

The Good and Bad of the Integrated Church Movement Philosophy by David Cloud

I am writing about the Integrated Church Movement and Vision Forum in one report, because they are so closely tied together. While the Integrated Church Movement is larger than Vision Forum, Vision Forum is probably the most influential part of it.

The Integrated Church Movement (ICM), also called the Family Integrated Church, is defined as follows:

“The family-integrated model jettisons all age-graded ministries. Those who adhere to this model view each family unit (single or married, with or without children) as one ‘block’ that comprises the local church. That is, they view the church as a family of families. They view the church’s purpose as equipping the parents, primarily the fathers, to evangelize and disciple their children” (Terry Delany, “Three Perspectives on Family Ministry,” March 18, 2009).

It is not an organization but a philosophy, and there are many varieties of Family Integrated churches.

THE GOOD

There are many biblically-sound things that are emphasized by the Integrated Church movement.

It emphasizes building godly families and it resists the cultural way of parents abdicating their responsibilities to government schools and church programs.

It urges fathers to take their rightful place as committed and involved leaders and instructors.

It emphasizes separation from the world’s philosophies and ways.

It exposes the danger of the typical segregated church ministry that follows the world’s pattern by putting young people together too much to be influenced by their peers and does not emphasize enough parental responsibility in training, perhaps even detracting from that responsibility.

The Integrated Church material has many helpful statements on these particular issues.

THE DANGERS

But there are also some serious dangers represented by the Integrated Church movement.

1. The Integrated Church has often led to the downplaying of the importance of the biblical church.

This is not always true, but it is often true. Vision Forum warns about “nomadic families that flit from church to church, or renegades who refuse to place themselves under the accountability of a local church,” and adds, “God requires His people to be under biblical local churches with biblical preaching, biblical church government, biblical ordinances, and biblical discipline.”

This warning is an admission that this is a problem.

In fact, the movement is rife with this error. Many have replaced a biblical church with “home church” where the fathers are the pastors. Others have tried to start “churches” with a few home-schooling families though they aren’t qualified and divinely called to the task.

The Integrated Church movement has turned the church into a “family of families,” but the church is much more than a “family of families.” The apostle Paul wasn’t even married and he emphasized the importance of the unmarried condition (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 25-35). The church’s main task is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8), and when the gospel is preached effectively, the result is the salvation of single people and those from all sorts of broken families. If the emphasis is on the ideal family, on the church being “a family of families,” a great many are left out.

We see this in our church planting work in South Asia. One of our churches is eight years old, and a high percentage of the members are either unmarried young people or are men and women representing broken homes. Several of the women have

unsaved husbands. Some of the husbands abuse them and try to hinder their faith in Christ; at least one is an abusive drunkard. The wife of one of the male church members left him after he came to Christ. We have only a handful of families so far that are composed of both husband and wife that are saved and are trying to raise their children right. In many cases the wives can't read and the parents have only the slightest clue of how to raise their children for Christ, though we are trying to train them. If our emphasis were on "a family of families," we would be a very discouraged group.

Our goal is definitely to produce godly Christian families, but our church is not a family of families. It is a church! We are busy teaching the people how to build godly homes and discipline their children biblically, but it is very slow and somewhat discouraging work, because it is all brand new to them. The Hindu culture knows nothing about such things. Most of our church members had never even seen a Bible until they heard the gospel through our evangelistic ministries. The vast majority are first generation Christians, saved out of endless generations of pagan darkness.

What we need are New Testament churches that seek to build strong families and that do not hinder the families by such worldly things as entertainment-focused youth departments. To that degree we agree with the Family Integrated philosophy, but only to that degree, because that is as far as the Bible allows us to go.

2. The Integrated Church lacks understanding about the danger of New Evangelicalism.

The Integrated Church is largely an evangelical movement rather than a fundamentalist movement. Popular speakers at their conferences include Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis and other New Evangelicals. You will find frequent positive references to evangelical leaders. There is little or no call for ecclesiastical separation. This is no light matter, as the Bible emphasizes the doctrine of separation from false doctrine and compromise (e.g., Romans 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Timothy 6:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 3:10). (See "New Evangelicalism: Its History, Characteristics, and Fruit," which is available from Way of Life Literature in book and e-book formats.)

3. The Integrated Church neglects the Great Commission.

If you look through Integrated Church literature and web sites, there is little emphasis on the Great Commission and preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth. I am not saying there is nothing at all, but there is far more emphasis on the family and other things. Their conferences are not missions conferences or evangelism conferences but family and dominionist/reconstructionist conferences (emphasizing the building of the kingdom of God in the here and now). Preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth is not even mentioned in Vision Forum's mission statement.

There are exceptions such as Antioch Community Church in Elon, North Carolina, which lists the following as two of their distinctives: "commitment to local and world missions" and "planting other churches."

This church appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

The family is not an end in itself. The objective of both family and church should be the fulfillment of the Lord's Great Commission, which He emphasized greatly after He rose from the dead and before He ascended to Heaven (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

The book of Acts models the working out of the Great Commission rather than the Family Integrated Church model. Though we believe in a strong emphasis on godly families, this should not be an end in itself. Paul, a single man who could not model the strong family emphasis, preached the gospel and started churches. Paul took the young Timothy away from his family and disciplined him apart from his father and mother and grandmother, and there is no evidence that Timothy ever married.

4. The Integrated Church has gone beyond the Bible in making rules about family and church.

The Integrated Church tends to be very legalistic. There is much liberty within the biblical model for both the family and the church, and it is legalistic to make laws that go beyond the biblical bounds.

For example, there is the teaching that the church must always be "family integrated." A lecture published by Vision Forum says, "The biblical example is that entire families are present for corporate worship. Age-segregated worship is rooted in

evolutionary humanism, not biblical Christianity” (Doug Phillips, “The Role of Children in the Meeting of the Church,” 2002, Family Renewal Audio Library).

The Bible says nothing about this one way or the other. Segregation of the ages has its dangers, but there certainly can be a time and place to teach children and young people separately from the adults. This is not contrary to any Scripture. A segregated ministry has some dangers that we need to consider and avoid, but it’s not a heresy. As the pillar and ground of the truth and possessing the Lord’s commission to “teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have taught you,” the church has the authority to teach children and young people as certainly as the home has (1 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 28:19); and the church has the right to decide how to accomplish this in a practical sense. I believe there is a great benefit in having Bible classes for children and youth. The Bible nowhere says that they must always be with their parents. That is to make a law out of the Bible’s silence.

Sunday School is neither a pillar of the faith nor a heresy. It is simply a tool. The Sunday School movement began in England as a way of evangelizing children from poor families and did not meet in the church or even during normal church times. It was held in various places in the community on Sunday afternoons. The typical Sunday School today is part evangelistic and part discipleship. Each church must determine how it will fulfill Christ’s command to preach the gospel to every creature and disciple those who believe, and the Sunday School can be a helpful tool if it is conducted properly. Having or not having a Sunday School doesn’t determine whether a church is biblical.

If mom and dad want to keep their children with them at all times in church, and if they don’t want their children to participate in youth activities, that is their prerogative before the Lord, but to go beyond this and make such things a law for everyone is to go beyond Scripture.

Another example of the legalism of the Integrated Church movement is its teaching that daughters must remain under the father’s roof until marriage. The following is a review of a Vision Forum book and DVD by a fundamentalist home schooling mother that investigated their materials:

“The two items I have reviewed are the book ‘So Much More,’ a book to daughters about how to have ‘vision’ for the kingdom of God. And the DVD ‘The Return of the

Daughters,' a documentary on the whole idea of daughters staying under their father's roof until marriage. On the surface these items seemed to be very God-honoring. Yet, I had an unsettled feeling that something just wasn't quite right. On the DVD, it seemed very touching to want to 'protect' your daughters in the way they suggest. What Christian father wouldn't want to do the best for his daughter? Being a home school father, my husband wanted to have an open heart to what the Lord may be leading him to in the future. We spent all these years training her to be a keeper at home and as she becomes an adult, we do not want to just 'throw her to the wolves.' This is exactly what the DVD suggests you are doing if you don't keep your daughter at home until marriage. ... The book had much material that seemed on the surface to be great. It mentioned modest dress, Christian femininity, etc. Yet, it warned daughters against an independent spirit and self-sufficiency to the point of calling working for anyone other than your dad, selfish and Marxist. It also mentioned if daughters did not have families that agreed with this vision, they should find a family that would adopt them into their families so they could fulfill this role. The whole idea was the family should not be split up at church and if you wanted to be a visionary daughter you better find a family in one of their Integrated churches so you could be a part. It was such nonsense as I have led 'bus kids' to Christ in junior church and have wondered how they would have fit in at church without any families to adopt them. There were so many other glaring flaws, often times they used Scripture quotes that were intended to be commands for our relationship to Christ, and they twisted it to be for our relationship to earthly fathers."

To teach that young women cannot leave their father's roof unless they are married is going far beyond Scripture and putting man-made yokes on God's people. Though we agree that we are not to follow the dictates and ways of today's feministic-influenced society (Psalm 1:1; Rom. 12:3) and children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1), this does not mean that we have to submit to man-made laws that go beyond this. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice.

Is a young woman to be treated as a child? For a young woman to go to a godly Bible College and even to become a single missionary within the ministry restrictions of the New Testament Scripture (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:12) is not unscriptural. My wife was saved as a teenager when she was living in home broken by divorce. Her father and step father were unbelievers, so she had no earthly father to help her spirituality. She faithfully attended the best church in her area, and after she graduated from high school she attended a godly Bible College, worked in a church, and was called to be

a missionary. Before we were married, she worked as a nurse at a missionary hospital, and I do not believe that she was disobeying the Bible. A single woman can operate under the authority of the church as surely as she can under the authority of a father. Consider Phebe (Romans 16:1-2). She was sent by Paul on a ministry journey to Rome and Paul instructed the church at Rome to assist her, yet no father or husband is mentioned.

To instruct young women to leave their own fathers and put themselves under another father, because her own father is not following the Integrated Church model, is actually rebellion to God's Word. Where does the Bible teach this? The Bible says, "Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). It doesn't say, "Daughters obey your father in the Lord unless he refuses to follow the Integrated Church philosophy."

Beware of Integrated Church legalism.

5. The Integrated Church will bring you into association with heresy.

As I have been examining the Integrated Church Movement, I have found many heresies that make this a dangerous movement. These are in addition to the errors that we have mentioned under the previous four points.

There is the heresy that salvation is by endurance.

Consider the following statement at a Family Integrated Church web site:

"While the dedication and discipline and athletic prowess is commendable, I fear that it may be at the expense of the child's salvation. I know that on earth it isn't fancy, it isn't glorious, millions of people won't be shouting your or your child's name, but I want to encourage you, as a father, to daily drill the Christian fundamentals with your children. There are no medals or crowns or tiaras or sashes. But this is an endurance race and if we remain steadfast until the end, we will receive the crown of salvation that will last for eternity" (Richard Boureston, "Will Your Child Throw a 100mph Fastball in Hell?" Walk of Faith Church, Orange County's Family Integrated Church, <http://ourwalkoffaith.com/articles/orange-county-church/will-your-child-throw-a-100mph-fastball-in-hell.html>).

That is work's salvation, and it is a heresy of the first order.

There is the heresy of dominionism.

Vision Forum, for example, is devoted to dominion theology, and Vision Forum has a vast influence throughout the Integrated Church movement. They seek to impart a "family vision for cultural reformation." That is dominionism. One of their DVD presentations is entitled "Training Dominion-Oriented Daughters." This is similar to the goal of the emerging church, except the emerging church is willing to adapt to the world's culture. Since Vision Forum interprets Bible prophecy allegorically, they do not believe in the imminent return of Christ and are seeking to redeem the world itself rather than merely winning souls to Christ. They don't believe in the urgency of preaching the gospel to every creature. **THUS, THOUGH THEY ARE RIGHT IN THE EMPHASIS ON A GODLY FAMILY, THEY ARE WRONG IN THE GOAL THEY HAVE FOR THAT FAMILY.** The proper biblical goal for a godly family is to reach the world for Christ, to fulfill the Great Commission as it is modeled in the book of Acts, which is through worldwide church planting.

There is the heresy of Calvinistic sovereign election.

Vision Forum is founded upon and permeated with Reformed Calvinistic theology. The statement of faith includes the following:

"All who were chosen in Christ from eternity past are born again by the Holy Spirit, respond from their new hearts with repentance and faith in Jesus, are justified on the basis of the shed blood of Christ, become children of God, and are indwelt, sanctified, and sealed by the Holy Spirit until they are glorified at Christ's return."

Vision Forum books include the following: *John Calvin: Man of the Millennium*, *The Story of the English Puritans*, *The World's Greatest Reformation History Library*, *The Geneva Bible Calvin Legacy Edition*, *Children's Stories of the Reformation*, *Stories of the Covenanters in Scotland*, *Reformation Heroes*, *Famous Women of the Reformed Church*, *Puritan Fathers Classics Library*, *Gill's Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (hyper, hyper Calvinism). They even sell a statue of John Calvin.

There is the heresy of Replacement Theology and the misuse of the Law of Moses.

This heresy replaces Israel with the Church. It is for this reason that the Family Integrated Church movement brings so many things from the Old Testament directly into New Testament church, which is a gross error. The Apostle Paul taught that the Law of Moses is not the Christian's law (2 Corinthians 3:6-18). In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the "letter that killeth" is the Law of Moses. (This verse is frequently taken out of context by New Evangelicals and ecumenists and liberals to support the heresy that the Bible should not be interpreted literally or that it should not be obeyed in all points.) Those who hold to Replacement Theology teach that the "moral code" of the Law of Moses is enforce in the Church, but Paul was specifically talking about the "moral code" in 2 Corinthians 3. He was talking about the Law that "was written and engraven in stones" (verse 7). That is the Ten Commandments! Yet he calls this Law "the ministration of death" (verse 7) and "the ministration of condemnation" (verse 9). This is because the Law of Moses requires perfect obedience in ALL points (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10), and sinful, fallen man cannot live up to it. Thus, the purpose of the Law of Moses was to show us God's holy character and righteous demands and man's fallen condition in order to lead men to safety in Christ (Romans 3:19-24; Galatians 3:24). Once a man places his faith in Christ, he is no longer under the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:25; Romans 7:1-4). Paul said the Law of Moses, specifically the Ten Commandments written and engraven in stones, is done away for the believer (2 Cor. 3:11). The New Testament believer has a different, an even higher law, and that is the "law of the Spirit" (Romans 8:2). The believer's law is to be conformed to the image of Christ by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Christian's law is also called "the law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25), because while the instruction of the New Testament faith is a requirement that God places before His people, it is a law of liberty because we obey God out of gratitude for His grace in Christ and we do not have to fear eternal condemnation.

There is the heresy of denying the imminency of the return of Christ.

The Integrated Church movement largely denies an imminent Rapture, but the doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture is both Scriptural and important. (See "The Pre-Tribulation Rapture" at the Way of Life web site.) It is not a peripheral doctrine. Christ, Paul, James, and Peter taught that the Lord's return is imminent and is to be expected at any time (Mat. 24:44; Phil. 4:5; Jam. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7). The early Christians lived in expectation of Christ's return and the literal fulfillment of the

prophecies. “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). The doctrine of a pre-tribulational Rapture is a great motivator for purifying one’s personal Christian life. It encourages the believer in trials and persecutions (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). It keeps the church’s focus on the Great Commission. D.L. Moody had it right when he said: “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’” The pre-tribulational Rapture motivates us to be busy in the Lord’s work (1 Cor. 15:58). It motivates us to live obedient lives (1 Jn. 3:1-3; 1 Th. 5:4-7). It motivates us to separate from evil (Tit. 2:13-14). It keeps believers on the outlook for heresy and apostasy (2 Timothy 4:3-4; 1 John 2:24-28).

There is the heresy of modern textual criticism.

The writings, videos, and web sites promoting the Integrated Church are filled with quotations from the modern versions, including the English Revised Version and the New International Version. There is a complete capitulation to the heresy of modern textual criticism and the smorgasbord approach to the Bible version issue. (See the following articles at the Way of Life Literature web site: “Textual Criticism Is Drawn from the Wells of Infidelity,” “Modern Textual Criticism’s Role in the Breakdown of Society,” and “The Ungodly Fruit of Modern Textual Criticism.” For a more extensive study, see the books “Modern Textual Criticism’s Hall of Shame” and “Faith vs. the Modern Bible Versions,” which are available in print and eBooks editions at the Way of Life web site.)

CONCLUSION

The Integrated Church movement has some good points that need to be emphasized in every church today, but the good is wrapped in a theological package that has many dangers for Bible-believing fundamentalists.