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Footnotes: Encouragement + Church of Christ Colleges

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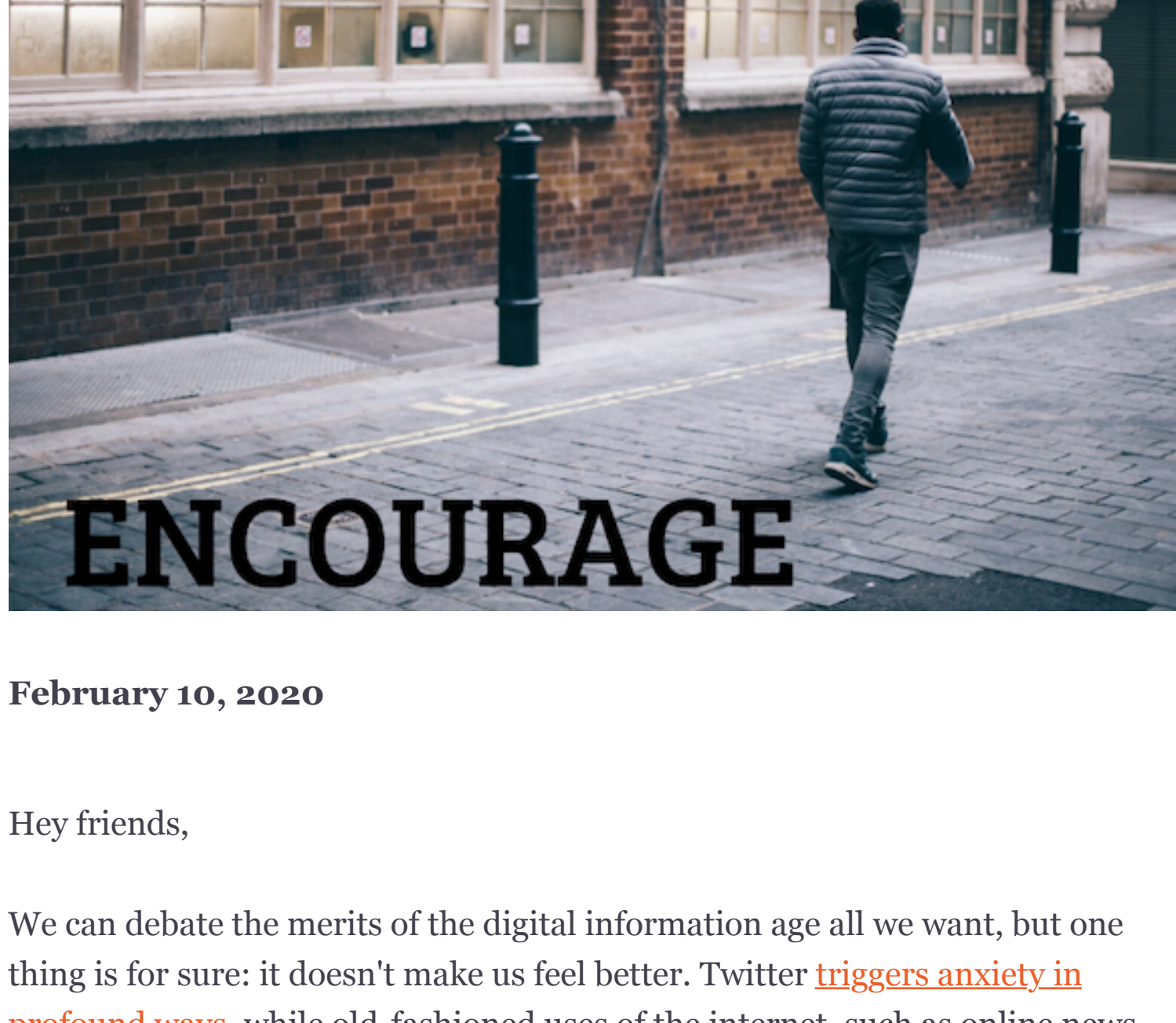
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HARDING
UNIVERSITY

Footnotes¹

Curated Resources for Ministers



February 10, 2020

Hey friends,

We can debate the merits of the digital information age all we want, but one thing is for sure: it doesn't make us feel better. Twitter [triggers anxiety in profound ways](#), while old-fashioned uses of the internet, such as online news, have spread "If it bleeds, it leads" from thirty minutes at night across a 24-hour day. The negative news becomes our negative life.

And that's just the real news. Combine it with the #fakenews, stories-that-aren't-really-stories, and clickbait and now you're overwhelmed, trying to drink from a firehose...that spews hemlock.

We could all use some encouragement.

One of the best words in the New Testament is *parakaleo*. It can mean to speak to, to call out, and to make a request. In many cases it means to *encourage*.

Ministry can be one of the loneliness professions. Unlike teachers, nurses, and software engineers, preachers often work in an organization where they are the only person who does what they do. That work, though rewarding, can be isolating.

Most ministers don't need a ton of professional help...they are competent to perform their duties. They are often as skilled as anyone in their congregations and have plenty of education. But I've never known a minister who would refuse some extra encouragement.

This issue I'll talk to my boss, Jim Martin, about the importance of encouragement for ministers. Also:

- Recent news in the Holy Land,
- News of the 2010s with Philip Jenkins,
- Christian Colleges are seeing less Church of Christ students,
- Plus, *A Few More Footnotes*.



Footnotes Roundtable with Jim Martin

Jim Martin is Vice President for Harding School of Theology. Before coming to Memphis, he preached for various congregations, most recently in Waco, Texas. One of his true gifts in ministry is being an encourager, so I was excited to see that he [recently launched a newsletter](#):

BT: When we say that ministers need encouragement, what do we mean?

JM: Encouragement can come in a variety of forms. Barnabas put in a good word for Paul and stayed by John Mark after he had abandoned his post in a previous effort. One encourages by paying attention to another person and sometimes speaking words of life, hope, or affirmation to a minister. Sometimes it is simply being present with another. No one size fits all.

BT: Elders/church leaders often have much of their relational/social network in place in a church/town/community. The minister often lacks much of that infrastructure. How does this affect ministers as they do their work?

JM: Without this infrastructure, it is easy for ministers to become isolated and lonely. They can also misread the context of their ministry. A minister can assume that certain problems or concerns exist within the congregation because of what is being said across the nation on social media. Because ministers sometimes lack a relational/social network, they may not hear the actual concerns of the congregation or the people in the community. Ministers could be encouraged by intentionally creating and investing in a network among other ministers, as well as others in their church and community. For example, some ministers are in Zoom groups or regional gatherings of ministers who meet periodically. For years I have met, and continue to meet with, various people within our community over lunch or coffee. Building this network is not always easy but it is important.

BT: You have embraced a role as being an encourager of preachers. Where did this come from?

JM: As a young preacher, I had encouragers who believed in me. As a young minister, I often felt isolated and inadequate. I will always appreciate the encouragement that I received from other preachers who saw something good in me or in my ministry, and affirmed this. Now, years later, I am intentional about encouraging preachers, church leaders, and others. Perhaps some of that is a gift, but it is also the result of being intentional. This typically involves paying attention to another, pointing out the good, and affirming what I can affirm.

BT: What led you to publish this newsletter?

JM: I have been thinking about publishing this for quite some time. My intention is to provide something every other Monday that in some way might be encouraging to ministers, Christian leaders, or any follower of Jesus who is simply trying to navigate life. Each issue will contain a "List of Five." These will include links to articles or podcasts, quotes, excerpts from books or articles, etc. I hope that by the tone and the content, someone will find a nugget of encouragement. This could help with one's work, family, or to simply help navigate life. This encouragement may seem small but it is often the beginning to building momentum.



Trends of the 2010s: Philip Jenkins

Philip Jenkins published 10 Trends of the 2010s in most recent [@ChristianCent](#).

- 1) The Rise of the Nones
- 2) Papacy of Pope Francis
- 3) Obergefell and the Redefinition of Marriage
- 4) Charleston murders and problem of Whiteness
- 5) Climate Change and Laudato si

- 6) Trump and the Evangelicals
- 7) Gender and Identity
- 8) Me Too and Women's Leadership
- 9) Crisis of the Seminaries
- 10) Fertility rates and faith



Churches of Christ and Christian Colleges

The population decline of Churches of Christ has meant a decline in the number of Church of Christ students in colleges that primarily identify themselves with Churches of Christ. Trace Hebert has [published his recent findings](#). In the fall of 2000, 4,411 of the 6,643 students who entered one of these schools for the first time identified themselves with Churches of Christ. Since that year, the number of first time enrollees has dipped from 6,643 to 4,960 and the CofC slice of that group went from 4,411 to 1,856. The current number of students entering all of these schools combined is roughly the number who CofC students who entered Harding + Abilene Christian the year I started college (Fall 2000).

I think there is a bit more to this story than the population decline of the churches, however. It might relate to the timing and location of each school's origin. I'm going to divide the schools into three eras:

Phase One

- Freed Hardeman University (1869)
- Lipscomb University (1891)
- Abilene Christian University (1906)

Phase Two

- Harding University (1924)
- Pepperdine University (1937)

Phase Three

- Faulkner University (1942)
- Florida College (1946)
- Southwestern Christian College (1948)
- Oklahoma Christian University (1950)
- York College (1956)
- Lubbock Christian (1957)
- Rochester University (1959)
- Ohio Valley University (1960)
- Crowley's Ridge (1964)

The first era makes perfectly good sense, and these colleges were established by a sort of pioneering spirit within the movement. While Henderson isn't where we'd put a college in an ideal world, it is central to West Tennessee; Nashville is the buckle of the belt; Abilene gets the Metroplex and West Texas-- and a comparable Baptist school had shown a few years earlier (Hardin-Simmons, 1891) that Abilene was a fine place to do this sort of thing.

The second era is defined by money. George Benson (Harding) and George Pepperdine were entrepreneurs and networkers. While Searcy and Los Angeles aren't the epicenters of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Pepperdine and Benson had the vision and clout to make sure that resources came their way. In Pepperdine's case, this came through oil money ([Blanche Seaver](#)) and the gifting of the nicest piece of university property on the planet. For Benson it came partially through anti-communism and a nationally-recognized program for free enterprise.

That brings us to the third era, which basically occurs from the middle of WWII until Vietnam. I'll keep it simple: we overbuilt. That period witnessed the birth of *nine* schools (throw in now-defunct Cascade in Portland, and we have ten). That's crazy. Apparently during that era you could get approval to start a college more easily than you could to start a second adult Bible class. The simple math is that Churches of Christ began more schools during the administrations of Truman and Eisenhower than they started from Lincoln *until* Truman. Sure, Churches of Christ grew during that era, with the baby boom, GI Bill, and other factors, but that expansion just hasn't been sustainable.

Geography and finances have played roles. As far as geography goes, only Oklahoma and Indiana sits on property that one would associate with any sort of growing, metropolitan area (Florida College is near Tampa, but targets a very specific theological tradition within Churches of Christ). If one could go back to 1960, they might start colleges in Atlanta, Houston, and Charlotte (a second small college near Nashville would probably have succeeded as well). The now-defunct Northeastern Christian Junior College, started in 1957 (that makes 11) had a really great location, just outside of Philadelphia. But it closed.

The schools that started in this era were probably conceived through a robust missionary spirit and a certainty that the region would be blessed by having a college, but with little more than faith about how that vision would be financed. With the start of each college, each slice of the enrollment/philanthropy pie got smaller. And the regions of the upstart colleges didn't exactly prosper. Rochester College's financial base in Michigan was pummeled by the decline of American automotive manufacturing. Regions around York and Ohio Valley negotiated the shift from manufacturing/farming to information/technology. All of this while the population of Churches of Christ declined.

That third phase of colleges simply lacked the benefit of being old and historic (like Freed Hardeman) or the influx of cash (like Harding and Pepperdine) to combat recent stresses. Starting an endowment without old money is no easy task. This is not to assign blame but only to show that as the number of colleges grew and the number of people in the pews shrunk. Now schools rely heavily on non-Church of Christ students, in addition to launching new academic programs and hoping for the best (which is why something like ten graduate Bible programs have emerged over the past 25 years....while Churches of Christ have been in decline).

Or maybe none of this is to blame, and instead it is as simple as Church of Christ schools existing for the liberal arts and they are now struggling to adapt to a STEM-based educational environment? That's for another issue.



Redrawing Israel?

Archaeologists at Abel Beth Maacah [have found a jug](#) with an inscription that reads *leBenayau*. This could be rendered as "God has built," which would affirm an Israelite presence that is slightly larger than archaeologists had formerly suspected (possibly more in line with what the Bible reports).

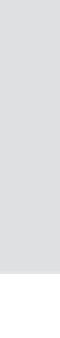
But I'd rather hear from someone who knows this stuff, so I talked to Harding's Dale Manor, my favorite scholar of the soil, to see what this means. He said:

I think the discovery is important, but as far as the discovery itself is concerned, it does not prove Aramaean, Phoenician, or Israelite control of Abel Beth-Maacah. As the article indicates, the settlement is at the junction of the three political entities. I think archaeologically it opens the possibility of an Israelite presence, if not control of the settlement. Of course, the Bible notes this is the place to which one of David's enemies, Sheba, fled and Joab went to capture him (2 Sam 20). The biblical narrative implies an interplay of Israelite control and I am inclined to agree, but the discovery can be interpreted differently. Being a "border" town and so far away from the center of Israelite hegemony, it is likely that the town had a tendency 1) to vacillate politically, and or 2) to be a town that reflected multiple ethnic realities.



A Few More Footnotes

1. "Our tendency is to overestimate the value of what we know, while underestimating the value of what we don't know." Kevin Dickinson makes the case for an antiliberal, in the spirit of the Japanese *tsundoku*. This means we should own more books than we'll ever read. In one sense, this creates a sense of wonder, but there is a more practical case, which has been stated repeatedly over time: [having a ton of books is good for kids](#). Researchers suggest a home should have at least 80 books. America's fiction fairy, Dolly Parton, has single-handedly made sure homes have 60 (5 yrs x 12 mos.) with her Imagination Library, which has distributed [more than 100 million books](#). Sure, Marie Kondo is out there asking whether all those books spark joy. The answer? Yes! Yes they do.
2. Shane Claiborne on the need to be [consistently pro-life](#).
3. Last issue's interview with Patrick Mead included a statistic about the prevention of 1,000,000 crimes each year by the lawful use of weapons. Many who tout this claim refer to [a 1995 study](#) by Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz on self-defense. I started digging into [Bureau of Justice statistics](#) and some other studies. Short story: there are a ton of variables that should be considered. Some say that the number is more like 50,000, while others have suggested that more than 4,000,000 crimes are prevented each year by use of weapons. Variables include whether official law enforcement are included, what we mean by "crime," and what we mean by "weapon." I'm exhausted. My review of the statistics reminded me of a course I took in library school where the professor started the class with the question: "What do we mean by *information*?" It was supposed to be a practical course. I guess I'm inclined to say that I'm a bit uncomfortable with the idea that everybody around me is packing heat and waiting to pounce. Doesn't anyone carry pepper spray anymore? While the numbers may suggest that it is safer for everyone to carry than for no one to carry, it just seems that we are perpetuating the problem, and fostering an environment where we not only anticipate the *possibility* of violence, but seem to falsely anticipate the *likelihood* of it. But that's why I'm a librarian/preacher and not an FBI statistician or political scientist.
4. I also mentioned that I really liked The Two Popes. Well, [some did not](#).



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FOOTNOTES helps church leaders discover the resources that will improve and sustain their ministries. It will regularly feature interviews, book recommendations, site reviews, and editorials. It is a project of Bob Turner. You can direct any questions or feedback to rjturner@harding.edu. Complaints can be sent to his [Juno account](#).

UPCOMING
February 24
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