

# Major Paradigm Shifts in World Evangelization

by Bruce K. Camp

**M**omentum is building in the Christian community to evangelize the world by the year 2000. Some suggest that every person should have the opportunity to hear the gospel by the end of the century. Others believe, at the very least, that we can have a church planting movement underway in every unreached people within this time frame. Regardless of the perspective, many assume that the American Church will play a significant role in the evangelization of the world during this decade. But will it?

The mission paradigm as it relates to the local church is changing, and until more congregations recognize the new paradigm and act accordingly, we probably will not be able to evangelize the world during this decade. More critically, if the American Church continues with the attitude of "business as usual," it will have lost a window of opportunity to help evangelize every unreached people group prior to the advent of the twenty-first century.

A paradigm is a model, a way that individuals view something, the rules of a game or the way people perceive reality (Barker 1992). Examples of paradigms abound. Some common paradigms in missions circles include the concept that only mission agencies are equipped to send missionaries, or missions leadership is male in gender, or missionary candidates must have 30 hours of formal Bible training.

Paradigms are useful to missions strategists, as they help to explain why something is happening as opposed to what is happening. They do not simply describe the new activity, but provide insight into the reason for the change.

Paradigms do change; they are not static. Local churches are reassessing their role and activities in world missions given the political changes that are occurring around the globe. While the goal of world evangelization has not changed, nor will change, the church's *modus operandi* must change, if it is to play a significant role in starting church planting movements in every unreached people group by the end of this decade.

Generally speaking, local evangelical churches in the United States have experienced a major paradigm shift during the last twenty years with regard to understanding its role in obeying the Great Commission. More specifically, numerous congregations have conducted their global missions activities based upon two paradigms (supporting and sending). Currently, a third, the *synergistic* (owning) paradigm is emerging.

It is important that the American Evangelical Church understand those paradigms. Presented in this article is a descriptive analysis and comments to assist both agencies and congregations in thinking through the implications of these mission paradigm shifts.

A major paradigm shift occurring within churches is that they, increasingly, are wanting to assume more active responsibility in world missions. The local church is seen as needing to become a primary participant in the task of global evangelization (Camp 1992). This paper will outline the major paradigms through which many churches have and are evolving. In reality, these paradigms represent a continuum of missions activities. No congregation fits one paradigm entirely and perfectly. A partic-

ular church may utilize selected ideas found within each of the three paradigms. For the sake of illustration, however, the paradigms will be presented as if each one is all-inclusive of a particular church's activities. Thus, while these paradigms overlap and simplify reality, they do enable us to make certain observations.

## The Supporting Paradigm

The supporting paradigm is still the predominate model for evangelical churches and can be traced back at least to the 1970s. From this perspective, the role of the local church in world missions is understood largely as supporting. The prevailing question is: What is their game plan? In other words, churches look to mission agencies to set the missions agenda. Basically, whatever agencies want to do is accepted as correct because they are perceived to be the experts. A descriptive summary word for this model is "dependence" in regard to how the local church conducts its missions activities through the agencies.

From a local church perspective, a number of ideas are used to describe this paradigm. These include a high loyalty to denominational and non-denominational mission agencies. Financial support is given to individuals who may reside outside of the geographical region of the congregation. Missionaries travel throughout the country to speak and raise support, rarely staying at one church from one week to the next. Mission education is provided by outsiders (generally visiting missionaries) via speakers, slides and mission

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conferences. Financial support for a missionary is assumed for the duration of their career. Agencies make most of the decisions.

Churches operating in this paradigm are mainly dependent upon mission agencies. They implicitly trust the agencies to know best, and follow the agencies' programs. Prayer support for missionaries is usually limited, since the congregation is often only superficially involved in the life of the missionary and his or her ministries. Although some churches still operate in this support model, changes in the supporting paradigm began to occur in the early 1980s as local congregations started to think in terms of a more participatory role and model of missions.

### The Sending Paradigm

Instead of maintaining a *supporting* role, many churches in the 1980s increasingly began to assume a *sending* role in world missions. The key word became "my," and the key question became: "What is my church's plan?" In this model churches have shifted from a more dependent mode to an independent one in their relationship to mission agencies. Congregations utilize the services of mission agencies when they want to, but churches are no longer dependent on any one agency. Some churches send their own missionaries, bypassing the agencies altogether. (I am not suggesting that churches bypass agencies. I view agencies, both historically and currently, as gifts from God to help churches fulfill their mission mandate.) Nonetheless, direct sending of missionaries from local churches is a trend that will not go away. In many cases, this direct sending is a result of congregations wanting to work in areas beyond existing work. Some local

churches believe that agencies have become bogged down into working primarily among reached peoples (AD 2000 Global Monitor 1992:2).

Several factors characterize this second paradigm. The agency to which a church was loyal in the previous decade now becomes one of many. Denominational and/or organizational loyalty is predominantly a notion of the past for churches which have accepted the sending paradigm. Financial support is regionalized. No longer are missionaries sent throughout the country to find support partners. Congregations now insist on both quantity and quality time with its missionaries whom it supports and sends.

aries for their own local church. Congregations still may work with agencies, but only as equal partners. If an agency does not accept this new role of the church as a partner, then a church may opt to find an agency that cooperates with the church's sending task.

Positive factors for missionaries that have resulted from congregations which have become sending churches include: 1). A stronger emotional tie with their home church; 2). Greater prayer and financial support; 3). More accountability to the local church.

Certainly not everyone agrees that a church should take a more active role in world missions. Some interpret this action as churches beginning to act like mission agencies. Negative factors of churches who do this, according to missions executive Sam Metcalf, include: 1. The potential weeding out of the best candidates who are unwilling to go through the church's pre-field training program, 2. More strings attached to church support which causes can-

<b>Supporting Church</b>	<b>Sending Church</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—The focus is on money.</li> <li>—The church chooses from among missionaries who already have established their strategy.</li> <li>—The focus is on quantity thus giving a less money to more missionaries.</li> <li>—Church members have little personal involvement with missionaries.</li> <li>—The church has minimal "ownership" of missions and missionaries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—The focus is on people.</li> <li>—The church has more opportunities to establish its own strategy.</li> <li>—The focus is on quality.</li> <li>—Church members have maximum personal involvement with missionaries.</li> <li>—The church can claim its missionaries to be "her own." (ACMC 1988: 9-10)</li> </ul>

If candidates for support cannot spend significant time with a church, then they are not considered for support.

Churches in this paradigm demand relationships with their missionaries that go beyond financial support.

Mission education also changed significantly in this sending paradigm. For example, church members began to speak about doing missions based on their mission training in a Perspectives class or on a short-term missions trips. If an outsider was brought in, the individual had to be an excellent communicator. Expectations for quality presentation rose dramatically during this time. In the process, the goal of the sending church changed to directly recruiting and training its own people to be mission-

didates to go to individuals for donations thus slowing down the time it takes missionaries to raise support; 3. According to Metcalf's view of history, whenever churches begin to exercise control of the missionary enterprise or seek to become an agency, "the missionary effort is eventually impaired and may even die" (1993:146).

Most churches currently still operate in the supporting paradigm. However, a growing number of influential congregations have transitioned to the sending paradigm. A few congregations are shifting to a third model, the synergistic paradigm which is appearing on the horizon in the 1990s. Larry Walker, a church missions consultant for ACMC, estimates that 90% of the mission-

active churches in North America fit the supporting paradigm, while 8-9% represent the sending paradigm and 1-2% fit the synergistic paradigm (Personal communication July 5, 1993).

### Synergistic (owning) Paradigm

The definition of the synergistic paradigm contains the idea of joint action by agents that when taken together, increases the effectiveness of both. Another term for the synergistic paradigm is "owning" since a foundational element to this paradigm is emotional ownership of the activity. The key word of this model is "we." The question a church asks is: "What is our role in obeying the Great Commission?" Instead of trying to accomplish numerous missions activities by themselves, synergistic churches will focus on a few items which they can do well. Synergistic congregations are fellowships which partner with others and combine their efforts to produce greater effectiveness than either party can accomplish independently. This partnership model assumes an inter-dependent (not independent) perspective. The churches realize that they do not have to respond to every need, and realize that they are not able to, and so instead, concentrate their energies and finances on a few needs. Frequently, such concentration of energies and finances is channelled to reach an unreached people group.

In this model, mission education is accomplished by both "high tech" and "high touch" efforts. Missionaries increasingly stay in communication with their supporters by the use of faxes, telephones, electronic mail, and voice mail. Synergistic type churches encourage Baby Boomers and others in their congregation to visit the mission field in order to gain a sense of ownership, and to understand why their church should strive for a strong missions emphasis, (Engel and Jones 1989). Short-term trips are encouraged, since they greatly facilitate more prayer for world evangeli-

zation and especially focus prayer on the part of the participants (STEM Ministries 1991).

The question of the church's role in world missions is precipitated by several factors. One is the recognition of a global Christian community. The missions-active church, in this paradigm, recognizes that the North American Church does not have sole responsibility for world evangelization. The Great Commission applies to every church throughout the world, and since over two-thirds of the Christian community is now non-Western (Douglas 1990:56), the synergistic church realizes that, at least numerically, the role of the American church is diminishing.

The synergistic church recognizes that the number of non-Western missionaries is increasing dramatically. Whereas in 1991 only 36% of the world's Protestant missionary force was from the Two-Thirds World, by AD 2000, it is projected that this number will rise to 55% (Pate 1991: 58-59). This increase, coupled with the growing concern about the cost of support for North American missionaries, has encouraged the idea that supporting nationals is more cost effective.

Synergistic churches desire to make a significant impact on the non-Christian world. They will adopt various approaches to missions, including an entrepreneurial one. Congregations utilizing the synergistic paradigm likely will reflect many of the Boomers' values such as a desire for multiple options in ministry, appreciation for diversity among individuals (men and women, lay and professional, ethnic and Anglo), desire for change and a hope for significance in their lives (Barna 1990; Collins and Clinton 1992) as well as the Thirteeners' value of pragmatism (Strauss and Howe 1991). For example, synergistic churches, influenced by the Thirteeners value of pragmatism, will scrutinize agencies and plans based upon actual accomplishments, as opposed to rhetoric. They likely will

agree with Andrall Pearson, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard's Business School, who writes: "Successful companies today realize that change is the new order and innovation is the primary driver" (1992:70).

Mission organizations which are likely to flourish during the time frame of this model are those which facilitate a local church's mission plans. Antioch Network is a prime example. Its goal is to network congregations that want to send church planting teams to unreached peoples (Antioch Times 1993:3). The organization called Issachar is another example. This organization partners with local churches to assist them in developing their vision and strategies in reaching their adopted people groups (Moats 1991:5). The Adopt-A-People concept is a strategy which corresponds well with the synergistic paradigm, and should blossom during this decade. The idea of a single people group focus for a given church correlates well with the question of a church's role in owning and obeying the Great Commission. Rather than strategizing to evangelize several thousand unreached people groups, the local church rather focuses on only one people.

Other factors, often influenced by the values of the Boomers and/or Busters, both positively and negatively, which may affect the church are:

1. *The blurring of religious distinction and categories.* Polarizing theological issues such as charismatic/non-charismatic or Protestant vs Roman Catholic will be less of a concern in this decade of the synergistic paradigm.

2. *The changing missionary role in North America.* As national churches mature, the role of the American missionary must change. They will adopt a *facilitating* role to assist the church in specialized areas. Church-related tasks in which missionaries have traditionally worked will fall to national leaders (Pate 1991:61). However, in areas and people groups where the church has not yet

been established, traditional church planters will still be needed.

3. *The recognition that mission is not just overseas.* Numerous language and ethnic groups have come to the United States that must be evangelized and reached. For example, in Los Angeles County alone, people from about 140 different countries are represented. In 1989, only 43% of the population was Anglo. By 2010, it is projected that in Los Angeles, there will be more Hispanics than Anglos. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, it is estimated that close to 100 different languages are spoken by the students (Pearlstone 1990). Synergistic church leaders recognize that demographics are changing in the United States. They realize that their mission fields include ethnic groups who reside within their own communities.

4. *The intertwined growth of evangelism and social programs.* There is a growing perception that the dichotomy between evangelism and social programs is artificial. Ministries like Prison Fellowship which intertwine the two will flourish. Issues like AIDS, refugees, gangs, drugs and starvation will not be dealt with only on the spiritual level.

5. *The recognition to hear God speak through Christians from around the world.* For many years, God used Westerners to set the Christian agenda for the rest of the world. Today, believers want to listen to non-Westerners also.

6. *The perception that changes in the world occur rapidly and require a quick response.* God often grants only brief windows of opportunity for believers to seize. For example, there is no indication of how long some of the new Muslim-dominated countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States will remain open to missionary endeavors. Synergistic churches expect to respond quickly to current opportunities.

### Church and Mission Implications

These paradigms are based on histori-

cal observation. They are not developmental stages. In other words, a church could begin its mission involvement from the synergistic paradigm. While there is no one right approach from which a church should operate, normally churches should strive for interdependence as opposed to dependent or independent paradigms.

Not all churches have changed their mission paradigm, nor should they. Some still fit the paradigm of support, while others have become involved in the sending model. But, some are becoming interdependent-synergistic churches. Agencies need to think through how to work in terms of these paradigms and be able to assist churches operating in the three models.

What are the implications of this synergistic paradigm for mission agencies? How should agencies respond? If the key question for this model is: What is our role in obeying the Great Commission?, then several questions must be considered on the part of agencies. Like: Does our agency offer a pre-packed program, either by attitude or action, of what a church should or should not do in missions? Do we strive to enable churches to fulfill their vision? For example, does our Adopt-A-People program allow for creative and genuine partnership? Do we (the agencies) dictate the game plan for ministry? Do we welcome dialogue with churches in the development of strategies, especially to unreached peoples?

The synergistic paradigm does not mean that the leaders of an agency no longer have the prerogative to set the direction for that agency. However, if an agency agrees with the synergistic paradigm, it will allow others to have input into where and how the agency might minister in the future.

As an example, leaders of the Evangelical Free Church Mission (my mission) recognized that there indeed is a paradigm shift occurring among local churches. Beyond acknowledging this shift, they also considered their

response to local churches which may want to originate their own overseas ministries. As a mission, the Evangelical Free Church has stated that there are at least four types of responses which they could give to churches which launch their own initiatives. First, they could respond at the *encouragement level*. Here, they rejoice in what a church is doing and show genuine interest in their ministry. Second, they could respond at a *consultant level*. At this level, the mission meets with the leadership of a church to help them think through the pros and cons of the project and what would be necessary for it to flourish. The mission's expertise and resources come to bear here and would be made available to the church. Third, they could respond at a *partnership level*. The terms of the partnership would need to be negotiated as to lines of authority, finances, role of the local church and role of the mission, etc. The fourth response would be the *adoption level*. Adoption means that the mission would ultimately take responsibility for the ministry. Any of these four responses could apply to entering a new country, targeting an unreached people, or evangelizing a world class city.

A further question which agencies should consider in regard to the synergistic model is whether or not the mission has adequately defined its role, and in what ways? Are we aggressively practicing what we have defined? Do the traditional measures of success for our agency (more money and more recruits) adequately take into account the synergistic paradigm? How should our role be changed in each of the three paradigms? Specifically, what programs and attitudes should change as a result of our recognizing the different paradigms? Have the different models and changes been communicated with churches and missionaries? Also are these changes acknowledged and supported by our mission leadership?

We need to understand that agencies can still provide a great service to

**SUMMARY OF PARADIGM SHIFTS IN WORLD EVANGELIZATION**

PARADIGMS	SUPPORTING	SENDING	SYNERGISTIC (owning)
Time Period	1970s and before	1980s	1990s
Key Word	“They”	“My”	“We”
Description	Dependent	Independent	Inter-dependent
Key Question	What is <i>their</i> game plan?	What is my church’s plan?	What is our role in obeying the Great Commission?
Mission Agency	High loyalty to a given agency	Awareness that an agency is one of many	Recognition of a global Christian community
Decision Making	Agency makes decisions	Partnership with the agency	Forming a strategic ministry
Geographic Support	Support outside the region	Support within the region	Support of non-Western missionaries
Philosophical Support	Support American missionaries	Recruit/train/support our own	Partnership with others (Americans/others)
Congregational Outreach	Non-directive philosophy	Directive philosophy	Empower church constituency philosophy
Relationships	Superficial contacts with missionaries	Quality/quantity time with our missionaries	Make a significant impact on the non-Christian world
Mission Education	Mission education by outsiders	Mission education done by insiders and by quality teachers	High-tech and high-touch mission training
Church Participation	Emphasis on goers	Emphasis on goers and senders	Emphasis on everyone participating in outreach
Focus	Focus is on money	Focus is on people	Focus in on opportunity
Strategy	No church strategy	A single church strategy	Multi-pronged strategy
Signs of Success	Bigger budgets for missions, better mission conferences	Bigger budgets and more missionaries sent	Souls saved, churches planted, more members empowered for ministry

local churches which are operating in terms of the synergistic paradigm. To be effective, however, agencies will need to think creatively about how to work in *true partnership* with local churches. Just as national churches on the mission fields move through various stages of development with a mission agency (Fuller 1980), so like-wise local churches must be allowed to move through stages of mission development and involvement.

Frequently congregations do not realize that there are various paradigms

from which they can operate. They need to ask themselves what the pros and cons are of each model. They should also discuss what issues need to be addressed for their church in following one or another paradigms. For example, what global realities do they see that will have a bearing on how a given church should conduct missions in the 1990s? What do they believe is the role of the church in obeying the Great Commission? What is the strategy of their church for this decade? As a church transitions from a supporting mode to

a more involvement and partnership model, what changes will need to occur in their church’s missions understanding and practice?

The synergistic (owning) paradigm offers local churches meaningful participation in the Great Commission. Yet, it is not a panacea. It will not cure every ailment found in the world mission enterprise. It does, however, address the changing global realities. It recognizes that the North American Church still has a significant role to play in world evangelization. At the same time, it

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also acknowledges that the American Church is not the only player in this endeavor.

### Conclusion

Will there be a church planting movement among every unreached people group by the year 2000? The answer is no, unless changes occur in how churches participate in world evangelization! While all three paradigms allow for involvement by churches in evangelizing unreached peoples (Camp 1993), only the synergistic ownership model allows for an aggressive and full-orbed participation by congregations in bringing closure to the final task in the foreseeable future. If indeed our goal is "a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000," then a myriad of supporting and sending churches must take a more active role and consider becoming synergistic churches.

The paradigm of passive mission involvement characterized by most local churches in the past is not conducive to the accelerated momentum and emphasis needed for world evangelization. More biblically and missiologically informed, as well as Spirit-led action is needed, especially as it relates to evangelizing the remaining unreached peoples. Our prayer is that both churches and mission agencies accept the challenge and blessing of the synergistic (owning) mission model and in the process form strong partnerships to finish the task that remains.

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