

(General Synod, conference) is to be depended upon more than the guidance of God in church meeting?

WIDER BODIES AS AGENCIES

The New Testament churches appear to have been gathered by spontaneous groups or selfless leaders, and the subsequent association of the churches with each other appears to have taken place as the churches needed agencies to do their work. Does the organization recognize the wider bodies, which the churches have created as agencies, for wider work and organs of fellowship? Or are the wider bodies represented as over the churches with assumed authority to reorganize and/or control the

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associations, conferences, boards and agencies, which have been created by the churches and the church members?

LAY MINISTRY

The New Testament bears ample testimony to the ministry of those who were not ordained. Is the matter of lay ministry in the churches seen as an inevitable outcrop of New Testament Christianity in each particular church, or is it regulated by bodies beyond the local church?

FAITH, FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP OR ... ?

The New Testament sets forth principles of faith, life and work; it is the record of what God did through persons responsive to His call. Is the organization a simple, straightforward example of Christian principles put into practice or does it say churches are free while, at the same time, setting up rules which deprive that freedom of any real meaning?

About the Author

Rev. Dr. Henry David Gray was a long time spokesperson for the Congregational Way of Life. He was an author of books and articles, preacher, teacher, Dean of the Congregational Center, editor of the Congregational Journal, and minister of distinction to several NACCC Churches. Dr. Gray was also a great promoter of relations with international groups and associations of Congregationalists. As testimony to his faithfulness, his son, Dr. David Gray, and grandson, Rev. Douglas Gray are both ministers within our tradition.

The NACCC is an association of autonomous Churches bound by our belief that Christ alone is the head of the local Church. With this in mind, we express and discuss theological issues respecting different positions. There is no one document which directs all our Churches, rather clergy and laity are encouraged to establish their own understandings of scripture and congregational life in Christ. This piece represents the views of one of our respected leaders and is submitted to the larger fellowship of Churches for consideration and/or edification.

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Congregational Way Series

New Testament Tests for Congregationalism

by
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*"The New Testament
portrays the Church as
the covenanted
fellowship."*

New Testament Tests for Congregationalism

Our Congregational forebears believed they were "completing the Reformation" when they applied the principles to church structure, which they found in the New Testament.

FACE TO FACE

The New Testament calls us to worship and serve God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Does the organization follow the scriptures by trusting God's revelation to persons directly and personally? Does it call us to repent and believe the gospel face to face with God, each responsible to Him and to Him alone? Does it ask us to serve an institution or does it invite us to serve God?

INSTITUTION OR INSPIRATION?

The New Testament bears witness to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of persons and churches. Does the structure lay claim to institutional authority, or does it trust in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in persons and churches individually? For example, does it set up procedures, which give authority concerning the ministry or other part of the church's life to committees, boards, or other bodies outside the particular church? Does it put its trust in structural efficiency, size and power, or does it show trust in the Spirit-awakened zeal and love of responsible Christians in the fellowship of the churches? Ultimately, is the main principle of the organization trust in itself or trust in God?

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The New Testament portrays the church as the covenanted fellowship of

those who dare to be followers of Jesus Christ. Gathered into particular churches in each community, they believe themselves to be one in fellowship with all people who share their common allegiance to Christ as Lord.

In the New Testament, the word "church" always means either the particular church in a given community, or the universal fellowship of all Christ's followers; past, present, and future. Does the organization use the word "church" in the way it is used in the New Testament? Does the structure apply the Scriptural principle that

Test any organization claiming to be Congregational by the New Testament.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"? Or does it "recognize" a "congregation" by institutionally established rules? Is the fellowship inclusive enough to welcome our Quaker brethren as fellow Christian or does it set up sacramental standards which would exclude them?

PEACE AND PURITY

The New Testament calls all persons to repentance and faith. Jesus said to a forgiven person, "Go and sin no more." Paul urged the Corinthians to guard the peace and purity of life in their church. Does the structure provide "national" standards for church membership or does it completely omit all reference to church membership, thereby clearly recognizing that it is a personal relationship to God and a covenant relationship to a particular church? Does the structure provide any means for the discipline of a minister by any other body? Or does it prohibit such reference to "higher bodies" in recognition of its responsibility to God alone, which is central in Scripture and in Congregational usage?

ADVICE AND COUNSEL OR ... ?

The New Testament portrays the counseling together of churches to seek the mind of Christ and give advice in time of need. Does the

structure provide for mere "congregations," which shall support the program of denomination as a whole, on the pretext that the denomination is the church? Or does it provide for churches which shall meet together for advice and counsel? Does the structure provide for control over the churches by a General Synod, conference, or other body? Does the structure indicate that "counsel" really means "requirements?" Or does it explicitly declare that "counsel" has as much weight as it has worth; no more and no less? Is a church a church or a "congregation" which is simply the basic unit of a national organization?

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COMMITTEE-CONTROLLED OR GOD-DIRECTED?

The New Testament tells us that churches, ordained leaders, and members themselves took part in the "laying of hands." Does the organization claim for a General Synod, conference or any other body of authority to ordain, license, call, dismiss, install, recognize, or otherwise oversee the pastor-church relationship? Or does it faithfully follow the New Testament principle that

this precious relationship is the inalienable choice of a pastor and a people acting under the direct guidance of God, sought in prayer and exercised only in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit? Does the organization distrust the principle of Spirit-directed pastor-church relationships, claiming that the guidance of some other body