

BIBLICAL MODEL FOR MISSION WORK

The question is how evangelism is to be done, and especially as to the structural aspects (support, answerability of the missionary, and organization of the sending agency).

The structure for Church work initially was centered in local churches, each of which had elders (also called pastors or bishops), and deacons (see Phil. 1:1, Acts 14:23, 1 Tim, 3:1-13, Tit. 1:5-9). While there is no specific example of the election process for elders and for deacons, the process of Acts 6:1-6 appears to be the best model. The Apostles give the criteria, the members seek out those who seem to fit, and the Apostles appoint them to the office of service.

Built into the specifications of Timothy and Titus are certain responsibilities to be accepted by elders. They are to be teachers of the word, they are to have care of the spiritual family and they are to guard the church against false teachers. Peter talks especially about leadership by example rather than being lords (I Peter 5:1-5). Paul stresses the feeding of the flock (Acts 20:17-35) and the helping of the weak, but he also warns that of their own number there will be false teachers who will rise up (v. 29-30). Contributions for the poor were given into the hands of the elders for distribution (Acts 11:27-30). Members were exhorted to be obedient to their leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17). Some of these elders who also preached, were to be supported financially by the church (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Members were to be careful about hearing or repeating anything accusatory against an elder, unless there was definite proof of the charge (1 Tim. 5:19-20), although those who defected in their responsibility to be an example, were to be rebuked publically. There is a general exhortation not to be too hasty in the appointment of men to such leadership positions (1 Tim. 5:22, 3:6).

By the early years of the second century (110 AD), Ignatius of Antioch, on his way to martyrdom in Rome, wrote seven letters which show that church organization was in the process of changing. It was no longer led by elders and deacons, but was in a process of eventually bringing large sectors of the church under one prominent leader. No longer were the terms "elder," "bishop," and "pastor" being used interchangeably, for now the term bishop alone was used to indicate a new office of higher rank. In his letter to the church in Magnesia he said, "I exhort you to strive to do all things in harmony with God: the bishop is to preside in the place of God, while the presbyters (elders) are to function as the council of the Apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ (Magn. 6:1, quoted in Quasten, Johannes; Patrology Vol. I, Newman Press, p. 67). As the above quote indicates, the process of exchanging the simple structure in which each local church chose local leaders according to the Biblical teaching, is on the way to the establishment of a centralized

leadership involving Episcopal Monarchs. This brings to mind Paul's warning that from among their duly elected leaders men would rise up leading the church into error (Acts 20:29-30). This appears to have begun in the change of church organization and the empowering of leaders who could, by command, take the church in whatever direction they desired.

Instead of being guardians of New Testament truth, church leaders very soon became a means by which important aspects of Bible truth could be ignored. Ignatius writes to the Ephesians that the elders and deacons are to be as obedient to the bishop, as Christ was to the Heavenly Father. To the Philippians he states there is one bishop assisted by the presbyters (elders) and the deacons. In his letter to Symrna, he insists that neither baptism nor the Lords Supper can occur except in the presence of a bishop and by his authorization (Ibid., pp. 67-68). It is interesting to note that in his letter to the church at Rome, he makes no mention of such organizational change having taken place which certainly damages the claim that the original rule over all churches was located from the beginning in Rome (Ibid)!

It is only a short while until the bishop of a local large church begins to have jurisdiction over smaller churches that are near by. Eventually, there are five archbishops who control large areas (Rome, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria). Finally, the power comes to rest in Rome and in Constantinople with each bishop at times claiming the supreme authority. That problem has not been resolved to this day, with the Bishop of Rome reigning over the Roman Catholic Church, while the Bishop of Constantinople (Istanbul), is the chief Bishop over the Orthodox Churches.

Given the above organizational situation, in the early middle ages and to the time of the Protestantism Reformation, missionaries were sent out from areas where powerful bishops were located. The principal system that was initially used involved the founding of monasteries which served not only as protected living centers for the missionaries, but as centers of education and culture as well.

Later the Catholic Church saw the formation of large orders of monks or priests (Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits), which occupied themselves in the missionary activity of Catholicism. Many of these were men of great ability and dedication even though their knowledge of Truth was partial. Untold numbers died in the process, often before even arriving at the chosen field. These orders did not always work well together, and sometimes had very active in-fighting.

Eventually, in an effort to centralize their missionary work (often dominated by Kings of nations such as Spain, Portugal, etc.), a special office to direct and govern mission work from the Vatican was established called the Propagation Office. Eventually, this led to all missionary activity of the Catholic Church being under the control of the Vatican as it is today.

When the protestant churches first began to come into existence, they did not show an interest in foreign missionary work. Involved as they were in a literal war for their existence, it is easy to understand why they did not. However, as they began to consolidate their forces, and stake out their specific geographical areas, they did turn their attention to missions. At first, after the manner of Spain and Portugal, their efforts were carried out as a part of nationalistic expansion on the part of such nations as Holland and England. Later, their efforts centered on the formation of missionary societies. These were separate entities within a larger church which raised money from individuals and churches and called, sent out, and directed all missionary activities. By the end of the 18th century, these began to be the vehicles of choice among most protestants, as continues to be true until today.

Recently in the media, there have been articles suggesting that there may be a Scriptural or Pauline manner of organizing and financing missions...one that was centered on the local church. There is in fact information regarding such in the New Testament, mostly surrounding the work and record of the Apostle Paul.

The principal passage usually given is found in Acts chapter 13. The important details seem to be (1) the Holy Spirit calls the individuals designated for missions, (2) the local church responds and accepts responsibility, (3) the missionaries are sent out with prayer and fasting, (4) and at the end of the assignment report back to the sending church (Acts 14:27, 18:22).

There is also evidence that in certain matters, churches pooled their resources (Acts 11:28-30, 12:25). This is also indicated in other occasions (1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 8:1-7, 9:1-5, Rom. 15:25-27). In the specific instance of Paul, he was supported by the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:15-16), and others (2 Cor. 11:8). It would appear to this writer that the best model for doing the work of the church, including church supported missionary work, is to be found in the New Testament.

There is an unusual expression in the New Testament related to the question of support for missionaries. That expression is "send on his way." That this indicates support is clear from 3 John 5-8. Paul uses it in reference to Rome in Rom. 15:24 (it is found otherwise in 1 Cor. 16:6, and in Tit. 3:13).

By far the greatest missionary thrust of the first century was that of an untold number of individual Christians who spread the Word at their own expense as they moved around the world (Acts 8:4, 11:19-24). When Paul was preparing for his eventual trip to Rome, he wrote to the church in Rome which he said had given an example of faith spoken of throughout the world (Rom. 1:8). This church was not started by an Apostle, and was most likely started by Jews from Rome present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11).

The "hands on" model for doing missionary work presented in the New Testament is still followed by churches scattered throughout the world. It individualizes and spreads Christian obedience to the Lord's will that the Gospel be shared with the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20). It literally puts world evangelism where it was in the beginning, in the local church and in individual disciples of Christ!

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