

A Study of
Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a
People in Covenant

by Stephen V. Sprinkle, Chalice Press, 1999.

Prepared by Laurence D. Merkle, January 2005

From the back cover

Some scholars in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) would say that the very title of this book is a contradiction in terms. But though the denomination has consciously avoided formal creeds, Disciples throughout their history have formulated their thought in distinctive theological ways. Following the lead of Eugene Boring's acclaimed *Disciples and the Bible*, Stephen V. Sprinkle traces the changing currents of Disciples theology from Alexander Campbell through the seminal contributions of such prominent voices as W.E. Garrison and Edward Scribner Ames and on the dynamic ferment of the present day. The final chapter offers a constructive proposal for ongoing theological reflection that identifies current trends and focuses on the theme of a people in covenant.

Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 9) – Author, Preface, Chapter 1
Week 2 (Jan. 16) – Chapter 2
Week 3 (Jan. 30) – Chapter 3
Week 4 (Feb. 6) – Chapter 4
Week 5 (Feb. 13) – Chapter 5

Week 1

Author

From the August 2003 issue of the Brite Divinity School e-newsletter:

Dr. Stephen V. Sprinkle, Director of Field Education and Supervised Ministry and newly promoted Associate Professor of Practical Theology was tenured in March 2003. He has also been a guest preacher at Bethany Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Fort Worth, Texas; Park Place Christian Church (DOC) in Wichita Falls, Texas and has participated or conducted ordination of Brite graduates at Monica Park Christian church (DOC) in Garland, Texas; First Christian Church (DOC) in Wilmer, Texas; Winterville Christian Church (DOC) in Winterville, N.C. and will speak at an ordination of a graduate in Greenville, S.C. at the First Baptist Church. He will also represent Brite at an ordination of a graduate at Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Texas.

This summer he will travel to Cambridge, England as part of the Brite Summer Program to teach a course entitled, "The Minister as Practical Theologian."

Preface

- Disciples of Christ (DOC) have traditionally characterized themselves as indifferent to theology ("no creed but Christ"); they have never produced a written theology.
- DOC have formulated their thought in distinctive theological ways with practical import.
- A clear path forward is needed so that DOC can write a theology.
- The book discusses five syntheses (distinct periods of thought):
 - o Campbellite (period of the founders) 1804 – 1866
 - o Milliganite, 1867 – 1899
 - o Liberal, 1900 – 1957
 - o Ecumenical, 1958 – 1977
 - o New (in which a theology may be developed), 1978 – Present

Chapter 1

Glossary

Definitions from the <http://www.answers.com> Dictionary. Additional information from the <http://www.answers.com> Encyclopedia.

a·pol·o·gy (ə-pŏl'ə-jē)

n., pl. -gies.

1. An acknowledgment expressing regret or asking pardon for a fault or offense.
2.
 - a. A formal justification or defense.
 - b. An explanation or excuse: "*The consequence of those measures will be the best apology for my conduct*" (Daniel Defoe).
3. An inferior substitute: *The sagging cot was a poor apology for a bed.*

Encyclopedia entry: Literary work that defends, justifies, or clarifies an author's ideas or point of view. Unlike the ordinary use of the word, the literary use neither implies that wrong has been done nor expresses regret. The most famous ancient example, Plato's *Apology* (3d cent. B.C.), presents Socrates' defense of himself at his trial before the Athenian government. Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* and *Defense of Poesie* (both: 1580), which examine the art of poetry and its condition in England, apparently were written to justify the poets' craft after it had been attacked by critics. A third famous example, Cardinal Newman's spiritual autobiography *Apologia pro Vita sua* (1864), was written to clarify the Cardinal's views after they had been misrepresented in an essay by Charles Kingsley.

a·pos·ta·sy (ə-pŏs'tə-sē)

n., pl. -sies.

Abandonment of one's religious faith, a political party, one's principles, or a cause.

ar·chi·tec·ton·ic (är'kī-tĕk-tŏn'ĭk) also ar·chi·tec·ton·i·cal (-ĭ-kəl)

adj.

1. Of or relating to architecture or design.
2. Having qualities, such as design and structure, that are characteristic of architecture: *a work of art forming an architectonic whole.*
3. *Philosophy.* Of or relating to the scientific systematization of knowledge.

ar·che·type (är'kī-tĭp')

n.

1. An original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a prototype: "*'Frankenstein' . . . 'Dracula' . . . 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' . . . the archetypes that have influenced all subsequent horror stories*" (New York Times).

2. An ideal example of a type; quintessence: *an archetype of the successful entrepreneur.*
3. In Jungian psychology, an inherited pattern of thought or symbolic imagery derived from the past collective experience and present in the individual unconscious.

ar·ro·gate (ăr'ə-gāt')

tr.v., -gat·ed, -gat·ing, -gates.

1. To take or claim for oneself without right; appropriate: *Presidents who have arrogated the power of Congress to declare war.* See synonyms at [appropriate](#).
2. To ascribe on behalf of another in an unwarranted manner.

cath·o·lic (kăth'ə-līk, kăth'līk)

adj.

1. Of broad or liberal scope; comprehensive: "*The 100-odd pages of formulas and constants are surely the most catholic to be found*" (Scientific American).
2. Including or concerning all humankind; universal: "*what was of catholic rather than national interest*" (J.A. Froude).
3. Catholic
 - a. Of or involving the Roman Catholic Church.
 - b. Of or relating to the universal Christian church.
 - c. Of or relating to the ancient undivided Christian church.
 - d. Of or relating to those churches that have claimed to be representatives of the ancient undivided church.

n. Catholic

A member of a Catholic church, especially a Roman Catholic.

Chris·tol·o·gy (krī-stōl'ə-jē)

n., pl. -gies.

1. The theological study of the person and deeds of Jesus.
2. A doctrine or theory based on Jesus or Jesus's teachings.

co·e·val (kō-ē'vəl)

adj.

Originating or existing during the same period; lasting through the same era.

n.

One of the same era or period; a contemporary.

con·so·nant (kɒn'sə-nənt)

adj.

1. Being in agreement or accord: *remarks consonant with our own beliefs.*
2. Corresponding or alike in sound, as words or syllables.
3. Harmonious in sound or tone.

n.

1. A speech sound produced by a partial or complete obstruction of the air stream by any of various constrictions of the speech organs, such as (p), (f), (r), (w), and (h).
2. A letter or character representing such a speech sound.

cree·dal also cre·dal (krēd'l)

adj.

Of or relating to a creed.

di·a·lec·tic (dī'ə-lĕk'tĭk)

n.

1. The art or practice of arriving at the truth by the exchange of logical arguments.
2.
 - a. The process especially associated with Hegel of arriving at the truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving them into a coherent synthesis.
 - b. Hegel's critical method for the investigation of this process.
3.
 - a. The Marxian process of change through the conflict of opposing forces, whereby a given contradiction is characterized by a primary and a secondary aspect, the secondary succumbing to the primary, which is then transformed into an aspect of a new contradiction. Often used in the plural with a singular or plural verb.
 - b. The Marxian critique of this process.
4. dialectics (*used with a sing. verb*) A method of argument or exposition that systematically weighs contradictory facts or ideas with a view to the resolution of their real or apparent contradictions.
5. The contradiction between two conflicting forces viewed as the determining factor in their continuing interaction.

dis·pen·sa·tion (dĭs'pən-sā'shən, -pĕn-)

n.

1.
 - a. The act of dispensing.
 - b. Something dispensed.

- c. A specific arrangement or system by which something is dispensed.
- 2. An exemption or release from an obligation or rule, granted by or as if by an authority.
- 3.
 - a. An exemption from a church law, a vow, or another similar obligation granted in a particular case by an ecclesiastical authority.
 - b. The document containing this exemption.
- 4. *Theology*.
 - a. The divine ordering of worldly affairs.
 - b. A religious system or code of commands considered to have been divinely revealed or appointed.

ec·cle·si·as·ti·cal (ĭ-klē'zē-ās'tī-kəl)

adj.

- 1. Of or relating to a church, especially as an organized institution.
- 2. Appropriate to a church or to use in a church: *ecclesiastical architecture*; *ecclesiastical robes*.

ec·u·men·i·cal (ĕk'yə-mĕn'ī-kəl) also ec·u·men·ic (-mĕn'īk)

adj.

- 1. Of worldwide scope or applicability; universal.
- 2.
 - a. Of or relating to the worldwide Christian church.
 - b. Concerned with establishing or promoting unity among churches or religions.

el·lip·tic (ĭ-lĭp'tīk) or el·lip·ti·cal (-tī-kəl)

adj.

- 1. Of, relating to, or having the shape of an ellipse.
- 2. Containing or characterized by ellipsis.
- 3.
 - a. Of or relating to extreme economy of oral or written expression.
 - b. Marked by deliberate obscurity of style or expression.

en·co·mi·um (ĕn-kō'mē-əm)

n., pl. -mi·ums or -mi·a (-mē-ə).

- 1. Warm, glowing praise.
- 2. A formal expression of praise; a tribute.

Enlightenment. From <http://wikipedia.com>: **The Age of Enlightenment** (or *The Enlightenment* for short) was an intellectual movement in [18th Century Europe](#). The goal of the Enlightenment was to establish an authoritative [ethics](#), [aesthetics](#), and [knowledge](#)

based on an "enlightened" rationality. The movement's leaders viewed themselves as a courageous, elite body of intellectuals who were leading the world toward progress, out of a long period of irrationality, superstition, and tyranny which began during a historical period they called the [Dark Ages](#). This movement provided a framework for the [American](#) and [French Revolutions](#), as well as the rise of [capitalism](#) and the birth of [socialism](#). It is matched by the high [baroque](#) era in music, and the [neo-classical](#) period in the arts.

es·cha·tol·o·gy (ĕs'kə-tōl'ə-jē)

n.

1. The branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind.
2. A belief or a doctrine concerning the ultimate or final things, such as death, the destiny of humanity, the Second Coming, or the Last Judgment.

ex ni·hi·lo (ĕks nē'ə-lō', nī'-, nī'-)

adv. & adj.

Out of nothing.

fulmination

noun

1. A long, violent, or blustering speech, usually of censure or denunciation: [diatribe](#), [harangue](#), [jeremiad](#), [philippic](#), [tirade](#). *See* [praise/blame](#).
2. A violent release of confined energy, usually accompanied by a loud sound and shock waves: [blast](#), [blowout](#), [blowup](#), [burst](#), [detonation](#), [explosion](#). *See* [explosion/collapse](#).

her·me·neu·tic (hūr'mə-nū'tik, -nyū'-) also her·me·neu·ti·cal (-tī-kəl)

adj.

Interpretive; explanatory.

in nuce

In a nutshell.

in·cul·cate (ĭn-kŭl'kāt', ĭn'kŭl-)

tr.v., -cat·ed, -cat·ing, -cates.

1. To impress (something) upon the mind of another by frequent instruction or repetition; instill: *inculcating sound principles*.

2. To teach (others) by frequent instruction or repetition; indoctrinate: *inculcate the young with a sense of duty.*

i·ren·ic (ī-rĕn'ĭk, ī-rĕ'nĭk) also i·ren·i·cal (-ĭ-kəl, -nĭ-kəl)

adj.

Promoting peace; conciliatory.

jer·e·mi·ad (jĕr'ə-mĭ'əd)

n.

A literary work or speech expressing a bitter lament or a righteous prophecy of doom.

Mar·cion·ism (mār'shə-nĭz'əm)

n.

A Christian heresy of the second and third centuries A.D. that rejected the Old Testament and denied the incarnation of God in Jesus as a human.

my·thos (mĭ'thŏs, mĭth'ŏs)

n., pl. my·thoi (mĭ'thoi, mĭth'oi).

1. Myth.
2. Mythology.
3. The pattern of basic values and attitudes of a people, characteristically transmitted through myths and the arts.

ob·du·rate (ŏb'du-rĭt, -dyu-)

adj.

1.
 - a. Hardened in wrongdoing or wickedness; stubbornly impenitent: “*obdurate conscience of the old sinner*” (Sir Walter Scott).
 - b. Hardened against feeling; hardhearted: *an obdurate miser.*
2. Not giving in to persuasion; intractable. See synonyms at [inflexible](#).

or·gan·ic (ôr-găn'ĭk)

adj.

1. Of, relating to, or derived from living organisms: *organic matter.*
2. Of, relating to, or affecting a bodily organ: *an organic disease.*
3.
 - a. Of, marked by, or involving the use of fertilizers or pesticides that are strictly of animal or vegetable origin: *organic vegetables; an organic farm.*

- b. Raised or conducted without the use of drugs, hormones, or synthetic chemicals: *organic chicken*; *organic cattle farming*.
 - c. Serving organic food: *an organic restaurant*.
 - d. Simple, healthful, and close to nature: *an organic lifestyle*.
- 4.
- a. Having properties associated with living organisms.
 - b. Resembling a living organism in organization or development; interconnected: *society as an organic whole*.
5. Constituting an integral part of a whole; fundamental.
6. *Law*. Denoting or relating to the fundamental or constitutional laws and precepts of a government or an organization.
7. *Chemistry*. Of or designating carbon compounds.

or·tho·dox·y (ôr'thə-dŏk'sē)

n., *pl.* -ies.

1. The quality or state of being orthodox.
2. Orthodox practice, custom, or belief.
3. Orthodoxy
 - a. The beliefs and practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church.
 - b. Orthodox Judaism.

pa·ro·chi·al (pə-rŏ'kē-əl)

adj.

1. Of, relating to, supported by, or located in a parish.
2. Of or relating to parochial schools.
3. Narrowly restricted in scope or outlook; provincial: *parochial attitudes*.

pre·crit·i·cal (prē-krit'ī-kəl)

adj.

Coming before a critical state or phase.

pre·sup·pose (prē'sə-pōz')

tr.v., -posed, -pos·ing, -pos·es.

1. To believe or suppose in advance.
2. To require or involve necessarily as an antecedent condition. See synonyms at [presume](#).

prim·i·tiv·ism (prīm'ī-tī-vīz'əm)

n.

1. The condition or quality of being primitive.
2. The style characteristic of a primitive artist.

3.
 - a. A belief that it is best to live simply and in a natural environment.
 - b. A belief that the acquisitions of civilization are evil or that the earliest period of human history was the best.

prin·cip·i·um (prĭn-sĭp'ē-əm)

n., *pl.* -i'a (-ē-ə).

A principle, especially a basic one.

prop·o·si·tion (prŏp'ə-zĭsh'ən)

n.

1. A plan suggested for acceptance; a proposal.
2. A matter to be dealt with; a task: *Finding affordable housing can be a difficult proposition.*
3. An offer of a private bargain, especially a request for sexual relations.
4. A subject for discussion or analysis.
5. *Logic.*
 - a. A statement that affirms or denies something.
 - b. The meaning expressed in such a statement, as opposed to the way it is expressed.
6. *Mathematics.* A theorem.

pro·vin·cial·ism (prə-vĭn'shə-lĭz'əm)

n.

1. A regional word, phrase, pronunciation, or usage.
2. The condition of being provincial; lack of sophistication or perspective. Also called *provinciality*.
3. The act or an instance of placing the interests of one's province before one's nation.

the·ol·o·gy (thē-ŏl'ə-jē)

n., *pl.* -gies.

1. The study of the nature of God and religious truth; rational inquiry into religious questions.
2. A system or school of opinions concerning God and religious questions: *Protestant theology; Jewish theology.*
3. A course of specialized religious study usually at a college or seminary.

sec·tar·i·an (sĕk-târ'ē-ən)

adj.

1. Of, relating to, or characteristic of a sect.

2. Adhering or confined to the dogmatic limits of a sect or denomination; partisan.
3. Narrow-minded; parochial.

n.

1. A member of a sect.
2. One characterized by bigoted adherence to a factional viewpoint.

syn·the·sis (sĭn'thĭ-sĭs)

n., pl. -ses (-sēz').

1.
 - a. The combining of separate elements or substances to form a coherent whole.
 - b. The complex whole so formed.
2. *Chemistry.* Formation of a compound from simpler compounds or elements.
3. *Philosophy.*
 - a. Reasoning from the general to the particular; logical deduction.
 - b. The combination of thesis and antithesis in the Hegelian dialectical process whereby a new and higher level of truth is produced.

via negativa. From <http://wikipedia.com>: The **via negativa** is a [theological](#) method attempting to define the nature of [God](#). It assumes that due to the [transcendental](#) nature of God and his inability to be comprehended by humans there can be no way of talking about what God is. Therefore they adopt the *via negativa* or negative way which states that God can only be talked about in terms of what he is not. For example God is not: evil; limited; comprehensible and so on. This idea was formulated in the middle ages, the main thinkers behind it are [Moses Maimonides](#), [11th century](#), author of *Guide to the Perplexed*, and [Pseudo Dionysius](#). However the problem with this argument is there seems to be no fixed basis on deciding what God is not.