The Chronicle speaks with the controversial former leader of International Churches of Christ

In churches of Christ, it's hard to think of a name that engenders more emotion than Kip McKean.

The former leader of the International Churches of Christ has inspired radical devotion from thousands of disciples. Equally convicted are his detractors, who accuse McKean and his church of luring unsuspecting members from the pews into a dominating and dangerous cult.

"Mainline" churches of Christ haven't always thought of McKean in such negative terms. Converted as a college freshman in 1972 at the Crossroads Church of Christ, Gainesville, Fla., McKean was a dynamic speaker, young and charismatic. In an era when many churches seemed to be losing the evangelistic zeal that had characterized them in the 1950s, the Crossroads church was growing, and McKean was the kind of leader that gave church members hope for the future.

But as McKean and Crossroads leaders relocated to Boston and the numbers of new converts swelled, mainline church members became wary of their techniques, which focused on "discipling," which mainline churches equated with mind control. Many also bristled at the Boston church's rejection of autonomy — as practiced in "mainline" churches of Christ (Boston-affiliated churches still made claims to some form of autonomy).

McKean's group, which soon reached 100,000 members worldwide, renamed itself the International Churches of Christ and moved its leadership to Los Angeles. Communication between the ICOC and mainline churches all but ceased.

Then, in the fall of 2001, McKean began a year-long sabbatical to deal with family concerns, and a year later he resigned as leader of the ICOC and became Lead Evangelist for the ICOC in Portland, Ore. Upheaval within the ICOC's leadership followed, and the church's membership dropped. In a document titled "From Babylon to Zion," McKean apologized for his own shortcomings and challenged the church to recapture its evangelistic vision.
In the interest of continuing dialogue with the ICOC, The Chronicle began talking with Kingdom News Network, the church’s media branch, in the summer of 2003 to secure this interview with McKean.

In December, Abilene Christian University announced that representatives of the ICOC and “mainline” churches will participate in an event called “Faithful Conversations” at ACU’s annual lectureship Feb. 22-25.

- Read the interview with Kip McKean
- WITH WEB-EXCLUSIVE CONTENT: Kip McKean, quotations through the years
- Kip McKean/ICOC timeline

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