

THE “TWO STRUCTURES” OF GOD’S MISSION

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I. INTRODUCTION

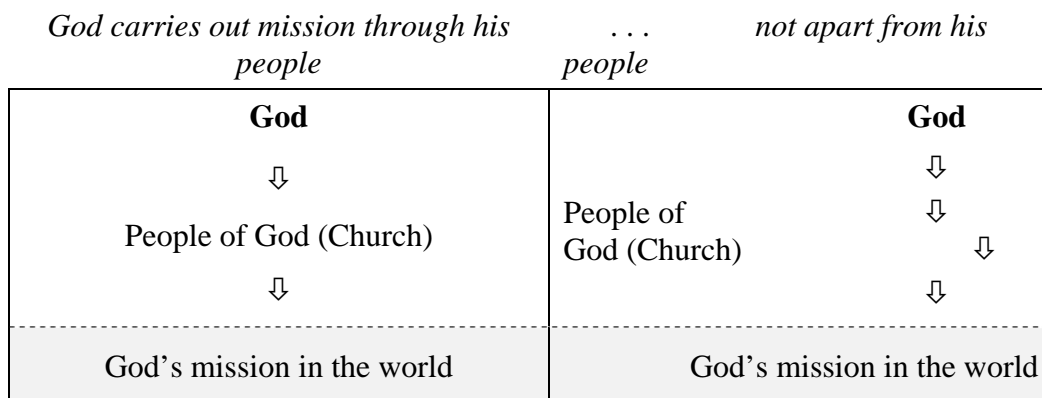
In a different article of this issue of *Global Missiology*, I proposed an approach to understanding “mission” that provides a “way forward” in the confusion over what Ed Stetzer has termed “MissionShift.” In this article I expand on this proposed theology of mission (called “Position 4” in the earlier article) and develop in more detail the question of the role of the “church” in God’s redemptive mission, re-examine the Great Commission passages and revisit the controversial concept of the “two structures.”

II. IS THE CHURCH “GOD’S AGENT OF MISSION”?

Most missiologists would affirm that “the Church is God’s primary agent of mission.” This statement can be understood in a broad way or a narrow way.

1. The Church as God’s agent of mission, broadly understood

Broadly understood, the Church, or the “the people of God,” is God’s agent of mission in the sense that God carries out his redemptive mission through his redeemed people.¹

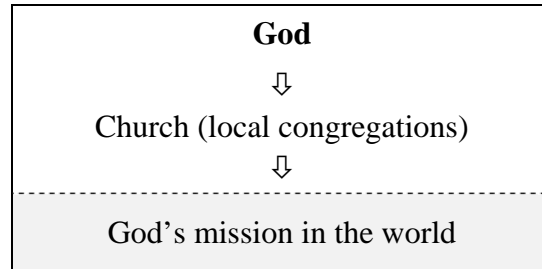


¹ In contrast to the controversial position of the World Council of Church (WCC) in the 1960s and 1970s that God can and often does carry out his purposes in the world (*missio Dei*) apart from and outside the Church.

2. The Church as God’s agent of mission, narrowly understood

Narrowly understood, to speak of the Church, or local congregations, as God’s agent of mission is to affirm that God has delegated the task of missions to local churches.

God delegates the responsibility for mission to the Church



In my earlier article, “MissionShift” and the Way Forward, I suggested that theologies of mission can be grouped into three categories, what I called Position 1, Position 2 and Position 3. Each of these positions view the Church as God’s agent of mission, narrowly understood. Local churches are responsible for carrying out God’s mission. In Positions 1 and Positions 2, the authority to “send” missionaries has been delegated to the Church. In Position 3, the Church itself is “missionary.”

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| Position 1 | God has delegated the responsibility for missionary outreach (obeying the Great Commission) to his Church. Local churches are responsible to “ send ” missionaries who carry out the Great Commission. |
| Position 2 | God has delegated the responsibility for missionary outreach (obeying the Great Commission) to his Church. Local churches do this by carrying out the Great Commission in their own communities and by “ sending ” out missionaries who carry out the Great Commission in new areas. |
| Position 3 | God has delegated the responsibility for missionary outreach to his church. Churches, by nature are “ missional ” and carry out God’s mission in their own contexts. |

In my earlier article, I put forward another approach to theology of mission. I argued that while local churches play a crucial role in the spread of the gospel, we need to be reticent about

applying “sending” language to the Church. Position 4, which I further develop in this article, can be summarized like this:

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| Position 4 | <p>God retains responsibility for mission. There are two structures in his mission:</p> <p>(1) God “sends” individuals (missionaries) to carry out the Great Commission</p> <p>(2) Local churches carry out God’s broader mission in their own contexts (as in Position 3).</p> |
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3. The role of local churches in God’s mission

Another way of describing the difference between Position 1-3 and Position 4 is by examining how we describe the *missio Dei*, i.e. the “sending” activity of the triune God.² Are there three “sendings” (Position 1-3) or two (Position 4) in the *missio Dei*?

- *Sending One*: the *sending* of the **Son** to carry out God’s redemptive mission
- *Sending Two*: the *sending* of the **Spirit** to continue God’s redemptive mission
- ? *Sending Three*: the *sending* of the **Church** as the agent of God’s redemptive mission

In Position 4 God remains the “sender” in his redemptive mission. Local churches play a part in the sending out of missionaries by recognizing and confirming God’s call in their lives and by “sending out” missionaries in the sense of giving their “blessing” as they go, but the “sender” remains God himself.

So when we ask the question, “Is the Church “sent” to be his “agent of mission” in the world?” I am suggesting that the answer should be . . .

- No, if we understand “mission” in the classic apostolic sense of mission, i.e. of being “sent with a mission, bearing the authority of the sender.”
- Yes, if we understand “mission” in the sense of a being “called to task or responsibility (the approach taken by Chris Wright).

The God who saves his people also calls them to serve him. In Exodus 19:5 God tells his people, who live “among the nations” of the earth that they are to be not only a “holy nation” but also they are “to be to me a kingdom of priests”. That implies a task or responsibility,

² Timothy Tennent, *An Invitation to World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 59.

They were to be at once priest-kings and royal-priests (Isa 61:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) - *everyone* in the whole nation. This expression was not a parallel phrase or a synonym for a “holy nation”; it was a separate entity. The whole nation was to act as mediators of God’s grace to the nations of the earth, even as Abraham had been promised that through him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3).³

This same verse is quoted in 1 Peter 2:9 and applied to Jesus’ Church. Peter expands and explains the “calling and responsibility” given to the people of God this way,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

III. INTERPRETING THE GREAT COMMISSION PASSAGES

A key difference between Position 1-2 and the theology of mission I am advocating (Position 4) is the way one interprets the Great Commission passages. My contention is that a careful analysis of these passages leads to two controversial conclusions:

- Jesus’ commission was given to the apostles, not all his followers
- Jesus’ commission focuses on pioneer evangelism and church planting in new areas and among new peoples. In this article I’m calling this “apostolic type” missionary work.

In this section I will try to justify these conclusions.

1. Whom did Jesus commission?

The Synoptic Gospels

What is striking in the Great Commission accounts in the Synoptic gospels is the emphasis on the Twelve apostles. In these gospels, there were other “disciples” who followed Jesus, not just the Twelve. At one point Jesus sent out “seventy” disciples to do missionary work. But in the Great Commission accounts in the Synoptic gospels, Jesus commissions the Twelve.

The Twelve were specially chosen (“*to be with him that he might send them out*”) and specially prepared by Jesus. Throughout the gospels the Twelve were given a unique status and a unique responsibilities. At the end of each gospel, these were the ones Jesus specially

³ Walter Kaiser, “Exodus 19:5” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). Zondervan electronic edition.

commissioned. This distinction between the commissioned apostles and the rest of the followers of Jesus is carried over into the early chapters on Acts (Acts 1:1-8, also 4:32-36, 5:12-21, etc.).

Matthew

In Matthew's gospel, the recipients of the Great Commission are clearly identified as "the eleven," not the wider group of disciples.⁴ The reference to "some doubted" in verse 17, and the actual grammar of the verse seems to indicate that the "eleven" were commissioned in the presence of a wider group of disciples - perhaps the 500 mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15.

Mark

In the extended ending of the gospel of Mark, "the eleven" are mentioned as the recipients of the commission (Mark 16:14).

Luke - Acts

In the Great Commission section of Luke's gospel, again "the eleven" are mentioned, along with "the rest," i.e. "those who were gathered with them" (Luke 24:8, 33). When Jesus appeared to them (vs. 36), it appears a larger group than the eleven were present. One could conclude that Jesus' commission, recorded in vv 48 ("you are witnesses of these things") was given to all those present. The beginning of Luke's second book, however, explains the commission in more detail. In Acts 1:1 we are told that Jesus "had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen."

The Gospel of John

To whom does Jesus give the commission in John 20:21? The actual text mentions "disciples." This could easily refer to a group broader than the 12 [11] apostles. However, the reference to "Thomas, one of the twelve" not being present (in verse 19) probably means that the apostles were the primary recipients of Jesus' commission, "That he is designated *one of the Twelve* argues that 'disciples' in v. 19 most probably refers to the Ten (the apostles less Judas Iscariot and Thomas)".⁵

⁴ cf. verse 16 "the eleven...them" with verse 18 "Jesus said to them"

⁵ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 656.

The same is true in the sending passage in John 17. In light of the context, it is clear that it was the Twelve, minus Judas, who are in view - yet Jesus expands the group in view when he prays for those who “will believe in me through their word” (vs 20).

2. Did Jesus have the “Church” in view when he gave the Great Commission?

An Examination of John 20:21

The Scriptural passage that comes closest to speaking of the “sending of the church” is John 20:21. Carson comments, “In recent years this verse has generated a storm of controversy amongst Christians concerned to think through the mission of the church”.⁶ John 20:21 must be interpreted, notes Carson, in light of “the matrix of themes connected with the ‘sending theme’ in John’s gospel.” Several observations are in order:

a) The sending in view is primarily “spiritual” not physical

In John’s gospel, Köstenberger argues, the two key words related to mission are “following” and “being sent.”⁷ These are both set in the context of the darkness of the “world.” Disciples, to follow Jesus, must leave the darkness and “walk in the light.”

The disciple’s mission is set in relation to the world: the disciples are set apart from it (cf. 13:8-14, 15:3), equipped for service, and then sent back into it... [While the world is] a dark place alienated from God, the world nevertheless remains an object of his love (cf. 3:16)... The ‘destination’ of the church’s mission is defined not primarily in geographical but in spiritual terms.⁸

In Jesus’ prayer for his disciples (John 17), Jesus says he hasn’t taken his disciples “out of the world” but “sent them into the world” (vs 18). He is not speaking here of their physical location. They didn’t literally leave the world, nor does he literally send to a specific location “into the world.” Instead Jesus is speaking of, “...mutually exclusive spheres that require a choice: ‘the circle of the world, in all its rebellion and lostness, and the circle of the disciples of

⁶ Carson, 648.

⁷ Andreas Köstenberger, and Peter O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 219.

⁸ Köstenberger, 221.

Jesus, in all the privilege of the relation to the living, self-disclosing, mission-ordaining, sanctifying God”.⁹

b) In this commission Jesus does *not* delegate responsibility for God’s mission to his Church

Jesus sends his disciples “into the world” to continue carrying out his mission. It is not quite right to argue God has delegated his mission to Jesus’ church and base it on this text.

Carson comments,

The perfect tense in ‘As the Father has sent (*apestalken*) me’ suggests, at the risk of pedantry, that Jesus is in an ongoing state of ‘sentness’. Just because he ascends to his Father does not mean he is no longer the ‘sent one’ *par excellence* (cf. 9:7). Thus Christ’s disciples do not take over Jesus’ mission; his mission continues and is effective in their ministry (14:12-14). ‘The apostles were commissioned to carry on Christ’s work, and not to begin a new one.’¹⁰

c) Jesus’ commission has both an individual and a corporate dimension

In the text, Jesus’ commission is given to the “disciples” (John 20:19, 20). I’ve already shown that John, when he refers to the “disciples” probably has in mind the apostles. The individual dimension of the commission is apparent in the related “sending” passage in John 17 (cf. vs 18, “I have sent them into the world). In John 17, Jesus prays for these “disciples” that they may “be one,” (vs 22, 23). The disciples, individuals, are “sent,” and although they may have differing roles (like the Father, and the Son and the Spirit), it is important that they be (relationally) united in purpose and in loving community.

Several important missiological conclusions can be drawn from a close reading of John 20:21 in its context

- First, Jesus remains the primary “sent one”. He has not delegated his mission to the Church
- Second, the primary “agents” (missionaries) sent out here by Jesus on a mission are the 12 [11] apostles. Their responsibility is to continue the mission Jesus has begun (cf. Acts 1:1-2)
- Third, the wider group of believers, followers of Jesus who are not apostles, are also “sent out among unbelievers (the world) and have a responsibility to bear witness to Jesus; this is present in the text in a secondary sense
- Fourth, the corporate life of the believing community is an important part of the mission

⁹ Köstenberger, 221; here he is quoting D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 567.

¹⁰ Carson, 649.

These conclusions fit well with Position 4, the approach to theology of mission I'm putting forward. Most attempts to build a theology of mission primarily on John 20:21, for example John Stott's approach,¹¹ or more recently the theology of mission suggested by Ott and Strauss¹² go beyond what John 20:21 actually says. Jesus is not, in these verses, "sending his church out into the world."

George Peters' argument for "apostolic succession"

Older, more traditional approaches to theology of mission build upon the Great Commission passages in the Synoptic Gospels. As historians have pointed out, this was not the interpretation of the Great Commissions before the time of William Carey. The reformers taught that Jesus' Great Commission was given to the apostles, who then fulfilled the commission in their lifetimes.

Today missiologists often analyze the commands Jesus gave his apostles and then quickly jump from that analysis and transfer the Great Commission to the Church, making it the Church's "mission" (some apply the commission to the universal "Church"; others apply it to local congregations). For example, Köstenberger and O'Brien, commenting on Matthew 28:18-20, write, "The eleven, *as representatives of later generations of believers*, are to embark on their mission, at the command and on the basis of the authority of the exalted Christ..."¹³

What is usually missing is a serious attempt to establish the link between "the eleven" and "later generations of believers." One of the few missiologists who does attempt this is George Peters in his class work *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. He argues,

The church, the local congregation, is "the mediating and authoritative sending body of the New Testament... The Great Commission falls principally upon her. She inherits the Great Commission from the apostles of Christ and becomes responsible for its realization."¹⁴

Peters offers three grounds for claim:

- the centrality of the church in the New Testament,

¹¹ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1975).

¹² Craig Ott, Stephen Strauss with Timothy Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

¹³ Köstenberger, 108-109 [italics mine].

¹⁴ George Peters, *Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 218-221.

- the ‘apostolic succession’ of the church in the New Testament¹⁵
- the priesthood of the believer and the mediating sending authority of the church.

He offers five further arguments to support what he calls “apostolic succession.”¹⁶ I don’t have time to analyze them here, but in my opinion, Peters’ arguments are not strong enough to support his contention.

The usage of the term “apostle” in the New Testament

The actual usage of the word “apostle” in the New Testament lends support to the interpretation of the Great Commission passages I’ve proposed. It is true, as Glasser points out, that the New Testament uses the word “apostle” in a “rather fluid fashion” and the term is applied not just to Christ, and the 12 apostles and Paul, but also to a wider group of individuals,

It occurs 79x and is applied rather loosely to a wide range of people. Its application ranges from Jesus (Heb 3:1) to the Twelve (Luke 6:13, Acts 1:24-26), to Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14:14), to unnamed believers (2 Cor 8:23) and to Junias, a women (Rom 16:7). Apostles apparently were the foundation laying preachers of the gospel, missionaries, and church founders possessing the full authority of Christ and belonging to a bigger circle in no way confined to the Twelve.¹⁷

While the “range of meaning” of the word “apostle” is wider, most of the 79 or 80 occurrences of the term refer to either the 12 apostles¹⁸ or to Paul.¹⁹ The focus of the New Testament is clearly on the “apostolic ministry” by the 12 and later by Paul. The Twelve were the ones Jesus chose, prepared, and sent to be “witnesses” to his life, death and resurrection. They laid the foundations of the Jesus’ church among the Jews. Their calling was clear, “It is not

¹⁵ i.e. Jesus mandate for missionary outreach passed from the apostles to local churches, i.e. local congregations now carry the responsibility for world evangelism.

¹⁶ Peters, 220-221.

¹⁷ Arthur Glasser, with Charles Van Engen, Dean Gilliland and Shawn Redford, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 301-302. Glasser here quotes from the D.Muller, “Apostle,” in *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Colin Brown, Vol 1:126-135, 1975.

¹⁸ At least 42x, the reference is clearly to the 12 apostles (every reference from Matthew 10 to Acts 12, plus Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23,33, Acts 16:4; 1 Corinthians 15:7, Galatians 1:17, 1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1, 3:2, Jude 17 and Revelation 21:14). In several other verses the reference appears to be to the 12 (Galatians 1:19, Ephesians 2:20, 3:5, 4:11? Revelation 18:20, and 1 Corinthians 12:28-29).

¹⁹ The term is applied to Paul about 20x. In many of these references, especially at the beginning of the Pauline epistles, a distinction is made between Paul, who is an apostle, and others with him, who are called something else, for example, Rom 1:1 “and Sosthenes our brother,” 2 Cor. 1:1 - “and Timothy our brother,” Gal 1:1-2 “and all the brothers with me”; Col 1:1 “and Timothy our brother”).

right,” they said, “that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” Instead they knew they must devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2, 4).

The “ministry” of the apostles was sharp and focused. This is not the case with the ministry of the local Church. When we argue that mission (the *sending*) is everything the Church is *sent* into the world to do, and base that on the *sending* of the apostles we are on shaky ground. I would argue that the church (viewed as a local congregation) is called to many ministries, not just prayer and preaching the gospel. The calling of the church is broader than the calling of the apostles.

Paul’s apostolic ministry

The focus of the New Testament, from Acts 13 on, is on the apostolic ministry of Paul. Like the 12, Paul was called, equipped and sent to preach the gospel. He “set apart for the gospel” (Rom 1:1) and appointed as a herald (i.e. a gospel preacher), an apostle and a teacher of the gospel (1 Tim 2:7, 2 Tim 1:11) - this is a description of missionary work quite similar to the task given the Twelve. Like the Twelve, Paul, had a very sharp ministry focus.

His calling, unlike the Twelve, was “to the Gentiles” (Gal 2:7). Although a few verses refer to individuals other than Paul as “apostles,” Paul is clearly the New Testament model of “apostolic ministry” among non-Jews. I’m suggesting that this is not an accident. Paul’s life and ministry is given as a paradigm of an “apostolic worker” among the nations. Schnabel’s book *Paul the Missionary* is a good example of the groundwork that needs to be done to study the Paul paradigm of “apostolic type missionary” work. This paradigm has several important components:

a) Calling

The pages of the New Testament stress Paul’s call to “apostolic” ministry. The same is true today. Jim Reapsome comment reminds us that, “

The classic understanding of “missionary” has been disfigured and put out with the trash. But I’m not about to bemoan its fate, because this should force us back to the Bible. Two basic ideas leap from its pages: God calls and God sends...

Those whom he called he also sent.” That was Paul’s concise description of God’s mission. That’s the pattern we must firmly entrench in our minds and hearts.”²⁰

The call and commission came from Jesus and was a call to carry out a specific task. In Acts 13:2, Luke tells us that the Antioch church was told by the Spirit to “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work (e!rgon) to which I have called them.” A study of this term (*the work*) in Luke’s account of Paul’s ministry in Acts shows how important “*the work*” was to Paul.

b) Partnership with the local church

Paul, while called by God to “apostolic work” worked in “partnership” with local churches. His call was confirmed by the church in Antioch, he worked hard to retain links with the church in Jerusalem and he praised the church in Philippi for their “partnership in the gospel.”

c) Missionary teams

Paul worked in teams. To accomplish *the work*, he gathered around him helpers or assistants, co-workers, fellow-laborers. The New Testament records some 35 people who worked together with Paul and 13 different teams. “Paul the apostle was a team-worker. His roving community was a training school, a miniature Church, and a mutual source of support in a very difficult vocation.”²¹

At the core of Paul’s teams was Paul himself. He was the dominant figure - his vision, his calling, and *the work* God had given him to do was the focal point of the missionary team. The others helped him accomplish that calling. His calling was the basis for the work of the team.

d) The basic elements of “*the work*”

Paul’s description of his ministry, which itself is a fulfillment of Jesus’ Great Commission, provides us with guidelines as to just what an “apostolic type missionary” does.

²⁰ Jim Reapsome, “Editorial: Who Is Today’s Missionary, Anyway?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 33:3 (1997), 262-263.

²¹ J.A. Grassi, *A World to Win: The Missionary Methods of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Maryknoll, 1965), 81. His chapter on “Teamwork in the Apostolate” is good. He concludes: “All the reasons why Paul made such extensive use of teamwork in the apostolate remain valid and are even more important today.”

The Pauline Paradigm (Romans 1:5 and Romans 15:18-19)

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| Proclaim the gospel | Call people to repentance & faith | Gather those who believe & lay foundations | Strengthen and encourage believers | (<i>Develop and</i>) Appoint Leaders | Link churches together (networks) | Move on |
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Though some aspects of the work of the Twelve and Paul were unique, I’m arguing that Jesus still equips and sends out people to preach the gospel and lay the foundations for new churches in unreached areas or among unreached people - what we might call “pioneer Church planters.” This aspect of the apostolic ministry remains. These are people “sent out” by the Holy Spirit with the gifts and calling to proclaim the gospel and plant new churches where there are none.

In Position 4, I’m suggesting that we limit our usage of the “sending” concept to this ministry. Local churches and individual believers carry out many acts of service to people outside their fellowship. In the New Testament this was not the task of the apostles. We have a good model for this sort of “non-apostolic” type work in the 7 men chosen in Acts 6 to oversee the feeding of the poor. The word group used here describes service done in Jesus’ name. These men were chosen and given responsibility. Theirs was a spiritual ministry - these were men full of wisdom and the Spirit. As the account in Acts makes clear, these men were also heavily involved in evangelism. But they were not called to “apostolic type” work.

Summary

What are we to make of the Great Commission account and the central role of the apostles? If the Great Commission was automatically transferred to the “Church” after Pentecost why did Jesus make such a point of selecting the Twelve? Why did Jesus focus so much of his time and energy training those he designated “apostles?”

We know that Great Commission work did not end with the 12 apostles because mission to the nations continues “to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20), until the gospel is preached to “the whole creation”, until “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47) and witness spreads to the “end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The 12 [11] represent in a unique way those called to an “apostolic type” ministry up until the “end of the age.” Is it not possible that the primary application of Jesus’ commissioning recorded in the Synoptic gospels is intended to be for those called by God to be “apostolic type

workers” and not the whole church? It seems to me this “fits” the New Testament account better the more typical interpretations of these verses.

IV. THE CONTROVERSIAL CONCEPT OF THE “TWO STRUCTURES”

Position 4, which I’m advocating as a theology of mission, is built around the concept of “two structures.” Ralph Winter popularized the term “the two structures” in his influential 1973 address to the All-Asia Mission Consultation entitled, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission.”²²

1. Overview of Winter’s “Two Structures” model

In the 1970s, Winter was a professor at the Fuller School of World Mission and taught the *Historical Development of the Christian Movement* course. Drawing on the knowledge of the history of missionary work, Winter identified two basic kinds of structures that he argued “make up the Christian movement.” These were:

- *The New Testament church*
By this expression he means local congregations of believers
- *Missionary bands*
He defines “missionary bands” as teams of committed, experienced workers who join together to carry out missionary work.

Joining the first structure (local congregations) requires a commitment or decision to follow Christ. Joining the second structure (missionary band) requires an additional commitment or second decision. Using terms from the social sciences, Winter labeled the first structure (local congregation) a *modality*, and the second structure (missionary band) a *sodality*.²³ Winter writes,

Note well the additional commitment. Note also that the structure that resulted was something definitely more than the extended outreach of the Antioch church. No matter what we think the structure was, we know that it was not simply the Antioch church operating at a distance from its home base. It was something else,

²² This address was published in the journal *Missiology* in 1974. “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” *Missiology* 2.1 (121-139).

²³ Winter had developed these concepts in an earlier book, Ralph Winter, “The Warp and Woof of the Christian Movement,” In Pierce Beaver and Ralph Winter, *The Warp and Woof: Organizing for Christian Mission* (South Pasadena, CA.: William Carey Library, 1970). See also Winter’s article “Sodality and Modality” in Scott Moreau, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 894.

something different. We will consider the missionary band the second of the two redemptive structures of New Testament times.²⁴

Winter goes on to trace what he calls “functional equivalents of these same two structures” through the whole history of the Christian movement and concludes,

All that is attempted here is to explore some of the historical patterns which make clear that God, through His Holy Spirit, has clearly and consistently used another structure other than (and sometimes instead of) the modality structure. It is our attempt here to help church leaders and others to understand the legitimacy of *both* structures, and the necessity for both structures not only to exist but to work together harmoniously for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and for the fulfillment of all that God desires for our time.²⁵

Bruce Camp’s article, “A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory” gives a helpful survey of further development of the “two structures” concept following the publication of Winter’s address in *Missiology*²⁶. What Winter and those who followed him proposed can be diagrammed like this:



Both of these structures, *local congregations* and *missionary structures* are to be seen as “visible expressions of the universal church.” Mellis, in his delightful and still relevant book, *Committed Communities: Fresh Streams for World Mission*, prefers different labels for the two structures. He writes about “nurture structures” (local congregations) and “service structures” (missionary bands). “The two structures together constitute the Church.”²⁷

2. Criticism of Winter’s “Two Structures” model

While most will acknowledge the soundness of Winter’s historical analysis,²⁸ many have criticized the (lack of) underlying theological foundations in Winter’s model. Bruce Camp, for

²⁴ Winter, 1974, 123.

²⁵ Winter, *Ibid.* 136

²⁶ Bruce Camp, “A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory” *Missiology* 23.2, April 1995, 197-209.

²⁷ Charles Mellis, *Committed Communities: Fresh Streams for World Mission* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), 7.

²⁸ Camp writes “God has used sodalities throughout church history to assist in the expansion of the Christian faith. To argue against this point would be ludicrous.” *Ibid.*

example, writes, “One does not establish a doctrine by historical occurrence alone. My concern is not with the historical argument for the existence of sodality structures; it is with the proposed theological justification of sodalities...”²⁹

Criticism by Bruce Camp

Winter’s formulation, Camp argues, is problematic, because “it is biblically unwarranted to suggest that missionary bands are another expression of the universal church.”³⁰ He gives three reasons:

- In the Scriptures, Paul and his traveling companions were never called “the church.”
- By definition, a sodality must restrict membership to those who have made an “adult second decision” or special commitment beyond membership in the local church - it is “inappropriate to exclude any believer from an expression of the universal church”
- The (universal) church’s structures for nurture and outreach cannot be divided between modalities and sodalities. Local churches are called to be involved in outreach and should be outreach oriented.

Personally, I think Camp is right. What Winter calls *missionary bands*, while made up of individuals who belong to the people of God (“Church” in the broader, or universal sense), are not “churches” in the sense of local congregations. That does not mean, however, that the concept of “two structures” itself is flawed.

Criticism by George Peters and Orlando Costas

Winter’s “two structures” is often used to justify the existence of mission societies. George Peters is a critic of such societies. While writing before Winter, his criticism is relevant to the “two structures” approach. In *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, Peters calls mission societies,

Accidents of history, called into being by churches or individuals to serve an urgent, divine mission in this world. They have tremendous functional significance for the ongoing of world evangelism and church expansion. It must be stated, however, that they are not of biblical origin, for they are not divine institutions of the same order as churches.³¹

²⁹ Camp, Ibid.

³⁰ Camp, Ibid.

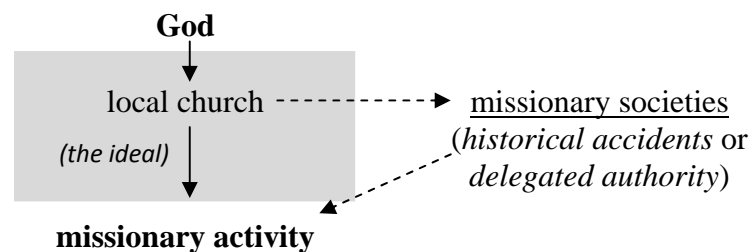
³¹ Peters, Ibid. 229.

“The church, the local congregation,” argues Peters, is “the mediating and authoritative sending body of the New Testament... The Great Commission falls principally upon her. She inherits the Great Commission from the apostles of Christ and becomes responsible for its realization.”³²

He explains the rise of missionary societies this way:

In cases where the church as a corporate body fails to carry out the purpose and mandate of God, He is not frustrated but raises up individuals who will respond to His mandate. This principle is well established in Scripture and in history. In fact, this is how most missionary sending agencies came into being. Few were born within their churches or denominations, for they are mainly the creation of individuals or small groups of men who had the vision and passion of Christ re-created in their hearts.³³

Peter’s approach could be diagrammed like this:



Orlando Costas, writing in the same year Winter’s article was published in *Missiology*, criticizes Winter’s two structure model along the same lines as Peters,

There is no ground in the New Testament for a concept of mission apart from the church... Rather than separating church and mission, modalities and sodalities, the two must work together as one... Mission sodalities should, therefore, be *church* sodalities. The biblico-theological model of the church does not allow for a missionary structure apart from the church... [independent missionary societies] should exist only when the church loses sight of her missionary responsibility... I see three basic problems with Winter’s approach, (1) it militates against the historic-universal character of the church. (2) It makes a universal generalization out of a historical particularity. (3) It makes a theological principle out of a missiological failure.³⁴

Personally, I think Peter’s criticism of the “two structures” model is misguided.

Criticism by advocates of the *Missional Church*

³² Peters, Ibid. 218-221.

³³ Peters, Ibid. 226.

³⁴ Orlando Costas, *The Church and its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World*, Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1974, 168-169, 171.

“Missional church”³⁵ advocates argue that the church is to be “understood not as an organization with a mission; rather, the church’s very identity *is* mission. Mission and church are merged into one.”³⁶ Because of this, any separation of church life and missionary work is suspect - the church does not have a mission, this church is on mission. The problem with this emphasis, however, is that in practice,

By disallowing any separate structure for global or local mission, mission suffers. The cause of mission as intentional outward engagement with the world becomes lost in the regular business of the church and the tasks of pastoral care, administration and a host of other important concerns... Bringing the gospel to yet-unreached peoples holds very little place in the missional church discussion.. one searches the missional church literature almost in vain to find references to bringing the gospel to the nations... one of the central themes of mission in the Bible.³⁷

3. Glasser’s adaption of the “two structures” model

Personally, I find the concept of “two structures” that Ralph Winter proposes helpful. As others have already noted, Winter does not lay biblical foundations for the concept. A colleague, Arthur Glasser, further developed the concept Winter proposed, provided a biblical foundation of sorts, and gave us a useful articulation of the “two structures” model. Glasser’s adapted “two structures” model is best developed in his book *Announcing the Kingdom*.

Glasser admits it is hard to draw firm conclusions as to the “structural form of the apostolic church” since there is simply not enough data in the New Testament.³⁸ On the other hand, Glasser argues, the two structures that Winter identifies, do appear in the record of Acts,

In Acts 2-12, the story of the expansion of the Christian movement is largely a record of spontaneous growth brought about by the witness of individual Christians... In Acts 13-28 the expansion of the Christian movement was achieved through a strikingly different structure -- the apostolic team or mission structure.³⁹

³⁵ as proposed by the *Gospel and Our Culture Network*, an approach that traces its roots back to Leslie Newbigin.

³⁶ Ott, Ibid. 197. The book’s summary of the *Missional Church* critique of Winter is excellent (pp. 197-201).

³⁷ Ott, Ibid. 201.

³⁸ Arthur Glasser, with Charles Van Engen, Dean Gilliland and Shawn Redford, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 299-300.

³⁹ Glasser, Ibid, 300.

I find three things extremely helpful in Glasser's treatment of the "two structures" approach to missionary work.

- First, Glasser doesn't set up an "either-or" dichotomy. Mission, outreach, evangelism, and the expansion of the Christian movement occur both through spontaneous growth of local churches, and through the work of *missionary bands*.
- Second, Glasser roots the existence of *missionary bands* in an "apostolic calling". He labels them "apostolic teams."
- Third, Glasser carefully delineates the relationship between "apostolic teams" and local congregations. A relationship exists between the two, but the apostolic team is not subordinate to a local church.

Glasser interacts with the criticism of George Peters, but concludes, rightly I believe, that George Peter's "inferences are devoid of supporting data." He writes,

The text [Acts 13:1-4] merely states that Barnabas and Saul were "sent...off" (literally "released") by the prophets and teachers" in Antioch, but it was the Holy Spirit who actually "sent [them] on their way." Harold Cook regards the position of Peters and Rees as "pure presumption" and then adds that the local house congregations "neither chose them nor sent them, and certainly they had nothing to say about what they were to do, nor how."⁴⁰

The account in Acts 13, argues Glasser, provides a biblical foundation for the "two structures" approach. Paul's *missionary band* was not a church,

Whereas the apostles were of the church, their corporate ministry outreach necessitated among themselves patterns of leadership and organization, recruitment and finances, training and discipline, distinct from comparable patterns within local congregations.⁴¹

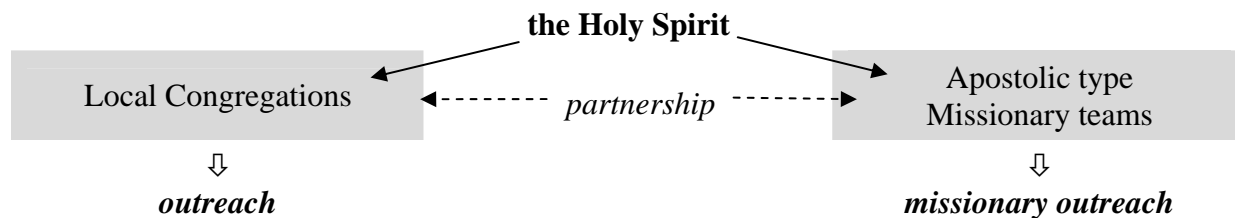
We have to ask then, if Paul and his teams are not churches, what are they? We can't say these *missionary bands* emerged due to the failure of the Antioch church to carry out its mission or as an "accident of history" (ala Peters) for the text makes it clear that they emerged in response to God's direction, given through his Spirit, in answer to the prayers of his people (Acts 13:1ff). Glasser concludes, "Both were subordinate to the Holy Spirit. Neither was to be an end in itself. Both were to be in wholesome symbiotic relation to each other... Neither was to be overly upgraded or downgraded."⁴²

⁴⁰ Glasser, *Ibid.*, 303.

⁴¹ Glasser, *Ibid.*, 301, quoting J. Allen Thompson.

⁴² Glasser, *Ibid.*, 304.

Glasser's model is similar to Winter's, yet different in significant ways. It can be diagrammed like this:



Glasser identifies several key elements of Paul's "apostolic teams":

a) Calling

"Team members were called to missionary service directly by the Holy Spirit." The part the local congregation played was that of "confirming their call."

b) Direction

There is "no indication in the book of Acts that the apostolic missionary team was either directed by or accountable to the Christians in Antioch. We state this without qualification..."

c) Commissioning

"The team itself was a voluntary association of Spirit-gifted and like-minded persons and was directly commissioned by the Holy Spirit."

d) Finances

There is "no indication that the apostolic missionary team was either directed by or accountable to the Christians in Antioch"... The "impression is gained that team members either provided or raised their own support, although the team's resources were pooled and shared."

e) Team leadership

"Within the team an egalitarian spirit based on mutual trust preserved the freedom of individual members, who moved into and out of its association under what was regarded as the leading of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, Paul was invariably regarded as the charismatic leader."

Summary

Glasser's adoption of the "two structures" model, in my opinion, provides the framework for developing a theology of missions along the lines I'm proposing in Position 4. I believe Glasser has shown that this model emerges from the New Testament itself, and it not something imposed on the text to justify an "accident of history. Two other factors support this contention:

1. The "puzzling" lack of exhortation to churches to carry out the "Great Commission"

First, the fact that in the New Testament epistles there is a "puzzling lack of exhortations" to individual believers and local churches to carry on the missionary work of Paul and the other apostles seems to support the validity of a "two structures" approach rather than Peters' "apostolic succession" model (the Church inherits the task of the Great Commission).

Köstenberger and O'Brien comment on this,

Although the apostle makes a number of important statements in his letters about his own missionary calling and its place within God's purposes (and in this endeavour his co-workers are linked with him), he does not seem, at first glance, to say a great deal about how the Christians in his congregations were to carry on his work or to be caught up with his mission... What are the links, if any, between his own dynamic endeavours and those of his fellow-believers?... A related question is this: why is so little written in the Pauline letters about the need for Christians to evangelize?⁴³

When we teach that local churches have "inherited" the responsibility of the Great Commission from the apostles, this is nearly impossible to explain. With the "two structures" model, it is more straightforward. Paul's calling was different from that of calling of individual believers and local congregations and what we see in the New Testament epistles is just what one would expect, an emphasis on helping individual believers and local congregations obey the calling and responsibilities God had given them.

2. The history of missionary expansion

Secondly, there is also the overwhelming evidence Winter and others marshal from Mission history. Paul Pierson, Winter's successor at the School of World Missions, summarizes the witness of history,

- Cross-cultural mission is rarely done without focused mission structures. I do not say never, but rarely.

⁴³ Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Ibid.*, 191.

- Mission structures seldom, if ever, originate at the ecclesiastical center. They always seem to arise on the periphery.
- Unrecognized groups of laymen and laywomen with little or no status in the Church have started at least half of the mission movements in the history of the Church, and perhaps more.⁴⁴

If the apostolic mandate has passed to local churches, why, historically, has so much of the actual missionary advance of the gospel to new places and peoples taken place outside that specific context, and often with only the token support of local churches?

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper I've tried to strengthen the biblical foundations for the proposal for a "way forward" that I made in my earlier paper (Position 4). There I proposed a theology of mission that is based on "two structures" in God's redemptive mission - an "apostolic" type missionary structure, and a local congregational structure.



Position 4

This is a controversial proposal (Position 4) for several reasons.

Issue #1

First, one can easily conclude that this model is not "church" centered. I would reply,

- It is "church centered" in the sense of the church universal -- the "agents" of missionary work are part of the people of God, and it postulates a "partnership" between local churches (congregations) and missionary work
- It is not "church centered" in the sense of local churches or networks of churches (denominations) being "in charge" of missionary work. It postulates two primary "sendings" in the *missio Dei* not three (the "church" is not sent into the world to replace Jesus as the

⁴⁴ Paul Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian History through a Missiological Perspective* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 40.

agent of God's missionary work). It locates the responsibility for the leadership and direction of missionary work in God rather than churches.

As difficult as this is to implement in practice, I am convinced this is what we find in the New Testament.

Issue #2

Secondly, this proposal (Position 4) is controversial because of the emphasis on the role of the "apostles." Personally I am hesitant to use this word in a contemporary formulation of a theology of mission because it means so many different things to different people.⁴⁵ Chong Kim writes, "There is a radical difference in perspective and application of apostleship between the Western missions movement and nonwestern missions".⁴⁶ Johnson summarizes,

[For some] just the word 'apostle' carries too much baggage. Gibbs notes, 'the problem with using the term 'apostle' in many church traditions today is that it is open to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. To Catholics - and some Anglicans - apostolic speaks to a succession of authority. For charismatics, an apostolic ministry is one that continues the miraculous work of signs and wonders performed by the earliest apostles (cf. Acts 2:43). Despite the fact that some Protestants 'like the sound of it' too often 'apostle' has been used to gain authority and exercise autocratic leadership. Some claiming the gift begin to assume the authority of the office. It has led Grudem to give this caution: 'Though some may use the word *apostle* in English today to refer to very effective church planters or evangelists, it seems inappropriate and unhelpful to do so, for it simply confuses people who read the New Testament and see the high authority that is attributed to the office of 'apostle' there.'⁴⁷

The problem, as many have pointed out, is that we don't have another word that conveys the full idea of the biblical word *apostle* (the Latin form of the word *missionary*, is just as problematic).

Issue #3

Finally, this is a controversial proposal (Position 4) because it seems to support the tendency for mission agencies and individuals to "do as they please" without regard to existing churches. Mission agencies have used the "two structures" model proposed by Ralph Winter to

⁴⁵ John Johnson gives a helpful overview of this problem in his 2009 ETS address, "Is Apostolic Leadership the Key to the Missional Church?"

⁴⁶ Chong H. Kim, "Singapore '02: One Participant's Reflections" *Mission Frontiers* (Jan-Feb 2003), 13.

⁴⁷ Johnson, 11.

“justify their existence”. David Tai Woong Lee reminds us that Winter’s “two structure theory,” has helped shape Western mission, particularly from North America, since World War II... The western missionary community [has embraced] this theory wholeheartedly.⁴⁸

I suspect this may be one of the reasons many church leaders are reticent to support the “two structure” model. In my opinion, many of their criticisms are justified. The “two structures” in the model I’m proposing (Position 4) are not “mission society ⇔ local congregations” but “apostolic type missionary teams ⇔ local congregations.” There are some significant differences between these two. For example,

Sharp ministry focus

In the New Testament we do not see “apostolic type missionary teams” teams doing ministry tasks other than pioneer evangelism and church planting in unreached areas. Their ministry focus is sharp. Much of the work of many missionaries and mission societies lacks this sharp focus.

The clearest pattern in the New Testament for other “ministries” is in Acts 6. Unlike apostolic type missionary teams, which have a unique status in the New Testament, other ministries (such as the social relief work that happened in Acts 6), fall under the umbrella of the local church (in this case, the church in Jerusalem).

Calling

Most missionary work today is based on a “plan” or “strategy” for reaching an area or accomplishing a missionary objective, not on a person with an “apostolic type” calling. In the Position 4 model, the basis for an “apostolic type missionary team” is a team leader called to and gifted for “apostolic type missionary work.”

Partnership

Partnership between the two structures is an important part of the Position 4 model. Often times, the main link between local congregations and apostolic type missionary teams is financial. In the Pauline paradigm, a different type of financial relationship existed between the

⁴⁸ Lee, David Tai Woong, “Rethinking Missional Structures in the Globalized Mission Context, Both Church and Mission Societies,” *Connections*, (January-April 2004), 18.

missionary teams and the local congregations. The form of financial partnership that underlies much missionary work today has both strengths and weaknesses - it also helps create many of the tensions that exist in church-mission relationships.

Our globalized world

We live in a “globalized mission context.” “With the globalization of the Christian church and mission, mission is no longer as simple as it used to be in the beginning of the modern missionary movement.”⁴⁹ Many of the old paradigms no longer “fit” very well. Marv Newell, the Executive Director of CrossGlobal Link, recently stated,

“The greatest challenge today for leadership of traditional western missions is to navigate the transition from the historic paradigm of “from the West to the rest” into the not yet fully understood paradigm of “from anywhere to everywhere.” This transition is requiring that many consider new organizational structures, revision of policies in personnel and finance, and the morphing of an organizational culture from western to global.”⁵⁰

I’m convinced we need rethink our theology of mission. We have not looked closely enough at the New Testament. I believe that the model I’ve set forth in Position 4 is closer to the Scriptures than the other models. It can help us in this time of transition to a “globalized mission context.” It is rooted in the *missio Deo*, is God-centered and depends on the calling, leading and working of God’s Spirit. It allows for both the healthy emphasis of the *Missional Church* approach and at the same time does not do away with the work of *missionary teams* that have made such a significant contribution to the advance of the gospel in the last 200 years. It is flexible enough to fit a globalized, interconnected world, and in theory at least, is not tied to western finances and/or control. Even if we are not comfortable with some of the implications of this model, it is worth our consideration.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Ibid.*, 17

⁵⁰ Engage conference (June 1-4) invitation / <http://www.crossglobalink.org/ENGAGE>

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