

RESTORATION: A WORK IN PROGRESS

I've not read Colleen McCulloch's novel, "A Creed for the Third Millennium," but its title is pregnant with a least one implication: that creeds – and perhaps more particularly the creed of Christianity – has no place in the 21st century (which was dawning even as McCulloch's book was launched).

A decade earlier many had predicted a New World Order; but since then the world has seen little but disorder. Throughout history men have grasped at ideas, concepts and philosophies that seemed the answer to their collective hopes and dreams. But of all of them it could be said, "The children came to the birth, but there was no strength to being them forth."

Our name of choice is Restoration Fellowship. Those jaundiced by their experience with names that promised much but delivered little might possibly see in this name the desire of yet another band of idealists to recapture truths lost during the past two millennia. They might think that in choosing such a name our hope is that these truths might be used to prop up a Church in a sad state of biblical disrepair. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There are those who associate restoration with the so-called "early church" of the first century, and who believe that if only the present-day Church could recapture the experience of the first generation of believers it could change our world. But New Testament restoration has an eye to the future: its view is forward-looking. Only when "all things" are restored will Jesus return to rule the nations.

The Reformation was but the beginning of biblical restoration; through Martin Luther God restored to the Church the truth of Justification by Faith. If the Church is a house, then Luther had done what Hezekiah did when he "opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them." Later reformers were used of God to throw light on other truths that had been locked away in decay since the Dark Ages.

No sooner had a truth been restored than an edifice was erected around it, ostensibly to proclaim it but in practice to protect it. Instead of lived in, the room of each spiritual restoration remained hidden within yet another denomination.

Almost every fellowship of believers begins with a vision of what it believes the Church ought to be. We are no different. Although on the

margins of what is considered Orthodox, we see God's House as less than the glorious church Jesus said he would build. Of course, those who look out at us from Orthodoxy may judge us as wrong simply because we don't belong.

It was said of the apostles that they turned their world upside down. We have an opportunity to do some church restoration. Not while loudly decrying the Church's sad state of spiritual disrepair, but by a thorough work of scriptural restoration.

Such a work can be painstakingly slow. But just as plaster and paint in a run-down house may hide a valuable feature, we may be surprised to discover like-minded believers in some unlikely places – brothers and sisters whose confession will also be the Creed of Jesus.

-- Peter Barfoot