



## Praying for Parachurch Ministries

By D. A. Carson

Here are six reflections on how I pray for parachurch ministries:

**1.** Should there be any difference between the way I pray for a local church and the way I pray for a parachurch organization? No and yes.

No, because in both cases I am praying for brothers and sisters in Christ, and in both cases the focus of my praying ought to be for the kinds of things that the apostles prayed for. For example,

- that the love of these brothers and sisters might abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight and that they might be able to discern what is best (Phil. 1:9-10);
- that God might make them worthy of his calling and that by his power he might bring to fruition every desire for goodness and every deed prompted by faith (2 Thess. 1:11);
- that they might have power, together with all of God's people, to grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ's love for them so that they might become mature (Eph. 3:17-19);
- and so forth.

We ought to pray *for people*, and insofar as we are praying for brothers and sisters in Christ gathered in the local church or working in the context of a parachurch organization, one is still praying *for people*.

On the other hand, yes, there will be a difference, in that the church is the only human organization sanctioned and mandated by the new covenant Scriptures, the only organization that is said to be the body of Christ. At some level or other, the distinction catches up with us, as we shall see. But consider how I might pray for the ministry of, say, Bob and Sally Smith (the names have been altered), who are working to translate the Bible into several languages in Papua New Guinea under the auspices of Wycliffe Bible Translators/SIL. Even though I know that Bob and Sally have been sent out and are supported by specific local churches, I think of them in the context of the organization in which they are discharging their specific ministry, and I pray for the specifics of their ministry, including the way their mission functions, in ways that scarcely apply universally.

**2.** I suppose it is possible to pray "for all truly Christian organizations everywhere" or something of that order, but in reality this sort of sweeping general prayer is usually immature or lazy or both.

One is far more likely to pray usefully and intelligently for parachurch organizations with which one has special connections: it may be an organization with which I am affiliated (e.g., The Gospel Coalition) or in which I have close friends in whose ministry I am personally invested in some way (e.g., Together for the Gospel, Wycliffe/SIL). At very least they will be organizations God has laid on my heart for some reason—perhaps because I have observed the strategic nature of their work, and I want to petition God to preserve and deepen that work.

**3.** The Bible lays out specifics regarding the organization, accountability, and distinctive roles of various leaders in the local church (though admittedly the relevant passages in the Bible are variously understood by different Christians). That means my prayers for particular blessings or outcomes or discipline in the context of the church will be shaped by my understanding of those passages. The Bible does *not* lay out specifics regarding the organization of TGC or Wycliffe/SIL. Nevertheless, the Bible says plenty about the morality, quality of life, integrity of relationships, love, and unreserved commitment to service of all Christians. Insofar as Christians serve in parachurch organizations there is therefore plenty to pray about with respect to the structures, discipline, and relationships within parachurch organizations, even though the specifics of organization are less clearly mandated.

**4.** Organizations whose aims are shaped by the priorities of the gospel and in whole-hearted submission to the Lordship of King Jesus as disclosed in Scripture should take a priority in our praying that other organizations should not have. Inevitably that means there must be some effort on our part to evaluate the faithfulness of the organization's commitments to worthy goals. A seminary that constantly strives to be faithful to Scripture and to be rich in gospel understanding as it trains people for service *ought* to call

forth intercessory prayer from Christians to the end that God would prosper this ministry more and more. Correspondingly, if that seminary begins to drift, believers should feel impelled to pray for corrective action, for necessary changes in leadership, for repentance. In the worst cases, it may be the part of wisdom to pray *against* the institution, precisely because it is doing great damage by undermining faith in the living God.

5. I have sometimes felt a special burden to pray for parachurch organizations that are going through transitions that will purify them and make them more faithful. I can think of four or five seminaries or theological colleges for which I have sometimes prayed during the last three decades, institutions that were being rejuvenated and brought back into line with Scripture by leaders who were struggling to reform their organizations. Sometimes the prayers are people-specific: for example, that God would stifle the efforts of those who are leading the organization astray; that God would replace them with faithful servants of the Word; and the like. Of course, there are analogies in the way one prays for local churches.

6. I am drawn to pray for parachurch organizations that self-consciously seek to strengthen local churches, that see themselves as useful extensions of churches and whose leaders are responsible to local churches. I am far more suspicious of parachurch organizations that are constantly talking down to churches, display no love for the church, and run competition with churches—all the while knocking on the doors of churches to ask for money to support their “ministries.” For the one I am happy to pray—indeed, I may pray that the organization will become better related to, even integrated with, local churches; for the other I rarely pray, except, in the worst cases, to pray against them.

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