

2022

Review of John Young, Redrawing the Blueprints for the Early Church: Historical Ecclesiology in and around the Stone-Campbell Movement.

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Recommended Citation

Jeffrey, Joshua W. (2022) "Review of John Young, Redrawing the Blueprints for the Early Church: Historical Ecclesiology in and around the Stone-Campbell Movement.," *Journal of Discipliana*: Vol. 75: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/journalofdiscipliana/vol75/iss1/5>

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John Young, **Redrawing the Blueprints for the Early Church: Historical Ecclesiology in and around the Stone-Campbell Movement** (Florence, Alabama: Heritage Christian University Press, 2021) 236pp. \$21.14¹

John Young's *Redrawing the Blueprints for the Early Church: Historical Ecclesiology in and around the Stone-Campbell Movement*, is both an important and novel contribution to understanding the history, theology, and the sociology of religion of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Young's principal arguments are that restorationism, as a theological project, is inherently historical because it looks to the past in an attempt to restore the church to its former orthodoxy, and that the beliefs that restorationists have about the early church also have their own histories that can be traced, examined, and compared. Young does just that with four restorationist groups on the margins of the Stone-Campbell Movement, including the Christadelphians, the non-institutional churches of Christ, and the International Churches of Christ (ICOC). Young also compares these groups with the non-Stone-Campbell but staunchly restorationist Emerging Church Movement. Young contends that by comparing these four groups, it becomes clear that shared driving forces behind the restorationist impulse can influence many groups, but the results of following those forces can look quite different. By demonstrating this, Young hopes to offer "a new perspective on the age-old "restoration vs. unity" theme in the movement's historiography."

After laying out his main argument, Young provides a set of four historiographical vignettes on the four sects of the movement that he has chosen to examine, beginning with the Christadelphians. This section is particularly helpful as a primer for scholars and students who are interested in acquainting themselves with the history and historiography of these four groups.

After acquainting the reader with these lesser-known groups, Young begins his comparative work using a framework that explores five Rs: Revelation, Recalibration, Replication, Recursion, and Repetition. Young uses each of these concepts as an organizing principle, and in the later three, he draws upon language that describes different ways of restoring the church, but that have scientific parallels in other fields. He uses these parallels as metaphors to explore restorationism through the Church-Sect theory of Troeltsch, Weber, and Niebuhr, and modified by Bryan R. Wilson in his book *Sects and Society*.

Young begins with the first R, Revelation, with a chapter examining how these groups have understood the function and usage of scripture, how these understandings have both changed over time within each fellowship, as well as between each group. Beginning with an examination of Scottish Common Sense Realism and how this epistemology, which was embraced by many leaders in the movement, affected restorationist views of scripture. For example, he found that John Thomas, the founder of the Christadelphians, claimed that the modern believer could better understand the biblical text than those in the past, because of their ability to better interpret the text in light of Christian history. For example, Thomas believed that the text of Revelation, with many of its events already having come to pass, is more legible today than it was to the first century church. Young also examines how the non-institutional Churches of Christ have blended common sense realism with some of the textual tools available from

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Biblical Studies, though some in the fellowship have expressed concerns about the use of such modern tools. Young also found that the ICOC has embraced the use of higher education to understand the text, highlighting several members who have completed PhD or D.Min dissertations in Biblical Studies, and showing how academic knowledge of the text has affected readings of scripture.

In chapter two, Young explores the second R, Recalibration, which is how Young sees the restorationism of the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) functioning. While the ECM looks at the early church as a source for its restorationism, it does not simply stop there. It also takes other points in church history as inspiration for its theology and practices, with ECM theologians and ministers speaking of practicing a “vintage faith,” instead of a “New Testament Faith.” Further, EMC leaders tend to emphasize the experiences and attitudes of past Christians that Christians today should emulate, instead of doctrines and practices that ought to be restored. Young ultimately argues in this chapter that this recalibration, the using of various periods of church history to fine-tune the faith, and not just looking to the example of the early church, is a restorationist enterprise, even though the end results often look very different than in other restorationist fellowships.

Chapter three, titled “Replication,” examines how restorationists in these traditions have made decisions about which examples of the early church are binding, and which ought to be practiced today. Young argues that not only do Restorationist groups believe that they have a duty to attempt to replicate the beliefs and practices of the early church, but that in embracing the project of replication, that they believe that they have the ability to replicate those practices. Young, however, highlights the difficulty of doing so by using examples such as arguments over women’s head coverings, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church among believers. Young also highlights various theories of replication, including those who believe that replication of early church practices is a process to be followed, or, if it is a fixed destination that must be arrived at. Finally, Young examines the tensions in both the ICOC and among the Christadelphians over questions of church government, specifically, whether or not democracy has any place in church polity in light of the idea of Jesus as King. Young found that while Robert Roberts, the second generation of the Christadelphians, believed that the group had made certain “concession[s] to the evil principle of Democracy,” the ICOC refused to do so, arguing that first century church polity was fully replicable in the 21st century. Young connects the ICOC’s steadfastness against democracy with the fellowship’s insistence that the Holy Spirit is still available to believers today, allowing believers to faithfully recreate a biblical plan for church government. Likewise, Young sees the Christadelphians rejection of the indwelling of the Spirit as a key reason for why the group felt the need to make concessions to democratic ideals inside the church.

The final chapter, “Recursion,” sees Young’s greatest contribution to understanding the Church-Sect dynamics of Restorationist groups. While early sociologists of religion argued that religious groups invariably proceed from sect to denomination, modern observers have noted that some sectarian groups in fact find ways to maintain their sectarian posture to culture, and do not in fact transition to denominationalism. In regards to Restorationist groups, Young argues that not only do these sects continually return to the bible as a means to continue to work towards restoration, but that these groups also return to their own origin stories, viewing the early events

of the group as a golden age deserving of replication. This is significant because it not only provides an explanation of how restorationist groups maintain a sectarian posture, but it also disproves the notion that restorationists are disinterested in church history past the apostolic age. Young demonstrates that the Christadelphians, for example, have not only repeatedly returned to their own history as a means of continuing the process of restoration, but have also asked which of their Christian predecessors outside the Christadelphians are worthy of emulation and adoration. Young also shows how the ICOC and the Non-Institutional Churches of Christ also practiced recursion by returning to their own pasts for inspiration.

In the Epilogue, titled “Repetition,” Young offers avenues for further research based upon his findings, including an increased focus on comparing how restorationist groups use the biblical text differently, and how various views on the activity of the Holy Spirit might be useful in exploring differences in Historical Ecclesiology.

Overall, Young concludes his stated task admirably, demonstrating how theological principles such as pneumatology and the church’s view of scripture have significantly impacted how different restorationist groups understand the nature of the church, its polity, and its stance towards the world. Additionally, by focusing upon groups on the margins of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Young has created an excellent resource for graduate students and those scholars more familiar with the mainstream of the movement who would like to become better familiar with the history and theology of the Christadelphians, ICOC, and non-Institutional Churches of Christ. The text will of course be of great use in graduate level courses in historical theology and ecclesiology as well. I heartily recommend this monograph for anyone interested in the history and theology of the Stone-Campbell Movement.