



Paradigm Shifts in Mission¹

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Conceptual Framework

The essential base: God's unchanging truth in God's changing world.

Our difficult task: Keeping the two related yet distinct.

How do we understand changes within the work of *missions* and *leadership development* within the church?

Change: Evidence of whose hand in things? The major theological issue in the evaluation of change: differentiating the sources in terms of God's intentions and Satan's mischief.

The difference between *intended* and *contextual* changes—accepting the right responsibility.

Paradigm shift: What does it mean? What does the concept “paradigm shift” allow us to see more clearly?

A Quick Scan: Christian Missions since 1945

Rejection of colonialism (What outsiders can no longer get away with).

The rise of nationalism (People insisting on the rights of ownership).

The rise and fall of ideological warfare (The cold war and beyond).

The re-emergence of inter-ethnic hostility (the reality of genocide).

Nostalgia and triumphalism (Absurd attempts to turn the clock back).

The Coming and Going of Educational Models: Implications for Missions

Development of leadership is now widely discussed as the major need in the missionary world.

Institutional forms of education persist as the dominant paradigm, despite the fact that such institutions are in sharp contrast with the examples and direct teachings of the Bible.

¹ Ted Ward. Paradigm Shifts in Missions. Outline for presentation to BILD Conference, October 21-23, 1992

The way leadership development is approached has always been a reliable indicator of the dominant values in a given era of missions. Consider the values represented by each of these generalizations:

1. They must be trained as we were trained.
2. They don't need much education.
3. The major purposes of leadership education are knowledge and intellectual development.
4. They must be *prepared* for ministry.
5. They must have special schools in which they can invest several years of preparatory effort.
6. Only those with adequate education can be ordained for ministry.
7. We must assure that they set valid educational standards.

Story 1. Theological Education by Extension

The pragmatic origin of TEE

Early hopes for TEE:

- Integration of learning and ministry.
- Broadening the outreach of theological education.
- Bringing more national persons into the leadership of pastoral education.
- Reducing the dominance of the missionary-based leadership education institutions.
- Shaking up the formal education establishment.

Major weaknesses that emerged in TEE:

- Emulation of traditional teaching.
- Failure to relate effectively to ministry experiences.
- Inadequate skills in leadership of nonformal learning.
- Domination and recapture by formal education institutions.

TEE as the *sign of a paradigm shift*.

Story 2. The Emergence of Ministry Degrees

- The “discovery” of *continuing education* after WWII.
- The emergence of the Doctor of Ministry and the Doctor of Missiology degrees.
- Trends in theological education that emerged from D.Min. experiences:
- Legitimization of extension education—”distance learning”.
- Discovery of new “markets” for theological education (e.g., pastors in center city ministries; parachurch staff groups)
- Acceptance of the worth of theological education for para-professional and lay groups
- Discovery of the necessity for changing accreditation standards to become more responsive to the newly discovered “markets” and needs of previously overlooked people.

Story 3. The Hidden Curriculum in Academia

In the worthy cause of producing an intellectually competent base for ministry, aspiring pastors can be alienated from their parish, linguistically and contextually. Unintended consequences of formal theological education, whether out of country or within, must be carefully examined. Surely God will hold us accountable for what happens to his people and his church, no matter how well-intended are our efforts.

Major Constraints in the Passing Paradigm

The “old way” of looking at theological education, for missions and for our home contexts, is tightly bound up in the imagery of formal schooling. Thus our ideas tend to be limited in the following ways:

Place-Bound: must use cubic space, preferably indoors.

Time-Bound: must be based on measurements of the clock.

Hierarchically Controlled: administrators manage; teachers teach; students learn.

Cognitively Centered: must deal primarily with information.

Competitive: must use extrinsic motivation to learn.

Recall-Assessed: must be scored, graded, and evaluated in terms of how much is remembered.

Caveat in Conclusion

Few summative or predictive generalizations based upon a view from one time and place should be expected to hold true for the church as a whole. The church of Jesus Christ is diverse beyond our capacity to comprehend. What we say here may relate only narrowly to those sectors represented in general by “evangelicalism” of North America. Our conclusions may not even be valid across all of that limited sector of the church.

The work of Jesus Christ, building his church, is a huge task of bringing people to accept the basis of reconciliation completed on the cross. We participate in that work, the work of the church, but we neither define it nor control it. Surely we do not invent it. It is God’s work. Our task is to see ourselves as part of it and to accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we seek to understand from his Word and in his world what God is doing. Then we need the courage to ask if we might help in some way.