

Chapter 12

God's Chosen Instrument **- The Importance of Missionary Structures -**

In one of Arthur Miller's plays "The Death of A Salesman" the hero Willy complains about the *"built-in obsolescence"* of his life and products. The Church and Mission face the same challenge in the face of a changing world and both need to find the right expression for their time. It's a bit like buying a computer in today's world. A few years ago the floppy disk was the in thing but in the face of Pentium 3.0 (and then 4.0 etc) and the mighty Broadband connections my old reliable Amstrad looks a bit dated!

With all the passion and energy that is put into the debate about "ideal church" and "ideal mission" we have to be careful that we are not basing our decisions and strategies on last year's model! The Bible gives us the core functions of church and mission. Our challenge is to find the right forms for our own world and culture. This chapter is important as it is essential for Christians to creatively grasp the best means for getting the job of World Evangelisation done. It is doubly important when considering the future for mission in developing nations which, up until now, are still looking to launch their own missionary movements.

Many of these nations have local church structures which are multiplying at incredible rates (1) but have yet to find the right missionary structures to launch these churches successfully into world mission.

It is a shame that the "mission minded" agencies which were so often behind the initial establishment of such churches sadly omitted to pass on that same mission element into the churches they founded!

As with most important questions it is vital to look at what has been written beforehand so in approaching the question of mission structures Ralph Winter's works, especially the Perspectives article "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission", and Dr Michael Griffiths' paper on "Ecclesiology and Mission" (which has a more church based perspective) will prove good reference points.

Another missionary writer, Warren Webster, tells us that :

"In the process of world evangelisation, one organisational structure that God has used to spread the gospel and plant churches in nearly every land is that of missionary sending agencies." (2)

Ralph Winter recognises two redemptive structures. The *"local church"* and the *"mission agency"*. He goes to great lengths to explain the biblical and historical development of these structures - the synagogue and Jewish missionary band, the "Christian synagogue" and Paul's missionary band, the "parish" and the "monastery", reformed church and mission society - and the importance for us of finding, as Kraft put

it, *"the dynamic equivalence" (3) of such structures in our own age*. Just as God has used certain secular, historical currents to give form to these basic redemptive functions, we need to find the relevant expressions for us today. Winter defines these two structures as modalities (i.e. the synagogue and parish) and sodalities (the missionary band and monastery):

"...a modality is a structured fellowship in which there is no distinction of sex or age, while a sodality is a structured fellowship in which membership involves an adult second decision beyond modality membership, and is limited by either age or sex or marital status ... Paul was "sent off" not "sent out" by the Antioch congregation. He may have reported back to it but did not take orders from it. His mission band (sodality) had all the autonomy and authority of a "travelling congregation." (4)

It is important to note here the “second decision” element (i.e. bonding together for a specific agreed task) and the autonomy and authority of the missionary expression. J.R.W. Stott gives a further definition of such a sodality as being,

"a religious guild or brotherhood established for purposes of devotion or mutual help or action." (5)

Winter's definitions are helpful especially in groupings which often neglect the missionary expression of Church. Because he is writing from a missionary perspective he is most incisive in developing the argument for the sodality. However his definition of modality as parish and local church being merely a place for biological expansion of the people of God may work for the less lively multitudinous churches, but may not fit more dynamic local congregations which make more demands on their professing Christians. Winter himself seems to half acknowledge this weakness when he talks of *"pure Church"* standing *"in a certain sense midway between a modality and sodality."* (6)

Griffiths, writing from a different perspective, still acknowledges the vital role of mission expressions of Church throughout the ages.

"... Parachurch sodalities have always been an efficient way of getting things done. Even a monolithic Church with a hierarchical structure like the Roman Catholic Church found that orders like the Franciscans or Jesuits were able to get action much more quickly than awaiting the cumbersome response of Establishment." (7)

Peter Wagner, generally known for his work on Church growth studies, also recognises the dynamism the sodality structure has given to world evangelisation.

"... There are some notable exceptions to the rule, but throughout history churches 'as churches' have not been particularly effective instruments for carrying the gospel to the regions beyond. The outstanding success stories in world evangelisation have usually come from situations in which the church or

churches have permitted, encouraged, and supported the formation of specialised 'mission structures' to do their missionary work... Those of our own ancestors who inhabited the forests of Northern Europe were largely won to Christ through missionaries working in what is called the monastic movement." (8)

I would join Wagner and Winter in strongly encouraging churches everywhere, but more especially in the Francophone African nations, to strongly encourage the formation of national mission (that is sending out men and women across geographic and cultural frontiers) structures.

Are such structures justifiable biblically ? Watchman Nee writing in "The Normal Christian Church Life" gives excellent biblical insight into the work of the Church and its ministry gifts but he tends to a narrow perspective in saying that :

"Scripture gives us no example of men set apart and being sent by one or several individuals or by a mission or by an organisation; neither do we find examples of workers sent by a local church. The only example that the Word of God uses is the setting apart of apostles by the prophets and teachers." (9)

Anabaptist traditions, as well as Luther himself, the Plymouth Brethren, the Restoration movement and other “new” house-church movements have had difficulty with the biblical reality of missionary structures. Some have even urged their members to withdraw from unscriptural missionary societies! What Biblical warrant do we then have?

Even in the Old Testament we see evidence of sodalities at work that functioned outside of the priesthood and levitical orders.

"The schools of the prophets would seem to be the prototype parachurch society!" (10)

They had independent life and often reacted strongly against the compromise of the religious establishment. The “*company of the prophets*” at the time of Elijah and Elisha are examples. (11)

Malachi 3 :16 speaks of

"those who feared the Lord, talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard."

This suggests a separate praying community. The “Hasidim” (holy people) were Jews passionately antagonistic to the hellenisation of Israel and formed separate groups. These may well have become the Pharisees of the New Testament, a dedicated separatist movement (12) opposed to the religious compromise of Israel as a whole.

We often consider Jesus and the twelve disciples as being the “embryonic church” but it is just as credible to see them as a prophetic, pioneering, praying missionary community! *Matt 18 :15-20*, recognises the existence of small groups praying and meeting together. Tertullian recognised the radical nature of such groups at a time when the church was establishing bishops and becoming less flexible :

"...where but three are, and they of the laity also, yet there is a Church ..." (13)

Such a 'Church' was evidently more of a “missionary band” than a parish.

Hebrews 10 :25, speaks of meeting and exhorting one another daily and again suggests structures which go beyond a simple Sunday meeting. Ralph Neighbour in his book *"Where do we go from Here"* (14) and other publications suggests that “cell church” is the best structure for church growth in our day and backs up his message with examples from Korea, Ivory Coast and Britain. The helpful thing about a “cell church” perspective is that it enhances the “missionary” aspect of the church freeing it from the parish mentality. It may well fit as Winter says *"midway between a modality and a sodality."* (15)

The obvious biblical example from the New Testament is Paul (16),

"God's chosen instrument to carry (His) name before the Gentiles," Acts 8 :15

and his missionary band. They were “sent off” from Antioch and appear to have enjoyed a great measure of autonomy, making their own plans, exercising authority and organising the itineraries of their members. According to Griffiths :

"They bear all the marks of being an independent missionary society, sending their workers off as circumstances required." (17)

In *Acts 11 :20* we also see “some ... men from Cyprus and Cyreno” going to Antioch on an evangelistic expedition to the Greeks!

"This as an independent lay movement by Hellenistic Jewish Christians and not in the first instance, initiated or approved by the leaders and the apostles in Jerusalem." (18)

This is a good example as it gives a model for how missionary structures have arisen over the years. Griffiths' defines this as :

"... Spirit-motivated initiatives taken first by individuals and small groups, used and blessed by God, and then finding favour with the churches ..." (19)

The vision of a multi-ethnic celebration of the Lamb in *Revelation 5 :9* and *7 :9* suggests something of this “missionary expression” of Church reaching even into eternity.

It seems we are on solid ground in concluding that Mission is definitely a biblical concept which has been expressed in various ways throughout history and which needs to find a relevant expression in our churches today.

Church and Mission have had “a chicken and egg relationship” from the very beginning. When Emil Brunner wrote,

"... that the Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning,"

he expressed a profound truth.

Leslie Newbigin said,

"... that the church that has lost its missionary vision no longer has the right to be called a New Testament Church..." (20)

Also, Griffiths would argue that,

"... the success of Mission is measured by the quantity and quality of the churches it is able to bring into existence." (21)

In other words,

"The mission of the Church is missions; the mission of missions is the Church." (22)

It is clear that there is an intimate and inseparable relationship between the two. In view of this we need to be careful not to be too dogmatic about our positions and humbly leave space for the Holy Spirit to lead us into greater understanding as to the mysterious beauty of His Bride.

Griffiths puts forward a very popular argument when he states the well known formula :

"Mission is the means, the Church is the end." (23)

Mission is the machinery, the scaffolding which will be taken away to reveal the Church at the end. Griffiths continues :

"The ugly sisters are good for a few laughs, but who cares much about what happens to them 'ever after' : it's Cinderella we fall in love with... It's the Church that is there at the end of the story : there is no eschatology for the parachurch organisations in any Bible that I've ever read." (24)

This sounds convincing, even though a bit unfair to call our missions “ugly sisters!”, but later on in his article he hits the difficulty of what he actually means by Church when he includes “the ugly sisters” as being part of Cinderella.

"While such groups cannot be regarded as being 'local churches' they are still part of the Universal Church." (25)

Kane helps us in our understanding by highlighting that :

"The church has at least five functions : worship, teaching, fellowship, service and missions or witness ... four functions will be continued in heaven, presumably in higher purer form. Only one witness (and mission) will not survive 'the rapture.'" (26)

Unfortunately Kane makes no reference to prayer. Kane uses this argument to emphasise the importance of evangelism but his premise is helpful, because if we are to assume that mission has no eschatological future it can only be in terms of its work. On the other hand worship, (prayer), fellowship and the other more eternal hallmarks are surely also part of the mission community's make-up and role, not simply the privileged domain of local church. Will locality survive the rapture ?

Try this as a definition for mission :

"A prophetic celebration of Christ's victory amongst the peoples of the earth." (27)

John Piper in “Let the Nations be Glad” clearly states that:

“Mission begins and ends in worship.”

We need to change our perspective on mission. Let not the “work” side be magnified to exclude the Christ centred celebration that is at its heart. Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian mission movement, (or was it a pioneer missionary Church?) said :

"I have one passion, and it is Him, only Him." (28)

Mission is not just scaffolding. Its heart has to beat with an eternal worship of the Lamb.

Paul didn't focus on the “work” but rather the “grace” which was with him. (29) Mission is God's gift to us. In *Romans 4 :5*, Paul speaks of the man who

“does not work but trusts God.”

Mission is about faith, trust and celebration. The hermeneutic of mission is worship.

We should look at Paul, the expert builder, talking about lasting values in *1 Corinthians 3 : 10-15*. The refined gold of faith, the silver of hope and the precious stone of sacrificial love, so evident in missions over the centuries, will certainly survive the rapture! (30) Surely these verses give an eschatological future for missions! The challenge for mission is to be Holy Spirit inspired, Christ centred and a community of praying, worshipping individuals. The scaffolding of mission work flows from this.

In the end most of the writers, including myself, seem to be saying essentially the same thing but from different perspectives. It is inherently difficult to try and dissect the body of Christ to fit our own formulas even if recognising the twin redemptive structures is useful. A few years ago the Lord spoke powerfully to me concerning these issues and gave me a very personal parable.

My father, as an orphan of 12, feeling lonely and abandoned, prayed that God would one day give him a family of his own. He actually found himself praying for twin boys.

Many years later twin boys were born to him and although both nearly died at birth, the Lord's hand was on them and they grew up to become dedicated to His service. At twenty- two both boys were called specifically to full-time service. My brother to *Icthus Christian Fellowship* in South East London, and myself to the small missionary beginnings of "*Horizons*" in Llanelli, S. Wales. As we grew in God's work we would often meet up together and compare notes. Some of our exchanges were quite heated as we defended our own "sacred" positions of mission versus local church. After one particular session I was going back on the tube thinking over our last debate when suddenly I felt the Lord speaking. He was sad that we were divided.

"Don't you understand,"

he seemed to say,

"You are two separate yet interwoven individuals, one going missionwards, one going local church, but you are the product of the one egg." (31)

I believe there is only one Bride and one Body. However I believe that both mission and local church find their expression within this and that both, in as much as they are centred around worship of Christ, fellowship, faith and prayer will find themselves together in eternity. I find Winter's definitions very useful and an exhortation for churches everywhere to encourage the missionary expression within their ranks.

To conclude this section it will be useful to look at the present situation in our own church situations as well as in much of French speaking Christian Black Africa, and compare it with the situation that existed around the time of the Reform in Europe.

For nearly three hundred years Luther and his fellows totally neglected the missionary identity and responsibility of the Church. David Clifford in his study on mission history gives seven major reasons for this failure.

1. Protestantism was so absorbed in the struggle with the Papacy and with internal doctrinal dissension, e.g. Consubstantiation, that it had little time to think and consider the lot of the unevangelised. Protestantism has been called during this period, "a Home Mission to Christians." Today, in many denominations throughout the world, we may not see direct war with Catholicism, but there exists much conflict even between the Protestant groups, with competition to multiply church upon church in the same areas.

How much evangelism is simply a “repeat hearing” for Christians ?

2. Many of the Protestant leaders contended that the Great Commission in *Matt 28* was no longer binding on the Church of their day. They argued that the early Apostles had fulfilled that commission using *Rom 10 :18* to back this up. Today liberal theology, universalism and a general “unbelief” concerning the seriousness of the Lord's command make some churches no more than religious social service centres or simply "waiting rooms" for heaven.

3. Some went even further in suggesting that Muslims and other religious and pagan groups had rejected the gospel in the years gone by and had thus become a cursed people having sinned away their day of grace. Happily some did actually go to Africa and the multiplied thousands of Christians in Africa today is a wonderful refutation of such a cowardly, shameful premise! Today we may not think this way, but often the racial hatred that exists between people groups is just as much of an obstacle. Like Jonah we don't always want 'those others' to come into the Lord's salvation.

4. Luther himself regarded the ignorance of the pagans as a sign of the end :

"Another 100 years and all will be over. The Gospel is despised. God's word will disappear for want of any to preach it - Asia and Africa have no Gospel. The Europeans ... have no Gospel. The small electorate in Saxony will not hinder the end" (32)

He must have been having a bad day when he wrote that! Today we must beware of falling into a negative fatalism concerning the future of the world.

5. The European wars between the Netherlands, France, Germany and Britain tied the hands of any prospective missionary enterprise. This really is a non-starter of an excuse compared to the odds and political conditions the early apostles faced. Today we must avoid blaming socio/political factors for our lack of courage to take up the missionary mandate. There have always been wars and rumours of wars **but**,

"the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all nations..." (33)

6. Protestant governments seem to have been completely indifferent to the welfare of the inhabitants of the West Indies and other parts of the world which they governed and were out of touch and distanced from the realities of the pagan world. Today the Church must be salt and light in society influencing the politics of nations for the greater good of the world. It is a tragic shame that in some nations where there are over 40 % evangelical Christians that the political state of such a nation is in chaos. **The Church must get involved.** As the poet W.B. Yeats said in his poem the "Second Coming" :

" The best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity ."
(34)

This could well be a description of the way fundamentalist Islam is rising while many Christians remain passive and unconcerned.

7. The chief navigating nations of the world at the time were Spain and Portugal, strong Roman Catholic countries. It was natural therefore that Roman Catholic Priests had a head start on any others. Today the Church blames her lack of resources to get the job done. Instead of simply doing nothing and complaining we should use our minds and hands to creatively exploit and develop the resources the Lord has given. Lack of resources is never a sufficient excuse and finishes as being an indictment on our own passivity and laziness.

Ralph Winter comments :

*"The Protestant movement started out by attempting to do without any kind of sodality structure... This omission, in my evaluation, represents the greatest error of the Reformation and the greatest weakness of the resulting Protestant tradition... The Protestants had **no mechanism for mission** for almost three hundred years, until William Carey's famous book, "An Enquiry" proposed "the use of means for the conversion of the heathen". His key word "**means**" refers specifically to the need for a sodality, for the organised but non-ecclesiastical initiative of the warm-hearted.." (35)*

Here we have the practical crux of the matter. The churches must find and put in place the right **mechanism for mission**. As God found a "*choice instrument*" in Paul for reaching the Gentiles so the churches must discover and release the redemptive sodality structures within their midst in order to take their place on the front-lines of world evangelisation. This cannot be over-emphasised, as without such structures the Church will simply continue in passivity unable to change even its own nation let alone the world.

However, for our encouragement, let's look at the explosive growth that took place when the Protestant Church finally gave up on all her reasons for failure and embraced the sodality structure. Quoting again from Peter Wagner we read :

"... Once missionary societies gained in strength, wonderful things began to happen. More men and women have been led to Christ and more Christian churches have been planted in the world in the 190 years since William Carey than in the eighteen hundred previous years all put together. Missions, then, are not an after-thought to God. They are an integral part of His design for "making disciples of all nations ..." (36)

I believe that we are on the threshold of another massive explosion of missionary endeavour and revival at the end of this century. The key to this is the discovery of the sodality by the emerging 2/3 world church rich nations. The challenge is not simply to find Carey's "missionary society model" but the "dynamic equivalent" suited to their own specific time and culture.

Every church needs to develop the appropriate missions structure to impact their nation and the nations.

It is encouraging to see all that is already happening in the English speaking parts of Africa and the Latin American and Asian nations in response to the missionary challenge. As Webster encourages us :

"The number of missionaries rising out of the Third World has reportedly been increasing at an annual rate three times faster than Western missionaries, so it is possible that by the year AD 2000 Third World missionaries may comprise half or more of the total world mission force!..."(37)

However, we need to see this happening over the francophone nations. Perhaps in the spiritual world there may be something to do with France's colonial influence and its "unique" way of keeping tabs on its "independent" cousins. A recent article in the Financial Times concerning France's influence on its colonies says :

"Critics often quip that what makes France's decolonisation special was that it never decolonised at all." (38)

The present spiritual situation in France which has a long history of "rebellion" against God's best may also be relevant. Let us pray and work like never before to see missions planted in Francophone Africa. May the Lord also restore and renew our mission structures in Britain and America. As Ralph Winter has already contributed so much to this debate it is only fitting that he should be given the last comment :

"The question we must ask is how long it will be before the younger churches of the so-called mission territories of the non-western world come to that epochal conclusion (to which the Protestant movement in Europe only tardily came) namely, that there need to be sodality structures, such as William Carey's "use of means", in order for church people to reach out in vital initiatives in mission, especially cross cultural mission. There are already some hopeful signs that this tragic delay will not continue ..." (39)

Endnotes

- 1) It is hard to walk more than 100 metres in Bangui, the capital city of Central African Republic, without coming upon a church of some kind.
- 2) Webster, W., The Messenger And Mission Structures, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.D.239.
- 3) Kraft, Dynamic Equivalence Churches, Missiology, an International Review, 1973, P.39.
- 4) Winter, R., The Two Structures Of God's Redemptive Mission, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.B.52.
- 5) Stott, J., Co-operating In World Evangelisation – A Handbook On Church, Parachurch Relations, Lausanne Occasional Papers n° 24, P.13.
- 6) Winter, P.B.52.
- 7) Griffiths, M., Ecclesiology and Mission, The Henry Martyn Lecture, 1988, P.3.
- 8) Wagner, P., On The Crest Of The Wave - Becoming A World Christian, Glendale, California, 1983, P.P.73-74.
- 9) Nee, W., La Vie Normale de l'Eglise, (Translated from the French) Pierrefitte, Rouen, 1976, P.58.
- 10) Griffiths, M., Ecclesiology and Mission, The Henry Martyn Lecture, 1988.
- 11) 2 Kings 2.3,7,15; 4.1,38; 5.22; 6.1
- 12) Bruce, F.F., New Testament History, Pickering & Inglis, London, 1982, P.65.
- 13) Tertullian's writing from Broadbent, The Pilgrim Church, Pickering & Inglis, London, 1963, P.13.
- 14) Neighbour, R., Where do we go from here ?, Touch Publications, Houston, 1990.
- 15) Winter, R., The Two Structures Of God's Redemptive Mission, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.B.52.
- 16) See Rolan Allan's book on Paul's missionary methods.
- 17) Griffiths, M., Ecclesiology and Mission, The Henry Martyn Lecture, 1988, P.4.

- 18) Ibid, P.4
- 19) Ibid, P.5
- 20) Kane, J.H., Wanted World Christians, Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1986, P.114.
- 21) Griffiths, M., Ecclesiology and Mission, The Henry Martyn Lecture, 1988, P.2.
- 22) Webster, W., The Messenger And Mission Structures, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.D.242.
- 23) Griffiths, M., Ecclesiology and Mission, P.2.
- 24) Ibid P.2
- 25) Ibid P.4
- 26) Kane, J.H., Wanted World Christians, Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985, P.113.
- 27) This definition owes a lot to the teaching of Rowland Evans, founder of 'World Horizons' and who first coined the phrase "Celebration For The Nations".
- 28) Grant, Colin, Europe's Moravians. A Pioneer Missionary Church, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.B.74.
- 29) 1 Corinthians 15 :10 Faith, Hope and Love.
- 30) 1 Corinthians 3 :10-15. Gold, Silver and Precious Stones.
- 31) These words were not the audible voice of God but are my interpretation of the intuitive burden He placed in my spirit at that time. Like all such subjective revelation it needs to be tested and interpreted in the light of scripture.
- 32) Luther from Clifford, Moorlands Bible College, P.19.
- 33) Matthew 24.14
- 34) Yeats, The Second Coming - Selected Poetry, Pan, London, 1979, P.100.
- 35) Winter, The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.P.B.53-54.
- 36) Wagner, P., On The Crest Of The Wave - Becoming a World Christian, Glendale, California, 1983, P.74.

- 37) Webster, W., The Messenger And Mission Structures, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.D.242.
- 38) Financial Times, Past Stalks France's Future in Africa, August 1996.
- 39) Winter, R., The Two Structures Of God's Redemptive Mission, Perspectives, Paternoster Press, London, 1992, P.B.53

