

A Response to the "Christian Affirmation" Statement

To those subscribers who are not members of churches of Christ (a little over half when by my most recent estimate), this special issue may be a little perplexing. Consideration discussion is going on over a statement published in the *Christian Chronicle* in apparent opposition to some changes in assembly practices within some churches of Christ. I understand that these men may be seeking to be helpful in addressing these changes and share their interest in the early church, but I personally find their statement sufficiently flawed to wonder about the underlying motivation.

In this special edition of ET&N, I reproduce the statement found at www.christianaffirmation.org with some personal commentary (preceded by **[DS]** and printed in **boldface**). I invite responses.



The following affirmation appeared in the May 2005 issue of the *Christian Chronicle* (vol. 62, no. 5), signed by 23 teachers in Churches of Christ in North America. The purpose of the statement is to encourage prayerful reflection on the foundational commitments of our churches and through the resulting conversation to clarify our identity as churches under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The statement affirms the convictions of the signers regarding beliefs and practices that have served to strengthen the Christian identity of Churches of Christ but now suffer challenge or neglect; it does not attempt to articulate the Christian faith in its fullness. We recognize that others think differently about some of the matters treated. We do not speak as their judges, but as fellow servants of Christ who seek only to be fruitful in his service. We seek thorough discussion with our brothers and sisters a deeper understanding of God's saving truth.

[DS] If the signers "seek thorough discussion with our brothers and sisters," why are all the signers men and why is the proposed moderated e-mail discussion similarly limited to "elders, ministers, and teachers" in the churches of Christ, who by the practices of most churches of Christ will be men? What will be done to ensure that these voices that make up over half our congregations are heard?

It is our intention to clarify our Christian identity in a time of increasing uncertainties. Churches of Christ are part of the American Restoration Movement, which sought to overcome the divisions of Christendom by returning to the faith and practice of the earliest Christians. While we believe that disunity and division among Christians are not according to God's will, we also believe that unity cannot be grounded in minimal agreements among Christian traditions. The path to substantive Christian unity is found in returning to the clear teachings of Scripture and practices of the early church, commonly acknowledged and respected by all Christian traditions. In this light, beliefs and practices characteristic of Churches of Christ are neither novel nor idiosyncratic, nor should they be easily abandoned.

[DS] It appears that "Scripture" and the "practices of the early church" is either redundant or two separate categories depending on one's definition of the "early church." If the "early church" is defined as the New Testament church, then the terms are redundant. If, on the other hand, the "early church" is defined as the pre-Constantine or Ante-Nicene church (approx. A.D. 320), these are clearly separate categories. If we are to consider the practices of the Ante-Nicene church as

authoritative, there will be substantive contradictions between Scripture and the early church even if we only consider the rigidly-Orthodox early church, as opposed to the minority voices and perhaps the heresies.

I would have hoped that such a discussion as this would, in fact, have been limited to the “clear teachings,” but in this Affirmation itself there is at least one hazy teaching that is clearly identified by the reliance on tradition rather than Scripture. This is an unfortunate beginning.

The Original Design

The compelling rationale for this common-sense approach to ecumenical reformation is well stated by Roman Catholic scholar Hans Küng. Recognizing “errors and false developments” in the church’s history, Küng states,

The New Testament message, as the original testimony, is the highest court to which appeal must be made in all the changes of history. It is the essential norm against which the church of every age has to measure itself. The New Testament Church, which, beginning with its origins in Jesus Christ, is already the Church in the fullness of its nature, is therefore the original design; we cannot copy it today, but we can and must translate it into modern terms. The Church of the New Testament alone can show us what that original design was. (The Church)

It is the early church that, in Küng’s words, provides “the essential norm” by which the church in every age and culture measures its message, beliefs, and practices. It is to this “original design” (Küng) that we turn both for substantive guidance and for the common faith to be shared by and to unite all Christians.

[DS] Note that Küng’s statement is limited to the New Testament church and does not suggest reliance on any traditions or developments afterwards.

According to the New Testament message, the Church of Jesus Christ exists to bear witness to the central truth that the Creator of all things “so loved the world that he gave his only Son” for us and our salvation (Jn. 3:16). This salvation embraces the whole of creation in its scope; God’s saving will is “to reconcile all things to himself” through Christ’s incarnate life, death, and resurrection (Col. 1:20). God’s saving purpose shapes the whole of the church’s life.

Baptism: the New Birth

Foundational to our response to the saving work of Christ is our faithful submission to his lordship in baptism. In baptism we enter the new creation inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection, which create a new humanity (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). As we once shared the destiny of Adam, God now grants us a share in the life and destiny of Christ, the new Adam, incorporating us into his body in baptism (Rom. 6:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:45; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:10, 11). In the ancient church there were no unbaptized Christians. The New Testament assumes that every Christian is baptized and has become a member of the body of Christ through the one baptism of water and of the spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5; Jn. 3:5). God does not save individuals apart from the body of Christ; he saves us by making us members of Christ’s body through baptism and transforming us into his likeness (Rom. 8:29, 30).

The early church practiced baptism as the immersion of believers in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those baptized received as benefits of Christ’s death the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Baptism is the Christian’s new birth into the people of God. Washed clean of sins and sealed by the Spirit of God, believers begin their transformation into the image of Christ (1 Cor. 6:11) and to “walk in newness of life,” “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:4, 11).

[DS] This is all true, but what really is the point? Is this meant to imply that anyone who has not been immersed is an outsider? Who is more the Christian—one who has been immersed but who shows not inclination to follow Jesus or one who is constantly striving to be more like Him but has not yet come to a mature

understanding of baptism? This is really the crux of the problem in the churches of Christ—the apparent obsession with labeling those who are in or out, often making those who are “in” complacent and those who are “out” resistant. Is that Christlike? For my time on baptism, see [ET&N 26: Water Baptism](#)

The Lord's Supper and the New Fellowship

Baptized believers gather each week around the table of the Lord. There, united as one body in Christ, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26) as the “expiation for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). As Israel remembered God’s deliverance in the Passover, Christians meet on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (the day of Christ’s resurrection) to remember and celebrate the salvation brought by Christ.

At the Lord’s table we are drawn together through Christ’s death and resurrection as members of his body. “Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body” (1 Cor. 10:17). Moved by the memory that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper “on the night when he was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23), members of the body of Christ are stirred to examine ourselves and recommit to serving Christ, one another, and the world (1 Cor. 11:28, 29). We also remember that the risen Lord was “made known” to his disciples on the first day of the week “in the breaking of the bread” (Lk. 24:35) and graciously invited his disciples to “come and eat” (Jn. 21:12). Thus we not only remember Jesus’ death, but also celebrate his presence at table with his people today; and until he comes, we joyfully anticipate being together with him.

The Lord instituted this observance, and he sets the conditions for participation at his table (Rev. 3:20). All who acknowledge Christ’s lordship and demonstrate this faith in their character and conduct are welcome at the Lord’s table.

[DS] Again, is this intended to define “in” and “out”? If we’re going to insist on being pedantic about this, we should also look at the verses that suggest the early Christians “broke bread” daily (Acts 2:46) and recognize that the first century Sunday began at sundown on Saturday. The consistent testimony of the New Testament is not so much how often or when, but rather how and why. I believe that participating in communion on a weekly basis is a wonderful privilege, but is it any less so monthly or more so daily? For my observations on the Lord's Supper, see [ET&N 36: Eucharist](#).

Worship and the New Life

For centuries Christians have recognized that as we worship, so we believe, and so we live. Worship stands at the center of the church’s existence and the formation of Christian identity. In worship, the people of God remember and rehearse God’s great acts of disclosure and deliverance in our history. We praise and adore God for the gifts of creation and redemption in Christ.

[DS] Just what Christians have, “for centuries...recognized that as we worship, so we believe, and so we live.” I find this backwards. Worship is not an event, it is a life. A more appropriate summary would therefore be as we believe, so we live, which is our worship. Jesus did not put a formal worship service at the center of everything, He put a submissive life honoring and serving God at the center.

The center of Christian worship is the Lord’s supper, which unites us in remembering the sacrificial death of Jesus and encourages us to offer ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1, 2). Christian proclamation, prayer, and singing in the New Testament and early church were characteristically Christ-centered. In content, Christian song is an instrument of teaching enabling the word of Christ to dwell richly in God’s people as we teach and admonish one another in wisdom with thankfulness (Col. 3:16).

[DS] No, the center of Christian worship is a Christlike life. The Lord's Supper is the center of the assembly, but this is only one part of Christian life.

In manner, Christian singing from the very first and for nearly a thousand years was "a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15) without accompanying instruments. Singing a cappella ("in the manner of the chapel") was encouraged by reformers such as John Calvin and the Puritans in England and America and remains the practice of some 300,000,000 members of Eastern Orthodox churches. The practice of a cappella singing recovers both the "original design" of the early church and the common practice of the whole church for centuries.

[DS] It is incomprehensible to put a cappella singing as a foundational issue and to use a verse like Hebrews 13:15, which has nothing to do with singing as a proof-text. Furthermore, an appeal to "a thousand years" contradicts the initial premise of the Affirmation Statement, viz, "The Church of the New Testament alone can show us what that original design was" (Küng). The New Testament is certainly not clear about this, so the argument devolves to a doctrine based on silence. If instrumental accompaniment was so wrong, why does every New Testament writer fail to say so? Furthermore, if the appeal to "centuries" of church tradition is valid, what else must we accept as foundational?

Finally, if we believe God is consistent and never changing, how can we claim that what He valued prior to Christ is something distasteful now? Did God change his mind? Are all a cappella churches open theists?

Christian worship delivers us from the illusions, distortions, and distractions of the world. Worship releases us from preoccupation with our limited thoughts, abilities, and feelings. Our worship reminds us, as Paul says, that our ultimate hope and confidence reside not in ourselves—not in our possessions, our feelings, our intellect, or anything we can measure and manage—but in "God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9).

[DS] I think the Affirmation signers are bordering on the idolatry of making human forms of worship assemblies more important than God Himself.

A Word of Concern

While the work of restoration is difficult and has often been done poorly, neither the difficulty of the task nor our failures justify abandoning the attempt to recover biblical faith and practice. Many in Churches of Christ today are rightly concerned to overcome a legacy of legalism, sectarianism, and divisiveness. It is easy to suppose that opposition to these scandalous realities means that we must relax our commitment to practices that have been characteristic of our churches.

[DS] I just cannot see how adherence to this Affirmation Statement overcomes "a legacy of legalism, sectarianism, and divisiveness. It still seems intent upon dividing between "ins" and "outs" by legalistically implying that a failure to practice in specific ways makes a group "out."

We commend an alternative vision. The restoration vision is to unite with the earliest Christians, to take as the indispensable guide to life in Christ their common faith and practice, which Christians in every age respect and honor. In the twentieth century, early Christian practice was rediscovered as a norm and a basis for seeking unity by leaders, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. It would be a sad irony if, now that others in the religious world are recognizing the value of a return to Christian beginnings, our own churches were to abandon the quest.

[DS] The quest of the early Christians was to serve Christ and spread the Gospel in whatever ways they could. Paul said, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own

profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor 10:31-33). His focus was on leading people to salvation, not on so narrowly defining correctness as to put obstacles in people's paths.

The undersigned prayerfully commend these considerations, this 18th day of April in the year of our Lord 2005.

[DS] Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Christian assembly are all important parts of the Christian walk, but ultimately the real test of discipleship transcends even these. Christianity is a journey, and these are events along that journey. An attitude that welcomes everyone seeking Jesus, wherever they are on that path, seeks "the profit of the many."

Jim Baird, Professor of Bible, College of Biblical Studies, Oklahoma Christian University; Terry Briley, Dean, College of Bible and Ministry, Lipscomb University; Everett Ferguson, Professor Emeritus of Church History, Abilene Christian University; Hugh Gainey, Elder, University Avenue Church of Christ; Austin, Texas; John Mark Hicks, Professor of Theology, Lipscomb University; Carl R. Holladay, Candler School of Theology, Emory University; Evertt W. Huffard, Dean, Harding Graduate School of Religion; Lynn McMillon, Dean, College of Biblical Studies, Oklahoma Christian University; Allan J. McNicol, Professor of New Testament, Austin Graduate School of Theology; Mike Moss, Associate Dean, College of Bible and Ministry, Lipscomb University; Curt Niccum, Associate Professor of Bible, Oklahoma Christian University; Tom Olbricht, Professor Emeritus of Religion, Pepperdine University; Jeff Peterson, Associate Professor of New Testament, Austin Graduate School of Theology; Paul Pollard, Professor of Bible, Harding University; J.J.M. Roberts, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Literature, Princeton Theological Seminary; Jerry Rushford, Professor of Church History, Pepperdine University; Mark Shipp, Professor of Old Testament, Austin Graduate School of Theology; Gregory E. Sterling, Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, University of Notre Dame; James W. Thompson, Professor of New Testament and Associate Dean, Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University; Don Vinzant, Adjunct Professor of Bible, College of Biblical Studies, Oklahoma Christian University; Michael R. Weed, Professor of Theology and Ethics, Austin Graduate School of Theology; Wendel Willis, Associate Professor of Bible, Abilene Christian University; John F. Wilson, Professor of Religion, Pepperdine University.

[DS] While I readily acknowledge that the signers are men of faith who hold their convictions deeply, I find it unfortunate that not only are they all men, but also that all but two come from academia. It is neither academic credentials nor employment that determine one's spirituality. God gives gifts according to His will through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:11). Our problems in the Christian world will not be solved by a few academics in one small corner of that world.

Let us not forget what is really important: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, the words of Jesus). The world doesn't know we are His disciples by our immersion, our weekly communion, or our a cappella singing.

To borrow from Paul (1 Cor 13:2-3): If I have been immersed in the waters of baptism, and celebrate communion every Sunday morning, and refuse to have instruments in my assembly, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Note: while I usually read each issue of Christian Chronicle cover to cover, somehow I missed the publication of the "Affirmation Statement." I first ran into it on radicalcongruency.com, the thought-provoking and often entertaining blog operated by Justin Baeder and my son-in-law, Aaron Ogle. If my church of Christ brothers and sisters sometimes think I'm a little radical, and you choose to click on the radicalcongruency link, just remember: you have been warned! If, on the other hand, you consider yourself a fellow-heretic, have at it. Thank God the Inquisition is over...or at least the execution variety of Inquisition is.

Discussion

There were several lengthy responses to my commentary on the "Christian Affirmation" Statement printed in the *Christian Chronicle*.

First of all, I was contacted by a *Christian Chronicle* staff member, who pointed out the the Statement was a paid notice and that, like all such notices, the printing did not imply any endorsement by the *Christian Chronicle* nor its employees. I didn't actually see the original Statement in the *Christian Chronicle*, but I apologize for this oversight.

The remaining responses are printed in the order I received them, with few comments.

Dick, what you covered sounds amazing like the "International" churches of Christ "doctrine" that ultimately drove us out of the church of Christ due to the arrogant, pharisaical approach to the "ins" and "outs," and the requirement that congregational members live "approvable" lives, i.e., approved of by another human being who was in charge of your local discipleship group, a discipling partner, or a full-time leader. Ultimately, the "church" and "appropriate conduct" became more important than a relationship with God, relationship with your family. There became no separation between God and his institution, to the demise of so many people who could not bear up under the scrutiny and pressure to be righteous in the eyes of others. Talk about tying up heavy burdens and putting them on shoulders! Sacrificing "weak" individuals for the purity and strengthening of the "church" became the norm. And, of course, it was "God" who was doing the winnowing. I kept thinking about the scripture about not cleaning the weeds out of the field, because you would uproot good with bad. And a lot of good people were hurt deeply in the mess that became the ICOC. To think the other churches of Christ are now heading in this ungodly direction is chilling.

Gary Pekoe
Virginia Beach, VA

Welcome, Comrade, to the samizdat. [DS: I had to look that up. I'll let you do so too.]
(every pun intended)

Your Comrade,
Rob (Georgia)

Here! Here! To your cogent comments.

Academia pronouncements and self aggrandizement drives me nuts. Why do they not solicit such folks as Rubel Shelly, Mike Cope, Joe Beam, Edward Fudge, and other learned and practical preachers of the gospel if they are so concerned about the Church of Christ denomination.

Daryl (Delaware)

Dick, I agree with much of what you said. However, it really seems, in places, that you were very intent on finding fault with the document. **[DS: Eric's probably right about that, but I certainly have nothing against any of the individuals!]** The musical instruments thing is interesting since it is one of the things that tends to set us apart in the churches of Christ, but it is not a core piece of Christian doctrine. I'm not sure which direction these signers really meant to go with this. At least they seem to acknowledge that it is more traditional than scriptural in origin.

The "in or out" thing is something I've always struggled with. I agree that the churches of Christ have historically drawn lines of fellowship where God did not, and the circle of fellowship we've drawn is much smaller than that shown in scripture. However, I still am at the point where I feel we should identify those who are not Christians for the purpose of sharing our understanding of the gospel (and our response to it). Lori and I have discussed numerous times that it seems we, in Newark, engage people in servant roles, and accept in full fellowship, those who are not baptized believers. In my view, we should gently determine whether a person is a baptized believer. If not, we should explore that further and encourage them to take that step so they can fully participate in the fellowship of believers.

I guess that still sounds elitist and exclusionary. I don't mean it to be. I just think people should see something special about being in the Christian fellowship that is distinct from just showing up at all the events. We should draw that distinction in a way that does not make people feel like lepers (I've see too much of that) but makes them want to enter into our fellowship by accepting Christ as Savior and participating in his death, burial, and resurrection through baptism.

I could ramble on trying to make my point here, but I think you know where I'm coming from. I'm curious about your thoughts on this.

See ya,
Eric

Dick,

Good comments on the Ekk. issue.

It is so frustrating to me how we can be so arrogant and narrow minded, when the New Testament is so loving and open! We argue over instruments and who can read/pray/teach when souls are dying everyday without Jesus. Thank goodness for His grace.

Hang in there! Keep challenging us on real study.
Thanks,
Angie

Dick,

In so many ways I feel completely "out of my league" to write any response or comment to you, but this time "God just made me do it".

I was raised in the Church of Christ in west Texas, the daughter of a graduate of Abilene Christian University. I married at 18 and as the "I told you so's" range out from the mouths of my parents, at 20 I divorced. Shortly after that time, the elders from my life long church went to my parents and told them that if I remarried I would be "disfellowshipped". Long story short I got mad at God and left the church.

After many years, I did remarry and now have a 12 year marriage and a wonderful 8 year old daughter and we are members of a Disciple of Christ church plant in Plainview, Texas.

During research for materials for communion meditation, I stumbled across the [website of Edward Fudge](#) and then was directed to your newsletter. What a blessing from our Lord!!!

As humans, we naturally seem to want to control our lives from A to Z. I also struggle on a daily basis to allow God's will to be my will. It always seems easier to find ways to work my will into God's. (Silly little human that I am.)

Thank you for your comments throughout the Affirmation Statement. It truly does my heart good to see people who are from a part of my upbringing coming to see that ALL of God's children have value. Thankfully our God is an awesome God who knew we would need His Son to make it along our journey to be with Him. God's love, grace and following the ways of Jesus Christ will allow every believer the opportunity of everlasting life. I believe that the guidelines set before us in the Word are simple to understand. Choosing to live a Christlike life and follow the guidelines are not quite as simple, but with desire in your heart, study of the Word, unceasing prayer and His love and grace all things are possible.

I thank you for the many opportunities you haven given me to think, reflect and study. I anticipate the future blessings I know that I will receive in upcoming issues. (I also ask for your patience in reading the ramblings of this reader, but I wanted you to know how much I appreciate you.)

In His service with you,
Stephanie Scott
Plainview, Texas

My brief response to A Christian Affirmation 2005 is simply this:

The litmus for knowing who is in the fellowship of Jesus Christ is,

1. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35
- and
2. "So then, you will know them by their fruits." Matthew 7:20
3. "For he who is not against us is for us. Mark 9:40

And one last word concerning the use of the testimony of time periods when musical instruments were not (widely) used in the early church:

God's "assemblies / congregations / church (Greek word, ecclesia)" far precede the time of Christ on earth. The qahal of the ancient times not only used instrument, they were commanded to do so (2 Chronicles 29:25; He then stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets.) Moreover, Revelation speaks of instrumental worship (which many in our fellowship attempt to conveniently gloss over as imagery) in eternal settings. Therefore, if we are operating off of the extent of testimony, the advantage is to the use of instrumental worship, bar none.

There is nothing called good by God in what we refer to as the Old Testament, that God suddenly turns and calls wicked in the New. That would be philosophically impossible.

James A. Sterling D.Min.

Dick,

Fine thinking in your response to the Christian Affirmation. I went to their site and read it first with out your comments and I have nearly the same responses that you had. It seems that many of our folks have no ability to look at ourselves from "outside". This is a laughable call to unity --- "Just see everything the way we see it and we will all be united!" This approach will save all the other believers in the world a great deal of time since we have already done their thinking for them.

Carl Ketcherside said we were "a sect opposed to sectarianism". His observation was astute. Now we have a creed from a group who has railed against creeds for over a century. This does not pass the laugh test! Can we not see that our identity should be Christ (His story and His love), not a cappella singing and baptism.

Your point is well made that the document wants to include "practices of the early church". (The Bible and Tradition--another place where we share a belief with the Catholic Church! We do share many views, often being more Catholic than Protestant.) Of course, with out early church history/tradition we loose our argument against instruments. What we have failed to understand is that the source of our a cappella tradition may actually come from the Jewish synagogue which has always been exclusively vocal from the Babylonian captivity. With nothing but Jewish converts for nearly a decade, it is no wonder that the chose vocal music. But to not study enough to know God any better than to think that he is opposed to instruments is not very "Berean".

Well, there is no reason to continue. You have uncovered the obvious flaws in the thinking that went into this statement. My hope is that the signers will someday be just as able to see them.

Keep thinking!
Sherman Dye
Vienna, WV

In the midst of the above, I heard from my friend Darryl from Texas, with whom I have had other spirited but always friendly exchanges on topics related to those in ET&N. The entire exchange is too long to reproduce here, so I have exerpted some of Darryl's comments and my responses.

Darryl: As usual I thoroughly enjoy your newsletter. I hope you don't mind a little good natured ribbing though. I think you're being too tough on the signers of the affirmation. Below are my little rejoinders to your comments. Please take them as friendly and not mean!

[DS] Hey, if I elect to dish it out, I'd better be able to take it, particularly from someone I respect!

ET&N: If the signers "seek thorough discussion with our brothers and sisters," why are all the signers men and why is the proposed moderated e-mail discussion similarly limited to "elders, ministers, and teachers" in the churches of Christ, who by the practices of most churches of Christ will be men? What will be done to ensure that these voices that make up over half our congregations are heard?

Darryl: (Questioning the all-male make-up of the signers) is below the belt and unfair. You failed to mention that all but one of the signers is either a Biblical professor or dean of Biblical studies in a Christian University. Now, just how many women in Churches of Christ hold a D.Min or Th.D. and teach at a Christian University in the Bible department? You can criticize their departments for not being more aggressive in recruiting women (however, that means there would need to be a pool of women in Churches of Christ with Doctorates in related biblical studies to choose from)—but don't criticize a bunch of professors for getting together and writing a statement they agree with! Furthermore, most of the teachers in our church are women—as is the case in most of the churches of Christ I've been a part of during the past 30 years! (I noticed it did not invite deacons or youth ministers, either—I think you are reading too much exclusivity here where none may be intended). Also, taken at face value I didn't see the statement at all as excluding women. I assumed "teacher" covered women. Maybe the sexism is in the eye of the beholder?

[DS] Yes, as I indicated later, I understood that the signers were mostly academics, but why limit themselves, particularly even there are certainly women professors on

all of those campuses? Are only biblical scholars entitled to an opinion? Intent or not, the list excluded women.

An additional comment after our exchange: there was an implication (although I don't think he actually thinks this) that only people "with Doctorates in related biblical studies" are qualified to comment on such issues. Scholarly Bible study is great, but there is no reason to limit biblical commentary to those holding degrees. The Bible is for everyone, and with careful research and an ear to the Holy Spirit, any Christian can understand Scripture.

Now, I anticipate a response and I agree with what I think it will be! We have created this problem! And yes, maybe our scholars would do well to encourage more women to pursue those degrees.

[DS] Actually, that's not exactly what I was thinking. The problem goes beyond the university walls...if the churches do not accept women in ministry, women are less likely to pursue academic study in Bible -or- they will do so and then seek employment outside the COC. Months ago, after my Women's Roles ET&N (which I need to edit soon since I've changed my mind about some details after having done a lot of additional studies for a class here that just ended), I received a heart-broken note from a father whose daughter had gotten a degree in ministry and then was denied a position as Minister of Children's Education at her home church simply because she was a woman. Of course, I don't know all the details of the situation, but this man's daughter ended up outside the COC.

Darryl: Btw, are the signers racist? From what I could see (and based on my knowledge of these guys) there is not one African American, Sino-American, Hispanic, etc. Now, are you racist for not even bringing up the fact that these are all white men? Did you notice this omission among the signers? Again: eye of the beholder—probably not intentional. I prefer to give folks the benefit of the doubt.

[DS] Point taken, although I suspect what you said about the lack of women Bible teachers at COC colleges probably applies almost as much to race, which is a shame.

ET&N: Who is more the Christian—one who has been immersed but who shows not inclination to follow Jesus or one who is constantly striving to be more like Him but has not yet come to a mature understanding of baptism?

Darryl: I would hope that more categories exist than merely the two you mention! I know some of these guys and I don't think they would argue much with you on that point. And yes, there are at various times obsessions (like the Pharisees) regarding "in and out" plague us—but certainly you don't believe that there is no import to baptism at all? If that's the case then why is it even commanded in the text? Baptism is certainly important to most restorationist groups including the Mennonites and Amish (you better double check that one for me, I think I'm right on the Amish...ho well). The issue of baptism is important among Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Baptists and Pentecostals. Now we don't all see eye to eye regarding purposes or modes—but the issue is that baptism is a terribly important part of universal Christian practice—and is based firmly on command by the text.

[DS] Yes, there are more than two categories, but those categories can exist. Sorry if the "forced choice" options bothered you--a product of my job in tests and measurement. But here's the crux...for too many the issue is not baptism, it's the insistence that baptism is necessary. Many of these guys are probably more flexible than the piney.com guys, for example, but I don't like to see them giving the aid and comfort the legalistic will take from the Statement.

ET&N: (Is weekly communion) intended to define "in" and "out"? If we're going to insist on being pedantic about this, we should also look at the verses that suggest the early Christians "broke bread" daily (Acts 2:46) and recognize that the first century Sunday began at sundown on Saturday.

The consistent testimony of the New Testament is not so much how often or when, but rather how and why. I believe that participating in communion on a weekly basis is a wonderful privilege, but is it any less so monthly or more so daily?

Darryl: Now Dick, please bear with me, because I really haven't had the time to pour over everything in the newsletter—so if I misunderstand you or misrepresent what you mean (or even misread the affirmation) please kindly correct me ok? I don't know if this intended to define "in" and "out". I didn't see anything in the statement re: the Lord's Supper about being "in" or "out." I do agree with you that the weekly observance is not a specific command in the text—although it was the common practice throughout the centuries. As an Episcopal priest friend of mine and I agreed one time: the main reason we do it weekly is because I can't imagine why any worship assembly would leave out the recounting of what Jesus did, who we are and why we are one! (Which is what the Lord's Supper does in part: reminds us of our story and our unity).

[DS] I would have great difficulty worshipping at a church that did not celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. The Statement did not differentiate between the three issues, implicitly leaving the impression that they carried equal weight. That was precisely one of the problems I had with it. And no, I don't think they necessarily intended for this to be an "in" or "out" but some will read it that way.

ET&N: No, the center of Christian worship is a Christ-like life. The Lord's Supper is the center of the assembly, but this is only one part of Christian life.

Ok, ok. Words have meaning and I agree that worship is a daily life-style. But you know what they meant. The common view of most people is that worship is the assembly. That is the context of their statement. (You know how we always claim to be sticklers for context).

[DS] A friend of mine is always reminding all of us not to let external evidence interfere with a plain reading of Scripture, something I agree with, although there are times external evidence can make the reading of Scripture plainer. Same principal here...I responded to the written word without trying to figure out what they meant but failed to say. And again, while THEY may understand, if they are going to publish a major statement in the principal COC organ, I think they have a responsibility to be precise with their working. Too many Christians think the assembly is worship and life is something else.

ET&N: I think the Affirmation signers are bordering on the idolatry of making human forms of worship assemblies more important than God Himself.

If you got that impression from the immediate statement that preceded your comment I'm still scratching my head trying to find it! (Of course, after reading my sentence you may be scratching your head! It is a bit of a run on, I know.) I feel you may be allowing some prejudices show here. Like I said, I know some of these men and I certainly do not believe they hold up forms over God! One could argue that you may be bordering on idolatry of freedom! Note I said "one could" I don't believe for a moment that's the way you feel! But just because a person believes they are right on an issue and even state it strongly doesn't make them an idolater or even close to it! In fact, I would point out that the entire tone of the affirmation is rather mild and open—not hard-nosed or ugly. No where do they state that those who disagree with them are lost or are sinners or anything close!

[DS] Okay, so the idolatry remark was a bit over the top. My apologies.

ET&N: I just cannot see how adherence to this Affirmation Statement overcomes "a legacy of legalism, sectarianism, and divisiveness. It still seems intent upon dividing between "ins" and "outs" by legalistically implying that a failure to practice in specific ways makes a group "out."

My concern is how people who want to be legalistic will use their statement. They published this, presumably believing that they are influential within the church, which is a reasonable assumption. That being so, they had a responsibility to consider not just their words, but HOW those words would be used. Of course, I understand that the same could be said of me, although my circulation is far less than the CC!

Darryl: Dick, I think you are really misreading their concerns. Most of these men are not legalists (I obviously can't speak for all of them). Many of them have been accused of advocating the "New Hermeneutic" as well as attacked from the very people you seem to be lumping them with!

[DS] I know, and I wondered if one motivation behind the Statement was to show those who think the COC universities are too "liberal" that there are "conservatives" there too. A cynic (not me, of course) might wonder if they were protecting enrollment.

Darryl: In the late 80's or early 90's I remember attending the National Conference of Youth Ministries. It's a "Church of Christ" event that invites a lot of Non-Church-of-Christ speakers. One year Dr. William Willimon (Dean of the Duke University Chapel and a well know Methodist author) was our key note speaker. He said to us (I'm paraphrasing): "Why are you Church of Christ folk trying to change? Everyone is trying to get where you are! Methodists are beginning to take baptism and immersion seriously now, acappella music is being seen as a wonderful way of praising God, your autonomy and simple structure and worship make you very attractive..." I think he had a point then.

[DS] So true...that's why I want to be in a church of Christ!! I hope when you read the ET&N about it, you'll understand how seriously I take baptism (and the communion issue). I believe in a cappella music for purely practical reasons...more congregational participation and we can actually hear each other instead of being drowned out by an organ like the people are at my mother's Episcopalian church. But none of that makes instruments evil, as some suggest, nor is there sufficient biblical evidence to conclude that instruments were avoided as opposed to just being generally unavailable to the typical convert.

Darryl: Is it legalistic to tell people they need to obey God and be baptized? Is it legalistic to take the Lord's Supper weekly so we will never forget the central part of our identity (the sacrificial death of Jesus)? Is it legalistic to encourage acappella music in a Christian subculture where assemblies seem more like concerts that revere the performers rather than everyone joining together to offer their unmitigated praise to God? (I've been to enough worship events where performers seemed to receive more honor and praise than God did—I'm not certain I'd want to introduce that in a worship assembly that is supposed to focus on God and honor him). You are free to use an instrument or to take communion whenever you will—I would never judge you for that (and I'm very serious about that—those are opinion areas)—but don't judge me as legalistic for wishing to participate with a group that is acappella and does take the supper weekly. Don't judge me as legalistic for suggesting that these things have a valid place in Christianity.

[DS] Certainly it is not legalistic for YOU or ME to wish to participate with groups that take baptism seriously, celebrate weekly supper, and sing a cappella. The problem arises when one insists that others do the same, even in the COC.

Darryl: I don't know if you read the statements of those who signed the documents, but it would be instructive for you to do so. Btw, I thought Tom Olbricht's comment on the website was

particularly insightful (as was John Mark Hicks'). I don't think they compromised themselves—especially with their additional comments.

[Note: there are [several comments by signers on the Christian Affirmation website.](#)]

Thanks for a great exchange! I hope I haven't just blathered on and made a fool of myself! I'm looking forward to reading your writing on baptism. I will tell you that I believe it is extremely important and I agree with the signers of the affirmation that the NT doesn't seem to have a category of unbaptized disciples. Disciples were baptized believers. Does this mean they had to know all the "whys and wherefores" of baptism? Obviously not. I have very little problem with most of the baptized believers I know (Baptists, Full Gospel, Mennonites, independents). I would never judge a person's baptism; that's up to the individual. Incidentally, my reading of the text is that we are baptized into the forgiveness of sins—in my mind that clearly mitigates the idea that we have to know that forgiveness is tied to baptism. Baptism into is something that happens, not something you necessarily have to know.

[DS] I would agree that the term "unbaptized disciples" seems like an oxymoron, just as "disbelieving disciples" or "unrepentant disciples" would be. I think the overused hear-believe-repent-confess-be baptized formula is accurate in terms of the critical events involved in being a disciples (although we know it's all based on grace, of course), but is the sequence inflexible? What if someone heard, believed and was baptized but went on largely unchanged and later truly repented? When did that person "become" a Christian? The shame of all this is that too many of us think we have to figure out the answer to that question so we know when it's okay to fellowship with them!

I too enjoyed the exchange! Thanks and let's do it again (or continue it) sometime soon



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, [post a message](#) so we can all share in the discussion!

NEXT ISSUE: Cities of the New Testament

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