

Address all communications to:

## GOSPEL ANCHOR

P. O. Box 10081  
HOUSTON 18, TEXAS

GENE FROST, Editor

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# editorial

## AN OLD PROBLEM BECOME NEW

The words of Jesus Christ constitute the law of the Kingdom. In contrast with the old law it is referred to as the law of liberty, whereas the old is that of bondage. (Gal. 6:2, 5:1). "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." (James 2:12). This law of liberty by which we shall be judged is the will of Christ. (John 12:48). It furnishes us completely unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The antithesis of law (Greek, NOMOS) is lawless (Greek, A-NOMOS). Since the law furnishes us completely unto every good work, any work performed without its authorization is evil . . . lawless! Regardless of the social merit a work may possess, without law to perform it is iniquitous. This principle the Lord establishes in Matthew 7:21-23 wherein "doeth the will of my Father" is contrasted with "work iniquity" (Greek, A-NOMIA). "Many wonderful works" did not justify working without (A-) law (NOMOS). Such iniquity is sin: "Everyone that practices sin, also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (ANOMIA)—literal translation by George R. Berry. "ANOMIA" is "the condition of one without law,—either because ignorant of it, or because violating it." (Page 48, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon). This is sin!

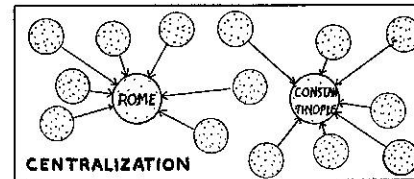
Notice, then, that when anyone suggests that we practise anything religiously not to be found in the law or gospel of Christ, he suggests that we sin!

Here we must stand in defense of the gospel, pleading with all men to walk by faith. (Rom. 1:17, 10:17). We must oppose every suggestion that we engage in things not authorized of God. Here our problem resolves: whether we are limited to what is revealed, or whether we are permitted to substitute human plans.

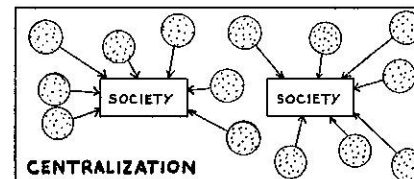
This is no new problem. The false concept that allows human wisdom to dictate the course has led to two major apostasies from the faith. This concept is the very soul of sectarianism. Its development is revealed in 2 Thess. 2:3-12. Notice that apostasy is foretold in verse 3: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a *falling away* (Greek, APOSTASIA) first . . ." For a time it was prevented; nevertheless, the "mystery of iniquity" (A-NOMIA) was already at work. (Verse 7). The apostasy finally resulted from the concept of lawlessness which the apostle here mentions and further describes in Acts 20:30. Here, in addressing elders, he says, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." As foretold, the apostasy began with a corruption in organization and its function, and then completed itself in doctrine. The concept of lawlessness (A-NOMIA) has expressed itself in two apostasies: the "Roman Catholic Church" and the "Christian Church," with both resulting from a corruption of the organization of the New Testament Church.

The Roman Catholic Church is the very embodiment of a universal concept of organized functioning, as its name implies: *Roman*, the church of Rome; *Catholic*, universal, i.e., the whole church functions through the Roman Church or See. Its development was gradual, beginning with a seemingly harmless practice called *central-*

*ization*. (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 2, page 142). Smaller churches of an area would send funds to a "sponsoring church" who in turn would do the work. A struggle for preeminence among the "sponsoring churches" finally narrowed to the churches in Rome and Constantinople. This struggle was resolved in 1045 with a division and formation of the Roman (Western) Catholic Church and the Greek (Eastern) Catholic Church respectively.



The "Christian Church" is the result of the same motive to centralize the work. But being aware of the Romish movement, brethren sought not a congregation through which to function, but formed a society composed of representatives from all the churches involved. This act of lawlessness led to apostasy and formation of a sect distinct from the New Testament Church. Departures in doctrine have since followed.

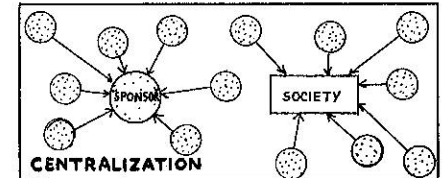


In both movements, centralization in one congregation and centralization in a society, the lawless concept and departure from faith is the same.

### The Problem Today

Today we find a movement abroad again advocating centralizing the work of the church. Its advocates embrace both expressions—centralization in congregations and in societies. The only qualification short of a complete endorsement of the past is a scruple over

evangelistic societies while permitting benevolent ones.



The problem is not new. Those who contend for centralization today have the unenviable task of defending what has already led to two major apostasies. Will this lead to the third?

### What Is Wrong?


What is wrong in the Romish movement, in the Digressive movement, and in a repeat of these movements today, may be summarized as follows:

- 1) Unauthorized
- 2) Violates Autonomy
- 3) Prostitutes the Work of Elders
- 4) Creates a Hierarchy
- 5) Denies the All-Sufficiency of the Church
- 6) Relegates God's Wisdom
- 7) Assumes the Church as Non-Essential

### I. Unauthorized

By "unauthorized" we mean *not permitted, without authority*. Authority belongs to Christ: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18). He is the one law-giver and head of the church. (James 4:12, Col. 1:18). For anything to be authorized or *permitted* in matters religious, it must be expressed in the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2, James 1:25, 2:12, John 12:48). This expression or authorization is in command or precept, approved example, or necessary inference. Without such a practice cannot be recognized as authorized, hence unauthorized.

The practice of churches functioning through one congregation or society is unauthorized. There is neither command or precept, approved example, or necessary inference in the New Testament authorizing the practice! It is lawless, hence sinful. (1 John 3:4).

LAW	LAWLESS
	A-NOMOS
<b>TEACH</b> SUPPORT DIRECT TO PREACHER— 2COR. 11:8-9 PHIL. 4:15-16	<b>TEACH</b> SUPPORT INDIRECT, ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER CHURCH WHO "SPONSORS" THE PREACHER—
<b>EDIFY</b> ITSELF, TRAIN OWN MEMBERS— 1 THESS. 5:11	<b>EDIFY</b> SUPPORT SOCIETY (COLLEGE) WHO TRAIN MEMBERS—
<b>RELIEVE</b> CARES FOR OWN— ACTS 6:1-6	<b>RELIEVE</b> SUPPORT SOCIETY WHO CARES FOR NEEDY—
IN CASE OF CHURCH DISTRESSED, DIRECT TO NEED, FOR EQUALITY— 1COR. 16:3 2COR. 8:14	SEND TO "SPONSORING" CHURCH WHO DIRECTS THE RELIEF—  <b>S / N</b>

In the realm of *teaching*, the scriptures authorize direct support of preachers. (Cor. 11:8-9, Phil. 4:15-16). The practice of one church sending to another church who in turn sends to the preacher is unauthorized. In apostolic times the church *edified* itself (1 Thess. 5:11); no human organization was ever established as an adjunct to the church, built and maintained by the church, to train its teachers. Support of schools and colleges by churches is unauthorized. In relieving the distressed of its responsibility, the church cared for its own (Acts 6:1-6); nowhere is there any indication that the churches maintained a society to care for the needy. In the case of a distressed church, other churches sent directly to the need, never to a "sponsoring church" for relief work. (1 Cor. 16:3, 2 Cor. 8:14).

Functioning in ways *authorized*, the

church can teach the gospel, edify its members and train evangelists, and care for every indigent of its responsibility—everything God demands, and do so without human appendages or "sponsoring arrangements" (such were unknown in apostolic times). Arrangements supplied by human wisdom are unnecessary and unauthorized!

## II. Violates Autonomy

By autonomy we mean just what the word conveys: *autos*, self; *nomos*, law or rule. Defined, autonomy is "independent in government; self-governing; also without outside control." Further defined, *govern* is "to direct and control the actions or conduct of, either by established laws or by arbitrary will. Hence, to control or direct the action, conduct, or operation of..."

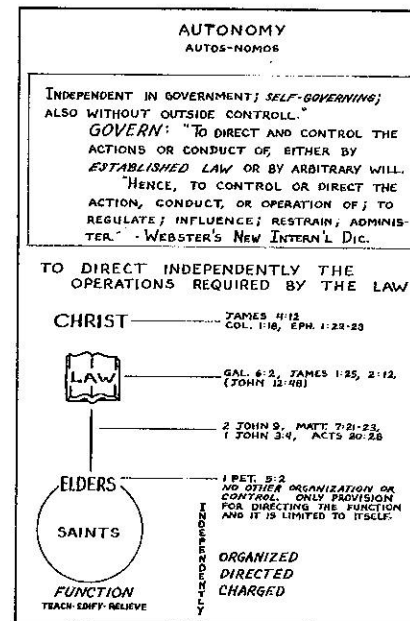
Legislation belongs to God; hence, in *self-governing* the control of actions, or operation, is according to "established laws." (2 John 9, etc.) Autonomy of a congregation then refers to its *functioning*: control of actions. This functioning, the carrying-out of the "established laws," is *independent*, "without outside control." Notice:

1) Self-governing is not in legislation; it is not the prerogative of man to decide what is to be done. The work of the church is prescribed by Christ, the one law-giver and head. (James 4:12, Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22-23).

2) The control or direction of action is in the operation or function, or the carrying-out of the orders of Christ. It is God's prerogative to legislate, man's to execute.

3) Autonomy means independent in the execution of the work God has legislated; self-governing.

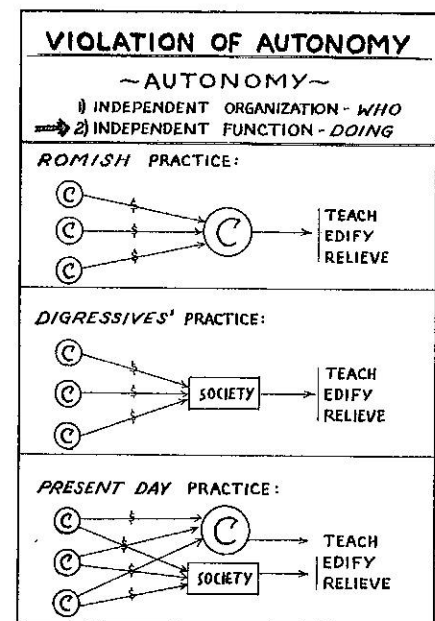
If every congregation is *autonomous*, each must *function independently* of others. Autonomy may be lost then by 1) outside force, or coercion, or 2) by a church voluntarily surrendering control of any work to another body, church or society.



To enable each congregation to be equally capable of executing His will, the Lord ordained that each should be organized and overseen alike. This organization is a plurality of elders to oversee each congregation. (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5, Acts 20:28). No church is ordained to superintend any other congregation. Thusly the oversight of any eldership is confined to the flock over which it is appointed. (Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:2). Every congregation is therefore fully sufficient in organization to carry out the Lord's commands. In fact, the only provision (the overseers) for directing this function is limited! (1 Pet. 5:2).

Every church is *independently ORGANIZED*; *independently DIRECTED* (from Christ; not through or by any human hierarchy); and *independently CHARGED* (told what to do, and must do it if no others do).

A violation in autonomy has resulted in two major apostasies. History is repeating itself in present day practices and advocations by some brethren.

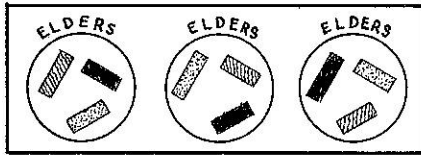


## III. Prostitutes the Work of Elders

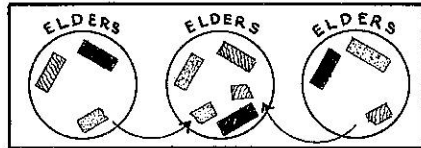
The work of elders is *limited*. God has not ordained diocesan or universal elders. Rather, every eldership is appointed over a flock. (Acts 20:28). Their responsibility is to tend this flock which is "among" them, taking the oversight thereof. (1 Pet. 5:2). Every flock is to be so ruled. (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5).

The work of the elders of a congregation is described in the very word identifying them — *episcopos* (Greek): "an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly . . ." (page 243, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon). Their work is to see that things given to the saints to do (LEGISLATED by God) are done (EXECUTED) rightly. Their rule is in *executing* the work. To transfer this responsibility to another eldership is to violate (neglect) their duty and prostitutes the duty of the receiving elders, giving them oversight of the responsibility of other churches.

Notice that every church of Christ is charged to teach the gospel, edify itself, and relieve the distressed of its responsibility:



The duty of its elders is to see that this is done rightly. This duty or responsibility is as great as their ability. (Being autonomous, each congregation is to function independently.) Note what occurs when one church sends her ability to another eldership to oversee:

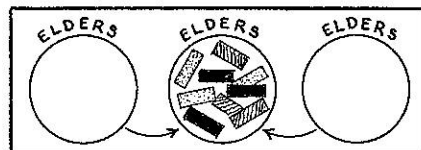


This makes the receiving eldership see that the work of other churches is done rightly. This

#### IV. Creates a Hierarchy

When one eldership can oversee the work of another eldership, we find preeminence that results, when carried to its full development, in orders or ranks of overseers. This occurred in the Roman apostasy . . . and it can happen again! If other congregations may surrender a part of their work to the oversight of one eldership, what would prohibit their surrendering it all?

In the present day practice of many elderships sending their ability (hence, responsibility) to be overseen by one eldership, the work of elders is prostituted and an hierarchy is conceived.



#### V. Denies the All-Sufficiency Of The Church

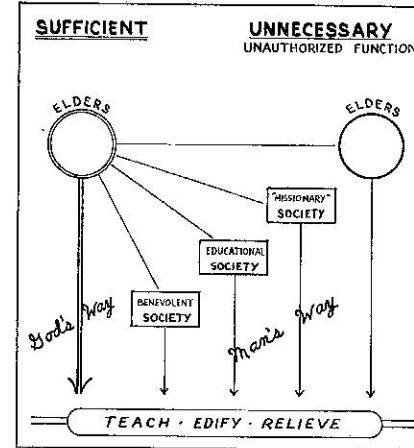
By *sufficiency*, it is meant the "quality or state of being sufficient, or adequate to the end proposed."

The only organization of God's people is in congregations. This order is sufficient to do *all* that God commands of His people. Else God's wisdom must be denied (VI). The local congregation is the only organized arrangement for the functioning of His people according to His eternal purpose. (Eph. 3:10-11). For man to deny that this order is sufficient so as to necessitate any expression of centralization (in "sponsoring church" or society) is to pit his own wisdom against that of God's. (Isa. 55:8-9). God's wisdom is manifest in the church and through it He is to receive glory forever. (Eph. 3:10, 21). The only function of God's people is in this order, and hereby He is honored. If there is any other arrangement (of churches in centralized effort, or a society), there is no revelation of it; yet God's revelation, the expression of His wisdom, furnishes us *completely* unto *every* good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17). To insist on other arrangements therefore, is to deny that the church as Jesus ordained it (congregational in function) is sufficient.

*The local congregation functioning independently is sufficient to do all that God requires of His people in organized capacity.* The local congregation is fully organized and competent to do its work—a super-arrangement of congregations or human society is both unnecessary and unauthorized.

The church is fully organized and competent to *preach* the gospel—a society through which the church may function is unauthorized. The church is fully organized and competent to edify itself—a society (school, college) through which the church may function is unauthorized. The church is fully organized and competent to relieve the distressed of its responsibility—a society (board over an orphanage or wid-

owage) through which the church may function is unauthorized.

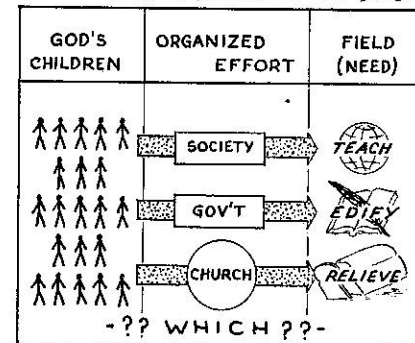


Further, building and maintaining a society financed by the church

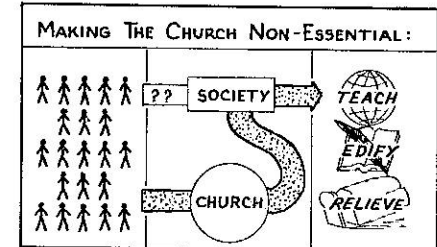
#### VII. Assumes the Church as Non-Essential

in practice whether in word or not.

God's people are to accomplish His interests in this world. In organized effort He could have legislated that they do this through an existing society (and if this could have sufficed, Christ died in vain, Acts 20:28). Or, He could have commissioned civil government to evangelize the world, etc., and through it we could do this work. Instead, He ordained that His people should be congregated under the oversight of elders duly qualified. (1 Timothy 3). This congregational capacity is the only functional arrangement of His people!



If God's people may function through a human organization in the care of indigents, etc., the Lord needed not to have established the church. Why may we not accomplish His will *directly* in this way (instead of via the church)?



Some inadvertently have admitted that the church to them is not essential because they have actually done this! I know of cases where elders have refused to support such human organizations, and so those insistent that the church honor man's wisdom have sent their contributions (as prospered) direct to human boards in charge of benevolent homes. They by-pass the church! They assume that the church is non-essential!!

#### Conclusion

As we view present conditions we are made to sorrow for we see human wisdom being exalted above divine revelation. A casual observance reveals a spirit of contention as "sponsoring churches" strive for preeminence. With this comes jealousy and pride and every evil thought. The innovation of unauthorized and unnecessary arrangements has already led to divisions and has caused heartbreaks reminiscent of the past apostasy. This present downgrade pursuit can only result in disastrous consequences if unchecked and unaltered. It is the plea of this writer in so addressing my brethren that we may cease the unlawful, and return to God's way—honor Him in the church as we serve in the capacity Christ ordained.

**SPECIAL NOTICE:** Realizing the seriousness and enormity of the subject embraced in this editorial, we will welcome a reply from anyone advocat-