



vidual abilities, preferences, and desires that must be respected for the overall good of the congregation. In those matters, that are a necessary part of the work of the church, there are enough of these kinds of complications that a church should deal with without adding any other matters that are unnecessary. How many elders and deacons in churches which support these “para-church” organizations find their meetings dominated by concerns over the manage-

ment, regulation, and functioning of these organizations rather than the true work of the church? How many quarrels and divisions have arisen over preferences about how such organizations should operate? How will we explain to the Lord on the Day of Judgment why we became alienated from a brother or sister for whom Christ died over the workings of some institution of our own creation? Why not avoid all of this and simply follow the New Testament pattern?

* The names of organizations used in this article are purely my own creation. Any similarity to actual organizations is purely coincidental. These names do, however, reflect the kind of names that are often adopted by such organizations and are intended to illustrate the manner in which they are used.



have we *matured* to the point that we don't get “caught up” in such “trivialities”?

IV. They Add Unnecessary Complications. As any elder, deacon, or preacher can tell you the functioning of a local congregation, which involves members from diverse backgrounds and maturity levels working together towards a unity of faith, can be a complicated business. There are feelings that can be hurt. There are maturity levels that must be taken into consideration. There are indi-

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ISSUE

17.24

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

June 21,
2015



Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Andrew Dow

“Para-Church” Organizations

By Kyle Pope

On more than one occasion in talking with people from a denominational background, when they learn that I am a preacher they begin to ask if I am involved in various man-made religious organizations. They might ask, “Are you part of Global Mission Outreach?”* Or, “Does your church have a Young Lion’s program?” When they learn that the congregations with which I have worked are not involved with such things, and that I am generally unfamiliar with these kinds of organizations, they seem shocked and puzzled that as a preacher I don’t know about things so common in the religious world. Sadly, even among some of our own brethren who long ago began to allow their congregations to support human institutions, if you don’t know about “Loaves and Fishes missions,” or “Christ in the Home outreach,” you are viewed as old-fashioned and out of touch. In our day brethren who once valued using “Bible names for Bible things,” barely speak the same language anymore!

Sometimes organizations of this type are referred to as “para-church” organizations. This very name acknowledges that these entities are not *churches*, but they are instead falsely viewed as extensions of the church. They either seek to carry out works of the church (under the oversight of their own organization rather than the church) or they simply do good works that are not the responsibility of the church (while soliciting support from the church).

There is no question that many human organizations exist that do good works. There are schools, hospitals, benevolent organizations, publishing houses, and publications that fulfill important functions while existing independent of any local congregation. Such organizations have the right to exist and operate. They need neither the sanction nor the oversight of any local church to do so. Problems arise only when the church involves itself in the support, oversight, or maintenance of these institutions. When that happens, those who respect the authority of Scripture must stand up and oppose this as an unscriptural departure from the true work of the church.



Olsen Park church of Christ

As some would see it, however, the church can't do some things unless it does them through some separate organization. They imagine that the church is dependent upon "para-church" organizations to do its own work. This raises a number of questions. If we see it this way, do we think the church is unable to do its own work? Do we imagine the Lord didn't know how to organize the church to fulfill the work He assigned it to do? Do we think that we have the right to extend the organization of the church in ways that the Lord has not?

An examination of Scripture reveals a church in the New Testament whose organization and purpose was distinguished by its simplicity. We see the simple organization of elders, deacons, and saints (Phil. 1:1), working under the headship of Jesus (Eph. 1:22) carrying out their work of teaching the gospel and edifying the saints (Eph. 4:12), with no need of "para-church" organizations to fulfill its purpose. Paul is never identified as the "President and CEO of International Christ to the Gentiles Crusade." John is not "Executive Director of Agape Outreach." Peter is not the founder of "Solid Rock Ministries." Yet, the church in the New Testament did exactly what God intended for it to do. So, if the New Testament church functioned without these things, why do we imagine that we need them?

What Difference Does It Make?

To many even raising such questions seems legalistic or as if we are *straining out a gnat* (cf. Matt. 23:24) and *disputing over words* (cf. 2 Tim. 2:14). Some might say, "As long as good is being done what difference does it make?" Church history has shown us that human efforts to expand upon what God set up has led to the very chaos of denominationalism that exists today. People saw some good work they thought needed to be done and failed to realize that by creating human organizations to do these works they would ultimately contribute to disunity. "Para-church" organizations lead to a number of significant problems:

I. They Diminish the Role and Work of the Church. If parents surrendered to a nanny, a childcare center, or even a grandparent all of their time with their

children and their responsibility to raise them it would be evident that in spite of the DNA and physical attributes that establish their parenthood, they would not be acting as parents to the children. When the church either branches out into unscriptural works through the extension of "para-church" organizations or abandons Scriptural works to human organizations, in the same way it is not acting as the church. Jesus came to establish His church (Matt. 16:18). He died to purchase this church (Acts 20:28). It is an important institution that acts as the "**pillar and ground of the truth**" (1 Tim. 3:15). How can we think so little of something for which Jesus shed His blood? How can we appease our conscience into imagining that the Lord will not call us to account if we surrender to organizations of our own creation the responsibilities the Lord has given to His church?

II. They Change the Role and Work of the Church.

Some might argue, "if the organization in question fulfills a work of the church (e.g. evangelism, or some type of benevolence) isn't that the same thing as the church carrying out the work?" Imagine there was a business executive who was too busy on his anniversary to take his wife out to dinner. If he sent his assistant to go to dinner with his wife instead, would she feel as if her husband was still "carrying out the work" of a husband? I think not! Do we communicate the same thing to the Lord? Are we too busy with unscriptural things that we must surrender to human institutions our own responsibilities? Do we care so little about our duties that we can give them over to others so easily? What if the man-made organization teaches error? What if it misuses or steals funds? Will the elders of the church assume the liability for such abuse? If not then how can they claim that dismissing their responsibility to another organization is the same thing as the church "carrying out the work?"

Sadly, in many cases churches that have so readily given themselves to such things become little more than clearinghouses for various human institutions. Sunday after Sunday organization after organization vies for the support of the church. The focus of the eldership shifts away from the spiritual feeding

of the flock to the evaluation of which institution is worthy of support. When they choose an assortment of "worthy causes," these budgetary administrators fold their hands feeling that they have accomplished their work, when in truth the church may have done nothing.

III. They Represent a Move Away from Respect for Biblical Authority.

Churches of Christ have taken a unique position in the religious world. We have affirmed that the Bible alone is a sufficient guide for doctrine and organization. Just as we have called upon denominations to abandon sprinkling as a substitution for Scriptural baptism (i.e. immersion), we have also called upon them to give up their popes, cardinals, synods, conventions, and any other man-made organization that is without Biblical authority. If we abandon this position and begin to create human organizations we view as extensions of the church, how can we legitimately call upon the denominations to abandon their own creations? Are our creations better than theirs? Is it acceptable for us to act without Divine authority but they must not? Or,