

Parachurch? by Jonathan Paris

Introduction

I am thankful for the local church. When I was lost and looking for God, He used the youth ministry of a local church to draw me to Himself. Since coming to faith, at the age of eleven, there has rarely been a week when I have not worshiped with a local congregation. But I am also thankful for the work of parachurch organizationsⁱ, for it is largely through structures working alongside local congregations that I have received, studied, and understand the Bible. Walking home from seventh grade I received my first New Testament from the Gideons, a parachurch ministry of lay people who distribute Bibles around the world. In college I joined InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a parachurch university ministry, where I learned the value of Bible study and gained a deeper understanding of the richness of God's Word. After college I began taking classes at an interdenominational seminary and continued to grow in love for the Bible through learning Biblical Greek and Hebrew, studying the historical background, refining my hermeneutical approach, and examining the history of biblical interpretation.

In more ways than one the parachurch has given the world the Scriptures. Throughout the history of the Church, scribes belonging to parachurch organizationsⁱⁱ have faithfully cared for and made copies of the Scriptures that we appreciate so much today. Wycliffe Bible Translators and similar parachurch organizations continue to lead the way in sharing God's Word with people throughout the world in their native languages. In the English language our Bible versions are largely the product of parachurch organizations.ⁱⁱⁱ We could go on to describe how over the last three centuries, parachurch organizations have led the way in church renewal, evangelism, and world mission.

In this paper we will argue that is right and good for parachurch organizations to exist alongside local congregations as two structures functioning together for God's purposes. We will survey the biblical and historical foundation for parachurch organizations, their role in the Universal Church^{iv} and

their relationships to denominations and local congregations. We will discover that throughout history God has used individuals and groups that have come alongside the local congregation for the purpose of equipping and mobilizing His people. In the Old Testament we will see that prophets came alongside the state and the priesthood in ministering to the people of God. Prophets also functioned as early evangelists, being sent by God into the world to preach and to heal. In the New Testament we will see how John the Baptist with his disciples, Jesus with His disciples and Paul with his missionary teams are models for the parachurch organization and their relationship to local congregations. We will then briefly survey God's use of monastic movements and comparable Protestant communities which functioned alongside local congregations as centers of education, scripture reproduction, and mission mobilization. We will end by reflecting upon the underlying causes for tension between local congregations and parachurch organizations, and upon how relationships might be fostered between these two structures within the Church.

Examining the Old Testament: The Prophets and the Parachurch

After the Exodus we see three primary structures emerge through which the people of God were led and served. Possibly the most prominent of these structures during this time was that of the nation state. This structure, first led by tribal leaders, prophets, and judges, came to be organized in the form of a monarchy in spite of a warning from God about the trouble it would cause (see 1 Sam. 8). Nonetheless God chose to work through this institution particularly through the line of David "for the sake of His people Israel."^v The role of the monarchy was to govern the people and administer justice. It also served to provide protection for the nation's people through the state military.

Another structure that functioned alongside the monarchy, and actually predated it by hundreds of years, was the Levitical priesthood established during the time of Moses. The priesthood, made up of the descendants of Aaron, fulfilled various roles including interceding for the people by leading them in worship through the sacrificial system,

maintaining public health through diagnosing unclean skin aberrations, and teaching the people the Torah.^{vi} Especially in its teaching, but not exclusively, the role of the priest has many similarities the role of the pastor and elders in the structure of many of our local churches.^{vii}

The final role enjoying prominence in this period is that of the prophet. Unlike the priesthood and the monarchy, the conditions for being a prophet were not primarily determined by heredity. “Even though the ministry of the priests involved systematic biblical teaching,^{viii} the prophets appear to have been more directly involved in the ministry of Scripture and of ‘biblical theology.’^{ix} Some were appointed to speak God’s Word within the nation.^x Others like Amos came from the northern kingdom but spoke primarily to the southern kingdom. Jonah, although reluctantly, went so far as to speak God’s word to a gentile nation. While prophets often functioned as individual agents of God, “on occasion the prophets functioned as a group rather than as isolated individuals. In this connection they constituted themselves as a renewal structure in Israel.”^{xi} Mellis describes a number of places where this can be seen:

One group appears under Samuel’s apparent leadership when the prophetic tradition was still in its infancy. They’re referred to in 1 Samuel 10:10 as a “band of prophets” and in 19:20 “the company of the prophets.” A seemingly similar group appears in the early chapters of 2 Kings as Elijah’s task falls to Elisha – including the leadership of these “sons of the prophets” (2:3 to 4:44). ... Much later when Amos declares that he was called from outside the prophetic tradition, he may be saying that he was not “one of the sons of the prophets” (Amos 7:14).^{xii}

While the prophets had relationship with both the priesthood and the monarchy serving as advisors and councilors, they were not organizationally dependent on either of these other two groups but functioned alongside them in the service of the God and His people. Their greatest corruption occurred when they began to function as agents of the state.^{xiii} One of the main expressions of their

organizational independence is their self propagation without the need of the priesthood or monarchy to consecrate them in their role. Alternatively, we see prophets involved in the consecration of future generation of prophets. We also see prophets join the priests in the consecration of kings.^{xiv}

In the organization of the prophetic community, we see a prototype for the modern-day parachurch. The prophets, like parachurches today, often led the way in renewal for the people of God and were the often the preeminent evangelists. They also enjoyed a measure of organizational independence from the state and the priests but functioned alongside and in partnership with the state and the priests in the service of God and his mission. Sadly, as with the contemporary parachurch, the community of prophets was often guilty of pursuing its own agendas and failing to stay faithful to the purposes of God. But this history of abuse was also perpetrated by both the state and the priesthood.

While the existence of the prophetic tradition does not necessarily imply that we need a structure like the parachurch that functions alongside the local congregations and the state, it does demonstrate that God has seen fit for this type of structure in the past. Some may respond that these structures were changed in the New Testament. This cannot be denied, but we will see that God does limit Himself a singular institutional structure during the time of the coming of His son, nor soon after.

Before we begin to look at the New Testament period, we should address some common misunderstandings. First, we will address those who may argue that God used prophets because the priestly community was not functioning properly.^{xv} We could contest this on exegetical grounds but it is sufficient to note that we are a fallen people, and all of redemption history and all the structures we observe are part of the story of God mending the damage we have done to the created order. While it is interesting to speculate what structures God would institute if the structures were not prone to falling short, this exercise would be purely academic. We would just as quickly need to question all the structures that we have come to appreciate that

have been put in place by God. As long as people are involved in the world, God will use individuals and organizations like the prophet and the prophetic communities to initiate renewal and outreach. We will see that this has been the case in our brief survey of the history of the Church.

Examining the New Testament 1: John the Baptist and Jesus

In the first century the priesthood and the state (although in a compromised form) were functioning in Israel, and the Essenes and the Pharisees were two prominent prophet like communities that emerged outside of the state and priesthood. It was in this context that God raised up a “voice crying out in the wilderness,” John the Baptist, and his community of disciples and in which Jesus came and called the twelve to follow him. “The renewal ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus’ training of the Twelve are worthy of examination.”^{xxvi} While we do not know all the details of how John and his band of disciples were organized, we do know that he was the leader of a religious community which included disciples and that he was organized separately from the Pharisees and the synagogue movement.^{xvii}

John formed a community of devout, morally earnest Jews. ... It was a preaching and baptizing movement for renewal among the professing people of God.^{xviii}

John’s ministry was not focused on replacing the state, priesthood or even the pharisaic movement. John calls Herod to repentance, but does so because of his lifestyle, not for his claim to the throne.^{xix} Similarly he calls agents of the Roman State to leave their post, but warns them not to use their power as a means of exploitation.^{xx} John the Baptist does not criticize the structure of the priesthood or that of the Pharisee’s, but calls members of these organizations to bear the fruit of repentance, to cease from putting confidence in their ethnic identity, and to anticipate Jesus’ coming.^{xxi} John does not try to be everything for the people of God but in is an agent of renewal in the prophetic tradition. As was the case with the

prophetic communities, in the community around John the Baptist we see a model for our contemporary parachurch organizations.

Jesus and his disciples provide an additional model for a structure that works alongside local congregations. While Jesus speaks out against the abuses of the state, the priesthood, and the synagogue movement, he also chooses to affirm and support these structures. He encourages a leper to show himself to a priest,^{xxii} affirms a Centurion for his great faith,^{xxiii} teaches in synagogues,^{xxiv} heals a synagogue leader’s daughter,^{xxv} and even pays taxes to the temple and to Rome.^{xxvi} By doing this, Jesus recognizes a certain level of legitimacy in these organizations and structures. Jesus does, however, reserve the right to challenge these organizations when they overstep the boundaries of their authority or abuse their legitimate power and influence. Jesus demonstrates how a renewal movement (the ultimate renewal movement) can function alongside existing structures, providing a model for how parachurch organizations might work alongside local congregations.

While he worked alongside preexisting organizations, Jesus also trained the women and men who became the leaders of his Church and served in both its local and mobile expressions. The structures established by the early followers of Jesus have outlasted or outgrown all the structures Jesus worked alongside during his earthly ministry. The Jewish nation state and the Temple system fell in 70 AD. The Roman Empire also slowly but surely lost its influence and power from the fifth century onward. While the synagogue movement continued, it diverged from the Christian movement and can scarcely be seen as an organization upon which the followers of Jesus should rely. Therefore, we must look beyond the organizational structures Jesus worked with and examine the structure of the church established by the apostles and their followers. Once again, we will discover that, far from having a single universal structure the early church took on various forms based on context and need.

Examining the New Testament 2: Peter, Paul, and the early church

It is difficult to establish on the basis of New Testament documents alone that a particular parachurch structure is prescribed by God, even as it is difficult to establish that any one ecclesiastical structure or form of leadership is prescribed for the entire Church.^{xxvii} However we can observe that the New Testament does not prohibit parachurch structures but provides positive examples of organizations that resemble parachurch organizations.

Before we examine Acts and the epistles it is worth noting that Jesus taught the twelve not to prohibit others from acting in his name. In Mark 9:38-40 the apostle John tells Jesus that he had just told others to stop casting out demons in Jesus' name because they were not among the twelve. Jesus tells John not to stop this in the future because, "whoever is not against us is for us." Even during his lifetime Jesus affirmed the ministry of those who acted in his name even when they were not affiliated with the twelve. We should also note that Jesus, in warning his followers about false prophets focuses on fruit and not on organizational affiliation.^{xxviii}

Paul, similarly, chooses not to focus on organizational affiliation when evaluating the ministry of others, even when others oppose him on similar grounds. In Philippians 1:15-18 Paul comments on some who are preaching Christ out of bad motives. He makes no comment on organizational affiliation or role; he comments only on their motives and in the end, he concludes that "the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."^{xxix} In Galatians 1-2 we see Paul defending his apostleship against those who challenged his leadership. In establishing his authority, he specifically does not appeal to his connection to the organizational structure of the Church. Instead, he claims that his authority comes from his commissioning from God and the truth of the gospel that he preaches. In his defense of his ministry in 2 Cor. 10-11 we see a similar pattern, rather than claiming that his authority comes from his organizational connection to Jerusalem or Antioch, like Jesus, he focuses on fruit, character, and relationship with God. In summary, the New Testament criteria for participating in ministry relate

to character, faith, and gifts of the Spirit, and not on organizational roles or affiliation.^{xxx}

The New Testament not only does not forbid others from ministry because they are functioning outside specific organizational structure, but it also actually forbids preventing it. But do we see examples of divinely initiated organization that function alongside local congregations? We certainly do in Paul and the early missionary teams.

The Holy Spirit initiated the mission structure when he called into being Paul's missionary team (Act 13). He also established the local congregation at Jerusalem for the first time in history (Act 2).^{xxxi}

While some might argue that Paul here is merely acting as an agent of a local congregation (Antioch) as we saw above, this was how Paul defended his apostleship.

The church leadership here only gave guidance and commission for the next stage of the work of already experienced men, supported them in prayer and received them on their return. It did not authorize them (Paul could not have understood his commission as an authorization in view of his claim to be directly called by the Lord in Galatians 2).^{xxxii}

In this example we see a helpful model for partnership between church and parachurch. As we will see in looking at the history of the Church, some organizational independence for mission structures helps the ministry go forward. Paul clearly exercised some of this independence. Nonetheless, the blessing and cooperation of local congregations and parachurch organizations is invaluable. Paul's connections with the Church at Antioch and with the church at Philippi provide a model for the contemporary parachurch minister or missionary to consider. In Paul's missionary teams we see the establishment of missions which are structurally separate from the local congregation. At the same time, we see clear partnership as Paul reports back to the churches in Antioch and Philippi. In this we

see reason that local churches can argue for the right and responsibly to audit parachurch organization and review their activities and evaluate their commitment to support the parachurch work.^{xxxiii}

Church History Part 1: Structures from the Second Century Onward

Over the course of the next couple centuries the primary structure of the Church came to reflect the structure of the Roman Empire. While in the New Testament documents many familiar words were used to designate the leadership of churches including apostles,^{xxxiv} elders,^{xxxv} bishops or overseers,^{xxxvi} and deacons,^{xxxvii} we also hear of prophets and teachers^{xxxviii} as well as of evangelists^{xxxix} and pastors.^{xl} By the second century the leadership begins to become clearer and more established. During this time “Ignatius held that it was not lawful to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast [the Lord’s Supper] without the bishop.”^{xli} He also “writes as though the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons had come to be essential to the existence of a church.”^{xlii} In these years another structure began to form alongside the ecclesiastical structure of church governance. This structure was the monastic movement.

While the monastic movement dates back to the third century, its rise to prominence occurred in the fourth and fifth centuries, especially as monks came together in monasteries and submitted themselves to a head monk and monastic rules. Out of the monastic movement came such prominent theologians, biblical scholars, and ecclesiastical leaders as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Benedict of Nursia, Martin of Tours, and Eusebius Hieronimus Sophronius who is better known as Jerome.^{xliii} The early monastic life was primarily motivated by the desire for greater spiritual discipline, holiness, and piety in a communal context. Still, as the names listed above illustrate, the monastic movement became one of the primary structural vehicles for renewal within the Catholic Church. This was facilitated by the fact that the monastic movement and the broader ecclesiastical structure were mutually supportive. Basil, for example, “became a bishop, and he made important

contributions towards bringing the monastic life into the life of the Catholic Church as a whole.”^{xliv}

Jerome, a prominent founder of monasticism, demonstrates the porous barrier between the life of the ecclesiastical government and the life of the monastery. Having become a monk in his mid-twenties, he devoted himself to a life of asceticism and study. He was, however, ordained priest and even served as secretary to the Pope Damasus. However, the Church can be thankful that he did not remain in the ecclesiastical government. After the death of Pope Damasus, Jerome founded a monastery in Bethlehem where he focused on literary work, including the writing of his commentaries and his translation of the Latin Vulgate from the original languages.^{xlv}

In the examples of people in the early monastic movements like Martin of Tours, Basil, and Jerome we find historic models for how parachurch organizations might function along side other church structures. While organizationally they exercised some degree of independence, they continued to maintain close relationship with the general ecclesiastical structure. Basil and Martin were eventually made bishops, bringing the richness of their monastic life into the service of the broader church body. In these men we find models of the parachurch worker who in his or her youth focuses on global missions or college ministry but eventually moves into leadership in a local congregation or denomination. Jerome on the other hand provided his best service to the larger Church in leaving the leadership of the local assembly and in focusing on spiritual and academic disciplines. In Jerome we find a model for those whose primary work is teaching and writing in the context of the university and seminary and whose primary focus is education, theological study, and biblical scholarship.

We also see that the monastic movements became the vehicle for evangelism and mission beyond the borders of the existing Church. Thomas Cahill explores the Irish contribution to this in his widely read book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. This “saving” was done largely by the Irish monks who, like Jerome, devoted themselves to writing and literature. This was spread by the Irish monks who left the monasteries as missionaries. Some like Columban spread the gospel and helped spread

renewal throughout the European continent. Others like Columba and the monastery he established on Iona helped spread the gospel in Scotland and later into Britain.

When Pope Gregory the Great took interest in evangelism and the revitalizing of the churches in Britain, he looked to men from the monastery to do the job. Augustine (not Augustine of Hippo) led a group of men from a Roman monastery to Britain to establish a connection with Rome and increase evangelistic work. Upon arriving, Augustine set up both a monastery which followed the Benedictine rule and a diocesan structure with bishops and the first archbishop of Canterbury (Augustine himself filled the role of archbishop).^{xlvi}

Monastic movements were also instrumental in the church renewal that took place between the mid-tenth through the mid-fourteenth centuries. Men from orders like the Franciscans and the Dominicans “were missionaries both to the nominal Christians of Western Europe and to non-Christians in various parts of the globe.”^{xlvii} These missionary “orders sought the places where men congregated and endeavored to bring the Gospel to them there.”^{xlviii} These older orders along with newer orders like the Jesuits continue to be the primary vehicle of the Catholic Church in sending out missionaries throughout the world.

In these monastic movements we see the wisdom of structures that function alongside the local church but are able to focus on specific tasks like the work of evangelism and mission, rather than the general concerns of local congregational life. We see the value in both the level of organizational independence and the relationship with the broader ecclesiastical structure. There were, however, abuses in the monastic life, including laxity in the spiritual disciplines and basic Christian character and, on the other hand, a belief that being part of a monastic movement made a person more meritorious of salvation. Again, it must be said that abuse was not exclusive to the monastic movement and was also present in other parts of the church’s leadership. Such abuses do show that from time to time even renewal movements needed to be renewed. Sadly, it was in observing the abuses of the monastic orders that Martin Luther and many of the reformers rejected the structure of monasticism all

together. As we will see, the consequence of rejecting certain aspects of the structure of monasticism was tragic for Protestant mission and evangelism.

Church History Part 2: From the Reformation to Missions to Present

The reformation brought much needed reform to Catholic Church. Prior to Luther the Church suffered from extreme excess including the sale of indulgences and the devaluation of secular profession. But, as Ralph Winters observes, while Luther rejected Catholicism and celibacy, he also rejected the structural vehicle of the monastery and the monastic order:

This in turn sheds light on something with which Protestant scholars have wrestled anxiously: the near-total absence of Christian missions in the Protestant tradition throughout the first three hundred years following the Reformation. ...But surely one monumental factor is simply the total absence of the structural vehicle of missions.^{xlix}

Winters (who uses the term, *sodalities*, to describe the monastic movement and parachurch organizations) also argues that the lack of a parachurch movement denied the Protestant church a structure of consistent Church renewal.ⁱ Thankfully the Church did not remain in this state indefinitely. Towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Protestants began volunteer societies to focus on mission both near and abroad. It is largely as a result of these societies that the Protestant foreign missionary enterprise grew exponentially in the nineteenth century. William Carey and the Baptist Missionary Society (organized in 1792) may be the most prominent of these societies, but it is not unique. Other societies mobilized for world mission include the Scottish Missionary Society, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary society, and the London Missionary Society.ⁱⁱ

Parachurch organizations contributed greatly to Church revival and renewal. This can be

seen in the Great Awakening through the revival work of George Whitefield. Whitefield partnered with leaders from various local congregations in his evangelistic ministry. More recently, the Billy Graham Crusade operated very similarly, working independently from, but in close partnership with denominations and local congregations.

While much of the revitalization and expansion of the Church has been the result of these parachurch organizations they have still not been well understood. As Winters observes these structures were gradually taken over by Church and denominational bodies so that

The once-independent structures which had been merely related to the denominations gradually became dominated by the churches, that is administered, not merely regulated.^{lii}

Once again renewal came through parachurch mission structures called the *Faith Missions* like Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission. This same pattern repeated itself in the mid-Twentieth Century with the bursting forth of groups like InterVarsity and Campus Crusade during and after the Second World War.

While these mission structures and parachurch organizations have continued to exhibit significant influence and can be traced throughout the history of the Church, misunderstanding continues. Parachurch organizations surely bear some of the blame for this in the way they have sometimes asserted their organizational independence with little respect for local congregations. Local churches, however, also bear responsibility for the broken trust in many of these relationships. We will look at how a contemporary parachurch organization might form and briefly explore the causes and remedies for the mistrust that often exists within congregation and denominational structures.

The Formation of a Parachurch: Fostering Unity

Imagine that members of a local congregation feel called by God to serve the homeless population in their city.^{liii} In conversation

with the leaders of their church they decide to start a program to assess and meet the needs of this community. Early on they discover that members of other local churches are also interested in partnering with this ministry. Moreover, the homeless community would be better served through these partnerships. As this ministry grows it becomes apparent that significant leadership and financial resources are coming in from Christians who are part of a number of different churches; it is clearly no longer the ministry of only one church. Even if the founding church decides that this ministry is not one of its priorities, the ministry would continue, since a parachurch ministry has been born. As is often the case, this ministry may expand to meet the needs of other cities and their homeless populations. Again, individuals from a number of local congregations may participate with their time and resources.

As can be seen from the preceding illustration, the local church and the parachurch organization can function together synergistically proclaim the gospel and serve the community.^{liv} It also illustrates how the parachurch organizations can help unite local congregations and distinct denominations in mission. While the Church since the Protestant reformation has become increasingly fragmented, parachurch organizations have played a significant role in fostering ecumenical and interdenominational dialogue and common mission. Wayne Grudem^{lv} recognizes this function:

In fact, the unity of believers is often demonstrated quite effectively through voluntary cooperation and affiliation among Christian groups. Moreover, different types of ministries and different emphases in ministry may result in different organizations, all under the universal headship of Christ as Lord of the church. Therefore, the existence of different denominations, mission boards, Christian educational institutions, college ministries, and so forth is not necessarily a mark of disunity of the Church (though in some cases it may be), for there may be a great deal of cooperation and frequent demonstrations of unity among such diverse bodies as these. (I think the modern

term Parachurch organization is unfortunate, because it implies that these organizations are somehow “beside” and therefore “outside of” the church, whereas in reality they are simply different parts of the one universal church.)^{lvi}

Understanding the Tension Between the Parachurch and the Local Church

"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us."^{lvii}

Riew makes the helpful observation that,

Hindrances to cooperation between church and mission structures seem always to lie largely in non-theological, “practical” confrontations such as the threat of conflicting authorities, bad interpersonal relationships, competitive ministries, suspicions about “sheep stealing” and financial usurpation.^{lviii}

One of the largest areas of tension between the local churches and parachurch organizations is in the area of funding. As the number of parachurch organizations has grown, so has their collective budget. Wilmer, Schmidt and Smith cite Barrett’s study of 1996 statistics which estimates that “worldwide \$100 billion is being given to parachurch organizations, whereas traditional churches receive a little less than \$94 billion.”^{lix} Willmer observes in amusement that “no one complains that the parachurch is taking up prayer time that ought to be devoted to the church”;^{lx} the concern is, more often than not, about money. In response many local churches and denominations are teaching what Willmer calls “storehouse giving.” “The idea, based on Malachi 3:10, (‘Bring the full tithe into the storehouse’), makes the local church [or denomination] the distributor of all money for

ministries.”^{lxi} While this is one way for resources to be distributed for compassion and mission, it is not the only biblical model. Numerous times throughout the New Testament, individuals are called to use their resources (time as well as finances) and affirmed for giving in settings other than the local congregation.^{lxii} It is a dangerous place for any local church to claim the status of exclusive storehouse. During the time in which Malachi prophesied, the nation of Israel was not bringing its offerings to the expression of God’s presence on earth, the temple, and therefore not participating in the work of God’s kingdom. But we must ask whether the local congregation is the only place where the kingdom of God is expressed. As we have already seen, parachurch organizations are another biblical expression of God’s kingdom at work and therefore are deserving of the support of God’s people both indirectly through local congregations and directly from individuals.^{lxiii} For their part the parachurch organizations most recognize their effect on the financial picture of local congregations. Too often parachurch’s only relationship to local congregations is as a donor or a context in which to find donors for their ministry. While financial giving and receiving is often an important part of relationships and partnership^{lxiv} at its best, it functions alongside other expressions of shared ministry.^{lxv}

Church fragmentation, lack of unity and disorder are also given as reasons against the advocacy of the parachurch by local congregations. We appreciate the reformed theologian Clowney’s appraisal of these views:

The church, shattered by denominational division, dare not label parachurch organizations illegitimate. In part, they are simply activities of church members. In an undivided church, there would be ‘lay’ organizations, under the broad oversight of the government of the church, but not the immediate responsibility of the government of the church officers [as there are in the Catholic Church]. In part, they represent shared ministries across denominational barriers. That such ministries may be regarded as irregular in denominational polity may reveal more about sectarian

assumptions in the polity than about violations of New Testament order.^{lxvi}

In our current context where there are so many different denominations, we need not ask what aspects of ministry the local church can reclaim from the parachurch. Instead, local churches and the parachurch need to continue to seek out ways they can share ministry to bring glory to God, equip the Church, and communicate the gospel to the world. This will effect larger change than any one denomination or congregation could accomplish and foster greater interdenominational unity and understanding. Far from losing the value of the church's particularity and special theological emphases, the church through partnership and engagement has greater opportunity to communicate its emphases with others. Churches who are more significantly involved in these parachurch ministries through financial and other types of partnership (like serving on parachurch boards and encouraging member participation) will also have significant organizational influence. If churches choose to support parachurch organizations, instead of trying to duplicate parachurch ministry in their own congregational or denominational structure, the larger church will see deeper cooperation, unity, and partnership. Denominations who take this type of role can also speak into the life of the parachurch. In doing so they will help keep the parachurch accountable through influence on parachurch boards and through conditions they choose to put on financial partnership.

For their part, the parachurch needs to do a better job of encouraging participants to be involved in local congregations and supporting their worship and work. Parachurch organizations should stop attempting to be an alternative to local congregations, while continuing to ask how to work alongside the local congregation to help pursue the purposes of God. While the parachurch should not compromise its focus on its specific calling, it must be aware of the broader concerns of local congregations and their members. Parachurch organizations need to consider the preferences of church leaders when appealing directly to church

members for the giving of time or financial assistance.

Summary and Conclusion

While the impact of parachurch organizations is undeniable, some Christians still question their legitimacy.^{lxvii} They have been described as unbiblical, counterproductive, and misallocations of time and money that should be used in the context of local congregations.^{lxviii} The following exhortation to church leaders is indicative of many of these sentiments:

The mere existence of parachurch movements reveals the lack of evangelistic and missionary fervor both home and abroad. Campus groups like InterVarsity and Campus Crusade became a necessity because of the prevalent infighting and competition between churches... Missions agencies are also a by-product of church neglect. Many of the ministries of such groups could be eliminated if the local church had taken up its rightful place as spiritual mentor and sender.^{lxix}

We hope that this paper has adequately addressed these concerns and furthered a biblical understanding that will help transform the relationship between many local congregations and parachurch groups. Our hope is that more local churches would come to appreciate and partner with parachurch organizations and see how the parachurch movement reveals the missionary fervor of God and his people. In North America groups like Young Life, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Billy Graham Evangelistic Association are examples of how local churches can set aside competition and partner together. While we might agree with those who argue that the Church has often been guilty of neglecting missions abroad, mission agencies are examples of how the Church has kept world mission in focus and have been effective in mobilizing and organizing the people of God to communicate the gospel, in word and deed, throughout the world. The content of disagreement between those who support the work of parachurch organizations and

those who oppose its work “is not so much the nature of the Church as the organization of the Church.”^{lxx} When it comes to the nature of the Church “there is deep agreement over the reality of the universal Body of Christ to which every true Christian belongs... Jesus is the head of the Church, whether it exists as fixed congregations or as mobile missions.”^{lxxi} As we have examined the Scriptures and the history of the Church we have seen that God never prescribes a mono-structural approach to the organization of His people. We have seen God calling for and blessing parachurch organizations functioning fruitfully alongside local congregations in pursuit of His purposes. May this partnership continue.

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¹ It is often said that "parachurch" is a misnomer. Technically it would better to refer to them as para-local church or para-denominational organizations. However, the point of this paper is not to coin a new term, but to understand the biblical and historical basis for organizations commonly referred to as parachurch. A parachurch can be defined as a Christian organization with one or more specific Christian purposes functioning with a large degree of independence from any one local church or denomination (see Willmer 12-28 for longer discussion on the defining characteristics of the parachurch along these lines). There has been some controversy over what differentiates a parachurch from a local church or denomination. Below are three ways a parachurch might be differentiated from a local church or denomination.

First, many Protestants have traditionally understood the local church as being marked by the proclamation of the Word to the entire community, right administration of Baptism

and the Lord's Supper, and the administration of Christian discipline. While a parachurch organization may assist the local church in one or more of these areas a parachurch does not necessarily bear all of these marks. Some parachurch organizations like InterVarsity have agreed not to administer the sacraments in order to respect partnership with churches that see this as the role of the local church.

Secondly, local congregations and denominations might carry the mandated reach the entire community in its cultural, linguistic, and generational diversity while parachurch organizations focus more narrowly and specifically. A parachurch is more focused and able to further contextualize for subgroups based on language (in the case of mission agencies) or on gender, generational or vocational subgroups in the case of Promise Keepers, Young Life, InterVarsity, or a seminary.

Thirdly and possibly the most important differentiation is found in the understanding that local congregations and denominations carry the broad mandate to preserve the core of the Christian tradition while parachurch organizations may focus on one or more specific goals. Examples of specific goals of parachurch organizations include scripture reproduction, evangelism, leadership development, discipleship, social justice, and community service.

Hopefully it has become clear that the parachurch is dependent on local congregations and is in no way a substitute. It should also be obvious that local congregations might greatly benefit from the work of parachurch organizations. The body of this paper should make this more explicit.

ⁱⁱ That is to say, ministries that worked alongside local congregations. This is how we understand the structure of the monastic movement, which functioned semi-independently from the structure of the diocese.

ⁱⁱⁱ These include the International Bible Society who worked on the New International Version, The Lockman Foundation in the case of the New American Standard Bible and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America who produced the New Revised Standard Version.

^{iv} I will try to consistently differentiate between the local church (or the local congregation) and the Church. The latter, often called the Church invisible, is made up of all true Christians around the world. When I capitalize, I am referring to the universal Church. When I do not, I am referring to a local congregation.

^v 2 Sam 5:12.

^{vi} Exo. 4; 2 Chr 15:3; Mal 2:6-7.

^{vii} One obvious exception would be the cessation of the sacrificial system and the priestly role therein.

^{viii} Mal 2:6-7.

^{ix} Riew, 31.

^x Be that Israel or in time of the divided kingdom either Israel or Judah.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, 30.

^{xii} Mellis, Charles J., *Committed Communities: Fresh Streams for World Missions*, William Carey Library: Southern Pasadena, California, 1976, 10. Quoted in Riew 31.

^{xiii} See 2 Chr 18:5-12 as an example of this.

^{xiv} See 1 Kin 19:16 as an example of consecration of other prophets and the king. See 1 Kin 1:32-45 for an example of the partnership between the prophet and the priest in the anointing of future kings.

^{xv} This same argument with greater exegetical foundation could be made regarding the existence of the monarchy for the people of Israel. Nonetheless, God sent His son to be our savior in the line of David.

^{xvi} Riew, 92. Riew surveys the various structures in found in the Scripture concluding that they can usually be categorized as a congregational structure or a mission structure. "Scripture does not specify any normative kind of form or structure. Rather, according to the descriptive account of churchly functions in the Scripture, we discuss many examples of cultural forms, usually summed up under two structures, namely, the mission structure and congregational structure [Riew, 522].

^{xvii} Mark 2:18; John 3:25.

^{xviii} Riew, 94-95.

^{xix} Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19.

^{xx} Luke 3:14.

^{xxi} Matthew 3:7-12.

^{xxii} Mark 1:44.

^{xxiii} Matthew 8:5-10.

^{xxiv} Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:15-16; 6:6.

^{xxv} Mark 5:21-43.

^{xxvi} Matthew 17:24-27; Luke 20:21-26.

^{xxvii} I realize that in saying this I might be alienating readers who believe that their particular church structure is specifically prescribed in the New Testament documents. While looking to the scriptures for guidance in how we organize our congregations is essential we should also humbly acknowledge that "the very fact that such diverse groups as Roman Catholics, Plymouth Brethren, and Presbyterians [not to mention the countless independent "nondenominational congregations] all use the Pastoral Epistles to support their ecclesiastical structures should give us good reason to pause as to what the New Testament "clearly teaches: on these matters [Fee, 122].

^{xxviii} Matt. 7:15-20.

^{xxix} Phil. 1:18.

^{xxx} The only exception is in Acts 1:20-23 where the role of apostle is reserved for those who were with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry.

^{xxxi} Riew, 522.

^{xxxii} McMann, 13.

^{xxxiii} Winters, *Warf*, 41.

^{xxxiv} Found throughout Acts chapters 1-16; in the first verse of almost all of Paul's letters Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1, 2 Cor. 1:1 etc.; also prominent in 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1.

^{xxxv} Acts 16:4; 20:17-18; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5; Jam. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1-5; 2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1.

^{xxxvi} Acts 20:28; Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-7.

^{xxxvii} 1 Tim. 3:8-13 and arguably Acts 6:1-7.

^{xxxviii} Acts 13; 1 Cor. 12:39; Eph. 4:11

^{xxxix} Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11.

^{xl} Eph. 4:11.

^{xli} Latourette, 117.

xlii Ibid.

xliii Ibid., 231.

xliv Ibid., 230.

xlv Ibid., 232.

xlvi Ibid., 345-6.

xlvii Ibid., 428.

xlviii Ibid.

xlix Winters, *Warf*, 19.

¹ Winters, *The Two Structures*, B-53.

ⁱⁱ See Latourette, 1033-5 for a description of the rapid increase of these societies and their work.

ⁱⁱⁱ Winters, *The Two Structures*, B-55.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ The homeless population is just one of many groups that could be used for the sake of illustration. It's one can readily think of how high school students, college students, prison populations, the elderly, or other groups with identifiable needs could be substituting but in this example. We could also use anyone of the numerous specific needs or communities involved in overseas missions.

^{liv} While this illustration was not based on one particular parachurch organization, I have experienced many such partnerships. I wrote it thinking of City Team Ministries which has helped my church in San Francisco (City Church) grow in compassion for the city's homeless population. I have also particularly appreciated the partnership between InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and a number of San Francisco congregations including City Church, First Baptist, Golden Gate Community, San Francisco Chinese Alliance Church, and San Francisco Christian Center. Besides providing prayer and financial support these congregations have set aside time to introduce incoming students to their churches and welcome their participation without drawing them away from ministry on campus. Pastors from these churches often come on campus as guest speakers for student fellowships. As a result, students get to know these pastors and join these churches. Since focusing more on this partnership, we have seen a number of students and alumni who came to faith through the ministry on campus get baptized in these local congregations and become involved in the life of the church. Since writing this paper I have begun to see this same partnership with churches near Stanford (where I have served since 2003).

^{lv} Wayne Grudem writes one of the few systematic theologies that mentions parachurch organizations.

^{lvi} Grudem, 877.

^{lvii} Mark 9:38-40.

^{lviii} Riew, 14.

^{lix} Barret, D. "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1996." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1997, 18(1), 23-24. Quoted in Willmer, 10.

^{lx} Willmer, 171.

^{lxi} Ibid., 172.

^{lxii} While we see the apostles providing central administration in Acts 4:34-6:7 this is not the case in Acts 2:42-45. Here the people seem to provide for the needy in the community with no mention of central administration. This can also be seen elsewhere in the New Testament chronologically before and

after the situation in Acts 4-6. Examples include Matt 25:14-30; 25:31-46; Luke 16:1-13, 19-31; Acts 2:42; Acts 10:2.

^{lxiii} While Paul often asked churches for support for (as was the case with the Corinthians and the Philippians) we see Jesus supported by individuals in Luke 8:1-3.

^{lxiv} This sort of giving and receiving is often described by Jesus in the Gospels and continues to be prominent in the early church. See Acts 2:40ff, Acts 4-5, and all of Philippians for examples of how can look.

^{lxv} In InterVarsity where I served from 1995-2009, I advocated for a change in our language of "fund raising" and "donors" to reflect a broader understanding of partnership. Instead of using the language of fundraising we have been using "partnership development" which is more than a merely semantics. As we focus on developing partners giving and receiving prayer, sharing ideas and vision as well as volunteering and mutual service have become intrinsic to the goal and not merely means to a financial end. Personally, as I have focused more on developing partners funds have continued to come in.

^{lxvi} Clowney, 107.

^{lxvii} Ironically some of these same critics are students or have been students of interdenominational seminaries which clearly parachurch.

^{lxviii} We must acknowledge that many of the activities of parachurch organizations have been unbiblical, counter productive, and have been examples of misallocation of time and resources, yet this is not a problem inherent in the structure. The same statement can be made about many of the structures and activates of local congregations. Humanity is sinful and all the structures that we take part in bear the mark of our sin.

^{lxix} Shin, 8.

^{lxx} Riew, 5.

^{lxxi} Ibid.