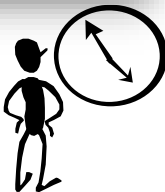


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

What is a Non-Institutional Church

By Erik Tryggestad

They meet in well-kept church buildings - the ones with no fellowship halls. They're the non-institutional churches of Christ. Today they number about 2,000 churches with roughly 132,890 in attendance. To members of "institutional" or "mainstream" churches of Christ, these congregations are a source of confusion. "They don't support missionaries" or "They don't believe in kitchens" are common misunderstandings.

Shedding light on the matter is William Ferrell Jenkins, retired chair of the Department of Biblical Studies at Florida College, Temple Terrace, Fla., a school associated with non-institutional churches. He is minister at the Church of Christ at Carrollwood, Tampa. A preacher for 50 years and author of study guides on theology, Jenkins has established two websites with study material (www.biblicalstudies.info and www.bibleworld.com). He has organized study tours around the globe since 1967.

Jenkins' former colleagues in biblical studies presented him a festschrift at the 2002 Florida College lectures. The 379-page volume, *God So Loved: Studies in the Gospel of John*, is a collection of 23 scholarly and practical essays on the gospel of John, one of the courses Jenkins taught.

Who are the churches described by Mac Lynn as "non-institutional," or "NI," in his book "Churches of Christ in the United States?" How do they differ from mainstream churches of Christ? What do the two groups have in common?

At first the differences mainly were over church support of private institutions such as orphan homes and colleges. Non-institutional brethren emphasized that the church is able to do its work without making contributions to support institutions apart from the church. The sponsoring church was a big issue. NI churches thought that each church should do its own work and that no church has the right to become the sponsor of a

work in evangelism, benevolence or edification and expect other churches to send funds to it.

For many years brethren discussed the scriptures which each saw as the basis for his beliefs. To many of us, it became evident that a new way of looking at scripture was developing. We held that the Bible directs in three ways: direct command or precept, approved examples and necessary inference or conclusion.

When some institutional brethren began to defend their practices in such lessons as “Where There Is No Pattern,” it became evident that we had a different understanding of how the Bible directs us.

At first the differences could be seen only by looking at the monthly financial statement. Did the church support, or not, this or that institution or a sponsoring church? After a while participation in social activities came to be another distinguishing mark. Fellowship halls, kitchens and recreational activities came to be tell-tale signs of “liberalism.”

The churches still had a lot in common, but the differences were too great for the NI brethren to overlook. Fellowship between the two groups is practically nil today.

Discuss the term, “non-institutional.” Is it accurate?

Well, it’s better than “antis.” Of course, we would prefer to be called Christians. I have no idea who first used the term “non-institutional” but it has become quite common. It means that these churches do not support the institutions that are commonly supported by the “mainline” congregations. I prefer the terms “institutional” and “non-institutional” over “liberal” and “conservative,” or “liberal” and “anti.”

What philosophies or elements of the Restoration tradition influenced this movement’s formation?

I see the Restoration appeal as valid because it is based on a return to the New Testament. In my book, “The Early Church,” I have tried to set forth the church of the New Testament. Historian Richard Hughes points out that “those who opposed the development of institutions stood squarely in the democratic, anti-institutional mainstream of their 19th century heritage, contrary to the assertions of mainstream Churches of Christ that they were deviants, radicals, and schismatics” (in his book, “Reviving the Ancient Faith”).

He says that it was the mainstream “that had removed itself almost entirely from its 19th century roots.”

What do you feel are the biggest misconceptions people have about these churches? How do church members combat these notions?

For many years it was that pejorative term “anti” that influenced many members of mainline churches to misunderstand us. We were said to be anti-orphan, anti-mission work and willing to let a non-Christian starve on the doorstep of the church building. Some lumped us with “anti-class” brethren. Because we opposed the sponsoring church in evangelism, we were called anti-cooperation. We insisted that churches could cooperate without pooling their resources through a sponsoring church.

We seek to combat these misunderstandings the same way we correct misunder-

standing among denominational groups about the necessity of baptism and the organization and work of the church. We just keep teaching.

How do these churches do missions, domestic and foreign?

Most of us would say that we do it just as New Testament churches did. Preachers are sent, or funds are sent to preachers. The early church was able to preach the gospel without forming missionary societies and without allowing some of the churches to become sponsoring churches through which the others might work. We find a pattern for imitation in passages such as Phil. 4:15-16 and 2 Cor. 11:8-9.

I think our biggest problem these days is not in finding funding but in having enough men willing to go into the field.

What distinctive doctrines should we, as Christians, be discussing today?

How would these churches define salvation issues?

We need to be proclaiming the good news about Jesus to a lost and dying world. Generally, I think we fail to understand our society and its cultural values. About the time we become comfortable responding to a philosophical or cultural approach it has become passé and we are still behind. By the time some of us learned how to respond to classical liberalism, modernism and neo-orthodoxy, we discovered that we were living in a post-modern world.

We do need to preach the distinctive nature of the New Testament church and how it differs from modern denominationalism. We need to teach respect for Bible authority by teaching how to establish Bible authority, which is the foundation of the Restoration principle. In "Biblical Authority" I have set forth the hermeneutical principles commonly acknowledged by NI churches.

My knowledge of what is going on in mainline churches is limited, but I assume that most of us are still teaching the necessity of faith, repentance, confession and baptism for the forgiveness of sins as the way of salvation. This is certainly what we find among NI churches.

How can these congregations grow in the midst of the community church movement and distractions that take people away from traditional practices? Do you think non-institutional churches are growing?

Well, it is difficult. The community church movement is able to poll a community and then offer what it wants. Our responsibility is to try to show people their condition apart from Christ and to lead them to obey Him. There are exceptions, but my observation is that most of these churches (non-institutional) seem to be "maintaining" rather than growing.

How should churches go about involving young people, who are often attracted to large congregations which offer college and singles ministries?

We see this as the responsibility of the homes, and many Christians are doing an admirable job of providing activities for the young people. The challenge and joy of learning and doing God's will keeps young people, as well as older people, involved in spiritual

activity. We believe that social and recreational opportunities, which are important, should be provided by individuals.

Eating in the Building - What's the Big Deal?

By Bubba Garner

A couple came by the church building several months ago. They were members of an area congregation, a group that was planning to construct a new facility, and wanted to see the layout of our building. I gave them a quick tour. As they were about to leave, the lady said, "I noticed you don't have a fellowship hall. I guess you just don't have room for one."

That says something about how most people look at the work of the church. She assumed that we didn't have a place for recreational activities because we couldn't fit it in the budget or on the lot. It never crossed her mind that we would choose not to build one; after all, nearly every church has one anymore. "No, ma'am," I replied. "The reason we don't have a fellowship hall is the same reason we don't have a gymnasium or a softball field. We've yet to find Biblical authority for them." I offer the following suggestions as to why eating in the building is, in fact, a big deal.

Hospitality is a function of the home, not the church. It's not that the Lord is opposed to His people eating with one another. The early Christians took "their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart" (Acts 2:46). It's important for the body of believers to be together, to share the joys and common experiences of life, and gathering around a table is one of the best ways to do that. But the New Testament instruction to be hospitable, whether the recipient is a stranger or a saint, is given to individuals, not local churches (Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2, 1 Pet. 4:9). Peter may have charged the elders to "feed the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2), but I don't think he had a covered dish in mind. When the church organizes activities meant for families to plan, it robs the individual both of opportunity and responsibility.

Mixing social and spiritual things is a recipe for disaster. While eating is thought by many to be a form of fellowship, it is not a spiritual work. And the danger of bringing a social atmosphere to the place of worship is seen in the Corinthians' perversion of the Lord's Supper. They turned the table of the Lord into such a common meal that Paul told them they were despising the church of God (1 Cor. 11:22). It is interesting that his solution involved eating and drinking at home in order to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner, rightly discerning the body and blood of Christ. I'm afraid that many have gone to the other extreme. They have so emphasized what you can get out of worship that they have neglected what you're supposed to give to God. When the social event becomes the feature of the service, the spiritual element is all but excluded. The people in the pew are no longer hungering and thirsting for righteousness; they're just hungry and thirsty.

Proper respect for authority cannot be turned on and off. Some appease their con-

science by saying, “We don’t have a multimillion dollar, state-of-the-art fellowship hall. We just use one of the back classrooms for a potluck every now and then.” That is a justification I find hard to swallow. The big deal about eating in the building is not just the unauthorized expenditure of money from the church treasury, funds that could be used for spreading the gospel or helping needy saints (Phil. 4:15-16). It is the irreverent attitude toward the Scriptures, an attitude that allows many to speak where the Bible is silent and to act when no approved example is given. When Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 18:18), that implies that He didn’t leave any for us with which to speculate and assume. If you respect what He said about believing and being baptized, you must also respect what is said about the church that He built. He is either Lord of all or nothing at all.

The other day, I saw a sign in front of a church building that read, “We’re redefining church.” Is that really something to brag about?

Things to Learn

By Greg Gwin

With the start of a new school year there comes an increased emphasis on learning. Study and hard work lie ahead.

But it is worth noting that there are some things we should NOT learn. Jeremiah warned God’s people to “learn not the way of the heathen” (Jer. 10:2). Certainly this counsel is much needed in today’s world. All sorts of wickedness and immorality are being promoted in our culture. Young people – be careful! Don’t let the influences of a sinful world take you on a path to eternal destruction. We pray that you will have the wisdom to realize that the things of this world are temporary (1 John 2:15-17) and the pleasure they bring won’t last (Heb. 11:25).

On the other hand, there are definitely some things that you need learn. “Learn to do well,” so said Isaiah (1:17). And Paul added, “learn to maintain good works” (Titus 3:14). These things do not come naturally, so you must work at learning them. Spend some time thinking seriously about what you can do that will help the cause of Christ, promote His church, and assist his disciples. There are many opportunities, but you must be looking for them – and you must learn to use them.

Of course, the most important thing to learn is obedience to God. It is said, even of Jesus, that “though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). His example is the one we must follow (1 Pet. 2:21). When we learn from Jesus, we find “rest for our souls” (Matt. 11:29).

Young people, as you begin a new year of learning, beware of the bad lessons out there. Avoid them! Commit yourself to learning the good things of God. You’ll never regret it.