

The Missional Church

By Don Golden

Church / Mission dichotomy

Introduction

A tension exists in Evangelical mission between the Biblical vision of the church and its real history. The Bible portrays a church that, as William Temple put it, is the only society that exists solely for the benefit of its non-members. The Church is a missional body. Too often however, the church has either been uninterested in mission or has reduced its importance and delegated it to mission agencies. In practical terms, the local church has been, in a real sense, divorced from the world mission endeavour. A *dichotomy* exists between Christianity in its localised expression and Christianity in its missionary expansion. That is, a dichotomy of the church itself, separated into two separate structures: the congregation, or what we call *the church* and another, the *missionary society*. Efforts to resolve this tension have proven problematic for missiologists.

1. German Missiologist, Gustav Warneck, 1890's.

Gustav Warneck is generally held to be the founder of Protestant missiology as an academic discipline.¹ Warneck held that missionary activity theoretically is the responsibility of the whole church, but in practice should be conducted by what he called a "*Gemeinde in der Kirche*" or a small community or society within the church.²

2. English Missiologist, Roland Allen, 1920's.

Roland Allen recognised that with no special organisation for mission, the early church had been "established and organised with a world-wide mission for a world-wide work".³ Contrariwise, the modern missionary movement had created an "elaborate organisation... within the Church".⁴ Allen compares the relationship between mission societies and the church with the institution of divorce. As divorce was permitted because the hard hearts of men rendered them unable to attain to God's original intention for marriage, so missionary societies have been permitted because Christians lost sight of the divine purpose for which the church was created- to be itself a missionary society. Allen believed that this dichotomy could only be corrected through a rediscovery of the biblical conception of the church. He stated that, "Missionary societies, and missionary boards are permitted because men's conception of the Church and their use of her organisation are far removed from that which was in the beginning."⁵

3. Mid-Century American Conservatism, Harold Cook.

Cook defended the dichotomist view stating that, "most people today accept the existence of

¹ David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1991) p. 4.

² See the analysis of Warneck's views provided by J. H. Bavinck in his, Introduction to the Science of Mission (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1960) p. 58.

³ Roland Allen, The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church (London, World Dominion Press, 1927) p. 131.

⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵ Ibid., p.161, 162.

mission boards without any question. They are quite the normal thing in missions.”⁶ Cook admitted that the Bible does not provide a unified picture of organisation and procedure; neither does it present an equivalent to the mission society, yet he insisted that the basic principle on which they are organised agrees fully with New Testament teaching.⁷ Cook's acceptance of mission boards on the basis of NT *principles* in the clear absence of NT *precedent* is representative of others. The principle of representation is central to Cook's theory. Through this principle it can be maintained that "mission is the church's job", even though he states elsewhere that she is "not in a position" to send missionaries.⁸

4. Mid-Century English Ecumenism, Stephen Neill.

Neill, along with other Ecumenicals believed that much of the thinking about missions was not so much an attempt to construct a theological basis for mission activity as "a theological justification of what we have done in the past and of what we are trying to do in the present."⁹ To Neill, an unfortunate consequence of this weak theologising was that "'foreign missions' have come to be largely divorced from the general life of the church"¹⁰

Neill suggested that the remedy for the dichotomy which had developed between the local church and the global mission to which she was called lay in a reconsideration of both ecclesiology and ministry. He stated that:

A correct theology of the Church would include everything that we now regard as the special and separate problems of 'missions'; and a correct theology of ministry would include everything that now perplexes us as the special problem of the 'foreign' missionary.¹¹

5. Dutch Missiologist, J. H. Bavinck, 1960's.

J. H. Bavinck recognised in the middle of the century that, "many were convinced that missions could be best conducted not by the church but through corporations or societies,"¹² and he was staunchly opposed to this idea. His important missiological textbook laid great stress on the central role the church should play in world mission. He wrote, "there are no other institutions that can take over this responsibility".¹³ Bavinck saw a shift taking place from an emphasis on missionary societies to a renewed call to the church, so much so that he declared: "throughout the whole world, people have come more and more to the conclusion that it is indeed the church itself which is called to perform missionary work."

⁶ Harold R. Cook, An Introduction to the Study of Christian Missions (Chicago, Moody Press, 1954) pp. 141-145.

⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stephen Neill, Creative Tensions (London, Edinburgh House, 1959) pp. 81.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 81, 82.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 81, 82.

¹² Ibid. p. 60.

¹³ Ibid.

6. American Missiologist, George Peters, 1970's.

George Peters viewed the local church in mission as "regular and ideal",¹⁴ but like others before him, believed this ideal to be impracticable. He stated in his important textbook that "It must be recognised. . . that ideally the church and not the missionary society is God's authority and creation for sending forth missionaries. But the agency may be called upon to act in the place of the church."¹⁵ For Peters, the "divinely chosen" agent of mission can call upon another agent to act in its place through an appeal to "broad organisational principles" in the Bible that "certainly provide authority for the organisation of societies and justify their continued function".¹⁶ He also concedes that to "establish exegetically the biblicism of missionary societies seems to be going beyond clear scriptural evidence."¹⁷

7. American Missiologist, Ralph Winter, 1980's.

Ralph Winter took the division of church and mission an important step further. Winter argued that the division of church and mission into separate structures is part of God's plan for world evangelism. According to Winter, the church must necessarily structure itself in two mutually supportive structures and he seeks to support this theory on theological, historical and practical grounds.

Winter argued that the Protestant missionary societies that emerged in the 19th century were similar in kind to the Roman Catholic orders which had existed throughout history. Winter's theory holds that every human society, including the church, requires modalities (i.e., overall, given governing structures) and also sodalities (i.e., other structured, decentralised, especially voluntary initiatives) in order to sustain and propagate themselves. In his view, the dichotomy argument betrays a lack of understanding about the fundamental role sodalities must play in healthy social structures. This lack of understanding contributed to what Winter called a "veritable schism . . . in Protestantism between church and parachurch organisations" and one "which profoundly frustrates the contemporary tasks of renewal and unity as well as mission".¹⁸

He believed that the Reformers "tragically abandoned"¹⁹ the sodality principle and function, and that only through its rediscovery could a solution be found to the dichotomy problem which had frustrated Protestantism throughout its history. Winter envisaged the church, the one people of God, functioning symbiotically as two structures.

8. South African Missiologist, David Bosch, 1990's.

Bosch contended that the development of mission societies came less from theological reflection

¹⁴ Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.225.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ralph Winter, 'Protestant Mission Societies and The "Other Protestant Schism"' in Ross P. Scherer ed., American Denominational Organization (Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1980) pp.194-199.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

than from the "spirit of enterprise and initiative spawned by the Enlightenment"²⁰ as well as the ideologies of "the social and political egalitarianism of the emerging democracies".²¹ For Bosch, the early Protestant missionary enterprise, based on Enlightenment optimism and individualism, form an essential element of the modern mission paradigm, and one which is giving way to what he calls an "Ecumenical missionary paradigm".²² For Bosch an essential element in the transformation of mission in the post-modern world is the "fundamental shift" which has occurred in the "relationship between church and mission".²³

Summary

Despite the efforts of missiologists from Warneck to the present, the problem of dichotomy remains. The Biblical vision of a missional church continues to strain against the real practice of the local church.

Three responses to dichotomy.

i. Single-structure view.

There are those who resist dichotomy, at least in theory, viewing the local congregation as the only biblically legitimate missionary structure. They resist attempts to separate the church into distinct congregational and missionary structures. This sort of church / mission integration was a motivating factor in the Ecumenical movement. Others, including the Brethren movement and more recently the 'New Apostolic Churches',²⁴ have also pursued an integration of the congregation and missionary expansion.

ii. Historical anomaly.

A second group of theorists recognise that no precedent for dichotomy exists in the NT. Nevertheless, they defend it for practical reasons by appealing to general NT principles. This was the approach of Gustav Warneck and in the current era George Peters is a notable example.²⁵

iii. Two-structure view.

A third theory holds that the division of church and mission into separate structures is a pattern discernible in the NT and that it represents a proven historical necessity for the mission of the church. This approach commends a two-structure view as the biblical pattern for world evangelism. The principle architect of this theory is Ralph Winter.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 327.

²¹ Ibid., p. 328.

²² Ibid., p.368.

²³ Ibid., p.369.

²⁴ C. Peter Wagner describes the movement and provides numerous case studies of churches that fit into this paradigm in his book The New Apostolic Churches (Ventura, Regal, 1998).

²⁵ Peters states that, "A serious dichotomy between church and mission societies has developed in a rather abnormal history of the church." Yet he maintains that, "the time of the mission societies has not expired and that their usefulness is not exhausted." There is evident here a tension between Peters' biblical ideals and the actual activity of world mission. See his, A Biblical Theology of Missions (Chicago, Moody Press, 1972) p. 231.

Biblical Ecclesiology: Exodus 19:3-6

In an effort to rediscover the missional church and to resolve the tension of dichotomy, it is necessary to return to Scripture. By re-examining the nature of the Church we hope to find perspective on how the Church fits in the plans and purposes of God. Towards this end, we consider that point in history in which Yahweh first entered into covenant with the people of Israel. For this background we turn to the covenant ceremony in Exodus 19: 4-6.

Durham stresses the abiding significance of this piece of liturgy as "a poetic summary of covenant theology...composed for use at covenant renewal ceremonies."²⁶ Terence Fretheim summarised the overall significance of Exodus 19:4-6 as "the lens through which one may view the entire Book of Exodus. . .indeed,. . . in the whole tradition of Moses, this is very likely the most programmatic speech we have for Israelite faith."²⁷ Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "Virtually the whole theology of redemption and the new life is summed up in Exodus 19:4-6."²⁸ The scholarly consensus surrounding this passage gives us confidence to look to Exodus 19:4-6 for a theological foundation of the Church.

A. A Relational Covenant: The Church is a Corporate Gathering.

Essentially, the Sinai covenant was a relational contract. Up to this point, human history had been dominated by the reality that mankind was alienated from God. Through the covenant with redeemed Israel, God will come to dwell with them as they become his special people (" . . .you will be my treasured possession. . .", Ex. 19:5). The most profound aspect of Yahweh's covenant with Israel is that by its establishment he intends to reside with them. In a gracious act of condescension, Yahweh offers Israel the gift of his presence ("I am going to come down to you. . .", 19:9). Durham points out the significance of this event as the most important event in Exodus and arguably in the whole OT. He writes that, "the form of the Sinai narrative has been determined by a single factor. . . the gift of Yahweh of his presence to Israel."²⁹

The relational nature of God coming to his people, demonstrates that restored relationships are essential to the people of God. The redeemed community must rightly relate to God and to one another (cf. Ex. 20:2-17). This feature of the covenant brings to the fore the corporate dimension of the church as well as an ecclesiology which gives pre-eminence to the localised over the universal, church. A proper definition of the church must include people gathered in time and space proximity demonstrating restored relationships between God and man and between man and man.

B. A Conditional Covenant: The Church is Gathered Around the Gospel.

A second characteristic of the covenant people of God is that it is conditionally based on obedience to God's Word (" . . .if you obey me fully and keep my covenant. . .", 19:5). Exodus chapter 19 directly precedes the giving of the Ten Commandments. The covenant that Israel agreed to in Exodus 19:8 ("We will do everything the Lord has said.") had God's commandments at its centre.

²⁶ Ibid., p.261. Further examples of covenant renewal ceremonies are found in Lev. 23; Num.10:1-10; Dt.1:1; 29:1; Josh. 1; 24:1-27; 2 Ch. 30; Is. 2:2-4; 56:6-8; and Joel 2:15-17; cf. also Ps.87.

²⁷ In his, "Because the Whole Earth is Mine" *Interpretation* 50/3 (1996), p.229.

²⁸ See his, *According to Plan* (Leicester, IVP,1991) p. 181.

²⁹ Durham, *op. cit.*, p.260.

The covenant people of God were those who were to hear and obey the word of Yahweh. The theology of Hebrews most explicitly demonstrates that the new covenant abrogation of Mt. Sinai in favour of "Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22) replaced the law of Moses with the gospel of Christ as the object of covenant obedience. Whereas the old covenant gathered Israel around the law which brought wrath (cf. Rom. 4:15), the new covenant is gathered before "a better word" (Heb.12:24) than that which the Sinai community heard (cf. Ex. 20:19). The "sprinkled blood" (Heb. 12:24)³⁰ of Jesus - the gospel, has become the "better word" (Heb. 12:24) upon which the NT people of God are founded (cf. Rom. 10:14-17; Heb.9:15) and it is, "the word which creates the church and constantly gathers it together again by rousing faith and obedience. . . ."³¹ The redeemed community has at its centre the message and person of Christ which orders its corporate life as a witness to a still alienated world.

The conditional emphasis of the covenant (cf. "if you obey me", Ex. 19:5) shows the redeemed community gathered in obedience to the gospel- the new covenant word. The gospel, the message about and the person of the risen Lord Jesus, has become the "better word" (Heb. 12:24) upon which the NT people of God are founded (cf. Rom. 10:14-17; Heb.9:15). Because of the central role the gospel plays, as the living and dynamic centre of the church, it alone must be permitted as the basis of authority in the church. The corporate process of elevating the gospel above all else provides the backdrop of unity required for the church's mission to the world (cf. Jn. 17).

C. A Vocational Covenant: The Church is Apostolic.

Finally, there is a vocational purpose behind the covenant between God and his people. Israel was commissioned to the task of witnessing to the nations that Yahweh is a God who redeems. The most significant element of the Sinai event is that once again God and man will dwell together. From the time of man's fall until Exodus/Sinai, there was no event as significant as recorded in Ex. 19:17: "then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God". The frequently quoted maxim "they will be my people and I will be their God" (cf. Jer. 24:7; 32:38; Ez. 11:20; 14:11; 37:23) is the goal of the divine plan for redeeming a people. As in the garden, God desires to dwell with mankind (Gen. 3:8). Yet, the vocational and mediatorial language of the covenant makes it clear that the plan for the people of God on earth, in addition to enjoying the presence of God, is to reveal his presence to the nations of lost humanity. We find at the Sinai conception of the people of God the seed which comes to maturity in the NT with the apostolic commission of the church, sent into the world and filled with the Spirit of Christ in order to manifest the Body of Christ.

The vocational emphasis of the covenant points to Israel's servant call, as the one who will manifest the presence of Yahweh and his redemptive purposes to the world. The priestly call of Israel (i.e. "you will be for me a kingdom of priests" Ex. 19:6) was corporate and pertained to the entire nation. The prophets demonstrated that this corporate ideal was never abandoned (Is. 61:6). An in the fullness of time, the NT sees its realisation. We find, at the conception of the

³⁰ We are aware of the debate surrounding the word 'blood' in Hebrews, however, the writer of Hebrews at the very least demonstrates the relationship of Sinai to the Church and the superiority of what Christ accomplished. See Allen Stibbs, The Meaning of the Word Blood in Scriptures, Tyndale monograph, 1947.

³¹ Hans Kueng, *op. cit.*, p. 375. This quote from Kueng can be compared to the famous statement by Luther, "Thank God, a child of seven years old knows what the church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs that hear their Shepherd's voice, for the children pray thus: I believe in a holy Christian church. This holiness does not consist in surplices, tonsures, long clerical gowns, and other ceremonies of theirs, fabricated by them without the warrant of Holy Writ, but in God's Word and in true faith." Smalcald, Pt. III, 12 cited in On Being the Church eds. Colin Gunton and Daniel Handy (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1989).

people of God at Sinai, the seed of an apostolic church which comes to fruition in the great commission of the NT when the Body of Christ, filled with the Spirit of Christ, is sent into all the world.

These three elements of biblical ecclesiology portray a church that exists for the salvation of the world – a *missional church*. It is this view which informs our understanding of the church and provides the standard by which we must evaluate all ministry that endeavours to honor and build the church as Christ's bride, preparing for his return.

The Apostolate.

The NT records a missionary expansion that, far from being divorced from the local church, actually built upon the nature of the congregation to achieve its missionary purposes. From our research, we are convinced that an important key to resolving the problem of dichotomy is found in the nature and function of the apostolate. It is Paul, "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9) who embodies within his own ministry that which the modern mission movement has consistently separated: the life and growth of the local church on one hand and the onward progression of the gospel on the other.

For the absence of the role of apostle in the life of the church we must turn to early Reformed history. The Reformers believed that the missionary mandate of Matthew was limited to and fulfilled in the apostolic era. Regarding this, Latourette commented that, "The New Testament command to 'preach the Gospel to every creature' which had been binding only upon the original Apostles . . . [and] had long before been accomplished".³² It has been held that the Reformers, while recovering a missionary message, did little or nothing to promote mission.³³ The ministry of the apostle has had little real place in the history of the Reformed church, a fact that has bearing on the dichotomy of the local church and the mission movement.

Apostolos

A problem confronts the inquirer into the meaning of the word *apostolos* in the NT. In its own Greek context there is no parallel to the way in which the word is employed by the Christian church of the same period. J. B. Lightfoot drew attention to the *shaliach* institution of late Rabbinical Judaism as a possible solution.³⁴ This theory came to maturity in K. H. Rengstorf's important article in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.³⁵

The *shaliach* was an essentially legal office summarised in the Rabbinical maxim, "The one sent by a man is as the man himself."³⁶ In an effort to integrate the Jews of the Diaspora, the *shaliach*, a commissioned agent, took form as a distinct institution in the latter half of the first

³² See A History of The Expansion of Christianity vol. III Three Centuries of Advance A.D. 1500 - A. D. 1800 (London, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1939) p. 25.

³³ Hedlund states categorically, "The Protestant Reformation did not produce a missionary movement." See, Roger E. Hedlund, Roots of the Great Debate in Mission, Bangalore, Theological Book Trust, 1993) p. 1.

³⁴ See St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Peabody, Hendrickson, 1981 [1st. published in 1865]) pp. 92 -101.

³⁵ Rengstorf, 'Apostolos', *op. cit.*, pp. 398-447.

³⁶ Rengstorf, 'Apostolos', *op. cit.*, p. 415.

century.³⁷ The *shaliach* may represent a number of individuals.³⁸ He may represent a community or a local congregation or, as with the case of the plenipotentiaries of the great Sanhedrin, the *shaliach* was commissioned to the Diaspora with the task (among other things) of announcing the date of the new month.³⁹ It is notable, however, that never is a Jewish missionary denoted by the title *shaliach*.

There is also an important personal and character element which was indispensable to the *shaliach* institution. It is critical that the one sent be a person of integrity and faithfulness conducting his assignment with a "resolute subordination of the will".⁴⁰ If the *shaliach* went beyond his authority, his decisions were invalid,⁴¹ yet within the boundaries of his commission, the decisions taken were considered that of the sender and its effects could not be revoked.⁴² For this reason fidelity was the quality most sought after. According to Rengstorf, the standard by which the suitability of the *shaliach* was determined was of a personal nature and was the "absolute trustworthiness of the one to be commissioned."⁴³

Of particular significance in Rengstorf's research was the tracing of the *shaliach* of the Rabbinical period to the OT Jewish sending-convention (cf. 2 Sam. 10; 1 Sam. 25:40; 1 Chron.. 17:7-9 and 1 Kings 14:6) which would date the phenomenon well before the first century.

The OT Law of Embassy.

An example of the Jewish law of embassy is found in 2 Samuel ch. 10. In this passage David "sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun" (v.2) on the death of his father, the king of the Ammonites. Fearing that David had sent them as spies Hanun had the delegation seized, stripped and their heads shaved. The passage records that the offence against David's delegation caused the Ammonites to "become a stench in David's nostrils" (v.6). As a result of this insult, perceived by David as a personal affront, Israel went to war with the Ammonites. The Jewish sending-convention held that "The emissary of a king is as the king himself",⁴⁴ thus David's personal pique was justified.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 413.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 416.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 415.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Martin H. Franzmann, 'The Apostolate: Its Enduring Significance in the Apostolic Word' Concordia Theological Monthly 28 (1957) p. 175. Franzmann offers as an example that a marriage which is annulled by the commission of a *shaliach* cannot be reversed by the husband (cf. Rengstorf, *op. cit.*, p. 415). Likewise, Donaldson states that, "The authority of the sender is so tied up with the role of the *shaliach* that as long as the latter did not exceed the bounds of his commission, if his task led him to perform a sacrilege it is the sender who is responsible (Me'il. 6:1f; Ket.98b)". See Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

⁴³ See his book, Apostolate and Ministry (London, Concordia Publishing, 1969) pp. 27,28.

⁴⁴ Rengstorf, 'Apostolos', *op. cit.*, p. 416.

A second OT example of the Jewish law of embassy is 1 Samuel 25:39,40 where a delegation is sent to propose to Abigail on David's behalf. Verse 39 states that "David sent and spoke"⁴⁵ a proposal to Abigail, . . ." but verse 40 reveals that it was actually his delegation which spoke to her ("When the servants of David came to Abigail. . . they spoke to her, saying, 'David has sent us to you. . . ."). The will and person of David were conveyed in David's delegation. Further examples of the OT sending convention are 1 Chron. 17:7-9, which records the sending of religious teachers by Jehoshaphat throughout Judah following the exile, and Genesis 24:1-9, where Abraham's servant is sent to Ur to take a wife for Isaac. The servant, in accepting the commission, becomes bound by the oath which Abraham had made before God (cf. 24:8).

Of particular significance is 1 Kings 14:6 where the prophet Ahijah is described in terms of a 'sent-man' to deliver bad news from the Lord to the wife of Jeroboam. This is the sole occurrence of *apostolos* in the LXX. It describes Ahijah as being 'sent', though it is actually the wife of Jeroboam who is sent to him. The use of the word *apostolos* in the LXX to translate the word *shaluach* (the passive participle of *shaliach*)⁴⁶ provides the best and earliest link between the Jewish *shaliach* concept and the NT *apostolos*. While it is true that 1 Kings 14:6 "hardly furnishes a precedent"⁴⁷ for the translation of *shaliach* by the Greek *apostolos*, it nevertheless is an undisputed occurrence of the phenomena and one that predates the Christian era. Donaldson finds strong support for the *shaliach* / *apostolos* parallel in 1 Kings 14:6, arguing that it provides "solid linguistic and terminological evidence for a link between the two concepts".⁴⁸

Origin in God.

C. K. Barrett has stated that "The true line of descent from Rengstorf is given not by those who have sought to make quick and easy capital out of his results but by those who have continued the historical inquiry."⁴⁹

We may properly trace the roots of this phenomenon beyond the above passages to God's self-revelation to Israel through Moses. It is from their own history that Israel came to know a God who chooses to reveal through human agents. Thus developed the Jewish tradition of embassy – of representing the corporate will of Israel through human mediation. The sending-convention held that "The emissary of a king is as the king himself"⁵⁰ and developed a wider usage through Israel's subsequent history. Following the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. the *shaliach* became a fixed legal institution that assisted in maintaining continuity in dispersed Israel. It is the later Jewish *shaliach* that stimulated the Jewish origins theory of the NT apostolate, indicating a

⁴⁵ The words "and spoke" are footnoted in the NASB.

⁴⁶ Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴⁷ Culver, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁴⁸ Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 207. In addition to this evidence, Donaldson cites Rengstorf's appeal to the verbs *apostello* and *shaliach* and their close relationship in the LXX. Of this, Donaldson says that "While *apostello* can on occasion render other Hebrew verbs, in the great majority of its occurrences it is used to translate forms of *shaliach*." (p.207, n.32). He points to the fact that later Christian writers used *apostolos* of the *shaliach* institution (Jerome, Ad. Gal. 1:1; and Syrian New Testament) as further strengthening the parallel which is believed to have existed in the first century.

⁴⁹ Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

common origin with the OT sending convention. A common thread connecting all three sending traditions (Christian, Rabbinical and early Jewish) leads back to God and his dealings with Israel. The NT apostolate, therefore, has its ultimate origin in the revelatory nature of God and his redemptive purposes first demonstrated at Sinai.

Thus, 'sending' is related to the nature of God and to his plan of salvation. There arises as early as Exodus a picture of a personal God who desires reconciliation with man and who establishes his pattern of redemption through presenting himself to men through men. In the NT this pattern reaches its fulfilment as God is revealed definitively in the person of Jesus Christ⁵¹ and, through his Spirit who indwells them, this representation of God is carried on by Christ's chosen apostles, and furthermore, the apostolic church. This background should inform our reading of the commissioning accounts of, for example, Jn. 20:21 ("as the Father has sent me, I also send you"). The apostolic church inherits the task of making God's presence known to the world.

It is our conclusion that the early church drew upon the *shaliach* concept as well as a Jewish national consciousness of the sending tradition. The *shaliach* concept both informed the apostolic identity of the church and provided it with a conceptual model for missionary expansion. The *shaliach* structural concept, though distinct from the local church structure, possessed characteristics that embraced essential elements of biblical ecclesiology in that it was relational, commission centred and representative. The *shaliach*, growing out of the very nature of God and his missionary purposes, provides a clearer understanding of the 'apostolic' church, chosen to present Christ to the world.

There has been no serious attempt to apply the lessons of the *shaliach* or the Jewish sending-convention to the practice of mission.

Postscript: New trends.

The church is currently facing a change of paradigm that is mostly clearly evident in the larger churches in North America. Stated simply, churches want to 'do mission' for themselves and are demanding a greater stake in the missionary task. In some extreme cases this has led churches to wholly bi-pass the traditional mission agency by sending and caring for their own missionaries or by disposing of the notion of missionaries altogether. In the latter instance, traditional mission has been replaced by strategic cross-cultural relationships with indigenous churches or agencies. Ted Ward recently highlighted this trend:

The newest and already the most problematic influence towards change is the pressure for closer involvement of local churches. Effectively dealing with this ... trend could become the foundation for the emergence of a revitalized mission of the church in the twenty-first century.⁵²

It is our conviction that this development should not be resisted but rather should be seen as a further step in the advance of God's plan for his Church and His plan of salvation for mankind. We should seek together, as churches and agencies, a functional ecclesiology and a theology of ministry that will guide us to a closer realization of the missional church. It is likely to be the case that, as this trend picks up, churches will rejoice in the privilege and responsibility they have to represent Christ to the world. The question remains, how will mission agencies respond? Ward

⁵¹ Vicedom, *op. cit.*, p. 8 states that "The highest mystery of the mission out of which it grows and lives is: God sends His Son; the Father and Son the Holy Ghost. Here God makes Himself not only the one sent, but at the same time the Content of the sending, without dissolving through this the trinity of revelation"

⁵² Ted Ward, "International Bulletin of Missionary Research" 23/4 October 1999, p. 148.

continues:

Almost everyone in the mission establishment sees closer involvement of the local churches as a mixed blessing, but the trend is picking up intensity: local churches are taking greater initiatives and expect to be treated at least as equal partners with the mission agency. They demand a stake in recruitment; they want some measure of authority in the overseeing of the missionaries whom they support; and their views of stewardship and management must be taken into account by the mission agency. After several generation of virtual autonomy, mission agencies are finding these adjustments rather difficult.⁵³

⁵³ Ted Ward, "International Bulletin of Missionary Research" 23/4 October 1999, p. 148.