

The International Church of Christ And The churches of Christ

Names really do matter. Coca-Cola and Pepsi believe it matters as do UPS and FedEx. No one wants to be confused with someone else. Unfortunately, the churches of Christ are often confused with other organizations which bear a similar name. The ultra-liberal United Church of Christ is in no way related to the church of which the Eastern Shore church is a part. Likewise, the so-called International Church of Christ is an aberration whose teachings are often foreign to Scripture.

Oddly enough, we now have a small Living Word Church of Christ that meets just down the street from our building. While the name is similar we are not related.

They appear to be Pentecostal/holiness in nature and seem to worship with certain additions to their worship not found in Scripture. It is common in some mid-Atlantic states to find churches of Christ that are actually of the Christian church denomination and make no claim of association with those of us in the south who wear the same name.

Sadly, there are even some churches of Christ that in the past were usually thought sound and devoted to careful application of the Word but have today followed dangerous paths toward liberalism and modernity. Although the name they wear is Biblical, their teachings and services do not mirror original first century doctrine.

The upshot of all of this is that we must be terribly cautious not to assume

that every church named "Church of Christ" is the same for they are not.

Why Not Register or Trademark the Name?

In the first place, we don't "own" the name, at least not the sense that Coke or Pepsi own their names. The name church of Christ is found, in a plural form, in Romans 16:16. Anyone wishing to plant a church and give it a Biblical name may use it or anyone of several other names used in the New Testament. If someone

owned the name they would be in the position of being able to oversee the work of congregations they were not a part of and would become

de facto Bishops over the entire church which is also foreign to Scripture.¹

Second, the name cannot be registered or licensed because in the strictest sense it is not proper noun, that is, it is not a proper name. The phrase in Romans 16:16 is actually a description, not a given name. The Bible teaches that ownership of the church belongs to Jesus Christ as the one who shed his blood for her purchase. Therefore, it is the church which belongs to Christ.

Finally, there is no overseeing body that could license the name for us all. Each congregation is autonomous, that is, it is independent of every other church of Christ and is linked to them only through common membership in the church given by God (Acts 2:47).

While it may be frustrating at times, we simply cannot restrict the use of the

Because these churches have often been in large areas and bear powerful sounding names...some think these are representative of the churches of Christ generally. Let me be clear, THEY ARE NOT."

term to those people of our personal liking. Truthfully, any confusion may serve as an opportunity to teach people about the church and invite them to see for themselves what we teach.

Name Confusion and the Cult Accusations

Since the tragic events in Tennessee recently, the national media have repeatedly erred in their description of the churches of Christ. We have been called "fundamentalist,"² "Pentecostal,"³ and even a "cult."⁴ Each designator is false for various reasons. Rest assured these are generally pejorative terms which carry great baggage to many hearers. However the term that seems to hurt the most is the charge that the churches of Christ are a cult. We know that nothing is further from the truth. Nevertheless, the charge occasionally crops up from uninformed persons. What is a cult? Here is one dictionary definition: "*A religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader.*"⁵ While many would disagree with us on some issues, I am unaware of anyone who considers us extremists. Christians are called to be "unconventional" (Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9) but no one I know suggests any of us live a cult-like life. We are about as normal as anyone else, although that is concerning in its own right.⁶ Specifically however, we do not seek to pull out of the world for our work is in the world (John 17:15-16) nor do we give elevated status to any one man or group of men. Jesus alone is our guide (1 Timothy 2:5).

So if all of the above is accurate, from whence comes the cult charge?

The International Church of Christ⁷

The International Church of Christ (ICOC) is thought a cult by many experts

in the field.⁸ Although some congregations within this group have not been as manipulative as others and although some individual members reject some of the teachings, they are often grouped together for better or worse. We should also say that there have been some changes in recent years with the ICOC and these should be welcomed but there still remains a great cloud of concern over their activities.

Because of their name and because of the early origins within the churches of Christ, we in the so-called mainstream, are often lumped in with them and branded a cult. While some of their teachings and practices are in conformity with the Bible, there is much that has been, and should be repudiated by the church.

The ICOC developed from a movement within the churches of Christ that was often called the "Crossroads Movement." In 1967 the 14th street church (later Crossroads church) in Gainesville, Florida, hired Chuck Lucas as their campus minister. Lucas immediately began an outreach to the nearby University of Florida campus. During his work, Lucas adopted and developed a system of monitoring or mentoring new converts. In addition, Lucas promoted a system of total commitment. Within the mentoring and total commitment systems there were many areas for abuse. Because of the apparent numerical success of the Crossroads church in Gainesville, many other campus serving churches began to implement Lucas' systems.

The abuses included various control techniques in which persons were required to confess minute details of their sins to a senior prayer partner. Allegations soon arose that the embarrassing details of these sins would be made public if the person began to slip and backslide. Other

alleged that every aspect of their lives were controlled even including a requirement that people seek permission before asking someone on a date.

Elders were often at odds with those who were of the Crossroads thinking and strife frequently developed. In the 1970's, elders became very watchful of the Crossroads movement and kept tight reigns on both youth ministers and campus ministers as they tried to prevent "Crossroads" from getting a foothold in their congregations.

In 1977, the Memorial Drive church in Houston, Texas parted ways with two young ministers they were supporting in Illinois.

After his termination, one of the fired ministers, Kip McKean, decided to try a different approach. He found a small almost defunct congregation in Boston and gained authority from church leaders to use his abilities to turn things around. The results were staggering and the numbers of people added were almost unbelievable. In 1981 a new ICOC was planted in New York and in 1982 Chicago and London were added to the group. Soon the Boston based group would succeed Crossroads as the center of the movement.

During the mid 1980's (actually some would say before) the leaders developed a system of "church reconstruction" in which so-called mainline churches would be the targets of a hostile takeover by Boston adherents. At times, people would move into a local church, hide their true intentions until they had converted a sufficient number to their way of thinking. Then they would arise and attempt a take over of the local church.

The Break Between Churches of Christ and the ICOC

In 1986 a well respected researcher examined the Boston Movement churches. His scientific research showed that there were probably significant cult-like practices occurring within the Boston-style churches. Upon publication of his data he was branded an enemy of the church by the Boston Leadership and followers were warned not to communicate with him.

As his research filtered throughout the non-Boston churches, a deeper and deeper rift developed. Soon, Boston demanded that all churches practicing the discipling, mentoring movement succumb to Boston's training and control. Those that refused were no longer considered part of the movement. Hence Boston broke all remaining ties with the mainline churches of Christ.

Our Lord never used mind control techniques nor attempted to manipulate people into obedience. We reject such practices as well as the intricate governing system of the ICOC with "World Sector" leaders and such like. Nor do we accept the financial system used by the ICOC which creates a single large organization supported by local churches.

Conclusion

The International Church of Christ has no relationship to the churches of Christ except a distant historical link long since repudiated.

Many of the practices of the ICOC are false and have been (and should be) rejected by the churches of Christ.

There is no reason to accept the designation "Cult" from any media outlet or from any curious friend or relative. We are not a cult, never have been and never will. We are just the church.

Bryant Evans

¹ The Biblical model always has a group of men over each local congregation. There is no example of a single man or even group of men, overseeing any group larger than a single congregation. The Apostles must not be included in this group for they occupied an office not present in the church today.

² *Commercial Appeal* Newspaper, Memphis, Tennessee

³ Geraldo Rivera, *The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News

⁴ Unnamed Guest on *Nancy Grace*, CNN Headline News.

⁵ www.dictionary.com as of 29 MAR 2006

⁶ We ought not be like everyone else. Our allegiance, our perspectives, our hope is different and therefore our conduct ought reflect our differences far more than it usually does.

⁷ Much of what follows comes from www.reveal.org, a website of former members of the Crossroads and Boston Movement within the ICOC. The information is generally consistent with that found elsewhere.

⁸ www.cultwatch.org