

The Church of Christ & Para-Church Organisation

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We learn from the Holy Bible that our Lord Jesus Christ has a church in this world. He called it "My Church" in Matthew 16:18. Our Lord is not only the "Owner" but also the Builder of His Church. He says, "I will build my church".

Now, how would our Lord Jesus Christ build His Church? What does the Holy Bible tell us about this matter?

The Holy Bible teaches us that our Lord has given the authority and Great Commission to His Church to fulfill (Matthew 28:18-20). We learn that our Lord has appointed officers in His Church. They are the pastors and teachers, elders, and deacons (Ephesians 4:11; Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 3:1-10). That is the picture we find in God's Word.

How should we look at the "para-churches" organisations? Is there a place for "para -church" organisations today?

The first thing we need to take note is, a "para- church" organisation is not a local Church. The stated aim of a "para-church" is to assist or help the local Church to fulfill its calling in this world, namely, to fulfill the Great Commission. That is what the word "para" refers to.

There are many features that show that a "para -church" is not a local Church of Christ. First, "para-church" organisations do not call their leaders "pastors", "elders" or

"deacons". By calling their "leaders" with non -biblical titles, it shows that they understood they are not the appointed officers of our Lord for His Church and hence their organisation is not a local Church.

Second, "para-church" organisations could not fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord. Most "para churches" are devoted to one or some aspects of the Great Commission but not all, especially in regards to the Christian Sacraments.

By the above, we note the distinction between a local church and a "para -church" organisation. We must remember this distinction whenever we look at the "para -church" issue.

Further to the above observations, we take note that "para-church" organisations do not receive their authority to exist directly from our Lord Jesus Christ. Their authority is derived from the Church of Christ. Without the support of the Church of Christ, the "para-church" organisations have no authority to exist. It is hard but it is the truth.

In other words, "para-church" organisations need to recognise the authority of the Church of Christ. Those who serve in such "para-churches" must be commissioned and sent out by their respective local churches. No "para- church" leader has the authority to appoint or call someone to serve in a "para-church" organisation without the agreement and blessing from the respective local church. No "para-church" organisation can be independent from the Church of Christ.

As we look at the "para-church" organizations today, we are mindful of many "para-church" organisations who are behaving more like "extra-church" organisations. Such organisations do not respect the authority of the church. In fact, many see themselves as more important than the local Churches of Christ. They do not respect the authority of the Church Officers appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ. They demand the financial support and loyalty from their supporters that rightly only belong to the Church of Christ. It is interesting to note that some of these "para-church" leaders even consider themselves to be "Church experts". They claim to be called by God to teach the local church how to be a better church. How ironical, isn't it? Now, it would be better for them to start a local Church with people who are like minded and show by their examples how an ideal and Bible-believing Church should be like.

In summary, we need to be clear about the distinction between the Church of Christ and the "para-church" organisation. No "para-church" should usurp the authority given by our Lord to the local Church. Instead, "para churches" must remember that their authority is derived from the Church and they are responsible to the Church. "Para-churches" must work closely with the Church of Christ and so help the Church to fulfill the Great Commission.

When a Christian wishes to support or be involved in a "para-church" organization or event, he should ensure the following: First, does the organization hold to the Reformed Faith in its teaching and practices?; Second, is the organization associating with Churches or others who do not hold to the

Reformed Faith?; Third, does the organization usurp the authority given by Christ to the local Church?; Fourth, is the organization under the authority of a local Church? These basic questions should be explored before a Christian engages in any work with a “para-church” organization.

Our Lord Jesus says, “I will build My Church”. Let us obey the Lord Jesus Christ in how we seek to assist Him in this building project