

## Chapter 3

# LOCAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN MISSION AND EVANGELISM

*by F. Hrangkhuma*

The Devlali Letter of 1977 says, “We affirm that the local church is the key to effective mission and evangelisation.” In spite of the emphasis put on the local church as the chief agent of missions and evangelism in recent years, however, it appears that the overwhelming majority of Indian churches are not effectively involved in missions and evangelism. The major concern of this paper is to answer questions such as: How should a local church involve in missions and evangelism? How should it be effective?

In trying to answer such questions, it is inevitable to ask questions such as, What factors hinder a church from involving and becoming effective in her missions? Hindering factors are not the same everywhere. The following, however, form a broad summary of those hindering factors – the misunderstanding of the meaning and purpose of the church; the place of the church in God’s plan and its relationship to the kingdom of God; misunderstanding about the nature and place of structure that often resulted in copying structures that are not conducive to effectiveness in Indian situations, unhealthy fight for leadership positions, wrong priorities, jealousy, hypocrisy, legalism, lack of practical commitment to God, and lastly, ignorance of how to be effective. I will attempt a brief consideration of some of these problems.

### **Theoretical Consideration**

Correct understanding is vital for the church’s effectiveness. It acts like a solid foundation that supports the

structure of a building. I therefore present a brief theoretical consideration on the subject.

## THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

There are at least two groups that deny that Jesus had any idea of founding a church at the beginning. One group follows the classic expression of Alfred Loisy, "Jesus foretold the Kingdom of God, but it was the church that came."<sup>1</sup> Dispensationalism is another group that teaches that it was only because Israel rejected Jesus' offer of the earthly (millennial) Davidic kingdom, that Jesus formed a church as an interim body.<sup>2</sup>

A careful study of the term used for Church in the Bible, its nature and purpose and its relationship with the kingdom of God reveals that God's original plan includes the Church.

### *Ekklesia*

Most probably the English word 'Church' greatly contributed toward the misunderstanding of its biblical meaning. The term 'Church' in English is derived from *kuriakos* as used in the phrase like *kuriakon doma*, or *kuriake oikia*. These terms are derived from the Byzantine Greek form and they basically mean the Lord's house, i.e., the Christian place of worship.<sup>3</sup> The New Testament word translated as 'Church' is *ekklesia*, which is used extensively.

Its secular usage means "those who have been called out", a meeting of the people, describing each particular session as used in Acts 19:32, 39f. But the important thing for the New Testament *ekklesia*, says Hans Küng, "is not Greek etymology but the use of the word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament."<sup>4</sup> *Ekklesia* occurs no less than a hundred times in the Old Testament (Septuagint) as a translation, almost without exception, of a Hebrew word, *qahal*, which means a meeting of the people summoned together. It is a secular word, but often qualified by the terms *ekklesia kuriou*, of the Lord. The dominant septuagint usage of the term is religious, thus describing the congrega-

tion of God's chosen people, who gather around God who calls them to be his people among the nations.

*Ekklesia* is used in the New Testament at least in three senses:

1. Five times it is used in its classical Greek meaning of assembly. Two out of these five references (Ac.19:32, 39, 41; 7:38; Heb. 2:12) represent the Septuagint usage, denoting the assembly of Israel (Ac. 7:38; Heb. 2:12).

2. The prevailing and fundamental idea of *ekklesia* is that of a local body organized on principles of brotherhood for purposes of proclamation, fellowship, worship and service. Of the 115 occurrences of the term in the New Testament, some 85 may be assigned to the local congregation.

3. A special use of the term by Christ (Mt. 16:18; 18:17) and Paul does represent the idea of the Church in an ideal sense, often spoken of as the Church universal of which all believers in Christ are a part. Paul uses the term in this sense at least twelve times; most occurrences are in Ephesians and Colossians.

These usages of the term indicates without doubt that the New Testament Church is thought of as a continuation of the Old Testament congregation of the Lord. Hans Küng is right in saying, "By taking over the term *ekklesia*, the early Christian community made its claim to be the true congregation of God, the true community of God, the true eschatological people of God."<sup>5</sup>

## METAPHORS USED FOR THE CHURCH

Many metaphors are used to describe the nature and functions of the Church. Most of the metaphors are derived from the Old Testament usage for Israel. This again shows the continuity of God's people. Israel is the bride of God, but unfaithful (Eze.16; Jer. 2:2; 31:32; Isa. 62:5; Hos. 2). The Church is the bride of Christ for whom he gave himself a sacrifice that she should be presented before him "in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7; 21:2). Israel is a vine taken out of Egypt

planted in the fertile land of Canaan, and cared for, but which produced grapes of injustice and oppression instead of righteousness (Ps. 80:8-19; Isa. 5). Therefore, God replaced the wicked husbandman, but also extended its life, for he claimed to be the true vine itself whose branches were dependent for their fruitfulness, both on their abiding in him and on their being pruned by the vinedresser (Mk. 12; Jn.15).

God was the Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1; Isa. 68:9; 40:11). In the New Testament, Jesus is the Good Shepherd searching for the lost sheep, laying down his life for the them, leading them into good pasture, and protecting them from the wolves (Lk. 15:3-7; Jn.10).

In the Old Testament the Israelite was a representative of God's kingdom, the sphere of His redemptive and covenant rule, his dominion (Ps. 114:2). This was repudiated, and in its place a new people was called out from among the nations who has been delivered "from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son" (Col.1. 13). And Christ exercises His rule over his people through his spirit, "for the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Ro. 14:17).

The Church is the household of God. This was dimly adumbrated in the Old Testament (e.g., Hos. 11:1), but fully worked out in the New Testament. God begets or adopts us in Christ, making us His children, adopting us into His family, and sends His Spirit into our hearts that we may call Him Abba Father (Gal. 4:4-7; Ro. 8:14-17; 1Jn. 2:29-3:3; 3:9-10). He is our Father who cares for us in every way (1Pe. 5:7).

The Church is the temple of God 'not made with hands', a building He himself made with Jesus as the foundation, as witnessed to by the apostles and prophets, in which he dwells through the Holy Spirit (1Co. 3:11,16; Eph. 2:20-22).

Lastly the Church, God's people, is the body of Christ. This is the most prominent usage in Paul's letters, and

probably the only one with no Old Testament equivalent. Christ is the Head, who supplies the life to the Church, nourishes it, makes it grow and rules over it.

All these metaphors collectively point to at least three basic truths: *First*, God is its Head, the Creator, the Life, the Sustainer, the Guide, Preserver, Protector and Ruler of His people the Church. *Second*, His people depended on Him for their existence, growth and strength. *Third*, the interrelation of the people of God, as the children in the same family, members of one body. They point out significantly the essential unity of the Church, originating in the call of God in Christ Jesus, and the responsibilities God has entrusted to his whole Church. For the effective carrying out of her responsibilities, God gave to the Church various gifts (Ep. 4:11-16). So, the Church is the people of God who respond to His call in Christ, and God lays on it an awesome responsibility, the responsibility of representing Him on the earth among the nations.

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The Church is the people of God called into the being by the gospel of Christ, and nourished by the word of God. And this people, the *laos* of God, is a priesthood, sent to the world by God to be a blessing to the world. 1Pe. 2:1-12 is one of the key passages for the understanding of the nature and purpose of the Church.

According to this passage, the living stone, the foundation, is Jesus. Believers are also living stones, the materials for the building of the spiritual temple. But they are more than mere materials for the building. They are the priests who offer spiritual sacrifices to God in the spiritual temple which is the corporate body of believers in Christ. The complexity of the nature and being is explained by Peter thus — But (in contrast to those who rejected Christ) you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God". The calling is "out of darkness into his marvelous light" and the purpose is "that you may declare the wonderful deeds" who called them out of darkness. These wonder-

ful deeds of God are to be declared and are centred around his calling out people from darkness to be in his marvelous light.

God's *laos* (people, laity) is called to be a bridge between God and the world which does not acknowledge Him; to be a temple set within the world, a messenger of God to the world, and a priest on behalf of the world. The Church is to be the messenger of God declaring (proclaiming authoritatively) the good news of God's wonderful deeds centred in Christ: the Gospel. The Church is also to be a royal priesthood, identifying with human beings in their needs in costly and lowly service at the same time maintaining its identity of separation to God in which it hears him, worships him and speaks in his name.

The Church is a pilgrim, not belonging to the world but sojourning in it. Therefore it should "abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." Instead the members should "live such good lives among the pagans, that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

Once again by applying the Old Testament passage that directly refers to the Israelite people (Ex. 19:5-6), Peter maintains the continuity between Israel and the New Testament Church.

## THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Although the actual term 'Kingdom of God' is dominantly used in the New Testament but hardly used in the Old, the concept is the central message of the entire Bible. The concept of the rulership of God, not His universal kingship as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe that is affirmed again and again in the Bible, but his covenant rulership, to use the Old Testament concept, and His redemptive rulership is the central theme of the Bible. By right of creation and upholding, God is already the ruler and therefore the king of the earth. But since God gives the right of free choice to human beings, He would not force anyone to enter into covenant relationship with him. His desire,

clearly evident in the entire Bible, is that all should enter into loving relationship with him in covenant by repentance and faith in him.

These are normally called 'General Revelation.' These, however, are not enough. God, therefore, communicates with human beings through another human being. That is the purpose of God's call that through those who respond positively, He may further communicate Himself to other human beings. God's revelation and communication to human beings culminated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and are recorded in the Bible (Heb.1:1-3; Jn. 1:14,18). Abraham was called to be a blessing to the nations. And through Abraham God called Israelites as a people belonging to him. Summing up God's purpose of the call of the Israelite nation, Herbert Kane says,

God has a three fold purpose in the election of Israel. First, Israel was to be the recipient and the guardian of God's special revelation to the world (Heb. 1:1-3). Second, Israel was to be the channel through which the Redeemer was to enter the stream of human history. He was to be the Son of Abraham (Mt. 1:1), of the tribe of Judah (Ge. 49:10), of the house of David (Ro. 1:3). Third, Israel was to be God's servant (Is. 44:1-2) and witness (Is. 43:10) in the midst of the nations.<sup>6</sup>

But what is the kingdom of God and what is its relationship to the Church? This is a complex question and there is no consensus among Christians. The Roman Catholics generally tend to identify the Church with the kingdom of God. John Bright is vague in his explanation of the relationship between the two. Most scholars agree that the two are not the same.

It is necessary to appreciate the complexity of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God as we read the Bible because the two overlap in many respects. To differentiate the two and put them in their respective places we need to look into the Bible and attempt to define them.

The Church, as already been discussed, is any community that centred around Jesus Christ, calling the Bible as

their book, forming themselves into worshiping, learning and fellowshiping community. It is likened to a vine, as the branches of the vine, household of God, temple of the Holy Spirit, sheepfold, bride of Christ, and the body of Christ to show the complexity of its relationship with God, and one another, its manifold functions, and its unity in the midst of diversity. It is spiritual due to its unique relationship with God. It is also human due to the people who compose it.

Since the Church is a human institution, it is always visible with clear boundary. It is entered by some kind of initiation rituals. Its members are subjects to discipline like in any other human society. Becoming a member of the Church does not necessarily mean to have eternal life.

In contrast, the Kingdom of God is purely spiritual. It is the rule of God exercised specially over people who entered into it by conversion (repentance and faith). It is operative only in those who received it by faith. When people willingly humbled themselves and submitted to the rule of God in Christ, they immediately entered God's kingdom. By entering the kingdom they received forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Mt. 21:31; Mk. 10:14-15; Jn. 3:3). This is the norm everywhere at all times (Ro. 14:17; Col. 1:13).

It is present now, but the fullness of the Kingdom is still in the future (Mk. 14:25; Mt. 7:21-23; 13:41-43; 25:31-34). Christians who are already in the kingdom are also looking forward to the days when they will inherit the kingdom (1 Co. 15:50; 2Pe. 1:11).

Following Don Fleming<sup>7</sup>, we can say that to enter the kingdom of God is to have eternal life or to be saved. The Bible uses these expressions interchangeably (Mt. 19:16, 23-25). Just as the believer experiences the kingdom of God now and will do so more fully in the future, so also he has eternal life now but will experience it in its fullness when Christ returns (Jn. 5:24,29). Likewise he has salvation now, but he will experience the fullness of his salvation at the return of Christ (Eph. 2:8; Heb. 9:28). Eternal life is the life of the kingdom of God, the life of the age to come; but

because the kingdom of God has come among humankind now, Jesus explains the kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven according to Matthew) by means of parables. I like the way Don Fleming explains the meaning of those parables.<sup>8</sup> The parable of the seed and the soils shows that, because people are free to accept or reject the message of the kingdom, most reject it. But those who accept it experience great spiritual growth in their lives (Mt. 13:18-23; cf. 23:13). The parable of wheat and weeds teaches that in the present world those who are in God's kingdom live alongside those who are not; but in the day of judgement, when God's kingdom will be established openly, believers will be saved and the rest punished (Mt. 13:24-30; 34-43).

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast illustrate that although the kingdom may appear to have insignificant beginnings, it will one day have worldwide power and authority (Mt. 13:31-33). The parables of the hidden treasure and the valuable pearl illustrate that when a person is convinced of the priceless and lasting value of the kingdom of God, he will make any sacrifice to enter in it (Mt. 13:44-46). Nevertheless, there are both the true and the false among those who claim to be in God's kingdom. The parable of the fishing net shows that these will be separated in God's decisive judgement at the close of the age (Mt. 13:47-50).

God's purpose was that Israel would be the first to have a chance to hear and to receive God's kingdom when the Messiah comes and they will have the privilege of spreading its good news (Isa. 49:5-6; Mt. 10:6-7; 15:24). But when Israel rejected the good news of the kingdom as a whole, God sent the message directly to the nations. Gentiles who believed entered the kingdom, but Jews for whom the kingdom had been prepared were excluded (Mt. 8:10-12; 20:1-6; 21:33-43; Ac. 13:46-47; 28:23-31).

The apostles preached about the kingdom, Christ the Lord and his good news. Those who believed became Abraham's spiritual offspring (Ro. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:28-29;6:16). The church came into being as a result and grew. George Eldon Ladd says, "The Kingdom of God, as the

redemptive activity and rule of God in Christ, created the Church and works through the Church in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

In explaining the relationship of the church to the kingdom of God, Hans Küng says,

... the Church is directed towards and belongs to the coming reign of God ... the reign of God is its goal, its limitation, its judgement. The Church is not the Kingdom of God; but it looks towards the Kingdom of God, waits for it, or rather makes a pilgrimage towards it and is its herald, proclaiming it to the world ... the Church may be termed the fellowship of aspirants to the Kingdom of God ... (and it is an anticipatory sign of the definitive reign of God). The Church is devoted entirely to its (Kingdom of God) service.<sup>10</sup>

Israel was given the keys to the Kingdom, but it did not use them to open the kingdom for others (Mt. 21:36-46; 23:13-14). Likewise the keys of the kingdom of Heaven have been given to the Church (Mt.16:19). Jesus is the only door to the Kingdom (Jn. 10). The responsibility of opening the door rests on the Church. The plural ‘keys’ implies the varied gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church for ministry (1Co. 13; Eph. 4:11-16; Ro. 12:3-8).<sup>11</sup>

The Church, through its members, is the seed of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 13:38). As God expected the Israelites to bear fruit as his vine (Isa. 5), He expects the Church also to bear fruit (Jn. 15).

In conclusion, the reason for the Church’s existence is the Kingdom of God and nothing else. It represents the kingdom on this earth as salt and light. It exists for the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God works in the world primarily through the Church. The Church therefore, is not an end in itself, but an agent of the kingdom of God. What Herbert Kane writes of the Israelite is true of the Church. God has a threefold purpose for the Church. *First* it is to be the recipient of the good news of the Kingdom of God. *Second* the Church is to be the channel through which the good news of the kingdom is to be communicated to others. *Third*, it is to be God’s servant and witness in the midst of the nations.

## STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

Most scholars agree that there is no universal New Testament structure which should be applied to all situations irrespective of nations and cultures. Even in the New Testament there are at least three different church structures such as the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch and the Pauline churches which are structured differently.<sup>12</sup> The only New Testament principle seems to be that each local church should form its structure, appointing its leadership best suited for the situation, and the local churches should maintain the unity by maintaining some kind of connection with one another. The pioneer missionaries under the Baptist Missionary Society in Mizoram followed this principle as they organised the Baptist Church of Mizoram by following a modified form of Presbyterian church polity with a little mixture of the Methodist Church as best suited to the Mizo society. I believe that this has been a very practical decision. In theory Howard A. Snyder is right in insisting that any structure of a church should be biblically true and culturally viable.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the churches in India are structured according to the traditions of the foreign missionary churches, it seems, without much questions being asked about their suitability for the concerned Indian Christians and their cultures. It may be too extreme to call ‘Demon of Structure’ following P. Manoharan,<sup>14</sup> but certainly unsuitable structures copied from the West are one reason why the churches in India as a whole are not effective. M.M.Thomas rightly raised the importance of this.<sup>15</sup> He says that the church in India is so structured that becoming a Christian in this context is largely becoming a proselyte, and baptism is like circumcision, which is the mark of transference of communal affiliation.<sup>16</sup> His concern is valid. His practical suggestion, however, is extremely difficult to put into practice. He suggests to form fellowships “which are explicitly religious, linked to Jesus Christ, but remain religiously, culturally and socially part of the Hindu community,” and that “church must become the bearer of Christ in all Indian communities,

and Christians should not become a separate judicial political community."<sup>17</sup>

The debates between M.M.Thomas and Lesslie Newbigin on the structure of the church reminds me of the concept of 'bounded set' and 'centred set' propounded by Paul G. Hiebert.<sup>18</sup> The result of the influence of bounded set thinking on church structure is the importance given to a set of boundaries instead of the centre. The maintenance of clear membership boundary enhanced proselytism rather than conversion. On the other hand, in centred set thinking, the centre is the all important concept. Boundary is there, that is turning either toward or away from the centre. This concept enhances M.M.Thomas' argument more than that of Newbigin, and this is understandable because as Hiebert argues, the Western mind is influenced by bounded set concept than the minds of the Indians in general. For our purpose Christ and his kingdom as the centre toward which everybody should move, and that centre should play a more prominent role than church's boundaries. We should keep this in mind as we attempt to structure our local churches.

In structuring a church, it is also helpful to remember the three dimensional relationship in which the church exists. In John's Gospel chapter 15, Jesus instructs his disciples as to how to function as they exist in relationship with God, with themselves and with the world. The basic nature of the relationship with God is one of abiding — abiding in God as the branches abide in the vine. The basic purpose of that abiding is fruit bearing (vs.1-11).

The believers should also relate to each other in love (v.12). That is, Jesus' new commandment to love one another so that others may know that they are his disciples (13:34-35). The basic purpose of loving one another is that they may bear fruit (vs.16,17). Upon this 'loving one another' all the rest of 'one another' are built up.

From verses 18 to 27, Jesus is talking about his disciples' relationship with the world. The nature of the relationship is one of hate and witness respectively. The world hates

the disciples because Jesus had chosen them out of the world (vs. 18-20). The disciples in turn make known the only saviour Jesus Christ to the world.

The church has a three-fold function based on its three-dimensional relationship and any form or structure of the church should enhance the following functions and characteristics<sup>19</sup>:

1. Upward Function: The structure of the church should enhance the church's upward function. That is, it should make it possible to worship in which the worshippers feel at home, ways in which they can express their thanks, praise, devotion, love and trust on God freely, form that encourages and enhances people to be themselves in their worship. For example, in many congregations that I worship in Maharashtra, the congregations always without exception sang *bhajans* with free abandonment, joyously singing with all their voice. That usually takes place before "the worship part", whatever that may mean, when they suddenly turned to translation songs. Their singing, again without exception, were strained, and all the freedom of expression of devotion had gone. I am not against singing translation songs, but it should be modified in such a way that people may sing with freedom, with tunes suited to their voices and ability.

2. Inward Function: The structure should be conducive for the inward function of the church to the maximum. It functions inward to herself in deification, purification, education, discipline and fellowship. Fellowship is basically around the word of God, prayer, helping each other in loving service, teaching, encouraging, upholding each other in love and humility, and the like. It seems to me that the present forms and structures of most churches do not enhance this biblical fellowship to take place in the congregations.

3. Outward Function: The church functions outwardly in evangelisation and service ministries. The church should reach out to its neighbours in loving service and sharing of

the good news about Jesus Christ. As it exists side by side with others it should be the salt and light of the world, serving the community in which it lives, communicating the love of God to them and supporting cross-cultural ministry by either sending or supporting missionaries.

The Indian church, particularly the local church should be released from the clutch and bondage of Western structure and style, institutionalism, clericalism, and communalism so that it may be free to do mission and evangelism more effectively. But what are mission and evangelism?

## MISSION AND EVANGELISM

The classical understanding of identifying mission with evangelism has been largely rejected. The broader concept of mission as everything God wants to do in the world too is not accepted by most. Today mission has been described mostly in a holistic way. But mission is not a word for everything the church does. John Stott defines it as “everything the church is sent into the world to do.” He further states that mission includes the church’s double vocation of service, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.<sup>20</sup> The broadest and the most general definition perhaps is that mission is the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.

Mission is the outward function of the church. It is the church’s deliberate ministry to communicate the reality of God and the gospel of God’s kingdom to those who are outside. This communication takes place through verbal as well as life/action methods. The good news is to be both proclaimed and demonstrated. Announcement and loving and concerned service should never be separated in our thinking and doing. Life, action and words should never be divorced from each other, i.e., life-style, social action and service and evangelism are integrally parts of each other. One is not complete without the other in the communication of the gospel of the kingdom. Thus mission is understood in holistic terms whereas evangelism is that verbal, both spoken and written, proclamation of the good news to

others. The Lausanne Covenant correctly affirms that “in the churches’ mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary”. But this in no way suggest the neglect of other parts of mission.

The purpose of mission is the spread or growth of the kingdom of God in this world and never the kingdom of the church. The kingdom spreads when men and women pledge their faith in the gospel and commit their lives to the king, Lord Jesus and worship him as their only God. They may or may not join the visible church, but if they are truly converted spiritually, they are in the kingdom of God. But their individual witness cannot be effective very long without the support of the people of God. That is the advantage of being in the church. The corporate worship and fellowship strengthen and build up the members. And a rightly structured local church is the most effective visible and audible agent of the kingdom. Anything – be it leadership system, style, structure, theology – that obstructs the church to freely and effectively involve in its mission and evangelism should be mercilessly discarded and replaced by a more suitable one.

## Practical Consideration

It is now time to make some practical suggestions. We must note, however, that a down to earth practical suggestion is not viable due to different circumstances. The following is only a guideline that may be modified to suit the situation.

## BUILDING UP THE BASE OF MISSION AND EVANGELISM

The greatest need of the time is renewal of the local church. In every renewal movement the Christian individuals and the church are without exception renewed in their relationship with the Lord, fellow believers and the world. Can we plan a renewal on that line? David Cornfield follows renewal on the three-dimensional relationship described above and it is an excellent plan of study.<sup>21</sup> He suggests that

we renew our relationship with God by renewing our vision for the kingdom of God, our prayer and devotional life, our corporate worship and our stewardship. In the area of renewing our relationship with God's people inside the Church, he suggests that we should renew our teaching and study of the word of God, our discipling and pastoral care, our Christian community, our ministry (spiritual gifts) and our family life. Concerning our relationship with the world he suggests that we should renew our local evangelism, our mission strategy, our social action and our spiritual warfare.

Mention have already been made elsewhere in this paper to make our corporate worship a congregation affair, as natural as possible for the worshipper to be meaningful and effective. Our major concern in this section is building each other up in the church. How should we best do it?

Our ministerial programme should be geared to growth, renewal, training and mission continuously. Pulpit ministry should be planned in such a way that it becomes a systematic teaching and preaching that really educate and renew the members. Special weekend evangelistic programme for its own members may be very helpful. Occasional week-long salvation campaign, camping and the like are found effective by many. Visitation of members' homes for evangelistic purpose is found helpful elsewhere. Special classes for those who are not yet born again or who are unsure may be helpful.

In most cases the present structure that binds us most often hinder renewal as well as mission effectiveness. How should we then structure our local churches? Details will vary, but the following is intended as a broad suggestion.<sup>22</sup>

The large structure that enhance the large group gathered for worship and fellowship we are used to should continue. The most effective and most sustaining means however, may be organizing small groups or house churches as is effectively done by many churches in Seoul, Korea. This is biblical and down to earth practical. Moses was

advised by his father-in-law to appoint leaders for thousands, for hundreds, for fifties and for tens. This is not only administrative efficiency, but evangelistic, fellowship as well as nurturing effectiveness.

It is through small groups or house churches properly organised and run that members care for one another, pray for one another, teach each other and counsel one another. This should be the most natural way of evangelizing members of our church and subsequently nurturing them in the small group situation. The group should not be bounded set but a centred set, where the centre is Christ and the boundary of membership should not be applied in these small group/house churches. Through small groups/house churches the local church should build its own mission and evangelistic base. Renewal should take place first in the local church and there should first be an active and effective evangelistic ministry in the local church before others are evangelised. The practicability and viability of organising Indian local churches on this line should be immediately and urgently sought and practiced.

The small groups/house churches should meet at least once a week for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. Those meetings should not be formal but open and informal where everyone should feel at home. The sharing of our burdens for prayer and praise will play very important part in our care for one another. Neighbourhood Bible study method may be adopted where every adult can lead and everyone is free to share his/her understanding of the scripture. Family as well as individual problems should be shared freely with mutual trust and prayed for. Counselling may be done either in group or singly. Special prayer and counselling may be made occasional for those who have not been born again and those who are not sure. Evangelism among its own members should be an ongoing concern in any local church. By a beautiful love/service, fellowship of a local church through its small groups/house churches, and the wholesome transparent lives of its members, others are sure to be attracted to its fold.<sup>23</sup>

The major responsibilities of the pastor are to conduct Sunday worship, the eucharist, the baptism and other rituals. Equally important are the equipping/training of the leaders of small groups/house churches. House visitation and counselling should be in the hands of the lay leaders and other members. As in Moses Principle, only the more serious cases should be dealt with by the pastor. Ministry belongs to the church and not to the pastors alone. Parts of the body of Christ should properly function according to their respective gifts.

### DOING MISSION OUTSIDE ITS OWN MEMBERS

Peter Wagner's analysis of types of missionary ministry is helpful. I quote him at length:

Church Growth specialists have found it helpful to assign value neutral letters and numbers to different kinds of mission activity as follows:

M-1 (Mission one): Mission directed to those who share the same culture as the missionary.

M-2 (Mission Two): Cross-cultural mission directed to those of different culture, but a culture which has a significant similarity to that of the missionary.

M-3 (Mission Three): Cross-cultural mission directed to those of quite distinct culture, having very little in common with the culture of the missionary.

Culture, not geography is the deciding factor. . . . While "M" for mission is the all-embracing term, three subcategories have been found helpful for analysis: evangelism (E), Christian nurture (N), and service (S). For those who accept the holistic definition of mission, all three are part of the whole, but, while naturally there is overlap, they describe different tasks.<sup>24</sup>

In mission, we must analyse the people group that we wish to witness to as accurately as possible in order to determine the nature of training of the missionaries and the methods of communications. Also it is helpful to identify the

type of work the church or the missionary is to do, E or N or S or any combination of the three according to the need of the people witnessed to. Small groups/house churches should be the most convenient structure and place for M-1, E and S ministries. Neighbours, relatives and friends with whom we share the same language and culture should be deliberately prayed for and invited to join in the fellowships and Bible studies. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst and the dynamite of the word of God and the loving and transparent fellowship we practice will surely convince people of the reality of our faith. They should be visited during their joys and sorrows, cared for when needed, becoming good neighbours to them. If this is faithfully and prayerfully practiced, we will surely experience both kingdom growth and church growth even in the cities of India. Vigorous neighbourhood, friendship and kinship evangelism and service should be practiced. I believe this is one of the most natural and most effective way of urban missions.

For M-2 and M-3, E ministry in our locality, if trade/common languages such as Hindi or English (or others) can be used, then an evangelistic and service ministry using various methods may be employed. Evangelistic groups may be formed to visit homes, distribute gospel tracts, help the needy, comfort the bereaved seeking out the lonely and needy people. Friendship evangelism and loving service should always go together.

It will be more effective if a local church can search for more responsive people group in their locality. Among such groups, the local church should concentrate its service and evangelistic ministry with the goal of planting responsible churches among them. Vigorous planning for mission in our own locality where most of the members can be involved is a necessity of India is to hear clearly the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Aiming to plant one church every year, in two, three, even five years by every local church will tremendously help to complete the unfinished task of mission.

Our God is the God of the poor, the oppressed and exploited, the deprived and the down-trodden. The local

church mission should be deliberately aimed at witnessing to these marginalised people. A project that will help them gain spiritual, social/racial, and economic liberation should be carefully planned and implemented. A clear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, a demonstration of the love, the care and the justice of our God to selected groups of people is one very important mission which a local church should do.

Local churches should also lead the entire community in ecological concern and care. This is becoming a global concern and we should start in our own homes and locality. Our God is the creator of our environment, which He had given to human beings to care for it (Ge. 1:28). We are responsible for the upkeep of the plants and animals around us. We must also plan for environmental protection and clearance of any thing that pollute our surroundings.

In mission to the intellectuals, specially to students in the cities, it will be very helpful if the local churches and organisations that concentrate on this section of the population such as the Evangelical Union, the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Scripture Union and the others work together. We Christians should learn to do mission together. We must be open to various mission approaches, methods, and views.

In some missions, co-operation of many local churches will be necessary, such as rescue centres in cities where the homeless, the hungry, the lonely and the like will find shelter and receive clear gospel witness. It is a tragedy and contrary to our faith that denominational constitutions of churches (such as CNI, Baptist, etc.) often hinder such cooperation. Christian unity and co-operation in mission is imperative if India has to hear the gospel of Christ clearly and effectively. In ministry to the blind, the deaf and other differently abled people, cooperation with the existing organizations must be sought wherever possible.

Every local church in India should aim to support at least one M-2 and M-3 missionaries. Larger and wealthier

city congregations should aim to support much more than one. If there is one's denominational mission body it may be best to support missionaries through it. This is the most popular method used in Mizoram. Churches such as the Baptist Church of Mizoram and the Presbyterian Synod of Mizoram have their own well-organized mission departments, and their missionary activities have been efficiently carried out both inside and outside Mizoram. Where such is not available, then there are over a hundred mission agencies in India concentrating on ministry among non-Christians. Many local churches have been supporting missionaries through such agencies. Many more should do so. This is where Christian unity and cooperation is manifested and we should do more than we do now.

To promote missionary involvement of a local church, mission emphasis week or even a month, where outside speakers are invited and when the needs around us and other places are presented with biblical expositions and challenging messages have been found very helpful in many places.

The most important person to develop a local church's missionary involvement is the pastor.

The need of the hour is a well-trained pastor imbued with deep and realistic concern for mission and evangelism, a pastor who is not satisfied until his congregation is actively and effectively involved in missions and evangelism near and far. Should we not pray that God may raise in India many such pastors?



## END NOTES

1. Quoted in George Elden Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, London, Lutterworth Press: 1974, p. 106.
2. Ladd, *ibid.*
3. D.W.B. Robinson, "Church", in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Leicester, IVP: pp. 283-6; Hans Küng, *The Church*, London, Search Press: 1976, pp. 81-2.
4. Küng, *ibid.*, p. 82.
5. Küng, *ibid.*, pp. 83-4.
6. J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Mission in Biblical Perspective*, Michigan, Baker Book House: 1976, p. 23.
7. Don Fleming, *Bridge Bible Directory*, Brisbane, Bridgeway: 1990, p. 248.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 248-9.
9. George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, Michigan, Eerdmans: 1959, p. 115.
10. Küng, *op cit.*, p. 95-6.
11. Cf. Ladd, *The Gospel and the Kingdom, op cit.*, p. 113.
12. Robinson, *op cit.*, p. 284-6.
13. I find the following three books of Howard A. Snyder very stimulating on this subject — *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age*, IVP: 1975; *The Community of the King*, IVP: 1978; and *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of the Church and Kingdom*, IVP: 1983.
14. P. Manoharan, "Reflection on the History of Mission in India", in *Debate on Mission: Issues from the Indian Context*, Ed. by Herbert E. Hoeffler, Madras, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute: 1979, pp. 39-47.
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17. *Ibid.*
18. Paul G. Hiebert, "Sets and Structures, A Study of Church Patterns" in *New Horizons in World Mission*, ed. by David J. Hesselgrave, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House: 1977.
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23. Joseph Aldrich, *Life style Evangelism, Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving world*, Hants, Marshalls Morgan and Scott: 1981.

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