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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

This issue of *Leaven* is unusual and distinctive in that it pertains to a movement in the Stone-Campbell heritage known as the International Churches of Christ (ICOC). The ICOC's origins date to the 1970s with campus ministry work at the University of Florida. Later, under new leadership, the movement shifted to Boston, Massachusetts; out of Boston the ICOC has spread to many cities in the United States as well as throughout the world.

D'Esta and I believe that now is a good time to inform our readers of this movement's history, current status and beliefs by listening to some of its key thinkers and writers. Your editors do not have the needed ties to accomplish this goal. So, we asked, who among us has such knowledge and has had strong relationships with the ICOC over time? Among those we knew, none is better qualified than Dr. John Wilson. A longtime leader in campus ministry efforts among Churches of Christ (*a cappella*) since the 1960s, Dr. Wilson is also a trained New Testament scholar and archaeologist. His greatest qualification for this task, however, is the lasting fellowship and respect he has established over the years with key leaders of the ICOC movement. D'Esta and I are most thankful that John has consented to serve as our guest editor. Almost all of the articles in this issue are authored by devoted and faithful leaders of the ICOC. We are grateful for their contributions.

Let us say a few words about forthcoming issues. We will close this year with an issue based on Pepperdine University's 67th Annual Bible Lectures, entitled *Acts of the Apostles*. An issue on the book of Hebrews has been delayed because guest editor Ira Jolivet Jr. has been suffering from some health problems. When Ira is sufficiently recovered, we will publish what he has prepared. In the interim we have developed an issue entitled *Things that Matter* that is based on a series of sermons preached this past semester by leaders of the University Church of Christ in Malibu, California, including Dan Rodriguez, Randall Chesnutt, John Wilson, Ron Highfield and Stuart Love. The sermons are bracketed by two services based entirely on the reading of scripture, which were organized by D'Esta Love and persons from within the congregation.

Beginning in January 2011, we will publish three issues based on the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jeff Miller of Milligan College will serve as guest editor for *The Gospel According to Mark*, Mark Black of Lipscomb University will serve as guest editor for *The Gospel According to Matthew*, and Kindalee Pfremer Delong of Pepperdine University will close this series with *The Gospel According to Luke*.

Continue to pray for *Leaven*.

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

JOHN F. WILSON

I wish to thank Stuart Love for the invitation to produce this special issue about the International Churches of Christ. This may be the first time some *Leaven* readers have even heard of the ICOC, given its isolation in recent years from other branches of the Stone-Campbell heritage. Beginning as a reform movement within what it came to call the "mainline" or "traditional" Churches of Christ, the leaders of the ICOC gradually drifted away from their historical roots and developed a distinctive polity, methodology,

vocabulary and sense of separate community. Some might suggest that the movement developed a distinctive theology as well, though on closer examination its *theological* distinctives seem relatively minor and often seemed to grow out of pragmatic concerns rather than independent and reformational biblical scholarship. The differences seemed to center on matters of application and varying points of emphasis rather than basic doctrinal beliefs. It is interesting that one of the authors suggests that in its present state of development the ICOC may have a closer affinity with the Christian Churches than with the Churches of Christ (*a cappella*). Whether or not this is the case, the fact remains that most of the authors of articles in this issue of *Leaven* were trained in schools operated by members of the Churches of Christ (particularly Harding Graduate School) and have strong personal roots in that wing of the Restoration Movement.

My own relationship with many leaders in this movement has a long history. Tom Jones, whose assistance in preparing this issue was indispensable, was a valued colleague in ministry for many years in Springfield, Missouri, during what some consider the “golden age” of campus ministry within the Churches of Christ. Other leaders were friends, students, or colleagues in ministry as well. The twin points of reform which launched this movement—a call for more radical discipleship and for more evangelistic fervor—seemed timely and appealing to me, as they did to many others in the Churches of Christ at the time. Indeed, as an observer of the ICOC through the years, and without wishing to place blame on one “side” or the other, I have been saddened that what began as an internal stimulus for needed reforms evolved into a separate sect (I use the term sociologically, with no intention to offend) which, due to its consequent isolation, had little or no effect on the larger Restoration Movement.

One goal of this issue is to reopen the dialogue between the ICOC and the larger Stone-Campbell Movement. As the reader will see, the ICOC of today describes itself as a chastened, penitent and “reorganized” movement. In view of this fact, one could hope that *both* “sides” might let bygones be bygones and begin to strategize a common future. The “mainline” Churches of Christ might attempt to leave aside criticism based on events of the past, and the ICOC might abandon its tendency to justify its own existence on the basis of the perceived (and sometimes actual) failings of the “mainline” churches. And once this new relationship took hold, both movements might find it possible to revisit and reevaluate the rationale for an organic separation.

Our purpose here is not to engage in debate. Rather, we hope that the following articles will allow *Leaven* readers to know something about what leaders in the ICOC are thinking after the upheavals of the past few years. There will be no attempt here to challenge or rebut, but rather simply to listen. Ongoing discussions should certainly be based on what ICOC leaders are saying and doing *now*, and not on painful memories of the past. These leaders have courageously and publically repented of a number of past mistakes, and have shown what I believe to be a sincere openness. Those who have formerly regarded the ICOC as a movement initiated and motivated primarily by criticism and judgment of the spiritual maturity of others may wish to suspend this judgment while reading these articles, and allow for the possibility of a new point of view. Those who have defined the movement in terms of its propensity to control the behavior of its adherents, and to control the content of all teaching, may likewise wish to take another (understandably cautious) look. I can personally testify to this: on several occasions in recent years I have been asked to teach or otherwise participate in events sponsored by members of the ICOC in three different nations. I was never asked what I planned to say. I was never given the impression that I should limit or censor what I said—even if my comments might be expected to be critical. Furthermore, I found the participants in these events open, willing to learn, refreshingly self-critical, kind and committed to their understanding of the message of Jesus.

I hope that a few personal comments and reactions will not seem inappropriate, given the perimeters suggested above. I continue to wish that what became the ICOC would have been content to remain a reform movement, and not a separately and centrally organized “family of churches.” Despite the pressures of church politics and strong opposition, it might have been able quietly yet firmly to demonstrate what it believed to

be a better way, without increasingly introducing the elements of judgment and control that almost assured a schism. What the writers in this issue say is intensely personal. They often start from a position of criticism of the “traditional” Churches of Christ that strongly reflects their own personal experiences. One might, of course, give examples to the contrary in every case, pointing to Christians within the “traditional” churches whose commitment to the gospel was as exemplary as the most centered leaders and members of the ICOC.

At the same time, many of the criticisms were—and are—valid. Many of them were articulated as strongly by many persons within the “mainline” Churches of Christ as by leaders of this movement, but who did not find it appealing or necessary to break off fellowship and create a new denomination (i.e., a “world brotherhood”). Many of the initial calls for reform (“sharing one’s faith,” “being fruitful in evangelism,” practicing “quiet times with God,” “practicing ‘one another’ Christianity,” etc.) could hardly be opposed in principle by the “mainline” Churches—then or now. Looking back, it seems more and more unlikely that differences over these concepts carried with them the seeds of division. It must have been something else. We may devoutly hope that as time goes by that “something else” will emerge more fully into the light of day. And then be eliminated.

