

Can the Church of Christ Establish Schools, Hospitals, and Similar Institutions?

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Definitions

The church of Christ is body of the saved; *it includes all children and Christ's disciples indeed -those called by the gospel from the darkness (sin) into His kingdom of light who acknowledge Jesus as the sovereign Lord and Savior –Mt 16:18; Mt 18:3; 19:4, Acts 2:47; Col 1:13-14.*

Since the “*universal church*” consists of all saved people of all era with an heavenly leadership, this discourse focuses on “*local churches*” or autonomous assemblies in known localities (e.g. CoC Ephesus, CoC Iwaya) led by Elders.

Hospitals *are institutions providing medical and surgical treatment and nursing care for sick or injured people.*

Schools are educational institutions designed to provide learning environments for the teaching of students, usually under the direction of teachers that follow a curriculum approved by some authority.

Our focus are secular schools devoted to formal western education and/or vocational training of skills, where children or adults are instructed based on government / a professional group's regulated curriculum so as to earn specific certifications.

Similar institutions refers to **Gyms, Restaurants Orphanages, Old People's/Beggars' Homes, etc., i.e.** service based facilities or businesses that may be patronized in any community.

Introduction

The issue under consideration is... based on the New Testament scriptures, is the church of Christ authorized to establish and run primary/secondary/tertiary schools, hospitals/pharmacies/gyms, farms/restaurants/hotels, transport businesses/automobile repair workshops / vehicle sales mart, Old People's/Beggars Home, etc.?

Interestingly, some Preachers aver “Yes!” and are not only canvassing for such, few have started taking steps to actualize the desire. There are now congregations that own and operate a Pry. & Sec. school in Nigeria, aspiring to build a university.

Others say “No” and affirm that such institutions are distinct from the church and are neither expedient aids nor methods.

Let us of search the scriptures...

Why did Jesus Christ come to earth?

God was manifest in the flesh as Jesus Christ so as to:

- save people from their sins -Mt 1:21
- seek and save the lost -Lk 19:10
- that we may have life abundantly -Jn 10:10b
- bear witness to the truth (Jn 18:37) which is God's word (Jn 17:17)

After His resurrection, He commissioned His followers to

- *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them ... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you... -Mt 28:18-20*
- *Go ye into all the world, and **preach the gospel** to every creature. -Mk 16:15*

What Christians are to teach is specified by the Lord –**the gospel!** We all know about *specifics* and *generics*. Since Christ specified what must be taught, we are constrained on ‘**what to propagate in the world in His name**’, that is as His authorized representatives, acting on His behalf.

Jesus trained the people including His disciples by teaching them the word of God, and by living an exemplary life. He showed compassion on the infirmed by uttering the word to heal all that came to Him for help. Likewise, His church presents unto mankind including its members, the gospel of salvation [spiritual education], healing for the body via prayer [aside miraculous command in 1st century], with counselling to usher peace into the soul.

Jesus from the beginning emphasized the spiritual nature of his kingdom. He stressed that it is not worldly in origin, nature and purpose -Jn 6:13-15; 18:36-37

- We enter the kingdom via a spiritual birth NOT the natural birth (Jn 3:1-7), have ALL spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:3), are a spiritual house offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5) and as a body partake of spiritual teachings (1 Cor 2:13), spiritual songs (Eph 5:19) and spiritual meals (1Cor 5:8 & 10:1-7), engage in spiritual warfare (2 Cor 10:3-5, Eph 6:10-13), spiritual reign (Eph 2:1,6) and expect spiritual rewards (2 Cor 5:1-5)*

The Mission of the Church in the New Testament

The church by Christ Jesus glorifies God in all era by acts of worship and service –Eph 3:21.

The church is not divinely mandated to be engrossed in merchandise, entertainment, recreation, secular education, etc. but to fulfill the work which the Lord Jesus assigned, namely:

Evangelism –repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations(Lk 24:47)

Edification –building up and equipping the saints unto maturity (Eph 4:11-13)

Benevolence –providing material succour for needy saints (Rm 15:26 , 1 Cor 16:1-2, 2 Cor 9:1)

As the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), the church as a body is the proclaimer of the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10). It does so (1 Thess 1:8) via its members (Eph 6:10-15) and the officers such as Evangelists sent out to preach (Rm 10:14-15, Acts 13:3).

It teaches THE WORD OF GOD unto various categories of Christians in its assembly (e.g. **by age group**: *children, young/older women, youths and older men* -1 Tim 4-5, Tit 2:2-4 OR **by maturity in faith**: *babes, intermediate, those of full age* -Heb 5:12-14, 1 Pet 2:2, 1 Jn 2:12-14).

Knowledge of God's word, ability to impart it and living a faithful life are the core requirements for Teachers [officers] in the church, not educational certificates or professional licenses issued by third parties (2 Tim 2:2).

Which NT passage authorizes the church to run schools, hospitals, etc.?

There is no NT command or direct statement which authorizes the local church to establish a secular school or an hospital or old people's/beggars' home. There is not a single Bible example of any congregation doing so. There is no necessary inference. Unfortunately, some brethren misconstrue and read into various passages [e.g. Mt 14:14-20; 25:35-40, Gal 6:10, 1 Tim 4:8a, Jms 1:27, Phil 4:8-9]. These were addressed in an article I co-authored with Bro. Ebong about 15 years ago on Church CSR.

It is not expedient for a church to establish these institutions since it would amount to abandoning Christ's mandate for what we feel like doing, to please ourselves, and to try imitate or compete with denominations.

Conclusion

The church of Christ is evidently God's school for our spiritual education. It is the School above all schools!

It is likewise the spiritual hospital where the Great Physician, prioritizes care for our soul and spirit. Though He wishes above all things that we may prosper and be in health (3 Jn 2), He taught that the physically sick need physicians (Lk 5:31) and the church should pray for such, members/elders do not have to be doctors (Jms 5:14-16).

Secular schools, hospitals and other human institutions are in the purview of individuals, organizations and/or societal authorities to establish and operate.

Scripturally, a church of Christ cannot afford such distraction or deviation, its business is to save souls and prepare people for heaven.

ADDENDUM

Individual action distinct from congregational action. E.g. an act of one or of two or three believers is distinguished from church action (Mt 18:15-17).

- **The church** is Christians working collectively in their spiritual relationship in Christ as a body -1 Corinthians 12:25-27; 14:34-35; 16:1-4, Phil 4:14-18
- **It is NOT** two or few Christians working together in their personal capacities, e.g. in business, study or generosity - Acts 18:1-3; 24-26, 1 Corinthians 16:15-17

The individual's money is not the church's money (Acts 5:2-4)

The individual has responsibility the church does not (1 Tim. 5:8)

The individual is charged when the church is not (1 Tim. 5:16)

Human institutions are parallel bodies, NOT methods

When some brethren build human institutions to hijack the church's work or introduce an unscriptural work into the church, they assert that such are 'mere methods.'

Thus, the Missionary Society, Secular Schools, Hospitals, Orphanages, Old People's/Beggars Homes. etc. are alleged to be methods of preaching the gospel. However, these are separate institutions or organizations having their own mission, officers, constitution or charter, etc.

In scripture, *the gospel was preached by word [verbal utterance or documented form] and via observed godly conduct* (1 Thess 1:5, 2 Thess 2:2, 1 Pet 3:1-2). These are methods of preaching. Operating a Gym or Inn or School was not a preaching method, after all Paul exhorted and debated many at the School of Tyrannus, not at a secular school established by the church of Ephesus.

When Christ stood on a ship to teach the crowd or Paul wrote an epistle to brethren in a city, *the ship and parchment/ink were aids, not methods of preaching.*

It does not mean the church must go into paper and ink production, run a printing business or venture into ship building or fishing enterprise today. Such services or materials can be purchased or donated by willing saints when needed.

Even if deemed expedient and affordable for a congregation to procure a bus/ship or printing machine for use today, she is not to venture into transportation or publishing business for the public to patronize.

Such items may only be utilized to facilitate its primary work of evangelism, edification and rendering assistance unto needy saints. [A *needy* means a Christian who lacks the basic necessities of life, not someone who wants or desires luxury beyond his capacity.]

Suppositions and FAQs addressed

Que: Which scriptures forbid the church from establishing schools, hospitals, gyms, orphanages, etc.?

Ans: A carefree congregation that wants to do as they like claims no passage prohibits such action whereas those who are truly subject to Christ rely on NT authorization for their religious beliefs and practices.

Most Christians can see the pattern for limited...

- Priesthood in the OT (Levites; Aaron's family only)*
- Music in the NT (singing only)*
- Baptism (only to repentant believers, no infants)*
- Message to proclaim (the gospel, not secular subjects)*

Que: Why are we allowing denominations to train our children and saying the church cannot build schools? Our next generation is being misled. The church must have its own schools, hospitals, banks, etc.

Ans: You do NOT have to send your children to schools owned and managed by denominations. **You have a choice** to send them to public schools or other private schools established by Christians or non-faith foundations. Your child's moral and religious upbringing is your duty at home while the spiritual upbringing is that of the church.

Inasmuch as we live in the world, we will interact with non-members of the church. It is wrong to aver the church must provide all secular education at all levels or provide employment and all services so we or our children can avoid unbelievers. Such flawed reasoning leads to the religious camps/cults along our expressways/forests where the gullible are manipulated.

Que: What if the church does NOT charge fees for her Hospital, School, Gym, Old People's/Beggars' Home, etc.?

Ans: Regardless of whether fees are charges or not at these facilities, Christ has not authorized His church to establish or run such institutions!

Individuals whether Christians or unbelievers are free to pursue such ventures as *philanthropists or business investors*.

A Christian doctor may volunteer to render free medical services to anyone, and any saint may choose to adopt an orphan or provide shelter to the homeless. It is not the church's duty to build homes for the poor or aged in society or to build an hospital or a gym for a community. The church cannot lure unbelievers with material stuff.

Que: Is it not hypocrisy to say we cannot build hospitals or Old People's Homes when the church may provide First Aid kit during lectureships, and can support a widow indeed?

Ans: *No, it isn't hypocrisy for these are different issues you seem to be conflating.* Congregational "First Aid" is provision of water, bandages, iodine, etc. or materials to handle minor medical emergencies when a crowd is invited to the assembly, this is optional and may be administered by anyone. It is different from when a fully equipped medical facility is established that needs government's approval, and is to be manned by licensed professionals. Even homes and offices **may** have First Aid kits but every family or firm isn't required or expected to establish an hospital! Supporting an aged Christian widow who is desolate, with cash or accommodation does not demand that the church must provide a housing block or estate for the old or poor people in society.

THANK YOU!

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