

**The Failure of Christian Leadership to Advance Oneness in Christ (OIC):
An Exegetical Analysis and Criticism of American Christian Leadership
Through the Lens of Galatians 3:27-28.**

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Abstract

Jesus Christ offers oneness with Him. St. Paul implored the Galatians to accept this unifying offer and ignore their ethnicity, status, gender, and other distinctions and focus on Oneness In Christ (OIC) thus fulfilling Moses's explanation that the Holy Trinity was one with each other and one with all of humanity whom They created. This is the foundation of the challenge now that Christ's church in modernity stands fractured, divided, arguing with each other, and moving farther away from OIC which demonstrates a leadership failure. Holy Scripture answers how to achieve OIC. After examining the current OIC leadership chasm, an exegetical inner texture analysis provides a way back to the Light. Christ's Great Commission "to make disciples of all nations" (Mat. 28-19), the 1917 Balfour Declaration (providing a roadmap for a 31-year journey to create Israel) (Gold, 2017; Vereté, 1970), and President Kennedy's 1962 "moon shot" declaration (that the U.S. would land on the moon within the decade) (Kennedy, 1962) identified how to achieve the unimaginable. This paper presents an outline of five preliminary steps leaders can use to unify Christianity into an American Christian Church focused on OIC.

Keywords: Christian leaders, transformational leadership, One In Christ, American Christian Church

Glossary

American Christian Church (ACC)	A unified Christian Church in the United States
ACC Implementation Team	A group of highly trained, talented, faithful, denominationally diverse Christian lay professionals working cooperatively to create the ACC
Accusation Effect (AE)	Accusers with culpability are evaluated more favorably by pointing out the failures of others
Denomination	A particular church, parish, jurisdiction, faith, congregation religious group, or tradition to which a person belongs
Denomination Disciples (DD)	Individuals more focused on supporting and promoting their Denomination instead of Oneness In Christ
Oneness In Christ (OIC)	The extraordinary gift of having Christ in each of us and being one with the Saviour and each other
OIC Promise	The promises of being “one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28), the oneness of the Holy Trinity with everyone (John 17:21-22), and that Christ lives in everyone (Gal. 2:20)
Oneness In Christ Denominational Leaders (OICD Leaders)	Leaders of all U.S. Christian Denominations
Oneness In Christ Disciples (OICD)	Christians who practice and teach OIC
Oneness In Christ Unity Date	The day a new and unified American Christian Church begins operating/functioning
Transformational Leadership (TL)	Leaders who inspire others to pursue a new Vision of an exciting future aligned with their Core Values and Why in the face of constantly changing circumstances

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Christian leaders have failed to fulfill a fundamental promise of God and Christ that we are all one. Moses first explains this reality in the creation story which Christ amplifies in His final prayers with the Apostles and St. Paul repeats to the Galatians. Yet, as we explore Christ's Church, rather than one in unity and strength we are many in division and weakness. Those who claim to be Christian leaders must confess and cure this departure from the "Oneness In Christ" (OIC) given to us by our Creator and Savior.

The OIC Promise

St. Paul made OIC clear by saying "*You are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28) (the OIC Promise). This OIC Promise is reiterated in Christian baptismal services because St. Paul explicitly stated: "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Gal. 3:27). Putting something on makes a statement about you; however, having something in you defines you.

Jesus Christ placed divinity in each of us. St. John poignantly describes the Lord's prayer for us "*...that they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us... that they may be one just as We are one*" (John 17:21-22). St. Paul affirmed this reality after being blinded by the Light of the Lord to see clearly "*I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gal. 2:20). Imagine what it means for God and Christ to be in you and all of us together as one. Living and teaching this is the duty of Christian leaders, the failure of which we lament.

OIC is not a leadership challenge new to modernity. The Apostles faced it repeatedly in the nascent Christian church. In the 49 A.D. Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) they wrestled with and resolved by a conciliar process of consensus the circumcision and other controversies threatening to divide Christ's church. This led to St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Paroschi, 2018). Centuries later, issues such as the Nicene Creed were resolved at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., and further clarified in 381 A.D. at the First Council of Constantinople (Marianes, 2023). Unified Christians eventually agreed we were: "Ἐἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν" ("One, holy, catholic, and apostolic church"). The added emphasis on the word one underscores our early Christian leader's consensus confirmation of OIC. So, where, when, and how did we get off track?

The OIC Leadership Failure Confession and Challenge

Admitting failure is not easy (Gollwitzer et al., 1982). Accusing others of failure is popular because research proves accusers with some culpabilities are evaluated more favorably when they point out the failures of others (i.e., accusation effect (AE)) (Rucker & Pratkanis, 2001). The author wishes no such AE projection benefit and instead claims full responsibility for his sin of OIC omission.

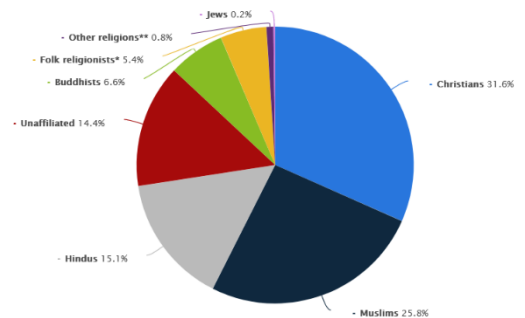
If you are a Christian, what do you say when asked to which church you belong? Is it the faith tradition in which you were baptized, a later one you embraced, or the church most convenient for your current lifestyle? Or do you claim OIC as a member of Jesus Christ's church? Are you leading people to OIC or instead to your current church, parish, jurisdiction, faith, congregation, religious group, or tradition (i.e., Denomination)?

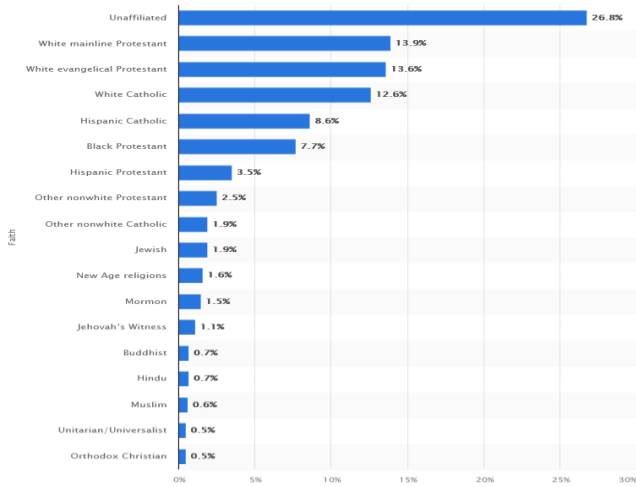
There is nothing wrong with celebrating whatever heritage/traditions you inherited from birth or embraced later in life. If you are courageous enough to read on, your challenge is to reflect on whether what you do and say is promoting the righteous theological tradition of OIC or something less. For those now thinking your Denomination is OIC (to the exclusion of others), please note your confirmation biases and consider if you are truly practicing OIC. As much criticism as the author expects to receive (including from some in his Denomination), this paper advances the thesis that Christian leaders must become OIC Disciples (OICD) rather than merely Denominational Disciples (DD).

The OIC Leadership Failure Data

Lexicographers reduce the negativity associated with DD by defining a Denomination as “a religious group that has slightly (emphasis added) different beliefs from other groups that share the same religion” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). By introducing the undefinable term “slightly,” the absence of OIC is admitted. One cannot be “slightly” different but “one.”

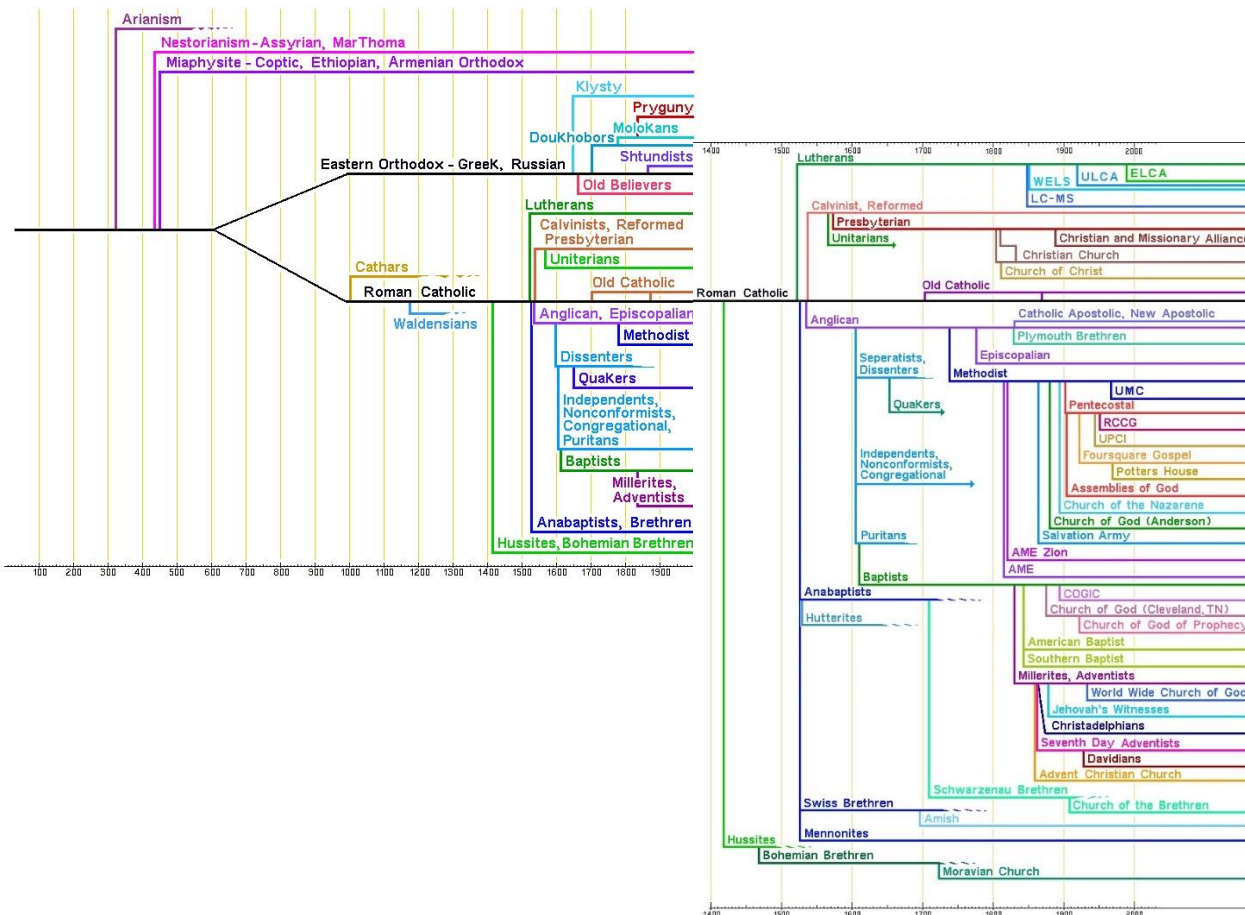
Following W. Edwards Deming who insisted “In God we trust, all others must bring data” (Oxford Essential Quotations, 2018), in 2010 Christians comprised 31.4% of the global population which is projected to remain unchanged through 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Christianity is not growing, OIC, or successful in making “*disciples of all nations*” (Mat. 28:19). The chart to the right depicts global religious beliefs as of 2022 (Dyvik, 2024). Indeed, the massive division of global Christianity is proven by the existence of over 30,000 Denominations (Noll, 2002) growing to 45,000 Denominations (Coffey, 2022).



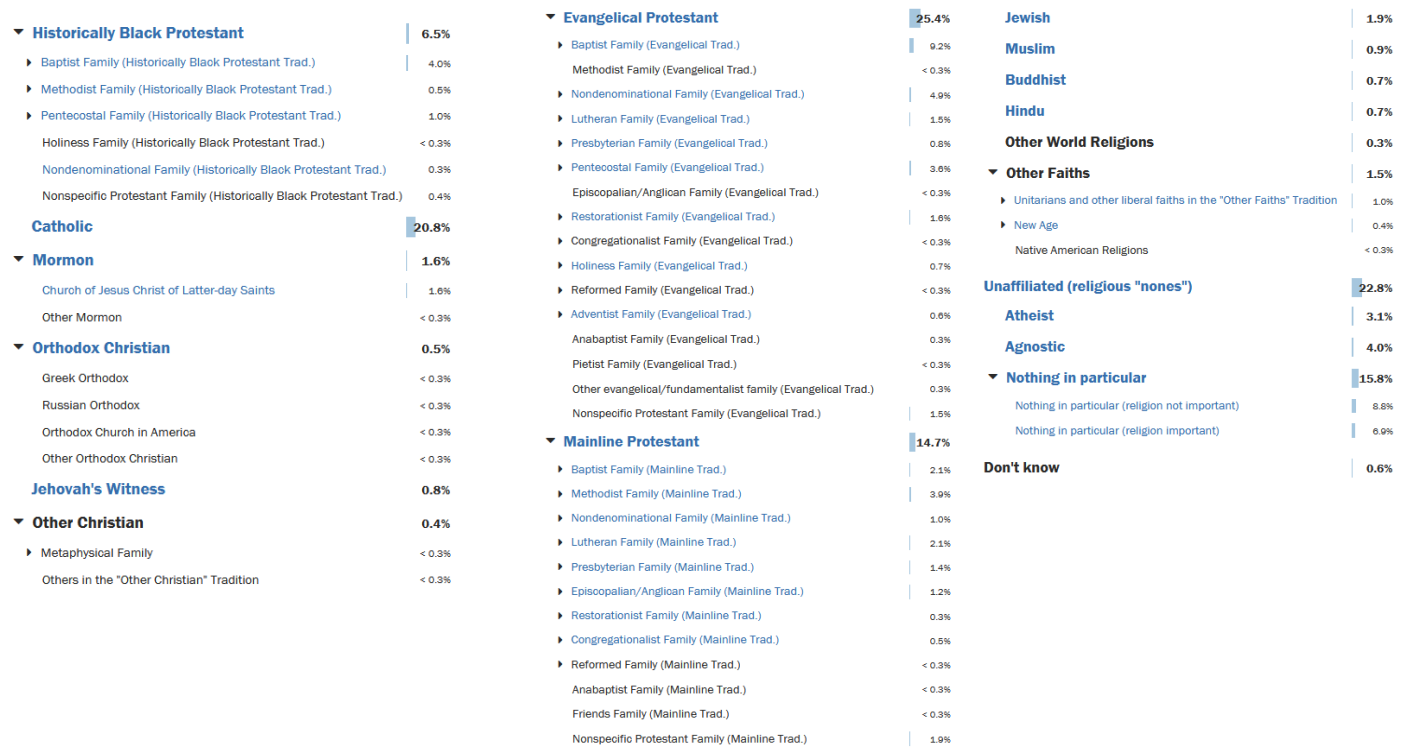


The absence of OIC and OICD is not merely a global phenomenon. The chart to the left manifests the massive division that exists in the 2022 Christian church in America (Korhonen, 2024). This clear consensus of massive division is reconfirmed by countless mainstream empirical researchers, including, Olson (2008), Zubkov

(2010), Lindner (2012), Pew Research Center (2015b), Public Religion Research Institute (2022), List of Christian Denominations (2024), among many others. Indeed, Damick (2017) and Wax (2020) summarize the major tenants and differences of the vast numbers of divided Christian Denominations in the U.S. The following diagram graphically depicts the dissent from one Christian church to a divided Denominational explosion (Rollison, 2023).



When analyzing various Protestant, Orthodox, and other Denominations, the lack of OIC becomes palpable and the emphasis on DD is obvious. The data above (Rollison, 2023) and below (Pew Research Center, 2015a, 2022), together with all the sources cited above and many others prove the absence of OIC highlighting the many U.S. Christian subdivisions that prove we are not the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed).



Given the dissent from one unified church founded by Christ to the divided, fragmented, and constantly further-subdividing 200+ Denominations in the U.S. and 45,000+ Denominations globally, the data exhibit a failure of Christian leadership in maintaining OIC. This leadership failure is explained by Case’s and Maner’s (2014) experiments confirming division results from the poor leadership of those seeking to maintain their power and authority. This divisive leadership stands in stark contrast to the unifying OIC servant leadership offered by Christ

(Greenleaf, 1970, 1977; Patterson, 2003). Exploring the God-inspired Holy Scripture provides an insightful transition to a solution. Understanding Holy Scripture's complexity is possible through the Holy Spirit's presence (Kennedy, 1999). The socio-rhetorical processes of Robbins (1996) and Henson et al. (2020) provide templates to better appreciate Holy Scripture "textures."

Socio-Rhetorical Inner Texture Exegetical Analysis

OIC is possible because Christ modeled Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, and Transformational Leadership (Dixon, 2021; Northouse, 2022). This analysis will focus on St. Paul's Transformational Leadership (TL) in Gal. 3:27-28, with support from John 17:21-22 and Gen. 1:26 (collectively, the OIC Promise) by applying Henson et al.'s (2020) socio-rhetorical Inner Texture six-category approach.

1. Textual Units

Instead of traditional paragraphs and punctuation, ancient writers used themes and narrational units to shift focus and understanding (Henson et al., 2020, p. 84). The OIC Promise theme moves readers from the creational understanding of humans as children of God (Gen. 1:26) to the imagery of their connection through baptism in an intimate and personal way (Allen et al., 2008, p. 1593).

2. Repetitive Patterns

Because of few educational texts/tools, ancient writers taught through repetition (Henson et al., 2020, p. 86-88). The OIC Promise texts repeat oneness from Gen. 1:26 with God's identification as Creator/Father by using the plural "Us" to teach the Holy Trinity's (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) unified omnipresence from the beginning that connects everyone as a family (Allen et al., 2008, p. 5). St. John repeats the description explaining how God is in Christ and He

is in His followers (John 17:21). The repetition continues through St. Paul's promise that through baptism we put "on" Christ and the OIC is complete (Gal. 3:27).

3. Progressive Patterns

The progressive pattern of inner textures uses the techniques of chiasm, encapsulation, development, and connection (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996). Focusing on chiasm with a resolution in the middle (Henson et al., 2020, p. 89), the OIC Promise offers a critical, perhaps shocking revelation, in the middle. The Galatians are challenged, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female*" (Gal. 3:28). This pericope has been quoted/misquoted as modernity continues its predictable pursuit of division vs. OIC. However, St. Paul clearly states our external differences have no place in Christ's church where "All are one in nature, and so all are equal in dignity" (Allen et al, 2008, p. 1593).

4. Open-Middle-Closing Patterns

This pattern focuses on a plot with a beginning, middle crisis, and final solution/denouement (Henson et al., 2020, p. 92). The OIC Promise begins by identifying everyone as "*sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:26) followed by the challenge of differences in ethnicity (Jew vs. Greek), freedom (slave vs. free), and gender (male vs. female) (Gal. 3:28).

Baptism is the solution through which everyone can "*put on Christ*" (Gal. 3:27) that leads to the final salvific restoration/connection to the Torah (Old Testament) "*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Gal. 3:29). This promise of connection between God and His creation is celebrated in Eastern Orthodox and other Christian church baptisms (Allen et al, 2008, p. 1593).

5. Argumentative Patterns

This element exposes the author's thesis, rationale, and examples leading to a conclusion (Henson et al., 2020, p. 93; Robbins, 1996). St. Paul begins the oneness with God (Gal. 3:26) to use the journey through baptism to bring us OIC (Gal. 3:27), tearing down the external trappings of our different status/national origins/genders (Gal. 3:28) to unite everyone as one just as we began our journey when the Holy Trinity created us (Gen. 1:26; Gal. 3:29).

6. Sensory-Aesthetic Patterns

This final element uses sensory/self-expressive feelings to expose the author's intent (Henson et al., 2020, p. 94; Robbins, 1996). St. Paul connects OIC with "*Abraham's seed*" (Gal. 3:29). St. John's recitation of Christ's prayer invokes the aesthetics of three examples of two becoming one (God in Christ, Christ in us, and all of us in God) (John 17:21). This unmistakable sensory element of our creation (Gen. 1:26) outlines the OIC Promise objective explaining our life's journey brings us full circle to our Father/Creator who exists in us (Allen et al, 2008, p. 1459).

The OIC Leadership Failure Premise

This highly abbreviated OIC Promise inner texture exegetical analysis leads us to briefly examine why our leadership failures allow Oneness In Christ Discipleship (OICD) to be replaced by Denominational Discipleship (DD). Insightfully, Hauerwas (1980) concluded Christians must first acknowledge the divisions and differences in our churches mirrored in our currently divided world (p. 59).

Thus, like all "12-step programs," our Lord desires us to take the first leadership step to overcome our division by acknowledging and admitting we are missing OIC. Many treatises have chronicled the countless divisions in Christ's church. Others try and justify why their

Denomination is more true or righteous. Perhaps they might acknowledge their DD advocacy is the antithesis of the OIC the Lord taught and sacrificed his life to achieve.

The author is acutely aware of the consequences of announcing, “the emperor has no clothes” (Anderson, 1837) and antagonizing the “Group Think” comfort provided by the psychological drive for consensus that stifles disagreements (Janis, 1972). However, each leader defending their Denomination's correctness by explaining why another disciple of Christ is wrong tears at the fabric of the Lord's OIC. The OIC Promise requires us to love one another, acknowledge our differences, and work to achieve salvific unification with God, Christ, and each other. Christ's final “commandment” that everyone must “*love one another*” was modeled when the Lord was crucified for all humanity (John 13:34-35). This challenged the Apostles since they believed only God could issue “commandments,” thus defining who Christ was. When this Love Commandment is combined with the OIC Promise, DD must give way to OICD.

Risking ostracism or ex-communication (as has been the consequence in the past within the Orthodox faith for such revolutionary arguments as advanced herein) (Helmholz, 1982), the author calls upon almost 40 years as a mergers and acquisitions lawyer to identify eight reasons consolidation/combinations/mergers frequently fail (Marianes, 2023):

1. No real reason and sense of urgency to combine,
2. Absence of a formal deadline,
3. The timing is not optimal,
4. Lack of commitment by the required stakeholders,
5. “Friendly Fire” usually in the form of internal people (i.e., DD) trying to protect their turf, positions, identity, authority, agendas, financial situations, etc.,

6. External forces who fear the impact of the consolidation,
7. Lack of the requisite resources, experienced and dedicated leaders, and teams charged with accomplishing the consolidation,
8. It is demanding work.

Countless treatises identified reasons mergers/combinations fail (Bekier et al., 2001; Faelten & Driessen, 2016; Koi-Akrofi, 2016; Freund, 1975). Fewer treatises tackle the Christian thorny (pun intended) challenge of cross-Denominational mergers/consolidations (Pietrylo, 2018; Simmons, 1996; Tomberlin & Bird, 2020). This presumptuous attempt to briefly outline a future vision of American OIC is offered with great humility and sincerity.

Before presenting this preliminary outline for the creation of the OIC “American Christian Church” (ACC), it is imperative to identify the motivation as the furtherance of the TL example of the Lord. Scholars of TL focus on being successful change agents by 1. inspiring followers to pursue with excellence, 2. a righteous new Vision, 3. for an exciting future, 4. aligned with fundamental Core Values and a central and inspiring Why, 5. in the face of constantly changing circumstances (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Dixon, 2021; Northouse, 2022; Sosik & Jung, 2018).

An OIC Leadership Failure Solution (ACC)

Space does not permit the entire plan for creating the ACC; however, five key steps are summarized below.

STEP 1 – Find OICD Transformational Leaders

Until U.S. Christian Denominational leaders (OICD Leaders) embrace OIC, TL, and the need for an ACC, unity will be difficult, unless a grassroots parishioner-led effort motivates

them. Christian leaders need not reinvent the wheel and can use the example of the Apostles who resolved early church differences/schisms. The Jerusalem Council and subsequent Ecumenical Councils provide TL examples of how today's OICD Leaders can cooperate to achieve OIC. A critical requirement is for the OICD Leaders to determine/announce the date the new ACC will begin (i.e., the Oneness In Christ Unity Date).

STEP 2 – Determine OIC ACC WHY and Core Values

The work of the previously identified TL scholars, along with Kouzes & Posner (2017) and Sinek (2011), underscore the criticality of understanding an organization's WHY and Core Values. Successful TL change efforts are often driven by the cultural Core Value of collaboration (clan culture) while at the same time encouraging autonomous and creative alternatives (adhocracy culture) (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The OICD Leaders should reach this consensus of WHY and Core Values on a mutually agreed upon schedule (e.g., within a year).

STEP 3 – Differentiate Sacred Beliefs/Practices from Mere Traditional Rituals

Different Denominational sacred practices/beliefs cannot be reconciled quickly. However, tactical, and operational practices and comfortable rituals can be harmonized more readily. An example of a sacred practice would be the loyalty and support of the Mother Churches/Patriarchates with which the Denominations are aligned (e.g., Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, England, Jerusalem, Moscow, Rome, etc.). However, other Denominational practices adapted over time can be the subject matter of non-sacred traditions to be reconciled.

The OICD Leaders should identify, recruit, and instruct (a) non-DD TL theologians from their Denomination to convene with each other in separate councils to prayerfully invoke the Holy Spirit and work toward a harmonization of the sacred beliefs and practices differences (e.g., within 2-5 years), and (b) non-DD tactical operational Denominational change agents to quickly

combine the best rituals and practices into a cohesive, yet diverse, set of practices for the ACC (e.g., within a year). The historic Ecumenical Councils worked relatively quickly. Everything will not be perfect at first, but we are called to work diligently toward OIC.

STEP 4 – OIC Vision, OIC Strategic Goals, and Timelines

Parallel with Step 3, trained Christian facilitators must lead the OICD Leaders and cross-Denominational representatives/diverse teams through a vision and strategic planning process to reach a consensus on an overall Vision for the ACC, the most critical strategic objectives (that take years to achieve and address root cause issues) and “low hanging fruit” matters (that can be addressed in less than a year). A step-by-step action plan to achieve each strategic SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timebound) Goal must be established consisting of four elements: 1. the action to be taken, 2. who is responsible, 3. deadline, 4. how to determine it is completed? A similar process should be used for low-hanging fruit initiatives.

STEP 5 – Leave It to the Experts

This step of trust may prove most difficult for OICD Leaders. There are many highly trained and talented, faithful, Denominationally-diverse Christian lay professionals (ACC Implementation Team) who would commit to OIC and ACC who must be charged with implementing the ACC Strategic Plan. Faithful OICD Leaders have been called by God and are well-trained theologically to serve their Christian church. However, many OICD Leaders lack sufficient education, training, and experience in leading/managing successful merger/combination activities. St. John Chrysostom said a church leader’s primary job was to “discern the spiritual gifts” of people and “encourage those gifts to be used to the full for the benefit of all” (Chrysostom, 1964, p. 44). This ACC Implementation Team can work to achieve the opening of the ACC by the Resurrection Date established by the OICD Leaders.

Conclusion

This paper identified issues to be resolved to achieve American OIC and address our Christian leadership challenges. Many more details remain that experienced ACC Implementation Team experts are extremely competent to address. As difficult to achieve as OIC appears, please remember that one evening during a Passover meal in a secret room former fishermen, farmers, tradesmen, and one tax collector, mostly in their early twenties, were told in 33 A.D. their job was “*to make disciples of all nations*” (Mat.28:19). We must become OICD Oneness In Christ Disciples and end our DD Denominational Discipleship, incessant bickering about differences, controversies, genealogies, and arguments about law and rules (paraphrasing Titus 3:9).

As impossible as this ACC objective may seem, in 1917 the Balfour Declaration that first proposed a roadmap to create an Israeli state was ridiculed by many. Thirty years later, that unimaginable plan led to the creation of Israel (Gold, 2017; Vereté, 1970). Similarly, people scoffed when President Kennedy announced America would land on the moon within the decade (Kennedy, 1962). In the spirit of the Balfour Declaration, the Kennedy moonshot, and the Lord’s Great Commission, we have the opportunity, and perhaps calling, to achieve OIC. The question that remains for Christian leaders is if they have the courage to lead their followers to become One In Christ and one with each other.

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NOTE TO DR. OSULA:

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