

GOING BACK TO THE SOURCES

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.”

Psalm 42:1

The Latin phrase *ad fontes* means “to the sources,” or more literally, “to the fountains.” It comes from the Latin Bible’s rendering of Psalm 42:1, which pictures a deep longing for life-giving water. During the Reformation (1517-1648), this phrase became a rallying cry for religious reformers and scholars who believed Christian faith and learning needed to return to their original sources, especially the Scriptures.

For nearly a thousand years, the Catholic Church relied almost exclusively on the Latin Bible. But figures such as William Tyndale and Martin Luther insisted that God’s word should be accessible in the language of the people. Going back to the sources meant studying the Bible in its original languages and letting Scripture itself shape belief and practice.

This impulse was influenced by Renaissance humanism, a movement very different from modern secular humanism. Renaissance humanists reacted against the heavy speculation of medieval scholasticism. Instead of debating layers of commentary, they emphasized close reading of ancient texts, practical learning, and moral formation. Their goal was not abstract theory, but wisdom that shaped real life.

The Renaissance had its weaknesses, sometimes valuing usefulness over truth. Yet it laid essential groundwork for the European Reformation and later American Restoration (1790-1850). Scholars such as Erasmus of Rotterdam helped recover ancient texts and sharpen attention to Scripture. Reformers like John Calvin and later Restorationist leaders in the United States, like Alexander Campbell, took this commitment seriously, devoting themselves to careful study of the biblical text and encouraging ordinary believers to engage God’s word with both mind and heart.

For everyday faith, *ad fontes* reminds us that renewal comes from returning again and again to Scripture itself. Traditions, teachers, and tools are valuable, but they must never replace direct engagement with God’s word.

*What habits could help you return more regularly and attentively
to Scripture as the primary source for shaping your faith?*