

Is FHU Serious about Commending a Clown Ministry?

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In the late '70s *Time* magazine ran a story about the introduction of clowns into the ministry in denominational churches. Members of the church of Christ who commented on it reacted with more sadness than surprise due to the loss of dignity for things divine. More recently a local congregation has adopted the clown concept. The degradation of the Sycamore View Church of Christ in Memphis into denominationalism is demonstrated by the description of the clown ministry on the church's website: "The Sycamore View Church of Christ Funnybones Clown Troupe was born in January, 2000. It had been a vision of Ed 'Shivers' Cookenham and his wife Leanne 'Sadie' Braddock to start a clown ministry. The idea was presented to the church's Youth Minister, Joe Godley, who thought it was a great idea. Shortly after he told the youth group about it eight young men and women said yes. When the clown classes started in early February of 2000 the goal was to get ready for our church's mission trip to Donetsk, Ukraine" (<http://svcc>).

The disappointment of developments deepens when a full page ad on the last page of the so-called *Christian Chronicle* which boasts a circulation of near 100,000 reads: "As far as Lisa's quest to become a clown, she put her trust in Michelle that one day it might come true. Michelle took her to her home congregation, the Sycamore View Church of Christ, which just happened to have a clown ministry, complete with make-up, training...the whole circus. Although only for a day, Lisa became a clown, complete with giant shoes, the red nose and, most importantly, a big smile. Help people. Form a bond. Help a clown find her dream. Freed-Hardeman University and The Power to Be!" (*The Christian Chronicle*, 59:5, May 2002, p. 36).

What can be done to break the repetition of history observed by J.E. Choate, "The one great lesson beginning with Harvard University shows that schools with a religious origin will ultimately follow the sources of money and students" (http://www.bible-infonet.org/ff/articles/agents/111_11_18.htm, p. 2)? Churches of Christ in Memphis are harmed by FHU's commendation of the very liberal Sycamore View Church of Christ. Consider this: Two months ago Sycamore View welcomed Joe Beam, co-worker with Rubel Shelly in Nashville, founder and president of Family Dynamics, which recently hired David Slater in jail convicted of theft, fraud, burglary and forgery, and seminar speaker on the title of "Love, Sex & Marriage" ("The *new Wineskins* Gathering," *LoveLines*, 28:20, May 15, 2002, p.

1; *The Christian Chronicle*, 59:5, May 2002, pp. 3, 22). Beam presented his “Seeing the Unseen” seminar with its tall tales involving angels and demon possession and etcetera at Sycamore View (cf. the book by the same name). In addition, the vituperations of Joe Beam are levied against the Getwell Church of Christ. In an article on their so-called “grace centered magazine” website he charts the Spiritual Sword Lectureship as extremist, referring to us pejoratively as right wing “Zealots,” condemning Getwell for not fellowshipping the Christian Church and all other denominations. He falsely charges those whom he labels “Zealots” who believe in “rightly dividing the word of God” with making matters of opinion into matters of faith (<http://www.gcmagazine.net>).

Two reasons are prominent why my alma mater would promote a congregation in something as ridiculous as a clown ministry and indirectly someone as radical as Joe Beam: 1) Money and 2) Students. Christianity is a battle for the hearts and minds of men in much the same way as Joel plead for the same: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14). The plea for men and women to come back to the Bible and “speak as the oracles of God” needs to echo once again through the auditorium and classrooms in this congregation as in the days of the old Jackson Avenue Church of Christ when G.C. Brewer was the preacher. The present preacher is an admitted disciple of Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris (Curt Sparks, “Its Time We Go To War!!!” *Sycamore Views*, 24:4, April 2000, pp. 1-2).

The “rest of the story” about the clown ministry at the Sycamore View Church of Christ is they took twenty-two teenagers and nine adults on the mission trip to the Ukraine for the supposed purpose of “teaching God’s Word” (*op.cit.*). Such behavior answers in part why respect for the Bible and preachers of the gospel is dwindling down almost to the point of flickering out among such brethren. The Bible deserves a higher place of honor than that: “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psa. 138:2). Isaiah said, “Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa. 66:1-2).

Every single member of a congregation who contributes into the treasury of that congregation is in fellowship with the work of that congregation (I Cor. 16:1-2; Phil. 4:14-16). People ought to be embarrassed at a clown ministry. Ignoring it

does not relieve the responsibility of promoting it. The motto of the clown ministry advertised on the website contains crude language unbecoming of a Christian. Children would be censured by virtuous parents for speaking in such a way. Is there anyone there who cares at all about decency and dignity? Our sincere hope for Sycamore View and FHU is that of the inspired apostle Paul, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11). The Bible says, "...Aged men be sober...aged women likewise...that they may teach the younger women to be sober...Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded" (Titus 2:1-6).