

# History Repeats Itself: The Rise and Fall of Kip McKean & Chuck Lucas

*by Anonymous*

---

*1986--Charles Lucas (nicknamed "Chuck"), 46 year-old leader of the Crossroads Movement (a series of campus ministries within the mainline Churches of Christ), is terminated from his position as evangelist, due to vaguely labeled "recurring sins". In a personal conversation with Rick Bauer, Lucas refers to his being fired as a "sabattical". After his termination, Lucas continues to be financially supported by Boston Movement/ICC leadership. By 1987, Kip McKean assumes Lucas' mantle of leadership, and is able to consolidate all Crossroads-connected ministries into his burgeoning "Boston Movement".*

*2001--Thomas McKean (nicknamed "Kip"), 47 year-old leader of the Boston Movement (now renamed The International Church Of Christ), takes a "sabattical" from his duties, due to vaguely labeled "family problems". McKean officially resigns from his position as Leader of the World Sector Leaders one year later. After his resignation, McKean continues to be financially supported by ICC leadership and retains a role in the "full-time ministry".*

---

In between those years, the Crossroads Movement and Boston Movement/International Church of Christ mirror each other in recruiting tactics, leadership structure and style, and charges of psychological and emotional abuse. As well, the lives of Lucas and McKean appear to have been intertwined, the dynamic of their relationship starting out with Lucas as "the teacher" and McKean "the student", but later flip-flopping to the point where the student far surpasses the teacher.

What are some of the circumstances surrounding the fall of Lucas and the rise of McKean? Why did the change in leadership result only in a duplication of hypocrisy and abuse? What direction will "the Movement" go in now; will the pattern of abuse finally be broken, or will it again be passed down to the "next generation" of leaders?

In 1967, Chuck Lucas became campus minister of the 14th Street Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida, and quickly injected that group with a shot of adrenaline, their membership mushrooming from 186 to a couple thousand over a short period of time. At least 50 Crossroads converts (many of whom are now first and second-tier leaders in the ICC) were then trained as ministers and were hired as youth ministers and senior ministers at Churches of Christ throughout the country. This date, 1967, can far more accurately be described as the beginning of what is now known as "God's modern day

movement", and not the often propagated myth of 1979 and the 30 "would-be disciples". However, present-day ICC leadership has often denied the Crossroads/ICC connection--the reason perhaps hinging on embarrassment over the ultimate fate of Chuck Lucas, which will be described later in this article.

In April of 1972, 17 year-old Kip McKean was baptized into Lucas' congregation and was personally mentored ("discipled") by Lucas. McKean quickly became Lucas' most ready and willing disciple. Robert Hach, a former leader in the movement until McKean excommunicated Hach's ministry in Miami in 1987, was baptized into the same ministry within a week of Kip, and writes about McKean's zeal for imitation:

By the time Kip left Crossroads for a brief and controversial campus ministry stint in Philadelphia before coming into his own at Eastern Illinois University, he had become the mirror-image of Chuck Lucas, only louder. Of course, all of us who were training for the ministry imitated Chuck to one degree or another, not only his public 'challenging' to be more totally committed and his private 'confronting' of sins like pride, ingratitude, and the 'independent spirit', but also his moustache, his three-piece and leisure suits (this being the early 70's), and his gold pocket watch. But no one did it with more gusto (minus the moustache, which perhaps refused to sprout) than Kip, even mimicking Chuck's gestures and verbal quirks in the pulpit and exaggerating Chuck's flair for the dramatic. It was embarrassing at first (at least I was embarrassed for him), but it eventually became par for the course, the pattern of true discipleship in the movement. When Kip, thereafter, expected his closest disciples to identify themselves so thoroughly with him that they might today be mistaken for the first signs of human cloning, he was expecting no more than he had so willingly done himself. (1)

While it was true that Lucas' impression on McKean was obviously powerful, it also appeared the young McKean exerted a strange kind of influence over his elder. Hach continues:

For the first year or so at Crossroads, I would 'go forward' about once a month, during the 'invitation song' that would follow each Sunday morning and Sunday evening sermon, in hopes that the prayers of the congregation would purge the guilt of my failures to live up to my 'total commitment', insecurity and self-doubt oozing out the pores of my skin. During that same period, Kip would go forward just about as often as I did. but he 'responded to the invitation' in a manner altogether different from the rest of us (typically from seven or eight to fifteen or more student recruits who, having been 'convicted of sin', would go forward after each sermon): we would whisper our prayer requests into the ear of minister Chuck Lucas, who would then announce our requests publicly; Kip, on the other hand, would ask Chuck if he could say a few words to the congregation. To everyone's surprise at first, Chuck would acquiesce, and it soon became a ritual for Kip to preach a three-minute sermonette whenever he 'went forward'. If he ever had any sin to confess, it was

typically lost in the message the Lord had laid on his heart to deliver to the congregation. Quite clearly, self-doubt had no air to breathe in Kip's world. He was defining the fast track to leadership in the movement while the rest of us looked on in wonder. (2)

McKean himself acknowledges his debt to Lucas and Crossroads in a letter addressed to the Elders, Evangelists, Deacons, and members of the Crossroads Church of Christ:

...the Lord put it on my heart to write this letter of appreciation to all of you. In a very real way, I owe you my ministry, my marriage, and my very soul. I thank God for you by name every day because of your influence...I want you to realize that you have had a profound effect on numerous churches--not only by the sending out of trained evangelists, but through the many members who have moved to help in several of the ministries you have influenced. In Boston, we have so many former members of Crossroads, and we treasure each of these individuals, because they have been so well equipped for the ministry!...Your efforts in Gainesville continue to live on in Atlanta, Columbia, San Diego, Berkeley, Boston, and many other places.

Your Brother and Son in the Faith,

Kip McKean (3)

As these statements show, and as Rick Bauer states in his book, "Toxic Christianity", Chuck Lucas was clearly "the founder, patron saint, and hero" to Kip McKean and many of his peers, who are now present-day leaders in the ICC.

But in 1986, "the fit hit the shan."

According to Bauer, Lucas was "abruptly terminated from the Crossroads Church of Christ for 'recurring sins in his life'. I was serving on the ministry staff that assisted in covering up the real reason for his termination--sexual perversion and homosexual activity with younger men in his ministry. Irrefutable evidence was presented to the elders of the Crossroads Church clearly depicting a pattern of sexual liberties taken by Lucas over an extended period of time." (4)

At this point in the evolution in the movement, Kip McKean had become more than just an up-and-comer within the mainline Churches of Christ (which his "Boston Movement" was still a part of); the growth of his ministry had surpassed Lucas' and he was clearly bucking for Chuck's position as "father" of the movement. Robert Hach describes the events leading up to Lucas' termination:

Later that same year, the headquarters of the movement was more-or-less officially transferred from Gainesville to Boston. This, not coincidentally, corresponded with the dismissal of Chuck Lucas from his position of Evangelist of the Crossroads Church of Christ. Martin Bentley, another old friend and Crossroads-trained Evangelist now closely allied with Kip (and married to the older sister of Kip's wife Elena), demanded that the

Crossroads elders discipline Chuck for unnamed sins, which both Martin and the elders, among others, had long since known about (and only later, though never publicly, identified as sexual misconduct).

Chuck had been resisting the inevitable shift of power from Crossroads to Boston, unwilling to accept that Crossroads, in a small town near a single campus, could not be the command center of a worldwide church-planting movement as it had been of a nationwide campus ministry movement. He had clearly become an obstacle in the path of God's Movement; thus, he had to be removed. I suspect that had Chuck been willing to turn over the reins of the movement to Kip by instructing all the remaining un-Bostonized Crossroads-connected leaders to move to Boston, he would have been allowed to continue in his hypocrisy indefinitely. Since Chuck had been making clear by his actions that he would not willingly relinquish what remained of his lordship over the movement, Martin blew the whistle: Chuck's time as God's present-day apostle Paul was up; Kip's time had come.

While Chuck's unethical and duplicitous behavior had continued unchecked for too long the timing of its exposure could not have been more expedient for Kip's purposes. Perhaps no event more fully reveals Kip's vision of God's kingdom as an army than the fall of Chuck Lucas. That Kip's father (if I remember correctly) was a high-ranking officer in the U.S. armed forces seems to have been integral to the shaping of Kip's concept of the movement: how it should be structured, how subordinates should be managed, how traitors and weaklings should be dispatched, how individuality should be smothered, and how even friendship and loyalty should be subordinated to the objective of victory. While Chuck was the pioneer of this faith, Kip was its perfecter. (5)

Lucas' own comments about his termination were somewhat more ambiguous. According to Bauer, "Of even greater damage was the 'spin control' Lucas himself engaged in when he described his termination. In one personal conversation he described his being fired as a 'sabbatical' and would not go into any specifics about his wrongdoing. Although a vaguely-worded statement came out about a year later from Lucas to the effect that "if I've hurt anyone, I'm sorry," he has yet to apologize to the hundreds and thousands of Crossroads members he lied to and deceived." (6)

The Gainesville Sun, a Florida newspaper, wrote an article about Lucas' termination, and printed the "vaguely worded statement" that Lucas made to his congregation. Lucas' statement as reported by the article may sound eerily familiar to anyone who has read McKean's sabbatical letter 15 years later:"

**I completely agree that it is best for me at this time to terminate my responsibilities as evangelist for the Crossroads Church. This decision has been reached after much time, thought, prayer and counsel. In recent years I have become increasingly and painfully aware of sins and weaknesses in my own life and character which have made it**

**difficult for me to serve in the exemplary and effective manner which the Lord and this church deserve. I want to get out of the spotlight and the pressures and demands of the full-time ministry for a period of time, in order to concentrate on and deal decisively with those things which will enable me to serve the Lord in the future in another ministry in a greater way than ever before.**

**I am truly sorry and penitent for every sin, failure and mistake, and praise God for every victory and success. (7)**

The article then said that Lucas refused to elaborate on the nature of the "recurring sins", and said "I'm sorry, but I just will not say anything beyond the statement. I think the statement says everything I want to say."

Bauer later commented:

**It is my firm belief that if the true nature of the corruption that existed at Crossroads were ever truly known by the members of both the former Crossroads Movement and the then-current Boston Movement membership, the necessary checks and balances on leadership corruption and abuse of power may have been put into place in the ICC, checks and balances which would have made it impossible for Kip McKean to amass an organization that is accountable to him only and no other outside regulatory body. (7a)**

So was Lucas' sin and ultimate termination a wake-up call to leadership, were reforms and changes going to be made? Hardly.

Let's look at parallel reports of abuses in two different newspaper articles. One is about Crossroads, written by the Florida St. Petersburg Times in 1979 (coincidentally, the year McKean began his "Boston Movement"). The other is about the Boston Church of Christ, written by the Massachusetts Middlesex News in 1987 (one year after Lucas' termination).

St. Petersburg Times (Florida), 1979	Middlesex News (Massachusetts), 1987
-- The Crossroads ministry has become so elitist that it has come to view itself as the only road to Christian salvation.	-- The Boston Church, unlike mainstream congregations of the Church of Christ, calls itself the only true 'Christian' religion.
-- Some students who have dropped out of its programs have been subjected to harrassment and/or 'shunning' by former friends in the church sometimes leading to psychological problems.	-- And after she [a former member] left, she was shunned by church members she had lived with, prayed with, and confided in for four years.
-- Converts are assigned 'prayer partners', usually an older student or more experienced church member, to who they are exhorted to confess their 'sins'; and that such confessions become 'common knowledge' in the church and are used to maintain 'control' of the members.	-- And she [a former member] was encouraged to tell her innermost secrets to her church 'discipleship partner'....those secrets are used against them [members] if they balk at what the church leaders want.

<p>-- The movement's doctrine instills excessive fear, guilt, and anxiety in some converts.</p>	<p>-- They use every tactic to keep you in, and it's very emotional, telling you how wrong you are, how bad you are, that you're going to hell.</p>
<p>-- The movement's ministers have been 'rebaptizing' converts or 'withholding' baptism on the basis of 'man-made' judgements about their acceptability... (8)</p>	<p>-- Its leaders, 'believe they have the right to create commandments that members must follow.' (9)</p>

Former leader Rick Bauer also shared his perspective on the duplication of abuses within the two "Movements":

I cannot begin to describe my shock and ever-growing revulsion upon moving to Boston, Massachusetts, and serving on the ministry staff of the Boston Church of Christ led by Kip McKean. From 1987 until my departure in 1991, I saw, led, and otherwise participated in an organization whose practices, doctrines, and tactics were essentially the same as the Gainesville-led Crossroads Movement. I had hoped that the Boston organization, of all groups, would have learned the brutal lessons of authoritarian, cult-like behavior and exclusivity, and that the hypocrisy that dominated the lives of the upper-echelon leaders of the Crossroads Movement would have been studiously avoided. Quite the contrary--**it seems that the old adage that 'those who fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them' rings true in the case of the Boston Movement and the present ICC.** (10)

Flash-forward to 2001. Books, websites, newspaper articles, television reports, and ex-members themselves have continued to charge the International Church of Christ and its leader, Kip McKean, with hypocrisy, abuse of authority, and lack of accountability to its membership on matters ranging from spiritual to financial. Fifteen years have passed since Chuck Lucas went on what he referred to as a "sabbatical", and on November 12, Kip McKean issued the following statement:

**During these days Elena and I have been coming to grips with the need to address some serious shortcomings in our marriage and family. After much counsel with the Gempels and Bairds and other World Sector Leaders as well as hours of prayer, we have decided it is God's will for us to take a sabbatical and to delegate, for a time, our day-to-day ministry responsibilities so that we can focus on our marriage and family.** (11)

One year later, McKean offered his resignation, along with a statement of apology. To read McKean's letter from the ICC's UpCyberDown website, [click here](#).

So here we are in 2002, and the questions arise again: is this really the dawn of a "new era" of church reforms? Or will the baton of abuse and hypocrisy now merely be handed off to a new leader, or group of leaders, under the ICC's upcoming "new governance"? I believe that the main issue when addressing questions like these is that, as both apologies

show, the responsibility of the Movement's "system" is never challenged -- the "system" being the extra-Biblical doctrine and methods that were "pioneered" by Lucas and "perfected" by McKean.

Lucas and McKean both attribute their church's problems solely to their personal "character sins and weaknesses". This has been a common thread throughout Crossroads/ICC history. The movement's battle cry has always been that it's leaders are "imperfect men in a perfect system". As the beginning of McKean's letter makes clear, the ICC is still God's "modern day movement" composed of "true disciples", to the exclusion of all others. Thus, leaders have been disciplined, demoted, and terminated (while often, as in Lucas's and McKean's case, continuing to be financially supported); yet the inherent and un-Biblical authority in relationships, whether they're called "prayer partners" or "discipleship partners" has remained the same. Depending on the particular leader, sometimes the leash on members has been loosened, sometimes tightened, but the leash remains in place all the same. Will ICC leadership finally cut the leash? Or will history repeat itself again and will another leader, or leaders, merely replace McKean as McKean replaced Lucas, and will the ICC continue to reel from a system which engenders abuse, scandal, and an increasingly declining membership?

**Post script:** Regarding the ICC's new governance, recently [www.upcyberdown.org](http://www.upcyberdown.org) printed an article about a "Unity Conference" where the new leadership structure was decided upon. The foundation of the new structure does not appear to address the problems with "the system" that are described in this article, but mainly involves the elimination of the World Sector Leader position in favor of expanding the number of decision makers. The problem is, many of the men to be involved in these decisions are still the same ones who allowed Lucas's and McKean's abuse of authority and hypocrisy to remain unchecked for so long. So now, instead of a small group that denies, excuses, and covers up the corruption, they'll just have a larger group to do that.

#### **Notes:**

- (1) Hach, Robert. Article, "The Way Up and The Way Out", 2000, p.2.
- (2) Ibid., p.2.
- (3) Bauer, Rick, *Toxic Christianity*, 1994, chapter titled, "The Crossroads Years", p. 2.
- (4) Ibid., pgs.2-3
- (5) Hach, pgs. 3-4
- (6) Bauer, p. 3
- (7) Bauer, p. 35
- (7a) Bauer, p. 3
- (8) Bauer, p.18
- (9) Bauer, chapter titled, "The Boston/LA era", pgs. 9-10

(10) Bauer, chapter, "The Crossroads Years", p.3

(11) McKean, Kip, Upcyberdown website, November 12, 2001