

30 years, the Boston Church of Christ/International Churches of Christ

1979 was a year that included many significant events in my life. My parents moved houses, so I attended a different grade school and made new friends. I remember a total solar eclipse that year – very exciting as a kid, and many notable newsworthy events (Voyageur I making its closest approach to Jupiter, Margaret Thatcher becoming England’s Prime Minister, Joe Clark becoming Canada’s 16<sup>th</sup> and youngest prime minister, the Iran hostage crisis, the Susan B. Anthony dollar coin being introduced into the United States, and the invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union). Yet none of these would impact me so much as another quiet event in 1979.

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 will mark the thirtieth birthday of the Boston Church of Christ and the International Churches of Christ (hereby annotated “ICoC”) movement, at least according to Kip McKean, its founder, and former top leader. McKean records:

During my last year in Charleston, the elders of the Lexington Church of Christ in Massachusetts, contacted me to be their pulpit and campus minister. Though this mainline church was desperate as they considered closing their doors because their number had shrunk to about 30, I hesitated for five months. I told the people in that congregation that in order for me to come, every member must vow to become (in the terminology of that day) "totally committed."

On June 1, 1979, history was made as 30 would be disciples gathered on a Friday night in the living room of Bob and Pat Gempel.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years is sufficient time to make some sense of the beginnings and movements within this denomination.

To really understand this movement, we must backtrack to the movement’s roots, the genesis of its methodologies, in the Fourteenth Street Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida (later renamed the Crossroads Church of Christ), and some of the Discipling or Shepherding Movement that had started there.

A certain Dr. Juan Carlos Ortiz, who had been an ordained minister of the Christian Assemblies of Argentina, was the pastor of the largest Evangelical church in Buenos Aires, Argentina, between 1966-1978. During that time, he came to Fort Lauderdale, Florida to give presentations, and influenced a number of teachers and leaders, including the Fort Lauderdale Five (Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Don Basham, Charles Simpson, and Ern Baxter), some leaders in the (mainline) Church of Christ, and several movements which have now distanced themselves from these forms of shepherding or discipleship (Maranatha/Tree of Life/Every Nation, Campus Crusade for Christ, and the Navigators). Ortiz had been very successful at mobilizing cell churches in Argentina in the 1960’s, an idea that involved empowered small groups or house churches to mature Christians and to enfold Christians into community and discipleship. Ortiz would speak of five elements: 1) devotion, involving prayer, worship, praise, confession, and breaking before the Lord, 2) discussion of the Word of God, 3) programming, 4) mobilization, and 5) multiplication.<sup>2</sup> Some of his ideas would find root within the Fourteenth Street/Crossroads

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<sup>1</sup> McKean, Kip. “Revolution through Restoration” (1992).

<sup>2</sup> Ortiz, Juan Carlos, with Jamie Buckingham. “Call to Discipleship,” pp. 106-7. Logos International, 1975. Also Ortiz, Juan Carlos. “Disciple,” pp. 139-140. Creation House, 1975.

Church of Christ and later the Boston and International Church of Christ, including top-down discipleship (i.e., discipleship starts with pastors and then is brought down to each and every member), that every member was called to evangelism, that Jesus was calling people to discipleship (and that discipleship involved making other disciples) and not just membership within the church, that submission to human authority was necessary, and if necessary, breaking out of current traditions or denominations.

Unfortunately as many discipling or shepherding movements found out, structuring a pyramidal or one-over-one hierarchy, where every member would be required to be disciplined by “more mature” or senior members would cause a system rife with abuse. Lord Acton once articulated the opinion that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” A Christianity Today article in 1975 expresses:

A dispute is taking place over issues of authority and discipleship. Powerful figures in the movement have built up a chain of command linking many local groups around the country to themselves. . . . Discipleship involves submission to the shepherd as he points the way-and points out flaws in behavior. . . . Some travel to Ft. Lauderdale to receive training directly from Mumford and his colleagues. . . . Those being disciplined must consult with their shepherd about many personal decisions. In some cases, shepherds forbid marriages, reject school and vocational plans, demand confession of secret sins. . .<sup>3</sup>

Often the people placed in charge would give “advice” in the forms of commands on matters that they had no expertise. In some cases, there were outright abuses of power. When sinful human beings are placed in a position that only the Triune Godhead was supposed to take, then such a system will be ripe for abuse.

### **Crossroads**

Where would McKean learn his brand of discipleship? The Fourteenth Street Church of Christ (later renamed the Crossroads Church of Christ) would introduce a campus ministry program, Campus Advance, at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida in 1967, where McKean attended. While Church of Christ campus ministries, like many campus ministries, prior to this time had tended to circle the wagons and to protect Christian student members from the worldly influences felt at secular colleges, Campus Advance was a strongly recruitment-oriented pilot project. Gainesville’s Fourteenth Street Church of Christ had hired a new campus minister in Chuck Lucas.<sup>4</sup> Influenced from a variety of sources, including para-church campus ministries such as the Navigators and Campus Crusade and books like Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism*,<sup>5</sup> Lucas developed two highly successful methods which would characterize his church and the later ICoC denomination. First, recruitment would be the primary goal, and the second of control, later termed "discipling."

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<sup>3</sup> Plowman, Edward E. "The Deepening Rift in the Charismatic Movement" in "Christianity Today", 1975, pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Rick Rowland, "The History of Campus Ministry," Campus Journal 32 (Summer, 1990): 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963).

Recruitment was the responsibility and a priority, if not the highest priority of every member. Two practices were characteristic to his practice of “discipling”: prayer partner and soul talks. Prayer partners paired up new converts with more senior members. The senior (or deemed more mature) Christian was to give spiritual advice and direction to the younger Christian in a one-on-one relationship. Soul talks involved small group Bible studies discussing Bible-related issues with non-Christians. In Chuck Lucas’ own words:

Members of the Soul Talks attend consistently, invite visitors, and assist the leader with relevant comments on the topic. The leader selects appropriate topics and scriptures for each week's evangelistic Bible discussion. . . . While there are many Soul Talks available at different time and places during the week, the average member attends only one Soul Talk per week. Soul Talks provide every member of a congregation an opportunity to be personally involved in an organized evangelistic outreach. In our ministry we have found it to be the most effective tool or method of personal evangelism that we've ever used or heard of. . . . While designed specifically to be evangelistic and to reach non-Christians, the Soul Talk is valuable for Christians in learning more of God's Word, and especially for recent converts and young Christian.<sup>6</sup>

Marty Wooten comments that in addition to evangelism, the soul talk leader was responsible for seeing that the expectations of the elders and ministers of the congregation were implemented by the members of the soul talk and was therefore given delegated authority over group members.<sup>7</sup>

The concepts are simple. The first principle is that the church should have a singular focus. If every member of a church is focused on recruitment, especially on numerical growth, then a church will grow. And of course, people have a tendency to be led by the Holy Spirit to the four corners of the earth. Some go to graduate school in other cities, states, or countries. Others take jobs elsewhere. Yet others move to be closer to their family. The second principle, to maintain a stable membership, is that every member needs to be tied by to the church with a discipler, a spiritual mentor, who would advise the mentee what to do.

The result of these practices was a highly successful ministry whose membership grew rapidly. So successful was the program that the Crossroads Church of Christ set up its own school of ministry and trained over 80 individuals for full-time ministry within the Mainline Churches of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Denunciations soon followed the successes, however. Charges of "cultism" from the secular media<sup>9</sup> began to surface in the late 1970s. Critics claimed that prayer partners and soul

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<sup>6</sup> Chuck Lucas, "Soul Talks," At the Crossroads, 14 October 1979, 1, 3; quoted in Wooten, "The Boston Movement as a 'Revitalization Movement,'" 85-86.

<sup>7</sup> Wooten, "The Boston Movement as a 'Revitalization Movement,'" 86.

<sup>8</sup> Wooten, "The Boston Movement as a 'Revitalization Movement,'" 46.

<sup>9</sup> See the following articles which appeared in the Gainesville Sun on 17 February 1979: Bob Arndorfer, "Crossroads: Its Dramatic Growth Is Accompanied by Reputation of Aggressiveness, Mind Control," B1-B2; Bob Arndorfer, "Commitment Exists, Pressure Does Not, Says Lucas," B1-B2; Maryfran Johnson, "Ex-Crossroader Assists People In Leaving Religious Groups," B1-B2. See also Jeanne Pugh, "Fundamentalist Church Gathers Campus Converts . . . and Critics," St. Petersburg Times, 21 July 1979, 1, 4) and Church of Christ periodicals (See the following articles which appeared in the Gospel Advocate in 1979: T. Pierce Brown, "Cultism in the Church," (22 February 1979): 114,121; Ira North, "Comments from the Editor," (24 May 1979): 331-35; Harvey Floyd, "The

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talks, which emphasized "in-depth involvement of each member in one another's lives,"<sup>10</sup> led to manipulation and abuse of members.

However, the Crossroads Church of Christ ended up opposing the Boston Movement by 1988.<sup>11</sup> In August 1990, the Crossroads Church of Christ issued a statement of repentance for past abuses in an attempt to once again be accepted by mainstream Churches of Christ,<sup>12</sup> the relationship between them is clear: (1) the leader of the Boston Movement, Kip McKean, was converted and trained at Crossroads by Chuck Lucas, (2) many of the other leaders of the Boston Movement were trained at Crossroads, and (3) Crossroads developed the blueprint for the methods that were later expanded and refined by the Boston Movement.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Heritage Chapel Church of Christ (Charleston, IL)**

Like many others at the Crossroads Church of Christ, McKean was trained to begin campus evangelism programs similar to Campus Advance in established mainline Churches of Christ around the United States. Some time after his graduation, in 1976, McKean was invited to initiate such a program at Heritage Chapel Church of Christ in Charleston, Illinois, to bolster the campus ministry at Eastern Illinois University. Though numerically successful (he increased student membership from 20 to 180 between 1976-1979), the local newspaper printed articles which charged that "tactics of manipulation and control were being used in the church program." The leaders of the congregation supported McKean, saying they did not "apologize for wanting to share Christ with people."

However, by 1977, as reports of abuse were becoming more widespread and various elders of the Memorial Drive Church of Christ, the parent church to Heritage Chapel, had investigated McKean's methods, the elders of the Memorial Drive Church of Christ confronted Kip McKean and his Crossroads accomplice, Roger Lamb, about problematical practices and abuses. Some items that they named specifically included: McKean and Lamb excessively focused on numerical growth, and growth should not be limited to that; that prayer partners required confession of intimate sins, employed intimidation and peer pressure to conform to human judgmental standards, was "artificially supported Christianity"; that McKean and Lamb had their members focus too much time (every waking hour) on evangelism; and that there was an elitist attitude in this ministry. The Memorial Drive Church of Christ subsequently withdrew financial support to McKean and Lamb, although the two remained there for nearly two more years.<sup>14</sup>

### **Lexington and Boston Church of Christ: Growth, Plantings, and Reconstructions**

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"Total Commitment' Evangelistic Movement," (15 March 1979): 161, 168-69. Much of this material was also from Russell Paden's Master's thesis at the University of Kansas, 1992: "From the Churches of Christ to the Boston Movement: A Comparative Study." <http://www.reveal.org/library/history/paden.html>

<sup>10</sup> Wooten, "The Boston Movement as a 'Revitalization Movement,'" 86-87.

<sup>11</sup> Jerry Jones, What Does the Boston Movement Teach? vol. 2, 8-10

<sup>12</sup> Glover Shipp, "Crossroads Seeks Restoration," The Christian Chronicle 47 (August 1990), 1, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Wooten, "The Boston Movement as a 'Revitalization Movement,'" 4.

<sup>14</sup> Burkhardt, Delbert. "Letter to Wayne Geiling of the Heritage Chapel Church of Christ from the Elders of the Memorial Church of Christ," found on <http://www.kipmckean.com/Documents/Memorial%20Drive.pdf>; see also The Elders of the Memorial Church of Christ: "Announcement from the Memorial Drive Church of Christ to the Congregation regarding Withdrawal of Support to Kip McKean and Roger Lamb," found on <http://www.kipmckean.com/Documents/NoSupport.pdf>

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As Kip McKean describes, the Lexington (Massachusetts) Church of Christ had dwindled to only thirty members. They were considering whether to close their doors and perhaps merge with the nearby Burlington Church of Christ (the next town over). However, upon hearing of McKean's "success," they invited him to be their pulpit minister.

McKean used the Crossroads methodologies, those he had practiced at Eastern Illinois University, and indeed, the Lexington Church of Christ grew very rapidly. They nearly tripled membership within six months, and multiplied their congregation by over four-fold within a year of McKean's arrival. Within a couple years, they renamed themselves the Boston Church of Christ with several hundred members, and by 1986, they had over 1800 members.

McKean's desire and ambition was not limited to Boston. His church gathered those trained by the Crossroads movement and sent them out to other cities: Chicago (1982); London, England (1982); New York City (1983); Toronto, Canada (1985); Johannesburg, South Africa (1986); Paris, France (1986); Stockholm Sweden (1986). McKean also found sympathizers within the Mainline Churches of Christ, who were not just satisfied with maintaining their church size, but were interested in employing the methods of Crossroads to revitalize and to grow their congregation. McKean who often have an exchange of leadership: the leadership of the churches moved to Boston for training, and his Boston-trained staff replace the former leaders. This process was known as reconstruction; McKean reconstructed a number of churches, including Kingston, Jamaica (1986). Jerry Jones explains:

Any congregation that wanted to come under the leadership of the Boston Church of Christ had to submit to reconstruction. In a reconstruction, the existing "corporate church" is dissolved and renamed in accordance with the city in which it is located. Most (if not all) of the present leaders resign their positions and are sent to other ministries for retraining. The Boston Church of Christ sends in leaders to help in the reconstruction, with some of these imported leaders remaining to lead the church. Anyone who wants to be a member of this "new church" must "recount" the cost: During this interview, his conversion and commitment to Christ are questioned. This "interview" and "recounting the cost" results in the rebaptism of many "Christians."<sup>15</sup>

Based on his inner circle's statements, McKean was interested in empire-building. In fact, all of the leaders of the other churches still reported back to him, and even within this brief period, a pyramidal structure, due to the practice of discipling, was formed, with McKean as its top leader.

However, even within this time period, there were symptoms of a problematic system. Former members of the Boston Church of Christ and its affiliates recorded charges of spiritual elitism (the Boston Church of Christ and at the time, the Boston "Movement" thought themselves as either superior Christians, if not the only Christians) and heavy-handed legalism and brow-beating practices. The use of the word "cult" was fairly prevalent. Some within the Mainline Churches of Christ resented McKean's empire building at the expense of existing congregations. Reconstructions were much akin to a hostile take-over.

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<sup>15</sup> "What Does The Boston Movement Teach?" Vol. 2, p. 39

One of the most interesting developments was the publication of the results of research by a church-growth expert, Flavil Yeakley Jr. Yeakley had served as the director of Church Growth Institute at Abilene Christian College where the spokesman and elder of the Boston Church of Christ, Al Baird, had matriculated. Baird and McKean were proud of their church's growth, and wanted to flaunt their amazing numerical growth to a church growth expert, perhaps to document or to praise them as a model. Unbeknownst to them, Yeakley had also studied deviant and manipulative sects (e.g., the Church of Scientology, Hare Krishna, Unification Church, and the Way International) and contrasted the results of the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to more healthy mainstream denominations (such as Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian). With deviant and manipulative sects, Yeakley found an unhealthy trend the longer a member was involved with the deviant movement, the more likely to change and the more pronounced the change of personality to the group norm, often one or two of the sixteen possible personality profiles, whereas healthy denominations did not see whole-scale personality shift. Yeakley conducted studies with the Boston Movement, starting in 1985, and ending some time in 1987. While Yeakley was amazed at the dramatic growth of the Boston Church of Christ, he also called it a mixed blessing. He urged the leadership of the Boston Church of Christ to desist in their form of discipling, and only after repeated attempts fell on deaf ears would he finally publish his book, "The Discipling Dilemma" in 1988. Yeakley would conclude:

"... those six groups that I have chosen to call 'manipulative sects' are clearly producing unnatural and unhealthy personality changes. ... the Boston Church of Christ is producing in its members the very same pattern of unhealthy personality change that is observed in studies of well-known manipulative sects. Whatever they are doing that produces this pattern needs to be changed."<sup>16</sup>

### **Schism from the Mainline Churches of Christ**

Due to mounting criticism within the Mainline Churches of Christ camp, the firing of Chuck Lucas (McKean's mentor and teacher) from Crossroads in 1985, and defections of membership and leadership (including the aforementioned Dr. Jerry Jones, Th.D., one of the earliest and most well-respected former theologians within the Boston Church of Christ who would become one of their most vocal early opponents), McKean and the Boston Church of Christ would split from the Mainline Churches of Christ. In late 1986, Kip McKean believed that he had discovered a "new truth" in Matthew 28:18-20, namely that the candidate for baptism was a disciple, and that the Boston Church of Christ and the rest of the Mainline Churches of Christ had many weak members because they had failed (in his poor exegesis) obey the commandment of Jesus, to only baptize disciples. (Of course this is a faulty reading and interpretation of the text, and McKean did not take time to study the original texts in Greek.) McKean would go on to publicize this teaching initially at "Perfectly United," the Boston Church of Christ 1987 Women's retreat:

"I really believe, sisters, we need to get it on straight who is a candidate for baptism. It is the individual who is a disciple. You say, "Well, now, brother, that's not been taught through the years so often in the Church of Christ." What does the book say? You say "Well, now, brother, we didn't even use that terminology back in the early days at Crossroads." . . . I think we also need to appreciate our roots in

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<sup>16</sup> Yeakley Jr., Flavil R. "The Discipling Dilemma", p. 37. Gospel Advocate Company, Second Edition, 1988. Found also at <http://www.somis.org/TDD-01.html>.

the Crossroads church. But you've got to understand that we are a process of restoration. The Holy Spirit is working and it is not that new truths are being revealed, but that old truths are becoming clearer. . . . The Bible says that after they converts are baptized (and you only baptize disciples), then you are to teach them to obey everything the Lord has commanded. You see, I think we've got to really get it on straight right here. Why do people who come into our fellowships have so much struggle when they come in? . . . I think they are uncomfortable when they come on in because they have never been disciples in the first place. You see what happens is after a period of weeks and months, maybe even years, in our fellowship they get hammered around enough they eventually become disciples, but just for the first time have they become disciples. They think, "Well, I'm still okay because I was baptized to get saved many years ago." Let me tell you something, if you have struggled to come into our fellowships, and even now you're a high-powered sister, I praise God that you are a disciple. But all the commitment in the world, and even being a disciple, does not save you. You must respond to Jesus with the commitment of a disciple and then and only then can you be baptized to be saved."

McKean charged that only his movement was correctly teaching on the matter of baptism, which was a matter of salvation, and therefore only his movement was "God's movement" and by implication nobody else was truly a Christian, nor were they saved. McKean challenged everyone to consider their own baptism, and every member had to meet with the church's leadership to review their life and their baptism, and many were re-baptized at this point, believing that they had not believed correctly on the matter of baptism when they were baptized. Rebaptisms continued to occur to this day: if any member was having difficulty or "struggling" with a sin in their lives, it would be attributed to having an invalid conversion. Transferring from one church to another would often result in a rebaptism.

At this point many of the studies in the study sequence known as "First Principles" and their core doctrine would crystallize. What makes this particular group difficult is that they would affirm, like the Mainline Churches of Christ that they only believe in the Bible. However, we all have our favorite passages and passages we do not understand as well, and to have a balanced diet of the Word of God, it is helpful either to preach through the entire books exegetically, or to use a lectionary, or to have a Systematic Theology, which addresses the various Christian doctrines (as the Bible is not generally arranged by doctrine). The "First Principles" was a study sequence which was designed to convince people they were indeed not Christians, that if they had a previous church background, that this church was not following God, that the person was a sinner and personally crucified God (without immediately providing mention of grace), that God only has one church in mind and that the correct church was the ICoC, that water baptism was a requirement for the forgiveness of sins and salvation and forgiveness of sins was acquired at the moment of full immersion in water, and that any other belief was faulty and had you believed otherwise, you were not a Christian. Many potential recruits were also required to write out a full list of sins, which were perused by members (some new members to their chagrin found out the long memory and lack of forgiveness of the members as they recalled the new member's sins prior to conversion, and in some occasions, lists of sins were stored on church computers and were reviewed by ICoC leaders). Many of these Bible studies would start innocuously, such as

with the Word study, that affirmed the Bible as the Word of God, which was a commonly held belief to many Protestants. However, many of the studies would have a twist, such as the Word of God study would draw the inference that the ICoC's interpretation of the Bible was the only valid one. The Discipleship study would look at the definition of a Christian, but would members would use various Scriptures to systematically eliminate any possibility that that the potential recruit was in fact a Christian (for instance, pointing out that if the person did not cold-contact evangelize, this was evidence the person was not a Christian).

The studies are designed and administered by often several members with only one non-member potential recruit. The notes are recorded only by members, so they are designed to reinforce points that the ICoC desired you to remember. Potential recruits were also presented this as "studying the Bible together," which sounds like mutual sharing, but this was more like "a group indoctrination session" where members were trying to teach the ICoC's interpretation of the Scriptures and doctrines. The studies were administered in such a way that until potential recruits accepted all major points of the study, the next study was not tackled, so that the culmination of all of the studies would be a newly indoctrinated member. Upon a final "Counting the Cost" study, where a potential recruit would renounce previous membership (if he or she had one), and pledged to follow only the ICoC as the only way, the person was then baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

Perhaps this is a good point to present some of the distinctive beliefs of the ICoC. If shown a major creed like the Nicene Creed, the ICoC's leadership or membership would affirm all the points. However, it is not their confessional theology that is largely at fault; it is more with their operant theology (what they do is much more indicative about what they believe than what they say or confess). In terms of confessional theology, like the Mainline Churches of Christ, they affirm that the proper candidates of baptism are adults or teenagers who can make a profession of faith, and like the Mainline Churches of Christ, one has to hear (the Word of God), believe, repent, confess, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, in a true church, and upon further clarification, this is one of the ICoC. They also believe that baptism within an errant church (e.g., one that had taught "wrong" or "false" doctrine, in their eyes, which was all other churches, and also did not teach "discipleship" in the form of discipling) was not a valid baptism. Al Baird, the ICoC's spokesman, was asked in 2000 by Charisma magazine whether he/the ICoC believed there was any other Christian group in the United States that is part of the church established by Jesus, he replied, "We haven't encountered any other denominational group that follows the teachings of the Bible."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the "kingdom of God" was equated to the ICoC, such that the Holy Spirit and God only worked through the ICoC, and often leaders would use the Holy Spirit, God, and (their) church interchangeably.

During the summer between my junior and senior years at college, being a bit of a renegade and believing there to be Christians outside of the Boston Church of Christ, I asked the other Evangelical Christian ministries why they cooperated so well together and why they did not cooperate with the Boston Church of Christ's group on campus, the Christian Students Association. The leaders from the other Christian ministries replied that the Boston Church of Christ did not believe they were truly Christians and were only interested in sheep-stealing, not

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<sup>17</sup> Minor, Kyle. "Is It a Church Or a Campus Cult?" Charisma Magazine, 30 September 2000.  
<http://charismamag.com/index.php/features2/291-developing-discernment/599-is-it-a-church-or-a-campus-cult>



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cooperation, so they returned the favor. I tried to bring the two parties to an amicable dialogue, but the Boston Church of Christ's campus leader at the time merely concluded that they were good-hearted believers, but not Christians, based on their (what he deemed) "faulty understanding of baptism."

### **Increased Numbers and Increased Controversy**

However, with continued emphasis on numerical growth and having every member focusing on recruitment, McKean would continue to rapidly grow his movement until it was finally recognized in 1992 by Church growth authority John Vaughan as "The International Churches of Christ."

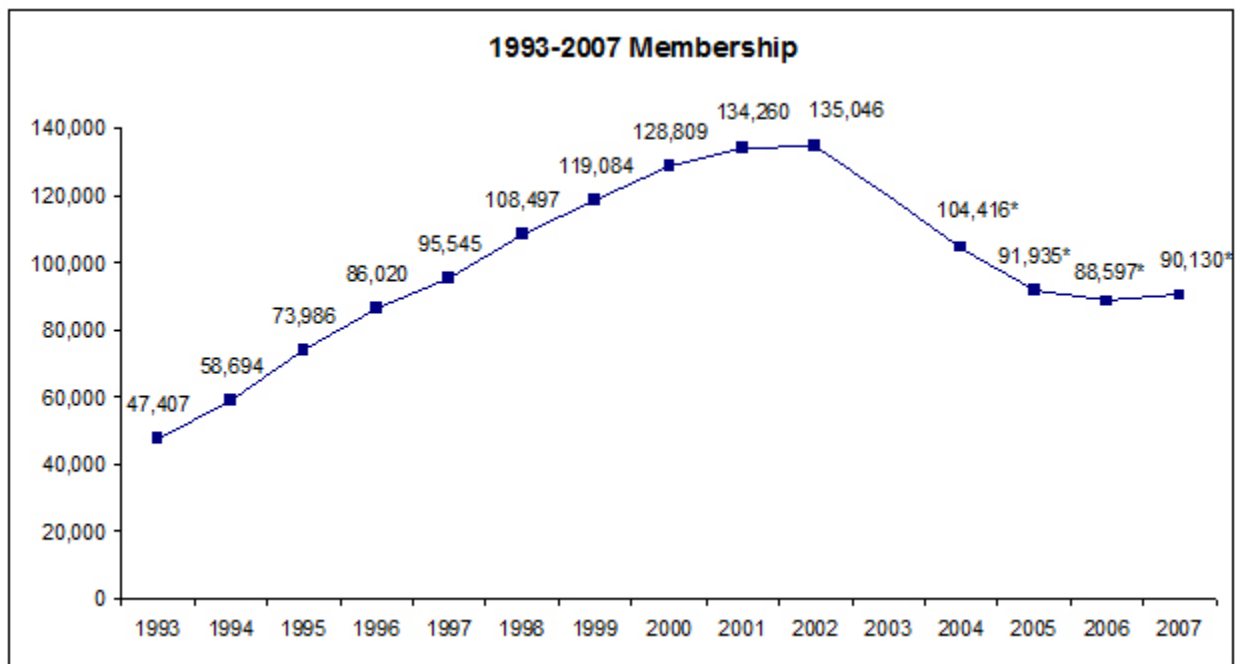


Figure 1: Growth of the ICoC Membership as reported and calculated by their own sources.<sup>18</sup>

During this time, controversy continued to mount. Dr. Jerry Jones would publish three volumes of analyses, ranging from pointing out poor doctrine and heavy-handed practices, and even stories of former leaders and members and their experiences with the Boston Church of Christ and Boston Movement in his "What Does the Boston Movement Teach?" (volumes 1-3). Former members published numerous articles in college and local newspapers and even more of them had silently suffered at the hands of the ICoC. Various people charged that this church took over their lives, required them to go to many meetings, and that they were required to confess their most private sins or intimate details of their lives to those who barely knew them and often had no expertise nor training to deal with these. Former members also spoke of how they were often "advised" in a tone of command where the expectation of the "advice" was to be obeyed, and the "advice" ranged on a number of non-biblical matters such as what to wear, how to talk, how to do make up, whom to date, whom to marry, and where to live. Certain "sins" were singled out for rebuke, such as "being independent (thinking for oneself and not asking for "advice"), being

<sup>18</sup> Found on <http://www.missionmemo.org/stats/totalmembership.html>

“selfish” (wanting some introversion or alone-time and not “encouraging” others), not blindly trusting leadership, questioning leadership, rebelliousness (not following advice). Some of these sins were recorded and kept on church computers, called sin lists, and included various disparaging comments on members.<sup>19</sup> Other former members noted that conditional love that they received as members, i.e., so long as they were members in good standing (doing what the church was telling them), they felt acceptance. As soon as they were no longer members or disagreed with church policies or doctrine, they were attacked or ostracized. Many former members reported being compelled to evangelize under quotas, needing a certain number of visitors for this service or studying with this many people, or having spoken with a certain number of people per day. Many former members recalled “breaking sessions,” where groups of members would berate them for various sins for hours and hours, and others recalled event inventing sins that they had not committed so they would no longer be grilled. Married members were asked intrusive questions about various aspects of their married lives. Some members and former members noticed their grades drop or dropped out of college all together. Some college students who had been unsuccessfully recruited complained of harassment or high pressure tactics by the members. Various colleges, including Boston University, Holy Cross, Brown, Harvard, Marquette, Vanderbilt, and numerous others across the US and abroad, have since banned the ICoC. Many of these campuses had to kick the ICoC off their campuses to protect their students from high pressure tactics. Brown stated that since many of the members had a downward trend for grade-point average and some even dropped out, that “it was against the academic charter of their school.” They have since returned to these campuses under the guise of other organizations such as “Alpha Omega,” “Campus Advance,” or “Christian Students Association” (at my alma mater), pretending to be a “non-denominational church.” Family members and friends have noticed how their loved ones would get involved and change to be someone totally unrecognizable, and even cut off the relationship, even if the friend or family member was a Bible-believing Christian. While the ICoC reported that “there were no known divorces between two member spouses in good standing,” divorce was often encouraged between a member spouse and a recalcitrant or reluctant non-member spouse (in outright disobedience and defiance of 1Cor. 7), encouraged by leaders of the ICoC and making the member spouse think that it was a “choice between God and his or her spouse.”

Some critics also called attention to deception in two specific areas: in recruitment and in financial giving. In terms of recruitment, I have mentioned that the ICoC has not been forthright about their association, especially when they have been kicked off campus. Even as a former member, when I’ve been approached by a member of the ICoC and I have asked about where the person worships, the person has looked uncomfortable and said “A non-denominational church.” In a BBC interview in 1993, Al Baird revealed he was willing to ignore laws and lie in order to preach Christ. Regarding financial giving, the ICoC until recently has taken a “Special Missions Contribution,” where members have pledged a certain sacrificial sum of money to be given to their church. During my time, this sum was 15-25 times the weekly amount. Unfortunately, leaders have not been forthright about the methods by which funds are solicited, nor the intended recipient(s) of the funds. Some leaders claimed that they were selling their houses or engagement rights to give to the special missions contribution, but failed to disclose that the church was purchasing a bigger or better or more expensive house or engagement ring after the contribution

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<sup>19</sup> Such a sin list can be found on REVEAL.org: “Toxic Christianity” page 123-124, <http://www.reveal.org/development/Toxic.pdf>

30 years, the Boston Church of Christ/International Churches of Christ

was taken. In terms of recipients, former members and some more wary members have questioned exactly where these funds have benefited and the answers are rather lacking.

As a recruit, I was not made aware of controversy surrounding the Boston Church of Christ, the Boston Movement, and the ICoC by other members. I only heard about such controversy from other Christians, including my best friend from high school (ironically warning about this church before I went off to Boston for college) and other Christians at my college campus, when they learned of my involvement with the Boston Church of Christ. It would only be after my involuntary departure that I understood this movement better, and come upon the countless articles, documentaries and analyses which would criticize this denomination.

In 1994, there would be a significant schism within the ICoC, as an entire city's church in Indianapolis, Indiana, would rise up and break fellowship with the ICoC in 1994. The leader of this church worked with other staff and his whole leadership to present his findings of unbiblical practices within the ICoC, including legalism and emphasis on quotas and numerical growth (over spiritual growth, which is not often visible). However, McKean and other top level leadership within the ICoC would move in and squelch information and caused a rift. McKean would write about this event in "Revolution through Restoration II" (1994) that the leader of the Indianapolis church, Ed Powers, was like Korah, and that Powers was grumbling against God's leaders (namely McKean) was in fact, opposing God.

At least two more churches and large segments of other churches were dissolved or disciplined by the ICoC leadership including Nairobi, Kenya, and Milan, Italy, for questioning ICoC policies (especially financial policies) or doctrine (especially those of that the "ICoC is the only true movement of God" and legalism). The ICoC has largely claimed that these people left due to "unrepented sin" (including alleging immorality) in trying to dismiss these charges. While there have been some who have left on more shady grounds, there are also many leaders who have left who were convicted of the problems within the ICoC, and who could no longer, in good conscience, remain as faithful leaders or members within the fellowship.

I can personally witness many of the aforementioned charges against the ICoC, but recalling many instances only after having been a member. Upon leaving, I was wondering where I got so much free time, and I realized that I had been participating in so many church meetings. Some quick mental math revealed that an average member might spend a minimum of twelve hours a week between church meetings excluding travel time, such as Sunday morning worship, midweek or "family group", one-on-one time with a mentor (or "discipler"), an evangelistic "Bible Talk," and other various meetings that crept in (all church workshops, Friday night devotionals, Love Your Neighbor Day, missions conferences, Women's Days, "highly encouraged" church-hangout-dates, and so on). The lowest level leader might spend 30-40 hours a week between all these things and mentoring time and leadership training time and so on. Imagine that and being a full-time student – no wonder so many students' grade point averages suffered. Moreover, of claims of manipulation and control, I can also attest that leadership meetings often contained material about how to manipulate people.

In this time period of the mid-1990's, information was being disseminated through the Internet, and I learned of the events of Indianapolis through an internet bulletin board known as

alt.religion.christian.boston-church. The internet began to be a powerful vehicle for gathering people from all over the globe, members and former members, who were experiencing so many of the same problems due to a perilous system. We all realized that our experiences were not alone and that the practices of the ICoC had been criticized and condemned many times in the past, often by more reputable and more scholarly analyses, only to fall on deaf ears. It was once said that the fastest growing denomination in America was the ICoC, but this is now the former members of the ICoC, whose estimated numbers are anywhere from double to quadruple the current membership. The Reformer Martin Luther was said to tirelessly quote from Matthew 7:17-20, regarding the good tree producing good fruit, and the bad tree producing bad fruit. I believe it to be applicable here, to wonder what kind of fruit, or results, the ICoC has produced on its members and former members.

Aghast that this information was not publicly available, the formation of a website began in 1995, REVEAL<sup>20</sup>, organized by a couple of former members on a home computer, which eventually became a repository of stories, analyses, articles, and much more, trying to accurately represent and document the ICoC, but also trying to offer constructive criticism. At this juncture, I offered my story as one of the first half-dozen or so, and joined the board of directors in 1997 and upon finishing my time at Gordon-Conwell became executive director. REVEAL did assist with recovery efforts, established some support groups, and disseminated information on the ICoC to help members, former members, and loved ones and friends of those involved to have a more informed view on this group. REVEAL also publicized much not well-known information such as H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Everyone) and the association with the ICoC.

### **McKean's Resignation to the Portland Church to Another Schism**

In 2001, Kip McKean announced he was resigning from leadership to take a sabbatical to work on unspecified marriage and family problems. It was well-known that his daughter, while at Harvard, was not fellowshiping with the Boston Church of Christ. When other leaders had children who were not members of the church, McKean had been harsh in removing them out of leadership, and many returned the favor. Prior to this point in time, he was the top leader, the leader of the World Sector Leaders. At this time as well, the economy of the United States had slowed down and we had a small recession, which also resulted in drastic loss of giving within the ICoC. Numerous staff members were removed from the payroll, and increased dissatisfaction within the churches led to some town hall meetings and inquiry.

In 2003, a leader (whose title was evangelist) within the London Church of Christ, Henry Kriete, would write a letter<sup>21</sup> which validated many of the observations and expositions leveled by former members and other critics of the church. After some time, the ICoC, under pressure from its own membership, published the letter for a short time. Kriete's letter was the catalyst for a number of members – even long-time members – to finally leave what they saw as a corrupt system. However, for a number that stayed, the letter sparked some desire of reform.

Ironically in the same year, the Portland Church of Christ was dwindling and some leaders in an adjacent church asked Kip McKean to meet with the Portland Church of Christ and to take it over. McKean would apply his methodology again and rapidly grow the Portland Church of

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<sup>20</sup> [www.reveal.org](http://www.reveal.org)

<sup>21</sup> Henry Kriete's letter, "Honest To God," can be found at <http://www.reveal.org/library/stories/people/hkriete.htm>

Christ. He would attempt to garner support within the ICoC to his vision, what he believed was God's vision.

In 2004 and onward, three factions<sup>22</sup> emerged from within the ICoC remnants. The first recognized many abuses as detailed in the Kriete letter, and strived to reform. Some churches invited former critics, others reconciled with their Mainline Churches of Christ brethren, yet others distanced from former ICoC practices and hierarchy. A second group, by far the majority, wanted some degree of reform and change, but did not want to “overreact”. They believed that change and thus reform would eventually occur. A third group or subgroup felt that the first two factions had moved too far away from “hard-lined” teachings and that they had become too soft. Some have wanted a return to one-over-one discipling and quotas and an emphasis on recruitment and even denounced church autonomy as ‘unbiblical’. This third group, as I mentioned, by and large had some who did not want Kip McKean to return to his role as leader of the World Sector Leaders, but some did.

As McKean attempted to call the fellowship of the ICoC to his vision, many of the other leaders within the ICoC united against him, and they wrote two rebukes. First, sixty-five of the leaders around the world had written him a request on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005 as a form of a rebuke<sup>23</sup> and when McKean did not respond, a few weeks later on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005 wrote a statement to him not to divide the church<sup>24</sup>. Some of the items addressed in the latter were Kip's sense of elitism and arrogance, his anger, disrespect, gossip and slander over other churches and their members, ungodly ethics, only reaching out to the “sharp” (the successful and the beautiful), and divisiveness (that he was trying to call members to his vision out of the ICoC).

As a result, in 2006, McKean dubbed those who were faithful to his vision the “Sold Out Discipling Movement” (or more recently in 2009, the “Sold Out Movement”) and upon his return to Los Angeles in 2007, called his movement by “the International Christian Church.” McKean has reverted to some of his tactics of the mid-80's such as church plantings and reconstructions. A number of churches of the ICoC fellowship have set their face against him, and numerous spokesmen have registered censure with various congregations. However, McKean also has a number of congregations in the United States and around the world who have aligned with him, from Washington DC (Washington DC International Christian Church) to Phoenix to Los Angeles (the City of Angels International Christian Church) and more. Even as I complete this article, the Portland Church, which had been led by McKean until 2007, has now returned to fellowship with the ICoC, a surprising turn of events.

At the present time, within the ICoC fellowship, a core group of leaders who are strategizing on what unity looks like, and are trying to formulate and articulate these beliefs, in terms of government, association, and beliefs. I have had several interactions with one of their former “Unity Proposal” council members. Their main website is Disciples Today.<sup>25</sup> This appears to be developing slowly. On the other hand, Kip McKean has formed his own fellowship and

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<sup>22</sup> Lee, Chris. “Three Factions.” 2004, REVEAL.org. <http://www.reveal.org/abouticc/factions.html>

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved from the International Churches of Christ page: <http://www.disciplestoday.org/content/view/432/64/>

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved from the International Churches of Christ page: <http://www.disciplestoday.org/content/view/431/64/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.disciplestoday.org/>

denomination with the International Christian Churches, and their family of churches has their own website.<sup>26</sup>

### **After Words and Lessons**

As a former member and former leader of this denomination, and now a seminary graduate, I have sometimes been called upon by the news or friends or ex-members to give some degree of assessment and summation on the ICoC.

Of my recommendation whether to join the ICoC, my litmus test is whether I would gladly and joyfully encourage a good friend to seek membership within the fellowship of the ICoC, and that answer is no. There are still many systemic problems that have not been address, and it is still on the whole and unhealthy system of churches. I for one have learned so much more about God and about God's grace outside the ICoC, and conclude that there are many healthy vibrant God-honoring and biblical churches that would be fantastic alternatives, so I can hardly give my approval to seeking membership within the ICoC. There are many parallels between spiritual abuse and physical abuse, as former Scientologist Robert Vaughn Young has noted.<sup>27</sup> As with an abusive spouse or significant other, if a former perpetrator declared he's changed, how are we to take that? Sometimes indeed, he has changed. But how do we know this is not just talk? I believe that time will tell, and I have laid out four criteria to help judge whether they have indeed changed.

1. Publicly announce what is or what was wrong, why it is wrong, and what they are doing to curb it or prevent it from recurring.
2. Meet with theologically-sound outside experts. (I do not consider myself an expert, but had suggested the former dean of my seminary, who has had formidable experience mediating conflicts and working with churches.)
3. Real training, requiring evangelists, pastors, and elders to do some continuing education at seminary. A course a year is reasonable.
4. Have a lay-voted committee of people of various appropriate talents manage the books to provide transparency on the financials.

This is not to say that there are a number of lessons that the ICoC can teach the rest of Christendom. Why do so many people, especially good-looking, young, intelligent, well-to-do people join the ICoC? (This church was nicknamed the "yuppy church" by some.) Sure, there is naivety and idealism, which I was certainly guilty of. However, some really are drawn in by the care and by love. I am sorely reminded of this when one of my Christian friends admitted to me that he overeats because he is trying to fill a void, he really wants to be loved, but he can't find that in the Christian church. Jesus did leave us with a commandment, not a divine suggestion: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35 ESV) The measure of Christian love is Jesus' love, a love that would die for his church. And it is the measure of the love of Christians that they have for one another; the primacy of love is to other Christians, and not to non-Christians, and certainly not "love-bombing" (showing significant interest in potential recruits in order to attract them to the

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.caicc.net/churches.php>

<sup>27</sup> <http://groups.google.com/group/alt.religion.scientology/msg/6661d0a7c4b4964a>

group). My first exhortation would be to think about how the Christian church could be more loving: show hospitality to all and bring them into your homes, care deeply for one another and show other Christians the love of Christ.

Second, many people are snared into the ICoC sincerely desire to follow God. Although they are misled by a devious system, I estimate 99% of those who join (or become baptized in) the ICoC want to be Christians. I joined because I prayed for a Bible-believing church, and for some members would teach me about the Bible and how to obey it. I joined because I thought this was how to obey God. So the second thing that I would say is this: this is a reminder to all Christians, all who call themselves followers of his name: we are to be wholly committed to him and set aside for his purposes. It is a call for Christians to committed discipleship. While the ICoC uses the word disciple almost in the sense of a superior (or mature) Christian, all of Jesus' followers – all of his students and those who wish to learn of him and obey him – are disciples, and they were then called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). As Bonhoeffer declared:

Discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship. Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.<sup>28</sup>

If more Christians took seriously the claims of Christ and lived it out, I believe this would be a great preventative against heretical movements and cults.

The third lesson from the ICoC was a reminder from a college friend, remarking that the ICoC members were so zealous and ardent to evangelize/recruit that they both inspired and shamed him. While the ICoC and the International Christian Churches make the primary responsibility of every member and every believer to recruit, and this is probably idolatry, that it must be one of the great responsibilities of ours, in addition to worship, growing in holiness and in the character of Christ, in stewardship and in social justice, but also, evangelism must be one of our priorities as Christians. Evangelism is more than sheep-stealing, taking Christians from other churches, which the ICoC is so good at doing. Evangelism is about speaking the good news of Jesus Christ in a fallen and sinful world, in a fresh and appealing way without losing crucial content.

For those who have had to help former members, this is a very difficult and challenging task. I wish to write some recovery studies and materials within the next year or so. So many, in their earnest desire to follow God have been terribly wounded by an abusive and fatally flawed system. God has been portrayed by the ICoC's actions as a fickle legalistic taskmaster who is conditional in His love, only when you do what He wants. It is estimated that over 90% of the former members no longer consider themselves Christian nor participate in any organized form of religion (let alone Christianity). Many have felt betrayed, their boundaries violated, and suffer from lack of trust (especially upon leaving the ICoC). Many have lost their ability to be "critical" (in a good manner, being able to evaluate good and bad), and many also have lost the ability to make their own decisions due to constantly being required to take advice. Many go through significant depression and symptoms similar to PTSD. My heart breaks for them and much can still be done to alleviate their suffering and help recovery.

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<sup>28</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "The Cost of Discipleship." SCM Press Ltd, First Touchstone Edition, 1995. page 59.