

UNITY IN (SPITE OF) DIVERSITY

By DUB MCCLISH

INTRODUCTION

Apostate brethren have definitely undertaken a renewed and intensified “unity” initiative with the Independent Christian Church (ICC). This effort has been growing and gaining momentum in the years immediately leading up to 2006, the centennial year of the separation of the Christian Church from the Lord’s church. Abilene Christian University had an ICC preacher on its lectureship in 2004. The Tulsa Workshop had two ICC speakers on its program in March 2004.

DECEMBER 2004 CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE PROMOTES “UNITY”

The Christian Chronicle has been subtly (and at times not so subtly) attempting to blur the line of distinction between churches of Christ and the ICC for a long time. The December 2004 issue gave major ink to two news stories and an advertisement, all of which emphasize the almost feverish interest of the liberals in forging some sort of union with the ICC.

News Story Number One

Page 1 carries the headline, “Church of Christ, Christian Church leaders test waters.” The article, written by *Chronicle* staffer Lindy Adams, tells of “Ministry Impact ’04,” an October meeting “for dialogue and fellowship” in Grand Prairie, Texas (near Dallas), involving 350 men from the ICC and churches of Christ. Adams, in typical liberal jargon, refers to us, to

the ICC, and to the Disciples of Christ as “three streams” of the “American Restoration Movement” and of the “Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.” (Note: I am not a member of a “movement,” but of the church of Christ, to which He added me when I obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation [Acts 2:38–41, 47].)

David Faust, president of Cincinnati Christian University (an ICC school) denied that the confab was “about an organizational merger.” Admittedly, “dialogue” with those with whom we differ does not imply unity or fellowship with them. Unless Adams was wrong in his report, however, they met for “dialogue **and** fellowship.” I need a bit of help to understand why engaging in “fellowship” with others does not imply “unity” with them, whether or not there is “an organizational merger.”

Some of “our” most devoted (to liberalism) liberals who spoke had other ideas. Rick Atchley (of the Richland Hills “Church of Christ” denomination near Fort Worth, Texas) wants to see a “family reunion” involving the two groups in 2006, the one hundredth anniversary of the division the ICC’s founders precipitated in order to have their unauthorized and idolized instruments and missionary societies. Prentice Meador of Prestoncrest “Church of Christ” in Dallas (another big city liberal church) suggested that Larimore, McGarvey, Brewer, and Lipscomb were men who believed in salvation “by God’s grace, not by getting everything right.” (Meador here—perhaps inadvertently—encapsulates the liberal credo: God does not regard obedience over disobedience or being right over being wrong, but merely good

intentions over bad intentions and good feelings over bad feelings.) Conveniently for Meador, the men he listed are not around to respond to his defamations.

The same article recorded the donation of \$50,000.00 by an ICC in Colorado toward beginning a new congregation in Odessa, Texas, sponsored by the avant-garde Golf Course Road “Church of Christ” in nearby Midland. The article also noted that the Northwest “Church of the Christ” (Seattle, WA) and a nearby ICC had merged in September. This was hardly monumental, since Northwest was already using instruments in some of its Sunday worship assemblies.

Victor Knowles, ICC leader and editor of *One Body* (the paper he founded in 1984 to mitigate crucial distinctions between the ICC and the Lord’s church), commented that, while “some will be contentious” about such unification efforts, “many will welcome the opportunity to join hands.” (Oh, but I thought the meeting was just for “dialogue,” rather than for “joining hands”—merger or union.) He was right on both counts: (1) Some will be “contentious” about such efforts (count me among them), and (2) some (doubtless, many, including several attendees) gleefully welcome all such compromising efforts.

A bit of history seems appropriate here. “Ministry Impact ‘04” (for “discussion,” “dialogue,” and “worship,” but not “unity,” remember!) grew out of the series of “Restoration Forums” conducted over the past twenty years and the “Stone-Campbell Dialogue,” begun in 1999. The first of these forums (originally billed as a “Restoration Summit”) convened in August 1984 on the campus of Ozark Bible College (an ICC school) in Joplin, Missouri. Fifty

men from churches of Christ and from the ICC (all deemed to be “irenic”) attended by invitation only. Principal participants included Rubel Shelly (he had publicly announced his liberalism only a year earlier) and Victor Knowles (ICC unity activist identified above).

Of the fifty men invited from churches of Christ, perhaps six were known for their conservatism, while the rest had already made a reputation, either as doctrinally soft and/or as unabashedly liberal. Some extremely compromising statements were made in this forum by men in—but on the way out of—the Lord’s church (e.g., Randy Mayeux, who repudiated his membership in the church of Christ and began his own denomination a few years after the 1984 Forum). Others who were present suggested compromises and/or wrote articles afterward that urged compromise in the interest of “fellowship” and “unity.” Liberals in the church have eagerly participated in these ecumenical exercises.

While some of “our” participants were quite willing to ignore such differences as the use of instruments in worship (and the crucial underlying issue of Biblical authority), the ICC attitude was uncompromising relative to their compromises. Concerning instruments, their attitude was (and is): “We are not about to give them up.” Since about 1987, only those on the extreme liberal fringe among us have attended these syrupy “love-ins” with the ICC folks. Faithful brethren rightly view these forums as both futile and malevolent because they ignore the numerous substantive hermeneutical, doctrinal, and practical errors that preclude Biblical unity.

News Story Number Two

A three-page article (17–19, including centerfold) reviewed a new book, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (more of that *Stone-Campbell Movement* lingo). The reviewers, John Harrison and Lynn McMillon (both *Christian Chronicle* staffers and Oklahoma Christian University religion professors at the time—McMillon has since been appointed *Chronicle* Editor), laud the work of the book’s editors, one from each of the “three major branches of the movement” (there they go again—the third “branch” is the modernistic Disciples of Christ denomination). The editor “representing” the “Church of Christ” is Doug Foster, highly acclaimed by Abilene Christian University as its resident “authority” on “restoration” history. (This is the same Doug Foster who, in a 1992 *Wineskins* article, attributed heretical statements from a Baptist preacher to David Lipscomb, whom Lipscomb had actually quoted in the process of refuting his error. Although over thirteen years have passed, Foster has still not come clean on his appalling error.)

Tom Olbricht, retired head of Pepperdine’s religion department and one of the originators and principal advocates of the “new hermeneutic” movement a few years ago, wrote several articles concerning the church in this book (including one on hermeneutics). His credentials and his history inspire anything but confidence that his material will faithfully represent Scripture or history.

One could easily infer that the reviewers consider all three bodies of the “Restoration Heritage” (the reviewers’ terminology) equally honorable and/or culpable concerning the three-way division. They say the *Encyclopedia* desires to “stress the ‘connectedness’ of the

three traditions.” This statement and/or aim is **almost** amusing, in light of the utter “disconnectedness” that prevails—and will remain—as long as the Disciples and the ICC despise the authority of Scripture, and as long as faithful brethren stand for the Truth.

Disciples of Christ Advertisement

On page 15, *The Christian Chronicle* carried a prominent advertisement, titled, “President Sought.” The ad seeks a new president for the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. The candidate “must be...committed to reconciliation,” and must have “commitment to and knowledge of all traditions in the Stone-Campbell Movement.” (Strange, but I failed to find “must be committed to the Scriptures” in the ad.) What business does the *Chronicle* have helping a branch of the modernistic Disciples of Christ (or any other denomination) find an employee?

As if this were not enough, as a follow-up on the ad, the *Chronicle*’s June 2005 issue (p. 27) reported the appointment of Glenn Carson (accompanied by his photo) to the position advertised above. The paper combined this announcement indiscriminately with announcements of various other appointees, the rest of whom are members of the church. Here we have a blatant display of the *Chronicle*’s consistent attempts to blur the line of fellowship between Truth and error—between the Lord’s church and denominationalism. Are there still those who doubt the *Chronicle*’s leftward theological tilt?

CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE GOES “ALL-OUT” FOR “UNITY” WITH ICC IN 2006

Apparently seeking to capitalize on the centennial of the 1906 division and the opportunity it provides, *The Christian Chronicle* and its companions in liberalism began beating the “unity” drums early in 2006. They steadily increased the beat as the year wore on. The February lead story on page 1 reported that both Abilene Christian University Lectures (February) and the Tulsa “Soul-winning” Workshop (March) would “tag-team keynote addresses featuring university presidents or ministers from both groups.” The secular press carried a news story, with accompanying photo, of Jeff Walling rushing across the Tulsa Workshop stage to symbolically embrace an ICC preacher. The *Chronicle* story also revealed that about forty men from “a cappella churches of Christ” were slated to speak at the North American Christian Convention (June), the annual national conclave of the ICC, in Louisville, Kentucky. The *Chronicle* story was tilted decidedly in favor of such union efforts.

The April issue’s front-page had a story headlined “ACU Lectures Promote ‘Spirit of Fellowship,’” with the sub-head: “After a century of division, reconciliation urged between ‘estranged brothers and sisters,’ despite differences on instrumental music in worship’.” ACU President, Royce Money, and Milligan College (ICC) President, Don Jeanes, delivered back-to-back opening addresses on the ACU Lectureship. Both of them basically called for a declared “unity” and “fellowship” while treating instrumental music as a mere matter of option and opinion. Along with, and as part of the lectureship, ACU hosted a “unity forum” with the ICC. The *Chronicle* had not the slightest hint of criticism for the rankest statements of compromise and hyperemotional “sweet nothings” exchanged by “our” liberals and the ICC

digressives. The total emphasis was upon mutual “acceptance” with no suggestions of the need for repentance or attention to doctrinal issues involved.

The May issue featured two news stories (pp. 14, 18) that dealt with relationships on the mission fields between members of churches of Christ and the ICC. The first article indicated that the 2006 Tulsa Workshop represented a “landscape that was different, with a host of displays unfamiliar to the members of a cappella churches strolling the aisles.” In case the reader missed it, this “host of displays” belonged to and promoted ICC causes. The article on page 18 touted the efforts of liberal members of the Lord’s church who have been living and working together in various foreign evangelistic efforts.

The only thing drastic enough to bump the unity-with-ICC agenda from the front page in June was the “Da Vinci Code” silliness and the tragic murder of Matthew Winkler by his wife. Even so, *Chronicle* editors found a way to keep the agenda before its readers. The front page carried a picture glorifying the Pepperdine University Lectures, conducted in May. The picture featured Tim Spivey, “senior minister” of Dallas’s Highland Oaks “Church of Christ” (noted for years for its liberalism), lecturing on “The God Who Fellowships.” The overall theme of the program was “Life Together, the Heart of Love and Fellowship in 1 John.” One can easily imagine all of the rank statements of compromise that came out of this storied symposium of apostates.

The *Chronicle* staff took a break in July, at least in its print medium. However, it could not keep quiet on the unity mantra, initiating an on-line poll that asked readers to “vote” on

the following: “Do you support fellowship between a cappella Churches of Christ and instrumental Christian Churches?” (Too bad these pollsters do not realize that the Lord settled this “vote” two thousand years ago [Rom. 16:17–18; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9–11; et al.].) The August issue got back in the thick of the fight for unscriptural “fellowship” and “unity” by printing a large photo of ACU “Bible professor,” Jerry Taylor and Steve White, an ICC preacher, praying together after they had exchanged Bibles on the platform of the North American Christian Convention in June. The Convention theme was “Together in Christ.”

Following his warm-up performance at the Tulsa Workshop in March, the notorious apostate, Jeff Walling, apparently started the Bible-exchanging gambit when he publicly presented his mother’s Bible to Dale Stone, an ICC preacher. (Walling’s mother had given the Bible to him in memory of his father, T.J. Walling, who, if reports I have received are true, would be appalled at the doctrinal surrender of his son.) One can almost see the reporter who wrote the story (Bobby Ross, Jr.) drooling as he wrote: “In an emotional display of love and acceptance, several prominent leaders of a cappella Churches of Christ and instrumental Christian Churches joined Walling and Stone in exchanging personal Bibles.”

It is safe to say that the 2006 ICC Convention would have been severely understaffed had it not been for liberals among us. Among the “prominent leaders” referenced above besides Taylor and Walling were such predictable participants as Marvin Phillips, Royce Money, Keith Lancaster (of Acappella fame), Mike Westerfield (Rochester College President), Prentice Meador, Rick Atchley, Carl Brecheen, Paul Faulkner, Joe Beam, Max

Lucado, Don McLaughlin, Ron Rose, Albert Lemmons, Lynn Anderson, Mike Cope, Calvin Warpula, Buddy Bell, Randy Harris, Milton Jones, John Mark Hicks, Carroll Osburn, and Doug Foster. Talk about a “Rogue’s Gallery” of liberal “Post Office pin-ups”—this is it!

These aforementioned fellows some years ago chose an all-positive, hyper-tolerant, restraint-despising elitism that has led inexorably to their present state of apostasy. The administrators of various “Christian Universities” are part of the list. They have in some cases led the way in these efforts and in all cases have given great encouragement to others in them. These heretics have always been able to count on their comrades at *The Christian Chronicle* to promote and favorably publicize their statements and stunts, regardless of how outrageous and unauthorized they may have been.

On page 1 of each issue of the *Chronicle* appears the following: “Our mission: To inform, inspire and unite.” The paper is fulfilling its mission statement in an admirable fashion. For years it has **informed** its readers (with implied approval) of every liberal project, person, plan, practice, and promotion. For years it has **inspired** departures from the faith by presenting said departures to tens of thousands of naïve, uninformed, and Biblically illiterate readers as attractive and “normal.” For years it has, first subtly, then with increasing openness, encouraged the Lord’s people to **unite** with the ICC. The *Chronicle* staff is doubtless proud of its measure of success.

The multifaceted 2006 crusade for union with the ICC signals that these folk have “crossed the Rubicon,” if they had not done so before, on the issues of fellowship and Bible

authority. Walling and others at the ICC Convention urged those attending to go home and start trying to forge a union between “us” and “them” in their local communities. I urge a different strategy for our apostate brethren who care more about their own union goals than they do the Truth. They should follow Max Lucado’s example and take “Church of Christ” off of their buildings, their deeds, their letterheads, and anywhere else it presently appears. Whatever else one might say about Lucado, he was at least honest in this respect concerning His “Oak Hills Church.” If the liberals listed above (and members of their pep squad) have an honest bone in their bodies, they will do the same. They have proved in every way possible that they despise the church which Christ purchased with His blood, the worship He authorized, the church polity He ordained, and the work He gave His church to do.

I challenge them to quit pretending to be something they are not. Let them be honest enough to pursue to its end the road upon which they have been so persistently traveling. In smaller towns, they should immediately preach their ultra-liberal views and set about as soon as possible to convince their congregations to sell their buildings with those despised “Church of Christ” signs on them. They should then take the proceeds to the nearest ICC congregation and place membership. No doubt they will be welcomed with open arms—just as long as they never suggest there is no Scriptural authority for instruments in worship. In larger cities, they should at least publicly repudiate any association with the church of Christ and just as openly announce that they are now one with the ICC.

IS UNITY THE *SUMMUM BONUM* IN RELIGION?

The foregoing considerations raise the question, “Should religious unity override all other considerations?” Are doctrinal Truth and Scriptural practice only secondary and relatively insignificant? Many in the church, in an ecumenism run amuck, now answer these questions affirmatively and would have all of us do so as well.

Some delight in stressing the emphasis the Campbells and other early restorers made on unity, especially in their early efforts to free themselves from sectarian shackles. These self-styled revisionist “historians” leave the impression at times that unity was their **only** interest and plea. However, an objective perusal of only a few of A. Campbell’s uncompromising, strongly worded articles in *The Christian Baptist* (1823–29) will quickly dispel this impression. The early restorers pleaded for unity, but based on submission to, rather than sacrifice of, inspired Truth. Faithful men have never sought or proposed unity merely for its sake alone.

Undeniably, unity in spiritual matters is a major theme of the Bible. Jesus came to heal the great division between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14–17). Moreover, He came to heal the ultimate alienation between God and mankind (Luke 19:10; 1 Pet. 3:18). None can (nor should any desire to) deny that the Lord and the inspired New Testament penmen urged (and urge) unity. The Lord prayed that all who would believe on Him would be one (John 17:20–21). Paul pleaded for unity among the Lord’s people (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1–3). Peace and accord are conditions that all right-thinking men highly prize and greatly admire: “Behold,

how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). It is still appropriate to ask, however, if unity is the ultimate goal of God and the Gospel.

SOME BALANCING CONSIDERATIONS

The Lord’s Prayer

As mentioned above, the Lord prayed for unity among all those who would “believe” on Him through the apostles’ teaching. However, one is mistaken to identify these “believers” as those who merely reach the conclusion that He is the Son of God, while ignoring His Word in their doctrine and practice. He did not have modern “Christendom” or the denominational labyrinth in mind. That this conclusion is sound is attested by the *even as* clause He employed: “That they may all be one; **even as** thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us” (John 17:21a, emp. DM). The Father and the Son are absolutely one in doctrine and practice, and this is specifically the unity for which the Lord prayed.

Further, the New Testament repeatedly uses *believe* as a synecdoche for the entire Gospel plan of salvation, beginning at least as early as John 3:16. This use of the word is especially noticeable from Pentecost forward. Those who received the Word, were baptized, were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47), and initially constituted “all that believed” (v. 44; cf. 4:4, 32; 5:14; 1 Cor. 3:5; 9:5; et al.). Similarly, inspired writers juxtapose *believer* with *unbeliever* to distinguish a Christian from a non-Christian (1 Cor. 14:22; 2 Cor. 6:15; 1 Pet. 2:7). A “believer” is one who has obeyed the Gospel and whom the Lord has added to His church.

Surely, the Lord would not have confused us by referring in His prayer to “believers” in some other sense. Granted, He would have all men who “believe” on Him in any sense be one, but His prayer is far more specific. He did not pray for some sort of pseudo “unity” of His people with doctrinally diverse denominationalists in an oxymoronic “unity in diversity” in which they would “agree to disagree.” *Believers* did not include such folk, so **any application of the prayer to denominationalism is secondary at best.**

Primarily and specifically, His prayer looked toward the fast-approaching Pentecost and the glorious new era it would inaugurate as the apostles began preaching His Word (Mat. 28:18–19; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:47–49). The “believers” were those who would believe on Him “through their word” (John 17:20)—those who would obey the Gospel, as demonstrated earlier. He prayed that all **these** “may...be one.” *May be* translates a present tense form, indicating continuing action. Hence, He prayed not only for initial, but also for perpetual unity among those **who would obey the apostles’ teaching and whom He would add to His church**, as occurred in the beginning (Acts 2:41–42, 47).

Those disciples did not need a “unity forum” to achieve unity. Unity occurred when—and because—they initially obeyed the Gospel, and it continued as long as they “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching” (cf. 1 John 1:6–7). When three or three thousand persons obey the pure Gospel and continue in it, they will become and remain genuinely united, whether in the first or the twenty-first century.

Paul’s Plea

Paul's plea for unity (1 Cor. 1:10) was directed to the Corinthian saints who had initially been united in Christ by obeying the Gospel (vv. 13–16; 15:1–2). For doctrinal and practical reasons in their private and congregational behaviors (e.g., 1:11–12; 3:3–6; 5:1; 6:1–8; 11:17–34; 12:1–31; et al.), the Corinthian saints were divided. Paul did not urge them to merely declare a state of “unity” in spite of their doctrinal diversity. Rather, he pleaded that “ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1:10). They were to be of **one mind** and **one voice** because of the **one message**, which Paul taught “everywhere in every church” (4:17), not because of negotiated compromises.

Division Commanded

Some depict those who dare oppose any effort supposedly aimed at “unity” as negative knuckleheads who delight in religious division. This depiction is neither Scriptural nor accurate. It is not even fair. “Unity,” if not based upon Truth, is not only undesirable—**it is unauthorized**. Some moderns are apparently unaware of Jesus' declaration in Luke 12:51: “Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.” God's forbids His people to seek or maintain fellowship and be united with those who rebel against the Lord and His Word (to do one is to do the other, John 12:48).

Jesus commands His church to separate from (not remain united with) one who sins against a brother and will not repent (Mat. 18:15–17). The church is to mark and turn away from (not unite with) those who deceive and alienate others by their false doctrines (Rom.

16:17–18). The church is to “purge out” and no longer “keep company” with a member who lives an immoral life (1 Cor. 5:1–13). The church must “withdraw” from and “have no company with” brethren who are disorderly and who reject apostolic doctrine (2 The. 3:6, 14; cf. Eph. 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:19–20; Tit. 3:11–12; 2 John 9–11; Rev. 2:5). These passages clearly affirm that “unity,” arrived at by compromise or surrender of the Truth, is forbidden and sinful. The conclusion is also unavoidable that our Master requires us to disrupt fellowship and unity when men will not repent of their rebellion against Him. We are to have no fellowship even with **brethren** who persist in sin and error, much less with denominationalists who have never been in fellowship with God and His people.

CONCLUSION

Both branches of the Christian Church (i.e., the Disciples and the Independents) are denominations, spawned by those who rebelled against the Christ and His Word. I know of no present attempt to “cozy up” to the radical left wing (theologically and politically) Disciples. The present thrust of liberals among the Lord’s people continues to be toward the ICC. However, those who are so eager to join themselves to the ICC (in spite of its adamant refusal to repent of its many errors) may as well go ahead and start fellowship negotiations with the Disciples. The two groups share the same basic crucial erroneous attitude toward the authority of Scripture: Where the Bible is silent, we have the right to act and speak. Scriptural silence gives us freedom and license. The Disciples have simply been more consistent in following where that attitude leads.

The old denominational slogan, “One church is as good as another,” is accurate only in reference to the denominations. If the liberals in the church of Christ accept one (e.g., the ICC), they have no logical basis on which to discriminate against and reject another (e.g., the Disciples and all the rest). Max Lucado and Rubel Shelly have been consistent—if grossly in error—in this respect. Not only have they openly embraced the ICC, but Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, and likely others in their open-ended ecumenism. Lucado has outdone even Shelly (and several other fellow-apostates) in at least one respect as already noted: He changed the name of his denomination so that innocent Truth-seekers are no longer confused by seeing “Church of Christ” on his building. I pray that all of those who are more in agreement with and feel a greater kinship toward the denominations than with and toward the Lord’s faithful people will go ahead and join them “whole hog.” The “sooner the better” it will be for the church of Christ. As beautiful and desirable as unity is, it is not the “be all and end all” in religion. Jesus did not say, “Ye shall know unity, and unity shall make you free,” but “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

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