

A SURVEY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT IN GLOBAL/LOCAL OUTREACH

by Bruce K. Camp

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This essay presents an overview of the past, present, and future practices of the local church in global/local outreach. The focus will be upon the Western evangelical church. In addition to analyzing historical and current practices of the church in outreach, the author offers possible trends and future activities of the church in missions.

Sizable and significant shifts have occurred and are occurring regarding Western evangelical local church participation in global and local outreach. Many churches seek to play a role that is different from what the local congregation historically has practiced. This new role will have profound ramifications in global/local outreach.

This essay will begin with a summary of local church practices in world evangelization during five periods of history.¹ These periods are as follows:

1. Spontaneous expansion (A.D. 33–311)
2. Expansion by the state (311–1700)
3. Influence of Pietism (1700–1800)
4. Expansion by mission structures (1789–1914)
5. The reawakening of the local church to its involvement in missions (1910–present)

After a review of the historical periods the author will explain three paradigms of current missions involvement by congregations and then offer several trends and forecasts for future involvement by churches.

Spontaneous Expansion (A.D. 33–311)

The expansion in the early church immediately following Christ's ascension can be categorized best as spontaneous. Church growth was accomplished by the witness of ordinary men and women, missionaries and local assemblies who followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Roland Allen writes: "In the beginning the Church was a missionary society: it added to its numbers mainly by the life and speech of its members attracting to it those who were outside."² James Scherer explains how this spontaneous expansion most likely occurred: "In part, it seems to have resulted from an awareness that mission was the task of ordinary Christians and of congregations acting together. Professional agents and special boards did not yet exist. Unconsciously these early Christians grasped that mission was a total activity involving preaching, teaching, baptism, personal witness and service to humanity."³ Harry Boer believes that the early church was propelled into action based upon the work of the Holy Spirit. He argues

that it was not the Great Commission that motivated people to witness; rather, it was the Pentecost event. In fact, Boer maintains that the early church leaders were reluctant to share the Gospel with non-Jewish people. He states that, as a result of the Spirit's work, the church became, by nature, a witnessing community. "Witnessing is not one among many functions or activities of the Church; it is of her essence to witness," Boer says, "and it is out of this witness that all her other activities take their rise."⁴

Whether evangelism and missions took place as a result of obedience to the Great Commission or as a by-product of the work of the Holy Spirit, the early church up until the time of Constantine spontaneously spread the Good News throughout much of the world. This spontaneous expansion is corroborated by the Scriptures and church history.

Verification by Scriptures

Sections of the Scriptures that highlight the extent of a gospel witness in the early church include the following: "Those who had been scattered [believers from the Jerusalem church] went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8). "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you [the church in Thessalonica], not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything" (1 Thess. 1:8). The Bible tells that the church grew both in times of peace and in times of persecution (Acts 2:41; 8:1–12). It expanded as a result of individuals declaring the Gospel wherever they happened to be *and* as a consequence of intentional witness (Acts 3:1–4:4; 16:6–10). Sometimes local assemblies were commended for their part in sounding forth the Good News; on other occasions an individual's missionary endeavors were highlighted for his ministry in furthering the gospel message (1 Thess. 1:8–10; Phil. 2:25–29). The extent of the declaration of the Gospel is described in the Scriptures as being worldwide, at least to the world as known to the early church.

J. Herbert Kane summarizes the geographic expansion of the early church in this way: "The Book of Acts opens with 120 timid disciples meeting secretly in an upper room in Jerusalem for fear of their enemies. A generation later, when the Book of Acts closes, the gospel had been preached as far west as Rome; and there was a thriving Christian church in almost every city of significance in the Eastern part of the empire. What began as a Jewish sect in A.D. 30 had grown into a world religion by A.D. 60."⁵ The Scriptures give substantial indication of this rapid expansion of the church in the first century. But what the Scriptures do not tell us, historical evidence does.

Verification by Historical Documents

One of the earliest historical evidences of the rapid growth of the Christian faith is found in correspondence between Pliny the Younger, who was an imperial legate in Bithynia in Asia Minor, to Trajan Pliny, the Roman emperor who reigned from A.D. 98 to 117. Pliny the Younger mentions that Christianity had made great progress and that it had spread not only in the cities but also in the villages and the countryside.⁶

Another indication of success in the spreading of the Gospel is found in Justin's work, *The First Apology* (ca. 153), chapter 39, where he mentions that twelve men went out from Jerusalem and announced the Gospel to men of every nation: "For twelve illiterate men, unskilled in the art of speaking, went out from Jerusalem into the world, and by the power of God they announced to the men of every nation that they were sent by Christ to teach everyone the word of God."⁷ From the evidence contained in these two documents, one could conclude that by the middle of the second century the Gospel was making such inroads throughout the world that it attracted attention from politicians and social historians alike. Who were the people that God was using to declare his message?

Missionaries

During the first two centuries of the early church, apostles (not the original twelve) ministered as itinerant missionaries. The Scriptures (in Acts 14:14, 2 Cor. 11:13, and Rev. 2:2, among others) highlight the activity of both true and false apostles.

This apostolic missionary activity is also documented in the *Didache*, written about A.D. 130–160, also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. This Christian writing contains moral exhortations for believers, instructions on baptism and fasts, the Lord’s Prayer, and rules concerning hospitality towards apostles and prophets.⁸ In addition, the document indicates that the apostles, as itinerant missionaries, were not permanently elected officials of an individual church. Rather, they were dedicated to poverty, and they could not settle down in any one place. Adolf Harnack believes that apostles, prophets, and teachers were all called to have a ministry to the church as a whole but not to have a permanent ministry like that of bishops, elders, and deacons. In addition, according to Harnack, the apostles received much honor for their ministry, a fact which, in turn, apparently resulted in abuses by others posing as apostles.⁹ To correct this abuse, the *Didache* says, “But let him not stay more than one day, or if need be a second as well; if he stays three days, he is a false prophet.”¹⁰

While the first-century work of the apostles is well documented, the missionary ministry of the apostles during the second century is largely unknown. With the exception of Pantaenus, who ministered in India, very few details of the ministry of the apostles were recorded during this period.¹¹ Apostle missionaries were an important element in the spread of the church in the first century. However, they were not the primary cause of the spread of the Christian faith, for laymen and -women provided an even greater witnessing force.

Laymen and Laywomen

Besides the professionals (apostles, prophets, and teachers), there were others whom God used to declare his message. Harnack says: “We cannot hesitate to believe that the great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries.”¹² Latourette concurs: “The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.”¹³

So powerful was the witness of these informal missionaries, according to Stephen Neill, that by the end of the third century 10 percent of the population of the Roman empire, estimated at 50 million, was Christian. Neill reminds the reader, however, that distribution of the Christian faith was very uneven. Some parts of Asia Minor were 50 percent Christian, while other sections of the world, such as the inland parts of Greece, were hardly penetrated with the Gospel.¹⁴

Overall, however, the believers apparently were able to expand the faith quite rapidly. Michael Green identifies several reasons why people may have been so attracted to the Gospel during this period: the evidence of transformed lives, the opportunity for fellowship that a church offered for all people, the joy and endurance of believers even under persecution, and spiritual power that included healings and exorcisms.¹⁵ Henry Chadwick adds that the most potent single cause of Christian success during this time was the practical application of charity. He mentions that believers would care for the poor, widows, and orphans, would visit the brethren in prisons and mines, and would help others in times of calamity.¹⁶ The early Christians also used several evangelistic methods to draw people into the church: public evangelism (in synagogues or open air, and through prophetic preaching as well as personal testimony), household evangelism, personal evangelism, and literary evangelism.¹⁷

To provide an overview of this epoch, Bavinc summarizes this period of spontaneous expansion as follows: (1) Outreach was spontaneous, and there was little reflection on the motive for missions. (2) Missionary work was primarily monocultural. (3) Political aims were not attached to missions. (4) Missionary work was not comprehensive, but rather, ministries developed out of a sense of Christian compassion in specific situations.¹⁸

James Bergquist postulates a reason why local congregations have not been acknowledged more for their involvement in missions: “Many if not most of the standard histories of the early church have dealt with the fact of Christian expansion, but have seldom looked in detail at how the growth was achieved.”¹⁹ He suggests that individuals look to specialized studies such as John Gager’s²⁰ and E. Glenn Hinson’s²¹ in order to gain a more accurate picture of ways the local church has contributed to the expansion of Christianity. Gager maintains that while many external and internal factors contributed to

the growth of Christianity, the single overriding internal factor was “the radical sense of Christian community,” which was open to all but required absolute and exclusive loyalty and involved every aspect of a believer’s life.²² Hinson documents that the corporate church played a major role in evangelizing the ancient world during the first three or four centuries. He believes that churches served as missionary communities and would evangelize and incorporate persons in their areas.²³ By the mid-second century, Hinson observes, the clergy began to take a more active role in the dissemination of the gospel message. He offers four patterns of starting churches: (1) sometimes a bishop or group of bishops would send another bishop to evangelize and start a church; (2) at other times a bishop would send presbyters or deacons to start a church; (3) now and then the closest bishop to a group of Christians would instruct the group until they were ready to elect a bishop or presbyter who would complete the constitution of the church; and (4) sometimes a bishop would evangelize an area until he had prepared a suitable candidate to replace himself.²⁴

In conclusion, the first era of the expansion of the church can be characterized by spontaneous witnessing by laymen and -women as well as intentional missionary efforts by local churches to send representatives to declare the Gospel. Global evangelism was prompted by the Holy Spirit and was not the result of a developed theology of missions. Mission agency structures had not yet come on the scene. Missions was the duty of every Christian. But what was accomplished so well by individual missionaries in the first few centuries was carried on by the state during the next fourteen centuries.

Expansion by the State (A.D. 311–1700)

During the 1,350-year-plus period of A.D. 311–1700, the vehicle of expansion changed from ordinary believers to governments. No longer were individuals primarily responsible for declaring the gospel message; rather, it became the duty of the political hierarchy. The statement has been made that the monastic movement was the primary means by which Christianity expanded during these years.²⁵ However, while there were many monks talking about Jesus Christ, their impact in converting non-Christians was relatively small compared to that of the political rulers. Latourette says, “The age [A.D. 500–1500] was one in which Christianity owed its spread largely to the patronage of rulers.”²⁶ In fact, he describes this growth as “almost monotonous uniformity.”²⁷ His synopsis of the way Christianity spread during this time was that a few individual converts were won by either merchants, captives, or monks. These new believers had little or no effect on the country as a whole. Later there was a mass movement into the church, usually led by rulers and not infrequently hastened by the use of force. Then, slowly, the masses learned about the Christian faith, usually through the ministry of the monks.²⁸

Christianity as State Religion

This new mode of expansion dates back to approximately A.D. 311, the year when the Edict of Milan was decreed by Emperor Constantine. The edict granted tolerance to Christians, allowed for conversion to Christianity, and stipulated that church property that had been taken during the persecutions must be restored to the Christian communities. Before this time Christians frequently had been persecuted for their faith, the extent of persecution depending upon which emperor was in power. Now they were recognized by the state as being an official religion. Thus began the movement of Christianity toward becoming a state religion. Will Durant comments: “By his [Constantine’s] aid Christianity became a state as well as a church, and the mold, for fourteen centuries, of European life and thought.”²⁹ Williston Walker adds: “To Constantine’s essentially political mind Christianity was the completion of the process of unification which had been long in progress in the empire. It had one Emperor, one law, and one citizenship for all free men. It should have one religion.”³⁰

When Christianity became a state religion, the churches were flooded with people who wanted, or were forced, to adopt the emperor’s religion. With these new “converts” came pre-Christian belief systems that were incompatible with the Gospel. Latourette writes: “The Church, in alliance with a state of pre-Christian origin and flooded by those who had come over lightheartedly from paganism, was found

acquiescing to much in its membership and in the society which it now embraced within its fold which was quite antagonistic to its professed principles.”³¹

Monasticism

From within, the church faced nominalism and syncretism; from without, it now was intertwined with a political system. Moral decay inside the church led many to separate from it and form monastic movements, which originally were not intended to carry out a missionary function but to allow individuals to practice Christianity uninhibited by the evils of society around them. However, the quiet zeal of the monks attracted others, and monasteries rapidly proliferated.

Ralph Winter provides an example of the use of the monastic movement even by the state church to plant a new diocese. Gregory the Great, bishop of the diocese of Rome in A.D. 596, wanted to plant a diocesan structure in England, but he had no ministry vehicle to accomplish this goal. He requested help from Augustine, a member of the Benedictine monastery, to plant a diocesan structure in England. Winter’s point is that, as strong as Gregory was in his own diocese, he had no structure to utilize to reach out in this intended mission other than a sodality.³²

Bruce Shelly notes that the monastic calling seemed, for many, the truest form of Christian life. While abuses and evils were indeed present in the monastic movement, the immense service which the monks rendered in the spread of Christianity and development of civilization should not be underrated.³³ Philip Schaff says: “By drawing to themselves the best spirits of the time, the convents became in their good days, from the tenth well into the thirteenth century, hearthstones of piety, and the chief centers of missionary and civilizing agencies.”³⁴

In any discussion of monasticism such notable missionaries as Ulfilas (*ca.* 311–383), Patrick (*ca.* 389–461), Columba (521–596), Alopen (seventh century), and Boniface (680–754) warrant mention. These individuals, along with others, were instrumental in the spread of Christianity. However, as noted earlier, while the monastic movement played a major role in the expansion of the Christian faith that Protestant histories tend to ignore, governments and political forces probably played an even more significant role in world evangelism.

Government Involvement

In their quest for expansion, governments in this era also became involved in the missionary enterprise. Ruth Tucker writes: “From the beginning, Roman Catholic missions were closely tied to political and military exploits, and mass conversions were the major factor in church growth. Political leaders were sought out and through promises of military aid became nominal Christians, their subjects generally following suit.”³⁵

Schaff³⁶ provides specific examples of governments assisting the masses to become Christians. His illustrations include Charlemagne (771–814) conquering and Christianizing the Saxons; Alfred the Great in 878 forcing some thirty Vikings to accept Christianity; Ratislav, a prince in Moravia, requesting missionaries for his homeland (*ca.* 862); and Vladimir of Russia (988) forcing his countrymen to be baptized.

The Crusades and the activities of the kings of Portugal and Spain further assisted the spread of Christianity. In 1493 Pope Alexander VI issued a Demarcation Bull that divided the world into two spheres of influence: Portugal was given Africa and the East Indies, and Spain was given the New World. In return for these areas, the kings of Portugal and Spain were responsible for the conversion of the heathen in their overseas dominions. This system became known as the *Patronato*.

The civil authorities of Portugal and Spain took their Christian responsibility seriously. Joseph Schmidlin writes: “Beginning with Columbus and Vasco da Gama, all the Spanish and Portuguese explorers regarded their expeditions as likewise crusades and missionary voyages, for the purpose of seeking Christians (as well as spices) and of opposing the unbelievers with fire and sword if they rejected the Christian law which the missionaries first preached with the spiritual sword.”³⁷

Redefinition of Missions

While the Roman Catholic Church utilized the *Patronato* system to expand its domain, it also had at its disposal many religious orders that were willing to take the Catholic Church's message to any part of the world. Four orders, in particular, are noteworthy for their missionary endeavors. They are the Franciscans (established 1210), the Augustinians (1215), the Dominicans (1216), and the Jesuits (1540). Some consider these orders as the first missionary societies and thus date the beginning of societies around 1210. However, missionary societies of today have as their primary emphasis the spreading of the Gospel; and to argue that the Catholic orders were concerned primarily with the expansion of the church would be debatable, although it was one of their objectives.³⁸ The Jesuits, for example, had a great missionary tradition, but their primary goal was to render unlimited obedience to the Pope.³⁹ The first Catholic mission society, established by a pope for the purpose of disseminating the Christian message and under his authority, began when Pope Gregory XV in 1622 founded the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.⁴⁰

Addison Soltau suggests that since Christianity was at this time a religion of the state, the church redefined the way it understood its mission. "Mission now came to be understood in a geographic sense. The unbeliever who needed to be evangelized was no longer one's neighbor, but the barbarian who lived on the borders of the empire. In a comparatively short time missions changed from being an activity of the local congregation and became a task carried on by special agents in remote areas. Unbelievers were no longer within the reach of the daily witness of the ordinary believer. This new understanding of mission dominated the thinking of the church from then on. From the fourth century missions was thought of as something distinct from the mainstream of the church's life."⁴¹ Soltau offers an important insight to the discussion of the local church's role in missions. He maintains that missions was seen as the obligation of local churches and all believers prior to the Edict of Milan. But from the time of Constantine, missions became separate from the normal life of a church and was seen only in geographic dimensions of reaching the barbarian tribes outside of the empire. David Bosch concurs: "No local church in Europe could still undertake any mission work in its own neighborhood since the only remaining pagans now lived far across the ocean. Mission thus became the task of travellers to distant lands."⁴²

Bavinck provides the following overview of the missionary activity of the church during the Middle Ages: (1) In the broadest sense, the transmission of culture was now connected with missions. (2) A political background was acquired by missions, as it was the state that initiated the work of expansion. (3) The church as a whole viewed missionary work as drawing wild and uncivilized people into the light of Christian culture and assimilating them into the Christian empire.⁴³

The practice of missions changed radically during the Middle Ages. No longer was it the ministry of individuals and congregations; now it was the responsibility of governments. The imparting of Christian culture was now more important than saving souls. No longer was the goal evangelizing a neighbor, but "Christianizing" the barbarians outside of the empire. With the government and monastic involvement in missions during this period, it is easy to understand how local congregations could have lost their missions vision. Interestingly enough, local assemblies did not regain their zeal for missions even during the Reformation. In fact, it took several hundred years—well into the 1700s—before any significant change came in terms of the local church and its influence in missions.

Influence of Pietism (1700–1800)

Reformation Context

To understand properly the Pietistic era, one must go back to the Reformation, to the context within which Pietism began. Walker provides a description of the religious and economic situation and events in Germany at the beginning of the sixteenth century: papal taxation and interference with churchly appointments, unworthy clergy, monasteries in need of reform, economic unrest, rising German humanism, and the stirrings of popular religious awakenings that resulted in a deepening sense of terror about death and concern for salvation.⁴⁴

While the Reformers were successful in bringing many people back to the early church's (biblical) view of salvation by faith alone, they did not bring individuals and congregations back to the earlier missions paradigm for evangelism either locally or globally. Latourette offers six reasons why missions was not actively considered by the Reformers:

1. In the initial stages of the movement, Protestantism was so engrossed in making a place for itself against Roman Catholicism—in working out its own theological positions, adjudicating controversies among its various leaders, and effecting the organization—that its members had little time for non-Christians outside of western Europe.
2. Several of the early leaders of Protestantism disavowed any obligation to carry the Christian message to non-Christians. Luther and Melancthon both believed that the end of the world was so imminent that no time remained to spread the Gospel throughout the world. In addition, Luther and others believed that the command to “preach the gospel to every creature” was binding only on the original apostles and that the Gospel already had been proclaimed throughout the earth. (According to Gustav Warneck, Melancthon believed it was the duty of the civil authorities, and not the individual believers, to extend the gospel message. Zwingli's position was to allow messengers “called of God” to go at their own risk to declare the Gospel, but he was silent regarding the duty of the church to send out missionaries. Calvin also did not emphasize the missionary duty of the church. He believed that the kingdom of God was not to be advanced or maintained by the industry of men, but that it was to remain the work of God alone through “election.” While a few churchmen believed and taught that the Great Commission still applied to the church, most of the better-known church fathers either did not write about the subject or were silent about it.)
3. Protestantism was preoccupied with the wars which arose out of the separation of the Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church.
4. Protestant governments were relatively indifferent to spreading the Christian message among non-Christians.
5. Protestants lacked the monastic system that, for over a thousand years, had been the chief agent for propagating the faith. Luther had rejected the monastic orders (sodalities) because of their lack of spiritual vitality.
6. Protestants were not active in missions because they had relatively little contact with non-Christians. It was not until British and Dutch sea power arose that Protestants had direct commercial contact with non-Christians.⁴⁵

In summary, according to Latourette, theology, internal and external struggles, lack of a missionary structure, and inadequate means of expansion all resulted in the failure of the Reformers to recapture the missionary vision of the early church.

It should be noted that there were several missionary endeavors during this era, such as Calvin's sending of evangelists back to his homeland in France and commissioning four missionaries and a number of Huguenots to travel to Brazil and establish a colony to evangelize the Indians. George Fox sent three missionaries to China, and Justinian von Wetz called for the church to recognize its missionary obligation, organize a missionary society to accomplish the task, and set up a school for missionary training. Although none of these activities succeeded,⁴⁶ the Anabaptists stand out as an exception to these failures. They maintained that the Great Commission was mandatory for all believers.⁴⁷ Yet, generally speaking, it took a renewal within the Protestant churches before Protestants recaptured a vision for a lost world.

Pietism was born in this environment and in turn gave birth to the modern Protestant missions movement. Gustav Warneck writes: “It was in the age of Pietism that missions struck their first deep roots, and it is the spirit of Pietism which, after Rationalism had laid its hoar-frost on the first blossoming, again revived them, and has brought them to their present bloom.”⁴⁸ Neill agrees: “The history of

missions supported by Churches on the European continent begins only with the emergence of the movement called pietism.”⁴⁹

Renewal Through Pietism

The Pietist movement was a reaction against the dead orthodoxy found in the Protestant state churches at the time. Some of the major tenets of Pietism were (1) that individuals need a personal and growing relationship with God, (2) that every Christian should have an understanding of the Bible, and (3) that believers have a responsibility to live holy lives, proclaim the Gospel, and help the needy. Kane’s analysis of the movement is that “[t]here can be no missionary vision without evangelistic zeal; there can be no evangelistic zeal without personal piety; there can be no personal piety without a genuine conversion experience.”⁵⁰

Pietism began with an individual’s personal relationship with God and moved forward from there. As a consequence, the universal priesthood of the believer received a new emphasis, and personal Bible study, prayer, and meditation became the hallmarks of Pietists. Unfortunately, Pietists were ridiculed and labeled as heretics by religious leaders because the Pietists saw Christianity as beginning with the individual and not merely belonging to the state church.

The “Father of Pietism,” Philip Spener (1635–1705), was a Lutheran pastor who in 1670 began to have a small group meet in his home for Bible reading, prayer, and a discussion of the Sunday sermons. His purpose for the group was to deepen the spiritual life of those who attended. Spener proposed the gathering of circles (small face-to-face groups) within the various congregations—*ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (circles within a church)—for Bible reading. He also suggested better training for the clergy and believed that ministers should be held responsible for their lifestyles. In addition, he recommended that since Christianity is more than intellectual knowledge, a new type of preaching was in order.⁵¹ As a result of his many new ideas, Spener was labeled a heretic. From the beginning Spener’s goal was never to separate from the church but rather to gather those from within the church who were concerned for their own salvation and the salvation of others. Pietism began to blossom, and when the universities of Saxony did not allow Pietists to enter their schools, Pietists founded their own University of Halle in 1691, formally opening it in 1694. Spener taught at the university for ten years and had August Francke join the faculty at the school.

As a result of Francke’s efforts the University of Halle became the fountainhead of Pietism. Mark Noll says, “Under his leadership Halle became the center of Protestantism’s most ambitious missionary endeavors to that time.”⁵² Walker says, “At a time when Protestants generally still failed to recognize the missionary obligation, Francke and his associates awoke to it.”⁵³ Protestant missions began from this institution, first with the Danish-Halle Mission and then, more notably, with the Moravians.

Missionary Efforts

The Danish-Halle Mission originated as a result of King Frederick IV of Denmark’s 1705 commissioning of Franz Lutkins, court chaplain of Copenhagen, to find missionaries for Danish colonies. Not finding any willing and suitable men in Denmark, Lutkins contacted Spener and Francke for assistance. They suggested two Germans: Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, both of whom had studied at Halle under Francke. The German church hierarchy and the orthodox Danish church authorities opposed the missionary endeavor, primarily because of its connection with the Pietistic movement. Nevertheless, the two missionaries did make it to India in 1706, and ultimately the Danish-Halle Mission recruited sixty missionaries from Halle.

It was Francke’s desire that missions would again be associated with local churches. While that dream never came to fulfillment, he was successful in helping some Christians understand that world evangelism was the duty not of the government, but of believers. Warneck writes: “True, he did not succeed in making missions the actual business of congregations or of the church, for the ‘official’ church declined the service. It was (and it remains still) only ‘ecclesiolae in ecclesia,’ which formed the missionary church at home. But there was this great advance, that from Francke’s time onward missions were no longer regarded merely as a duty of the colonial governments, but as a concern of believing

Christendom, that individual voluntarism (freewillinghood) was involved in them, and that this voluntarism was made active in furnishing means for their support. Without Francke the Danish mission would soon have gone to sleep again.”⁵⁴

In addition to assisting the Danish-Halle Mission, Francke and Spener were influential in the spiritual life of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), who became the bishop of the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf was sent to Halle at the age of ten and studied under Francke. During this time he and some other school friends formed the “Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed,” a Christian fraternity dedicated to “loving the whole human family” and to spreading the Gospel.

In 1722 German-speaking Moravian refugees settled on Zinzendorf’s Berthelsdorf estate and founded a community named Herrnhut (meaning “the Lord’s watch”). Soon other religious refugees from various backgrounds arrived. In 1727 a revival swept the community which resulted in a passion for missions. After a trip to Copenhagen, where the count met two native Greenlanders and a Negro slave from the West Indies—each of whom pleaded for him to send missionaries to their lands—von Zinzendorf returned to his home convinced of the urgency to send out missionaries. “Within a year the first two Moravian missionaries had been commissioned to the Virgin Islands, and in the two decades that followed, the Moravians sent out more missionaries than all the Protestants (and Anglicans) had sent out in the previous two decades.”⁵⁵

Bavinck notes the following characteristics of this era:

1. Missions no longer operated in close connection with the government agencies of colonial powers.
2. The message of missions was individual repentance and faith in Christ. Other emphases were deep personal piety and anticipation of Christ’s immediate return.
3. In general, the churches were not able to exert much effort in the task of missions. The state church was not inclined to risk missionary activities. Thus, missions was separated from the official church leadership and was conducted by small groups.
4. The motive for missions was the believers’ need to tell others about Christ’s love as experienced in their own spiritual life.
5. The Pietistic concepts of missions that excluded the questions of national community and culture were not accepted by others.⁵⁶

Soltau offers a provocative insight on the Pietistic movement. He maintains that the movement had a nontheological missions basis and that it did not challenge the theology of its day: “Those involved in the spread of the gospel were content to do the work of missions rather than seek a broad theological base for what they believed to be God’s clear and unmistakable purpose. On the one hand the church utilized theology to serve its own ends, to excuse its unwillingness to participate in missions. But on the other hand, while the Pietists remained steadfast in their pursuit, they did so without much recourse to theology. In short, the modern missionary movement was primarily a non-theological one.”⁵⁷

Scherer offers an additional insight on Pietism, pointing out that the Pietistic movement contributed to the divorce of the church and missions: “In making mission work the special concern of spiritually regenerated groups and individuals, rather than the task of the entire church, pietists contributed to a divorce between church and mission which still formally exists in many European regional churches. Even in those churches where mission has been “integrated” into the life of the church, mission work is generally seen as the cause of special-interest groups. Pietism activated many persons in mission, but it did not establish a genuine universal priesthood based on Baptism.”⁵⁸

Expansion by Mission Structures (1789–1914)

While the expansion of the Protestant Christian faith during the first three hundred years after the Reformation was noteworthy, it was not a triumphant success. Neill writes, “In 1800 it was still by no

means certain that Christianity would be successful in turning itself into a universal religion.”⁵⁹ However, by the end of the century Protestant Christianity had spread like wildfire. Latourette writes: “Never before in a period of equal length had Christianity or any other religion penetrated for the first time as large an area as it had in the nineteenth century in the regions covered by this volume [the Americas, Australasia, and Africa].”⁶⁰

A number of factors fueled the rapid expansion of the Protestant Christian faith during this era. Tucker⁶¹ mentions that it was a time of reform movements, as the Age of Enlightenment and eighteenth-century rationalism had given way to the Age of Romanticism—a time to put theory into practice. Other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam were relatively quiescent, and Catholicism was actually declining in many parts of the world as the French Revolution cut the economic purse strings of Roman Catholic missions. It was a time of relative world peace. People no longer saw religion as something that the state organized and administered, but as the responsibility of each individual—to take care of his own spiritual condition and to reach out to others. Harold Cook adds, “Increasingly missions were held to be the responsibility of the organized church. The church, rather than the state, had to take up the task and carry it through, even at times in opposition to the state’s desires.”⁶²

While there was a shift of emphasis from governments to believers, in the matter of whose duty it was to take the Christian message to the unevangelized, there was no corresponding change in attitude for many local congregations to facilitate this process. Because there was a reluctance to take up the challenge of global evangelism, mission societies arose to tackle the task. Neill comments: “[T]his was the great age of societies. In many cases the Protestant Churches as such were unable or unwilling themselves to take up the cause of missions. This was left to the voluntary societies, dependent on the initiative of consecrated individuals, and relying for financial support on the voluntary gifts of interested Christians.”⁶³

William Carey

During this time William Carey, the “father of modern missions,” began his work. Kane says of Carey, “What Luther was to the Protestant Reformation, Carey was to the Christian missionary movement.”⁶⁴ Carey was converted to Christ at the age of eighteen and left the Church of England to join the Particular Baptists. His view of missions began to evolve while reading *Captain Cook’s Voyages*. As he pinpointed regions of the world on a map, he saw places where people were still living in ignorance of God. As he studied the Bible, he became convinced that the Great Commission still applied to the church in his day. He posed the following arguments for this view: first, if the command to teach all nations was restricted to the apostles, then so should be the command to baptize; second, if the command applied only to the apostles, then those who had gone out after that time had done so without warrant; third, if the command applied only to the apostles, then the promise of God’s divine presence in this work would also be limited.⁶⁵

In the spring of 1792 Carey published a small book entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, which presented the biblical rationale and the need for world missions. One of the “means” to which he referred was mission societies. Prior to 1792, only three mission societies were in existence, all designed to operate within the colonial framework of North America. These were the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England (founded in 1649), the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (founded in 1698 as an independent mission within the Anglican Church), and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (founded in 1701 as a mission agency of the Church of England).⁶⁶

Development of Mission Societies

Ralph Winter describes Carey’s *Enquiry* as the “Magna Carta of the Protestant missions movement.”⁶⁷ As a result of that publication, as well as encouragement from Carey, several mission societies formed within the next thirty years: the London Missionary Society (1795), the Scottish and Glasgow Missionary Societies (1796), the Netherlands Missionary Society (1797), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), the American Board of Commissioners for

Foreign Missions (1810), the American Baptist Missionary Union (1814), and the American Bible Society (1826).⁶⁸

During this time mission agencies were not governed by denominations. Even Carey's mission, the Baptist Missionary Society, while it had arisen within the denominational framework, was not sponsored or directed by the denominational hierarchy. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, denominations themselves began to initiate mission societies.⁶⁹ Some of the denominational mission societies of this era were the Wesleyan Methodists, American Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

What began as a handful of mission societies in the 1790s had, by 1999, increased to at least 693 agencies in the United States and 121 in Canada, according to the 2001–2003 edition of the *Mission Handbook*.⁷⁰

Why was there not more involvement by local congregations in global evangelism during Carey's era? Neill suggests that it was because the majority of Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century were not churchmen and because the doctrine of the church played a far lesser role in theology in those days than it does today. "The emphasis was on the Church as an administrative organization, as a corporation, rather than on the Church as the divine creation, the body of Christ," says Neill.⁷¹

Latourette has noted some of the main features of Protestant Christianity in the nineteenth century:

1. The mission societies were influenced by individualism, the Pietistic tradition, the Wesleyan movement, and the revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷²
2. Students, women, and laypeople played a significant role in mobilizing individuals to help spread the Gospel.⁷³
3. The financial base of support for missions changed from governments and a few wealthy individuals, or the missionaries themselves, to hundreds of thousands of givers. For the first time, a substantial minority of laymen and clergy became interested in and contributors to world missions.⁷⁴ Latourette expounds further on this subject: "While in any one congregation those actively interested in 'missions' were generally in the minority, and although much opposition was voiced by the church members and indifference characterized the majority, in the aggregate, by the latter part of the century, the contributors to these societies numbered several hundred thousands."⁷⁵
4. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw a rapid increase of the nondenominational societies for the spread of Christianity.⁷⁶

While it is true that Christianity was expanding geographically during this era, this expansion was not a direct result of a strong local church emphasis. Denominations supported missionary endeavors, but the major efforts in expansion came from individuals and independent societies. The chasm between the local church and missions that began during the reign of Constantine continued through what might be called the age of mission societies. A theology of missions that included the local church had yet to be developed.

The Reawakening of the Local Church to Its Involvement in Missions (1910–Present)

While early Christian churches played a significant role in world evangelism during the first few centuries A.D., the role of the church was minimal during the following sixteen hundred years. It was not until 1910 and the first World Missionary Conference that the local church began to reawaken to its role in world missions. Most ecumenical churches trace their missions histories back to this 1910 conference. This, together with several subsequent missions conferences, in fact, facilitated the church's movement in world evangelism from virtual noninterest to active involvement in the missionary enterprise. This section

will briefly review the role of the church in missions from an evangelical conference perspective and then articulate the activities of churches in missions from a practical perspective.

World Missionary Conference (1910)

In June of 1910 over twelve hundred individuals from 159 missionary societies gathered in Edinburgh, Scotland, for what proved to be an extremely significant missionary conference. It was a conference devoted to strategizing a final campaign to present the offer of salvation to everyone on the face of the earth.⁷⁷ But the Edinburgh conference began an emphasis on missionary cooperation without a prior doctrinal consensus between the many denominations in attendance. Indeed, there was very little discussion of theology.

One of the conference's greatest accomplishments was the establishment of a Continuation Committee that eventually became the International Missionary Council (IMC). It was set up to promote international missionary cooperation. The IMC had no doctrinal guidelines of its own; its aim was "to further the proclamation to the whole world of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the end that all men may believe in him and be saved."⁷⁸ However, because of a lack of doctrinal agreement, important differences would emerge between the many denominations desiring to cooperate.

By the conclusion of the World Missionary Conference, delegates agreed that the responsibility for the task of world missions fell upon the church as a whole. While local assemblies were charged to take part in this commission, they were *not viewed as the only catalyst* in world evangelization. In the final message of the conference the emphasis was made that the responsibility for evangelism "is committed to all and each within the Christian family; and it is incumbent on every member of the Church. . . . The missionary task demands from every Christian, and from every congregation, a change in the existing scale of missionary zeal and service."⁷⁹

Wheaton Congress (1966)

Building upon the foundation laid at the 1910 Edinburgh conference, the Wheaton Congress has been regarded by evangelicals as a key event that has resulted in current-day evangelical cooperation in missions. The Wheaton Congress marked the beginning of evangelicals coming together to discuss global evangelism on a large scale. It was here that the importance of the local assembly in world missions was widely recognized. Two American inter-mission organizations, the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA), representing thirteen thousand overseas missionaries, jointly sponsored a conference at Wheaton College in Illinois and entitled it "The Congress on the Church's World-Wide Mission." Nine hundred thirty-eight delegates from seventy-one countries attended the conference. Harold Lindsell wrote the following five points as rationale for the necessity of such a conference:

1. In the events of the past decade which culminated in the demise of the International Missionary Council in 1961,
 2. In the subsequent need for evangelicals to define their own position in light of this change,
 3. In the desire for a closer fellowship of evangelicals committed to fulfill the terms of the Great Commission,
 4. In the realization that changing modes of thought require a reaffirmation of Biblical missionary principles and a re-examination of missionary attitudes,
 5. In the conviction of the continually pressing spiritual needs of a world that is shrinking in size but increasing in complexity,
- Therefore it becomes the duty of evangelical leadership to make plain to the world their theory, strategy and practice of the Church's universal mission.⁸⁰

The Wheaton Declaration, which was unanimously adopted by the delegates, stated that the local church has primary responsibility for world evangelism. One of its more pointed statements in this regard is: "In the Acts of the Apostles local congregations were God's primary agents for the widespread

dissemination of the gospel. The total mobilization of the people and resources of the churches in effective, continuous evangelistic outreach is indispensable to the evangelization of the world (Acts 17:1–4 and I Thessalonians 1:8–9; Ephesians 4:16).”⁸¹

Berlin Congress (1966)

From October 24 to November 4, 1966, evangelicals held another significant missions convention in Berlin, Germany. *Christianity Today* magazine sponsored the convention, entitled “The Berlin World Congress on Evangelism,” which drew over eleven hundred evangelical leaders from over a hundred countries. The theme of the congress was “One Race, One Gospel, One Task.” In his opening address Billy Graham, the honorary chairman of the conference, spelled out the necessity for convening the congress at that time. He stated that there was confusion in the church worldwide as to the very meaning, message, and method of evangelism as well as the strategy of the enemy of evangelism.⁸²

At Berlin many messages exhorted the delegates to practice evangelism, but little was said about the role of the local church in missions and evangelism. Bassham comments on this lack of emphasis on the local church: “Berlin’s participants assumed the place of the church in the total process of evangelism. The church received little attention in the theological addresses. Yet probably most would have agreed with the theological presuppositions made by Künneth about the church when he stated: “‘Gospel’ and ‘Church’ . . . stand in an indissoluble relationship. The Gospel points to the Church, and the Church derives from the Gospel.””⁸³

Green Lake (1971)

For evangelicals the issue of the local church’s role in missions, from a theological viewpoint, surfaced for the first time in the 1960s at both the Wheaton and Berlin conferences. Still, a theological rationale for local church involvement in global evangelism needed further clarification. This clarification began in the 1970s and 1980s. Green Lake ’71 (GL ’71) was a significant conference because it brought this issue to the forefront.

An important convention occurred for U.S. mission agency executives in Green Lake, Wisconsin, from September 27 through October 1, 1971, as delegates tried to address many significant issues related to both the “home church” and the “receiving church.” Sponsored by the IFMA and EFMA, GL ’71 was designed to address, on the one hand, tensions in the relationship between the local church in the United States and the mission agency (church/mission) and, on the other hand, tensions between the mission agency and the national church (agency/church).

The IFMA prepared a list of subjects with primary and subsidiary questions for each topic and sent the list to its constituency for study before the convention. The topics and primary questions which related to the church/mission tension were:

1. Recruitment: Has consideration been given to the wide variety of churches, pastors and officers with which the IFMA deals? What problem is presented by the mobility of students and consequent limited contacts with any one church? How should the largely impersonal relationship between mission and churches regarding recruits be improved? How can the mission help the many candidates who apparently fail to demonstrate in their home churches qualifying gifts for missionary service?
2. Mission Structure: How can the mission increase the voice of a local church in mission affairs? How can communications between the church and mission on official matters be improved? How can meaningful involvement of churches or pastors in mission affairs be secured considering the diversity of structures in churches and missions?
3. Finances and Publication: Has the mission defined the responsibility of the church and the mission in the securing of support for missionaries, candidates and administrative expenses? How can communication be improved between home churches and mission boards? How can help be given to meet the support needs of nationals who replace missionaries in overseas service

functions? How can IFMA missions adequately project a favorable contemporary image to supporting churches?

4. Mission Personnel: How can local churches receive from mission agencies an accounting of the stewardship of missionary manpower? How can the missionary on furlough best serve within the program of a local church? How can the church exercise a spiritual ministry to the children of missionaries in North America in post-high school training? How can the mission and the local sending church cooperate to minister to the specific pastoral care needs of the missionary family during furlough?⁸⁴

It is apparent that these questions were asked from a practical perspective. But the primary thesis question—Biblically, how should a church be involved in global evangelism?—was not addressed. Perhaps this is why Harvie Conn writes: “The only radical theological perspectives were provided by Edmund P. Clowney’s morning messages on ‘The Biblical Doctrine of the Ministry of the Church (Biblical Ecclesiology and the Crisis in Missions).’ And, judging from the essays published after Green Lake, they played little normative part in the structuring of solutions. The activism of evangelical missions thinking continued to present the picture of a ‘church without theology’ and a ‘mission without theology.’ Biblical theology functioned on a devotional, not a canonical level.” Conn concludes: “We are convinced that, as long as evangelical missions theory continues to develop on a purely functional level, without the operative judgment of biblical theology, the tension areas cannot be isolated and solutions cannot be found. We are also convinced that the tension areas of a basic sort are theological in nature.”⁸⁵

Lausanne I (1974)

The Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelism, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July of 1974, featured Billy Graham as the honorary chairman and the primary catalyst for the gathering. He had four hopes for this congress: (1) to see the congress frame a biblical declaration on evangelism, (2) to see the church challenged to complete the task of world evangelization, (3) to state the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, and (4) to develop a new *koinonia* or fellowship among evangelicals of all persuasions throughout the world.⁸⁶

While Berlin 1966 was predominantly Western in representation, Lausanne 1974 was not. The 2,700 delegates and 1,000 observers, guests, and staff came from 150 countries. Close to 50 percent of the participants were from the Two-Thirds World.

Three of the most significant outcomes of the Lausanne conference were (1) the emphasis on the unreached peoples and the priority of cross-cultural evangelism, (2) the formation of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE), and (3) the adoption of the Lausanne Covenant (a statement of evangelical mission theology). Saphir Athyal, a leader in the Lausanne movement and the principal of Union Biblical Seminary in India, writes about the covenant: “This historical statement served as a theological basis for the evangelicals for their fuller understanding of the nature of the gospel and the task of evangelization. Thus, the covenant has since become a basis for fellowship and cooperation in world evangelization.”⁸⁷ The covenant is divided into fifteen sections. Of these, two deal directly with the issue of the local church’s involvement in global evangelism: section 6, “The Church and Evangelism,” and section 8, “Churches in Evangelistic Partnership.” Because of the significance of the Lausanne Covenant and its recognition of the local congregation’s role in evangelism, both sections are quoted below.

The Church and Evangelism (Clause 6)

We affirm that Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as the Father sent him, and that this calls for a similar and deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break out of our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world. The church is at the very center of God’s cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the Gospel. But a church which preaches the

Cross must itself be marked by the Cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the Gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance. The church is the community of God's people rather than an institution, and must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology.⁸⁸

Howard Snyder's address, entitled "The Church as God's Agent in Evangelism," dealt specifically with the question of parachurch structures in evangelism.⁸⁹ Several of the major thoughts in section 6 were adopted from his address. Snyder believes that the church is the community of God's people, not institutional structures. The institutional structures are the parachurch.⁹⁰ He argues from the biblical perspective that evangelism can best be understood as the outgrowth of the normal body life of the church.⁹¹ Furthermore, neither denominational structures nor paradenominational structures such as Christian schools, evangelistic associations, and missionary societies existed in New Testament days. Therefore, it should be self-evident, according to Snyder, that such structures have no explicit biblical basis.⁹² Finally, the church is God's agent of evangelism as it truly becomes the community of God's people.⁹³

Peter Savage, coordinator of the Latin American Theological Fraternity, was asked to expand on the topic "The Church and Evangelism." In writing about whether the church is adequate for the evangelistic task or if the task should be given to the para-ecclesiastical structures, Savage suggests that giving the task to parachurch agencies would not take into account the biblical view of the local church and would also fail to acknowledge that "[t]he greatest outreach in evangelism has often sprung from community churches." He concludes by saying: "The church today finds itself faced with two great inter-related challenges: the challenge of the massive task of world evangelisation and the challenge of being the truly biblical community described in Scripture that is capable of carrying out that task."⁹⁴

While the issue of the church and evangelism is discussed in clause 6 of the Lausanne Covenant, clause 8 explains the nature of evangelistic partnership, especially considering the role of the younger churches.

Churches in Evangelistic Partnership (Clause 8)

We rejoice that a new missionary era has dawned. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing. God is raising up from the younger churches a great new resource for world evangelisation, and is thus demonstrating that the responsibility to evangelise belongs to the whole body of Christ. All churches should therefore be asking God and themselves what they should be doing to reach their own area and to send missionaries to other parts of the world. A re-evaluation of our missionary responsibility and role should be continuous. Thus a growing partnership of churches will develop and the universal character of Christ's church will be more clearly exhibited. We also thank God for agencies that labour in Bible translation, theological education, the mass media, Christian literature, evangelism, missions, church renewal and other specialist fields. They too should engage in a constant self-examination to evaluate their effectiveness as part of the Church's mission.⁹⁵

Costas elaborates on this clause: "The centrality of God's redemptive mission in the message of the Bible also underscores the importance of the church as a missionary agent."⁹⁶

As seen, the Lausanne Covenant stresses the church's duty in evangelism. This emphasis differs from the emphasis at Berlin 1966, where personal evangelism was stressed. Johnston wrote, about Lausanne, that a strong ecclesiology permeated the congress, covenant, and Continuation Committee deliberations; the Planning Committee declared their intention to convene the congress "as members of Christ's body."⁹⁷

The Lausanne '74 congress was, indeed, significant to the evolving discussion of the local church in missions theology. Snyder reminded those in attendance of the biblical view of the church regarding missions; the Lausanne Covenant stated that the church is God's appointed means to spread the Gospel.

Stott even questioned the indefinite survival of parachurch agencies in his commentary on the covenant.⁹⁸ All these items and others indicate a renewed perspective on the involvement of local congregations in world evangelism.

Pattaya (1980)

The LCWE sponsored its second Consultation on World Evangelism at Pattaya, Thailand, in June of 1980, with over eight hundred delegates and observers meeting to discuss the development of new strategies for cross-cultural evangelism and to evaluate the progress of world evangelization since Lausanne 1974.

Two items pertinent to this discussion came out of the Pattaya consultation. First, the Thailand Statement recognized the local church as “the principal agency for evangelism, whose total membership must therefore be mobilized and trained.”⁹⁹ Second, *Co-operating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-church Relationships* was published. This Lausanne occasional paper, number 24, published in 1983, was the first book that highlighted the tensions between local churches and mission agencies. These tensions included dogmatism about nonessentials and differing scriptural interpretations, the threat of conflicting authorities, the harmfulness of strained relationships, rivalry between ministries, and suspicion over finances.

Overall, the book is written from a practical rather than a theological perspective. Stott, in the “Theological Preamble,” notes that the legitimacy of parachurch agencies is still under debate. From his point of view, the key question is regarding who should initiate and operate the specialist organizations. Stott believes that the argument in favor of parachurch organizations is largely historical, while the contrary argument begins with the Scriptures. His solution is to place agencies on a graded axis: “*independence of the church is bad, co-operation with the church is better, service as an arm of the church is best.*” Stott concludes: “Here then are the two extremes to be avoided. The tendency of the ‘establishment’ to control individual initiatives runs the risk of *quenching the Spirit* [italics in original]. The tendency of voluntary organisations to insist on their independence runs the risk of *ignoring the Body*. It is the age-old tension between authority and freedom. To quench the Spirit and to ignore the Body are both serious sins; they grieve the Christ whose Body and Spirit they are.”¹⁰⁰

A pertinent observation about the role of the local church in world evangelism in connection with Lausanne II is offered by Scherer: “In my opinion the wholistic emphasis picked up by Lausanne at Manila 1989 (whole gospel—whole church—whole world, etc.) and emphasized by the IMC after Willingen 1952 is of limited help because while it makes the “whole church” responsible for mission, it stops short of demonstrating how local congregations can effectively carry out the missionary obligation.”¹⁰¹ Scherer’s analysis of the Lausanne movement from 1966 to 1986, with regard to the local church’s role in missions, is encouraging. He writes: “Evangelicals now moved increasingly toward a church-centered mission stance in which the local church was viewed as the principal agent in evangelism, and elements from the older IMC formulas were taken over. Parachurch groups were held accountable for maintaining a spirit of Christian unity, and urged to move toward something like de facto integration with local churches.”¹⁰² If his observation was correct, then the next several years should have shown signs of local church activity outside of the Lausanne umbrella; unfortunately, controversy continued instead.

Wheaton (1983)

In June of 1983 the World Evangelical Fellowship sponsored a conference in Wheaton, Illinois: “The Nature and Mission of the Church.” Over half of the 320 participants came from non-Western churches. Delegates were divided into three working groups or “consultations” to deliberate over (1) the church in its local setting, (2) the church in new frontiers for missions, and (3) the church in response to human need. John Gration believes that Wheaton ’83 is very significant to the discussion of church and parachurch relationships: “The growing crescendo of interest and attention given to this subject [church and parachurch relationships] across the decade and a half of this brief survey reaches its climax in the Wheaton ’83 Congress on the Nature and Mission of the Church.”¹⁰³ A news release about the

conference, dated July 19, 1983, reads, “‘The local church is God’s primary agent in his mission for the world’: this was the consensus of the participants in the Wheaton ’83 conference.”¹⁰⁴

While many speakers, such as Wilson Chow, Valdir Steuernagel, Theodore Williams, Peter Kuzmic, Luis Bush, and Tokunboh Adeyemo, spoke about various facets of the local church’s ministry, it was Pablo Pérez’s presentation, “The Relationship Between Church and Para-Church: A Theological Reflection,” that was most germane to the subject of the local church having primary responsibility in world evangelism. He offered an important insight about the nature of parachurch agencies, based on pragmatic reasoning, when he exclaimed: “Sad to say, the very pragmatic consideration that the para-church agencies are doing efficiently what the church as a whole has not been able to do, seems to be more important than trying to determine their nature. If there cannot be found a Biblical basis for this nature, are these agencies to disappear from the picture or should we learn to live with these ‘abnormalities’?”¹⁰⁵

A brief summary of the conference discussions about the local church was released in a Wheaton ’83 newsletter entitled “Letter to the Churches” where the mission of the universal church, expressed in local assemblies, was stated to be that of the Great Commission. With regard to cooperation between local churches and mission agencies, the conference declared about agencies (both denominational and parachurch): “We view them as servant agencies supplementing the mission of the church to the world. Let us bear in mind that para-church agencies have a responsibility to relate their ministries to the full fellowship of the church.”¹⁰⁶

Indeed, Gratton was correct in his observation that the topic of the local church and parachurch relationship reached its climax in 1983 at Wheaton. The conference was the first attempt to apply a biblical understanding of the local church and its duty to minister in the world. While the subject may have reached its climax at this conference, it has not diminished in importance, and the issue continues to be debated and discussed to this day.

Lausanne II (1989)

The International Congress on World Evangelization held in Manila, Philippines, in July of 1989 was the second international congress sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. More than 4,300 Christians from 173 nations participated. The large number of women (22 percent) and younger leaders under age forty-five (50 percent) gave special significance to this gathering.¹⁰⁷

While Lausanne I gave a summons to the local church to involve itself in world evangelism, Lausanne II provided an even more pronounced emphasis. Not only were plenary sessions devoted to the subject, but the “Manila Manifesto” and a special track on the local church highlighted the congregational structure’s obligation in world missions.

Jong-Yun Lee, a Korean pastor and conference speaker, stated: “Each local church visibly represents the whole church. When we call for ‘The Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World,’ we are calling for each and every church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. . . . The local church is primary both in terms of the call and the task of workers in the harvest field. The call is issued from within the local church and the task is to plant more local churches.”¹⁰⁸

Eduardo Maling, a pastor in the Philippines and plenary conference speaker, told the audience that the local church is the key to world evangelization: “The church is God’s instrument, chosen to demonstrate and declare to the whole world Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Lord.”¹⁰⁹

In a video presentation on the primacy of the local church in mission, Luis Bush discussed what God was doing in the world, especially in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Bush concluded, “It is the local church that is having a key role in the effort of missions launching out from these different continents.”¹¹⁰

The Manila Manifesto, similarly to the Lausanne Covenant, outlines what the delegates at the conference signed as a public declaration of their convictions. Two declarations in particular relate to the subject of the local church having primary responsibility in world evangelization. They are numbers 16 and 17:

16. We affirm that every Christian congregation must turn itself outward to its local community in evangelistic witness and compassionate service.
17. We affirm the urgent need for churches, mission agencies, and other Christian organizations to cooperate in evangelism and social action, repudiating competition and avoiding duplication.¹¹¹

The manifesto gives emphasis to the local church reaching its own community but broadens the responsibility of spreading the Gospel in the world to both congregations and agencies.

The summary of the track on the local church, coordinated by James Wong, Canon in the Anglican Church of Singapore, draws the following conclusions about the local church:

We believe that the local church is the God-ordained channel to fulfill the Great Commission. We believe that the local church bears primary responsibility for the spread of the gospel. We believe the local church is God's primary instrument for world evangelization. Church and parachurch organizations should also work together, for the parachurch agency is a servant of the church, while the church can benefit from its specialist expertise.¹¹²

Lausanne II, like Lausanne I fifteen years prior, saw the local church as the primary vehicle God intends to use to reach the world with his Gospel. Both congresses stressed the importance of local assemblies being involved in the Great Commission. Participants at the two events stated that it is the duty of churches to reach the lost with the Good News, and at Lausanne II, that agencies are servants of the church.

While the growing recognition of the role of the local church in missions is encouraging, it should be noted that at both events, as well as at the other major evangelical meetings discussed above, there was no in-depth study of the biblical role of the local church in missions. Scriptural texts were given at all the gatherings to support the local church's involvement in missions, but these were used as proof texts rather than providing a theological rationale or analysis. Many evangelicals have returned to the early church perspective that the local church has primary responsibility in world evangelism. Yet throughout the many writings suggesting such a position, one looks in vain for a detailed scriptural analysis to support it.

Since 1910 many evangelicals have felt a growing desire that local churches be more significantly involved in missions. This concern was first *expressed* in the 1960s at the Wheaton Congress (1966) and the Berlin Congress (1966), *grew* in the 1970s at the Green Lake Conference (1971) and Lausanne I (1974), and *blossomed* in the 1980s at Pattaya (1980), Wheaton (1983), and Lausanne II (1989).

This summary of the historical practices of the local church yields several important conclusions. First, the expansion of the Christian faith was accomplished primarily via three movements: the spontaneous witness of individual believers, the conquering and colonizing activities of state governments, and the work of mission societies. Local churches have been involved in the growth of Christianity sporadically, but they have not played a significant role throughout history. Only during the nineteenth century did God begin to use mission agencies as his primary means to spread the Gospel.

Second, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between evangelism and missions. Just as the apostle Paul planted a congregation in Thessalonica and then from that church the gospel message spread out to new communities, so a similar pattern of Christian expression can be observed throughout church history. Often it was missionaries who would pioneer the spread of the Gospel to a new area and plant a church, and then the church would be the major catalyst to evangelize the surrounding region.

Third, a major transition occurred in the life of the Christian church in A.D. 311 when Christianity was recognized as a state religion by Constantine's decree, the Edict of Milan. Previous to his decree the spread of the Christian faith was the obligation of individual believers and local assemblies. After 311 the duty to Christianize people was inherited by the state. No longer were nonbelievers acknowledged as neighbors; now, they were perceived as outside of the Christian empire and therefore to be conquered and "Christianized." Missions thus became distinct from the normal life of the church.

Fourth, when individual believers *did* rediscover the command to "make disciples in every nation" during the age of Pietism, it was understood as the obligation of a few enthusiasts, not the work of

every Christian. This understanding continues in many congregations today. The modern missionary movement has its origin in the Pietistic movement, when nonchurch structures composed of a few enthusiasts began to plant churches in various parts of the world.

Fifth, a well-developed theology of missions that includes the local church has yet to be formulated. When Christianity first spread, it was by spontaneous expansion, with little reflection on a missionary theology. Outreach simply happened. With the advent of governments that assumed the responsibility for Christianizing their citizens, a theological study of the subject was not warranted. As Protestants rediscovered the Great Commission during the age of Pietism (*ca.* 1694) and the era of William Carey (1761–1834), Matthew 28:18–20 became a primary text to support global missions. However, the challenge of world evangelism, again, belonged to a few, not to the whole church. At present, while discussions have taken place about the missionary nature and duty of the universal church, a comprehensive theology of missions from a local church perspective has not been written from either an ecumenical or an evangelical point of view.

Sixth, though the structures for carrying out missions have evolved over the last two millennia, the purpose of God was not thwarted. If his people were not going to be faithful in fulfilling the Great Commission, he found other ways to declare his message. Sometimes his declaration was made through volunteers; at other times it was through slaves who were taken by force by opposing armies. Occasionally God would use local bodies of believers, such as the Moravians or Anabaptists; at other times he would use monks, governments, or mission societies. God’s desire to see men and women come into a personal relationship with his Son would not be circumvented by the inactivity of the local body of Christ.

History proves useful when explaining what has already occurred. Yet how are churches currently involved in world evangelization? What paradigms of global/local ministry do congregations utilize?

Paradigm Shifts

In the last twenty-five years local evangelical churches have begun to make major paradigm shifts with regard to their role in obeying the Great Commission. More specifically, numerous congregations have conducted their global missions activities based upon two paradigms: supporting and sending. Currently a third, the synergistic or focused paradigm, continues to emerge. Presented in this section is a descriptive analysis of these paradigms.¹¹³

A major shift occurring within churches is that they increasingly seek a more active responsibility in world missions. Granted, many are willing to take a less active role. But many are not. The paradigms presented here represent a continuum of missions activities. No congregation fits one paradigm entirely and perfectly. A particular church may utilize selected ideas within each of the three paradigms. For the sake of illustration, however, the paradigms will be presented as if each one is an all-inclusive pattern of a particular church’s activities. Thus, while these paradigms overlap and oversimplify reality, they enable us to make certain observations.

Paradigm 1: The Supporting Church

The supporting paradigm is still the predominant model for evangelical churches. From this perspective, the role of the local church in world missions is understood largely as supporting. The involvement is passive. The prevailing question is “What is *their* game plan?” In other words, churches look to mission agencies to set the missions agenda. Basically, whatever agencies want to do is accepted as correct, because they are perceived to be the experts. A descriptive summary word for this model is “dependence” in regard to the way the local church conducts its global/local activities through the agencies. The way that churches perceive success in this model is that they have bigger budgets and better missions conferences each year.

The age group that responds best to this model is believers over sixty years of age. The Boomer generation does not enthusiastically support it as it is currently practiced. James Engle comments: “[I]t is

time for churches still functioning in the mode of Paradigm 1 (the vast majority) to recognize that they are seriously out of phase with today's missions realities."¹¹⁴

Paradigm 2: The Sending Church

Instead of maintaining a supporting role, many churches in the 1980s increasingly began to assume a sending role in world missions. The key word became "my," and the key question became "What is *my church's* plan?" In this model, churches have shifted from a more dependent mode to an independent one in their relationship to mission agencies. Congregations utilize the services of mission agencies when they want to, but churches are no longer dependent on any one agency. Some churches send their own missionaries, bypassing the agencies altogether.

Several factors characterize this second paradigm. The agency to which a church was loyal in the previous decade now becomes one of many. Denominational and/or organizational loyalty is predominantly a notion of the past for churches that have accepted the sending paradigm. Financial support is regionalized. Congregations insist upon both quantity and quality time with their missionaries.

Missions education and partnerships also changed significantly. Church members began to speak about involvement in missions based upon their missions training in a Perspectives class or on a short-term missions trip. Congregations still may work with agencies, but only as equal partners. If an agency does not accept this new role of the church as a partner, then a church may opt to find an agency that cooperates with the church's sending task. The signs of success for this model are bigger budgets and more missionaries sent.

Paradigm 3: The Synergistic (Focused) Church

The definition of the synergistic paradigm contains the idea of joint action by agents that, when taken together, increases the effectiveness of both. This model starts with a recognition of the end goal of souls saved and churches planted. It focuses on the end result (world evangelization), not on the means to the end (such as sending missionaries). Synergistic churches want to use all the resources at their disposal to accomplish the task.

The key word of this paradigm is "we." The question the church asks is "What is *our* role in obeying the Great Commission?" Instead of trying to accomplish numerous missions activities by themselves, synergistic churches focus on a few items they can do well. They have emotional ownership of these activities. They partner with others and combine their efforts to produce greater effectiveness than either party can accomplish independently. The partnership model assumes an interdependent perspective. The churches realize that they do not have to respond to every need—and that they are not able to—and so instead, concentrate their energies and finances on a few needs. Frequently such concentration of energies and finances is channeled to evangelize an unreached people.

Synergistic churches desire to make a significant impact on the non-Christian world. They adopt various approaches to missions, including an entrepreneurial one. Congregations utilizing the synergistic paradigm likely will reflect many of the Boomers' values, such as a desire for multiple options in ministry, appreciation for diversity among individuals (men and women, lay and professional, ethnic and Anglo), desire for change, and a hope for significance in their lives.¹¹⁵

Engel grasps the implications of this model. He writes: "This paradigm presents major challenges to mission agencies which are still functioning in the resource-funneling mode of Paradigm 1. Proactive churches have little interest in passive involvement and hence will be increasingly nonreceptive unless there are distinct opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships. In other words, the onus is placed on the agency to let the church become a part of the action and demonstrate that real partnership can be established."¹¹⁶

Reasons for the shift in attitudes toward this new model include technological advances that allow for ease of communication and travel, a different set of values of Boomers and Generation Xers, and a wealth effect that allows many people the option of travel (such as for short-term missions).

Summary of Paradigm Shifts

PARADIGMS	SUPPORTING	SENDING	SYNERGISTIC
Key word	“They”	“My”	“We”
Description	Dependent	Independent	Interdependent
Key Question	What is <i>their</i> game plan?	What is <i>my church’s</i> plan?	What is <i>our</i> role in obeying the Great Commission?
Mission Agency	High loyalty to a given agency	Awareness that an agency is one of many	Recognition of a global Christian community
Decision Making	Agency making decisions	Partnership with an agency	Forming a strategic ministry
Geographical Support	Support outside the region	Support within the region	Support of non-Western missionaries
Philosophical Support	Support missionaries	Recruit/train/support our own	Partnership with others (Americans/nationals)
Congregational Outreach	Nondirective philosophy	Directive philosophy	“Empower church constituency” philosophy
Relationships	Superficial contacts with missionaries	Quality/quantity time with our missionaries	Make a significant impact on the non-Christian world
Missions Education	Missions education by outsiders	Missions education by insiders and quality teachers	High-tech and high-touch missions education
Church Participation	Emphasis on goers	Emphasis on goers and senders	Emphasis on everyone participating in outreach
Focus	Focus on money	Focus on people	Focus on opportunity
Strategy	No church strategy	A single church strategy	Multipronged strategy
Signs of Success	Bigger budgets for missions and better missions conferences	Bigger budgets and more missionaries sent	Souls saved and churches planted

It is readily acknowledged that no one paradigm is best for every church to follow. As churches consider their role in global/local outreach, they will need to ponder the pros and cons of each of these models. Probably many churches will want to use elements from all three.

Now that the church's practice in missions has been surveyed from both a historical and a present-day perspective, the question needs to be addressed: How will Western evangelical churches participate in global/local outreach in the future?

Trends and Forecasts

Below are macropredictions that many proactive churches may choose in the coming years regarding issues relating to the local church and world evangelization. Some individuals may interpret these as positive changes; others will view them as negative. They are listed to suggest what the future increasingly might bring and to help people plan for such changes. After each trend or forecast is stated, an explanation is provided. Implications are mentioned to highlight possible ramifications of each trend or forecast.¹¹⁷

1. *A shift from being means oriented to being goal oriented.* Historically, congregations focused their efforts on sending missionaries, which presupposes that the role of the church is to send. In the future, churches will change models based upon the question: What needs to happen in order to see this people reached with the Gospel? Assemblies will not limit themselves to sending long-term missionaries. They will want to include any possible resource to see a group evangelized and disciplined. Thus, they may not send long-term missionaries from the church. Instead, they might support nationals, radio broadcasts, short-term professional teams, and literature distribution.

Implications: (1) Churches will increasingly question the role of the long-term church planter where the church is already in existence. (2) Churches will not support ministries of which they do not readily see the value. (3) Agencies will need to prove *why* a missionary with a particular set of abilities is needed in a certain ministry and area.

2. *A shift from being missions focused to being mission focused.* The shift from a focus on missions to a focus on mission acknowledges that the entire church is to participate actively in the Great Commission. Overseas missions is not viewed as the ultimate ministry. Outreach is the calling of the church. It is the nature of the church, as opposed to the task of a minority within the assembly. Acts 1:8 is seen as the model for the entire congregation. The hierarchy of lostness of those overseas is not assumed as it was in previous generations.

Implications: (1) Support for ministries outside the homeland will decrease as demand for funds for overseas efforts will compete more intensely with needs in the homeland. (2) Agencies will want to assist churches in meeting their entire Acts 1:8 concerns. A sole focus on overseas ministries will not satisfy churches. However, as agencies assist churches in their ministries, greater trust will be built between the two entities.

3. *A shift in the church's perspective of mission agencies from dependency to expediency.* Agencies will not play the same role as they have in the past. Historically they served as intermediaries. They were needed to interpret the world to churches. Their expertise was required to send people to the field, keep them there, and ensure their effectiveness. As we look to the future, these roles diminish in importance given technological advances. Often churches have a more accurate picture of what is occurring in the life of one of their own missionaries than does the leadership of an agency. Churches increasingly will realize that agencies, while helpful, are not the only ones with expertise.

Implications: (1) Agencies will need to fulfill different roles with different churches. For some, they will create and control ministry opportunities as they have in the past. In other cases, they will serve churches and let them set the agenda. (2) Churches will look to networks and peers for ideas and inspiration. (3) Agencies will want to approach entrepreneurial churches as learners.

4. *A shift from the missionary being over the national church to serving under the national church.* As church leaders travel and see the quality of national leaders that God has raised up, they will question the need for the missionary to be in control. They will assume that where there is a national church, missionaries will work under its leadership. Short-term ministries will further this vision.

Implications: (1) Agencies that do not work under national churches will be viewed as paternalistic. (2) More and more finances will go directly to support national workers. (3) The role of the missionary will change from church planter to expert in areas that the national church lacks. (4) In many situations, churches will experience frustration as they begin to feel stifled by national churches that do not share their entrepreneurial bent or vision for closure. As this happens, churches will shift their focus from working under a national church to working alongside a national church.

5. *A shift in emphasis from professional missionaries to lay involvement.* While long-term missionaries will still be needed and crucial to world evangelization, churches will focus their efforts on mobilizing as many of their laity as possible in outreach. Short-term missions is just the beginning of this trend. As people seek to make a difference in the world, churches will offer opportunities as well as encourage laity to pray and dream about meaningful participation in the Great Commission based upon who they are and the resources God has given them.

Implications: (1) Church missions conferences will not focus predominantly on the unevangelized; they will focus on empowering laity for both local and global involvement. (2) Agencies with quality short-term ministries that are family-oriented will thrive. (3) The establishment of nonprofit corporations by churches and individuals will increase in order to simplify and expedite giving and outreach. Often, these nonprofit corporations will facilitate broader participation among a variety of churches.

6. *A shift in the donor's attitude about outcomes.* Boomers and Generation Xers will take a harder look at results and consult with multiple experts on how finances can best be utilized for the kingdom. Their desire to leverage money will be a significant dynamic in the missions equation. They want "bang for their buck," so to speak. Therefore, major donors who want to give to missions will in essence become active partners, sitting at the table with agencies, churches, and training institutions.

Implications: (1) Money will be available, but people will have to be persuaded that what they are giving to matters. (2) Agencies will be forced to consider donors' intent and offer projects within their parameters. (3) Agencies will experience increasing challenge in tapping into networks of people who have money and a concern for global outreach. Simply having representatives in various parts of the country will not suffice. (4) Agencies will be forced to trim operating expenses in order to reduce missionary support requirements. (5) The perception that supporting Western missionaries costs too much will motivate individuals to look for alternative ways to participate in missions. (6) Many churches will abandon their commitments to persons, projects, and ministries if they do not see the expected results from their investments.

These trends and forecasts are based upon materials read, discussions with church and agency leaders, and present realities extrapolated into the future. They are my best informed conjectures as to what the future holds. I readily acknowledge that in the future additional trends will occur and events will take place that we never imagined.

We all orient our lives and ministries based upon an expected future. My questions to my readers are: What are your forecasts in regards to the local church and world evangelization? What are the implications of these shifts? How are you and your organization preparing for the implications?

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