lord’s commands, and not just in that first generation, but “to the end of the world” (Mat. 28:19–20). These passages powerfully further demonstrate that the Lord has a pattern for His

religion and that He intends men to follow it. If the foregoing is not plain enough in this regard, Paul's instruction to Timothy should be:

And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

Our Lord intended that men of every generation should hand down the pure Gospel to every succeeding generation without interruption. History reveals that men failed the Christ, causing grievous and multi-generational interruptions to occur and resulting in corrupt pseudo-Christianity that has prevailed for centuries. Liberals such as Hughes and Allen aver that, once corrupted, the church can never again exist in its purity. By implication, however, the immediately foregoing passages teach that in any generation men can take the Gospel, follow it, and restore the church to its pristine beauty.

It is both desirable and possible for us to do the will of the Father and the Son (Mat. 7:21, 24). If it is possible to love the Lord Jesus, it is possible to keep His commandments (John 14:15). Those who hear the Gospel can respond in faith and obey the commands to repent and be baptized unto the remission of their sins (Acts 2:36–41). When they do so, the Lord still adds them to His church (v. 47). That “process” constitutes a pattern.

Truth and error in religion are actualities that may be distinguished. Men who teach error and disturb the unity of believers by so doing not only can be, but must be identified and shunned for so doing (Rom. 16:17–18; Eph. 5:11; Tit. 3:10; 2 John 9–11; et al.). All the Lord's people are under Divine mandate to speak and even think alike in obligatory matters, which demands that we can both understand and adhere to His requirements (1 Cor. 1:10). Our Savior apparently has a pattern for His church, otherwise He would not have inspired Paul to teach the same message “everywhere in every church” (4:17).

There are various man-made “gospels,” but there is not another Gospel of and from Christ. If anyone (be he angel, apostle, or any other man) preaches any “so-called” gospel besides that of the New Testament, he is under the anathema of God (Gal. 1:6–9). Its very words are inspired, and they alone constitute the Lord's revelation (1 Cor. 2:10–13). Therefore, men add to it or subtract from it at their own peril (Rev. 22:18–19). It is not only possible to recognize and be obedient to “the faith,” but we are also required to “contend earnestly” for it (Acts 6:7; Jude 3). When men obey this order, they constitute the same church the Gospel produced when the apostles originally preached it. It is that simple.

The Seed Principle

In His parable of the sower, Jesus likened the heart-conditions of various men to various kinds of soils (Luke 8:4–8). He identified the “seed” in the parable as the Word of God (v. 11). From the beginning, seed has produced only after its kind, if it produces at all (Gen. 1:11–12). “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” is invariable in both physical and spiritual matters (Gal. 6:7). If men preach and practice the same Gospel the apostles preached and practiced, it will produce the same religious body in any age. If men cannot establish the apostolic church in post-apostolic times, it can only be because they no longer have the same Gospel seed. It is difficult to avoid the implication of those who deny the possibility of restoration that they do not believe we have the pure seed, the pure Gospel. If we have the same seed, we can produce the same plant.

Conclusion

All denials, such as those of Hughes and Allen, of the possibility of restoration are rooted in a more fundamental denial. They deny that men can arrive at an accurate understanding of New Testament Truth; they must ever be in pursuit of it, but never attaining it. None such should ever refer to the New Testament as the Lord’s “revelation,” for by implication they believe its message is so clouded in ambiguity as to be incomprehensible. To them, any who profess that they truly know or understand it are “arrogant,” “presumptuous,” and “boastful,” notwithstanding Jesus’ clarion statement: “and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” and John’s claim: “but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him” (John 8:32; 1 John 2:5).

Not only can we know what God has communicated to and through inspired men, Peter declared we can “know assuredly” those truths (Acts 2:36). To deny that we can know or understand what God and His Son mean in the inspired, revealed message conveniently overlooks a rudimentary fact: Deity gave us the Bible **that we may be able** to know and understand God’s mind and purpose sufficiently to be reconciled to Him (all emph., DM):

Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the **revelation of the mystery** which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, **but now is manifested**, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is **made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith**: to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 16:25–27).

But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, even **the wisdom that hath been hidden**, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this world

hath known: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory: but as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But **unto us God revealed them** through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:7-10).

How that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, **ye can perceive** my understanding in the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:3-4).

Even the **mystery which hath been hid** for ages and generations: but now hath **it been manifested** to his saints, to whom **God was pleased to make known** what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27).

God certainly knows the intellectual and reasoning powers of His own creation, and He is quite capable of expressing Himself in terms men can comprehend. Otherwise, why did He give us the Bible, why did Jesus charge us to take the Gospel to all mankind, and why does the Bible contain repeated warnings of tampering with and departing from that which God has revealed? It appears that the likes of brethren Hughes and Allen have a very low view of the capabilities of both God and men.

It may be, on the other hand, that such liberals, in the depths of their souls, fully understand that men are capable of understanding the meaning of God's Word and can arrive at true conclusions regarding its message, but, as with all denominationalists, they **have decided that God does not mean what He says.**⁴ This being so, their contention that it is impossible to restore the church is merely a camouflage claim. Behind the mask, they understand the Word all too well; their real conviction is that **it just does not matter.**

This attitude toward Truth and restoration gives such men cover for their faithless ecumenical inclinations that allows them to embrace in their fellowship men of every variety of name, creed, doctrine, and practice as long as they profess "belief" in Christ. Their mentality is perfectly typified in the remarks of Royce Money, president of Abilene Christian University at the time, in the opening speech of that institution's 2000 lectureship. After making what at first sounded like a strong statement on the necessity of baptism, he then took it all back. Of John 3:5 he said:

I assume it's still true. That's the rule, but what about the exceptions? What about countless believers...whose spirituality and Christian virtues at times far outstrip mine? What about all that? I don't know, but the Lord knows exceptions, and I hope He makes a lot of them. Our job, it seems to me, is to teach the rule and let the Lord make the exceptions [long and loud applause] (Money).

As all certifiable liberals so often do, Money put his brain in neutral and raced his emotional engine in this statement. I paraphrase: “God is obligated to make exceptions to His teaching on baptism because there are so many ‘spiritual believers’ out there who do not believe in it. Surely He will not condemn all of those good, sincere people.” This is vintage denominational tripe. No, brother Money (and all of your liberal cronies) – it is not our job to teach the rule and suggest that the Lord will make exceptions. It is our job to teach the rule – period (Mat, 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16). It is interesting that such men call us “arrogant” if we claim to know the Truth, but they see no arrogance in claiming to know that God will do what He explicitly revealed He will not do, namely, allow those who are not born of water and the Spirit enter the kingdom of Heaven.

One would be insane to claim to know everything, for that would be a claim of omniscience that only God possesses. We who love the Word of God fully believe Paul’s assessment of God in this respect:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! (Rom. 11:33).

However, none who faithfully serve in the Lord’s church have ever made such a knowledge claim. All we are claiming is sufficient knowledge of the Truth to be what that Truth requires us to be, both as individuals and as groups of individuals in various congregations. If that is not possible then nothing matters in religion, and we only waste our time in studying the Bible.

The New Testament contains the pattern for the church. Men in any age who love the Truth can recognize that pattern and follow it in the essential matters relative to salvation. When several of them do so – in whatever century – they constitute the restored church of the apostolic age. It is not arrogant, but imminently Scriptural to so declare. Hughes and Allen have only pity for the simplicity of those who have the effrontery to claim that the church has been restored and exists today in its restored state. To our liberal authors, Tolbert Fanning’s 1845 statement represents a tragic development in restoration efforts:

No modern system or church is of God..., and he who professes to believe a system, formed since the Apostolic age [to be so]...must be in great error.... We claim to be members of the Church of Christ, which had its origin in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and not on Brush Run Creek, in 1810 (131).

They bemoan the fact that Fanning’s statement “spoke for most” brethren at the time, and in response, they plaintively asked, “What had happened to the ‘Christians’ in the short

span of forty years?" (i.e., since Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell began sounding forth the plea for restoration) (131). The answer is both simple and obvious: In those four decades, dedicated disciples (such as Fanning) had studiously applied the principles of restoration and the Scriptural hermeneutics those earlier pioneers preached, even more fully than Stone and Campbell were willing to apply them in some cases. When faithfully followed, those same Bible principles will produce and maintain the same apostolic church in any age, including ours.

Let us never be intimidated from heralding the grand plea of restoration, for it is simply the plea of Gospel Truth. It would be a wonderful day if Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen and all of their *Christian Chronicle* comrades would quit pretending to be part of the church they so much despise. Integrity ought to compel them to do what Max Lucado did a few years ago in shedding that albatross designation, "church of Christ." I strongly encourage them, if they must proceed in their progressive path, to follow the course of their liberal ancestors who a century ago forced a systemic, open schism between themselves and their "weaker brethren." This would allow them to hasten the formation of the denomination they are working so hard to make of the remnants of the church of the Lord Jesus.

For my part, over the years I've grown weary of the term, *Restoration Movement*. When I obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation preached on Pentecost, the Lord didn't add me to the "Stone/Campbell Heritage," the "Stone/Campbell Movement," the "American Restoration Movement" (ARM), or any other "movement." The Lord added me to His church because He saved me from my sins in my obedient faith. He has continued doing this since He began doing it on Pentecost, and He will continue doing so, "even unto the end of the world" (Mat. 28:20).

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Endnotes

¹ Readers should be prepared to grow tired of such words as *primordial*, *primordium*, *primitivists*, *primitivism*, *restorationists*, *restorationism*, *historyless*, *infinitude*, and a few other buzzwords that appear with great frequency, sometimes more than once on the same page.

² In the past five and one-half years an alarming number of those once considered Scripturally sound and faithful have behaved as if Holy Writ were stone silent on fellowship with false teachers. Ironically, when we have challenged their behavior, they have behaved just as the liberals they once exposed. They have first denied the error of the false teacher, then defended the false teacher in his error, then attacked those who correctly applied Scripture to their error, and finally, kept right on fellowshiping brother Dave Miller, the blatantly proud and impenitent advocate of error. I have tried to distinguish between the behavior of “blatant” liberals and that of our “not-so-liberal” – but errant – brethren on fellowshiping those in error but see little difference in principle.

³ Respect for the prohibitive force of Scriptural silence is itself “implication-based.” Biblical silence implies the absence of authorization and thus carries a preclusive impact.

⁴ This hypothesis fits well with the denial of the Biblical doctrine of eternal torment in Hell (i.e., “annihilationism”) by some renowned brotherhood liberals (e.g., Edward Fudge, F. LaGard Smith, John Clayton, et al.).

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