

What is a Church? What is a CU?

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The objections: is a CU a church?

The doctrine of the Church has always been the ‘wilted side-salad’ of theology. If you are going to enjoy a good theological meal out, the doctrine of the Church is unlikely to be the option that will tempt you. In particular, it is always the evangelicals who get told that we need to eat up our greens. Evangelicals are commonly said to be so over-obsessed with personal salvation that they have no place for community. There is definitely some truth in that. Yet evangelicals are not the only ones. The doctrine of the Church is habitually shunted to the ends of systematic theologies (even the current Pope’s systematic theology follows that rule). Thus, so appended, discussions of the theology of the Church have a tendency to be somewhat lacking in fibre.

If that is generally the case, what about UCCF? The ever-present accusation (and danger) is that UCCF is especially blameworthy: it confuses its categories and so rides roughshod over the body of Christ in a hyper-pragmatist hunt for individual souls. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that UCCF does have a biblically thought-through understanding of the Church, and that it is one that has the additional cachet of being the traditional basic Protestant ecclesiology.

The key questions to address are ‘what is a church?’ and ‘what is a CU?’ Or to combine them, ‘is a CU a church?’ Put simply, there tend to be two types of answer to the last question that call into doubt the existence of CUs in any recognisable form.

The first type of answer is one given by some (though not all) within the Newfrontiers churches. The argument is that a CU is not a church. However, since the Church is God’s agent of mission, CUs should hand over their mission to the local churches. Such ‘para-church’ organisations as CUs are not Biblical and should not be encouraged. One advocate of this position argues that the real problem with mission organisations, such as CUs, is that they have ‘sprung to life’ in reaction to local mission ineffectiveness. Rather than solving the problem, however, they have weakened churches, making the church more pastoral by creaming off the zealous and motivated.’[1] Effectively, he thinks, ‘para-church’ organisations such as CUs have stolen mission from the local churches, leaving local churches to suffer the cost.

The second type of answer is one that has been expressed by the conservative evangelical movement, Church Student Ministries (though again, members of the movement are not unified behind it). This argues quite the opposite, that a CU is a church. The problem is that a CU is simply ‘church done badly’. One proponent of this position puts it like this:

UCCF states ‘Our strategy is to grow a witnessing community of students on each campus.’ ... By any Biblical definition that I can come up with ‘A witnessing community’ that is seeking to share the gospel and build up believers is a church. Therefore CU’s (sic) in their present form are on campus, student orientated churches.’ So, he asks, ‘what will be the difference between the two churches that we are asking students to attend?’ (That is, the CU-church and the local church.) First, he says, ‘Churches provide more mature leadership.’ Here he quotes 1 Timothy 3:2 (‘the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...’) to conclude:

'These are the characteristics that we would be looking for if we were appointing someone to church leadership. These are the criteria that are been (sic) sought in CU presidents.

To the suggestion that CUs don't have elders he responds: 'my whole point is that we ask students to fulfil the role of elders without the qualifications of elders.' He says:

I hope that folk at UCCF would see that while most would agree in principle with the Priority of the local church the present structure and activities of a CU as set out by UCCF make that practically impossible to achieve. Pragmatically the message given is, be involved in everything at CU, and Oh yes do go to church on Sunday to meet some old people. (Slight parody perhaps!)

To correct that, he hopes to see 'A Bible teaching local church committed to student work in every university or college town and city in partnership with a Christian Union that ran evangelistic meetings... The CU becomes the mission arm of the local church.' (This final acceptance of the existence of the CU is probably generosity on the part of the author, for the CU would still be the 'church done badly' that the argument condemns.) He concludes by saying: 'What I'd really appreciate is a well argued case for why CU's (sic) aren't church and why student leadership is a Biblical model.'

For those reasons UCCF has come to be seen by some as perpetuating a model that fails to be pro-church and so fails to be scriptural. The argument of this paper is that, for all CUs might have failed to live out a biblical ecclesiology in practice, their existence as entities distinct (though not independent) from the local church does have biblical, theological, historical and practical warrant.

What's in a word? The meanings of 'church'

It seems that much difficulty stems from confusion over the very word 'church'. The word 'church' has an ambivalence to it that means that in some sense a CU is a church, even if you can argue that in another sense it is categorically not.

How? The word 'church' is probably derived from the Greek word *kuriakos*, meaning 'belonging to the Lord (the *kurios*)'. But the word 'church' is usually used to translate the Greek term *ekklesia*. The problem is, *ekklesia* has a number of different applications in the New Testament. Its first and most basic meaning is simply 'assembly', and nothing more than that. The *locus classicus* for this meaning is Acts 19, where the rioting mob in Ephesus is referred to as the *ekklesia* (vv 32, 39, 41), and a legal assembly is also referred to as an *ekklesia*, assembly. In that sense a 'church' can be a mere gathering (of Christians or non-Christians).

However, a simple word study on *ekklesia* shows that it is also given a more technical meaning in the New Testament. For instance, Acts 8:3: 'Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women'; Acts 9:31: 'the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.' Being spread from house to house and throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, this can no longer be an assembly of people in one place.

How, then, can the *ekklesia* still be called an *ekklesia*? One of the more useful references is Hebrews 12:22–24 ('But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.')

Thus the Church remains an assembly, but the nature of that assembly is not local to a particular town, but to Christ in heaven. Just as Israel gathered around the Lord at Mount Sinai at the exodus, the Church is the gathering of the faithful around the Lord on Mount Zion in heaven.

Some theologies have been content to stop there and see that description as the final word on the Church. In essence, that is the Roman Catholic position. In Roman Catholicism, there is just the 'one holy, catholic, apostolic' universal Church. It is a worldwide corporation, composed of thousands of local outlets or branches, each bearing the image of the big reality, which is the real, universal Church. Recently, however, some Protestants have been prepared to take this reasoning to conclusions that have never been reached by Rome itself. That is, that if that is the Church, then how the local churches meet and operate can be much more (perhaps almost entirely) liquid. If there are faithful people meeting together to encounter Christ, then that is a valid local expression of the heavenly reality. Matthew 18:20 is habitually mis-quoted here to suggest that 'where two or three gather in my name', there is a church. Yet in the context, the 'two or three' are specifically distinguished from the church as being a special delegation from the church charged with bringing the sinning Christian back to repentance.

Traditionally, Protestant (and, in fact, Eastern Orthodox) theologians have held that to give such weighting to the universal Church at the expense of the local church is imbalanced and unscriptural. The New Testament, they have argued, is just as interested in both the local church itself and how it should look. To get a more fully-orbed ecclesiology we would do well to refer to the ecclesiological experts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the magisterial theologians of the Reformation.

The Church as creature of the Word: Reformation ecclesiology

Turning to the magisterial Reformers is not mere hide-bound evangelicalism. It follows from the fact that the doctrine of the Church was never a topic of theology in its own right during the early post-apostolic Church or through the middle ages. It took the Reformation to provoke serious reflection on the nature of the Church: could a Protestant assembly that had rejected the structures of Roman Catholicism rightly be called a church?

What is also helpful about the Reformation is that people's thinking on the Church gradually grew more complex as time went on. Thus, by walking through the Reformation timeline we can build ourselves up from the fundamentals to quite a nuanced and sophisticated ecclesiology. For example: in Luther's day, particularly that of the younger Luther, the Church wasn't a serious topic of concern. Luther's fight was for the gospel. For most of his life, it was far from clear that the withdrawal from Rome was to be a permanent split. Luther's hope was to reform the Church. As a result he rarely discusses ecclesiology.

It was in Calvin's lifetime, a generation later, that things started to change. It is even possible to track that change through Calvin's own writings. When Calvin first writes the *Institutes* (1536), he wrote no examination of the Church as such. Three years later, in his 1539 edition, he has a section on Church, because the Church is becoming a pressing issue. Yet still it was not clear that the split with Rome was permanent. That only became definite when the last attempt to reach Protestant-Catholic unity failed at the Colloquy of Regensburg in 1541. It is from then that the Reformers are compelled to produce a substantial ecclesiology. This Calvin did, such that by the final 1559 edition of his *Institutes*, all of his book IV – substantially more than a quarter of his theology – is dedicated to the topic of the Church. Thus people began to say: Luther's battle was the gospel; Calvin's was the Church.

To appreciate the wisdom of the Reformers best, we will proceed chronologically, starting from Roman Catholic ecclesiology, then work through Luther's and then Calvin's ecclesiology. Finally we will look at some of the thought of the Reformed tradition and the Puritans. In each case the governing question is: what is it that constitutes the Church? For Rome, the Church is constituted by the apostles and their successors, the bishops. The Church of Christ is therefore very easy to spot: it is the visible Church of Rome, with all its hierarchy.

When Luther saw this, he said that this was exactly the same kind of thinking that prophets like Jeremiah denounced in Israel (Jeremiah 7:3ff): 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!"' The Israelites believed that they could tie the Lord to his structures, just as Rome was tying him and his grace to theirs.

The Lord responds to this from verse 11 –

Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord. 'Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. While you were doing all these things, declares the Lord, *I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer.* Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. I will thrust you from my presence.'

Which he did in the exile.

Luther said that for the same sin the Lord had brought down the same judgement on the Church of Rome. What matters is not the structures, but what the Lord says in verse 13, 'I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer'. What matters is the Lord speaking. So, said Luther, the Church is not constituted by bishops: it is the Word of God that is the foundation of the Church. That, after all, is the story of salvation: the Word of God goes out to create a people for God.

This, then, is Luther's only personal, formal attempt to express a doctrine of the Church: 'Thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and the lambs that hear their Shepherd's voice'.^[2] The Church is those who hear the Word of God with faith. It may sound incredibly over-simplistic, yet Luther meant every word to be pregnant with implication. What we will now see is how later Reformation thinkers acted as midwives for that definition to bring out clearly the full meaning of it all.

The first attempt to come up with a formal Protestant definition that encapsulated Luther's thinking was written by Luther's right hand man, his 'Timothy', Philip Melancthon. It was written with Luther's full approval in 1530 as article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, the first Lutheran confession of faith. It reads: 'The church is the congregation of the saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered.'

That became the Protestant standard on the church. Calvin did little more than quote it to give his definition: 'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.'^[3] Article XIX of the Church of England's 39 articles similarly reads: 'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'

A question arises, however. These definitions seem quite different from Luther's simple description, that the Church is 'the holy believers and the lambs that hear their Shepherd's voice.' The development was only natural, however, given the Reformers' basic understanding of what a sacrament is. They took as a starting point Augustine's definition, that sacraments are 'visible words'.^[4] The Word of God is found in both audible and visible forms: you can hear the gospel read and preached, and you can see it preached visibly in the sacraments, but the content of both is the same.

When Calvin wrote that a true church exists wherever the word is preached and the sacraments are administered rightly, he did not believe he was adding anything to Luther's definition, that the church is simply where God's word is heard. He was merely holding that the church is where God's word is received in both its audible and its visible forms. Take 1 Corinthians 10:17, for example, ('Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf'). The argument is that individual believers unite to become one body, a church, because there is one bread. The one bread does not represent the fact that they are already one body, because the church is formed by the Word of God, and the Lord's Supper is the Word of God in visible form. It is not a projection of something in us.

These Protestant definitions were getting at this simple truth: it is the Word of God that creates and founds the Church. The Church exists as the creation, the product, of the Word going out.^[5] Just as God first created all things through his Word, so now the Church is the new creation of his Word. Thus we can find a church wherever we see the word received in both its audible and visible forms.

In addition to those two defining marks of a church, some Reformers wanted to add a third defining mark: discipline. The First Scotch Confession of 1560 therefore reads:

The notes, signes and assured taken whereby the immaculate Spouse of Christ Jesus is knawen fra the horrible harlot, the Kirk malignant ... we beleeve, confesse, and avow to be, first, the trew preaching of the Worde of God, into the quhilk God has revealed himselfe unto us, as the writings of the Prophets and Apostles dois declair. Secundly, the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, quhilk man be annexed unto the word and promise of God, to seale and confirme the same in our hearts. *Last, Ecclesiastical discipline uprightlie ministred, as Goddis Worde prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and vertew nurished.*^[6]

The Scots were not alone in this. Other Reformers such as Bucer, and the Reformed tradition generally, agreed on discipline as a valid mark of a church. They felt it was valid because when the Word goes out purely, it must involve correction. A true church is where the Word, in all its correcting and purifying power, is preached truly and 'purely', as Calvin put it. If the true Word is not preached, you cannot have a true church, just as much as if another word is preached (say the gospel of Chemosh), for then the church formed by that word will be the church of Chemosh, not the church of Christ.

The Word is administered through a ministry

Not everyone was happy with such a definition of God's Church. A significant challenge was mounted by those whom the magisterial reformers called the 'fanatics' of the radical Reformation, people like Caspar Schwenkfeld. Schwenkfeld argued that it is wrong to try to come up with these visible marks that define what a church is, and we must not seek to order God's Church. The Church, according to Schwenkfeld, is God's people called by his Word and Spirit and meeting in his Spirit around his Word, and any attempt to impose more definition than that is simply to slip back into the old structuralism of Roman Catholicism.

The magisterial Reformers, and later the Puritans, could hardly have disagreed more sharply. Through time their ecclesiology deepened and matured, they became increasingly clear: the true church is an ordered church. In particular, a true church has within itself a Word ministry. What Calvin, then, really adds to Luther is a sustained examination of the ministry of the Word. Thus Book IV of the *Institutes*, on 'the society of Christ', moves almost directly to talk about the ministers of the gospel (not denying every-member ministry, but simply referring to the pastorate).

There it is made very clear that, for Calvin, the appointment of pastors is never merely incidental. It is not just one convenient way for a church to operate. For Calvin, there is no church without a minister of the Word. To some, such as Schwenkfeld, that smacked of the old Roman Catholic structuralism that they had rejected. The only difference was that Calvin had replaced the old bishops with new preachers. Such a reading misunderstood Calvin, because of the vital difference, that he did not view the church eldership as a new structure that in and of itself constitutes the church. For him, the ministry of the Word is vital to the existence of a church because it is the ministry of the *Word*, not because of the ministers themselves. If a pastor ceases to be a true minister of the Word, then he ceases to have that significance that Calvin gives the ministry.

Why did the ministry of the Word have such a significance for Calvin and others? In one sense the answer is very simple: 'how can they hear without someone preaching to them?' (Romans 10:14). If there are to be believers in Christ, there must first be preachers of Christ. The Word of salvation comes through humanity from incarnation to the Sunday sermon.

However, the lynchpin of the Reformers' argument was not Romans 10 but Ephesians 4. In Ephesians 4, from verse 4 it is clear that Paul is writing about the Church, the 'one body'. He writes how Christ has equipped his Church by apportioning grace 'to each one of us' (v. 7). He then proceeds to quote Psalm 68:18: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.' In verse 11 he details some of those gifts: 'he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up'.

Reading the entirety of the verse that Paul quotes from Psalm 68 clarifies his point (and doing so in the King James translation also helps with what can be a sticking point: does Christ receive gifts from men as NIV reads Psalm 68; or does he give gifts to men, as NIV reads Ephesians 4?). 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast *received* gifts *for* men; yea, for the rebellious also, *that the Lord God might dwell among them*'.

Christ, therefore, receives these gifts for men and gives them to them 'that the Lord God might dwell among them'. Christ gives different ministers of the Word – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – so that the Lord might dwell with sinful people, that the body of Christ may be built. (NIV reads 'built up', suggesting mere improvement of the body. The Greek, *oikodomē*, however, is not so confined in its meaning.) Christ gives these different types of ministers of the Word, because it is only through that ministry that there can be a church. The great Puritan theologian of the church, Thomas Goodwin, said of these gifts of ministers: 'next to God's Son and Spirit, these are the greatest gifts, because conveyors of both to us'.^[7]

That essential value given to the ministry of the Word was carried over from Paul's theology into how he actually operated. In Acts 14:23, going through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 'Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them [the believers] in each church.' In many ways Paul's pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus are all about the pastorate, and Paul makes it plain that every church should have elders. Thus to Timothy he says: 'the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others' (2 Timothy 2:2). And to Titus he writes: 'The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you' (Titus 1:5). He takes the time to detail what sort of men should be appointed to that ministry (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), as well as the procedure for dealing with a sinful elder (1 Timothy 5:19-20). In Acts 20, Paul is in such a hurry to reach Jerusalem that he decides to sail right past his beloved Ephesians, with whom he had spent years of his ministry. However, he did think it was so important to exhort the elders, that he got them to him at Miletus, instead (vv. 16-38). According to Paul in both word and action every church must have a pastorate, a ministry of the Word, for that is the primary means by which the church is built up on the Word.

Who, then, should be a pastor? Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 are the key texts. (The fact that one talks about 'elders' and other about 'overseers' comes from the fact that the terms seem, to a large extent, to be interchangeable, as seen when comparing Titus 1:5 and 1:7.[8]) In those passages Paul describes what, on the whole, one might hope any Christian man should be like. (Coming from unmarried Paul, his stipulation that the overseer must be 'the husband of but one wife' [1 Timothy 3:2] seems to be a simple ban on pastors being polygamous.)

There seem to be only two qualifications that could not be demanded of all Christians. First, 1 Timothy 3:2: he must be 'able to teach'; which seems fairly similar to Titus 1:9: 'He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.' Thus the first distinctive about the elder is that he must be able to teach.

This does not mean that he has to be able to teach exceptionally well. Calvin writes: 'it forms a most excellent and useful training to humility, when [God] accustoms us to obey his word, though preached by men like ourselves, or, it may be, our inferiors in worth.'[9] What it does seem to be different from is the general ability of all Christians to communicate the gospel. This is a more specific gift which is why James can say, 'Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly' (James 3:1).[10]

The second distinctive qualification for being an elder is 1 Timothy 3:6: 'He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgement as the devil.' There we see the necessity of the ministry of the Word, and something of what it will look like. That, very roughly, is where the Reformers left off.

The Word and Spirit create a community

Now come the Puritans, and particularly John Owen. He is particularly interesting, for, while standing squarely within the tradition of the magisterial Reformers, he found himself being forced to be gently critical of their ecclesiology. He felt that, for all the good they had come up with, they had failed to stress the importance of community for the being of the church. (It is perhaps because Owen had such a strongly Trinitarian mind that he was able to notice the omission.)[11] Indeed, Reformation ecclesiology post-Owen does look just a little lop-sided. The overwhelming emphasis is on the Word and its fruit; there is no such emphasis on the Spirit and community.

It would be wrong to overlay the contrast, and Owen never sought to. The amazing Heidelberg Catechism, for instance, which is probably the most Trinitarian of the Reformed confessions, has this to say on the Church: 'the Son of God, by his Spirit and Word, gathers, defends and preserves for himself unto everlasting life, a chosen communion'.[12]

Yet it was Owen who saw with particular clarity that, just as it is the Spirit who holds the Father and the Son together in communion, so it is the Spirit who is the author of our communion (1 Corinthians 13:14; cf. Philippians 2:1). Thus Owen reasoned that we must bring the Spirit, just as much as the Word, into our thinking on the church. That means affirming the community, the fellowship, that the Spirit has constituted on the Word.

To be fair, while Calvin never articulated such thought, he was a good enough theologian to assume it instinctively. This can be seen in the warnings he builds into his discussion of the Church:

Pride, or fastidiousness, or emulation, induces many to persuade themselves that they can profit sufficiently by reading and meditating in private, and thus to despise public meetings, and deem preaching superfluous. But since as much as in them lies they loose or burst the sacred bond of unity, none of them escapes the just punishment of this impious divorce, but become fascinated with pestiferous errors, and the foulest delusions.[13]

If, though, the idea of community does not feature strongly in Reformation ecclesiology, it does feature heavily in the New Testament. The simple fact that the early apostolic and sub-apostolic churches met in individual houses makes a theological point. Meeting in individual homes, these are families getting together. Saul, when he's persecuting the church, does so by going 'from house to house' (Acts 8:3). Having been converted, again and again he writes greetings 'to the church that meets in so-and-so's house' (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15).

This idea of the family of God is basic to the gospel: God is our Father, we are his children, and Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers. The church as family is evidently a key thought in Paul's mind as he writes to Timothy. Paul starts by calling Timothy his 'son' (1 Timothy 1:2, 18). Chapter five seems dominated by the idea: Timothy is to treat an older man 'as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters' (1 Timothy 5:1-2). In verse 4 we see that Christians should look after not only their own blood relatives; but also, for instance, if a widow has no blood relative, then, verse 16, the larger Christian family should care for her. In chapter three elders are to be 'family' types, because managing a family looks very much like managing a church ('If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?' [3:5]). Paul explicitly calls the church a family in 3:14-5, ('Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth').

To say that a church is a family is not to say that it must be small. Abraham's household operates as the primary model of what constitutes a household in the Bible, and when Lot is kidnapped in Genesis 14, Abraham takes '318 trained men born in his household' (v. 14) with him to rescue Lot. Size is not the concern; what matters is familial community.

There is one last characteristic of this community that we must think through: how socially diverse need this community be? Is it essential that a local church expresses the fact that the universal Church is made up of people from every walk of life and from every tribe, language, people and nation? Need every local church be like that? The question has been a red-hot one ever since the 1960s, when Donald McGavran publicised his 'homogeneous unit principle' of church growth. In this he advocated faster growth through the gathering of people into socially homogeneous groupings.

The difficulty with McGavran's argument is that the Word of God, by its very nature, creates a community of all types of people. The churches described in the New Testament often, do look socially diverse, even generally so. In 1 Timothy one sees a whole range of ages present; elsewhere one sees slaves and masters in the same church; in other places there are different races – Jew and Gentile – present together.

However desirable that diversity may be, it does not seem that diversity *per se* can claim to be a formal distinguishing mark of what a church is. Churches in Nigeria are unlikely to attract many Eskimos; churches in the Highlands of Scotland are going to consist largely of native Scots. Perhaps it is best to say that, while diversity itself cannot qualify a church's very existence as a church, to take Ephesians 2:11ff seriously must mean that a congregation cannot qualify as the body Paul describes if it intentionally remains homogenous. There must be an *ambition* to include all sorts of people.

So does a CU qualify as a church?

We have already established that, in the loosest sense, a CU is a church. If by 'church' what is meant is a mere gathering of Christians, then a CU is a church. If as evangelicals, however, we follow our theological ancestors in their reading of what the Bible has to say about the Church, then we cannot say that a CU is a church in any more specific sense.

First: a CU, itself, simply cannot exercise the ministry of the teaching eldership, for:

- i) CU leaders are not appointed for their abilities to teach;
- ii) they may well be, and often are, recent converts; and so they cannot be appointed to biblical eldership. They are not expected to shepherd the flock of God, as Peter exhorts elders to do (1 Peter 5:1), to protect them from wolves, to lead, guard, care and feed them. They are not expected to keep watch over the souls of the CU members, or have those members obey them (Hebrews 13:17). We do not 'ask students to fulfil the role of elders'.

Instead it might be said that CU leaders have a role corresponding to that of deacons in the Bible, for they do have a real responsibility within the church. Yet deacons are not elders; deacons are specifically appointed to take practical burdens off the elders so that the elders can dedicate themselves to the ministry of the Word (Act 6:1–6; the word translated 'to wait' or 'to serve' in verse 2 is *diakoneo*, the verbal form of the word for 'deacon'). Deacons, like CU leaders, are given criteria which they are expected to live up to (1 Timothy 3:8–13), but it is simply confused to then equate deacons with elders. Paul and Christian history have always distinguished clearly between the two.

That said, UCCF has no wish to confuse CU leaders with deacons, CU leaders are not appointed by the local churches. The point is, in 1 Timothy 3 Paul feels it necessary to give criteria for those who have responsibility in the church, but who are not elders. UCCF does no more when it gives criteria for student leadership (in much the same way as a church might lay down criteria for a position of responsibility within the church that is outside the pastorate). In no way does UCCF confuse the two halves of 1 Timothy 3.

As for the measure of teaching going on within the CU: the Bible seems very happy to allow for there to be teaching within the church happening outside the preserve of the pastorate. In Titus 2, for instance, older women are 'to teach what is good' (v. 3; cf. Acts 18:26; Colossians 3:16). This, too, is how most local churches operate within home groups: a substantial amount of teaching goes on within each church that is derivative of the actual appointed teaching ministry. So it is with a CU.

At this point the practical necessity for such teaching is worth noting. The matter is quite simple: healthy, effective, faithful Christian witness requires biblical fuel – indeed, the whole counsel of God – not just pragmatic tips. It would be a mistake to conclude from the fact that a CU is a mission team that it should be fed solely on a diet of exhortation to evangelism. No evangelical mission team would set out without re-filling their hearts and minds with the gospel, just as no evangelical mission team would imagine setting out without prayerfully committing themselves and their endeavour to the Lord. From this we can say:

First: a CU cannot function as a church in the manner in which Paul and the apostles wanted churches to function because it does not have an appointed ministry of word, sacrament and discipline, and must not pretend to.

Secondly: a CU cannot function as a church because, for all the warmth and closeness of fellowship that can be experienced within a CU, it does not have the communal characteristics of a family that the Bible assumes.

Distinguishing CUs from chaplaincies helps to make things clear. Like a CU, a chaplaincy fails to qualify as a church, because, whilst there is a pastorate, there is no family community, but a constantly changing congregation. (In some chaplaincies this has become harder to see. For example, the university chaplain can minister to a staff who are permanent and long-term residents on-campus. However, this distinction between a chaplaincy and a church was decisive in the emergence of the figure of the mediaeval court chaplain. Perhaps this is best exemplified today by the hospital chaplain, who ministers to a congregation that is never the same from one day to the next.) Something like that kind of distinction can be seen in Acts 19:9–10, where for two years Paul teaches and holds discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. There is a true ministry of the Word, but it is never seen or described as being a church, in the way that you find churches in people's homes.

If, for example, a 'Spurgeon' arrived as a student^[14], completely qualified to be an elder even at his tender age, even then it would only be possible to establish a temporary chaplaincy. Even his wonderful presence in the CU would not make it a church, for despite his teaching ministry, there still would be no church family. It is the difference between a student's digs and a family home. A CU, by the nature of what it is to be a student for three years (and back at home for half of that), cannot be the kind of family that Paul envisages a church being.

Yet it is the existence of the chaplaincy that in many ways has brought about the confusion between a CU and a church. This has happened in various ways. Perhaps the most significant for evangelicals in the UK and Australia is the case of Philip Jensen and his amazingly fruitful ministry in the University of New South Wales. The perception that may have fuelled some confusion has been this: Jensen was the pastor of a local church, St Matthias; but it was he – the local church pastor – who led the ministry to students at the University of New South Wales. There is an instance of a church reaching out to a particular university with the gospel. Shouldn't we work the same way here in the UK?

What was essential for that situation, though, was that Jensen was not only a local church pastor; he was at the same time the chaplain of NSW university and for that reason was able to exercise that ministry. It was a unique situation in which a church and a university ministry could be run as one. It might be a situation ministers in the UK could fight to obtain (though it would hardly be a fight they could enter with much optimism). At present, however, it is not generally replicated here in the UK, and it would simply be another confusion to try to copy the ministry without sharing the same legal situation.

That being the case, UCCF is not interested in creating chaplaincies, precisely because of its high view of the Church. UCCF does not only want to see students being taught the gospel, but to see them as part of their local churches.

Thirdly: a CU cannot function as a church is because it is a specialised ministry that is seeking to target only one mission field. It has a clearly limited missionary objective: students. In no sense does it have the ambition to function as the heterogeneous body that Paul describes in Ephesians 2.

In summary, there is a clear and definite distinction between a church, a chaplaincy and a CU. A CU is simply not the kind of ordered community with a specifically appointed ministry of the Word (which includes sacraments) that a church is.

Another way of putting it might be to say that where the local church is an expression of the Christian goal of gathering around Christ, the CU is merely a means to that end. The CU seeks to lead students to the Church universal and thus the church local. The practical result is that, while it is undoubtedly a healthy and desirable thing for the student to be part of a CU, it cannot be said to be mandatory for the Christian. The CU is only one of the springboards for outreach. The same cannot be said for the local church. Unlike the CU, the local church itself expresses the goal of what it is to be a Christian.

Should local churches do all student ministry? Should there be CUs?

We have got as far as seeing that CUs are something quite different from the biblically and historically defined local church. A CU cannot qualify as a local church and so in no sense should it attempt to operate as one. Is there, then, any biblical or historical warrant for the kind of ministry that a CU has?

Having articulated something of a theology of the church, the task now is to come up with a theology of what is usually called the 'para-church'. Here we have a bit of a head start for very few would disagree with the fact that special functions (such as Bible translation, research and publishing, cross-cultural mission and targeted evangelism) require specialist organisations. The real question is: who should initiate and operate such organisations? What relationship should they have to ordinary church structures?

Before seeing what light the Bible and church history have to shed on this issue, we need to get our vocabulary straight. A distinction we have become acclimatised to is that made between the church and organisations that work alongside church structures and are thus designated the 'para-church' (from the Greek para, meaning 'beside'). The term 'para-church' however, is an unfortunate one, for while such organisations do work alongside local congregations, they cannot be said to work alongside the universal Church, as the term might imply, for they are an intrinsic part of the universal Church.

To remedy this, some have tried to use the terms 'modality' and 'sodality' to refer to the local church and the para-church organisation respectively. Yet to most, this is a bit like talking about stalagmites and stalactites – it all gets a bit confusing. Yet whilst 'modality' is a neologism, the term 'sodality' (from the Latin for 'fellowship', sodalitas) is one with a venerable pedigree. It was the traditional term used in the early post-apostolic Church to refer to all the non-congregational fellowships of believers (such as the monastic communities). The sodality was a voluntary fellowship which would be formed within the larger community for a more precise, focused and limited task than the whole community could attempt. Instead of distinguishing between the church and the 'para-church', with the theological confusion that can all too easily follow, we will talk about the local church and the sodality.[15]

The biblical evidence

First, then, does the Bible know anything of the sodality, and if so, how does it describe or prescribe it? The Old Testament writers in the prophetic tradition (amongst many other examples) certainly knew of such a thing: not only did individual prophets act as independent agents of the Lord, but on occasion we also see them functioning as a group. Thus Samuel is said to lead a well-known band of prophets (1 Samuel 10:10; 19:20). In what is perhaps a different situation, Elijah and Elisha gather around themselves a group referred to as the 'sons of the prophets' (2 Kings 2:3 – 4:44). It is, perhaps, such a grouping that Amos is talking about when he states that he was 'neither a prophet nor a prophet's son' (7:14). Though we do not know much about this tradition, what is apparent is that these bands of prophets operated as sodalities outside the organisational structures of the synagogues and state. In fact, it appears that it was when they allied themselves too closely with the state that they became corrupted (2 Chronicles 18:5ff). None of this is to equate the prophetic tradition and subsequent sodalities; it is simply to note that God raised up companies that functioned alongside the main congregation of Israel in order to perform specific ministries.

Moving from the Old Testament to the New, the most important sodality to consider is Paul's missionary band. This was almost certainly modelled on the Jewish missionary bands that had gone before the apostles, ensuring that 'Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times' (Acts 15:21; cf. Matthew 23:15). As a result there would appear to be little new in how those first called Christians organised themselves. Just as they seemed to have based their congregations on the synagogues (cf. James 2:2; Hebrews 10:25), so they based their missionary practice on established precedent.

Acts 13:1–5 is therefore an essential passage to consider. What we see there is the formation of a missionary sodality and its relation to the local church where it was first formed. The first point to note is that neither the local church in Antioch, nor the elders, prophets and teachers there were actually appointing Paul and Barnabas. Paul had already been called to his specific ministry (verse 2; cf. Act 9:15; 22:21; 26:16–18); Simeon, Lucius and Manaen were simply recognising and confirming that prior commission. The result is that Paul's missionary band did not see itself as finally answerable to the local church in Antioch from where it was first sent out. The sodality that resulted was something different to the normal outreach of the Antiochene church. For one thing the church in Antioch does not seem to have provided Paul with financial support (cf. 1 Corinthians 9).

From then on we see it is the Holy Spirit that guides the apostolic band (13:4; 16:7) in such a way that the band decided on where and when they would travel (18:23; 19:21). They did not seek approval from the church in Antioch for what they did, even when they returned there. Instead, it is they who gather the church to declare to them all that God had done with them (14:27; cf. 18:22–23). Later, on having again returned to Antioch, it is Paul who initiates a new mission and recruits for it (just as he recruits elsewhere, 16:3). He is commended for this by the church (15:36–40).

Could all this be simply an extraordinary, non-transferable case, given that we are dealing with an apostle? It seems not, for Barnabas along with Mark, (who did not bear Paul's apostolic status), also led a separate mission to Cyprus organised along the same lines (15:36–40).[16] Paul might have disagreed with Mark's presence on the Cyprus mission, but he never spoke against the mission itself (indeed, in testimony to Mark's subsequent ministry Paul later singles him out as especially useful, 2 Timothy 4:11). Priscilla and Aquila are other examples of the members of Paul's missionary band who were separated from him, and yet maintained a ministry independent of the apostle (Act 18:18–26; Romans 16:3). Such a thing seems to have been entirely acceptable.

Thus, while Paul's 'sending church' can commend him to the Lord's grace (and such blessing looks invaluable), we see missionary sodalities portrayed in Acts as operating almost entirely self-sufficiently. Just as we do not know much about the precise shape of the local church in the New Testament, so too we do not have much information on the shape of those missionary bands. What we can see, however, is that while local churches may have blessed, and even regulated, such sodalities, the actual administration of the sodality (including the appointment of new members) was left to itself. The result of this cooperation between the churches and the sodalities as seen in Acts was evidently a symbiotic relationship of mutual encouragement and edification between the two: just as the missionary bands were blessed and supported by the churches, so the churches were strengthened and equipped through the work of the bands.

As well as such cohesive sodalities, the New Testament also portrays some more informal and shorter-term fellowships in which Christians sought to go about the work of mission. This should hardly be surprising, for while the gospel is held out to the world through the Church, that does not mean that unbelievers are required to walk through a local church's doors to hear it. From Jonah's mission to Nineveh onwards the pattern is quite the opposite: individuals and teams go out from the churches so that people might be saved and join the Church.

So, for example, Jesus is seen sending the disciples out in pairs. And it's not just the apostles in Acts: when Saul persecutes the church in Jerusalem, 'those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went' (Acts 8:4; 11:19–21). Of course they did – that's what Christians do, whether they be alone or in corporation, whether they be fixed in one place or wandering. It would seem to be a case of quenching the Spirit to suggest that all such initiatives need be specifically authorised or managed by the local churches.

John Stott summarises a theology of the relationship between the local church and the sodality as follows:

Whether we are thinking of national church and foreign mission, or of church and para-church, or of modality and sodality, how should they relate to one another? It would not be possible, or even desirable, to lay down rules and regulations. The overriding principle should, however, be clear. On the one hand, we should encourage and not hinder individual initiatives. Throughout biblical history, especially in times of widespread apostasy among his people, God has called individuals (e.g., prophets) to challenge the establishment, and even to stand over against it. Such individuals are uncomfortable to live with, as are the groups they form around them. Yet we should be extremely wary of surrendering to our natural desire to bring them under control. For we may find ourselves quenching the Spirit of God. On the other hand, whatever initiatives an individual or group may believe themselves called by God to make, they should wherever possible seek the counsel, goodwill, support and co-operation of the church. Indeed, they should desire to be a part of the church's work rather than independent of it. They should not be over-hasty in pronouncing it dead, washing their hands of it. For they may find themselves sinning against the Body of Christ. Here then are the two extremes to be avoided. The tendency of the 'establishment' to control individual initiatives runs the risk of quenching the Spirit. The tendency of voluntary organisations to insist on their independence runs the risk of ignoring the Body. It is the age-old tension between authority and freedom. To quench the Spirit and to ignore the Body are both serious sins; they grieve the Christ whose Body and Spirit they are. It is, therefore, basic to our evangelical responsibility that in all our labours and relationships we should magnify Christ by seeking simultaneously to give honour to his Body and liberty to his Spirit.[17]

With this we can heartily concur, for while we believe it is biblical for a sodality to self-administrate, like the missionary bands in Acts, the very existence of UCCF derives from a desire to see more students participating fully in the Body of Christ. CUs in no sense are intended to exist in competition with the local churches. They exist in order to bring people into them in a way that those local churches themselves could not bring about. A CU that is in right, cooperative relationship to the local church, properly led by student leaders who discern that they are not church elders, is we believe, a mission of the Spirit to be rejoiced in, and in no formal way ignores the Body.

The historical evidence

What of sodality in Church history? Certainly the historical arguments for the value of missionary sodalities are overwhelmingly strong. John Stott, Ralph Winter^[18] and others have maintained that under God they have made a much greater contribution to world evangelisation than the church has made.

The first key sodality to develop in the first millennium AD was the monastic movement. The Protestant critique of the corrupted movement at the time of Reformation leaves most evangelicals with a strong desire to distance themselves from it. However, the Reformers themselves recognised the immense benefits the movement had brought before mediaeval theology had atrophied the gospel into the system the Reformers so roundly condemned.

The first benefit was the profound theology to come out of the movement: Augustine of Hippo, Jerome and the Cappadocian Fathers are just some of the outstanding guardians of the gospel and teachers of the Church who emerged from it. Without them the Church of the day would not have had Jerome's vernacular translation of the Bible to read and understand, nor would it have been defended from so many dangerous heresies. Without doubt it was the specific structure within which they worked that enabled such fruitfulness. Calvin's *Institutes* would look very different without Augustine's theology behind it (and interestingly, Calvin's own lifestyle looked remarkably like Augustine's and Jerome's, thus enabling him to be equally prolific in his publication).

The second benefit was the monastic movement that became the driving force for mission and evangelism in the Church of the first millennium. Thomas Cahill's argument in *How the Irish Saved Civilization* is generally considered unanswerable, that it was Irish monks, dedicated like Jerome to study, who were most responsible for the spread of the gospel across Britain (and even large tracts of mainland Europe).^[19]

The rest of the evangelisation of Britain was led by Augustine of Canterbury's monastic band. Augustine (a Benedictine monk) was appointed by Gregory the Great, the then Bishop of Rome (and another product of monasticism) because it was the sodality that provided the best structure for a mission to Britain. What is vital to note is that Augustine was not commissioned to plant new Benedictine monasteries but local churches. All this was quite characteristic and normal: throughout the early middle ages the vast majority of local churches were the fruit of sodalities.

Yet it was not just in theology and mission. Any study of the first millennium of post-apostolic Church history makes it abundantly clear that it was the sodalities that were so often the primary instruments of Church renewal. Stott's suggestion that such movements are movements of the Spirit for the blessing of the Body seems clearly borne out historically. It does not seem out of place to mention UCCF and IFES here, a list of whose staff over the years reads like a 'Who's Who' of evangelical leadership. Pastors, theologians and evangelists, having been given early training, and cut their teeth in those ministries, move on in the church for the blessing of the wider Church.

All this is particularly important for the argument that sodalities, by stealing mission from the local churches, tend to 'create a context where the local church feels little responsibility for mission'.^[20] Church history fails to bear this argument out. It is a legitimate complaint that churches are not evangelistic enough, but it is a mistake to lay the blame for this at the door of the sodalities. Historically it can be shown that it is when the mission sodalities *do* exist that the local churches are most active in their outreach, not vice versa. If it is the case that mission is in danger of being withdrawn from normal church life, surely the answer is to teach and promote the importance of mission in the local church, not to quench existing missionary endeavours.

Further along the timeline of Church history there is an almost complete lack of any type of mission at the time of the Reformation. Some missiologists have blamed a failure to develop Protestant sodalities for this dearth. This is perhaps unfair, given, for example, the healthy symbiosis that existed between the academy in Geneva and the wider Church, or, later, between John Wesley's meetings and the wider Church in Britain. The problem is almost certainly a deeper, theological one, perhaps related to John Owen's critique of the Reformers' ecclesiology (that they had not sufficiently incorporated the Spirit in their thinking).

However, it was with the formation of missionary sodalities that Protestant mission really can be said to have begun. The year of that revolution was 1792, when William Carey wrote his epochal, if not succinctly titled, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens, In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, Are Considered*. What was revolutionary for Carey's Baptist tradition was his proposal 'to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens', by which Carey was referring to the creation of a sodality to achieve his mission objective effectively. The resulting Baptist Missionary Society was not the earliest society of its kind, but its creation, alongside the careful arguments of the book, triggered the formation of numerous other 'copycat' mission societies. There were all seeking to use Carey's 'means' for the conversion of the heathens. In consequence the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented missionary surge, moving evangelicalism from being a startlingly small European club to being a truly worldwide phenomenon.

Somewhere around this time comes the familiar world of modern evangelicalism. What is worth noting is the way in which these sodalities began to serve as instruments of Church renewal. As in the first millennium so it was in the nineteenth/twentieth centuries. For the new missionary societies fast became both the expression and the engine of common ground between evangelicals who otherwise were separated by what was, at the time, the very high dividing wall of hostility between the Anglican Churchmen and the Dissenters. In no other way than through these evangelical sodalities was evangelicalism as a whole movement able to act as anything like a whole movement. Such has been the subsequent history of evangelicalism. Mainstream denominations have remained under liberal administration that would never advance evangelical principles, and so modern evangelicalism has been wrought largely outside the organised church. As a result, historically, it has been the sodalities that have been the usual place, where evangelicals have acted together and found their fellowship. It can even be said that it has often been through evangelical sodalities that local churches have been able to partner together.

But back, briefly, to the nineteenth century and the timeline. Unsurprisingly, this new evangelical empire, built around the sodalities, soon attracted ecclesiastical opposition. The mainstream denominations felt that they should be the ones to administrate (and not just regulate) the missionary societies. The second two-thirds of the nineteenth century, therefore, saw control of the missionary societies being handed over to the denominations. On the whole the evangelicals did not perceive this move to be a healthy one (the evangelical nature of the societies was usually diluted by the denomination). Consequently, the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a substantial counteraction in the formation of so-called evangelical 'faith missions' (Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission being the best known) that returned very much to the original Carey model.

Ed Clowney made a very pertinent application of this:

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.[21]

Conclusion

Pastors of local churches understand the difficulty of having to work in a fallen situation with less than ideal structures. The ideal ecclesiology and what is seen in the denominational constitution or even the local church's own make-up never match up entirely. Ecclesiology is therefore a dangerous greenhouse in which to start throwing theological 'bricks'. Even a local church student ministry can look like 'church done badly', with homogenous groupings which fail to be led by an appointed eldership faithfully exercising the ministry of word and sacrament. It might be said that in some cases the local church is as much to blame as the CU for students sensing that there is no real difference between the two. If students are effectively treated as long-term visitors to the church, and, because of a focused student ministry, given little interaction with the main body of the congregation, it is no wonder that they get confused.

That said, it would be inaccurate to imagine that such confusion tends to reign supreme amongst students. The fact that the normally active CU member is also active in his or her own local church is clearly observed, nationwide.

What this paper has shown is that for all CUs might have failed in practice to live out a biblical ecclesiology, their existence as entities distinct (though not independent) from the local church does have biblical, theological and historical warrant.

Pragmatically, too, their continued presence seems desirable and necessary (provided, of course, that they conduct themselves biblically). As short-term specialist mission teams (with a shelf-life of just 3–4 years), CUs can provide the kind of springboard for on-campus mission that local churches can very rarely (if ever) provide. For the simple reason that no organisation outside of the university is entitled to operate on campus at will, even the most effective local church student ministry would be unable to equip the kind of campus witness that a CU can orchestrate. To try to squeeze the ministry of the CU into the ministry of the local church would not only be to misunderstand the nature of a CU; it would also drastically curtail the evangelisation of the student world. Student evangelism would become a fragmented, denominational affair, and unreached campuses would remain unreached.

In its nearly ninety-year history, UCCF can hardly be said to have damaged the Church in the UK or worldwide. Its fruit can be seen throughout the evangelical constituency and beyond. This is not to deny the great Reformation challenge that we must be always reforming to ensure that our thought and practice become ever more scriptural. Such reformation of UCCF is already, and will remain, underway as we seek to align with the Scriptures all we do and set out to achieve. Yet UCCF's track-record leaves a significant burden of proof with those who disapprove of it. Our evangelical desire is to be always reforming, but our conviction is that through the existence of the CUs we can magnify Christ by simultaneously giving honour to his Body and liberty to his Spirit.

- [1] Tibbert, Steve, 'What's Wrong With The Para-Church?', Newfrontiers Magazine, Volume 2, Issue 14, April–June 2006
- [2] Smalcald Articles, III, 12
- [3] Institutes, IV.i.9
- [4] On Christian Doctrine, II, 3
- [5] When speaking of the Word of God here, it is helpful to have in mind both Christ as the Word of the Father and the Bible as the Spirit-breathed Word of Christ. Christ as the Word of God creates the Church by going out in salvation and so creating a people, a Church, for himself. The Bible as the Word of God creates the Church by going out with the offer of that salvation. Later, though, we will need to distinguish between the roles of Christ and the Bible.
- [6] Article xviii (Matthew 18:15–18; 1 Corinthians 5:4–5 are cited in support); cf. Belgic Confession, xxix
- [7] Works, XI.vi.v.2, p. 310
- [8] It would be too simplistic, however, to see this as the end of the matter: Timothy and Titus themselves have roles that are somewhat distinct from the elders of the local churches: whilst not apostles, they have a charge from Paul to appoint those elders. Perhaps there is some similarity here to the fact that, quite apart from the bishops of episcopalian denominations, some particularly mature and wise pastors do exercise a de facto authority over other more junior pastors because of the respect with which they are held (even if is no official sanction for that authority).
- [9] Institutes, IV.iii.1
- [10] 1 Timothy 5:17 is worth examining here ('The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.'). It can look as if there are some elders who direct the affairs of the church and some others who preach and teach. Yet I Timothy 3:2 Paul stated that a qualification for being an elder is that he can teach. Is this a contradiction? Perhaps it is helpful to note that the word rendered 'especially' need not separate out two types of elder. It can be included for emphasis, such that the verse reads 'those who direct the work of the church, indeed those who teach or preach the Word of God'. Such a reading would preserve the truth that there is no authority in the church other than the Word. The elders cannot have any authority on their own; they only have any authority in the church as ministers of the Word.
- [11] The True Nature of a Gospel Church, Works, Vol. XVI, 28–9. 'By the matter of the church, we understand the persons whereof the church doth consist, with their qualifications; and by its form, the reason, cause, and way of that kind of relation among them which gives them the being of a church' (p. 19).
- [12] Answer 54
- [13] Institutes, IV.i.5
- [14] Spurgeon was a pastor at the age of 17, and so gifted and godly that nobody doubted he should be.
- [15] When in the field, it may be more accessible to use the term 'para-local-church' instead of 'sodality'. However, 'sodality' will be used in this paper in order to preserve a greater degree of historical accuracy.

[16] John Stott, commenting on Acts 14:4, where Barnabas is referred to as an apostle, writes: 'The attribution of the title 'apostles' to Barnabas as well as to Paul, both here and in verse 14, is perplexing, until we remember that the word is used in the New Testament in two senses. On the one hand, there were the 'apostles of Christ', personally appointed by him to be witnesses of the resurrection, who included the Twelve, Paul and probably James (1:21; 10:41). There is no evidence that Barnabas belonged to this group. On the other hand, there were the 'apostles of the churches', sent out by a church or churches on particular missions, as Epaphroditus was an apostle or messenger of the Philippian church. So too Paul and Barnabas were both apostles of the church of Syrian Antioch, sent out by them, whereas only Paul was an apostle of Christ.' (Stott, J., *The Message of Acts*, BST (Leicester: IVP, 1990), 229) Barnabas had neither the apostolic status of Paul, nor of the Twelve, but was instead an 'apostle' of the standing of Andronicus and Junia(s) (Romans 16:7). Even then, it does not seem that Paul's extraordinary status was always definitive for his partnership with Barnabas. Early on in their work together, Barnabas does seem to have been the senior partner, regularly being mentioned first (Act 13:1-7) and taking the lead (Act 11:22-30).

[17] John Stott, John 'A Theological Preamble for the Commission on Co-operation', *Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 24

[18] Winter, R. D., 'The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission' in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement a Reader: Revised Edition*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library: 1992). Winter gives an extensive history of sodalities, much of which I have used and engaged with here.

[19] Cahill, T., *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995)

[20] Tibbert, Steve, 'What's Wrong With The Para-Church?'

[21] Clowney, E. P., *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1995), 107