



American Religion

Session 1: Wednesday, June 5 • 1-2:30 p.m.

“The Power of Narrative and Hope”

Location: Lamb & Scroll

Scott Billingsley, *University of North Carolina at Pembroke*, Respondent

- **Michael Ditmore**, Pepperdine University
- **Wesley Constandse**, Independent Scholar
- **Morgan Proffitt-Davis**, Princeton Theological Seminary

This panel examines the intersection of hope and narrative and how the stories we tell shape the challenges, opportunities, and collaborations we face. Michael Ditmore explores the narrative Thomas Jefferson created in the early nineteenth century in what is now called *The Jefferson Bible* and how Americans interpreted that narrative nearly a century later. Wesley Constandse seeks to revise the traditional narrative of westward migration by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century. He argues that many Latter-day Saints who never made it to Joseph Smith’s “Zion” maintained their faith and their hope in the promise of the LDS Church despite their failure to make it to the “promised land.” Finally, Morgan Proffitt-Davis examines the “missiological martyr” narrative created by American missionary societies about the killings of American missionaries John and Betty Stam in communist China in the 1930s. She seeks to give voice to the characters in this story who were marginalized or ignored in order to canonize the Stams.

Michael Ditmore, *Pepperdine University*, “Corruptions, Extractions, and Mutilations: Reconsidering Thomas Jefferson’s ‘diamonds from a dunghill’ Gospel”

The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth was not made public until the early twentieth century and was never as widely read as some of Thomas Jefferson’s other writings. This essay seeks to reconsider *The Life and Morals* in a less systematic but no less probing way in terms of the kind of practice Jefferson undertook and the kind of reader and reading implicated. It asks the questions, how is Jesus proclaimed and how does Jesus proclaim, in Jefferson’s extracts? Furthermore, it explores what remains if one follows the order and emphases of Jefferson’s cuttings, what manipulations he navigated to produce a reduced Scripture, and how such a text is to be understood or used.

Wesley Constandse, *Independent Scholar*, “A Fleeting Hope While in the Crucible of Crisis”

In the 1850s, European immigrants were making the long and dangerous journey to Utah and the new home for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These travelers were not seasoned frontiers people but were instead artisans, farmers, and middle-class professionals. The hardships they faced caused many to abandon the journey and settle in towns or unclaimed farmland along the way. Many of those who continued perished before they arrived at their destination. This is a story about the hope these people had in a promise of a new “Zion” and how their faith led them to make radically different decisions about continuing the journey.

Morgan Proffitt-Davis, *Princeton Theological Seminary*, “The Myth of Miasosheo”

In December 1934, a young missionary family from capitalist America, far from home in communist China, is taken, marched, and then publicly executed by the Red Army in the dead of winter. Only their three-month-old child, hidden in a blanket in an abandoned home, survives. Two days later, a local Chinese pastor finds her and carries this infant 100 miles to safety where she is pronounced healthy. Using primary and secondary resources from the Stam family’s archival donation to Princeton Seminary concerning the murders, this paper is a critical examination of Protestant media coverage of the event, arguing that the genre of these accounts should be considered less as historical and more as “martyrological.”

Session 3: Thursday, June 6 • 9-10:30 a.m.

“Major Book Review: Richard T. Hughes and James L. Gorman, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America, 3rd ed.*”

Location: Lamb and Scroll

Corey J. Markum, *Freed-Hardeman University*, Convener

- **Douglas A. Foster**, *Abilene Christian University*, Reviewer
- **Loretta M. Hunnicutt**, *Pepperdine University*, Reviewer
- **Edward A. Robinson**, *Texas College*, Reviewer
- **James. L. Gorman**, *Johnson University*, Respondent

For nearly 30 years, Richard Hughes’s *Reviving the Ancient Faith* has been considered by many the standard and most influential single-volume history of the Churches of Christ in the United States. Earlier this year, Eerdmans published a third edition of the book, significantly expanded and updated by James Gorman, who carries the narrative of American Churches of Christ forward from the 1960s into modern day. In this session, several leading scholars of Restorationist history will critically review the new edition of *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, assessing both the durability of Hughes’s original narrative and the contributions of Gorman’s update. Gorman will then offer their own responses and reflections on the book and its reviews.

Session 4: Thursday, June 6 • 1:45-3:15 p.m.

Roundtable Discussion: “Gender and Race in the History of Churches of Christ: How Does the Past Speak to Today?”

Location: Lamb and Scroll

Scott Billingsley, *University of North Carolina at Pembroke*, Convener

- **Richard T. Hughes**, *Lipscomb University*
- **James L. Gorman**, *Johnson University*
- **Kathy J. Pulley**, *Missouri State University*
- **Loretta M. Hunnicutt**, *Pepperdine University*
- **Edward A. Robinson**, *Texas College*
- **Doug Foster**, *Abilene Christian University*, Moderator

Based on sections of the Hughes and Gorman book, *Reviving the Ancient Faith, 3rd ed.: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, this roundtable discussion will focus primarily on the fragmentation of the

Churches of Christ from the 1960s to today, with the emphasis on the cultural issues of gender and race. All panelists will informally discuss whether the church's history on gender and race affects churches today in regard to unity, identity, and direction for the future? Discussion from the audience is desired.