

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The television ad begins with a picture of a church building as people begin to assemble for worship. As people approach the door they are met by two “bouncer” like gatekeepers who pick and choose who may enter the worship services. Two men, hand-in-hand and obviously homosexual, are stopped by the bouncers and told they cannot enter. Similar fates await an African-American woman and a Hispanic man. The voice-over announcer declares that at the United Church of Christ, everyone is welcomed. This advertisement is so misleading and controversial that two major networks have refused to air it. The UCC has brought a complaint before the Federal Communications Commission .

The important concern for members of the churches of Christ is to differentiate clearly between the manmade denomination called the United Church of Christ and the churches of Christ one reads of in the New Testament. Already, some brethren have been gently confronted by denominational friends who think the UCC and the churches of Christ are the same. As we will show, nothing could be further from the truth.

The UCC was founded by men in 1957, the result of a merger between the Evangelical and Reformed church and the Congregational Christian churches. These two churches had previously been formed by mergers among other denominational groups. So immediately we see that there was no divine element in the creation of this organization. In fact, the UCC is about 1900 years too late to be the church that Jesus built. Matthew 16:18 makes clear that Jesus intended himself to build a church. In Acts 2:47 we find that the church had come and that God was adding believers to their number. Individual congregations make up the church and are referred to, in plural, in Romans 16:16 when Paul writes that the “*churches of Christ salute you.*” The church of which we are members is not the church created almost 1900 years *after* Jesus died.

John H. Thomas is the General Minister and President of the UCC. Thomas is chosen from among members of the General Synod which is the highest level organization within the church. While the church constitution declares Jesus Christ as the “sole head” of the church, further authority is vested in the General Synod, various conferences, associations and the local church. This arrangement stands in stark contrast to New Testament teaching which knows nothing of church constitutions, synods, associations or conferences. The church of our Lord is governed entirely at the local, congregational level through elders serving under the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

One stated goal of the UCC, reflected in its name, is the union of all believers. It is indeed both a worthy goal and a Biblical desire. Jesus prayed that we all might be one (John 17:21-23) and Paul wrote of concern over divisions in the Corinth church (1 Corinthians 1:10-14). Based upon these and other Scriptures, the UCC has deemed itself a viable conduit for unity among protestant churches. We would applaud such *if* the UCC was willing to stand squarely in the middle of the Word. Instead, UCC accepts almost anything in the realm of religious creeds. “The United Church of Christ embraces a theological heritage that affirms the Bible as the authoritative witness to the Word of God, the creeds of the ecumenical councils, and the confessions of the Reformation.”ⁱ So, *in addition to the Bible*, the UCC affirms as authoritative the creeds and confessions of

manmade organizations. The Bible says Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16,17), the study of which makes one approved before God (2 Timothy 2:15). Additional creeds are unnecessary for the Faith has been completely delivered (Jude 3). The Scriptures are definitive and require no further explanation through creeds. Unity is absolutely impossible so long as we hold to such extra-biblical “authorities.”

Further examination of UCC history reveals claims that the UCC was first to combat many social ills of our society such as slavery and economic oppression. That’s an interesting claim inasmuch as the UCC has only been around since 1957. But among the “firsts” that they are so proud of are a claim to have appointed the first woman pastor and the claim to have been the first to ordain an openly gay minister.ⁱⁱ So we see that their claim to accept the Bible as authoritative only goes so far as the trends of the day. The Bible says women *may not* have authority over the man in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-15). The Bible also says homosexuality is wrong (Romans 1:26,27). Obviously, UCC thinks otherwise.

There are many other departures from truth found in UCC teaching and documents. We may correctly state that the UCC is perhaps the most liberal protestant faith found today. While we may share similar sounding names, we ought repudiate the very existence of the UCC. Brethren, be aware of their teaching and make sure you draw a sharp line of distinction between the church that belongs to Christ and the UCC.

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ⁱ Testimonies, Not Tests of Faith. United Church of Christ Website at <http://www.ucc.org/faith/index.html> as of December 23, 2004.

ⁱⁱ UCC Firsts. United Church of Christ Website at <http://www.stillspeaking.com/about/firsts.html> as of December 23, 2004.