

THE FORMATION OF AN ACADEMIC TRADITION IN BIBLICAL STUDIES AT ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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Michael Casey has shown that the emergence of an academic tradition at Abilene Christian University at the end of the twentieth century was anticipated by developments in the early part of the century.¹ When the institution was in its infancy, President Jesse P. Sewell, with the academic leadership of George Klingman and William Webb Freeman, embarked on the ambitious project of establishing a seminary that reflected developments in theological education in other religious traditions in the United States. Casey described the failure of this project and the resulting change in direction that occurred when Klingman and Freeman left the college. Major developments took place in the period from 1949 to 1970, including the appointment of faculty members who held the terminal degree, the initiation of graduate theological education, and the development of a scholarly journal. In this article I shall describe the reemergence of the academic tradition that occurred in this period. I dedicate this article to Ian Fair, under whose leadership the program in biblical studies made important and lasting progress at a later period.

Developments in the Bible Department, 1924–1950

After the departure of Klingman and Freeman, the college turned away from the ambitious academic program of the Klingman era. From 1924 to 1949, academic credentials played less of a role than it had in the earlier years. The catalog lists no one on the faculty who had a doctorate in religious studies. From 1924 to 1929, the Bible faculty included Batsell Baxter (who also served as president 1924–32), Morgan Higdon Carter, M. V. Showalter, and R. C. Bell. From 1929 to 1935, E. W. McMillan, one of the most respected ministers in Churches of Christ, served as the chairman of the Bible Department. During

¹ See Michael Casey's two-part article "The First Graduate Theological Education in the Churches of Christ," *ResQ* 44 (2002): 73–92, 139–57.

this period Homer Hailey and Charles Roberson joined the faculty,² and Batsell Baxter returned to the faculty. With the exception of Homer Hailey, who did not earn his M.A. until 1944, these faculty members held the M.A. degree. However, their graduate degrees were in a variety of fields, and several of them taught primarily in disciplines other than biblical studies.

From 1936 to 1951, Charles Roberson served as head of the Bible Department. Roberson completed the A.M. degree at TCU and course work for a Ph.D. in classics at the University of Texas. During this time the faculty included R. C. Bell, Homer Hailey, and James F. Cox. Paul Southern, a student of Roberson, joined the faculty in 1938. Near the end of the Roberson era, JW³ Roberts and Woodrow Wilson also joined the faculty.

Roberson was the dominating influence during the 1930s and 1940s. His students included the men who later made an impact on the Bible faculty: J. D. Thomas, JW Roberts, Paul Southern, LeMoine Lewis, and Wendell Broom. He also taught Jack P. Lewis, later of Harding University Graduate School of Religion. According to Lewis, Roberson “kindled a fire for study.”⁴ According to J. D. Thomas, Roberson alone on the faculty was able to read the Bible in the original languages. He was aware of critical scholarship and wrote numerous articles on issues involving higher criticism and the science-religion debate, which he later published in *The Bible vs. Modernism*.⁵ He encouraged his students to seek additional education in order to meet the challenges facing the church.⁶

Roberson’s tenure also continued the uneasy relationship between the college and its constituency. Because of ACC’s pivotal role in the education of ministers, it became the battleground among those who recognized its importance. This uneasy relationship erupted into open conflict in 1940 when Roberson came under attack at the ACC Lectureship for his suspected views on

² Roberson had been on the original faculty in 1906, but left the college two years later to establish Southwestern Christian College in Denton, Texas. He later taught at Thorp Spring Christian College (1917–18) and at the Bible Chair at the University of Texas (1919–28). After other attempts to establish a Christian college, Roberson returned to ACC in 1932. See Jim Mankin, “Charles M. Roberson: Teacher and Scholar,” *ResQ* 36 (1994): 25–29. See also John C. Stevens, *No Ordinary University: The History of a City Set on a Hill* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1998), 31. Homer Hailey taught from 1930 to 1952.

³ JW was the actual name of Dr. Roberts, hence the letters JW without the period.

⁴ Jack P. Lewis, “Some Memories of ACC,” e-mail message of May 31, 2002.

⁵ Charles Roberson, *The Bible vs. Modernism* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation, 1930).

⁶ Jack P. Lewis recalls a visit with Roberson as Lewis was contemplating going east to school: “I mentioned concern about the danger to faith. I told him that if I knew it would destroy my faith, I would not go. His advice was ‘I think you can make it.’ He was one of two people outside my family who thought my plans were a good idea.”

premillennialism. The charges were based on an article in Roberson's *What Jesus Taught*, in which Roberson was heavily dependent on the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. In response to the public charges at an event in Sewell Auditorium, Roberson asked all of the preachers who were his former students in the auditorium to come to the front. They lined up all the way across the front of the auditorium. Roberson said, "These are my jewels," and immediately sat down. He later said that he had intended to ask the preachers if any had heard premillennialism in his classes, but in the excitement of the moment he had forgotten to ask.⁷

Accreditation and the Move toward Academic Credentials

Changes at the end of the Roberson era determined the course of the 1950s and laid the basis for the development of biblical scholarship at ACU. Academic credentials began to play a significant role in the entire college as it sought accreditation in the early 1950s. In the Bible Department, ACC followed the trend among evangelical schools by demonstrating a new concern for academic respectability and pedigree.⁸ In 1949 Paul Southern became the first professor at ACC to hold the doctorate since W. W. Freeman.⁹ Frank Pack, who earned his Ph.D. in 1948 from the University of Southern California, joined the faculty in 1950. The appointment of Southern to be head of the Bible Department reflected the school's new interest in academic respectability.¹⁰ Others who joined the faculty at the end of the Roberson era would later earn doctoral degrees in biblical studies and shape the program in the 1950s and 1960s. JW Roberts and Woodrow Wilson joined the faculty in 1946. Roberts enrolled in the Ph.D. program in classics at the University of Texas and completed the degree in 1957. Wilson earned the Th.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1956. LeMoine Lewis joined the faculty in 1949 after earning the

⁷ Philip McMillion, "Charles Heber Roberson," unpublished research paper at Abilene Christian University, 1972. For a more detailed account of this event, see David Edwin Harrell, *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 256–59.

⁸ See Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 97. According to Noll, the number of young evangelicals who sought academic training at Harvard University began in the 1930s when E. J. Carnell, George Eldon Ladd, and Kenneth Kantzer went there to study for the doctorate.

⁹ On W. W. Freeman, see Michael Casey, "First Graduate Theological Education," *ResQ* 44 (2002): 139–57.

¹⁰ This new direction was not uniformly welcomed in the ACC community. The appointment of Southern and the move toward academic credentials precipitated the departure of Homer Hailey, Southern's competitor. According to Harrell (*Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century*, 270), "Southern's appointment was symbolic of a change in directions that made Hailey feel increasingly ill at ease." Hailey joined the faculty of Florida Christian College.

S.T.B. from Harvard in that year. J. D. Thomas also joined the faculty in 1949 after completing his course work for the Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. Thomas completed the Ph.D. in 1957, and Lewis completed his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1959.

The generation of the 1960s was educated during this period. Everett Ferguson, Abraham Malherbe, and Anthony Ash received degrees at ACC in the early 1950s.¹¹ Those educated in the 1950s who would become influential in American religious scholarship, in addition to Ferguson and Malherbe, were Harold Forshey, Harold Vanderpool, John T. Willis, J. J. M. Roberts, Roy Bowen Ward, and William Martin.

Under Southern's tenure others with Ph.D. degrees joined the faculty in the 1950s. Neil Lightfoot came in 1958 after completing his doctorate in NT from Duke in that year. Robert L. Johnson, who joined the faculty in 1953, earned his Ph.D. from New York University in 1957.

The Beginning of Graduate Education and Academic Publishing

The new emphasis on academic credentials brought a new dimension to scholarship, classroom instruction, and intellectual leadership for the churches in the 1950s under the leadership of LeMoine Lewis, J. D. Thomas, Frank Pack, and JW Roberts. This generation of scholars demonstrated an appreciation for intellectual activity to a constituency that had been wary of higher education in religion. They made a lasting impact on both the college and the churches. Under their influence two major developments in theological study occurred at ACU.

The first initiative was the development of the master's degree program in the early 1950s. George Pepperdine College, the Bible Chair at Eastern New Mexico University, and Harding College had preceded ACC in the offering of the master's degree in 1944, 1950, and 1953, respectively.¹² Abilene Christian awarded its first master's degree in 1954.¹³

LeMoine Lewis was a significant influence from the time he joined the faculty until his death in 1987. His major contribution was in the classroom. His lectures on church history, one of the most popular courses in the college, opened up a new world for students who had learned early that nothing of

¹¹ Ferguson received both the B. A. and M. A. at ACC. Malherbe received the B. A. at ACU before going to Harvard for graduate work. Ash received the M. A. at ACC after completing the bachelor's degree at Florida State University.

¹² See Everett Ferguson, "Higher Education in Religious Studies among Members of the Churches of Christ," *ResQ* 25 (1982): 206; Nile Alexander Todd, "A Study of the History and Development of the Church of Christ Bible Chair at Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico" (M.A. thesis, Abilene Christian University, 1959).

¹³ Ferguson, "Higher Education in Religious Studies among Members of the Churches of Christ," 206.

importance had happened between the first century and the nineteenth. He demonstrated genuine appreciation for the great Christian thinkers and their legacy of faith. Consequently, he introduced his students to a perspective that was open to the world of scholarship and to the contributions of Christian thinkers of the past and present. Although he included the history of the American Restoration Movement in his course in church history, he did not reduce the study to an account of the “the falling away and restoration.” He also expressed admiration for his teachers at Harvard, encouraging his students to follow him. Those who did so in the 1950s included Pat Harrell, Everett Ferguson, Abraham Malherbe, Roy Bowen Ward, and William Martin. Although Lewis did not contribute to scholarly literature, he educated many students who excelled in both academia and the church. The esteem that the students had for him is evident in the festschrift that former students published in his honor in 1981.¹⁴

Frank Pack, similarly, was a gifted lecturer, preacher, and classroom teacher. His training in textual criticism is evident in the articles he published in *Restoration Quarterly*.¹⁵ In the article on textual criticism in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, M. M. Parvis describes the significance of Pack's dissertation on the textual work of Origen.¹⁶

JW Roberts taught at ACU from 1946 until his death in 1973. His training in classics brought an important dimension to the Bible faculty. He wrote widely in popular journals for the Churches of Christ,¹⁷ addressing the major issues of the churches of his day. As a professor of Greek and advanced Bible courses, Roberts used his outstanding philological skills to clarify grammatical and exegetical issues in the biblical text. A regular feature of *Restoration Quarterly* (see below), which he edited from 1957 until his death, was the section “Exegetical Helps,” in which Roberts offered grammatical assistance on difficult texts.¹⁸ While he was consistently conservative in his conclusions, he engaged the issues

¹⁴ See Everett Ferguson, ed., *Christian Teaching: Studies in Honor of LeMoine G. Lewis* (Abilene: ACU Bookstore, 1981).

¹⁵ See Frank Pack, “A Study of Papyrus Bodmer II (P66),” *ResQ* 4 (1960): 1–10; “A Study of Papyrus Bodmer II (p66) (II),” *ResQ* 4 (1960): 61–70; “Origen's Evaluation of Textual Variants in the Greek Bible,” *ResQ* 4 (1960): 139–46; “The Western Text of Acts,” *ResQ* 4 (1960): 220–33; “The Contributions of Textual Criticism to the Interpretation of the New Testament,” *ResQ* 4 (1961): 179–92.

¹⁶ M. M. Parvis, “Text, NT,” *IDB* 4.603.

¹⁷ The complete bibliography of Roberts's works is included in *ResQ* 17 (1974): 3–18.

¹⁸ See, for example, “Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences in the Greek New Testament,” *ResQ* 4 (1960): 72–79; “Exegetical Notes: The Preposition *eis* after the verbs *pisteuo* and *baptizo*,” *ResQ* 5 (1961): 157–59; “Exegetical Helps: The Greek Noun without the Article,” *ResQ* 14 (1971): 28–44.

in critical biblical scholarship seriously. Such articles in *Restoration Quarterly* as “The Interpretation of the Apocalypse: The State of the Question”¹⁹ and “The Genuineness of the Pastorals: Some Recent Aspects of the Question”²⁰ mediated international scholarship to the readership of the journal. His article on “Greek Particles” took up one of the significant issues in the Pastoral Epistles. In his attention to critical biblical scholarship, Roberts introduced readers to the larger world of biblical criticism. Although he published only one article in a journal for international scholarship,²¹ his articles in *Restoration Quarterly* reflected a new era in academic work at ACC.

J. D. Thomas, also a student of Roberson, earned his bachelor’s degree in 1943 at the age of thirty-three. After first studying architecture at the University of Texas and then working as assistant city manager of Lubbock, he returned to ACC to study Bible under Roberson, who, aware of the need of intellectual leadership at ACC, encouraged Thomas to continue his studies and return to ACC. Thomas completed the M.A. at Southern Methodist University in 1944 and then enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago, completing the course work in 1949 before returning to the ACC faculty. His professors included Allen Wikgren, Amos Wilder, and J. C. Rylaarsdam. Thomas completed the degree in 1957 with a dissertation on “The Greek Text of Tobit.”

Thomas, a prolific writer, addressed the major concerns of the Churches of Christ in the 1950s and 1960s, providing intellectual leadership in several areas in that era. He provided intellectual leadership in several areas. In the first place, he addressed the issues that were controversial in Churches of Christ such as hermeneutics, fighting on two fronts. In 1957 he published *We Be Brethren*, a response to the controversy over cooperative efforts among churches to establish orphanages and mission programs such as the radio program *Herald of Truth*.²² In this book Thomas defended these cooperative ministries against attacks from the right. Although he agreed with the opponents of these programs that the Bible offers a blueprint, he employed the pattern to defend the biblical basis for these cooperative works. In 1974, Thomas addressed the issue of hermeneutics once more in *Heaven’s Window: Sequel to “We Be Brethren.”* Whereas Thomas wrote *We Be Brethren* to meet challenges from those who read the pattern principle in a more restrictive manner than did Thomas, the sequel was a response to a new generation of those who challenged the idea of the Bible as a pattern.²³ Here Thomas affirmed that “the Bible is ‘Heaven’s

¹⁹ *ResQ* 8 (1965): 154–62.

²⁰ *ResQ* 8 (1965): 104–10.

²¹ “Note on the Adjective after *pas* in 2 Timothy 3:16,” *ExpT* 76 (1965): 359.

²² J. D. Thomas, *We Be Brethren* (Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1957).

²³ J. D. Thomas, *Heaven’s Window: Sequel to “We Be Brethren”* (Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1974), 7–10.

Window’—indeed the only avenue man has to the knowledge of God’s will.”²⁴ In his treatment of biblical hermeneutics, Thomas often employed scriptural texts, but did not attempt to place them in their original context or engage the larger world of biblical scholarship. Thus his hermeneutical discussion was intelligible only within the Churches of Christ.

A second area of Thomas’s writings addressed issues that many had not yet faced: the new intellectual challenges to the traditional understanding of the Bible posed by biblical criticism, science, and contemporary theology. Thomas taught undergraduate and graduate courses and published articles in the *Gospel Advocate* in these areas before publishing the two-volume *Facts and Faith*. He rejected the conclusions of biblical criticism that became a near-consensus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, insisting on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the unity of Isaiah, and the sixth-century dating for Daniel. He also rejected theories of literary dependence among the Synoptic Gospels. Nevertheless, many students first learned about the documentary hypothesis, the Synoptic Problem, and other critical issues through his lectures. Similarly, many students first learned about Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and Niebuhr from his lectures on these twentieth-century theologians. As with his treatment of the major critical issues, Thomas rejected the liberalism and neo-orthodoxy of these twentieth-century theologians. In pursuing this agenda, Thomas was following the lead of Roberson, who had suggested that the study of these currents in biblical criticism and theology would be necessary for Christian leaders.

One must see the scholars of this generation within their own context. As the first generation to attain advanced degrees, they faced a climate that was anti-intellectual and suspicious of higher education.²⁵ Their areas of specialization concentrated on church history, Greek philology, textual criticism, the history of interpretation, and backgrounds to the NT. No one at this time wrote on biblical studies or systematic theology.²⁶ In their writings they

²⁴ Ibid., 1. Cf. p. 4: “In the same way that a blueprint is a constant reference to a builder and reads the same way to everyone who has the ability to interpret blueprints, the pattern concept of Biblical revelation means that it is a continuing spiritual reference to all logically-capable truth-seekers.”

²⁵ See Michael Casey, “The First Graduate Theological Education,” 73.

²⁶ Restoration scholars were following the pattern earlier established by evangelical scholars, as noted by Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 98: “Fewer [evangelical scholars] seemed eager to engage the general intellectual values of the modern university or the specific conventions of critical Bible scholarship. Their theses were mostly on historical subjects. When they did specialize in Scripture, they wrote dissertations on textual or extrabiblical subjects.” The dissertations indicate the areas of concentration: LeMoine Gaunce Lewis, “Early Christian Contemporaries, with Special Emphasis on Origen as a Commentator”; Frank Pack, “The Methodology of Origen as a Textual Critic in Arriving at the Text of the New Testament” (USC, 1948); JW Roberts, “The Use of Conditional Sentences in the Greek New Testament as Compared with Homeric,

consistently reaffirmed their loyalty to the positions of the Churches of Christ, but often employed their scholarship to moderate the more extreme positions held by the polemicists within the fellowship. For example, while many argued for six literal days of creation, Thomas took a more flexible view that demonstrated a willingness to engage arguments from geology and biology while maintaining the basic historicity of Genesis.²⁷ When most of the constituency had never heard the names of the great theologians, Thomas introduced a generation of students to the issues of the rest of the world. These scholars' common insistence on plenary verbal inspiration moderated earlier views of inspiration as dictation. Neil Lightfoot's critical work on the textual basis of the RSV and his popular publication *How We Got the Bible* introduced to lay audiences needed information about the history of the biblical text and opened the way for an appreciation of modern translations at a time when many church leaders were condemning the RSV. The most significant achievement of this group of scholars was that they mediated a knowledge of the world of scholarship and argued forcefully that advanced education was necessary in the modern world. Their students learned about the contributions of the great opinion leaders of the past. This generation introduced advanced education to a people who regarded it as a threat to the church and offered a theological conservatism that was an alternative to the positions commonly held by the constituency.

Classical, and Hellenistic Uses" (University of Texas, 1955); Paul Southern, "The New Testament Use of the Preposition *kata* with Special Reference to Its Distributive Aspects" (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948); J. D. Thomas, "The Greek Text of Tobit" (University of Chicago, 1957); Woodrow Wilson, "The Date of the Exodus" (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1956); Jack P. Lewis, "An Introduction to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" (Harvard University, 1953); W. B. West Jr., "An Ante-Nicene Exegesis of Galatians and Romans" (University of Southern California, 1942). Cited from Alex Humphrey Jr., "A List of Some Doctors of Philosophy and Doctors of Theology Dissertations by Members of Churches of Christ," *ResQ* 2 (1958): 71–72.

²⁷ See J. D. Thomas, *Facts and Faith* (Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1965), 1.157–64, for ways of harmonizing Genesis with the facts of science. After surveying various attempts to reconcile geology with Genesis 1–11, Thomas concludes (1.163): "A valid Christian faith does not have to make a decision as to how creation came about before one can accept that it did. With these views or perhaps a combination of them (i.e., 'day' = 'age,' the 'gap' theory), we can see that it is *possible* to harmonize the statements in Genesis with the known facts of science and that there can be ample time for the earth to have existed as long as need be to fit any scientific fact; that life on earth for both plants and animals may have been for any period of time as far as the book of Genesis demands—especially if 'the days' can be somehow accepted as figurative descriptions of long periods of time (as Genesis 2:4b necessarily demands)."

With their academic training, they were aware of some developments in international scholarship, but they did not write within this context.²⁸ Their interaction with the guild of biblical scholars was minimal, and their work was rarely acknowledged outside Churches of Christ. Thomas wrote for the Churches of Christ, expressing appreciation for evangelical thinkers, but largely rejecting historical-critical scholarship. Although Roberts's work was addressed to church leaders in Churches of Christ, his articles in *Restoration Quarterly* on grammatical issues were genuine contributions to exegetical studies and useful for biblical scholars everywhere. Lewis taught his students the value of, and modeled an appreciation for, education. In his speech at the 1964 Lectureship, Lewis articulated a view that was new in Churches of Christ.

It is shocking . . . that we still have a lot of people who really do not believe that a preacher needs training. We have many elders and congregations who show little or no interest in a preacher's training. . . . In recent years a mood has swept across a large part of the church that holds that education is dangerous. It is not uncommon to hear a preacher with little training say that the greatest danger facing the church is too much training. . . . What we have to fear is ignorance and incompetence—not education or training.²⁹

Later in the speech, Lewis added:

The function that distinguishes the calling of the preacher from all other callings is the public proclamation of the word. He has no business in the pulpit unless his scholarship in the word surpasses that of those who sit in the pew. The preacher's scholarship should command respect and inspire confidence. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament in Greek. Every week the preacher needs to wrestle with the originals to make sure it is the word of God he proclaims.³⁰

He added, "What the law school is to the lawyer, and what the medical school is to the doctor, the seminary course is to the preacher."³¹

The second development was the founding of *Restoration Quarterly* in 1957 by Pat E. Harrell and Abraham J. Malherbe, recent graduates of ACC. Harrell was a graduate student in historical theology at Boston University and

²⁸ Mark Noll observes that this pattern was common among evangelical scholars. "In its early stages, however, evangelical application to mainstream scholarship seems to have had little impact on evangelical methods or convictions. Certification rather than confrontation was the goal. Evangelical leaders wanted their institutions to be respectable." Noll notes that "only a few in this generation of evangelical scholars published for the academic world at large. Much more common was a pattern in which after beginning a teaching career, the scholar would set aside the dissertation and its technical concerns in order to pursue popular publications for evangelicals" (68).

²⁹ LeMoine Lewis, "Training Young Men to Preach," ACC Lectures 1964, 86.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 88–89.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

minister of the Church of Christ in Natick, Massachusetts. Malherbe was a graduate student at Harvard and minister at the Church of Christ in Lexington, Massachusetts. Faculty members of Abilene Christian College joined these recent alumni as writers for the journal. After two issues of publication under the board, ACC faculty member JW Roberts became editor, serving in that position until his death in 1973.

The journal, billed as “Studies in Christian Scholarship,” was the first academic journal in Churches of Christ. It attempted to contribute to discussions in theological scholarship and was soon indexed and read in libraries throughout the United States. For a movement that had a small pool of potential readers and writers for this level of scholarship, the journal was an ambitious undertaking. The early issues reflected the transitional situation of scholarship within Churches of Christ. Although some articles took the polemical stance familiar to readers of such popular journals as the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Firm Foundation*,³² many articles in biblical studies and restoration history were genuine contributions to the academy, offering a level of scholarship previously unknown in the Churches of Christ. Abraham Malherbe’s “An Introduction: The Task and Method of Exegesis”³³ became standard reading in graduate exegesis courses in numerous institutions. His “Through the Eye of the Needle: ‘The Doctrine of Christ’”³⁴ and Roy Bowen Ward’s “The Restoration Principle: A Critical Analysis”³⁵ offered critiques of positions widely held among Churches of Christ. Pat Harrell’s “‘Almost Persuaded’ Now to Believe”³⁶ offered

³² For example, see JW Roberts, “Gone to the Christian Church,” *ResQ* 3 (1959): 79–83; R. L. Roberts, “That Which Is Perfect,” *ResQ* 3 (1959): 199–204. See also Paul Southern, “Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Restoration Movement,” *ResQ* 1 (1957): 9. “Pioneers in the Restoration Movement found themselves in a world of religious error with a multifariousness of religious practices on every hand. . . . Roman ecclesiasticism continued, with an ever growing emphasis on the authority of an apostate church. The Reformation, furthermore, having veered from its original purpose, had evolved into a monstrous movement known as Protestantism.” The article then demonstrates how Restoration leaders introduced direct command, a clear example, or a necessary inference, “the true method of exegesis indicated by the nature of the Scriptures themselves.” See the comments by M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 291.

³³ *ResQ* 5 (1961): 169–78.

³⁴ *ResQ* 6 (1962): 12–18. By placing 2 John 9 in its historical context, pointing out that the author’s concern in the phrase “the doctrine of Christ” is the Christology of the opponents, Malherbe challenged the common polemical use of the passage within Churches of Christ, according to which the “doctrine of Christ” was understood as a subjective genitive that could be applied to a wide range of doctrinal errors.

³⁵ *ResQ* 8 (1965): 197–210.

³⁶ *ResQ* 4 (1960): 252–53.

exegetical insights that questioned the use of a favorite proof-text in the preaching of that era.

New Developments in the 1960s

Roberson's students introduced changes that increased in momentum in the 1960s when students from the 1950s joined the faculty. Everett Ferguson returned from Harvard in 1962 with a Ph.D. in church history. In 1963 after earning the Th.D. in NT from Harvard, Abraham Malherbe came to ACU to replace Frank Pack, who had moved to Pepperdine University in that year. The generation of the 1950s remained, but the new generation assumed the leadership of the graduate program. The younger faculty members brought a new dimension to scholarship in the Churches of Christ. While they joined their colleagues in writing for their fellowship and articulating theology within the restoration tradition, they also interacted with critical theological scholarship outside the Churches of Christ. Ferguson and Malherbe were participants in the Seminar on Catholic Christianity, a study group founded by Albert Outler and composed of scholars from institutions in the Southwest, and they were active in the academic professional societies. Despite heavy teaching loads, they engaged scholarship at the international level. In addition to their frequent articles in *Restoration Quarterly*, they published in such journals as the *Harvard Theological Review*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* during the 1960s and early 1970s. Both Ferguson and Malherbe went on to distinguished academic careers and gained an international reputation. Ferguson taught at ACU until his retirement in 1992. Malherbe left ACU in 1969. After one year at Dartmouth College, he went to Yale, where he taught until his retirement in 1994.

Thomas Olbricht, who joined the faculty in 1967 and became editor of *Restoration Quarterly* in 1973, taught at ACU until 1986. Having earned his Ph.D. in communications (University of Iowa, 1959) and the S.T.B. (Harvard, 1962), he remained active in both disciplines. During his tenure at ACU, he served terms as president of the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies (1978–79) and of the Southwest region of the American Academy of Religion (1976–77), and he founded and directed the Christian Scholars Conference (1981–97). The most notable feature of Olbricht's scholarship was the wide range of disciplines that he covered. At ACU, he taught courses in systematic theology, philosophy, and biblical studies. Throughout his academic career, he published major articles in communications, restoration history, and biblical studies. When the rhetorical criticism of biblical texts was introduced in the 1980s, Olbricht's background in rhetoric and biblical studies made him an international leader in the developing discipline.

During the late 1960s, the school moved toward establishing a seminary program comparable to the Bachelor of Divinity offered at other institutions.³⁷ The faculty and administration faced a problem in providing the proper nomenclature for the degree inasmuch as the terms “divinity” and “theology” were largely unacceptable to the constituency of Churches of Christ. After considerable debate, the administration decided to follow the Harvard nomenclature for the degree, awarding the S.T.B. (Scientiae Theologicae Baccalaureus). However, whereas the normal translation of the Latin at Harvard was “Bachelor of Theological Knowledge,” the translation provided at ACU was “Bachelor of Sacred Knowledge” (the genitive *theologicae* was rendered “sacred” rather than “theological” to avoid the use of the latter term). Although words such as “theology” had been used in an earlier era,³⁸ this nomenclature was now unacceptable to many in Churches of Christ. Nevertheless, the standard seminary degree was first awarded in 1967, and the standard designation “Master of Divinity” was adopted in 1975.

During the late 1960s ACU faculty were instrumental in writing the Living Word Commentary series, the first attempt to write a commentary of this scope since the Gospel Advocate Commentary series. The Living Word Commentary, published by Sweet Company, reflected the work of the new generation of scholars at ACU and other institutions. Under the editorial guidance of Everett Ferguson and Abraham Malherbe, authors included many ACU faculty members and recent alumni of the graduate program, including Earle McMillan, Anthony Ash, Robert Johnson, JW Roberts, Carl Spain, Carl Holladay, Pat Harrell, Michael Weed, and James W. Thompson. Although it was intended for lay readers and the conclusions on major critical issues were conservative, the series demonstrated an awareness of biblical scholarship and used the tools of historical criticism in order to describe the original meaning of the passage. For the first time in the noninstrumental Churches of Christ, a team of scholars from academic institutions collaborated for the production of a commentary series.

The rapid changes created a backlash in the late 1960s. Numerous preacher schools were founded to offer an alternative to a university education that was no longer insulated from the larger world of scholarship. Writers in the *Firm Foundation* expressed alarm and dissatisfaction with the changes and questioned the orthodoxy of the professors at ACU. In an article in *Firm Foundation*, Glenn Wallace suggested that the presence of the preacher schools presented a clear signal to colleges that the brotherhood was not satisfied with the kind of preachers being turned out by the colleges. He also took aim at the

³⁷ During the 1970s most institutions changed the name of the degree to Master of Divinity.

³⁸ The 1924 catalog lists Jesse P. Sewell as president with a teaching field of “theology and homiletics.” The catalog lists a “theology” division within the curriculum.

Living Word Commentary series, arguing that the writers were too young and too inexperienced for the job.³⁹ Reuel Lemmons agreed:

Take a good look at the colleges among us. There is almost total dearth of fervent evangelists on their faculties. . . . Colleges seem to be no longer interested in producing Bible preachers; all they want to produce is “scholars.” Unless we return to a church trained, rather than college trained, ministry, the evangelistic spirit upon which the church grew may disappear.⁴⁰

Lemmons expressed further concern about the colleges in 1968:

One thing that bugs us is that some teachers relieved of their duties at one college because of unsoundness have been hired by others of our colleges whose administrations knew that they had been dismissed because of error in their teaching. Others have been retained for years on faculties when their unsoundness was fully known.⁴¹

Wallace and Lemmons had expressed concern about the liberal tendencies of the new journal *Mission* and the Living Word Commentary. In 1968, JW Roberts wrote to defend ACC and his own participation in both endeavors. He reassured his readers that these projects should not reflect on Abilene Christian College since ACC had no connection with them. “I value President Don Morris’s judgment, and I feel sure that if the charges being circulated should be proved, and if in his judgment the connection of those of us on either of these two projects who are employed by ACC should become detrimental to the college and the cause of Christ, that the situation would be dealt with in an appropriate manner.”⁴²

Roberts’s defense of his role in these new ventures reflected the growing antagonism between ACC and some of its constituency in Churches of Christ. As with the era of Klingman, the administration of Abilene Christian College feared the impact of critics during the late 1960s. As a result, new developments signaled the end of new initiatives in academic scholarship and the administration’s response to frequent attacks. Ian Fair recalls that he, as an older student, was invited to the president’s office in 1968 to discuss charges that were circulating against two of the faculty members. In the presence of two ministers who had brought their concerns about the Bible faculty, Fair was asked to report to the president whether he had heard any comments from two faculty members that might be construed as liberal or contrary to ACC’s historic positions. He was asked to report on what he had heard in the classes that might

³⁹ Glenn Wallace, “A Voice of Concern,” *Firm Foundation* 85 (1968): 198.

⁴⁰ “The Changing Ministry,” *Firm Foundation* 81 (Feb. 4, 1964): 66.

⁴¹ *Firm Foundation* 85 (April 23, 1968): 258.

⁴² JW Roberts, “My Connection with *Mission* and the Living Word Commentary,” *Firm Foundation* 85 (1968): 263.

be disturbing. He responded negatively, indicating that the two classes and professors under discussion were two of his favorite classes and professors.

The college ultimately responded to the concerns about the content of the instruction and faculty participation on the board of *Mission*. President John Stevens encouraged faculty members to resign from the magazine's board. Of the four ACU faculty members who were on the board of *Mission*, only JW Roberts refused to resign.⁴³ Some faculty members circulated a statement of beliefs in order to assure the constituency of their soundness. One faculty member, Robert Johnson, rejected the creedal statement and resigned as a consequence. Abraham Malherbe, who was on leave when the creedal statement was initiated, left ACC in 1969 to join the faculty of Dartmouth College.

The 1960s marked a turbulent period throughout the United States. The developments in the Bible Department at Abilene Christian College reflected this time of change. Just as the Freeman era had ended with a period of stabilization, the end of the 1960s also brought a period of consolidation in which the college's administration attempted to reassure its constituency in Churches of Christ. At the end of the decade, Paul Southern retired and was replaced by J. D. Thomas, who served as head of the department until 1978. The end of the 1960s—and of the chairmanship of Paul Southern—marked the end of the era of major initiatives. In the following decades, most of the initiatives of the 1950s and 1960s remained in place. Under the influence of Professors Thomas Olbricht, John Willis, and Everett Ferguson, Abilene Christian University continued to educate ministers for the Churches of Christ and prepare students for doctoral work in biblical studies. Some of these students have had a major influence on international scholarship. Their story remains to be told.

⁴³ See Thomas Olbricht, *Hearing God's Voice: My Life with Scripture in the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1996), 335. Olbricht comments, "It would have been interesting to have seen how this conflict played itself out. Unfortunately, Roberts died of a heart attack in April 1973."