

# A Defense of Parachurch Organization: An Example of a Missional Ecclesiology

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# The Immediate Question

- Why do we have both local churches and on-campus fellowships?
  - Is it divisive?
  - Who should do what?
  - Is it a faithful witness to the unbelieving world?
- Usually, the on-campus Christian fellowship is seen as less important
  - e.g. when students have time conflicts
- Parachurch organizations like InterVarsity are seen as less legitimate
  - Does the parachurch exist only because local churches can't or aren't doing enough?

# Identifying the Broader Questions

- Why have ministry by groupings at all?
  - Why have college ministry? Youth ministry? Elderly ministry? (Ministry by age group)
  - Why have singles/couples ministry? (Ministry by marital status)
  - Why have ethnic-specific churches? (Ministry by language and cultural groups)
  - Why have marketplace ministry? (Ministry by occupation or interest)
  - Etc.

# Overview of this Presentation

- Church Organization in the Reformation
- Special Purpose Groups in Britain and the U.S.
- Special Purpose Groups: Causes
- Parallels to Medieval Catholicism
- Soft Parallels to the Early Church
- Going the Opposite Direction: What Limits Organizational Diversity in the Church?
- Power, Attitudes, and Results

# Church Organization in the Reformation

- In the sixteenth century, the magisterial Reformation (church-state) church model emerged as a prominent mode of church organization.
- “The predominance of state churches meant that many of the influential developments shaping European Protestantism came about through the workings of internal reform movements, organized as special interest groups, not from splinter groups or separatist sects.” (Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*. Princeton, 1988, p.102ff. Much of the material in the following slides was drawn from Wuthnow.)

# 'Special Purpose Groups': Europe & U.S.

- Reform worship and liturgy
  - Oxford movement in England (1833)
- Missionary Societies
  - Society of Foreign Missions, Catholics training native clergy (1663)
  - Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, British (1701)
  - London Missionary Society (1795)
  - American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810)
  - Baptist Missionary Society (1814)
  - Society of the Missionaries of France (1815)
  - Pious Society of Missions (1835)
  - Leopold Association (1838)
  - 94 American missionary societies by 1900
- Social Ministry, Charity, Care for the Poor
  - Clapham Society (1780): London evangelicals seeking abolition & settling blacks in Sierra Leone (abolition accomplished in British parts in 1833)
  - Society of Saint Vincent DePaul (1830's) in Paris

# 'Special Purpose Groups': British Evangelicals

- “Ours is the age of societies. For the redress of every oppression there is a public meeting. For the cure of every sorrow there are patrons, vice-presidents and secretaries. For the diffusion of every blessing of which mankind can partake in common, there is a committee.”
  - Sir James Stephen, 1849, commenting on the Evangelical Revival, in what became a very popular and oft-quoted article
- In Britain, from roughly 1700 to the founding of the YMCA in 1854, the list of hospitals and medical charities, together with the list of religious, moral, educational, and philanthropic associations, spans 11 pages of very small text! (Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*. Cambridge, 1961, p.329-340)

# 'Special Purpose Groups': U.S.

- Interdenominational movements, not incorporated
  - Prayer Meeting Movement in NYC (1850): by 6 months it had 10,000 participants; eventually credited with adding 500,000 new members to the city's churches
  - Abolitionism
- Interdenominational groups
  - American Tract Society (1823)
  - American Sunday School Union (1824)
  - American Education Society (1826)
  - American Temperance Union (1836)
- Interdenominational groups targeting urban and industrial problems (alcoholism, desertion, vagrancy, child abuse)
  - Women's Christian Temperance Union (1874)
  - Anti-Saloon League (1895)
  - YMCA (1844 from Britain)
    - grew from 10,000 volunteers at the Civil War; 263,000 by 1895; 720,000 by World War I



# 'Special Purpose Groups': U.S.

- By 1988, ~800 new nationally incorporated special purpose groups (not denominations) that meet IRS standards for a religious organization.
  - Focus ministries (Healing ministries, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, defense of inspiration of Scripture)
  - Social ministries (WorldVision, Habitat)
  - Special target populations (youth, college, businesspeople, etc.)
  - Technology usage (Christian Broadcasting Network)
  - Political causes (accounts for over 1/3 of the 800)
- Compare with denominations:
  - 1,200 denominations in the broadest sense
  - 200 more standard (100 if counting only those with substantial membership)
- And budgets (1998 data from Willmer, *The Prospering Parachurch*)
  - Local churches: \$94 billion
  - Parachurches organizations: > \$100 billion
    - e.g. American Bible Society: \$42 million
- By 1988, ~16,000 national nonprofit associations of all kinds. Thus, religion 'special purpose groups' account for 5% of all nonprofits. *There has been no change in this proportion since 1888.*

# 'Special Purpose Groups': Causes

- To Respond to Increased Professionalization
  - Businesspeople, nurses, counselors, psychologists, educators, administrators, musicians
  - Response to cults
- To Respond to New Demographic Divisions
  - Youth, college students, urban culture, prisoners, etc.
- To Imitate Secular Associations
  - Around racial equality, gender issues, handicapped rights, etc.
- To Use New Technology
  - Around communication: Radio, television, direct mail, internet
  - Around transportation: Aviation (e.g. Missionary Aviation Fellowship)
- To Respond to the Role of the Government
  - "At the close of WW2, only a handful of religious organizations had political influence as their primary goal," e.g. Bible Sabbath Association, National Reform Association. Today, over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> do. (Wuthnow)
  - Welfare, education, equal rights, regulation, public transportation of children to schools, abortion, prayer in school, "Christian legal system," Vietnam, nuclear arms race

# Parallels to Roman Catholicism

- To Respond to Increased Professionalization
  - Monasteries, Convents, and Orders
  - Guilds and Societies (secular medieval trades)
  - Hospitals
  - Artists
  - Confraternities and Brotherhoods (more recent; after 1840's sometimes suspiciously termed *extra ecclesia* due to potential bias against Irish)
- To Respond to New Demographic Divisions
  - Nationalities, language groups
- To Imitate Secular Associations
  - Academies, schools and universities
- To Use New Technology
  - Around communication: writing and printing
  - Around transportation: knights, missionary orders
- To Respond to the Role of the Government
  - Concern for natural law, problem of usury, "Christian state," the "problem of outsiders," warfare

# Soft Parallels to Early Church?

- To Respond to Some Degree of Specialization
  - Apostles & Prophets
  - Widows (1 Tim.5:3-16)
  - Itinerant prophetic ministry (Didache)
  - Mercy (small informal hospitals)
  - Scholars of Scripture (Hebrew experts like Jerome, Origen, etc.)
  - Informal groupings of Christian soldiers in the Roman army
  - Teachers and theologians (councils)
- To Respond to New Demographic Divisions
  - Nationalities (Jew & Gentile), language groups
- To Imitate Secular Groups
  - Early church worship patterned after diaspora synagogue worship
- To Use Technology
  - Around communication: amanensis, scribe, Scripture-carrier
  - Around transportation: apostles and prophets
- To Respond to the Role of the Government
  - Unfortunately, the government seems to have provided a model for the church to steadily imitate (see next slide).

# Going the Opposite Direction: What Limits Organizational Diversity in the Church?

- Growing Bureaucracy of the Church's Community Life
- Growing Distinctions Around the Clergy
- An Increasingly Clergy-Centric View of the Church

# Growing Bureaucracy of the Church's Community Life

- An Example: Pope Gregory the Great
  - When he became pope in AD 590, in the face of the insecure and unpredictable barbarian threat, Pope Gregory centralized the selection of church leadership (previously church leaders had been locally elected).
  - Financing, social welfare (hospitals), and education programs were also centralized.
  - Sacred actions, people, and times began to be reestablished.
  - It is not surprising that this bureaucratization of authority, jurisdiction, and administration occurred largely under Gregory, who had once been a secular bureaucrat: governor of Rome in AD 573. (Lewis Mumford. *The Condition of Man*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc. 1944. p.100-104)

# Growing Distinctions Around the Clergy

- Example – The Sacrament of Marriage: Who can do it?
  - In the early church, there was no formal marriage service. Neither episcopal blessing or benediction was necessary to validate marriages among the early Christians. We can only assume that marriage was witnessed and validated by the entire believing community, because not until the fifth century did an official benediction become a universal custom, and in the sixth century a special form of service became widely common. (Edwin Yamauchi, “Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*)
  - This responsibility, originally left to the church community, was thus monopolized by the clergy.
- Can we find other examples? (baptism, etc.)

# An Increasingly Clergy-Centric View of the Church

- Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* (first century, AD 57-58)
  - shows no awareness of a formal leadership structure (Rom.16)
- Ignatius' *Epistle to the Romans* (early second century, AD 110-120).
  - describes bishops as “representing” or “embodying” the local church
  - does not address any centralized leadership structure at Rome
- Cyprian in North Africa (third century)
  - First to use priest/Israel analogy (greater to lesser) for clergy/congregation
  - Opposite of Paul's priest/Temple analogy (lesser to greater) for apostles/Christians (1 Cor.9).
- Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (fourth century)
  - Argues for apostolic succession from Peter in Rome and the conflation of the papacy and the emperor in Constantine



- So now that we understand what caused the shift in the church's life and attitudes in its early period. Can we focus on more recent time periods to get more perspective?

# Power, Attitudes, and Results – Let's Compare Catholics and Mainline Protestants

- Roman Catholic Church
  - Complex matrix organization.
  - Alliance with the Roman state was problematic, but it...
  - Allows for some diversity of form and function because accountability lines can be drawn to the top, though some of the time this diversity was not encouraged.
- Magisterial Protestantism
  - Single line reporting.
  - It splintered off from the Roman Catholic Church, but has an idealistic vision of being organizationally unified. Magisterial Protestants sought control through formal alliances with national governments like Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, England, and Scotland (church-state symbiosis very similar to Roman Catholicism).
  - Historically uneasy with Anabaptists, other Christian groups, and other forms of parachurch organization because of its conflicted legacy.

- Mainline Protestants have had more problems with organizational diversity than Roman Catholics because they
  - (1) are suspicious of other Christian groups
  - (2) have parishes (local churches) but no orders (parachurches)
  - (3) want the parishes (local churches) to do everything with very limited resources
  - (4) they want organizational unity under a person representing Jesus' authority
    - the senior pastor at the local level
    - the executive at the denomination level
    - the Christian politician at the national level

# Power, Attitudes, and Results – Let's Compare Britain and the U.S.

- Evangelicalism in Britain
  - British pragmatic, corporatist culture allowed for diversity of organizations both secular (e.g. East India Company) and religious.
  - Britain's historically earlier loosening of state and church influenced British evangelicalism in 3 ways:
    - *Spirituality*: Britain's evangelical Methodist revival in the 1800's
    - *Response to Social Conditions*: British evangelicals' political flexibility allowed for a more aggressive urban ministry to counter the ravages of the Industrial Revolution
    - *Scholarship*: Better historical New Testament scholarship at British universities emerged while Continental scholars attending seminaries under denominational control were stymied in higher criticism and pseudo-pastoral concerns. They did not respond to the challenges of the secular university over the Bible's historicity.
      - Sir William Ramsay's biblical archaeology in the early 1900's overturned consensus that the NT is historically inaccurate.
      - N.T. Wright in 1990's emerges as probably the leading 'historical Jesus' and 'theology of Paul' scholars (see also Ford, *The Modern Theologians*)

# Power, Attitudes, and Results – Let's Compare Britain and the U.S.

- Evangelicalism in United States
  - Until World War II, American denominationalism and fundamentalism affected American:
    - *Spirituality*: Perhaps overly pragmatic, non-intellectual. Oriented around cultural preservation (school prayer, inerrancy of Scripture, creation vs. evolution) and preserving American mythology of being God's chosen nation
    - *Response to Social Conditions*: Very slow to address racism. Very slow to recognize urban problems because of rural and suburban white congregations
    - *Scholarship*: Princeton, etc. focused on inerrancy of Scripture and creation vs. evolution debate
  - After World War II, Christian churches started to rapidly lose clarity into their own approach to politics and thus their political clout. Parachurch movements then swelled and major changes in American religious life (evangelical or otherwise) started to appear (see Wuthnow).

- Evangelicalism in Britain was vibrant, responsive to a wide range of issues, flexible and fresh in its approaches.
- Evangelicalism in the United States was stagnant to slow in its responses to the world, fixated on a few issues, rigid and convention-bound in its approaches.
- The determining factor was organizational diversity in British Evangelicalism.

# Conclusions

- Within Protestant circles, there is some basis for saying that high clergy-centeredness of the “local church” has historically led to a low spiritual and intellectual vitality of the Christian community, broadly speaking.
- Or, centralized church power and effective spirituality have been inversely related.
- Parachurch organizations (special purpose groups in Wuthnow’s language) were understood to be a relevant and contemporary expression of ‘the priesthood of all believers.’