

Still Two Structures After All These Years

Robert A. Blincoe

Some of church history's greatest pioneers—Samuel Zwemer, Mother Teresa, William Carey—did not wait to get permission before they started new mission structures. They began, attracted others to the task, and only subsequently were they honored for their leadership. Samuel Zwemer, the first American missionary to Arabia, was told by the Reformed



Church of America that “lack of funds” prohibited his appointment.¹ So Zwemer raised his finances directly from congregations and formed the Arabia Mission and sailed to what is Bahrain today. Four years later the Reformed Church adopted Zwemer as its missionary (and it cost the denomination not a penny!). Today's new denominations—Vineyard, People of Destiny, Calvary Chapel—as well as older, mainline churches should look for pioneers who are already working “without permission” to accomplish tasks that congregations have never done well.

Even television's Mister Rogers, it turns out, first started a public

broadcasting company—a kind of mission structure—and then went to seminary so that Fred Rogers could be ordained by the Presbyterian Church to continue what he was already doing!

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Denominational governments should monitor these upstart “task” structures, in the same way that state governments monitor private industry. These two in combination—denominational government and private enterprise (mission agency)—are the “two structures of God's redemptive mission” that Dr. Ralph Winter identified more than three decades ago.² A task structure (mission agency) registers with and reports to the government structure. Tension between the two is normative, but this is not to say that they work at cross-purposes. A mission agency (Habitat for Humanity, the American Bible Society, Youth with a Mission) turns out a “product,” while a denominational government (Presbyterian, Baptist, Calvary Chapel) has the task of monitoring “quality control.” (Of course, mission agencies are responsible to monitor themselves as well; hence their membership in the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, annual audits, et cetera.)

We can learn a lesson from the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholics, famously centralized, permit their entrepreneurial members to begin structures and attract

bands of men and women to do good works. Consider, for example, Mother Teresa's mission order: Mother Teresa founded her order in 1948, and Pope Pius XII subsequently sanctioned it in 1950.

Luther and the 250 Years of Silence

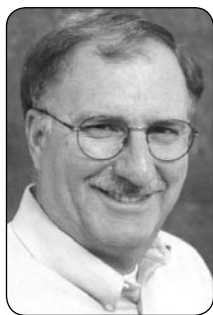
Because Luther dismantled the church's monastic structures—Franciscans, Dominicans, and his own order,

the Augustinians—the Lutheran church had no means for mission to the non-Christian world. Luther believed in the proclamation of the gospel for all the world, but that is the whole point: without the voluntary structures Luther could do “exceedingly little” to put his belief into practice.³

Calvin as well dismantled the Catholic monastic structures, and like Luther ended up with no means to move his message beyond the Christianized world. It was not that Protestants did not traverse land and sea; they did, for profit. Catholic missionaries, meanwhile, for the sake of the Great Commission pushed the limits of knowledge and exploration until they reached India, China, Japan, Vietnam, Africa, the South Seas, and the Americas.

A Jesuit historian, Johann Baergert, writing in the 1790s, said in effect, “We know why the Protestants are heretics: *because they have no missions.*” The problem preventing some Protestant denominations from “making disciples among all the ethne” is not theological but structural. If the governing powers (“grow the church where it is”) do not permit and monitor the pioneer

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William Carey

missionaries to “grow the church where it is not” then God will find other ways and other structures to complete His task of world evangelization.

We owe to William Carey the recovery of the means of apostolic church-planting. Here is Carey’s original proposal:⁴

Suppose a company of serious Christians, ministers and private persons, were to form themselves into a society, and make a number of rules respecting the regulation of the plan, and the persons who are to be employed as missionaries, the means of defraying the expense, etc., etc. This society must consist of persons whose hearts are in the work, men of serious religion, and possessing a spirit of perseverance; there must be a determination not to admit any person who is not of this description, or to retain him longer than he answers to it.

So Carey and thousands of serious Christians have formed themselves into societies. It was as though the Holy Spirit had been blowing past the Protestants, who had to hoist small sails to catch the divine wind. Those sails are the missionary structures of the church.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Remarks by Dr. John Beardslee, New Brunswick Seminary, April 1989 at the Arabia Mission Centennial.
2 Winter, Ralph D. "The Two Structures of Gods Redemptive Mission," reprinted in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, William Carey Library, 1999.
3 Luther's attitude was at least partly due to unfavorable circumstances, which James Scherer states as: a desperate shortage of preachers at home; no Protestant monastic orders; preoccupation with the Protestant struggle for existence in Europe; and lack of contacts with non-Christian lands and peoples (Anderson 1998:416).
4 Reprinted in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, p. 299, 1999 edition.

REFERENCES CITED

Anderson, Gerald H. 1998 Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions. Macmillan, New York
Baeger, Johann 1771 Observations in Lower California. University of California at Berkeley. Reprinted 1952
Carey, William 1792 "An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens," reprinted in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement (1999) William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA

The above brief taste of a longer article by Bob Blincoe article can be found complete in the International Journal of Frontier Missions, 19:1. See the end of my editorial on page 5 for details on how to get this journal and, at the bottom of the page, the contents of some sample past issues. RDW, Editor.



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