

# The Triad for Century 21

by Paul A. Beals

Today, with the perspective of twenty centuries of world mission behind us, we must take a new look at our current situation and opportunities. In Protestant circles, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have brought about many changes by which the church's mission is carried forward. Mission agencies, both denominational and interdenominational, are continuing to multiply, and Christian schools of higher learning are offering more courses and degree options for those preparing for intercultural ministry.

In this developing environment our local churches, Christian schools, and mission agencies form a triad in tackling the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth: the assembly, the academy, and the agency. The members of this triad must move into the next century with renewed understanding of and commitment to their interdependence and synergy in carrying out the Redemptive Mandate. Because of their differences, we cannot paint all churches, schools, and agencies with the same brush. However, areas of commonality exist which need to be addressed.

## **The Role of the Assembly**

Local churches are the key to world missions. They are the source of missionary personnel, of financial support, and of informed prayer. They are the engine, under God, that drives world mission. They are His vehicle to carry out His Redemptive Mandate to the peoples of the earth. World mission will never be stronger than the combined energy of local churches. Without the assembly there would be no academy or agency.

***Current changes in the assembly.*** Some good things are happening in our churches. Recruitment for short-term mission involvement is booming. Teen teams are moving out for targeted projects. Teams of skilled builders are meeting needs for overseas church building and camp construction. People with specialized medical skills are filling the gap in mission hospitals and clinics.

Short-termers help supply teaching needs in MK schools and leadership training institutions. Growth of mega-churches is spawning new churches, as well as new practices of missionary authorization.

On the other hand, recent years show a sharp decline in long-term missionary commitment. This is a matter of concern since missionary personnel come out of churches. Within the church, Christian home influence is a significant factor. There is some evidence that prospective long-term missionaries tend to be older when entering missionary service than previously. There are no doubt multiple reasons for this, one of which may be the increase of people entering missionary service as a second career. Also, in general, career decisions are now made later in life.

***Suggested changes in the assembly.*** The success of mission commitment in the local church rises or falls with the leadership. Mission interests in the church vie with many other legitimate demands. For example, in addition to the pastor's role as an expositor of the Word, intercessor for mission, organizer of mission outreach, and recruiter of missionary personnel, he needs personal exposure to the fields in which the church's missionaries labor. Funds escrowed in the annual budget to send the pastor to visit these fields will pay dividends for the church, the pastor,

and the missionaries visited. The pastor needs to communicate both with schools and agencies in order to keep abreast of changes taking place.

One of the greatest needs in the local churches is updating the support structure for their missionaries. Deputation, or so-called "pre-field ministry", for support-raising must be addressed. Enhanced understandings of requirements for adequate missionary support must take place. Prolonged fund-raising by missionaries is a major cause of discouragement for potential candidates.

One of the most effective means of meeting support needs is a regional consortium of churches. These churches of like faith, varied in number, agree to support the missionaries who are members of their churches at percentages of support adequate to meet the missionaries' needs. These consortia bring geographic and percentage giving into manageable and realistic parameters. Churches, both denominational and interdenominational, that support "faith missions", face this dilemma.

Because of the interrelatedness of the schools and agencies with the churches, they, too, are responsible to provide information and encouragement to help bring about these necessary changes.

### **The Role of the Academy**

It is a well-known fact that the majority of missionary personnel are prepared by Bible institutes and Bible colleges, despite the fact that advanced education is very much needed on many fields. Some seminaries today have effective departments of missiological study. Seminaries have varying degrees of success in preparing people for missionary service. Their major ministry focus is usually pastoral preparation for American local churches, as well as preparing students to become professors for theological education.

Historically, missiology as a theological discipline has had a tenuous journey. As we review the academy's role, we will concentrate on seminaries, varied as they are.

***Current changes in the academy.*** A number of seminaries today are developing extension models, internet study, and intercultural internships.

Distance education now augments local campus study in some seminaries, as well as some Bible institutes and Bible colleges. Some extension models are used overseas for training national leaders, as well as missionaries. Advanced degrees are available for those students who qualify.

Internet study is another innovative means of biblical education. This technology is developing rapidly. Hopefully this can be utilized internationally as well. Other means of theological education are also available via audio or video cassettes and CD-ROM.

Intercultural internships help bring together the members of the triad. Internships carried out in local churches at home and abroad enhance the educational process, and benefit the churches by bringing new vision and personal interest in missionary endeavor.

***Suggested changes in the academy.*** Observations here are threefold: communication, education, and integration. Structured communication is needed among the three members of the triad. Church leaders and mission agency leaders need to know what the schools are doing to prepare students for intercultural ministries.

Visits to churches by school representatives who can communicate the school's world mission commitments will open windows of understanding. Mission recruiters need regularly scheduled visits to the school campuses to interact with administrators, faculty, and students. Experience shows that the agencies who minister in schools regularly are the ones who influence potential candidates to go with their agency.

Continuing education for pastors and other church leaders is another vital link the academy can forge with the assembly. This is an ideal setting for mission information and instruction that the schools can provide. Pastors need to be informed concerning their own alma maters in their commitment to world mission.

A missions center on campus, acting as a coordinating clearing house for all school mission activity both on and off campus, will help to enable each member of the triad to maintain a meaningful synergy.

Seminaries need to give attention to the integration of the entire encyclopedia of theological education being offered. The Redemptive Mandate encompasses God's redemptive initiatives revealed in the Old Testament, beginning with the fall of humankind and continuing with His dealings with both Israel and Gentile nations. The New Testament continues the redemptive theme of Scripture in Christ's instructions to the church to proclaim the gospel among all peoples. The glory of God and His supremacy are the focus of the Redemptive Mandate. The Mandate should be the integrating factor in all areas of theological study: exegetical, biblical, historical, systematic, philosophical, and ministry. This integration brings God's redemptive purposes into focus in every area of theology.

### **The Role of the Agency**

Contrary to the thinking of many people in the churches, mission agencies do not send missionaries. Local churches send missionaries. The agency simply rounds out the triad by serving the churches in their task of sending.

***Current changes in the agency.*** Mission agencies now find themselves serving an expanding group of people who want to serve in intercultural contexts. With the explosion of short-term missions of many types, the agencies must find ways to oversee a variety of individuals and teams intent on making an impact for Christ.

Processing applications, coordination with the fields, sometimes helping with travel arrangements for groups, and handling financial accounts for additional personnel are only a few of the tasks handled by the agency for short-term ministries on behalf of the churches.

Many mission agencies face a decline of applicants as long-term personnel. The agencies together with local churches need to evaluate strategies for recruitment. Representation in the schools must be intensified with renewed understanding of student thinking today.

***Suggested changes in the agency.*** Never have mission agency personnel needed more wisdom and discretion in decision making than in today's world situation. Both research and recruitment are concerns.

Research on the decline of long-term missionaries is developing. Not only are reasons and remedies needed, but both agencies and churches need to know how best to minister to those missionaries who are leaving their fields of service.

Research on potential ministry opportunities is an ongoing need. People who are still unreached within an agency's area of work are a challenge. Restricted Access Countries present new means of gospel penetration, and the concept of nonresident missionaries needs further development.

Recruitment patterns also need reevaluation. Church-planting ministries in new frontiers need to be explored. Support ministry opportunities continue to multiply. Computer technology skills are increasingly needed, and media technologies enrich biblical preaching and teaching.

Literacy and TESL open avenues for evangelism and teaching; translation skills are needed as tribal people want and need the Scriptures in their own languages. Schools can help prepare people for these ministries, but national leadership development remains a basic ingredient in world evangelization and church planting. Agencies play a key role in making these opportunities known; they must concentrate on local churches and schools.

## **Reflections**

Where is the church's mission headed in century 21? The direction depends on the people in the assembly, the academy, and the agency. Because of its constituency, the Evangelical Missiological Society is in a position to take the lead in encouraging the triad to forge ahead. Here are some suggestions:

- Encourage mutual commitment to synergy in the triad by communicating more effectively.
- Engage mission-savvy pastors, missionaries, and mission executives to present papers, and participate in panels and discussion groups in the EMS regional and annual conferences.
- Enlist pastors, mission representatives, and missionaries to speak in seminary chapel and seminars.
- Expose people from the churches and the schools to the international world in which the missionaries serve.

Yes, synergy. May God give us the will and the way to move ahead together to reach every tribe, language, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9).

**Response #1**  
by Jim Forstrom

## **Assembly**

Paul Beals has stated some basic issues that face the assembly, academy and agency as we enter the new millennium. I feel another source needs to be factored into the synergism of change which will propel us ahead in global evangelism; the national church. As we see the rapid growth of the church in developing countries, we must include our networking relationship with them to aggressively fulfill the Great Commission. As we consider the impact of the assembly in missions, I agree with Professor Beals that the church is the key to world missions. However, I would add to the personnel, financial and prayer ingredients in missions that many churches

today desire to be involved in both hands-on ministry as well as strategic thinking in opening new fields and reaching out to unreached people groups. We see a growing number of churches either desiring partnership with agencies or are striking out on their own to open new fields. Northside Community Evangelical Free Church in Atlanta has spearheaded a movement in Bosnia resulting in church plants, a biblical training center and a good number of missionaries who have been sent out through their own 501C3 agency which they have formed. Their denominational Mission, the Evangelical Free Church Mission, is now partnering with this church in church planting ministry in Bosnia. This trend of churches sending their own missionaries to the field may be a primary reason for agencies seeing less people coming through their doors for long term service.

Another concern I see in churches today is the lack of understanding in global evangelism. George Barna reports that only 14% of evangelicals can clearly define the Great Commission. Dr. Bruce Camp recently surveyed over 800 adults attending Sunday School in evangelical churches on the question, "Men and women who don't hear the gospel will go to hell." Over 50% responded they either questioned or doubted this statement. Such statistics indicate that we have a basic task of missions education to do in the assembly. Short term missions teams have proven to be very popular the past decade as indicated in Beals' article. I am concerned as to the focus of many short term projects as they seem to be an end themselves, rather than tying in with long term results as they relate to church planting goals and personnel on the field. As short termers have the opportunity to rub shoulders with veteran missionaries, God can use these experiences to nudge many hearts to long time service. In the EFCM we see the majority of our candidates coming with short term ministry backgrounds.

I also agree with Dr. Beals in the impact of pastors visiting the field. Pastors not only return to the pulpit with new vibrancy in preaching, but can also cast a vision to their congregation of global evangelism. We are seeing pastors leaving the local church pastorate to move into cross-cultural ministry. Other pastors are returning from vision trips to lead their church into a partnership to reach out to a specific people group.

Dr. Beals also addresses the issue of funding of missions. He shares the concept of regional consortium of churches as a possible solution to helping to fund missionaries. This is a wonderful concept and we have seen several consortiums that have helped a few of our EFCM missionaries significantly. I see a greater response for support as people sense a relationship with a missionary. Therefore getting missionaries into small group settings and allowing them to share their story seems to be a more effective means of raising support. Another trend is for churches to permit people to designate their giving to a specific missionary on their support list. Many laymen in church today want to give to a specific person or cause rather than to a general budget.

### **Academy**

I appreciate Professor Beals' emphasis on the need for the academy to flex and change to meet the needs of personnel going to the field today. As we see a large segment of people making mid-career decisions for missions, we need to adjust to supplementing their educational background with biblical and missiological training. Our fast changing technology is providing some excellent resources and I also highly endorse the intercultural internship concept. As we establish the agenda for preparation for mission personnel we need to include both the practical training in skills as well as in the philosophy of knowledge in missions. I would applaud the need for leadership from the assembly, academy and agency to dialog as to the changes needed in preparation of personnel to meet the global needs in the next century. The future agenda of the academy needs to be fed by both the assembly and the agency. I urge the academy to invite the leadership from the other groups to meet at the table soon!

## Agency

I agree with Dr. Beal's statement that "churches send" missionaries. The agency's role is to process and place the personnel. Both assembly and agency need to care for the missionary as they serve. Agencies do need to have a strong short term missions program if they are going to have a feeder system to long term personnel. Another important factor facing the agency today is who are they serving; themselves or the local church? As churches are becoming much more aggressive in strategic thinking and desire for involvement, the agency needs to come alongside the local church to help them clarify and fulfill their global vision. As the agency provides this service to the local church, the assembly will flow their personnel through the agency. Yes, we are living in a day of change requiring networking and close working relationships between the assembly, the academy and the agency. As the synergism of these bodies work together we shall see great resources mobilized for global missions in the 21st century.

### **Response #2**

by David Hesselgrave

Paul Beals can always be counted on to supply a thoughtful analysis of almost any missiological issue. Many concerns connected with the relationship between "assembly, academy and agency," as he so nicely puts it, have been dealt with in his outstanding book A People for His Name--A Church-Based Mission Strategy (rev. ed, 1995, William Carey Library). That work should be consulted when dealing with most of the issues highlighted in the foregoing article. In the outworking of Christian mission today something similar has happened as has been the case with the tax code of the Internal Revenue Service. The more numerous the attempts to define, refine and expedite both of them, the more complex they become! By my count, in this short article Beals has raised at least twenty crucial concerns that cry out for collaboration by churches, schools and missions. Actually, many more are likely involved.

The operant word here is "synergy." In theology synergy refers to the doctrine that, in regeneration, there is a certain cooperation between divine grace and human activity. In physiological terms synergy has to do with the kind of cooperation between agencies that produces results greater than those that could be expected were those agencies to act independently of each another. Setting aside certain fundamental theological questions such as those having to do with the primacy of grace in spiritual regeneration and of the Church in Christian mission, it seems apparent that one of the greatest needs in missions today is for synergism between churches, schools and mission agencies. If representative leaders would periodically devote time and energy to a collaborative consideration of issues such as those catalogued here, only the Lord Himself knows the magnitude of positive results that twenty-first century missions could be expected to reveal! Paul Beals deserves our gratitude for providing the appropriate agenda. The Evangelical Missiological Society deserves commendation for providing an appropriate forum.