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Review of John C. Nugent, ed., "Restoration Appreciation: The Rich Legacy and Hopeful Future of the Stone-Campbell Movement"

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JOHN C. NUGENT, ED. *RESTORATION APPRECIATION: THE RICH LEGACY AND HOPEFUL FUTURE OF THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT*. EUGENE, OR: WIPF & STOCK, 2022. 148 PAGES.

REVIEWED BY WES CRAWFORD¹

Restoration Appreciation: The Rich Legacy and Hopeful Future of the Stone-Campbell Movement seeks to recover the best tools from the movement's past to build a stronger and more unified future. The book consists of twelve essays originally presented at Restoration Appreciation Week, an annual lectureship held on the campus of Great Lakes Christian College (GLCC) since 2016. Most of the twelve authors serve as faculty members or administrators at GLCC, but the list also includes representatives from other colleges associated with the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ as well as preachers from the same tradition. John C. Nugent, Professor of Bible and Theology at GLCC and author of numerous publications centering on theology and the Old Testament, collected the varied essays for publication, offered an essay of his own, and edited the volume.

In his introduction, Nugent states, "The book provides highly accessible introductions to the Movement's origins, founders, guiding slogans, core commitments, and key figures who kept its vision alive and navigated difficult transitions." The last part of this sentence provides a glimpse of the book's purpose, namely to assist Christian Church leaders in their task of leading the Movement through another difficult transition. Calling attention to the many polarities dividing American culture now (liberal vs. progressive, left vs. right, pro vs. anti, blue vs. red, allies vs. traditionalists, those in favor of the ordination of women vs. those against such action, those in favor of LGBTQ+ clergy vs. those against) Nugent uses the essays in this volume to remind its readers of a former age when church leaders focused upon the most important elements of the faith and allowed for great diversity on matters of opinion.

Nugent believes the Stone-Campbell Movement's past holds the solutions to many of

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the problems plaguing the United States and the church today. In this respect, *Restoration Appreciation* joins other books written recently by authors from the Churches of Christ (A Cappella) tradition, including Jack Reese's *At the Blue Hole: Elegy for a Church on the Edge* (Eerdmans, 2021) and *Discipleship in Community: A Theological Vision for the Future* (ACU Press, 2020) by Mark E. Powell, John Mark Hicks, and Greg McKinzie. These books also name serious problems confronting the church in the early decades of the twenty-first century, such as declining membership and loss of ecclesial identity. Recognizing the common problems confronting these two streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement and the sense of urgency to solve these problems among many of their foremost leaders, perhaps these numerous authors, administrators, preachers, and professors should collaborate, in the spirit of the unity described in this volume, to address these challenges together.

Among the many excellent essays offered in this volume is Larry Carter's admonition to restore first-century practices by paying special attention to the *Didache*. Carter notes that Christians from the late first-century allowed for tremendous theological diversity, even on the method of baptism. Certainly drawing upon the high esteem with which members of the Stone-Campbell Movement hold the earliest Christians, Carter asks, "Can't we put aside lesser issues that divide us and focus on the much larger intentions of Christ?" This question surfaces repeatedly, in various forms, throughout the book and provides a timely and appropriate query for twenty-first century Christians in the United States.

The volume could be improved by calling more attention to the serious and even divisive disagreements among some of the Movement's founders, including Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. Stone and Campbell debated their varying theological viewpoints from the pages of the *Christian Messenger* and the *Millennial Harbinger* for years before the two groups united in the winter of 1831-1832. Additionally, one should not overlook the fact that Campbell did not even attend the union meeting! The fact that these serious differences did not render unity an impossibility only adds strength to the primary aims of this volume. Readers of *Restoration Appreciation* might also expect to find how members of the Disciples of Christ, the third major stream of the Stone-Campbell Movement, are addressing present ecclesial and national challenges. Despite these shortcomings, however, Nugent's book demands a hearing among all three streams of the Movement and promises to foster healthy and productive conversation as leaders and lay persons address the challenges and opportunities that exist on the road ahead.