

VOL. 10 • NO.2 SPRING 2019

AN ALTERNATIVE MISSION PARADIGM FOR HEALTHY CHURCH GROWTH

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Abstract

Christianity is becoming weaker and nominalized, and it is expected to be surpassed quantitatively by Islam in 2070. The purpose of this article is to analyze the limitations of the holistic mission paradigm, a representative view of mission today, in terms of healthy church growth, and to propose key points of an alternative mission paradigm which would be helpful for overcoming these limitations. The history of holistic mission is examined to show the identity and characteristics of the paradigm, and then an alternative mission paradigm that can contribute to healthy church growth is presented.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity, which accounted for 34.5 percent of the world's population in 1900, declined to 32.5 percent in 2000. However, the growth of Islam is amazing. In 1900, Islam, which accounted for 12.4 percent of the world's

population, grew to 21.1 percent in 2000.¹ According to a survey by Pew Research, Islam is expected to almost equal Christianity in 2050, and after 2070 it will surpass Christianity and become the world's largest religion.² According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, "Overall, between 2000 and 2010, Islam grew faster than Christianity. Islam grew at 1.86% per annum, whereas Christianity grew 1.31% (the world's population grew at 1.20%). In 2010, there were 2.3 billion Christians (32.8% of the world's population) and 1.6 billion Muslims (22.5% of the world's population)."³

The mainline churches are seriously reduced or nominalized, especially in Europe and other western regions that were the main habitations of Christianity. This phenomenon does not occur only in the West. Even the Korean church, a younger church which has been recognized as a mission leader in the majority world, is also showing serious decline and ineffectiveness.⁴

In this situation, Christians must seriously reflect on the cause of the weakening of overall Christian growth compared to Islam. An in-depth analysis is needed as to why the church is weakening rather than having a strong influence. In this article, I identify major causes of weakening, especially in terms of mission paradigms, because the paradigms are crucial factors determining the increase or decrease of the church.

Though the history of missions is difficult to simplify, it is possible to say that there appeared three major mission paradigms in mission history: the evangelical mission paradigm, the ecumenical mission paradigm, and the holistic mission paradigm.⁵ Currently, the holistic paradigm is widely

1 The number of Muslims increased from 200 million in 1900 to 1.23 billion in 2000. One major cause of this increase is a high birth rate. But that is not all. In the background of this rapid growth, there were strong zeal and dedication of Muslims for maintaining and expanding Islam. Patrick Johnston and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001), 2-3.

2 Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," accessed January 2, 2019, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

3 "Quick Facts about Global Christianity," Gordon-Conwell Resources, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/Quick-Facts-about-Global-Christianity.cfm#3>.

4 Of course, dynamic growth still occurs in Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Asia. However, it is difficult to deny that the share of Christianity in the world is declining and becoming nominalized.

5 The holistic mission paradigm is difficult to define, but for the sake of a clear discussion, it can be defined as follows: The holistic mission paradigm is a mission view that does not prioritize either

accepted not only by the ecumenical group but also by the evangelical group as well.⁶ But is the holistic mission paradigm a proper vision for saving Christianity from its crisis? Can Christianity overcome its crisis and grow if Christianity continues to pursue the holistic mission paradigm? We must seriously diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. For healthy church growth, the holistic paradigm will be analyzed and evaluated. After this analysis, some emphases of an alternative mission view will be presented. Adoption of this alternative view would overcome the limits of the holistic mission for the healthy growth of Christianity.

HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HOLISTIC MISSION PARADIGM

Conflicts between Ecumenical and Evangelical Camps

The concern of mission has gradually changed from planting churches in mission fields to establishing shalom in the world since the Edinburgh conference in 1910. This change became more evident with the launch of the *missio Dei* (God's mission) concept in 1952. At the third World Council of Churches (WCC) General Assembly held in New Delhi, India, in 1961, the International Missionary Council (IMC) was integrated into the WCC. At that time, many people expected the WCC to accept the apostolic task as the core of the church ministry, but the actual results showed that interest in evangelization in the WCC became secondary. In 1968, at the Uppsala Assembly, "humanization" was adopted as a goal of mission instead of "evangelization," which was a definite purpose of mission in the traditional mission paradigm.⁷ In the 1973 Bangkok conference, the

evangelization or humanization, evangelism or social service, church or world; it carries out missions seeing all elements as equally important.

6 The evangelical group, especially the Lausanne Movement, actively accepted the concept of holistic mission at Micah Network in 2004, and at Cape Town Lausanne Congress in 2010. The Lausanne Congress said, "All our mission must therefore reflect the integration of evangelism and committed engagement in the world, both being ordered and driven by the whole biblical revelation of the gospel of God." Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization. "The Cape Town Commitment." accessed on February 6, 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

7 WCC, *Drafts for Sections Prepared for the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Uppsala, Sweden: WCC, 1968), 34.

concept of mission began to be understood as “salvation today,” political salvation, instead of the traditional spiritual and personal salvation.⁸

As the ecumenical camp changed the goal and concept of mission, evangelicals began to express opposition to this paradigm. They thought that the ecumenical camp had become theologically liberal, losing confidence in evangelism and replacing evangelism with social action. They held the Wheaton conference in 1966 and proclaimed the Frankfurt Declaration in 1970 to emphasize that mission should be focused on evangelism. So, while the two camps were both using the term “mission,” they had a totally different understanding of mission.⁹

A New Concept of Mission Presented by the Ecumenical Camp

In this situation of conflict, the ecumenical camp started to present a somewhat changed concept of mission. The ecumenical camp, which proposed the goal of mission as humanization at Uppsala in 1968, changed the concept and suggested a new paradigm that encompasses both evangelical and ecumenical concepts. The camp suggested a holistic approach of mission at the Nairobi Assembly in 1975, insisting that evangelization and humanization are equally important.¹⁰

The “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation” document, which was the official view of the WCC in 1982 on mission, said, “Churches are learning afresh through the poor of the earth to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. The ‘spiritual gospel’ and ‘material gospel’ were in Jesus one gospel.”¹¹ Regarding the

8 WCC, *Bangkok Assembly 1973* (Bossey: WCC, 1973), 87-89.

9 David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 40.

10 Of course, Nairobi was still interested in liberation theology, *minjung* theology, liberator Jesus, contextual theology, doing theology, and so on; these concepts tended to be horizontal rather than vertical. As for the Nairobi Assembly, Lee explained, “In a word, Nairobi’s interest was in the holistic mission, so that evangelism, social responsibility and service should be integrated.” Yongwon Lee, 빌링겐에서 나이로비까지 [From Willingen to Nairobi], 선교와 신학 [Mission and Theology], no. 4 (1999): 95.

11 WCC, “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation,” no. 33, in *You Are the Light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005*, Jacques Matthey, ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 23, accessed February 14, 2019, http://www.mission2005.org/fileadmin/files/mission_statements_web.pdf.

nature of this document, Hyung Ki Lee, a representative ecumenical scholar in Korea, said, “This directly revised the bias of the Melbourne CWME [Commission on World Mission and Evangelism] in 1980, and indirectly it seems to have inherited the viability of Nairobi in 1975” (my translation).¹² In other words, the ecumenical theology came to have a paradigm to see mission as a whole, refusing to prioritize either the spirit or the body, the church or the world, humanity or the earth, individual salvation or social salvation.

The Evangelical Camp’s Gradual Acceptance of the Holistic Mission

When the ecumenical camp presented the holistic view of mission, the evangelical camp did not initially accept it; but the evangelical camp gradually tended to accept it after long contemplation. The history of acceptance will be briefly considered.

After the appearance of the holistic view of mission by the ecumenical wing, the evangelicals examined it and began to put evangelism and social responsibility in an equal relationship in the “Grand Rapids Consultation” in 1982.¹³ Since the San Antonio meeting of the ecumenical wing in 1989 and the Lausanne II Assembly of the evangelical wing in 1989 shared a common concern with the holistic approach to mission, the two camps came to see mission in a holistic view.¹⁴

Since the 2000s, the evangelical camp has been inclined to accept the holistic mission view. In the Micah Network¹⁵ and the Third Lausanne

12 Hyung Ki Lee, 복음주의와 에큐메니칼 운동의 세 흐름에 나타난 신학 [Theology Appeared in the Three Streams of Evangelical and Ecumenical Movements] (Seoul: Hankuk Jangrokyochulpansa, 1999), 370.

13 This consultation was held at Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1982, sponsored by Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and World Evangelical Fellowship. This meeting produced a paper entitled “Evangelism and Social Responsibility.”

14 Young Hwan Park, 로잔운동의 선교신학과 WCC의 선교신학 비교 [Comparison of the Missiology of Lausanne and WCC], in 로잔 운동과 신학 [Lausanne Movement and Mission], ed. Korea Association of Professors for Lausanne Study (Seoul: Korea Lausanne Committee, 2014), 203.

15 The Micah Network was founded at Oxford in 2001 by 140 leaders working for the poor from 50 countries for pursuing integral mission, and the network produced a report entitled “Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission,” September 27, 2001, accessed February 6, 2019, https://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_

Congress on World Evangelization (Cape Town, October 16-25, 2010),¹⁶ the emphasis on holistic mission appeared more vigorously. In particular, in the Cape Town Commitment, the evangelical camp officially declared its holistic mission without mentioning the priority of evangelism that evangelicals had emphasized so strongly in the past.¹⁷

Characteristics of the Holistic Mission Paradigm

As we have seen, the holistic approach to mission is a paradigm that came from the ecumenical camp at the outset. In other words, the origin of the holistic theology was from the ecumenical camp, and the evangelical camp gradually embraced it. This is a situation similar to that the *missio Dei* concept that came from the ecumenical camp and was progressively embraced by the evangelical camp.

What kind of paradigm is *missio Dei*? According to Lee's analysis, *missio Dei* is basically a world-oriented paradigm. In the history of Christian mission, Lee said that there was a shift from "the paradigm of evangelism" in the 18th and 19th century to "the paradigm of God's mission." In the former paradigm, the church saw mission in terms of "God-church-world" order; in the latter paradigm, the church tends to see mission in terms of "God-world-church" order.¹⁸ In other words, if there is a tendency to emphasize the church in the former paradigm, the latter paradigm tends to

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16 As the title suggests, this is the third conference of Lausanne, a gathering of "4,200 evangelical leaders from 198 countries" around the world. See Foreword of "The Cape Town Commitment," last modified October 2011, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

17 The commitment declared the holistic mission in section 10-B of the document under the title "The Integrity of Our Mission," saying, "All our mission must therefore reflect the integration of evangelism and committed engagement in the world, both being ordered and driven by the whole biblical revelation of the gospel of God." "The Cape Town Commitment," accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

18 Hyung Ki Lee, *하나님의 선교* [The Mission of God] (Seoul: Hankuk Haksuljungbo, 2008), 388. In the "God-church-world" paradigm, the church tends to understand that God carries out mission in the world through the church, while in the "God-world-church" paradigm the church tends to see that God himself works his mission in the world in which the church is just a participant.

place more emphasis on the world.¹⁹

With the advent of the *missio Dei*, the ecumenical group tended to see the church and the world as equivalent objects of God's love, and gradually refused to prioritize either the world or the church. Also, when speaking of salvation, the group no longer prioritized either spiritual or material salvation, personal or social salvation. This tendency was well demonstrated in the 1973 Bangkok Assembly which tried to redefine the definition of salvation from an ecumenical perspective.²⁰ In other words, even before the 1982 appearance of the ecumenical document "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," which suggested the concept of holistic mission, the ecumenical group already had a holistic view of mission.²¹ So the holistic mission is not a concept derived from the combination of the evangelical and ecumenical theologies, but rather the theology that already existed in the ecumenical theology. The holistic mission paradigm, thus, is another expression of ecumenical missiology.

WEAKNESSES OF THE HOLISTIC MISSION PARADIGM

Too Many Wide-Ranging Goals

The holistic mission paradigm considers all ministries to be its goals, including evangelization, humanization, personal salvation, social salvation, human salvation, and salvation of all creation. In one sense, the broadness of the holistic paradigm can be a strength. At the same time, however, it can become a serious drawback, since it tries to include all kinds of purposes, and then it can weaken clarity and efficiency in mission. David Bosch, one of the leading theorists of missiology, said, "Ultimately mission

19 Ibid., 374.

20 WCC, *Bangkok Assembly 1973* (Bossey: WCC, 1973), 87-89. The "History" of the WCC describes this assembly's emphasis: "The world mission conference in Bangkok, at the turn of the years 1972/1973, became famous for its holistic approach to the theme 'Salvation Today,' encompassing spiritual as well as socio-political aspects in equal measure." WCC, "History," accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/cwme/history>.

21 As mentioned earlier, the document describes the holistic mission as follows: "Churches are learning afresh through the poor of the earth to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. The 'spiritual gospel' and 'the material gospel' were in Jesus one gospel." WCC, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," 23.

remains undefinable. . . . The most we can hope for is to formulate some *approximations* of what mission is all about.”²² The many goals of holistic mission has made the work of describing mission even more difficult. Holistic mission is not only difficult to define specifically, it also is difficult to accomplish efficiently with so many goals.

Holism does not emphasize the term “priority.” Nevertheless, the ecumenical camp occasionally uses the term,²³ and it also uses the term “highest priorities.”²⁴ Healthy church growth is difficult to achieve when a church tries to attain all purposes at the same time without setting priorities. For this reason, Stephen Neill said, “If everything is mission, nothing is mission,”²⁵ worrying about the danger of a much too inclusive missiology. David J. Hesselgrave also mentioned, “My thesis here is that to define Christian mission in such a way as to make socio-political action a partner with evangelizing the lost and building the church is both a badly mistaken and potentially deleterious approach to Christian mission.”²⁶

The Possibility of Conflict

With the emergence of the holistic view, the conflict between the evangelical and ecumenical camps seemed to be solved. But was it? Contrary to expectation, the conflict still exists and is just barely covered by a temporary expedient, the holistic paradigm.

The evangelical group and the ecumenical group have pursued different goals and targets; so a harmonious coexistence is problematic. The evangelical paradigm has tended to place priority on evangelism (saving souls), the eternal world, and the church. The ecumenical paradigm has tended to remove priorities on specific dimensions.²⁷ By putting equal priority on all

22 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 35.

23 WCC, “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation,” no. 32, page 22.

24 *Ibid.*, appendix no. 8, 34.

25 Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (London: Edinburgh House, 1959), 81.

26 David J. Hesselgrave, “Holes in Holistic Mission,” *Trinity World Forum*, Spring (1990): 1.

27 Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 35.

things in the world, there is little emphasis placed on the church. While the evangelical paradigm puts the church ahead of the physical world, the ecumenical paradigm puts the physical world ahead of the church. The evangelical paradigm emphasizes carrying out evangelism and church planting, though it may disrupt shalom in the world temporarily. The ecumenical paradigm pursues shalom in the world though it may require compromising the duty of evangelism. Pursuing contrary directions at the same time without any conflict is difficult.

The holistic mission paradigm insists that the church must pursue the two contrary directions at the same time, removing priority in mission and possibly causing conflict or confusion in mission. With this complicated and conflicting concept of mission, it is difficult to carry out successful and effective mission.

Mistakes in Order and Procedure

Humans cannot do everything at once. When climbing a mountain, the eyes are looking at the summit, but the climber should start at the first step at the base of the mountain. Mission is the same. Genuine shalom will not be accomplished where there is no evangelization. Even though justice, peace, and integrity of creation (JPIC), the goals of the ecumenical missiology, are accomplished, JPIC without evangelism is nothing more than the construction of a welfare society and cannot be viewed as the kingdom of God. However, the holistic mission paradigm tends to think of all goals as equally important aims to be accomplished without considering a particular order.

After Jesus' resurrection, his disciples were interested in knowing the time of Israel's recovery, the political independence of Israel, but Jesus avoided a direct answer and commanded his disciples to go to the ends of the earth to be witnesses. Thus, the Lord seems to suggest that the way to change the world is not through revolution or political struggle, but conversion through witnessing.²⁸ This spiritual priority does not mean that structural reform is not important. Evangelical Christianity, however,

28 Jejawon, 옥스포드원어성경주석 사도행전 [Acts in the Oxford Commentary on Acts] (Seoul: Jejawon, 2006), 53-58.

tends to change the structure of a society not by changing the structure first but by changing the individuals first.

Indeed, in the history of Christian mission, evangelism and revivals have brought about the transformation of the world in many ways. For example, as a result of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, the evangelical movement did not remain only as a simple revival movement but led social reform as it was linked to the emancipation of the slaves and the poverty resolution movement.²⁹ In other words, evangelism is an essential cause of positive social transformation. Without evangelism, true social transformation is difficult, and even if social transformation occurs, it is hard to see that mission has been achieved.

The Possibility of Declining Evangelism

The holistic mission paradigm can contribute to challenging the social responsibility of the church. However, as it puts the same stress upon evangelism and social service, it tends to weaken the enthusiasm for evangelism. As evangelism becomes frail, the church becomes feeble as well. What is the reason for this problem? Kent Hunter provided an answer to this question. “The point is that churches grow when they provide for people in those areas for which churches are uniquely qualified. This is in contrast to churches that have gotten involved in many other issues due to poor focus and a lost sense of biblical priorities.”³⁰ Hyung Ki Lee, a renowned ecumenical theologian, also accepts the fact that the holistic mission paradigm leads to decreasing energy for evangelism. As the WCC in Nairobi 1975 pursued holistic mission, ecumenical theology got more and more distant from the enthusiasm of evangelism in the 19th century.³¹

29 Timothy L. Smith explained, “By the time of the Civil War the conviction had become commonplace that society must be reconstructed through the power of a sanctifying gospel and all the evils of cruelty, slavery, poverty, and greed be done away.” Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957; republication, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 161.

30 Kent R. Hunter, “Membership Integrity: The Body of Christ with a Backbone,” in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, C. Peter Wagner, ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986; republication, Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2014), ch. 7, “Membership Integrity,” Kindle.

31 Hyung Ki Lee, *예큐메니즘의 역사적 고찰* [A Historical Study of Ecumenism], 장신논단

Wonkyu Lee, a sociologist in Korea, said that most of the liberal ecumenical churches tend to decline from a global point of view as they prefer reason and logic while neglecting the Bible. Then he showed some detailed statistics as follows: “During 1940-1985 the so-called liberal mainstream denominations of the United States . . . , 48% of Methodists, 49% of Presbyterians, 38% of Episcopal Church, and 56% of Congregational Church decreased” (my translation).³² He also said that this emphasis led to a reduction in the percentage of missionaries from the liberal denominations from 26.8% in 1948 to 18.0% in 1966, and to 4.2% in 1996. On the other hand, conservative churches that emphasize the Bible and evangelism have grown continually and sent a lot of missionaries. For example, Southern Baptist churches grew 32% more, Nazarenes 42% more, and Assembly of God 371% more. The vacancy in world mission made by liberal denominations was supplemented by the missionaries of these conservative denominations.³³

MAJOR EMPHASES OF AN ALTERNATIVE MISSION PARADIGM

In the preceding section, the limitations of the holistic mission paradigm were examined. In particular, although the holistic mission paradigm has some advantages, it weakens evangelism and the church, which is a serious problem for healthy church growth. What alternate mission paradigm should we look for? In this section, I would like to suggest some emphases of an alternative mission paradigm that can help build a healthy church. Of course, this argument for an alternative paradigm is still in the beginning stage, so it needs to be further developed. I would like to present only some basic points.

[Journal of Presbyterian Theology], 7 (1991): 125. Bosch also mentioned the reduction of the gospel in ecumenical theology: “In ecumenical missionary theology we encounter a serious reduction of the gospel. It frequently lacks a powerful biblical stress on the reality of sin in every man.” David J. Bosch, *Witne(ss) to the World*, 217. Similarly, this problem appears in the holistic mission as well.

32 Wonkyu Lee, *종교사회학적 관점에서 본 한국교회의 위기와 희망* [Crisis and Hope of the Korean Church from a Religious Sociological Perspective] (Seoul: KMC, 2010), 290.

33 Ibid., 290-292.

Emphasizing the Priority of Evangelism in Mission

In the preceding section, I emphasized that a crucial limitation of the holistic mission paradigm is its tendency to promote multiple goals in mission without priorities. In the enterprise of mission, many goals exist, but not all of them have the same importance. If all the goals are pursued with equal vigor, Christians cannot effectively achieve them. When the church carries out mission, its energy, time, and manpower are always limited. Therefore, priorities in mission must be set to make mission successful.³⁴

What is the most important matter in mission? It is none other than evangelism, which helps people restore their relationship with God. The holistic mission paradigm prioritizes neither evangelism nor social service, but the alternative mission paradigm clearly prioritizes evangelism. This evangelistic priority is logical because social service can be done by many other institutions besides the church while evangelism can be carried out only by the church. Of course, I am not saying that social service is not significant. Social service is a part of mission as well. But if the church is neglectful in evangelism, then there is no institution which would do evangelism instead of the church. In addition, even if a society becomes an improved society through social service, it cannot be identified as a godly society if the people of the society still ignore God. For this reason, Jongsung Lee says:

The church can participate in social works as needed, but it is inherently unessential. Therefore, it is right for the church to do the essential duty first, and the secondary works later... What society needs fundamentally is not reformation, but salvation. The church provides this salvation. Only the church has this mystery.³⁵ (my translation)

34 In this sense, David Hesselgrave argued for a definition of mission as that “which puts evangelism church planting at the heart of the definition and thus as top priority in developing missionary strategy.” David J. Hesselgrave, “Holes in ‘Holistic Mission,’” *Trinity World Forum*, 1.

35 Jongsung Lee, *교회론* (1) [Ecclesiology (1)] (Seoul: Daehan Kidokyo Chulpansa, 1989), 489-490.

Therefore, the first priority of mission is evangelism, and the church that carries out this core ministry faithfully will experience healthy growth. According to Dean Kelly's analysis, the liberal churches do not grow, not because they serve the society, but because they neglect the essential work of the church, evangelism.³⁶ Jesus also had a definite priority in his ministry though he carried out various ministries. When people, after experiencing the miracles of Jesus, told Jesus not to go to other villages, Jesus answered, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43, ESV). Then "he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea" (Luke 4:44, ESV). Through this message, he clearly stated that his core ministry was none other than evangelism.³⁷

Stressing the Value of the Church

The holistic mission paradigm tends to view the church and the world with equal importance. Surely the church and the world are both important and are the objects of God's love. However, we should not forget the importance of the church in mission. Of course, the erroneous attitude of the church in its misunderstanding that the church itself is the owner of mission should be rectified. The church is also mistaken to think of church growth itself as the final goal of mission. However, we need to be aware of the potential danger of *missio Dei*. Bosch mentioned, "Those who supported the wider understanding of the concept tended to radicalize the view that the *missio Dei* was larger than the mission of the church, even to the point of suggesting that it *excluded* the church's involvement—as we have seen in the previous section."³⁸

Missio Dei was given birth in the context of Christendom in Europe where the church and the state were in an intimate relationship. The church existed for the first time as a politically powerful institution. In that

36 Dean M. Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a new preface for the Rose edition* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), xx-xxi.

37 Youngjin Kim, *그랜드주석 마태복음 마가복음* [Grand Commentary Matthew & Mark] (Seoul: Seongseo Kyojai Ganhaengsa, 1992), 748.

38 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 392.

context, people do not have to worry about the existence of the church. Rather they worry about the world and emphasize the responsibility of the church for the world. This attitude seems very altruistic and plausible, but it can easily fall into a trap of leading the church to ineffectiveness. In this sense, Jungwoon Suh said that a side effect of *missio Dei* might be the loss of dynamism in the Western church caused by the anti-church theology.³⁹

Of course, the church is not perfect. It is not the heavenly kingdom of God. It is composed of forgiven sinners, and it makes many mistakes. However, the church is still the body of Christ bought by the blood of Jesus, and it is the core institution which can transfer the gospel to the world. God uses various people and institutions for his mission. Still, the church is a unique institution chosen by God for the vocation of spreading the gospel on the earth. The church is a nucleus tool for his ministry. In this sense, Bosch mentioned, “We can be utterly disgusted, at times, with the earthliness of the church, yet we can also be transformed, at times, with the awareness of the divine in the church.” Then he said, “It is *this* church, ambiguous in the extreme, which is . . . ‘a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race’ (LG 9).”⁴⁰ Meeting the material needs of the world and encouraging shalom in the world are significant, but if the church becomes weedy or disappears, serving the world itself is impractical. No other entity can talk about and carry out mission anymore. So the alternative mission paradigm is deeply concerned about the value of the church and making a healthy church in the world.

Considering Ethical Duty as a Way and Glorification as a Goal

Traditionally, the church considered saving souls and church planting as major goals of mission. Ethical duties such as social service and becoming light and salt in the world were considered to be ways or methods to achieve evangelism and church planting. However, with the emergence of *missio Dei*, the ethical duties came to be elevated to the position of being major goals of mission. Now, the ethical duties are not considered

39 Jungwoon Suh, 후켄다이크의 선교관 [Missional View of Hoekendijk], 교회와 신학 [Church and Theology], no. 20 (1988): 222.

40 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389.

as methods of mission anymore; instead, they are major goals of mission in ecumenical theology and the holistic paradigm as well. Of course, the ethical duty is crucial; surely, it is an essential duty of the church. Still, it is not mission but ethics; it is a bridge which helps the church to become salt and light in the world and to win the souls.

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16, KJV). In this passage, the purpose of letting the light shine on the people is not for the act itself; rather, it is for leading people to glorify God. The act of shining light on people is the ethical duty, and leading people to glorify God is the task of mission. The ethical duty is the bridge for the missional duty. In this sense, the norms of the heaven (Matt. 5: 3-12) work in the life of the kingdom people and make witness to the kingdom of God.⁴¹ The alternative mission paradigm unquestionably values the ethical duty and attitude, but it puts the priority on encountering and glorifying God rather than on ethics, though it emphasizes the function of ethics in mission.

The end goal of mission goes beyond evangelization or humanization. The ultimate goal of mission is to lead the nations to see the greatness of God and have joy in Him.⁴² The ultimate end of mission is the perfect worship described in the Gospels and in Revelation (Matt. 22:2, Luke 14: 15, Rev. 19:17).⁴³

When the end goal of mission is set as worship, it may be helpful for overcoming the restrictions of the former mission paradigms. If the church sincerely tries to pursue the glorification of God as the goal of mission, the church may not fall into the snares of traditional mission such as imperialism and greed. Also, when the church seeks the glory of God, it will not make a mistake of considering social welfare or humanization without relationship with God as the accomplishment of mission.⁴⁴ So

41 Byungdo Kang, 호크마 성경주석 마태복음 [Hokema Commentary: Matthew] (Seoul: Kidok Jihyesa, 1990), 231.

42 John Piper said, “And the deepest reason why worship is the *goal* in missions is that worship is God’s goal. . . . If it is God’s goal, it must be our goal.” Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 15.

43 See John Herman Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David Hugh Freeman (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960), 156.

44 In the case of Japan, human rights and material richness are present to a certain degree. However,

the alternative mission paradigm sets the end goal of mission as glorifying God.

Seeking the Criteria of Mission through Christ

Christianity believes that Jesus Christ is the most accurate manifestation of God's will. Jesus declared: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). Christianity believes that Jesus is the only way through which Christians come to know God's will exactly. Our God, in whom Christianity believes and speaks about, is not a vague god, but the God who takes human form and reveals himself in Jesus Christ.⁴⁵

As the concept of *missio Dei* was given birth in 1952, the traditional idea of mission began to be replaced by *missio Dei*. Today, even the evangelical camp accepts *missio Dei*. Of course, *missio Dei* has some advantages; it has helped the church to see the will of God and change its erroneous attitude in mission. Also, *mission Dei* challenged the selfish church to become a participatory church in the world. But the concept has some weaknesses as well. First, it emphasizes that God himself is the subject of mission and performs mission directly in the world and that the church is only one of many diverse institutions to carry out the mission of God. This idea can lead the church to neglect the responsibility of mission, though that idea did not intend such neglect. Furthermore, when the church hears that God carries out mission with many other institutions, the church naturally can become careless about evangelism. Regarding this possibility of misuse or danger, Wright said, "The affirmation that mission was God's came to mean that it was not ours! Such distorted theology virtually excluded evangelism, and quite rightly therefore came under sustained criticism."⁴⁶

Secondly, the teaching that God's concern is to make mankind have

mission was not accomplished in Japan, because the core of mission is to make people encounter God and glorify Him.

45 Kyunjin Kim, 기독교조직신학II [Christian Systematic Theology II] (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1989), 137.

46 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 63.

shalom in the world, not to save mankind, naturally can lead the church to pay more attention to world justice and peace, instead of leading people to Christ. The goal of mission has been changed from saving souls to making the world a good place to live. As a result, the mission that makes the world a better place, not the mission that evangelizes the world, has been recognized as a mission that meets the will of God.⁴⁷ This kind of mistake can occur when the church seeks the goal of mission directly from God without seeing Jesus. The goal of mission in Jesus seems clear since he was deeply concerned about making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20), preaching the good news to all creation (Mark 16:15), and being witnesses (Acts 1:8). The alternative mission paradigm, therefore, seeks the criterion of mission from or through Jesus.

CONCLUSION

This study sought an alternative mission paradigm that could restore the church in crisis and help the church to experience healthy growth. The weakening of the church is not caused by a weak paradigm of mission alone, so a better paradigm of mission will not solve the church's problems by itself. But with the current holistic mission approach, there is a high possibility that the numerical decline of the church will accelerate. To prevent this acceleration and to make the church healthy again, identifying the problems of the holistic mission paradigm and finding alternatives to it are necessary. In his book, *The Frog in the Kettle*, George Barna warned that churches can die like a frog slowly dying as the temperature rises in a gradually heated kettle if the church is satisfied with the current framework, not detecting and solving the dangers in advance.⁴⁸ Like other theologies, the holistic paradigm has its limitations. In particular, as it disregards the priority of evangelism in mission, it can cause the church to lose enthusiasm for evangelism and eventually dwindle. Where the church becomes weak, other religions, particularly Islam, will occupy its place. Christians should seek ways to solve the problems and help the church

47 Cf. WCC, *The Church for Others: Two Reports on the Missionary Structure of the Congregation* (Geneva: WCC, 1968), 16-18.

48 George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 15-20.

expand in a healthy way.

This discussion, of course, can be seen as a church-centered and selfish debate. From the viewpoint that shalom and humanization of the whole world are more significant than healthy church growth, this article can be viewed as a narrow-minded discussion. However, Christians cannot ignore the worldwide phenomenon that is occurring. In the places where the church is dying, it is replaced by other religions, and violence, dehumanization, and secularization are worsening. Establishing healthy churches is not a selfish act for Christianity, but a contribution to shalom for the whole world. The Gospel is the key element of happiness for this earth. When this conviction is accepted, healthy churches can carry out mission fearlessly and contribute to shalom for the world.

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