

# Church of Christ

## U l t i m a t e o f C h r i s t

by Steven M. Bergson

*"It is not necessary to broadcast what is being done, or even what our ultimate plan is, but just to let the meetings grow out of the common need for fellowship" — The Master Plan of Evangelism (pg.118.).*

On February 10, 1988, the InterFaith Council of York University removed the Church of Christ (which was calling itself Students for Christ) from the Council.

Subsequently, the COC declined to renew their registration as a club with the Office of Student Affairs, losing the privileges of being recognized as a club by York: being allowed to use the York University name and logo, and being able to rent tables in Central Square.

According to Cora Dusk, Director of Student Affairs, if the COC were to reapply, she would seek advice from the InterFaith Council before accepting their application.

The Church of Christ (a.k.a. Multiplying Ministries a.k.a. Discipling Movement) is an international, religious organization that was started about 15 years ago by Kip McKean.

McKean founded his group upon ideas that Robert Coleman expressed in his 1963 book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, from which I will be quoting passages.

Allegations that have arisen against the group in the various cities where they have operated include: demanding absolute obedience to the group's leaders, using confessions to attack the character of their members, using deception when they recruit members, demanding an unreasonable time commitment from their members, depriving members of sufficient sleep time, regarding everyone who does not belong to the group as a sinner, and separating members from their family and friends.

The first thing one notices about the Church of Christ is their recruitment techniques. Other organizations (both on and off-campus) recruit through flyers, posters, and/or renting tables out at Central Square.

The Church of Christ's method is direct and personal. Last October, I was approached by Keastner, one of the COC's members. He invited me to a weekly Bible study that meets on Thursdays at 6 Assiniboine Rd.

Another noticeable aspect of the Church of Christ is their secrecy. During his invitation, I was not told that Keastner was a member of an international Christian organization or any information about that organization (eg. its history, beliefs, expected commitment), or that he wanted me to join his organization to prevent me from going straight to hell when I die.

There were two Bible study groups held in separate rooms: one for men, the other for women (I don't know why this is done or if the talks differ). Rather than discuss morality, Keastner showed us passages about discipling. At the next meeting, we looked at passages that told of Jesus' actions and superiority to ordinary men.

As the "outsider," I was always questioned at the end of the meetings about whether I believed what was taught. Keastner and the rest of the group were unable to accept the fact that I could reject the New Testament, while agreeing to the Old Testament.

Keastner seemed to feel that if I wasn't accepting his version of "the truth," it was because I had an inadequate teacher. Thus, last November, he invited Sean Barnes, one of the leaders of the Church of

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Christ (York University Zone), to the Bible study to convince me of the validity of Christianity.

I was surprised that the group had not made demands of me yet, except that I should continue to attend the weekly meetings. I was also in doubt as to whether this was really the COC or just a group of students who meet informally to discuss the Bible.

I decided to tell Keastner that I intended to become a Christian to see what effect it would have. At the next meeting, I was told that I needed individualized instruction and that Keastner and Sean would be my "disciple partners."

At the meeting, I was told that the group whose Bible studies I had been attending was the Church of Christ, led in Toronto by David Eastman.

They told me that only those who have been baptized will go to heaven and that only disciples can be baptized. To prove this they showed that the Bible has only three references to Christians but 270 references to disciples.

This belief is echoed in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*: "Evangelism is not an optional accessory to our life. It is the heartbeat of all that we [Christians] are told to do." (pg.92). They also told me that

**"There is no use to pray vaguely for the world. The world is lost and blind in sin." (p.109)**

because we disciple our friends, I would probably be discipling my friends in the Jewish Student Federation.

They said that not only should the beliefs of Jesus be put into practice, but that the practices of Jesus must be done. "He always knew what was right and was the perfect Man, he lived as God would among men." (pg.17). They also said that I should love Jesus so much that my parents would think that I don't love them. (Luke 14:25-33).

They said that I should increase my time spent studying the Bible and praying from two hours per week to 30 minutes per day. They also told me not to worry about spending too much time learning about Christianity because my salvation was most important. They said that Satan works 24 hours a day, and if I were to die at that instant, I would go straight to hell.

They warned me that by becoming a disciple for the COC, I would be subject to persecution. As examples of such persecution, they used the "attacks" (critical articles) by the university media, the expulsion from York by the InterFaith Council and the "fabrications" (complaints) of former members.

They also mentioned how an organization that calls itself evangelical, but who they don't consider "real Christians" (the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship), helped get them expelled from York. "His way was contrary to the accepted pattern of worldly wisdom. Therefore, they would be hated of all men." (pg.85).

They said that they were willing to do anything to help me become a Christian. This included running errands, providing transportation, typing, and even writing

my essays for me. If I were kicked out of my house, they would provide housing for me. "As to their [the disciples'] support, they were to trust God to supply their needs." (pg.82).

One of the complaints against the Church of Christ is that they make claims they can do the impossible. George Nellis said that a COC member told him that Christianity can cure blindness. David (not his real name) said they told him that they could cure AIDS. Dan Mahoney said they told him they could help him "cure" his homosexuality.

It is interesting to note some of the other beliefs that are expressed in *The World Plan of Evangelism*. The book talks about the need for obedience. "Jesus expected the men he was with to obey him. . . for in time, obedient followers invariably take on the character of their leader." (pg.50). "He brought up his future commanders from the ranks, drilling in them along the way the necessity for discipline and respect for authority. There could be no insubordination in his command." (pg.58-59).

The book also suggests that the disciples and new members remain together as much as possible. "The counsellor should stay with the new believer as much as possible, studying the Bible and praying together, all the while answering questions, clarifying the truth, and seeking together to help others." (pg. 48-49). "It is crucial that those engaging in the work of

evangelism have personal supervision and guidance until such time as they are matured enough to carry on alone." (pg.100).

The utter distaste for the "outside world" is also shown throughout the text. "There is no use to pray vaguely for the world. The world is lost and blind in sin." (pg.109). "Carnal attitudes and reactions need to be detected early and dealt with decisively." (pg.123). "The devil, assisted by all the demons of hell, will seek to defeat them [the disciples] by every cunning device at his command. . . The world to which they are going lies under his evil spell." (pg.125).

When I last spoke to Keastner, he was unhappy that I had deceived him to gain admittance to the group. The use of deception in research studies has always been controversial because of methodological and ethical problems. Nonetheless, I feel, as many sociologists, psychologists and social scientists do, that the results of such studies have a high accuracy that could be lessened if the researcher approached the subjects in an honest way.

Keastner said that his reaction to allegations about the COC in general and the York Zone COC specifically was expressed in his talk with me. I take this to mean that because this article is critical, I must be just another one of those "religious persecutors" that Satan keeps using.

*Please do not confuse the Boston-based Church of Christ with the mainline Church of Christ organizations that they broke away from. The Boston-based Church of Christ organizations are linked with Kip McKean. The mainline ones are not.*

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***The Master Plan of Evangelism (p.92)***