

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE: CHURCH PLANTING <i>Mark R. Teasdale</i>	1
LESSONS FROM THE "SOCIETY PLANTING" PARADIGM OF EARLY METHODIST WOMEN <i>Paul Chilcote</i>	5
CHURCH PLANTING IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL URBANIZATION <i>Art McPhee</i>	31
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS OF A VETERAN CHURCH PLANTER <i>Marylin Draper</i>	57
THE STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT & THE INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF EVANGELICAL STUDENTS: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING TWO STUDENT MISSION MOVEMENTS <i>Jon Hietbrink</i>	83
SOME FELL ON GOOD SOIL: CHURCH PLANTING IN RELIGIOUS ECOLOGIES <i>Christopher B. James</i>	105
BOOK REVIEWS	133



## **EDITOR'S NOTE: CHURCH PLANTING**

Church planting has been gaining in popularity over the past decade. The growth of seminary courses, denominational initiatives, and literature on the subject all witness to this. Nor is this a geographically bounded phenomenon. Churches are being planted at an amazing rate across the globe.

No small reason for the immense number of new church plants is that many church communities around the world, especially in countries where Christians are the minority, understand that a fundamental work of a local congregation is to establish yet more local congregations. In a recent trip I made to Myanmar, I had the privilege of meeting with church leaders who embodied this logic. Rather than being hindered by their lack of resources, which is the reason so many American churches give for not reaching out beyond themselves, they made evangelism and the establishing of new faith communities their priority. One little, relatively poor congregation on the outskirts of Yangon epitomized this. It had found the capacity to launch no less than five pastors into the ordained ministry and provided resources to sustain them as they each founded new faith communities in surrounding neighborhoods. Since church planting is legally forbidden in Myanmar, the new congregations were simply called “mission centers.” A bishop in Myanmar told me that, if the law ever changes, Myanmar will suddenly have over double the number of existing local

churches because of how many of these mission centers would be able to self identify as local churches.

Scholars have picked up on this need to reclaim the church's procreative nature, pointing to both church history and theology to demonstrate that founding new churches is a natural activity for Christians. This is opposed to church planting being perceived as a next-level activity for only the few large churches that can afford not to spend their entire budget and volunteer power on themselves.

It is with an eye toward this scholarship that *Witness* presents the following articles. This volume begins with the presidential address offered by Paul Chilcote at the 2012 AETE annual meeting. Bringing his expertise on the Wesleyan revival to bear, he presents the creativity and commitment of women who participated in the revival and suggests how they might contribute to present day typologies of church planting.

Following this is an article from Art McPhee, who considers the vast needs and opportunities for planting churches in the burgeoning cities of the world today. Marshalling historical data on church planting in Chicago, a survey of the current church planting marketplace in North America, and observations of the growing Christian movement outside of North America, he challenges the reader to participate in the remarkable work God is doing in the cities.

Marylin Draper shares her own, deeply personal experiences in church planting. Giving the reader open access to her successes and failures in the process of planting churches in Canada, she specifically

calls on church planters to remember the essential role of worship in their work.

Expanding on the theme of church planting, Jon Hietbrink offers a retrospective on the establishment and growth of two mission organizations: the Student Volunteer Movement and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. In tracing the development of each agency over time, he points to the need for a clear theological identity for Christians to avoid being seduced into believing cultural values are equal with the gospel.

Finally, Christopher James provides an insightful view of conditions that help sustain evangelical church plants. Playing with the metaphors of ecology and microbrews, he suggests that there are ways for smaller evangelical church plants to thrive in a world of megachurches.

It is particularly exciting to present the research of several young scholars in the field of evangelism in this volume of *Witness*. The diversity of generation, as well as the mixture of practitioners and scholars who have articles this year, has made for a richer contribution on the topic of church planting. It is the academy's hope that these historical surveys, reflections on personal practice, and sociological and anthropological presentations of church planting will provide the readers with ample resources to encourage the planting and revitalization of Christian faith communities.

Mark R. Teasdale, Editor  
Evanston, IL  
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# LESSONS FROM THE “SOCIETY PLANTING” PARADIGM OF EARLY METHODIST WOMEN

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PRESENTED AT THE AETE ANNUAL MEETING,  
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John and Charles Wesley rediscovered a missional church model of the community of faith in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain.<sup>1</sup> Their biblical paradigm, drawing committed Christian disciples perennially to Jesus and to one another in community (centripetal movement) and spinning them out into the world in mission and service (centrifugal movement), reflected an apostolic vision of the people of God in their view. Women played a major role in the practice and multiplication of this model. They functioned as pioneers of Methodist Societies within the Church of England and planted these catalysts of renewal across the British Isles. Their Society planting paradigm offers valuable insights for those who seek to rediscover a missional vision and a church planting ethos today. In this brief address, I will seek to locate the efforts of these women in the larger context of church planting, examine the unique vision that fueled their work, describe two particular scenarios common to their practice, and articulate lessons that we can learn from their engagement with God’s mission in the world.

An examination of the contemporary literature on church

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planting reveals a bewildering array of models, strategies, and paradigms, most of these aspects of the Christian practice couched in the framework of “how to” manuals and practical guides.<sup>2</sup> It is not my purpose here to survey this material; I have neither the space in this brief essay nor the personal competence to provide such an overview. Rather, my primary interest is to provide a broad historical and theological framework within which to locate the early Methodist women Society-planters whose perspectives and methods may have value for us today. Before I lay out that framework, however, reference to several more recent studies provides something of a generic portrait of the particular interests today related to the planting of Christian communities.

I turn first to two widely acclaimed texts (both now in their second editions) because of their pervasive use across the spectrum of Christian traditions. Nearly twenty years ago now, Daniel Sanchez described Aubrey Malphurs’s *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal* as “one of the most comprehensive, instructive, and inspiring books on the subject of American church planting written to date.”<sup>3</sup> In great alliterative fashion, he articulates a vision of preparation, personnel, principles, and process for church planting that takes the unique identity, location, and community with utmost seriousness. “Not only are we to sow new works to reach the various people groups here on the North American mission field,” Malphurs concludes, “but these, in turn, can sow churches on the mission fields of other countries.”<sup>4</sup> In *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North*

*America and Beyond*, David Hesselgrave attends closely to what he describes as the “Pauline Cycle.”<sup>5</sup> Carefully avoiding the viewpoint that St. Paul had no strategic vision (Michael Green), on one hand, and that the Apostle developed a highly nuanced strategy on the other (Donald McGavran), he articulates a mediating position based primarily on the work of Herbert Kane in an effort to get back to the missionary methods of the early church.<sup>6</sup> He identifies ten phases of cross-cultural church planting based on St. Paul’s missionary example to which we will return at a later point.

In *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*, Craig Ott and Gene Wilson seek to answer the more theological/ecclesiological question, What kind of church is to be planted? Their response is unequivocal:

Unfortunately many books on church planting or growth give little attention to the kind of church that is to be planted. However, if churches are to be planted as we have attempted to biblically define them, they must adhere to more than some minimal definition or denominational standard. They must be *kingdom communities, healthy congregations, reproducing organisms, indigenous churches, and interdependent fellowships*.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ott and Wilson, movements that have sought to emulate this vision throughout the history of the church tend to be works of the Holy Spirit, gospel-centered, lay grassroots movements, have a multiplication DNA, and are influenced by external factors.<sup>8</sup> They distinguish three types of church planters.<sup>9</sup> The “pastoral church planter” simply begins a new church and pastors it until appropriate new leadership assumes responsibility for the community. Ott and

Wilson consider this to be the most common method in church planting. The “catalytic church planter,” intends to remain in pastoral leadership of a newly-created community that will birth many other churches, thereby launching a movement. The “Apostolic church planter” represents a radically different perspective. “This church planter,” they explain, “seeks to follow the model of the apostle Paul, who as far as we know never became the pastor of a church he planted. Instead, after initial evangelism, he focused on empowering the local believers, primarily laypersons, to carry on and expand the work after his departure.”<sup>10</sup>

In each of these popular texts, the authors place great importance on reclaiming a biblical model of church planting—one in which the ministry of the apostle Paul looms large. They also emphasize the importance of context and genuinely incarnational models of life and work. They seek, in other words, to carefully balance the text and the context. Some church planting authors provide some historical background to this practice, but very little has been written, actually, on the history of church planting. One exception is *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*, in which Anabaptist scholar Stuart Murray provides a very brief but helpful analysis along historical lines. He identifies four main kinds of church planting in the history of the church.<sup>11</sup>

*Pioneer planting* refers to the practice of establishing churches in areas previously unreached by the gospel.

*Replacement planting* has to do with the practice of establishing churches in areas where churches had previously been planted, but no longer

exist.

*Sectarian planting* refers to the practice of establishing more churches in areas where churches already exist, to express and embody distinctive doctrinal or ecclesiological convictions.

*Saturation planting* refers to the practice of establishing more churches in areas where churches already exist, to enhance the ability of these churches to engage in mission within these areas.<sup>12</sup>

While the creation of new churches across two millennia of church history has happened primarily in areas previously unreached by the gospel, Murray argues that “contemporary church planting does not fall within the category of pioneer planting.”<sup>13</sup> The two mediating models—replacement and sectarian planting—while reflective of particular periods of decline in the history of the church, do not have a dynamic presence today either. Rather, saturation planting dominates, the purpose of which “is not to impact new areas, nor to recover lost ground, nor to develop new kinds of churches, but to plant more churches in already churching areas.”<sup>14</sup> Murray’s historical analysis is helpful, enabling contemporary church planters to locate themselves in the larger context of God’s mission in the world, but the practices of the early Methodist women do not fit neatly into any of these categories. In order to find a place for them in a taxonomy of church planting, we must take a closer look at the holistic approach of Wesleyan ecclesiology.

## **A Holistic Model of Church and Mission**

In an effort to embrace the perennial tensions between maintenance and mission, modalities and sodalities, church and sect in

the life of the Christian community, the Wesleys developed a holistic model of church and mission. Early Methodist women exhibited this paradigm in their Society planting practices. An examination of these polarities and the way in which these women sought to hold them together may be instructive for us today.

### *Maintenance and Mission*

Given the fact that the church is both a community of faith and an agent of God’s mission in the world—both an institution and a movement—it should be no surprise that these two realities represent something of a natural tension. In the history of the church, context has often played a major role in the “tipping of the scales” one direction or the other with regard to these two constitutive elements of church. History demonstrates that balance is not easy to maintain with regard to this particular tension. Rather than functioning as a means to a spiritual end, the institution, with its structures and forms, can easily become an end in itself. On the other hand, unless properly channeled and directed with intentionality, Spirit-led mission may have no clear trajectory—much wind and fury without any healthy impact. Quoting Robert Warren’s *Building Missionary Congregations*, Stuart Murray observes:

“A church wholly given to ‘mission work’ is not a sustainable model.” The result is exhausting activism and a “sales-addicted organization.” This is not what becoming a missionary congregation implies. But when maintenance becomes central or all-consuming, as it frequently has in European church history . . . mission has been marginalized, and the church has forgotten its *raison d’être*.<sup>15</sup>

Years ago, George Peters advanced the argument that the history of Protestant missions exacerbated the bifurcation of maintenance and mission in Western, European Christianity. As a consequence, what he considered to be an abnormal historical development “produced autonomous, missionless churches on the one hand and autonomous churchless missionary societies on the other hand.”<sup>16</sup>

John and Charles Wesley sought to tackle this issue head on in their own day. As I have written elsewhere:

The church of Wesley’s England had exchanged its true vocation—mission—for maintenance. (This is a confusion that slips into the life of the church in every age.) It had become distant from and irrelevant to the world it was called to serve. It needed desperately to reclaim its true identity as God’s agent of love in the world. The Wesleys firmly believed that God was raising up the Methodists for the task of resuscitating a missional church.<sup>17</sup>

The Wesleys drew this holistic vision primarily from Jesus’ poignant vine and branches image of the church in John 15. The church maintains faith as believers abide in Christ, drawn into the center, to the core, to the source through the means of grace. But the vine does not exist for its own benefit. Rather, it exists for the benefit of others through its fruit. The Spirit spins the church into the world, therefore, in loving service and witness. The Wesleys fervently believed that a church turned in on itself would surely die, for it would lose sight of its reason for being. But a church rooted in Christ and spun out in loving service into the world rediscovers itself day by day. They held maintenance and mission together in dynamic tension.

### *Modalities and Sodalities*

Nearly a half century ago now, Ralph Winter associated these polarities with the sociological terms “modality” and “sodality,” developing a theory of their normative character in the life of the church.<sup>18</sup> These concepts have now made their way into the common parlance of the mission and church planting disciplines. Winter used these terms to distinguish between the larger church or congregation (the modality) and distinct, smaller sub-communities that had a strong missional orientation (the sodalities). He traced these structures back to the Apostolic community and throughout the history of the church. While the modality comprises all believers and revolved around the broad range of practices related to worship and discipleship, the sodality represents an elite group particularly committed to a particular mission or vision. Monastic communities or movements of renewal within the Roman Catholic tradition represent some of the most striking examples of modalities and sodalities held in holistic tension. Winter conceived that the Believers’ Church—the Anabaptist model of the 16<sup>th</sup> century—“stands in a certain sense, midway between a modality and a sodality, since it has the constituency of the modality (involving full families) and yet, in its earlier years, may have the vitality and selectivity of a sodality.”<sup>19</sup>

### *The Society: A Third Alternative to Church and Sect*

Howard Snyder viewed Pietism, Moravianism, and Methodism in this same light.<sup>20</sup> There is no question that this dynamic connection

between modalities and sodalities informed the Wesleys' conception of the church and the relation of their Methodist Societies to the established Church of England. From their perspective, maintenance/mission, modality/sodality, and church/sect dialectics interconnect in a dynamic way. Rupert Davies provides an incisive analysis of Wesleyan ecclesiology and identifies, perhaps, one of the most unique qualities of early Methodism. He plays off two of the three classic categories established by Weber and Troeltsch in their sociological treatises, namely, church and sect.<sup>21</sup> While the church "claims to confess objectively the width and depth of catholic tradition, to guarantee the grace of the sacraments, and to comprehend all genuine varieties of worship, spirituality, and faith within its generous embrace," the sect "cuts itself off from the life of the church" so defined "on the grounds of possessing the totality of Christian truth . . . and of embodying the only authentic form of Christian discipleship."<sup>22</sup>

Davies conceives early Methodism as a third alternative to these two classic types—a vision of Christian community that falls somewhere between the two and evinces some of the characteristics of both. He views the "Society" as a unique form of Christianity and provides his own classic definition as follows:

A "society" acknowledges the truths proclaimed by the universal church and has no wish to separate from it, but claims to cultivate, by means of sacrament and fellowship, the type of inward holiness, which too great an objectivity can easily neglect and of which the church needs constantly to be reminded. A society does not unchurch the members of either church or sect . . . it calls its own members within the larger

church to a special personal commitment which respects the commitment of others.<sup>23</sup>

To employ the classic language of Pietism, the Methodist Societies were *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (“little churches within the church”).

At the Puritan and Westminster Conference in 1965 dedicated to the theme “Approaches to the Reformation of the Church,” D. M. Lloyd-Jones provided a definitive discussion of “Ecclesiola in Ecclesia.” According to his analysis,

the idea of those who formed these little churches was not to form a new church. That is basic. They were not concerned at all about separation; indeed they were bitterly and violently opposed to it. They were not out to change the doctrine of the church. . . . their position was that they were not so much dissatisfied with the nature as with the functioning of the church. They were not concerned about the church’s doctrine, but were very concerned about its spiritual life and condition.<sup>24</sup>

Howard Snyder, among others, has traced the earliest conception of little churches within the church to Martin Luther, and to his Preface to the German Mass of 1526, in particular, where he proposes an “evangelical order” within the life of the established church.<sup>25</sup> In his monumental study of *Ecclesiola in Ecclesia*, the German scholar Gerhard Hilbert argued that Luther envisaged a smaller voluntary covenantal community within the state church. Luther in his view, “never understood this ‘ideal’ as false, even though he had not embodied it practically.”<sup>26</sup>

Under the influence of this Lutheran and later Pietist tradition, the Wesleys designed their United Societies to function like catalysts of

renewal within the life of the larger church. Having rediscovered a mission-church paradigm within the life of their own *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, their hope was that the leavening influence of these small groups of committed missionaries would re-awaken the Church of England to its primary vocation in the world, namely, the *missio Dei*. The Methodist Societies were like little dynamos, spinning inside the church and building momentum in order to re-establish a centrifugal force in the church itself, spinning it out in turn in mission. The Societies under the leadership of the Wesleys, therefore, were neither church nor sect. Their members viewed themselves as part of a larger community of faith—the Church of England—but functioned as sodalities within that structure. They endorsed both the maintenance of the institutional church and God’s mandate for mission in the world, and their intention was to do all in their power to effect a dynamic symbiosis between them. Early Methodists, and the women we will look at in particular, therefore, did not plant churches. They do not fall neatly into the categories of pioneer or saturation planters; nor do they resemble replacement or even sectarian planters. Rather, they planted little churches within the church.

### **Planting *ecclesiolae in ecclesia***

Women were conspicuous as pioneers in the establishment and expansion of early Methodism. As I observed in *She Offered Them Christ*: “It was in large measure due to the activities of women that the network of societies under Wesley’s direction quickly spread across the land. Women . . . founded prayer groups and societies on their own

initiative.”<sup>27</sup> Women employed two basic models in the efforts to plant *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. First, individual women planted Methodist Societies on the basis of their own entrepreneurial initiatives, most frequently by simply inviting John Wesley or one of his itinerant preachers to their communities and establishing a regular routine of preaching, fellowship, and service in their homes. Secondly, from time to time women drew themselves together into intentional communities in which the rhythms of mutual accountability and active social service modeled vital Christianity to the world around them. These women formed intentional, semi-monastic communities, not unlike the various forms of neo-monasticism in the life of the church today, but all within the larger matrix of the Church of England.

#### *Individual Ecclesiolae Planters*

The history of Methodism in many English towns and villages begins with the story of a woman who planted the first Society. A brief litany of examples must suffice here.<sup>28</sup> Smith House, the home of Mrs. Holmes of Halifax, became the chief center of religious revival after she invited John Wesley to preach there and organized a Society in the summer of 1742.<sup>29</sup> Mary Allison was the first to open her home to Methodist preachers in Teesdale;<sup>30</sup> the aunt of Mary Denny introduced Methodism to Maldon in the same way;<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Hosmer procured a room for preaching in Darlington.<sup>32</sup> In each of these instances, illustrative of many other parallel activities, the connection between these women and itinerant evangelists was critical. But in other circumstances, women took the initiative in the actual formation of

Societies without the support or authorization of Wesley or his itinerants. For example, several years before Wesley's first visit to Macclesfield, Mary Aldersley opened Shrigley-fold for religious services and led informal meetings for the purposes of prayer, scripture reading, and religious conversation.<sup>33</sup> In 1746 Elizabeth Blow pioneered the founding of Methodism in Hull by means of the same informal methods.<sup>34</sup> Martha Thompson, a wealthy widow who possessed a considerable estate at Rufforth, established her own Society and later pioneered Society planting in the nearby cathedral city of York as well.<sup>35</sup>

The pioneering work of Dorothy Fisher illustrates in a more detailed manner the methodology employed by most of these women in their Society planting practices.

Converted under Wesley's preaching in London, she joined the society there in 1779. About the year 1784 she moved to Great Gonerby in Lincolnshire, opened her house to preaching, and in 1786 purchased a small stone building to serve as a chapel. A small group of Methodists at Sturton heard of Dorothy's piety and observed her work. . . . Sarah Parrot of Bracebridge, walked twenty-seven miles to Mrs. Fisher's home. She boldly proclaimed that Dorothy had been brought to their area by God in order to bring Methodism to Lincoln. Concluding that it must be a call from God, Dorothy consented, settled her affairs, moved to Lincoln, purchased a large home to accommodate preaching, and invited the traveling preachers to make it their base of operations. . . . Dorothy formed a small society in an old lumber room near Gowt's Bridge. Not unexpectedly, it consisted of four women.<sup>36</sup>

The Society planting work of Fisher and these women reflects the “Pauline Cycle” developed by Hesselgrave in a number of ways.<sup>37</sup> Each of the women received something akin to a commission, more generally a direct impression or command from God, before they entered into their work. They contacted a specific group of people for the purpose of their making a deeper commitment (or a first time commitment) to the gospel. They continued to meet together in a regular pattern of life, elevated leaders from their own ranks, sustained their relationships through active service and common cause, and extended their mission into their community. Almost all of these women maintained a vital connection with the Anglican parish in which they worshipped regularly and received the sacraments.

#### *Semi-Monastic Ecclesiolae Planters*

The establishment of intentional communities of women in a cenobitic or semi-monastic style of life represents a second model of Society or *ecclesiolae* planting among early Methodist women. While only a few of these communities emerged over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, their influence was pervasive. Mary Bosanquet was the center of one such community.<sup>38</sup> The following account not only describes the process by which this Society was created and its life governed, but links this experiment with the sodality framework of the Pietist movement as well.

In her childhood and against the wishes of her affluent parents, Bosanquet became associated with the London Foundry Society as a young girl. In her late teens she secured two unfurnished rooms in

Hoxton Square and committed herself to a plan of ministry and service, established a “rule of life,” and fixed her mind on the example of Christ. In 1763 a property near her place of birth in Leytonstone, known locally as “The Cedars,” became vacant. Mary and Sarah Ryan (an older friend whom John Wesley would later describe as her “twin soul”) moved there on March 24 with the intention of establishing an orphanage and school on the basis of Wesley’s own prototype at Kingswood. Mary’s explicit intent was to model authentic Christian community, combining vibrant personal piety and active social service. On December 1, 1764 John Wesley struck a clear note of optimism concerning these developments: “M[ary] B[osanquet] gave me a further account of their affairs at Leytonstone. It is exactly *Pietas Hallensis* in miniature. What it will be does not yet appear.”<sup>39</sup>

After much careful deliberation the women of this community decided to take in none but the most destitute and hopeless. The children came, as Mary recalled, “naked, full of vermin, and some afflicted with distemper.”<sup>40</sup> At first this semi-monastic conclave consisted of Mary, Sarah, a maid, and Sally Lawrence, Sarah Ryan’s orphaned niece of about four years of age. With the addition of five more orphans and confronted with the problem of Sarah’s declining health, Ann Tripp was secured as a governess for the children. They formed themselves into a tightly knit community, adopted a uniform dress of dark purple cotton, and ate together at a table five yards in length. Over the course of five years they sheltered and cared for thirty-five children and thirty-four adults.

In Mary's account of this community, she observed that "the first Light Given Concerning outward things was that we should walk according to Rule in our family."<sup>41</sup>"Family meetings" which were held on Fridays at noon provided an opportunity for the community to gather to discuss and make decisions concerning their rule of life. Decision-making apparently included all members of the community, adults and children alike. Mary's primary responsibilities, according to her own report, included planning and leading worship, caring for the sustenance of the community, teaching the children, meeting each member of the family alone each week at a set time to discuss personal and spiritual matters, superintending public meetings, and caring for the sick of the community. For all intents and purposes, Mary functioned as an "abbess" of a religious community, whose influence in worship and religious life extended not simply to the "Leytonstone family," but to the surrounding community as well.

Mary's community, established on a definitive pattern of life together on a semi-monastic model of austere communal life, disciplined religious contemplation, and service to the needy, maintained strong connections with the Foundery Society and the Anglican parish in which it was located.

### **Lessons Learned**

The work of these women provides a unique example of church planting that breathed new life into the moribund ecclesial establishment of their own day. As part of the Wesleyan movement of renewal that sought to remain intimately connected to the Church of

England, these endeavors modeled a symbiosis of modality and sodality, maintenance and mission. The planting of little churches within the church brought renewal to the church at a time when a rediscovery of a biblical, missional vision of life in Christ was sorely needed. This paradigm affords theological and practical lessons for the church today.

### *Theological Foundations*

Stuart Murray provides a helpful theological framework for church planting that coincides nicely with the vision of the early Methodist women.<sup>42</sup> It consists of three primary concerns: *missio Dei*, Incarnation, and the kingdom of God.

### The Mission of God

A robust theological foundation undergirded the missional vision that gave birth to the *ecclesiolae* planting of the early Methodist women. The Wesleys taught them that mission began with God and not with them. They conceived a “missionary God” because the God they had come to know in Jesus Christ was a God of love who was always reaching out from self to others—an expression of God’s love and grace they described as God’s prevenient action.<sup>43</sup> The missional practices of the women mirrored this understanding of God’s nature and character. Moreover, they firmly believed that God was active and at work in the world to save and restore all creation. These primary convictions led the early Methodist women to reclaim mission as the church’s reason for being and evangelism as the heart of that mission

in the world.<sup>44</sup> They developed a holistic vision of mission and evangelism that refused to separate faith and works, personal salvation and social justice, physical and spiritual needs.

### Incarnation

The way in which God entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ provided the primary metaphor shaping the church planting practices of the women. The Incarnation, in other words, pointed to the “centrifugal nature” of God’s activity, poignantly demonstrating this missional quality. The Wesleys and their followers, moreover, were drawn to the kenotic understanding of the Incarnation, owing in part, perhaps, to the influence of the Moravian Pietists.<sup>45</sup> In his famous hymn entitled “Free Grace,” Charles Wesley condensed the whole *kenotic* doctrine into a single line:

He left his Father’s throne above  
(So free, so infinite his grace!),  
**Emptied himself of all but love,**  
And bled for Adam’s helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me!<sup>46</sup>

No image of self-emptying impresses itself with greater veracity than the pervasive and distinctive phrase, “Emptied himself of all but love,” a poetic line found pervasively throughout the writings of the women. They sought to emulate this kenotic character in all they did. Servanthood became the keynote of their church planting practice.

## The Kingdom of God

The early Methodist women understood that Christian mission that flows from any source other than the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ is ultimately without substance and power. They were convinced that mission and evangelism must be held together without pitting personal salvation against social justice. Mary Bosanquet's Laytonstone community incarnated this vision. The biblical witness to God's reign functioned like the lens through which they viewed the world and their action in it. The church planting efforts of the women, therefore, were nothing other than an attempt to realize God's shalom in the world. Moreover, they found it impossible to speak of God's reign apart from Christ, or of Jesus without God's reign. The purpose of the communities they planted was to woo others into the loving embrace of God and then help them to see that their mission in life, in partnership with Christ, was to be the signposts of God's reign in this world. The little churches within the church that they established were something like kingdom demonstration and training plots in which the characteristics of Christian community that are absolutely necessary to the church's mission—acts of devotion and worship, acts of compassion and justice—were practiced and explored.

### *Practical Lessons*

I believe that there are significant practical lessons to be learned from the ways in which the early Methodist women planted *ecclesiolae* as well. I want to take my lead once again from Stuart Murray who discusses church planting models in terms of planting

agency, motivation, and results.<sup>47</sup> Using these categories in a slightly different way than Murray, I suggest that the women's dependence on the Holy Spirit, passion for a symbiotic ecclesiology, and vision of authentic discipleship provide relevant insights for the church today.

### Holy Spirit

In discussing one of the primary thrusts of Wesleyan theology, Albert Outler once observed that “the gospel is God’s enacted promise in Christ that we can live intentionally, following the inner leadings of the Holy Spirit, obedient to what we are given to know of God’s will.”<sup>48</sup> In their efforts to plant new communities of faith in the church, the early Methodist women demonstrated their total dependence on the Holy Spirit. In their view, it was not so much owing to their own efforts that new communities of faith grew and flourished; rather, they pointed consistently to the all sufficiency of the Spirit at work in the world. Dorothy Fisher, for example, began her work in Lincoln in response to a somewhat unconventional calling of the Spirit. Mary Bosanquet acknowledged that her work was based on an invitation from the Spirit as well. This posture implies some practical lessons related to dependence upon prayer and openness to the movement of the Spirit. Isabella Wilson, one of the many *ecclesiolae* planters of her day, expressed this well in the form of a prayer offered in the midst of her work:

My whole dependence is upon thee both for present and future blessings. I cannot distrust my blessed Jesus, who has dealt so lovingly with me. I can never sufficiently praise thy holy Name for the consolations of thy Spirit, and favours renewed day by

day. . . . let us live dependent on Thee our merciful God  
for the supply of every want.<sup>49</sup>

### Symbiotic Ecclesiology

In many ways, the genius of the Wesleyan Revival was the absolute insistence on the part of the Wesleys that their Societies remain within the Church of England.<sup>50</sup> On multiple occasions they resisted the natural inclinations of many within their ranks to separate from the Church. As long as the symbiosis of Society and Church remained intact—as long as a dynamic tension was maintained between these two normative structures—spiritual renewal ensued. Not all to be sure, but by far most of the early Methodist women were adamant about maintaining a close working relationship with the Anglican parishes in which they were immersed. This became increasingly clear toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the call for separation from the church intensified. In the heat of this contentious situation, women like Mary Bosanquet (Fletcher by that time) styled themselves “Church Methodists” and did all in their power to stress the extraordinary nature of their mission inside the Church. Without question, intentionality more than anything else held them true to that course and required the practice of humility, forbearance, and love.<sup>51</sup>

### Authentic Discipleship

The early Methodist women understood that authentic Christian discipleship requires community.<sup>52</sup> Their little churches within the church functioned as greenhouses in which Jesus’ disciples

were encouraged to grow and mature in their faith. As I have observed in *Making Disciples in a World Parish*, these Christian families became disciple-making communities “as they bore witness to the good news by making room and creating safe space for the other (hospitality), by offering reconciliation and peace to the broken-hearted and the oppressed (healing), and by living in and for God’s shalom-vision for all humanity and creation (holiness).”<sup>53</sup> The primary lesson to be learned from their experience revolves around the profoundly personal nature of this work. The *ecclesiolae* provided an intimate context in which faith was born and awakened sinners were encouraged to grow in grace, to be channels of love for others, and to enter a particular, revolutionary path of self-sacrificing love for the world. Early Methodist women planted *ecclesiolae* in order to experience the gift of God’s reign, offer it to others, participate in it more fully, and help the larger church community rediscover the centrality of God’s rule in its life. A little-known hymn of Charles Wesley celebrates the resistless love that animated their practice:

Love, which willest all should live,  
Love, which all to all would give,  
Love, that over all prevails,  
Love, that never, never fails.  
Love immense, and unconfined,  
Love to all of humankind.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I have discussed the centrality of this “mission-church” theme related to the Wesleyan heritage elsewhere. In particular, see “*The Mission-Church Paradigm of the Wesleyan Revival*,” in Darrell L. Whiteman and Gerald H. Anderson, eds., *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), 151-64; *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), esp. chapter 7; *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); and “*Evangelistic Practices of the Wesleyan Revival*,” in *Methodist Evangelism: Wesleyan Mission*, ed. Lacey Warner, *Equipping Global Ministry: Wesleyan Studies Project, Session 8* (Washington: Wesley Theological Seminary, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Not meant to be a criticism or a clarion call for more theological and historical reflection (although both are always welcome), a sampling of titles from contemporary syllabi for church planting courses reveals the practical orientation of many of these texts: Warren Bird, *Starting a New Church: How to Plant a High-Impact Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2003); Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994); Tom Cheyney, J. David Putman, and Van Sanders, eds. *Seven Steps for Planting Churches* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, SBC, 2003); Harvie Conn, ed., *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997); Dale Galloway and Tom Jones, ed., *Church Planting from the Ground Up* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2004); J. D. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009); and Lyle F. Schaller, *Forty-four Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). Handbooks abound; for online resources, see Tim Keller’s Redeemer Church Planting Manual:

<http://www.redeemer2.com/rstore/category.cfm?Category=23>; Robert Logan’s Church Planter’s Toolkit:

<http://www.churchsmart.com/store/viewItem.asp?idProduct=1007>; Gary Rohrmayer’s First Steps for Planting a Missional Church:

<http://garyrohrmayer.typepad.com/yourjourneyblog/>; Mark Driscoll’s reading material available on the Acts 29 Network website:

<http://www.acts29network.org/resources/articles-excerpts/>.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel R. Sanchez, Review of [\*Planting growing churches for the 21st century: a comprehensive guide for new churches and those desiring renewal\*](#) by Aubrey Malphurs, *Missiology* 21, 3 (July 1993): 359. The second edition of the book was published by Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 393-94.

<sup>5</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 41-53 in particular.

<sup>6</sup> J. Herbert Kane developed a synthetic understanding in this debate in *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 73-77.

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, 90-100.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001; see Chapter 4, “Church Planting: A Historical Perspective,” pp. 87-105. Scholars offer historical analysis related to mission, evangelism, and church growth, of course, but the relatively nascent status of “church planting” as a discipline explains the dearth of historical material.

<sup>12</sup> Murray, *Church Planting*, 88-89.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>15</sup> Murray, *Church Planting*, 106; cf. Robert Warren, *Building Missionary Congregations* (London: Church House, 1995), 26.

<sup>16</sup> George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 214. It might be argued in parallel fashion that similar forces led to the bifurcation of church and evangelism. Parachurch organizations took up the practice of evangelism (on behalf of the church) while those very organizations disengaged evangelism from the church, leading to “evangelism-less churches” and “churchless evangelism.”

<sup>17</sup> Paul W. Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 94.

<sup>18</sup> See Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” *Missiology* 2, 1 (January 1974): 121-39 and Ralph D. Winter and R. Pierce Beaver, *The Warp and the Woof: Organizing for Mission* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> Winter, “Two Structures,” 129-30.

<sup>20</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989); see chapters 3-5 in particular.

<sup>21</sup> The three concepts of church, sect, and mystic Christianity are given definitive expression by Ernst Troeltsch in *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Rupert Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 9: The Methodist Societies, History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 3. Davies does not discuss the third Troeltschian category of “mystic” Christianity as it is not directly germane to his analysis here.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, “Ecclesiola in Ecclesia,” [http://www.the-highway.com/ecclesia\\_Lloyd-Jones.html](http://www.the-highway.com/ecclesia_Lloyd-Jones.html). Accessed on May 31, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Paul W. Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 26.

<sup>28</sup> For a full discussion of this pioneering work, see Paul W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1991), 45-66.

<sup>29</sup> James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester* (Manchester: S. Russell, 1827), 52.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Steele, *History of Methodism in Barnard Castle and the Dales Circuit* (London: George Vickers, 1857), 41.

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- <sup>31</sup> Leslie F. Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 40.
- <sup>32</sup> George Jackson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the Darlington Circuit* (Darlington: J. Manley, 1850), 17.
- <sup>33</sup> Benjamin Smith, *The History of Methodism in Macclesfield* (London: Wesleyan Conference, 1875), 17-19.
- <sup>34</sup> *Methodist Magazine* 60 (1837): 885-99.
- <sup>35</sup> John Lyth, *Glimpses of Early Methodism in York* (York: Williams Sessions, 1885), 53-54.
- <sup>36</sup> Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ*, 28-29.
- <sup>37</sup> See Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 47-51.
- <sup>38</sup> See Henry Moore's standard biographical account, *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, 6th ed. (London: J. Kershaw, 1824), which passed through numerous editions on both sides of the Atlantic during the 19th century. Perhaps no life was so well known to the women of early Methodism as that of Mary. The account that follows is based upon the historical analysis provided in Paul W. Chilcote, "An Early Methodist Community of Women," *Methodist History* 38, 4 (July 2000): 219-230.
- <sup>39</sup> W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley. Vol. 21. Journal and Diaries IV (1755-1765)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 495.
- <sup>40</sup> Moore, *Fletcher*, 43.
- <sup>41</sup> [Mary Bosanquet], "An Account of the Rise & Progress of the Work of God in Latonstone, Essex, 1763," unpaginated.
- <sup>42</sup> Murray, *Church Planting*, see 38-53 in particular.
- <sup>43</sup> The writings of the women clearly reflect the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace. For a discussion of this doctrine, see Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 83-84.
- <sup>44</sup> David Bebbington has argued that one of the "striking symptoms of discontinuity" between the Evangelical Revival under the Wesleys and the previous two centuries was "a new emphasis on mission." The women, more than any others, embodied this emphasis. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 40.
- <sup>45</sup> See my discussion of this in "'Claim Me for Thy Service': Charles Wesley's Vision of Servant Vocation," *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society 11 (2006-2007)*: 69-85.
- <sup>46</sup> John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), 118, verse 3.
- <sup>47</sup> See Murray, *Church Planting*, 229-30.
- <sup>48</sup> Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings Press, 1964), 62-63.
- <sup>49</sup> John Pipe, "Memoir of Miss Isabella Wilson," *Methodist Magazine* 31 (1808):465, 468-69.
- <sup>50</sup> For a definitive discussion of the evolutionary process that transformed the Methodist Societies into a church independent of the Church of England, see Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970).
- <sup>51</sup> In a discussion of Stephen Clark's *Unordained Elders and Renewal Communities*, Snyder observes, "Clark holds that subcommunities are and should be a normative

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pattern in the church, . . . ‘movements [for him] in which the central thrust is towards a more fervent and effective living of the Christian life’” (*Signs of the Spirit*, 54.).

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the formative nature of early Methodist small groups, see Sondra Mattheai, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Paul W. Chilcote, ed., *Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission & Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Pub., 2011), 7.

<sup>54</sup> S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Songs for the Poor* (New York: GBGM, 1993), Hymn 1.

# **CHURCH PLANTING IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL URBANIZATION**

PRESENTED AT THE AETE ANNUAL MEETING,  
TECHNY TOWERS, IL, 15 JUNE 2012

Art McPhee\*

The recent arrival of global urbanization has implications for the church on its errand to the world. It is a big deal because it means the cities are where the critical issues regarding the well-being of humans and society will unfold and be worked out in the coming century. It is a big deal for the church because, for the foreseeable future, the streams of people flowing into the cities will grow larger and more numerous. During the next 40 years, the population of the world will grow 40 percent; the population of the cities will grow 100 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Place will matter too. A child born in remote Africa will likely live half as long as a child born in New York City. And during that short life, the child born in New York will earn two dollars for every one cent the African child will earn.<sup>2</sup> However, one more disadvantage the child in Africa must not suffer is the absence of an opportunity to hear about, and learn to know in a community of believers, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. That must not happen.

## **The Need for Churches**

For that child to hear about Jesus, there will need to be a church, for churches are God's primary means of evangelizing. For that child

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to become a mature follower of Jesus Christ, there will need to be a church, for the church is the body that builds believers. If there is no church, there are unlikely to be witnesses in that place. If there are no witnesses, the child is unlikely to hear the gospel, for evangelism is the witness of the Spirit through disciples whose firsthand relationship with Christ speaks to those outside Christ. The church is the church whenever and wherever it expresses the depth of its devotion to Christ through redemptive communication. All this is to say the church in its outreach needs to focus on the places where the people will be as the world becomes yet more urban.

As I look at the current interest in church planting in North America, which is more spirited than it has been for a long time, I wonder two things: (1) To what extent is global urbanization on the church's radar? (2) Is the church in the West up to the challenge of encouraging, investing in, and collaborating with the global church to help start the thousands of new congregations that will be needed in the fast-growing cities of the majority world?

There are, of course, churches that can already answer that in the affirmative. An example is New York City's remarkable Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Under the leadership of Tim and Kathy Keller and their colleagues, the church, through its planting center, has helped start scores of small congregations in the city, and through its City to City program has encouraged gospel movements in even more cities of the world.

## Chicago: A Case Study

The term, “global urbanization” points to the fact that urbanization is now a worldwide phenomenon. But it wasn’t always. In the beginning, it was the outcome of industrialization in Europe and America. Circa 1850, urbanization was just getting up steam for its run in Chicago, but who would have guessed? Chicago was just that big town on the lake, where you went every month or two for supplies needed on the farm. Back then, most people in the region were not town-dwelling people. They scratched out a living on farms. Farming was hard. There were no tractors. And, although an Illinois blacksmith named John Deere had recently invented a steel plow, the steel was expensive because it had to be imported from Britain. In those days, it took 19 people on farms to feed one person in the city. That is why cities remained small. In 1850, New York had 500,000 people. But it was the exception. Chicago had just 29,000.

However, that did not last for long. A decade later, technology was sprinting to the farms of the Illinois. Horsepower was displacing hand power. Steel plows were at last supplanting the wooden ones that were always breaking. Another decade brought steam power, followed soon thereafter by electricity, then the internal combustion engine, and natural gas. Chicagoland was on the rise! As Carl Sandburg would soon describe the makeover:

Hog butcher for the world,  
Tool maker, stacker of wheat,  
Player with railroads and the nation’s freight handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the big shoulders.<sup>3</sup>

Chicago became a magnet. The more it grew, the more it drew. Like today's urbanization, it caught the attention of church planting advocates who saw the inflow of immigrants as propitious for the advance of the gospel. That is what brought the YMCA to Chicago, and a 19-year-old Dwight L. Moody. By the time young Moody opened his Illinois Street Church in 1864, the city's mid-century population of 29,000 had septupled to more than 200,000.<sup>4</sup> At the nexus of the industrialized East and agrarian heartland, Chicago was the fastest growing city in the country: "Queen of the West" . . . "Chitown" . . . "Second City" . . . "the Windy City!" The great fire of 1871, for which Mrs. O'Leary's cow falsely got the blame, scarcely rippled the surge. Rebuilding began immediately, and the population juggernaut rushed on.

Half the growth of those years was immigrant growth from Europe, including, among others, continental refugees from the 1848 revolutions; Irish Catholic sufferers from the Great Hunger (a.k.a. the Potato Famine), in which a million starved and a million more fled; and German Pietist escapees from religious intolerance. By 1870, European diasporas were a larger proportion of Chicago than those in any other city in the country.

Then, as now, urbanization and immigration were twins, a fact not lost on the mid-century church any more than the movement of today's diasporas was lost on Cape Town 2010's recent Lausanne gathering. As one Connecticut and future Chicago minister told his congregation

They are crowding in, tens of thousands of them, to make up a yet more formidable power there in the West. If the whole host of them, landing from the

immigrant ships were made to pass before us on their way to their new homes, in a single procession, with steady tread, year in and year out, we might come possibly to appreciate their number. It is no great wonder certainly, that, with such an influx, and with all who are moving westward from the Atlantic States, new cities should rise as if by magic, like Satan's palace in Milton's Pandemonium. They can almost show you, on the same spot, a settlement to-day, next year a town, the year after a metropolis.<sup>5</sup>

Aware of the possibilities, alert to the Spirit, and awake to the needs of the newcomers, the churches in Chicago flourished as fully as did the city itself. Newly-planted congregations, many by immigrants themselves, budded and blossomed exuberantly. Of course, Chicago was but a piece of the whole. St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland were flourishing too. But Chicago was the nerve center. Countless home mission societies, self-appointed itinerant preachers, and denominational groups were rushing to the new immigrant populations, as well as recently-freed slaves and other diaspora populations. Thus, Chicago's diasporas became synonymous with opportunity.

Thus, came appeals like the following from the J. E. Roy to Congregationalist leaders assembled in Ottawa, Illinois in 1866. In an address entitled "The Wisdom of Planting Church Institutions along the Streams of Emigration," Roy exclaimed.

The same policy, inaugurated by the Apostle [Paul], will still be our highest wisdom in seeking the spiritual conquest of our whole land. In pushing on to the West, and in going in to possess the conquered South, we

must follow the track of settlement . . . As the angel of the Lord says to the Philip of our time: “Arise, and go toward the south, which is desert,” we must also be on the alert to enlighten and to baptize . . . the four million Ethiopians who are anxious to learn to read and to understand the Word of God.<sup>6</sup>

Most successful of all the evangelists and church planters in Chicagoland were the “fresh expressionists” of that era—the Methodists and Baptists! Congregational and Presbyterian ministers, who were known for their theological training, started many schools and seminaries and were effective church planters. Yet, despite their intention to plant churches among immigrants, they had a reputation for being starchy and stuffy. The Methodists’ preachers, on the other hand, could be licensed to preach and organize classes simply based on a call (and, of course, the ability to teach and preach). However, the real secret of the Methodist’s exponential surge prior to the Civil War was an exploding lay apostolate within a brilliant system of regional circuits and circuit riders—among them exceptional itinerant leaders like Illinois’s Peter Cartwright. After the Civil War, the willingness of Methodist laypeople to live in the cities and develop innovative ways of addressing the heretofore-unknown social and economic problems posed by the city continued this powerful evangelistic work alive.

Although the Baptists lacked the genius organization of the Methodists, their preachers were people of the people. Most were bi-vocational; many were farmer-preachers. Newcomers found their earthiness and passion attractive. Their democratic, congregational style was also well suited to the frontier.

The Methodist and Baptist success stories were truly extraordinary. They went everywhere and preached to everyone. Their leaders may not have waxed as eloquently on reaching immigrants as the urbane, Reformed preachers did. But their fervor, their fire, and their freedom in sowing extravagantly and exorbitantly attracted thousands whom others dreamed of evangelizing but could not.

I should mention two other groups: (1) women's missionary organizations like the network of societies begun out of Boston by American Baptists, Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles—societies determined to reach freed slaves, Indians, immigrants and “the new settlements of the West”; and, (2) Christian immigrants themselves. It was a struggle to make a new place home and put bread on the table. Yet, they did not hesitate to welcome others even newer on the scene than they were. That had tremendous impact! The hospitality they exercised led to the start of hundreds of new church communities.

Wandering around Chicago today, one sees the evidence in the many immigrant church buildings in the city. The Slavic, Polish, Irish, and German Catholic edifices alone are ample testimony to what was going on,<sup>7</sup> although today, after a century and a half of population shifts and the arrival of hundreds of non-European immigrants, many of those buildings are filled with Chinese, Telegus, Brazilian, and Nigerian Christians. Then, of course, there are the Technys, built by emigrants sent by missionary-minded saints like Arnold Janssen to live and work in the growing population centers, developing, for example, as the Divine Word Society did, passionate bi-vocational missionaries to send out.

How do you sum up that stunning half century of church planting and advance in Chicago? You could point out that those who welcomed the migrants, showed them the gospel, and gathered them into churches, were, like those to whom they ministered, all migrants themselves. They too moved to the city. They settled down. They learned to love strangers into neighbors. They shared the kerygma. They welcomed their neighbors into communities of the kingdom. They built them up. They sent them out. Something like that, I suppose.

Regrettably, the momentum of those days did not last. By 1900, church papers that had for half a century faithfully reported where new churches were emerging and new ministries were planned, instead were covering the churches' new interest: *conservation*. In other words, the focus had shifted from growing fruit to canning fruit. To be clear, urban growth was still happening. We remember the turn of that century, still, as the era of the metropolis, when big, busy, bustling cities like Chicago burst through their borders to swell the suburbs. But the catalytic effect of urbanization on the churches, motivating them to evangelize and plant churches was gone—regrettably so—because the shift of focus to conserving results marked the start of a long season of plateau and decline, especially in the mainline churches of the city and the nation—a descent that continues to this day.

### **Keeping in Step with the Spirit**

There are those who look at the Chicago story and the growth of its half-dozen churches to hundreds in just 50 years, and presume “we

can do it again!” They interpret it as a concerted effort, the result of some strategic plan, which of course it was not! When you examine what happened in those decades of rapid urbanization and marvel that the churches’ growth rate outpaced the city’s for a time, you discover something quite unexpected. What you see is not a drill sergeant Holy Spirit leading the church militant on a 50-year march through the city, but a virtuoso Spirit leading faithful ministers every which way to a thousand small celebrations, each one a new community of the kingdom. Instead of a symphony, in other words, you have thousands of improvisations going on. A poem entitled “Pentecost Jazz” dedicated to memory of Charles Reynolds, an Illinois church organist, is a good expression of what I mean to convey:

Perhaps a jazz improvisation says  
Exactly what is thinkable about  
New life, fresh breath...the Holy Spirit. Has  
There ever been a music without doubt  
Except jazz? Faith, improvisation cause  
Circles of sound to rise and fly throughout  
Our cosmos. Tongues of flame are seen on heads  
Singing or playing solos. Then without  
Time passing—a new language: Jesus! Jazz!<sup>8</sup>

In the 1980s, Henry Blackaby urged Christians to “get on board with what God is doing.” In the 1990s, Leonard Sweet suggested we abandon WWJD and ask, “What is Jesus doing now?” Along the same lines, Craig Van Gelder has been pressing missional churches to pay more attention to Holy Spirit discernment.<sup>9</sup> Van Gelder says we do it through the lens of the Scriptures. Yes, but Paul adds, “live by the

Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit!”<sup>10</sup> I wonder if Paul would give me permission—I think he would—to add, “improvise with the Spirit!”

The concept of improvisation and innovation with the Spirit calls for much prayer, careful reflection, and deep commitment to the mission of God. Though it implies freedom, it also demands discipline: the discipline of not hanging back—of, rather, going into the world as salt and light. This is our life: we are ambassadors, fishers, stars, good seed, letters, salt, light. In the New Testament, they all appear in the indicative. They are not commands; they are who we are—evangelists, planters of churches.

As we go, we improvise with the Spirit for the sake of the stranger-neighbor. As we go, we learn new ways to help Christian communities form. As we go, we learn to form new kinds of Christian communities. As we go, we learn no two church plants are alike; each one is unique. Different people are involved, different spiritual gifts, different resources, different situations, different opportunities for gathering—the list goes on. I know there are church planters who embrace cloning, who have a formula they want to repeat. But even their experiences will differ to some degree. Those who have been church planters know the Spirit is an improvisational spirit. Here is an example. The last church I was involved in planting started in our living room in Waltham, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. Eventually, more small groups formed and we were big enough to search for a meeting place. What came of it was this: (1) from a hermit with a PhD, we were able to purchase a prime property immediately adjacent to I-95, the beltway around Boston; (2) we formed a

corporation with a Messianic Jewish congregation and the Greater Boston Baptist Association so we could raise funds together and build a building that would suit all of our needs; and (3) with the help of Mennonite, Baptist, and Messianic Jewish volunteers from New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina we were able to construct a versatile, high quality, 16,000 square-foot facility at very low cost. Was that not a case of improvisation with the Spirit? Here is the update. Twenty years later, all three groups still share the building in friendship and harmony.

### **The New Urban Diasporas**

People on the move have always been at the heart of the advance of the gospel. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, whose aim was always to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, nevertheless consistently began by engaging diaspora Jews. If, as tradition has it, during Paul's second missionary journey, Thomas went to India in 53 AD, that is where Thomas would have begun too: among the Jews then residing on the Malabar Coast.

Diasporas are key in mission today too. From recent Lausanne gatherings has come an initiative that centers on "Diaspora Missiology"—which intends to bring missiology and migration theory together in order to gain fresh insights for reaching migrant populations with the gospel.<sup>11</sup> In a more and more borderless world due to migration and technology, fresh opportunities are present for evangelism and church planting. But we need to embrace that fresh combination of disciplines to identify them.

The close connection between the push and pull of migration and global urbanization means diaspora missiologists and church planters will inevitably come together too. Their collaboration will be essential. As always, the faith will spread most spontaneously, naturally, and effectively along relational lines within communities of care, concern, companionship, and commerce. But trading information, insights, and ideas will be key in knowing how best to accomplish that with people on the move.

Church planters today, especially, those called to minister among urban diasporas, face very different circumstances from those encountered by their 19th-century American forerunners in the Midwest and Chicago. The challenge now is more extensive, dynamic, varying, and complex. Reaching the new diasporas is not about preaching to whites from a semi-Christianized Europe; it is about reaching out to people of every race and religion. Those who are on the move today—some 200 million—are propelled and pulled from everywhere to everywhere by everyone. Some live in one place while maintaining their most important social connections and allegiances in another place far away—something not possible before jets, computers, and satellites. Some establish a base in one part of the world to support a home community in another. Some emigrants are trying to gain a foothold before calling families to join them. Their cavalcade of situations is diverse; yet, some things stay the same—the motivations of mobility for example: work, business, study, asylum, hope. Those do not change.

However, the breadth of their diversity . . . *that* has changed! And the domestic ability to cross the street and reach the world . . . *that* has changed!

Here is a current example. When a friend from India, a librarian, came to Kentucky this spring for training in setting up an archive, he reflected that his parents in Andhra Pradesh had no concept of where Kentucky, or even America, might be. “I’ve brought them by train to my house in Bangalore,” he said. “So, they are thinking America must be around Bangalore.” Then, he said, “Because I have gotten an education and live and work in a city, when I go home, my relatives and friends hang on my every word and believe virtually all I tell them. It is a responsibility. One of my great joys, though, is that most of my friends and family, including my parents, have now learned to love Jesus and what he loves.”

### **Entrepreneurial Church Planting**

This spring, I attended three national church planting conferences, two for the first time. There are now at least half a dozen such conferences with names like the following: Exponential, Velocity, Fresh Expressions of the Church, Converge (whose theme this year was “Surge”), and Verge. At each of the three I attended, urban church planting was prominent, and workshops on urban church planting were offered. However, although attendees are aware of global urbanization, most would not have, so far, reflected in depth on its implications for the spread of the gospel.

When I asked leaders and participants at those conferences what kind of person makes the best church planter, I almost always got the same answer. Most said that a church planter needs to be an entrepreneur. In the not-so-distant past, church planter profiles such as those developed by Charles Ridley, Robert Logan (essentially Ridley's categories, plus two), and Elmer Towns were widely employed. However, in the minds of many church planting leaders today, much of that is irrelevant. They only care that the church planter knows Jesus and is an entrepreneur.

I raise that semaphore to signal the strong influence on contemporary church planting of what some call "Generation Sell." I'll give a quick tour of the precincts outside the main auditorium at Exponential to show what I mean. At Exponential, everything is writ "LARGE!" If you are counting heads at Exponential, "large" means 5,000 in attendance. If you are promoting the event, it means marketing "the largest gathering of church planting leaders on the planet!" The conference motto is equally unassuming. It is: "Accelerating Multiplication!"

The first thing to notice when you go to Exponential, besides the full parking lots, is all the commercial booths. You feel a little like Jesus among the moneychangers. There are services for sale, consultancies for cash, boot camps for bucks, and bunches of speakers' books to buy that seem to have been ported from last-year's business books. The moneychangers offer everything church planters could ever need—from "Church in a Box" (a trailer with all you need for setting up your worship space in ten minutes) to an app for figuring

out if you are called to be a church planter...and also have the right stuff! For revealing your email, there are prizes to win, cloth tote bags of promotions, free videos and thumb drives, and tickets to extra-conference events outside the margins of the official schedule. If this description sounds cynical, I don't mean it that way. Actually, I find the moneychangers a genial lot. I enjoy talking with them. I buy their books. I learn more from them sometimes than from some workshop leaders. Suffice it to say, the moneychangers don't upset me . . . And I don't upset them!

Although I have decided reservations about the oversell and commercialism of Exponential and some of its sister church planting conferences, overall I am supportive. I think they are worthwhile, even for me. As a professor of evangelism and church planting, I find I learn a lot from conversing with attending church planters. The venue also offers me opportunities to join informal gatherings of denominational and professional colleagues for mealtime conversations. In these ways—and also, of course, from the formal part of the conferences—I discover both current challenges and useful insights. It is an important way of staying on the cutting/leading edge of issues I know will come up in the classroom.

In recent years, I have sought out church planters starting new work in large cities. Their experiences are fresh, and their concerns are serious. I have been an urban church planter more than once, and I have been an overseer of church planting. But I last planted a city church more than two decades ago, so I need to catch up with what church planters are encountering today.

Hundreds of specifically urban church planters show up at conferences like Exponential and Fresh Expressions of the Church because, each year, their lineups of speakers and workshops pay attention to contemporary urbanization. There are plenty of “how to” sessions on everything from “vision casting” to “missional communities.” There are testimonials like “this is our New York experience.” There is theological encouragement, although it tends to be weak tea (vague reminders to be kingdom centered; or to focus on making disciples; or, that numbers are not the point). There are workshops on themes like researching urban communities, understanding living systems in cities, avoiding common mistakes, fostering organic and simple churches, and maintaining a vital spiritual and family life while church planting. Some workshops offer personal challenges, like the one in which participants make a tic-tac-toe board, put their name in the center, and try to identify their eight surrounding neighbors. The workshops are not all gold, but neither is there much fools’ gold.

In the Fresh Expressions of the Church Conference in Alexandria, Virginia this spring, I wrote down several pages of ideas that might be gold for Methodists in America, just as similar ones seem to have been gold in recent years for Anglicans and Methodists in England. The Fresh Expressions of the Church concept centers on provoking churches to initiate gatherings of pre-Christian people who are totally different in ethos, lifestyle, and interests from people in the sponsor churches. Because of those differences, emerging groups are less threatening to the existing churches. They need not fear people will

leave to join up with the emerging expressions. So, competition is not in the cards. Moreover, creating fresh expressions of the church doesn't cost much, because you don't need to pay for buildings or staff. Most importantly, the people who are reached are people who, otherwise, would not have been reached.

Now, obviously, that is a WinZip compression. It needs extraction, but, essentially the fresh expressions concept centers on a realizable dual objective: (1) freeing older churches from their innate resistance to church planting; and (2) birthing non-threatening fresh expressions of the church. In other words, it is like feeding two birds with one scone!

How effective has it been? From 2000 to 2009, four in ten parishes in the Church of England started a fresh expression. In their first 1,000 fresh expressions, there are 40,000 believers, 30,000 of whom were not in a church before.<sup>12</sup>

So, there you have examples of the present-day American and British entrepreneurial mode of church planting. Like it or not, today's church planters by and large think of themselves as entrepreneurs. A small business is their inspiration. Becoming Steve Jobs is their aspiration. To start a church, then, is like starting a restaurant. You promote it. You launch it. And you serve what people like in it.

Having ventured that description, I will share my top three reservations. First, matching the category "entrepreneur" with normative descriptions of servant-leaders in the New Testament is indubitably problematical. Second, focusing on entrepreneurs could mean recruiting people totally unsuited for certain contexts and

cultures (e.g., Thai culture, in which meekness is key). Third, I have known—and certainly the reader has too—extraordinary church planters who did not have an entrepreneurial bone in their bodies.

### **Church Planting and the Seminaries**

There is today an up-tick in interest among seminary students in church planting, including urban church planting. Many of us who teach courses in the field are seeing class enrollments rise. Earlier this year, a *Christian Century* article revealed “many seminaries have updated their curricula to focus on church planting.”<sup>13</sup> The “updating” of which the article speaks varies according to the school, but included are new courses, concentrations, and degrees.

One example is an urban church planting course offered jointly in Bangalore last January by Asbury Theological Seminary and South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (a course co-designed and taught by Dr. Atul Aghamkar and me). A course flier included the following statement:

In this young century, no task is more urgent than planting many churches of various kinds in the world’s urban centers. It is key to the growth and renewal of the church and the best way of reaching new generations, migrating populations, and the nations.

Twenty-three students from India, the U.S., Singapore, Indonesia, and Zimbabwe participated. Bangalore, a prime example of the contemporary urbanization phenomena, was a perfect fit. In ten years, its population had grown from 5.5 million to 8.5 million, and its churches from about 750 to 1150. Hence, the city offered abundant

opportunities for students to interact with leaders and church members from a variety of cultures and traditions. As it turned out, the students themselves were valuable resources. Several had planted churches. One, even as he was taking the class, was planting churches in three small slums: the first occupied by auto rickshaw drivers, the second by fishermen, and the third by a mixture of people.

I am also aware that some seminaries offer church planting courses that include participation in one of the large church planting conferences. Others are using audio and video recordings from the conferences for in-class discussions.

As we move toward developing new church planting courses in the seminaries, I hope to see two shifts. First, I hope there will be less focus on programs and more on people. Second, I hope more attention will be paid to the theological foundations of church planting—for example, on God’s reasons for wanting to see new churches emerge. I have a longer list, but those come near the top.

### **The Problem of Dependence on Programs**

The American church of the past two centuries has had a robust history of providing plans for every providence of God and options for every opportunity in the world. Americans mastermind well! Take the 20th-century with its “miracle of the airwaves,” “dependability of demographics,” “proliferation of programs,” and “moral majority” in politics. Despite some usefulness, we have found all of them wanting. None were the way forward for the gospel that church leaders aspired them to be.

I, myself, participated in a small way in “the miracle of the airwaves.” For several years, I was the writer-speaker on two radio programs—one weekly and one daily. Both were on 140-plus stations, including many nonreligious ones. We estimated how many people we were reaching over the airwaves, and marveled. We offered free books and Bible correspondence courses and were excited when people took us up on our offers. Plenty of people did too. But they were almost all Christians! That is what happened with most Christian radio programs in that era.

I was a student of C. Peter Wagner and John Wimber, and I knew Donald McGavran. I learned a lot from them all. I still remember most of it in fact, and I still impart modified versions of the best of Church Growth insights. McGavran, for example, helpfully distinguished between conversion and transfer growth. Transfer growth is not the same thing as conversion growth: it is taking a dollar bill out of one pocket and putting it in another. All that changes is the location. Yet, despite that knowledge, most of the growth of most of the growing churches in America in the past fifty years has continued to be transfer growth—and many pastors don’t care.<sup>14</sup> The real world impact of McGavran’s principle has been substantially disappointing.

In a 1991 *Christianity Today* article, Peter Wagner admitted, “I don’t think there is anything intrinsically wrong with the church-growth principles we’ve developed, or the evangelistic techniques we are using. Yet somehow they don’t seem to work..., maybe something else is needed.”<sup>15</sup> John Wimber once told me, “I can make any church grow.” But he added, “there is a difference between making churches

grow and making disciples.”<sup>16</sup> A few years ago, Willow Creek Community Church revealed the results of a self-study on the effectiveness of their disciple-making programs. The report’s conclusions were a colossal discouragement. The very programs they were most deeply invested in and most seriously dependent on were not working.

I think stories like those are particularly important for church planters. To me, church planting can never be reduced to collecting an audience and giving them programs. Instead, it is about expanding our daily lives into the fabric of the new communities we host, or who host us, and giving them Christ. In every respect, our lives always boil down to loving God and demonstrating it by loving others.

### **The Problem of Overlooking God’s Priority in Church Planting**

I will illustrate this by showing how an essential theological and sociological concern can, if we are not careful, obscure God’s ultimate concern. We think of contextualizing the gospel as a young idea, but it is not. The New Testament is replete with examples of the early church’s attempts to contextualize the Good News to the cultures, languages, aspirations, preconceptions, and local practices of the Mediterranean Basin. That, for instance, is what lies behind the Jerusalem Council meeting in Acts 15 on what to require of Gentile believers. Two chapters later, it is what lies behind Paul’s comments on a shrine in Athens:

For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the

inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.<sup>17</sup>

The supreme example of contextualization in the Bible, of course, is that of God contextualizing himself in the Lord Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Wedded to that event was the centuries-long preparatory march of God’s restorative mission through the descendants of Abraham—a contextualizing drama that included calling, directing, disciplining, and readying them for the arrival and reconciling work of the Messiah.

Today, we view contextualization is a means of helping pre-Christian people understand that historical event. It is how we go about making things fit so they make sense. For the sake of those to whom we minister, some degree of contextualization is always necessary. It is basic to the presentation of the gospel message. (There is no such a thing as a supracultural gospel.)

But contextualizing cannot be our ultimate aim because above our desire to make things fit is God’s desire to make things right. Thus, we affirm that a rapidly urbanizing world demands contextualizing work on the part of church planters. Contextualizing the gospel is virtuous, vital, and eminently vindicable—*provided* it complements and advances God’s ultimate purpose of making things right.

*What* needs making right? Well, to rehearse the story briefly, once there was a garden encounter in which a serpent’s line won the day: And it was the most tragic day in the world. When the triune God created humanity, God intended his friendship with the man and the woman to be a free one. But to be a free one, they had to be able to choose. To make that possible, God had to reveal to them the one thing

in all of his creation that could destroy his and their companionship in the garden. He had to reveal they had a choice; he had to reveal the tree with its forbidden fruit. To make Adam and Eve free, God could not hide the tree's existence. He could only forbid its fruit. In other words, from the beginning, God could not have been more generous, more gracious, more giving, more good. That was the nature of the prohibition. Only by Adam and Eve's not believing in God's goodness could the companionship and community God wanted for us all become death instead.

When, after their fateful choice, God came to the garden, Adam and Eve hid themselves because they saw themselves differently, as those whose disobedience was now apparent in their nakedness.<sup>19</sup> Exiled from the garden, the progeny of the first humans began to look for community elsewhere—notably in cities. When God stranded the tower of the nations in confusion and babel, that is the mission impossible they were trying to do—trying to restore community independently of God.

Some, though, *did* want to commune with God, as Adam and Eve had been able to do. They were those who, among the early heroes of the faith, were said to have “walked with God”—notably, Enoch and Noah.<sup>20</sup> But they were not all. Why did God latch onto a man like Abraham? Because, he, too, wanted to walk with God. So, at God's initiative, God and Abraham got together. God wanted to bring him to a city and to bring a city to him. God said to Abraham, “Go... to the land that I will show you... In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”<sup>21</sup> The next words say, “So Abraham went.”<sup>22</sup> It was as

simple as that. He didn't exactly know where he was going.<sup>23</sup> But he was walking with God. And God was going to do something. And, in that knowledge, Abraham rejoiced.<sup>24</sup> Although the writer of Hebrews reminds us that Abraham set out "not knowing where he was going,"<sup>25</sup> God knew! God began by creating a people from Abraham—a people through whom the road back to fellowship with heaven would be restored. What the nations had tried, God would do for them with his own city.<sup>26</sup>

That city exists now! But it has not come via propitious church planting during rapid urbanization. Instead, it has come as the church has been the church where the people live. Whenever the church gathers to pray in the name of Jesus, and in whatever place it gathers to worship God, it gathers as the whole church in a community God is restoring.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.<sup>27</sup>

When did God do that—bring that community into existence? It is best to describe it as still in the making, but, also, already made. The critical point was the assembly of the freed slaves of the Exodus at Sinai, the progeny of Abraham through whom God had resolved to bless the nations. At Sinai, God established his pact with them and gave Ten Commandments.<sup>28</sup> The event became known as "the day of

the assembly,”<sup>29</sup> and the assembly became known as “the people of God.” Of that community, Peter would write, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.”<sup>30</sup> That is how God makes things right. In Christ he restores us to communion with him, each other, and even the earth. And the visible expression of it is the church.

I conclude by coming back to our role. I have been reflecting in this last section of the paper on the fact that redemption and reconciliation are the work of God. There is no restoration of fellowship with God and reconciliation with fallen humanity and God’s earth without his initiative and the sacrifice of his Son. As Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

To the *ekklesia* (church) of God . . . to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours . . . <sup>31</sup>

Clearly, the church is the result of God’s mission, not ours. He has done it. Yet, he refuses to do it alone. The world is filled with people on the move. The world is filled with pain and need. The restoration is still in process. We have a role to play: a prayerful, purposeful, powerful, sometimes painful, role that does, indeed, involve church planting—particularly in propitious days like these!

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  19. Gen. 3:7ff.
  20. Gen 5:22, 24; 6:24.
  21. Gen. 12:1-3.
  22. Gen. 12:4.
  23. Heb. 11:8.
  24. Jn. 8:56.
  25. Heb. 11:8.
  26. cf. Heb. 10:11, 16.
  27. Heb. 12:22-24.
  28. Deut. 5:22.
  29. Deut. 5:22; 9:10; 10:2; 18:16
  30. 1 Pet. 2:9-10.
  31. 1 Cor. 1:2.

# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS OF A VETERAN CHURCH PLANTER

Marilyn Draper\*

This title alludes to experience in ministry and mission, to being in the thick of confrontation, perhaps even being wounded, but surviving to bear witness to God's presence in the midst of confusion, growth and vulnerability. Rather than focusing on better methods of church planting or improved assessment or training, this paper suggests that what is needed is a theological re-orientation of mission which places glorifying the Triune God at the center of the vision of the church planting team in order to develop worship as *habitus* and to experience mission as lived doxology expressed as an invitation for others to join in worship.

## **The Challenging Reality of Church Planting**

I have been in leadership in four different church plants in Ontario, Canada. Three no longer exist. They failed for a variety of reasons. These include: differing visions, poor denominational decisions and lack of resources. Differing visions were evident when an older dwindling congregation asked, and was then invited, to join the smaller but more vibrant church plant. While the church plant was actively reaching out, the older congregation wanted its own needs met; the two visions were incompatible. Within two years of

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amalgamation, the newly formed congregation was gone. Two other church plants were hindered by a lack of denominational support. One was thriving, but the denomination insisted that it leave the high school it was renting and move into an older vacant church building across town. The church plant never recovered momentum. Lack of resources was a challenge in each of the church plants. In one case, the mother church died and left the church plant orphaned in its first year of development. The new church plant struggled to keep going, but could not gain strength. It was a premature delivery, more of a mission outpost than a church congregation, and it could not survive without support. In all three cases as time passed, the church planters and leadership teams grew weary. We simply could not sustain the output of energy required. One after another, the church plants closed their doors and surrendered their charitable status.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, the church planting team feels the loss of the church plant deeply, and the decision to close is often accompanied by personal feelings of guilt and failure.

Presently, the church plant where I serve on the leadership team continues to survive and even gives hints of thriving. After half a dozen years of dependent ministry, we separated amiably from the mother church (we still do some activities together) and we received our charitable status from the Canadian government last fall. Last year, we received a couple of large and unexpected financial gifts from within the congregation. Recently, we held our second Annual General Meeting. We have laid out an ambitious plan for the next couple of years and will transition from our church planting pastor to our first

lead pastor in the next few months. But our future remains uncertain. In one of our last discussions, one leadership team member made the comment: “In three years we may be thriving and healthy, or we may have disappeared.” There is always a sense of vulnerability with church plants.

So the question remains: Will this congregation flounder or flourish? Or, is that the most appropriate question? When I started doctoral studies, my underlying goal was to discover solutions so that I could help church plants thrive. I thought if I understood the culture more adequately, or grappled with how to do evangelism more effectively, or had a better grasp of discipleship, then I would have something to offer other church planters in Canada. However, through much study, prayer and interaction, I have moved away from methods and cultural studies, as important as those are, and found myself focusing instead upon the God behind church planting. In his book, *Missional God, Missional People* which examines Trinitarian missiology, Ross Hastings suggests: “Our first task in the business of getting the gospel and mission right, in other words, is getting the God of the gospel right.”<sup>2</sup> This is because when we seek the Triune God, the underlying question concerning mission often changes. The survival of the congregation is no longer the most important issue; rather, the question that emerges is this: What is the nature of human mission in partnership with God’s mission?

## Need for a Theological Re-orientation

Domestic theology of mission is currently experiencing a seismic shift and this has implications for church planting in Canada. In 1991, David Bosch wrote *Transforming Mission* in which he described the six major paradigm shifts that have occurred over the millennia of Christian mission. His thesis is that the transformation of mission is ongoing “and that we find ourselves in the midst of one of the most important shifts in the understanding and practice of the Christian mission.”<sup>3</sup> This transition, which Bosch recognized more than 20 years ago (right around the same time that I started my involvement in church planting), continues to unfold. Canadian church planters are experiencing some of the tremors of this shift.

In his book, Bosch delineated the different aspects of mission. “The term ‘mission’ presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent and an assignment.”<sup>4</sup> These aspects have been and are currently being fleshed out in the missional conversation. In terms of the sender we have a new emphasis on Trinitarian missiology and the *missio Dei*. In terms of the persons sent, we have a more detailed missional hermeneutic and better understanding of mission history and the missional nature of the church. Mission and church are re-connected.<sup>5</sup> In terms of those to whom one is sent, there has been tremendous depth and breadth added to our understanding of anthropology, cultural studies and globalization. And in terms of the assignment, there is a renewed emphasis on the meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ and importance

of the reign/kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup> We more adequately understand this idea of sender, sent ones, and the importance of assignment.

The area that requires further examination is the *nature* of the assignment. We accept as foundational that the mission is God's mission and that God is responsible for the initiative and completion of mission. The question that is crucial for the church planter to ask is this: What is the human role in mission? How is the *nature* of this assignment, the *nature* of human mission best understood?

This question requires a theological answer.<sup>7</sup> But first it is necessary to place church planting within its evangelical Protestant mission roots in order to remind ourselves of the triumphalist mentality and pragmatic methodology that provides the foundation for church planting initiatives both in North America and around the globe.<sup>8</sup> The slogan: "The evangelization of the world in this generation" was prominent at the 1910 Edinburgh Missions Conference.<sup>9</sup> Bosch suggested that slogan "epitomized the Protestant missionary mood of the period: pragmatic, purposeful, activist, impatient, self-confident, single-minded, triumphant."<sup>10</sup> Even though the mission movement faced many setbacks during the early twentieth century, this slogan was picked up again in the 1950s in North America by Christian student groups.<sup>11</sup> There was a feeling of urgency in the 1980s, sparked by the premillennialist leanings of fundamentalist evangelicalism, which led to the continuation of the mindset.<sup>12</sup> The anticipated immanence of the *parousia* resulted in a call for action and a disinterest in theological reflection on the nature of human mission.

In many ways, this triumphalist mentality accompanied by pragmatism continues in the church planting movement of the twenty-first century with its focus on numbers and the birthing and growth of large churches with elaborate plans “to ‘take’ the entire city for the Savior.”<sup>13</sup> Obedience to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is over-emphasized to the detriment of developing a more robust understanding of the nature of the participation of the church in mission.<sup>14</sup> As a result, mission in North America at the grassroots church planting level is often expressed in terms of church growth and focused on methodology and human enterprise. The assumption remains that because this is a mission undertaken in obedience to God’s command, it is therefore destined to receive God’s blessing and succeed. The church planter is sent off with the confidence that when the church planting methodology is implemented, this work will result in the creation of a new congregation because that is what God wills.

### **Theological Re-Orientation: Lived Doxology**

There is a great deal of enthusiasm when a new church plant flourishes. Numbers appear to “impart God’s endorsement.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, in Canada, too often these new church plants do not succeed. Many struggle, flounder and close within a short period of time.<sup>16</sup> Is it time, as Ray Anderson suggests must be done in each generation, to “search for the fundamental paradigm of ministry as demonstrated in God’s ministry for us and for our salvation”<sup>17</sup>? This paper suggests that the fundamental paradigm of ministry, and specifically the nature of mission, is lived doxology. Lived doxology

means that the central calling in the life of the church planter is to worship, where worship is the glorification of God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit, enacted concretely in a local context that infuses “our whole life.”<sup>18</sup> More than a weekly worship service, worship becomes central in the life of the church planter and the church planting team through daily practices and awareness that enlivens their interactions with each other and the community with a growing realization that the purpose, goal and source of mission is worship for the glory of God. This emphasis on worship requires a re-orientation of our understanding of mission. Numbers and measurable success become less central. Worship becomes the main occupation of the church planting team and leaves God responsible for the mission.

Lived doxology is, thus, an exercise in spiritual theology which clarifies the nature of human mission by portraying human participation in God’s mission as characterized by worship of God through union with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Human alignment with, and co-operation in, God’s mission is only possible when it emerges from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13). When built on this foundation, human mission becomes an invitation for others to join in worship, to yield their whole selves in response to God’s mission and participate more fully in God’s ongoing story of reconciliation.

Others have recognized the need for this lived doxology. Lesslie Newbigin identifies the purpose and motivation that ideally inspire human activities of mission. “Mission is an acted out doxology. That is its deepest secret. Its purpose is that God may be glorified.”<sup>19</sup> Lived

doxology reminds the church planter of the purpose of mission and relieves the church planting team of focusing on results. Activities that have traditionally gone by the names of ‘mission’ and ‘evangelism’ have as their purpose that God be glorified, are a participation in the ministry of Christ and are initiated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. They are not isolated activities, but a *habitus*, a way of life characterized by worship. Thus, they are lived doxology, a practical form of worship that honors God by yielding to and being carried along by God’s own missional initiative. By acceding in this manner to God’s mission, the church invites others to join in worship of the triune God.

### **Worship as *Habitus***

Edward Farley writes that for Christians historically, “it was natural to see theology as a *habitus*, a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals.”<sup>20</sup> A *habitus* is a holistic orientation of surrender to God in co-operation with the Holy Spirit, a daily engagement with God, lived out in community. It develops as people interact with the Triune God, one another and their communities, and as they acquire ways of speaking and acting that are aligned with the values of that community.<sup>21</sup> *Habitus* goes beyond anthropological or sociological categories to become a theological term of dwelling in and living out the mission of God through the encounter of God in worship where God initiates transformation in the individual and the church planting team members. In time, this *habitus* of worship becomes the spiritual

dwelling place of the church community as the individuals interact with one another and with the larger community around them. The words, actions, reactions and ministry initiatives of the church planting team emerge out of this understanding that their role is to worship while the Triune God is responsible for the results of the mission. This *habitus* is the practical outworking of a doxological response to God's initiative to bring redemption. Lived doxology is not only conceptual, but practical and livable. In this time of transition and shift in mission theology, a *habitus* of spiritual practices embedded in worship lived out in co-operation with God's mission provides the basis of a re-contextualized lived doxology.

This emphasis on worship as the central focus of the church planting team requires that we envision the concept of worship holistically with added breadth and depth. David Peterson provides added breadth in his biblical theology of worship where he suggests the "theme of worship is far more central and significant in Scripture than many Christians imagine. It is intimately linked with all the major emphases of biblical theology such as creation, sin, redemption, the people of God and the future hope."<sup>22</sup> Worship and mission are intricately connected. In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Jamie Smith provides depth when he argues that worship is "the matrix from which a Christian worldview is formed;"<sup>23</sup> what Christians do in worship serves a pedagogical purpose in the formation of their understanding and interactions with the world. He writes, "expanding our conception of what counts as 'worship' is precisely the point" if we are to

understand worship as formative of our desires and then to see its implications for mission.<sup>24</sup>

Building on this foundation of worship and *habitus*, we can define lived doxology in this manner. Lived doxology means that the goal of the church planting team is to seek God's glory as the team members live each day vocationally, familiarly, individually and corporately as an act of worship. There is no division between the sacred and secular, instead all of life is characterized by worship as participation in God's mission through union with Christ in the Holy Spirit. This definition expresses seven important aspects of lived doxology. 1) The goal of mission is God's glory. 2) The source of mission is worship. 3) Lived doxology encompasses all of life and is active. 4) It is both communal and individual (although the individual emerges from the communal). And it is embedded in the character of the Triune God. 5) It rests upon the grace of Jesus Christ, 6) emerges from the love of the Father and 7) is experienced in communion with the Holy Spirit.

### **Lived Doxology: Expanding the Definition**

Let us expand further on the seven elements this definition. As mentioned previously, the glory of God is central. "The goal of the church planting team is to express God's glory...." First of all, the goal of mission, just as the goal of the church, is the glory of God. Lived doxology emphasizes this importance. Three times in the opening verses of the book of Ephesians, we are told that the purpose of the Christian life is "for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:6,12,14). It is not surprising that the lives of the early church were characterized by

worship. In Acts 2:46-47, we discover that worship provided the foundation for the lives and mission of the early church; at the temple, in their homes, while eating, their focus was on “praising God.” “Mission flows *from* and then back again *to* God’s glory. Doxology gives all other activities and elements of mission their ultimate purpose.”<sup>25</sup> Newbigin writes, “At the heart of mission is simply the desire to be with him [Jesus] and to give him the service of our lives. At the heart of mission is thanksgiving and praise.”<sup>26</sup> The priority of the church planter is not to embrace the methodology as ultimate, but to learn the value of a life of worship. Lived doxology is a reminder that mission is for the purpose of glorifying God.

Second, not only is doxology the purpose of mission, it is also “the source of mission.”<sup>27</sup> This was true in the lives of Paul and Silas. The jailer in Philippi came to know Jesus Christ *after* he heard them praising God (Acts 16). Christopher Wright writes, the “praise of the church is what energizes and characterizes it for mission.... So in as much as our mission is part of our creaturely response to our God, praise must be its primary mode also.”<sup>28</sup> Lived doxology breaks down the categories in the lives of the church planter and reminds the church planting team that worship is the source of all life and mission.

Third, there is “no division between the secular and the sacred” because worship encompasses all of life; doxology is an active part of mission. Lived doxology makes every aspect of mission and life sacred by intentionally bringing it under to lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> Often worship is perceived as inward, passive and individualistic, even when in a corporate setting; while mission is perceived as concrete,

active, outward and results oriented.<sup>30</sup> Lived doxology helps break down these categories and emphasizes that the church planter is active in worship everyday, all day. Wainwright argues that worship is a “hard task. Work is energy directed towards a goal. The offering of ourselves in worship is the active direction of our whole personal being towards God.”<sup>31</sup> Worship does make a difference in the life of the church planter because it realigns the priorities, attitudes and focus of the church planting team. Mark Labberton asks: “What’s at stake in worship?” His answer: “Everything.”<sup>32</sup> He continues, “Such comprehensive worship redefines all that we call ordinary. Worship turns out to be the dangerous act of waking up to God and to the purposes of God in the world, and then living lives that actually show it.”<sup>33</sup> In reality, true worship is active and as a result of worship things change.<sup>34</sup> This is not to support the notion that worship is needed for pragmatic reasons.<sup>35</sup> The church planting team must not now add worship because it works! Instead, worship becomes the attitude and activity upon which all of life and ministry is built for the Triune God is the source and sustainer of both.

Fourth, lived doxology is both individual and corporate; worship reflects personal and communal dimensions of mission. There is a tendency to relegate worship to the Sunday ‘worship service’ when the Christian congregation gathers together. Lived doxology recognizes the value of communal and ritual acts of worship and requires communal times of confession, praise, teaching and experiencing the Lord’s Supper together, even though these are unfortunately often downplayed by the activist church planting team. Out of a robust

communal time of worship, a life of worship can develop which is not reduced to set times and places or prescribed practices. Lived doxology also includes private times of prayer and fasting or unplanned times of prayer for a particular part of the neighborhood in which the church plant is to be placed. There is biblical emphasis on both individual and private practices of worship. Jesus took time alone to pray to prepare for mission. In Romans 12:1, the apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Rome to offer their bodies “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.” Lived doxology requires that each member of the church planting team individually build his or her life on the worship of God while not neglecting corporate times set aside specifically for worship where worship “is primarily the offering of our total selves to God – our intellects, our feelings, our attitudes, and our possessions.”<sup>36</sup> From the very beginning of the church planting work, the church planting team discovers the centrality of individual and, even more particularly, communal expressions of worship as participating in the life of the Triune God and the important implication this has for mission undertaken together with the Holy Spirit. Hastings emphasizes that in the early church worship led to mission. “It is the church intoxicated with God, actively participating in the life of God, the church in worship, that is the missional church. The church of Acts 2 was just such a church. The evangelism was effected through the church at worship.”<sup>37</sup> Mission is enacted in the testimonial praise of the individual who has experienced the transforming power of the gospel and the praise of the Christian community that has learned to live

together in the story of the self-emptying Triune God made manifest in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Worship spills out in mission that invites others to come and participate in this work of God completed in Jesus Christ.

When worship becomes the primary focus of the church planting team, the members become less captivated by numerical and financial success, and more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Worship as *habitus* is formed through daily practices and is the appropriate response when God is encountered as the Triune God who is participatory and relational. Worship is active response to who God is; transformation and mission become the by-products. Thus far, we have discovered that the glory of God is the goal of both mission and lived doxology. Worship as lived doxology becomes the source and mode of mission. It is active. It is communal and individual. It is constant. It is also dependent upon participating in the life and mission of the Triune God.

### **Lived Doxology Embeds Itself in the Character of the Triune God**

In 2 Corinthians 13:13, we read the Apostle Paul's doxology. "The grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." This verse reminds us that lived doxology emerges out of a trinitarian foundation. Worship as *habitus* dwells in the life of the Triune God. It is life filled with the grace of Jesus, infused with the love of God and empowered by the communion of the Holy Spirit.

## *The Grace of the Lord Jesus*

A developed Christology is essential for an adequate understanding of worship and mission. Because Jesus' mission on earth was tangible, it is easy to see Jesus as the model of mission. Thus, the church planting team has a tendency to focus on *imitatio Christi*. The church planting team sees Christ as their model for service and sacrifice. This approach leads to discouragement for they can never embody the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus. Rather, lived doxology emphasizes *participati Christi*.<sup>38</sup> Bosch concludes: "...mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus...It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world."<sup>39</sup> Jesus is the one with whom we are joined in death and resurrection. As Rick Richardson writes in his article on missional movements:

Ecclesiology can become focused on following the way of Jesus rather than on becoming indwelt by Christ. We are not just following after Jesus; we are, in Christ, in a union that participates in the perichoretic indwelling of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

Lived doxology starts with worship, rejoicing in Christ's life, death, resurrection and glorification and then asks how the church planting team might experience their union with Christ through participation with Christ in grace and hope for that community.

Lived doxology is a life filled with grace. It is absolutely essential that the church planting team recognize the importance of living in the grace of the Lord Jesus. Through a life of daily worship, the experience of grace becomes the basis for gratefulness, as well as cruciformity.<sup>41</sup> Church planting is concrete. The life of the church

planting team is lived out daily in a series of relationships with each other, family members, and the larger communities in which they are involved. Those relationships must first of all be placed in the context of worship and grace. This grace leads to cruciformity because church planting includes hardship and simply because of the nature of the task, church planters are called to suffer. “The cross of Christ reminds us that at the heart of God’s mission there is suffering – divine suffering and the suffering of those who participate in God’s mission.”<sup>42</sup> Christ’s death is simultaneously an act of obedience to God and, as such, a gift of grace to humanity. Denominations do young church planters a disservice by focusing on methods, and reinforcing expectations of success and positive results. There is no guarantee that this church plant will succeed. However, there is a guarantee that suffering and difficulties will be a reality for the church planting team. It is essential that church planters realize that it is the grace of Jesus Christ that will carry them through suffering. Worship as *habitus* takes the emphasis off the task and the results, and instead encourages the church planting team to experience the grace and fellowship of Christ in the midst of their suffering (Phil 3:10).

It is not uncommon for church planters and their families to face sickness, house problems such as flooding, encounters with people who hold unorthodox beliefs, disgruntled Christians from other churches, distrust, challenges with municipal bureaucracies, as well as discouragement and exhaustion. There may be challenges within the denomination as well and other churches in the area may see the new church as competition. (Even though church plants often give more

people to established churches than they ever receive from them.)<sup>43</sup> Because it is challenging and exhausting work, church planting often results in suffering at the physical, emotional and spiritual levels. (There is also the problem of lack of resources that causes the church planter to suffer financial loss as well). Suffering is a part of the church planting experience. Lived doxology enables the church planting team to react in the same way that the early disciples did when “they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name” (Acts 5:41).

In this area of suffering, the church planting team discovers a wonderful companion in the Apostle Paul who endured great hardship and found that the grace of Jesus Christ sustained him. The key is that Paul did not focus on the mission, but focused rather on the grace of the One who called him to participate in that mission.<sup>44</sup> Thus, lived doxology is characterized by worship as *habitus* where the church planting team is enraptured by the person of Jesus Christ so that praise carries them through days of joyous ministry and prayer carries them through days of challenge and concern.

While suffering may make the church planting team feel like victims; it also serves as a reminder that ministry cannot be forced. It may be tempting to the church planting team to ‘sell’ the value of the church plant at denominational meetings and ‘sell’ the gospel in the community in order to win more resources and more converts. However, difficulties and suffering remind the team that only the Triune God transforms lives and communities. The way to avoid bitterness and discouragement is to dwell in the grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ, for “grace is the very being of the essence of God.”<sup>45</sup> When the church planting team worships throughout each day, both individually and corporately, the emphasis is not on the numbers or whether the targets are being reached, the emphasis is gratitude and surrender. Lived doxology is filled with the grace of Christ.

### *The Love of the Father*

Worship as *habitus* dwells in the love of the Father. God so loved the world that He gave (Jn 3:16). “We must never forget that self-surrender flows out of love. Experiencing the divine embrace, the joyful Trinitarian ministry ... evokes the response of glad surrender.”<sup>46</sup> Worship is God’s gift in which the church participates. The God who initiates his movement toward us in order to make worship through the Son in the Spirit possible is the same one who draws us into the heavenly sanctuary through the Son in the Spirit.<sup>47</sup> And it is this same love that is foundational for lived doxology. Thus, the love of the Father transforms and makes it possible for the church planting team to give to one another and the community by first giving themselves to God. The church offers itself; it offers nothing that the Father does not already have, yet in the very action of bringing itself to the Triune God, the church brings glory to the Father and in this way participates in the Father’s mission in the world.

This has significance for the church planting team. The church planter will discover that his or her resources for the community are limited, but the needs of the community seem without limit. Lived doxology fills the gaze of the church planter with the sufficiency of the

love of God. This makes God and his glory the goal of the mission. This is an important corrective because too often the goal of church planting is about acquiring people, resources, locations, equipment and volunteers. It is an important reminder for the church planter that the character of the Father is about giving – giving the Son, giving the Spirit, giving life. In church planting, as we learn to give in the way that the Father gives, the kingdom can take priority over the “success” or “failure” of the church plant. Lived doxology means that the priority of the church planting team is to give themselves first to the Father and then seek to join what the Triune God is doing in the community.

### *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is essential not only to the work of church planting, but to lived doxology. As Gary Tyra writes, “being *missional is the heartbeat of the Holy Spirit.*”<sup>48</sup> And then Tyra connects the work of the Spirit to worship:

*The Holy Spirit is all about the enablement of Christ’s followers to glorify the Father, in the name of the Son, in such a way as to encourage lost and hurting human beings to accept the invitation to join the divine dance, experiencing justification, sanctification and empowerment for ministry themselves in the process.*<sup>49</sup>

The Holy Spirit is active in the life of the church planter, the church planting team, the mother church and denomination and the broader community. Listening to the Holy Spirit teaches the church planting team about what the Triune God is like and how the Triune God is at work. In *Worship and Mission After Christendom*, the Kreiders emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit:

This is where worship and mission meet. In the worship that we offer God, God builds up the kind of people who – whatever is happening in the world – are alerted by the Holy Spirit to ways that the missional God is at work, moving history toward the impossible reconciliation that God has promised.<sup>50</sup>

The phrase “the communion of the Holy Spirit” contains the idea of relationship. This communion includes listening and following, and the role of “unceasing prayer.”<sup>51</sup>

Church planting is above all both a spiritual work and the work of the Holy Spirit. Too often, church planters are equipped with methods and enthusiasm, but little training in discernment of the Holy Spirit. Lived doxology is a community endeavor to listen to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. “Because of human fallibility, understanding the ways of the Spirit can never be an individualistic effort. A pneumatology of quest requires that discernment be subject to public examination, either for ratification or for correction.”<sup>52</sup> Discerning the voice of the Spirit together is not something in which many evangelical Protestant church planting teams are trained or experienced, but it is a crucial element of mission. It is also an act of worship. Worship as *habitus* demands that the church planting team spends time asking and listening for discernment and direction so that the Holy Spirit guides their involvement in the Triune God and then their involvement in the community.

### **The Implication of Lived Doxology**

While a church planting team developing worship as *habitus* will do many of the missional activities done by others, such as share their

faith, set up a meal for homeless persons or provide a Bible study for young mothers, their motivation and goal remains focused on the glory of God rather than the success of their mission. This frees them to envision mission as an invitation for others to join them in worship.

### *Worship as Witness and Invitation*

Worship as *habitus* re-aligns the activities of the church planting team with the purposes of God, for the glory of God. It also allows them to put their work of evangelization and practical ministry in a larger context of mission as an invitation for others to come and worship God. God is now the focus of the team; lived doxology characterizes daily life and this spills over into interactions with the community. Because conversions are not the goal, there is freedom to be authentic and in this way, witness simply becomes another form of worship where the church planting team invites others to come and worship and to encounter this Triune God. This emphasis is found in the definition of “worship” in *The Dictionary of Mission Theology*:

Obviously, our active response to God is a necessity but our worship (thankfully!) is carried by the Father’s initiative, offered through the mediation of Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Worship conducted in this way will inspire humble dependence on God in our mission, through which God invites all people to enter into and share in the glory of his Trinitarian life. Mission is thus first an invitation to worship...<sup>53</sup>

Thus, human mission is less about creating churches and winning converts, and more about glorifying God, listening to the Spirit and inviting others to worship God as well. To answer the question with which we started: What is the nature of human mission in partnership

with God's mission? Human mission is lived doxology. It is the formation of worship as *habitus* which encourages the church planting team to dwell in the Triune God so that mission becomes an overflow, an invitation for others to join in worship, to come and encounter this amazing God and to yield their whole selves and lives in response to God's mission. The nature of mission for the church planting team centers on encountering and glorifying God.

### **Conclusion**

Time will reveal if the current church plant, of which I am a part, survives. There are many indications that this congregation shows signs of health. But its ultimate survival is not our primary aim. Our current emphasis is to provide theological grounding so that we truly are a missional church plant. Our present focus is not to 'win' converts or claim our city for Christ, but to develop worship as *habitus* for kingdom living. This exercise in spiritual theology clarifies the nature of our human mission by portraying human participation in God's mission as lived doxology characterized by worship of God through union with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Human alignment with, and cooperation in, God's mission is only possible when it emerges from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. When built on this foundation, human mission is clarified, the church lives as an expression of God's kingdom and mission becomes an invitation for others to join in worship, to yield their whole selves in response to God's mission and participate more fully in God's ongoing story of reconciliation. The choice to focus on

glorifying God through the experience of worship as *habitus* will determine if our current church plant learns to express mission as lived doxology.

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<sup>1</sup> These four church plants were started under the auspices of four different denominations, but all were of the evangelical Protestant persuasion.

<sup>2</sup> Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 107.

<sup>3</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), xv.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> “The ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission.” Darrell Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision For the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eermdans, 1985), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapid: Baker, 2011), 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> This is in keeping with the conclusions of Guder. “The real issues in the current crisis of the Christian church are spiritual and theological.” Guder, *Missional Church*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> It could be argued that this triumphalism is part of the residue of Christendom. During Christendom, church and state became intertwined. There was little need for mission within the state because those baptized into the State church were both Christians and good citizens. Thus, mission was an activity done outside the church and outside the state and became associated in time with state expansion, empire expansion and colonialism. Alan and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission After Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> John Mott wrote a book by this title in 1900. The slogan was originally adopted by the Student Volunteer Movement in 1889. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 336.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 336.

<sup>11</sup> This attitude was clearly displayed by Campus Crusade for Christ and its founder Bill Bright. He makes reference to “the original vision which God gave in 1951 to help reach the world for Christ in our generation.” Bill Bright, *Come Help Change the World* (San Bernadino: Here’s Life, 1985), 241.

<sup>12</sup> Mission through the lens of premillennialism also emphasizes individualism and separation from the world. For more detail on the influence of premillennial on mission see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 315-327.

<sup>13</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 337. This is just one of numerous books written to provide church planters with methods for starting and growing a new church plant. Like so many, while it acknowledges the need for both a detailed scriptural basis and a theological basis for church planting, it highlights the importance of being obedient to the Great Commission and then provides a methodology for how to plant a church including the raising of funds, the importance of evangelism and the development of leaders. It does contain a chapter on worship; however, it is pragmatic rather than

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theological. “If worship is not done well, then, in most minds, this is a reflection on the other programs of the church, and they don’t come back for a second look” (189). The result is that church planting, mission and worship become a human empowered and human oriented endeavor. Hunsberger criticizes the “American mystique of growthism [that] makes growing the church larger an end more important than representing the gospel of the reign of God.” George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (eds.) *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 341. For the way that The Great Commission mandate is used to justify mission see David Wheeler and Vernon Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011) which discusses the relationship of evangelism and worship within the Great Commission mandate. Newbigin discusses and rejects the tradition of “the missionary mandate,” when mission is seen primarily as the church’s obedience to a command. He argues, rather, that mission is a joyous overflow based on what the triune God is doing. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

<sup>15</sup> William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: The Church’s Hidden Problem with Transfer Growth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 24. Chadwick’s thesis is that because growth has been exalted and not examined, the emphasis on numbers has resulted in transfer growth rather than conversion growth.

<sup>16</sup> According to Outreach Canada, between 1997 and 2003, 1500 evangelical churches were planted in Canada. However, the total number of evangelical churches only rose 767 in this period because of the closure of both older congregations and church plants. See Murray Moerman and Lorne Hunter, “Saturation Church Planting: Current Needs and Recent Progress,” 40. In Murray Moerman (ed.) *Discipling Our Nation: Equipping the Canadian Church for its Mission* (Delta: Church Leadership Library, 2005), 13-45. This problem continues. The website for the Canadian Revenue Agency shows that between January 2010 and February 2013, 627 churches registered for charitable status while 663 asked to have their status revoked, [www.cra-arc.gc.gc/ebci/haip/srch](http://www.cra-arc.gc.gc/ebci/haip/srch), accessed on February 10, 2013. This is not only a Canadian problem but an English one as well. There was an emphasis on church planting in England in the 1990s and Stuart Murray realistically summarizes: “many new churches in Britain struggled: some never gelled, and closed after a few years; others persisted but did not thrive; some grew rapidly through transfers but made few inroads in the community they were meant to serve.” Stuart Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ray Anderson (ed.), *Theological Foundations for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 3.

<sup>18</sup> This definition encapsulates the four theses of Don Saliers, “The Travail of Worship in a Culture of Hype: Where Has All the Glory Gone?” *Journal for Preachers* 24 (Jan 2001): 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 127.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 35.

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- <sup>21</sup> *Habitus* is important in the description of the narrative canonical method of theological reflection. “This method does not establish abstract rules or principles to guide the reflective process. Rather it invites the Christian to develop a *habitus*, or way of life, through which the story of Jesus continues to be told in the life of the story-shaped community of the Church.” Elaine Graham, et.al. *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM: 2005), 78.
- <sup>22</sup> David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 17.
- <sup>23</sup> James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 11.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.
- <sup>25</sup> Craig Ott and Stephen Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 84.
- <sup>26</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 127.
- <sup>27</sup> Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 84.
- <sup>28</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 134.
- <sup>29</sup> In order for an everyday activity to become an act of worship requires intentionality which is learned through participating in or observing ritual acts of worship. See Ninian Smart, *The Concept of Worship* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Paul Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission Through the Collapse of Time and Space*. (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009), 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: A Systematic Theology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth, 1980), 26.
- <sup>32</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 188.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>34</sup> Even though worship results in change, change is not the purpose of worship. The purpose of worship remains to glorify God, the resulting changes are by-products determined by the Triune God.
- <sup>35</sup> In fact, Marva Dawn argues that we worship precisely because it is not pragmatic. “My thesis is that the world needs us instead to waste our time royally in worship....” Marva Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being the Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 323.
- <sup>36</sup> Franklin Segler, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman, 1967), 10.
- <sup>37</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional People*, 116.
- <sup>38</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody: Handrickson, 2009), 28.
- <sup>39</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 519.
- <sup>40</sup> Rick Richardson, “Emerging Missional Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Witness – Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education*, vol. 25 (2011), 15-29.

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- <sup>41</sup> Cruciformity is “conformity to the crucified Christ.” Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 4.
- <sup>42</sup> Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 33.
- <sup>43</sup> All of these were experienced by the church planting teams in which I have been involved.
- <sup>44</sup> 2 Corinthians 1-4.
- <sup>45</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1. (Edinburgh: T& T, 1957), 356.
- <sup>46</sup> Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 90.
- <sup>47</sup> See Dennis Ngien, *Gifted Response: The Triune God as the Causative Agency of our Response* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).
- <sup>48</sup> Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 30.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>50</sup> Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 102.
- <sup>51</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 141.
- <sup>52</sup> Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 314.
- <sup>53</sup> David Pass, “Worship,” John Corrie (ed.), *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 441.

# **THE STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT & THE INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF EVANGELICAL STUDENTS: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING TWO STUDENT MISSION MOVEMENTS**

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The University is a clear-cut fulcrum with which to move the world. The church can render no greater service, both to itself and to the cause of the gospel, than to try and recapture the universities for Christ. More potently than any other means, change the university and you change the world.

--Charles Malik, former President of the UN General Assembly

## **Introduction**

When we peel back the layers on the great movements of history, what we often find at the core is a small group of students discontent with the status quo and willing to do something about it. The movements of God follow a similar pattern: whether the Protestant Reformation or the Great Awakening, God in his mercy has often chosen to bring renewal to his church through the courage of students.

In terms of the most influential Christian student movements of the last 150 years, almost none shine brighter than the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). Each centrally concerned with the mobilization of students for world mission, the two movements share

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significant similarities: both emerged in in the late 1800's (though SVM ascended to prominence more quickly), involved university students on both sides of the Atlantic, were catalyzed by some of the same leaders, and made significant contributions to the world-wide church. Indeed, IFES leaders consider their movement a new iteration of the SVM spirit: "The true lifeblood of the SVM in North America is now incorporated into the aims of the IFES movements."<sup>1</sup> And yet, for all their similarities, the two movements demonstrate a striking difference. Whereas the IFES currently works with over half a million students in more than 150 countries, the SVM has ceased to exist at all (and as we will see below, hasn't for the last half century): the same roots, but very different fruit over a century removed from their emergence.

How do we account for this massive disparity? What gave rise to these movements at all? What traits of renewal movements did they share? What can movement leaders today emulate or avoid based on these works of God? These are the core questions this paper will seek to answer. To do that, we will first reflect back on the shared emergence of these movements (1877 -- 1909), tracing the ways God brought them into being and guided them into maturity. Then, as the paths diverge, we will look at the movements independently: the peak and decline of SVM (1910-1950), and the growth of the IFES (1920-current). Then, with that historical backdrop in place, we will reflect on some of the critical lessons to be learned as the SVM declined and IFES continued to expand. Finally, we will work to offer a few potential application points for movement leaders today.

## **Shared Roots (1877-1909)**

The historical antecedents of SVM and IFES trace back several hundred years and include the likes of Nicholas Von Zinzendorf and his “Order of the Mustard Seed” (early 1700s), John and Charles Wesley’s “Holy Club” (1729), and Samuel Mills’ Haystack prayer meeting (1806), but it wasn’t until the first half of the 1800s that multiple independent student unions began to emerge globally, 90 in all between 1810 and 1850.<sup>2</sup>

Most prominent among the European Christian student societies was the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU), which began as an outreach to poor youth, and eventually became focused on regular corporate prayer. In 1862, students “had started to pray together and seen something of a spiritual awakening result among their schoolfellows. They now called on the two main evangelical leaders in Cambridge and proposed a daily prayer meeting”<sup>3</sup> despite opposition from university officials. In the Spring semester of 1877, “the decisive step was taken, and the CICCU was officially founded. Oxford’s ICCU followed two years later.”<sup>4</sup> From the beginning the CICCU evidenced a strong commitment to both campus and overseas mission. Following a campus mission by D.L. Moody in 1882, “the ‘Cambridge Seven’ offered themselves to the China Inland Mission. The news caused a national sensation....All seven were to carry out a long spell of missionary work.”<sup>5</sup>

Not limited to England, other student movements around the world began to organize in similar fashion during the last third of the

century. Movement historian Clarence Shedd noticed multiple similarities about these groups, including “the urge for inter-collegiate fellowship”, “interdenominational outlook”, and “the desire of all student life to express itself internationally”. In addition, Shedd noted that these groups tended to arise first as “purely devotional”, then “theological or apologetic”, and finally “evangelistic and the missionary”.<sup>6</sup>

A watershed moment in the formation of SVM came in the summer of 1886 when D.L. Moody convened a month-long student conference at Mt. Herman School in Northfield, Massachusetts. Where “one hundred students pledged themselves to foreign missions”<sup>7</sup> including the students John Mott and Robert Wilder who became the first Chairman and Secretary, respectively, of the SVM shortly thereafter.

By 1888, a tremendously successful recruiting tour of nearly two hundred colleges and theological seminaries [by Wilder and his classmate John N. Forman]...had swollen the number of pledged students to over 2200. In December of that year, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) was formally organized on a national basis under the auspices of the intercollegiate Young Men’s Christian Association.<sup>8</sup>

More than anything else, the SVM became known by its ambitious watchword, “the evangelism of the world in this generation,” and it leveraged quadrennial conventions to challenge students to sign the volunteer declaration: “It is my purpose, if God permit, to become a foreign missionary.”<sup>9</sup> Capturing the thinking of that time, Robert Speer commented on the watchword, calling it “short, striking, Scriptural, and heroic”<sup>10</sup> and yet thoroughly doable:

“the evangelization of the world in this generation is possible as far as the Church is concerned. The Church of Jesus Christ has the men.”<sup>11</sup>

Mott became a champion for the watchword in his role as chairman of the SVM: “It is indeed the decisive hour of Christian mission....Let each Christian so resolve and so act that if a significant number of others will do likewise, all men before this generation passes away may have an adequate opportunity to know of Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

As the SVM was gaining momentum, formerly independent Christian unions were beginning to connect themselves together into more expansive networks. “By the year 1895 there were several national organizations which felt strong enough to enter into purposeful international cooperation with like-minded movements. The local Christian Unions in Canada and USA had united into the ‘North American Student Christian Movement.’”<sup>13</sup> SCM, as it came to be known, was comprised of the YMCA, the SVM, and the Inter-Seminary Missionary Alliance and within only a couple years formed the global World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in 1897.

In summary, it was a time of tremendous spiritual vibrancy as students started joining together across campuses and countries to labor together for the causes of Christ in the world. Robert Wilder, who was to become a key catalyst for both SVM and IFES noted in retrospect that “It seems clear that the source of the modern missionary uprising among students must have been in Heaven, appearing as it did on earth at the same time in lands so remote as Scandinavia, Great Britain and North America.”<sup>14</sup> God was on the move, and students

were responding in unprecedented ways to see the mission of God advance in the world!

### **Different Paths**

While the movement of God was unmistakable during this season, significant threats were brewing just below the surface. As the nations of Europe hurtled toward the armed conflict of World War I, a theological schism was brewing between the ecumenical thrust of SCM/WCSF and its more evangelical roots. In compiling the history of IFES, Douglas Johnson notes: “Expansion and comprehension [of SCM/WCSF], however, were not purchased without cost. Clearly the net was thrown too wide, and a series of incompatibilities grew in strength until there began to be something of a reaction.”<sup>15</sup> This conflict came to a head at Cambridge with the CICCUC.

In response to the CICCUC’s disagreement with a proposal by SCM to begin including Unitarians in membership, the General Secretary of SCM, Tissington Tatlow, was dispatched to campus in 1909 to try and negotiate a solution. He would later write, “I spent a good deal of time in Cambridge seeing individuals and attending Conferences, and in the end, I advised disaffiliation [for CICCUC from SCM].”<sup>16</sup> This process played out over the next decade and ultimately finalized in 1919 when two of CICCUC’s leaders met again with the SCM committee to try and negotiate a way forward. One of these students, Norman Grubb commented on the meeting:

After an hour’s talk we appeared to be getting nowhere, so I asked their president point blank-- ‘Does the SCM put the atoning blood of Jesus Christ central in its

beliefs?’ He hesitated and then answered, ‘Well, we acknowledge it, but not necessarily as central.’...This set the CICCUC going again on its old foundations and from which it has not moved.<sup>17</sup>

This decision to stand as a small group of students against a major national network that had previously been on the cutting edge of God’s movement required incredible courage and resonated in the histories of both movements. IFES historian Pete Lowman captures the stakes well:

As far as they knew, they stood virtually alone against the shared assumptions of a WSCF of 148,000 members...At a time when liberalism had captured the theological colleges and even the once-conservative high-church leadership, CICCUC was one of the few outposts of a biblical faith left in Britain. And from Cambridge...would come a national movement, the IVF [InterVarsity Fellowship of Britain]; from the IVF...would stem the IFES.<sup>18</sup>

While this theological schism would prove to have major implications for SVM over the coming decades we will examine below, the first part of the 20th century would actually prove to be a high-water mark for the movement, both in terms of involvement and influence. Bolstered by strong ties with denominational networks, the visionary leadership of Mott and Wilder, and its mammoth quadrennial missionary conventions, by some estimates, the SVM “would motivate twenty thousand youth, mostly college-age and college-trained, to enter missionary service.”<sup>19</sup> The 1920 quadrennial, hosted in the shadow of World War I, added an astonishing 2,783 signed volunteer pledges for foreign missionary service.<sup>20</sup> Summarizing the impact of SVM, Clifton Phillips notes:

The SVM made a significant impact on the evangelical missionary enterprise...its volunteers...probably composed well over half of the total number of foreign missionaries sent abroad under North American Protestant auspices in this period. As the missionary arm of the intercollegiate YMCA and YWCA, it represented the largest, most active student Christian movement on the continent, mobilizing youth for the foreign service of the church militant in a way that conventional ecclesiastical organizations could not match.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the phenomenal rise of SVM was matched by an almost unbelievably quick decline. Only a few years after the 1920 convention mentioned above where almost 2,800 students pledged themselves to foreign mission, the 1938 convention enrolled a mere 25 missionary volunteers!<sup>22</sup> Whereas between 1900-1920, SVM's quadrennials were gathering roughly 1% of the total student population in North America,

after the Des Moines convention [in 1920], the SVM's numerical impact on the American student population declined as precipitously as did new volunteer enrollments. By 1932, quadrennial attendance as a percentage of student population had dropped to less than one fifth of its pre-war level, and less than a tenth of what it had been in 1906.<sup>23</sup>

As the movement matured, it increasingly emphasized ecumenical unity, and as such, it sought to leverage a series of organizational mergers to maintain relevance, but in retrospect, far less than resulting in strategic advancement, the history strikes a tragic note.

In 1944, the YMCA, YWCA, SVM and denominational groups joined together in the United Student Christian Council. In 1956 the USCC and the Interseminary Committee merged to form the National Student

Christian Federation. In 1966 the NSCF combined with the Roman Catholic National Newman Student Federation and some other groups to form the University Christian Movement (WCSF felt ‘a tremendous sense of excitement’ of this ‘ecumenical breakthrough’). In 1969, the UCM voted itself out of existence.<sup>24</sup>

During this same period, the IFES was beginning to take shape as an international movement. The theological break captured in the CICCU dispute began to be repeated in other locations leaving a sort of “evangelical remnant” of the SCM/WCSF that would begin to be networked together late in the 1920s (Norway in 1923, Sweden in the late 20’s, and England in 1928). In a paradigmatic move for the future of the IFES, in the first year of its formation, the British IVF sent its Vice-Chairman, Howard Guinness, on what would become a six-year missionary journey resulting in the pioneering of evangelical student movements in Canada (1929), Australia (1930), New Zealand (1930), and the United States (1941).

These national movements then started to link arms as well through a series of global conventions in 1934 (Oslo), 1939 (Cambridge), and 1946 (Oxford). As if to demonstrate what IFES believed to be the continuity of their movement with the true roots of the SVM, Robert Wilder himself played a significant role in the convening of the 1934 conference.<sup>25</sup> Johnson notes:

As the conference drew to a close...the mood was not one in which the delegates were prepared to plunge into hasty and impetuous planning....The spirit was rather one in which all present were deeply impressed by a feeling of quiet assurance that God was with them and that He was clearly guiding them into some fruitful new

acts of service for His kingdom....Under the guidance of Ole Hallesby, Robert Wilder, and Howard Guinness...the members of the Conference devoted themselves humbly to seek from God the assurance that, whether through their endeavors or by His using those of others, Christ's honour and authority might be restored to its rightful place in the world's universities.<sup>26</sup>

Whereas the 1934 conference included students from primarily England, Norway and Sweden, the 1939 convention had a far more global feel, involving "over 800 students from thirty-three different countries"<sup>27</sup> and with a strong sense of what awaited the movement in the future. Although World War II brought a temporary halt to the progress toward international partnership, it was quickly taken up again in 1946 when delegates embraced the charge of drafting a constitution which could be ratified by member movements in 1947. Lowman notes a spiritually significant surprise that occurred during this time:

As the last steps were being made to complete the provisional Constitution, a telegram arrived from the new Chinese evangelical student fellowship, suggesting the formation of a world movement. This was generally agreed to be 'a striking confirmation that the step taken was in accordance with God's will and the present needs' say the meeting's minutes.<sup>28</sup>

Convening again in August of 1947, ten founding member movements<sup>29</sup> officially formed the IFES at "Phillips Brooks House in Harvard University...and very close to Plymouth Rock, where the Pilgrim Fathers landed in search of a place where they could freely worship God."<sup>30</sup>

Since its inception, the IFES has enjoyed nothing short of phenomenal growth. In the first forty years after 1947, the movement expanded from 10 countries to 100 (1989), and currently consists of member movements in 150 countries involving more than 500,000 students around the world.

### **Movement Comparison**

SVM and IFES are two movements with strikingly similar roots-- both founded at the intersection of Christian students and the global missionary cause of Christ. Both emerged organically from the revivalist student culture of the late 1800s and were marked by incredible missionary zeal. Both forced to navigate enormous global shifts precipitated by two World Wars. Both movements placed a compelling, even heroic vision at their core: “the evangelization of the world in this generation” and “a clear evangelical student witness established in every university in the world”<sup>31</sup> were (and are!) certainly not for the faint at heart! In addition, each enjoyed the benefits (and sought to endure the complexity!) of poly-organizational partnership, expressing a uniquely interdenominational spirit. In fact, the roots of the two movements are similar enough that many consider IFES a derivative movement of SVM’s organizational foundation, a reality that is evidenced by the role that Robert Wilder played in the catalyzing of IFES after his resignation from SVM.

And yet, as similar as their roots are, the current reality of the two movements could not be more different. Whereas IFES continues to grow and expand to new countries around the world and is as vibrant

as it ever has been, SVM ceased to exist at all in the mid 1960's, a single generation after the peak of its influence. How are we to understand the collective (and unique) history of these movements? How can we account for just how disparate they became after sharing so much by way of foundation?

Though there is of course much that has been (and could be!) said about this discrepancy, I would like to suggest three key places of distinction that contributed to SVM's collapse but allowed IFES to thrive: 1) Indigenization, 2) Liberalization, and 3) De-spiritualization, and then suggest some potential implications for these findings for our movements today.

In contrasting SVM and IFES one of the key differences one notes is the greater degree of indigenization that existed in IFES and the ways the more ethno-centric approach of SVM subjected the movement to greater levels of cultural syncretism, despite the intent of SVM's founders.<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting a few realities to highlight this distinctive. Whereas in IFES there was never any real "center" of the movement (having been from the beginning a poly-centric fellowship of ten independent, national movements), SVM tended to center on both the person of John Mott and the USA (e.g., each quadrennial was hosted in the Midwestern US) given that it was founded in the US by Americans and then exported to other places. Along these lines, Nathan Showalter notes:

Even though the federation [i.e., SVM and affiliates] had created international structures for uniting Christian students in many parts of the world, it had never challenged future leaders to consider their role as world rather than national citizens...While the federation made

much of a commitment to Christianizing international relationships, it had created no practical program--other than its role in the international missionary enterprise--to further that process. The crusade for world evangelization produced leaders with an apparent knowledge of the world to be conquered...Men of robust confidence, the volunteer movement founders were men inebriated by the extravagance of their own words, and deceived by the achievements of their world.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, the “fundamental principle of IFES is that it is a fellowship of students witnessing to students, not of people coming in from outside to do the job”<sup>34</sup> and the expansion IFES has enjoyed has certainly not been directed or exported from one primary center. Rather, the “family tree” of IFES movements is distinctly multi-directional as captured by Stacey Woods, the former General Secretary of IFES:

Through the vision and action of that group of London students [i.e., London Christian Union of the newly formed British IVF who sent Howard Guinness], a pattern was laid. Staff and students in established movements would from now on take responsibility for pioneering national movements in other countries. This practice has had wide implications. From early on, IFES was forging ahead as a fellowship of indigenous national movements planting other indigenous movements.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to the inherent indigenization of IFES, the centralizing tendencies of SVM rendered it particularly vulnerable to cultural syncretism, and in the imperialistic age surrounding World War I, this created a strongly militaristic and nationalistic co-opting of the mission of Christ. Examples abound from the writings of SVM in this

time period. Specifically, the teaching and communication of John Mott (and other SVM leaders) were filled with images of Christian military conquest.<sup>36</sup> The continued use of these metaphors (even after the terrors “Christian nations” committed against each other in the first World War) contributed to a significant rift between the leadership of SVM and the modern students they were trying to reach: “Once the war was over, the SVM founders were ready to return to the missionary crusade as they had known it, as they themselves had shaped it. Student volunteers, on the other hand, saw the hypocrisy of an evangelistic crusade that seemed to presume the moral superiority of Christian civilization,”<sup>37</sup> particularly in light of the horrific violence visited on the “Christian” continent.

A second critical point of distinction centers on the decisions made by the SVM to drift from more traditional Biblical Christianity and embrace a more liberalized “social gospel.” Whereas SVM’s watchword, with its emphases on mission, evangelism, and personal salvation dominated the early stages of the movement, as early as 1920 the watchword was no longer used at the quadrennial. Due in part to its value for widespread mobilization and ecumenical partnership, SVM never employed a doctrinal basis or theological rubric for its members/volunteers. In considering the implications of this practice for SCM, Lowman notes:

Inevitably, members unconvinced of the fundamentals [of traditional faith] came eventually to be influential in SCM...and within a few years a number of them would be people describing themselves as ‘seekers’. A gradual paralysis of evangelism and of Bible-based devotion and thinking slowly followed. By 1926 the basis [for

membership] had changed to ‘The SCM is a fellowship of students who desire to understand the Christian faith and live the Christian life. This desire is the only condition of membership.’<sup>38</sup>

This theme came in time to hold significant influence over the “mission” entirely. Showalter notes, “During the war the missionary message became associated increasingly with the secular mission President Wilson had declared for the United States in entering the war – making the world safe for democracy.”<sup>39</sup>

It is important to note that rather than being an intentional shift to “liberalize” Christianity, it seems likely that this trend played out due in large part to the strong desire for ecumenical inclusion (i.e., desiring to partner and recruit as widely as possible) and cultural engagement (i.e., staying relevant to the primary questions of new student generations) – both of which are important and valuable desires. However, each of these proved to be a slippery slope, and particularly so for SVM since its *raison d’être* was the mobilization of students for world evangelization. As the missionary arm of the YMCA (which was growing increasingly liberal), “the SVM was caught between a rock and a hard place. If it lost favor with the Y, the SVM would lose the privileged access [for recruiting] that the Associations provided...Following popular student mood could threaten the distinctive purpose of the volunteer movement. If the SVM stopped recruiting missionaries, the support of mission boards would not last.”<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, IFES has used nearly the same doctrinal statement for leadership since the early part of the 20th century. Lowman notes that

“by 1924 the Inter-Varsity Conference [in England] had acquired a doctrinal basis by which all its leaders and speakers would sign....The resulting document is substantially the same as the doctrinal basis of the IFES today.”<sup>41</sup> This doctrinal basis has secured the core beliefs of the movement while still allowing substantial room for contextualized theology and mission.

Just like its forerunner the CICCUC in 1909, IFES has chosen to stand on Biblical Christianity in prophetic challenge to the shifts of the wider culture, and what could be a counter-intuitive result has in fact come to pass. Whereas the SVM/SCM was primarily concerned with relevance so as not to lose influence in the culture, in retrospect, it was in fact they who conformed to the culture and thus compromised their influence entirely. In contrast, though often unpopular for its stances, IFES’s influence continues to grow, even in the midst of an increasingly secularized world.

The final factor to mention is the de-spiritualization of SVM, which flows naturally from the previous discussion on the effects of liberalized theology. Put simply, if the uniqueness of Jesus is questioned, missionary and evangelistic zeal cannot help but be squelched, and the history of SVM bears this out. In his analysis of the SVM, Beahm notes that as a result of the increasing liberalization of the gospel “the heart had gone out of the early argument for foreign missions.”<sup>42</sup> In noting the spiritual decline of the SVM, Cumming makes some fascinating observations:

In reading the correspondence of the movement’s leadership through these years [i.e., early 1900’s], one finds less and less often phrases like, ‘The Spirit fell

upon us,’ or ‘God has done a wondrous work in our midst.’ More and more often, one reads phrases like, ‘Careful supervision,’ or ‘Cautious, balanced approach,’ or ‘Approved of by every leading denomination.’<sup>43</sup>

Put simply, the zealous heart of the movement for Christ and his cause was eventually replaced by an emphasis on managing “merely” social concerns of freedom and equality without need of Christ at all, and this cut the movement off at its spiritual and social roots.

Again, the IFES stands in stark contrast to this trend. In a personal note toward the end of his extensive history of IFES, author Pete Lowman says, “One of the things that has been most striking to the writer in the preparation of this history has been to see the commitment to prayer that marked the early student groups...the records seem full of this emphasis.”<sup>44</sup> In addition, the findings of a Yale Divinity school study on this very SVM versus IFES comparison underlined this conclusion as stated by Woods:

The conclusion was that Inter-Varsity consciously depended upon the Holy Spirit, upon his leading and enablement. We believed in supernaturalism, in contrast to the Student Christian Movement which was judged to be much more naturalistic and humanistic....Since then, I have often prayed that this dependence on God might not be lost.<sup>45</sup>

## **Implications**

As I’ve reflected on the implications of these movements for my own leadership (and perhaps for others seeking to lead missionary movements!), a few key considerations come to mind. First, I am struck by how critical it is that our missiology flow from our

Christology where we find a king who conquers not by dominance but by suffering and death. So much of the early rhetoric of the SVM rings of a kind of arrogant dominance that was merely an expression of the prevailing culture read onto biblical texts like the Great Commission. While the Kingdom of God is most certainly powerful and victorious, our tendency is so often to skew the means of this victory; trading the baptism and cup of suffering for the seats of power at the right and left (Mark 10). As movement leaders, it is critical that we remember the model demonstrated by our Lord and follow him in the path of sacrifice and powerlessness.

Second, the importance of true indigenization cannot be over-emphasized. Even though the leaders of SVM desired that this would happen, the ethno-centric systems of the movement and their personal shortcomings seemed to hijack this intent. Though they likely would have been supportive of indigenization, in practice, their culture was anything but conducive to this process. In retrospect, SVM might have avoided many of its errors had it reflected a truly global Christianity. Though often more difficult to manage in the short-run, decentralized movements that operate on a basis of empowerment are far stronger in the long-run, and this requires a proactive transfer of power/influence to other indigenous leaders. Although there is no “magic bullet” to avoid movement stagnation, the power of indigenization seems a powerful antidote. I like nothing more than being “in the center” of something, but there is also no place quite so dangerous for my soul. Equipping others to lead where I might be tempted to take control has the potential to cut this temptation off at the knees.

Third, it is important that we plant genuinely apostolic communities where sending is foundational. It was so compelling for me to read of the history of IFES and see the pattern of costly sending demonstrated by the different national movements embedded in its ethos. In retelling the story of the planting of IVCF Canada and IVCF USA, Loman recounts that a mere 2 years after IVCF USA was planted, sights were being set on Latin America!

The Canadian board voted unanimously to send Stacey Woods on a month's survey of the possibilities of work in Central America and the Caribbean. The USA board was a little more hesitant: war was raging, their young movement was desperately short-staffed. 'It seemed madness even to consider another pioneering endeavor', says Stacey. Yet--like the British students at their movement's first conference deciding to send Howard Guinness to Canada, and like the Canadians venturing to pioneer the USA when their own movement was still in its early stages--the IVCF-USA leaders were filled with the authentic missionary spirit. They had needs and problems of their own; but still they had a responsibility to the world's unreached campuses. Stacey Woods made his tour in the spring of 1944. When he returned, IVCF staffworker Ed Pentecost applied to serve abroad, and was sponsored by the two North American movements to pioneer student work in Mexico. The Mexican movement he founded still exists today.<sup>46</sup>

I am thoroughly convinced that if we desire to see a movement persist, we must embody this kind of risky sending. It is this kind of posture which reinforces our desire to depend on the Spirit rather than our own resources to accomplish the task before us!

Fourth, the necessity of a strong, Biblical core of doctrine jumps off the page of the SVM/IFES story. While certainly not the only

reason for its decline, the loss of authentic biblical faith was something of a fatal blow to the movement. In a day where we could be tempted to think that mere missional alignment (i.e., all pursuing the same mission) is enough, the story of SVM reminds us that “mission” can be far too inclusive a term; Christian mission is fundamentally christocentric and must remain as such if it is to maintain vibrancy.

Finally, it’s abundantly clear through the stories that true movements rely on the Holy Spirit in profound ways, manifested particularly in risky mission and consistent intercessory prayer. It seems that perhaps the most insidious temptation for movements is to trade the “gift for the giver” and make the mistake of turning from a vibrant trust in God himself to a trust in momentum, strategy, or know-how gained in experience. From my perspective, the practices above (particularly indigenization and apostolic sending) are particularly helpful “engines of dependence” – they put movements in places of need in such a way that produces prayer and dependence upon God and help to ensure that our perspectives are not skewed in idolatrous ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Brown, *Shining Like Stars: The Power of the Gospel in the World’s Universities* (Chorley: 10 Publishing, 2010), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Pete Lowman, *The Day of His Power* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Clarence Shedd, *Two Centuries of Christian Movements* (New York: Associated Press, 1934), 26.

<sup>7</sup> John G. Turner, Bill Bright & *Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in North America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 28.

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- <sup>8</sup> John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974), 92.
- <sup>9</sup> Timothy Wallstrom, *The Creation of a Student Movement to Evangelize the World* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 1980), 21.
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Speer, *Missionary Principles and Practice* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902), 512.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 523
- <sup>12</sup> John Mott, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions* (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1910), 239.
- <sup>13</sup> Douglas Johnson, ed., *A Brief History of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students* (Lausanne: IFES Press, 1964), 35.
- <sup>14</sup> Trent Sheppard, *God on Campus: Sacred Causes & Global Effects* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 99.
- <sup>15</sup> Johnson, *A Brief History of IFES*, 37.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>17</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 92.
- <sup>18</sup> Lowman, *Day of His Power*, 36-37.
- <sup>19</sup> Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker, eds., *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 92.
- <sup>20</sup> Keith and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the USA, 1940-1990* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 45.
- <sup>21</sup> Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, 101.
- <sup>22</sup> Hunt and Hunt, *For Christ and the University*, 45.
- <sup>23</sup> Nathan D. Showalter, *The End of a Crusade: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and the Great War* (unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1990), 172.
- <sup>24</sup> Lowman, *Day of His Power*, 43.
- <sup>25</sup> Johnson, ed., *A Brief History of the IFES*, 13.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>28</sup> Lowman, *The Day of His Power*, 79.
- <sup>29</sup> Australia, Britain, Canada, China, France, Holland, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the USA
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>31</sup> Brown, *Shining Like Stars*, 18.
- <sup>32</sup> See Hunt and Hunt, *For Christ and the University*, 44.
- <sup>33</sup> Showalter, *The End of a Crusade*, 31-32.
- <sup>34</sup> Lowman, *The Day of His Power*, 8.
- <sup>35</sup> Brown, *Shining Like Stars*, 29.
- <sup>36</sup> See particularly Mott, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Mission*. As another example the theme for the second international convention of the SVM in 1894 was "The World's Conquest for Christ".

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- <sup>37</sup> Showalter, *The End of a Crusade*, 131.
- <sup>38</sup> Lowman, *The Day of His Power*, 38-39.
- <sup>39</sup> Showalter, *The End of a Crusade*, 80.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.
- <sup>41</sup> Lowman, *The Day of His Power*, 52.
- <sup>42</sup> William Beahm, *Factors in the Development of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions* (unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 1941), 317.
- <sup>43</sup> Joe Cumming “The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions” in Cindy Smith and Joe Cumming *Rebuilding the Mission Movement* (National Student Missions Coalition, 1982), 514.
- <sup>44</sup> Lowman, *Day of His Power*, 331.
- <sup>45</sup> C. Stacey Woods, *The Growth of a Work of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 145.
- <sup>46</sup> Lowman, *The Day of His Power*, 77.

# SOME FELL ON GOOD SOIL: CHURCH PLANTING IN RELIGIOUS ECOLOGIES

Christopher B. James\*

## Introduction

In the midst of the decline of mainline denominations and the rise of the “Nones” in the U.S. something surprising is happening.<sup>1</sup> Church planting is booming. According to Stetzer and Travis, the number of new churches started annually jumped from approximately 1500 in the late 1900s to 4000 by 2006.<sup>2</sup> Such a spike is not only the greatest surge in church planting in the last century but Warren Bird claims it has yielded such a flurry of planting that the number of churches opened annually has outpaced church closures—a much more discussed and visible reality.<sup>3</sup> This rising phenomenon calls for sociological study, not only to describe and explain its occurrence, but also to understand the factors influencing the vitality of these new congregations.

This essay will contribute to this needed area of study by seeking to bring insights from organizational and religious ecology perspectives to understanding the influences upon the vitality of new congregations and their networks. An organizational ecology approach “focuses on the influences of the characteristics of organizations and of the demography and ecology of the populations in which they operate.”<sup>4</sup> Thus it explores not only the impact of internal factors such

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as the church's attributes, but also of external ones, such as the existence and characteristics of other churches. Animating this study, then, is the question: *What are the most relevant ecological factors impacting the vitality of new congregations and church planting initiatives in the U.S.?*

In the final section, I will employ the most relevant theories toward an analysis of Churches for the Sake of Others (C4SO), a new church planting initiative on the West Coast of the United States. Based on the factors identified as pertinent to new congregations generally, I will highlight some of the features of C4SO that promise to be either liabilities or assets.

### **The Church Planting Boom**

Church planting has experienced a dramatic rise in recent years. While the scholarly attention to this phenomenon is disappointingly scarce, it is unsurprising to find that insiders and advocates of church planting have been busy tracking its progress, and marketing its successes. Unquestionably at the frontier of this effort is Leadership Network, whose "mission is to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact."<sup>5</sup> Founded in 1984, Leadership Network is an extension of the evangelical 501c3 OneHundredX, whose name is an allusion to the recompense Jesus promised his followers in Mark 10:30. It is staffed by evangelical Christians, and produces books, publications and online experiences to share learnings and inspiration with Christian leaders. In the last decade, Leadership Network has devoted considerable research and

publication on church phenomenon such as megachurches and multi-site churches, in addition to church planting.

In 2007, Leadership Network published findings from a research project that included surveys from more than 200 church planting churches, over 100 denominational leaders from dozens of denominations, and in excess of 45 church planting networks. While this sample is not demonstrated in Leadership Network's publications to be representative, their findings are nonetheless valuable, if for no other reason than they spring from virtually the only research available.

Ed Stetzer and Dave Travis claim that "most planters are connected to a denomination in some way."<sup>6</sup> Again, this finding may be more representative of the survey sample than the phenomena as a whole. Also interesting is the discovery that the churches most likely to plant other churches are those with fewer than 200 in attendance; Churches with more than 1000 are 4x less likely than these to plant new churches.<sup>7</sup> This fact may well be related to the increasing popularity of the multi-site strategy among large and growing congregations. In addition to contributions of denominations and church planting churches, church planting networks are starting new congregations at an increasing rate. Survey responses from church planting network leaders suggest that 93% of the churches they begin become fully established with an average attendance of 143 by the first anniversary, though this figure may be inflated since it would be in the network's interest to self-report a strong number.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the house-church movement, while a smaller player, is also adding to the number

of new congregations at an increasing rate.

What each of these surveyed sources of church planting has in common is a similar theological perspective that fits comfortably within the larger evangelical camp. While mainline denominations are, in several cases, participating in church planting, even here it is often the evangelicals among them that are spearheading the efforts, and evangelicals who compose the new congregations. Who is starting new churches? For the most part, it is evangelicals whose orientation toward their communities is what Roozen, McKinney and Carroll would label “evangelistic,” distinguishing it from those of activist, civic and sanctuary churches.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, these authors asserted it was churches of this orientation which were the most likely to grow.

Another major study on church planting was published in 2007, also conducted by insiders committed to the cause. The Church Planting Group and the Center for Missional Research of the North American Mission Board (Southern Baptist Conference) jointly sponsored the “Church Survivability and Health Study,” which yielded 500 completed surveys from across the eleven participating denominations and networks who satisfied a doctrinal criteria for the label “evangelical.”<sup>10</sup> The basis for inclusion was that the church plant had received church planting funding during the years 2000 through 2005, making it clearly an unrepresentative sample. As with the Leadership Network research, the researchers overt advocacy for church planting calls into question the findings. Particularly problematic is the acknowledgment that of 2,266 church plants in the original study sample, researchers were only able to contact 2,080 of

those churches. They removed the additional 186 from the analysis. This skewed the data in a positive direction, especially given the fact that the churches that were inaccessible may have become so because they had not survived.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the report claims that some church survival was discerned through “internet searches,” an unreliable source given the persistence of church websites even after the congregation itself has ceased to exist.

Nonetheless, the key findings of the “Church Survivability and Health Study” are worth noting. Church health, in this report, was measured by growth in attendance and baptisms. Programming and strategy factors that were found to contribute to church health included offering a new member class, using a church covenant, and having a proactive stewardship plan. Whether these caused growth or were caused by the growth is uncertain. The same chicken-and-egg question applies to the other factors. Planting a “daughter church” within three years of a church’s inception also was found to correlate with increased attendance and baptism. Offering mid-week children’s programs and block parties tracked with higher numbers of baptisms. Churches that met in schools and used mailers averaged 100% higher attendance than those who did neither.<sup>12</sup> Leadership mattered, too. Leadership-related factors include a statistical tendency of churches to thrive when church planters are engaged in peer, group and mentoring structures. Not surprisingly, experienced church planters generally led their churches to more numerical growth than novice ones. Churches launched with a staff team generally had higher attendance than others and those with full-time church planters also experienced higher

attendance that those led by part-timers.

It is important to note that the factors explored in this report belie a fundamental conviction, namely, that the fate of a church rests mostly upon its internal workings (its strategy and leadership) rather than on external, environmental factors. The relative significance of institutional (internal) and environmental (external) factors was a topic of hot debate in the 1970s. In order to place this contemporary research in its proper context, a brief review of related scholarly exchange surrounding church growth over the last forty years is in order.

In 1979, Hoge and Roozen concluded that contextual factors at local and national levels were the principal causes of church growth, suggesting that congregational growth was up to seventy percent dependent on features of the local community.<sup>13</sup> Namely, congregational growth was found to coincide with contexts of suburban affluence, residential stability, homogeneous majority racial composition and limited alternative congregational options. McKinney and Hoge offered a less dramatic assignment of priority to environmental factors after a study of growth and decline in the United Church of Christ between 1970-1978.<sup>14</sup> Contextual factors, in their analysis amounted to 51% of the variance and institutional ones amounted to 49%. While the most growth-related institutional factors were the newness of the congregation and the youth of its membership, only 33% of institutionally related variance stemmed from changeable institutional factors. Complicating matters, Hoge and Roozen also insisted that the salience of institutional factors was contextually

dependent. Institutional characteristics were found to be most salient in growing suburban environs, less so in stagnant suburbs, and dramatically less influential in rural areas and small towns.

On the other side of the debate, Dean Kelley and church growth practitioners like Donald McGavran attributed church growth to institutional attributes such as having a conservative theological orientation. Kelley's 1972 book, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, noted that environmental factors were not impacting all denominations or churches equally. Kelley attributed the difference between the decline of mainline churches and the growth of conservative ones to the benefits of a high demands upon congregants. Namely, strict churches demand total loyalty, unwavering belief and uncompromisingly distinct lifestyles—expectations that guaranteed to reduce the number of members who contribute nothing to the institution while draining resources, those he called “free-riders.” Iannaccone took up Kelley's mantle by arguing that strictness offers churches a competitive advantage because it “increases commitment, raises levels of participation, and enables a group to offer more benefits to current and potential members.”<sup>15</sup>

In the midst of this debate about the sources of church growth and decline, Bibby and Brinkerhoff challenged the assumption that conservative churches were growing by asserting that most of this “growth” was merely indicative of the “circulation of the saints.”<sup>16</sup> Seventy percent of new members in their Canadian study were found to be transfers from other evangelical churches, with another twenty percent coming from children of members, leaving less than ten

percent who joined through conversion. The growth of the conservative church in this study is attributed mostly to the evangelical ability to retain children and mobile members. In 1994, Bibby and Brinkerhoff revisited the “circulation of the saints” thesis and highlighted its weaknesses, but reiterated the accusation that conservative churches are “living with the illusion that they are reaching outsiders because they typically do not critically differentiate between church growth and actual evangelism.”<sup>17</sup>

This literature provides a starting point for investigating the contemporary rise and apparent successes of church planting by evangelicals. Most importantly, it raises a number of critical questions. Namely, (1) what contextual factors are most salient for new congregations? (2) What institutional factors have the greatest influence on the growth or decline of new congregations? (3) What is the relative impact of institutional and environmental factors on new congregations? and (4) Where does the growth in church plants come from—conversion or circulation of the saints? Unfortunately, complete answers to some of these pressing questions will have to wait for further research. However, organizational and religious ecology approaches have made some contributions.

### **Ecological Approaches in Congregational Research**

In *Congregation & Community*, Nancy Ammerman identifies two ecology literatures to be considered. First, she highlights “population ecology,” also known as “organizational ecology” theory, which focuses on the whole population of organizations in a given

environment. Given its attention to competition for limited resources, she labels this the “survival of the fittest” theory. Second, Ammerman identifies the “new institutional framework” with a “survival of the similar” perspective because of its focus on the central need for an organization to achieve legitimation—that is for new organizational forms to gain popular recognition of legitimacy, something that is both a factor of time and visible distribution.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on both of these literatures, I will highlight key claims and their relevance to an understanding of the ecological factors upon new congregations.

As Ammerman notes, both population ecology theory and the new institutionalism acknowledge a so-called “liability of newness” that makes mortality more likely in the earliest years of a new organization. “While population ecologists locate those liabilities in deficient resources, new institutionalists locate them in lack of legitimation.”<sup>19</sup> I will grapple with the task of legitimation faced by new congregations and church planting organizations, but first I will weigh the relevance of the population ecologist’s insights.

Resources are an inevitable concern for new congregations. While money and a building are the most obvious and material ones, the most basic resource for a new congregation is people. Without congregants, there is no congregation. Though, often, new congregations launch with a core group of members, this is no guarantee of growth—nor even that founding members will not quickly abandon the neo-natal congregation. Indeed, Stark and Bainbridge’s study of 417 American-born sects concluded that “nearly a third of all sects (32 percent) reached their high-water mark on the

day they began.”<sup>20</sup>

A number of new congregations launch with a store of temporary resources such as six months of full funding for staff and rental of a space, scaling down over two years. In addition, new congregations generally begin with an initial endowment of enthusiasm, which is vulnerable to dissipation as challenges are encountered. It is precisely these sorts of realities that lead to what has been dubbed “the liabilities of adolescence.” Hannan explains the effect: “the hazard of mortality rises during the early lifespan before eventually declining with age.”<sup>21</sup>

While organizational youth is fraught with one set of liabilities, age comes with another set that new congregations can be grateful to avoid. Dubbed the “liability of senescence,” numerous population ecologists have described the hazards associated with organizational aging. The most important among these is the liability of obsolescence.<sup>22</sup> The longer an organization exists, the greater duration has elapsed since its founding and this translates to an increasing difference between the environment the organization was founded in and the present conditions in which it exists. New congregations and church planting organizations, even if unconsciously, take on elements of their environments and can thus be expected to have a competitive advantage over older ones which were “imprinted” by the bygone eras in which they were founded.<sup>23</sup> This may provide at least a beginning explanation for the rise of church planting amid the decline of mainline churches.

A second liability of senescence is also due to age’s secondary effects. In this case, aging is correlated with both organizational size

and complexity. Barron, West and Hannan's study found that when controlling for organizational size, age was an organizational asset, suggesting that size, not age, is the liability.<sup>24</sup> Hannan and Freeman argued that societies favor organizations that can "reliably produce collective action" and give a rational account of their activities.<sup>25</sup> A prerequisite for this performance is the "capacity to reproduce a structure with high fidelity" and the price of this reproduction is "structural inertia."<sup>26</sup> This inertia is seen as rules and structure grow, adaptation becomes more difficult, and the organization becomes calcified. While many new congregations and church planting organizations are initiatives of existing denominations or congregations, they are nonetheless attempts at adaptation and innovation. Others, such as house churches and church planting networks, are free from large, aged structures altogether. In both cases, the relative smallness, simplicity and single-mindedness of these organizations favor their vitality in the short term.

New institutionalists have offered a distinct, but perhaps complimentary, set of explanations for the liabilities of newness. As Ammerman noted, the primary focus of attention is an organization's struggle to gain social legitimation—societal approval of its form and existence as valid. Classically, a new religious group's journey to legitimation has been discussed in terms of Weber's church-sect theory. Also important is the notion of "institutional isomorphism," or the idea that over time churches and denominations, seeking to be recognized by their peers and the larger society become more and more alike (hence, Ammerman's "survival of the similar").

Scheitle and Dougherty sought a theoretical framework for growth that neither denied the ability of religious groups to affect their pattern of growth nor failed to recognize the import of resource distribution and limitations within a given environment.<sup>27</sup> Turning to the organizational ecology literature, they deployed the theory of “density dependence” toward an analysis of the growth of Reformed Church in America congregations in New York between 1628 and 2000. According to density dependence theory, a population with a high concentration of organizations of a particular type will have a low likelihood of promoting the growth of new organizations. The theory predicts a “curvilinear relationship between the number of organizations currently existing in a population and the likelihood for growth in that population.”<sup>28</sup> When a new organizational form is founded it will struggle to gain legitimation, and with it the resources necessary for growth. Few foundings will take place as a result. If successful in building legitimation, foundings will increase, in turn adding to further legitimation as the organizational form becomes more common and accepted. Eventually, density dependence theory predicts, “the resources in the environment will become too scarce to support the population of organizations in existence” and having reached the population’s “carrying capacity” competition will become fierce among existing organizations, preventing further foundings and growth.<sup>29</sup>

Scheitle and Dougherty add to density dependence theory the concept of “niche switching.” Once an organization has run up against a population’s carrying capacity, it has the option (not without danger)

of attempting to change the population toward which it is oriented, jeopardizing its standing in the current niche and reinitiating the process of legitimation in a new population with the hopes of capitalizing on the new population's available resources and larger carrying capacity.

Density dependence and niche switching have relevance for church planting on both the congregational-local level and the denominational-network-regional level. Scheitle and Dougherty applied it to a denomination by demonstrating how the RCA "niche-switched" from serving Dutch immigrants to a broader niche serving the general American population. This denominational example is likely similar to what a new church planting network, if successful, might experience: early years of struggling for legitimation, foundings and legitimation rising together, foundings plateauing at the population's carrying capacity, and the question of whether to attempt a switch to a larger or more resource-rich niche.

Bringing these theories down to the level of a single new congregation in a neighborhood is also instructive. The number of established churches present already is important, but even more critical is knowing whether there are untapped resources (people) present, or if the population is saturated. The existence of established congregations of new denomination X in neighboring towns can make it easier to accept the founding of a new one locally. Equally, the more similar the new congregation is to existing congregations in the neighborhood, the easier it will be to gain legitimation. And yet, if the neighborhood is already dense with that "organizational form," then

the resources will be scarce and competition fierce.

The presence of established congregations who have run up against a population's carrying capacity is not a nonstarter for church planting success. Carroll and Swaminathan, in their study of the U.S. brewing industry have demonstrated the effects of "resource portioning."<sup>30</sup> In a market dominated by large generalists, there remain narrow bands of untapped resources ripe for the success of specialists. As the number of generalists become fewer and their sizes increase, these untapped resource bands grow, and along with them the viability of specialists.

For a potential new congregation, this means that viability may lie down a counter-intuitive path. Rather than focusing on the need for legitimacy sought through isomorphism (putting the same congregational experience on tap as the large, established churches in town) viability may be found through specializing (offering a microbrewed Christian community unlike anything else available). Indeed, perhaps church planting is booming precisely because it exists in a concentrated market dominated by large churches. Chaves points out that "people are increasingly concentrated in the very largest churches."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, more than half of church-goers attend the largest 10% of churches—those with more than 350 weekly participants—and 10% of church-goers attend megachurches.<sup>32</sup> This market concentration, due to increasing numbers of large churches, may go a long way to explaining the proliferation of new congregations, if these are seen as specialists targeting microniches the large generalists have ignored.

This suggestion that church plants might be compared to microbreweries may have a further implication. As the organizational form “microbrewery” gained legitimization among the beer drinking population, more and more microbreweries sprang up. Perhaps we are experiencing something similar with regard to the rise of church planting. As church planting has become more and more common, it may be that the “church plant”—often distinct from other U.S. congregational forms by nature of such things as atypical gathering times and venues—is gaining legitimacy, particularly among the evangelical population.

One further comparison to microbreweries might be considered. Research has noted specialty brewers do more than siphon off business from the megabrewers—they bring in new customers for as much as half of their markets.<sup>33</sup> While there is no similar data to consult relative to new congregations, I have no doubt that church planters would be delighted if they could find a way to assure that half of their attendees fit the designations: unchurched, dechurched, nonchristian or “Nones”.

Since church plants are, by all accounts, overwhelmingly evangelical in theological orientation, it is especially relevant to consider the other particularities of this niche population. Smith and others have attributed evangelical vitality to the evangelical “strategy of engaged orthodoxy, distinction-with-engagement.”<sup>34</sup> Kent Miller explains that the vitality of religious groups is linked with “reaffirming religious beliefs while continuously adapting their expression to environmental conditions.”<sup>35</sup> According to Roger Finke,

sustaining core teachings and promoting adaptive innovations contribute to organizational vitality. Whereas the core teachings are essential for generating member commitment and sustaining member loyalty, organizational innovations are required to adapt the core teachings to an ever-changing context.<sup>36</sup>

This penchant for theological conservatism and ecclesial innovation may be at the root of two recent and relevant developments within evangelicalism besides church planting, *viz.*, megachurches and multisite churches. The relevance of these phenomena lies in the fact that they appeal to the same theological niche as church plants do.

Again it is Leadership Network that is leading the way in research on these phenomena, and again questions about the research methodology and reporting must be raised. A megachurch is a congregation that has a weekly attendance of 2000 or more adults. While the number of megachurches has been on the rise since the 1970s, their number almost doubled between 2000 and 2005.<sup>37</sup> Located most heavily in suburban areas (73%) and concentrated in the Sunbelt, the total number of megachurches is approximately 1600. The average megachurch has approximately 3900 attendees, and 90% of them report to be growing, with the average megachurch claiming an 8% increase in attendance per year over the last 5 years.<sup>38</sup> A majority of megachurch attendees are Caucasian (82%), middle class, and under 50 yrs (70%).<sup>39</sup> Megachurches overwhelmingly use “contemporary” forms of worship with “electric guitar or bass and drums (80%) and report having made at least minor adaptations in worship style (87%) in the last five years. Fifty-four percent of megachurches are non-denominational, a proportion that is quickly

increasing, yet most (70%) have some connection to a network, fellowship, association or denomination. The most important identifier, though, is “evangelical” with 71% of megachurches claiming the label.

A related trend is the rise of the multisite church—a single organization that orchestrates worship services at multiple campuses that share a common leadership structure, budget and vision. While half of all megachurches have adopted the multisite strategy (rather than building bigger sanctuaries) and another 20% are considering it, the average size of a multisite church has been moving downward and is well below the mega-threshold at 1300.<sup>40</sup> Virtually non-existent before 2000, as of 2010, multi-site churches out-numbered megachurches more than three to one, with approximately 5000 in the US.<sup>41</sup> More than half of multisite campuses launch in schools.<sup>42</sup> In the first year after its launch, the average multi-site campus experiences numerical growth of 43%, and an additional 16% increase in year two.<sup>43</sup> But, experts say, multisite is a strategy for growing churches, rather than a strategy for church growth. Regardless, the motive of multisite churches is unequivocally evangelistic: “the purpose of becoming a multi-site church is to make more and better disciples by bringing the church closer to where people are.”<sup>44</sup> Some multisite churches use predominantly video teaching, but most use either mainly in-person teaching (46%) or a mix (34%).<sup>45</sup> While a number of multisite churches strive to replicate the popular central worship experience at each campus, others cater the feel and style of each campus worship experience to its setting or target demographic.

Both these trends exemplify the evangelical strategy of “engaged orthodoxy” and fit Finke’s recipe for vitality with the preservation of “core teaching” and environmental adaptations. Megachurches seem to often be capitalizing on the environmental benefits of white, middle-class, residentially-stable suburbs. The growth of mega and multisite churches may be due, also, to a rise in the legitimation of these organizational forms. One impetus for the multisite could be a response to the success of church planting, a trend which began a few years earlier, in the 1990s. Instructively, when the major beer distributors saw independent microbreweries succeeding, they began launching their own microbrews. Perhaps, similarly, multisite churches are attempts to target untapped resources while maintaining the advantages of efficiency that come with size, something that Chaves pointed to as a chief reason for the success of megachurches.<sup>46</sup>

The purpose for considering the mega and multisite phenomenon is to gain a sense of other significant trends in the evangelical niche, so as to consider what effect these might have on proximate church plants. While too little is known about the effects of multisite churches on their local religious ecologies, one relevant piece of data is available: one third of multi-site campuses are launched as a merger or acquisition with an existing or recently closed congregation.<sup>47</sup> Whether multisite churches contribute to, or merely benefit from, the decline of the existing congregations is impossible to say without further research, but a 2011 study does offer some answers regarding the effects of megachurches on their local religious ecologies.

Wollschleger and Porter utilized Stark and Finke's definition in their analysis to explore the claim that megachurches exercise a "Walmart effect":

*Religious niches are characterized by preferences for religion that vary across different levels of tension between the religious group and general society. There is a normal distribution of preferences ranging from ultra-liberal to ultra-strict, with most people falling in the conservative and moderate categories.*<sup>48</sup>

With this framework, and the knowledge that megachurches are predominantly evangelical, they found support for two relevant hypotheses. First, the presence of megachurches *negatively* impacts local congregations occupying a similar niche, namely evangelical congregations.<sup>49</sup> This "Walmart effect" was felt by evangelical congregations in the same county as the megachurch and, even more strongly, by those in adjacent counties. Second, and less obvious, megachurches *positively* impact local congregations that occupy dissimilar niches, "namely Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic on the Liberal end of the spectrum and Fundamentalist congregations on the Conservative end."<sup>50</sup> This occurs, the authors suggest, because the local megachurch provokes local out-of-niche congregations to become more competitive, but this benefit does not extend to churches in adjacent counties.

There are two implications of these findings for church plants and church planting networks. First, new evangelical congregations should expect to have the strongest viability if they are located in neither the core nor adjacent counties of megachurches. But given the number and spread of megachurches, this may make finding a location like this

in an urban or suburban setting difficult. Second, if there is a megachurch in town (and there probably is) it is better to plant under its nose than in a neighboring county. Wollschleger and Porter offer no explanation for this rather puzzling finding: “Both Evangelical congregations and Pentecostal congregations declined at a greater rate in the adjacent counties than they did in the core counties.”<sup>51</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests a possible explanation for this reality, which warrants further study. Megachurches are notorious for producing defectors disillusioned with their perceived corporate leadership, high production value worship services, costless discipleship and cheap anonymity, a number of whom may find their way to another local evangelical congregation, seeking a smaller, simpler, and more devoted fellowship of faith. This disillusionment is something a new congregation can benefit from, because with newness it offers a hope that church doesn’t have to be like that. Indeed, the research suggests that the churches that succeed in the shadow of megachurches are those that define themselves against the giant—something which even local evangelical churches may be able to do.

### **Case Study: Churches for the Sake of Others**

As a way of summarizing the ecological factors most relevant to church planting explored above, I will apply them to Churches for the Sake of Others (C4SO), a new church planting initiative on the West Coast of the United States. C4SO is a church planting initiative, initiated by the Rwandan Province’s Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMiA), but recently relocated under the ecclesial oversight

of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). The mission field which C4SO has identified for itself is the Western U.S., citing 2008 Gallup and Pew findings that point to high numbers of atheists, agnostics, and “nones” in that region. Here they hope to reach “the unchurched, dechurched of this increasingly post-modern, post-Christian generation.”<sup>52</sup> One unique characteristic of the effort, is the expectation of each C4SO congregation to plant two additional congregations every five years.

While an Anglican-sponsored initiative, it is led by the novice-bishop Todd Hunter, a recent convert to the tradition who describes himself as an “accidental Anglican.”<sup>53</sup> Hunter has an interesting history as the former President of the charismatic Vineyard Church, former National Director of Alpha USA (a widely popular church evangelism program among Western evangelicals), and a notable voice in recent conversations surrounding spiritual formation and the emerging church. As a result of Hunter’s relational networks and circles of influence, many of those who have come on to plant churches with C4SO have history in the Vineyard, Calvary Chapel or other evangelical churches, while others are cradle Episcopalians and still others are emerging church devotees.

C4SO, like any new religious organization, in order to be successful will have to overcome the liabilities of newness. As the literature has suggested, these liabilities include a lack of resources as well as the struggle for legitimation. I am unaware of what, if any, financial backing the oversight of the ACNA involves, but I know that Todd Hunter has been actively publishing books, teaching seminary

courses, and starting a conference ministry as a way of supporting himself financially. If the same is expected of C4SO staff and clergy, the resource-related liability of newness will be a formidable one. In addition, recruitment of leaders and participants poses another challenge, which can only be heightened by Hunter's reticence to extract friends and associates from their present denominations.<sup>54</sup> That said, Hunter's popularity in evangelical and charismatic circles and his personal credibility has proven to be a powerful draw, as the C4SO church planters I encountered at a December 2010 C4SO retreat demonstrate: it seems they all volunteered themselves, rather than having responded to recruitment efforts.

Liabilities of newness related to legitimation are also in play. On the negative side, C4SO is a relatively unknown network. Its previous oversight by the Rwandan province may have posed an obstacle a legitimacy challenge since a number, perhaps most, of Americans are uneasy—even if subconsciously—with the idea that their homeland is now considered a mission field. This sentiment is likely to be even higher among C4SO's target demographic: young, un/dechurched, nonbelievers. On the positive side, C4SO may be able to “borrow” legitimacy from its Anglican affiliation, since this is a globally recognized tradition. Similarly, priests and bishops are part of several soundly legitimized churches. Mitigating this benefit, a number of evangelicals (the niche most likely to be drawn to C4SO churches) are uneasy with Episcopal polity and liturgical traditions given their roots in Catholicism (a tradition some Evangelicals view with skepticism or even suspicion). In addition, while bishops and priests may bring

institutional legitimacy, the priest sex scandals of the last decade have caused some (again, maybe particularly within C4SO's target demographics) to view this hierarchical polity and its roles with increased suspicion. Back on the positive side, C4SO may also be able to borrow legitimacy from Hunter's own cache as a recognized figure in evangelical circles. Finally, the growing legitimization of church planting networks, and church plant congregations, at least among evangelicals, should also be in its favor.

Like other church planting networks, C4SO has the advantages associated with "engaged orthodoxy" since it is committed to a fairly traditional Christian orthodoxy, but open to environmental adaption of style and forms. This is typified by the leeway Hunter gives to his church planters to discern the context and plant a church that faithfully contextualizes the gospel of the kingdom in that locale, and it is a definite advantage over church planting efforts committed rigidly to a single organizational or liturgical form regardless of the environment.

The commitment of C4SO congregations to plant two new congregations every five years, if successful, would have several advantages. First, each new congregation will be "imprinted" by the particularities of its own historical moment of founding—something which is a competitive advantage in a religious ecology. Second, this sort of rapid replication is likely to keep all C4SO congregations relatively small and simple. Third, and relatedly, starting a larger number of smaller churches may prove to be a faster route to legitimation than founding a smaller number of larger churches. If successful, density dependence theory would anticipate an accelerating

rate of foundings with rising legitimation until foundings taper off at the niche population's carrying capacity. Fourth, and finally, this strategy may reduce the felt need for individual congregations to attempt a risky niche switch themselves, since when they identify a niche ripe with resources (people) they can simply launch a new congregation into this alternative niche. Of course, there is no reason to necessarily believe C4SO congregations will grow enough to be able to pull off this level of replication. Even if they can, each new congregation would have to overcome the liabilities of newness and adolescence.

C4SO will also be affected by the presence of mega and multisite churches in its communities. Since these are both competitors within the evangelical niche, C4SO churches will have to distinguish themselves from these forms. The concentration of people in large churches does, however, pose an opportunity that C4SO, like other church planting initiatives, can capitalize on. If C4SO congregations enter these concentrated religious ecologies as specialists (offering a microbrewed brand of church) they are likely to find smaller niches within the broader evangelical niche, which are large enough to carry C4SO's small-by-design congregations. Indeed, this likelihood is actually higher in the same county as a megachurch than in neighboring ones, perhaps because megachurches regularly shed members who are looking for alternative, but still evangelical, forms of congregational life.

## Conclusion

This exploration of ecological factors relevant to the vitality of new congregations has pointed to several questions church planters and church planting leaders would be wise to ask: What are the demographic realities of this environment, and how will these affect church plant viability? How will we overcome the liabilities of newness and adolescence? How will our network and churches gain legitimation? To what degree will our churches self-consciously engage in institutional isomorphism? With whom? Should we attempt specialist micro-niche targeting? What is the density of congregations in the environment and what are their types and niches? How might our church plant(s) minimize negative impacts from these and capitalize on positive ones?

The term “church planting” has its origins in the writings of Paul, the first, and arguably the most effective church planter of all time:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are God’s co-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7, TNIV).

While Paul was clearly pointing to God as the source of the growth for the church in Corinth, something population ecologists and new institutionalist approaches legitimately omit from their considerations, perhaps there is something on which Paul and these scholars can agree. Namely, that ecology is a fitting metaphor for understanding the vitality of new congregations.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Chaves, "All Creatures Great and Small: Megachurches in Context," *Review of Religious Research*, 47(4) (2006), 329-346; Michael Hout and Claude Fischer, "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations," *American Sociological Review*, 67(2)(2002), 165-190.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer and Dave Travis, "Who Starts New Churches?: State of Church Planting USA" (Leadership Network, 2011), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Warren Bird, Warren, "More Churches Opened Than Closed in 2006," *Rev Magazine* (August 2007), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Hannan, "Ecologies of Organizations: Diversity and Identity," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 19(1) (2005), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Leadership Network's website: [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org)

<sup>6</sup> Stetzer and Travis, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Stetzer and Travis, 6. According to Nancy Ammerman, this finding is compromised by poor methodology (note 12/2011).

<sup>8</sup> Stetzer and Travis, 5.

<sup>9</sup> David Roozen, William McKinney, and Jackson Carroll, *Varieties of Religious Presence: Mission in Public Life* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Participating denominations/networks included Southern Baptists, Sovereign Grace Ministries, Baptist General Conference, Leadership Network, General Baptists, Wesleyan, New Thing Network, Assemblies of God, Evangelical Free, Foursquare, Southern Baptist, Christian Church, and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. An evangelical Christian was defined as "a person who believes that Jesus Christ is the sole source of salvation through faith in Him, has personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit, recognizes the inspired Word of God as the only basis for faith and Christian living, and is committed to biblical preaching and evangelism that brings others to faith in Jesus Christ."

<sup>11</sup> Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor, "Church Survivability and Health Study 2007: Best Practices," A Publication of the Center for Missional Research, North American Mission Board (2007), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Stetzer and Connor, 6.

<sup>13</sup> David Roozen and Dean Hoge, Eds, *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> William McKinney, Dean Hoge, "Community and Congregational Factors in the Growth and Decline of Protestant Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22(1) (1983), 51-66.

<sup>15</sup> Laurence Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," *American Journal of Sociology*, 99(5) (1994), 1181.

<sup>16</sup> Reginald Bibby and Merlin Brinkerhoff, "The Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People Who Join Conservative Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 12(3) (1973), 273-283.

<sup>17</sup> Reginald Bibby and Merlin Brinkerhoff, "Circulation of the Saints 1966-1990: New Data, New Reflections," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33(3) (1994), 280.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Ammerman borrows this language from Rosabeth Kanter, *Challenge of Organizational Change: How Companies Experience It And Leaders Guide It* (Simon and Schuster, 2003).

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 46.

<sup>20</sup> Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (University of California Press, 1986), 134.

<sup>21</sup> Hannan, 62.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 63; James Ranger-Moore, "Bigger May be Better, But is Older Wiser? Organizational Age and Size in the New York Life Insurance Industry," *American Sociological Review*, 62(6) (1997), 903-920.

<sup>23</sup> Victoria Johnson, "What Is Organizational Imprinting? Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Founding of the Paris Opera," *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(1) (2007), 97-127.

Arthur Stinchcombe, (1965). "Social Structure and Organizations. In J. March (Ed.), *Handbook of Organizations* (New York: Rand McNally, 1965), 142-193.

<sup>24</sup> David Barron, Elizabeth West, and Michael Hannan, "A Time to Grow and a Time to Die: Growth and Mortality of Credit Unions in New York City, 1914-1990," *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(2) (1994), 381-421.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Hannan and John Freeman, "Structural Inertia and Organizational Change," *American Sociological Review*, 49(2) (1984), 149-164.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Scheitle and Kevin Dougherty, "Density and Growth in a Congregational Population: Reformed Churches in New York, 1628-2000," *Review of Religious Research*, 49(3) (2008), 234.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 235.

<sup>30</sup> Glenn Carroll and Anand Swaminathan, "Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry," *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(3) (2000), 715-762.

<sup>31</sup> Chaves, 329.

<sup>32</sup> Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, "A New Decade of Megachurches: 2011 Profile of Large Attendance Churches in the United States," Leadership Network and Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011; Chaves; Research Fast Facts: [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html)

<sup>33</sup> Richard Backus, "'Business as Usual Is Over': An Interview with Brewing Industry Analyst Robert S. Weinberg," *New Brewer*, 15 (March/April 1999), 27-43.

<sup>34</sup> Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 35.

<sup>35</sup> Kent Miller, "Competitive strategies of religious organizations," *Strategic Management Journal*, 23(5) (2002), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Roger Finke, "Innovative Returns to Tradition: Using Core Teachings as the Foundation for Innovative Accommodation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43(1) (2004), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Scott Thumma, Dave Travis and Warren Bird, "Megachurches Today 2005: Summary of Research Findings," (Hartford Institute for Religion Research and Leadership Network, 2005).

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<sup>38</sup> Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, “A New Decade of Megachurches: 2011 Profile of Large Attendance Churches in the United States,” (Leadership Network and Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Even at 82% Caucasian, Thumma and Bird claim that megachurches are the most diverse class of church. Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, “Not Who You Think They Are: The Real Story of People Who Attend America’s Megachurches,” (Hartford Institute for Religion Research and Leadership Network, 2008a); Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, “Changes in American Megachurches: Tracing Eight Years of Growth and Innovation in the Nation’s Largest-Attendance Congregations,” (Hartford Institute for Religion Research and Leadership Network, 2008b).

<sup>40</sup> These numbers represent a spike since “Megachurches Today 2005,” which found that 27% of megachurches were using multi-site and another 27% were considering it. Bird and Thumma (2011), 3; Thumma, Travis, and Bird, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Warren Bird, “Big News-Multisite Churches Now Number More than 5000,” (Leadership Network Learning Blog, 8/22/2012).

<sup>42</sup> Warren Bird, “Survey of 1,000 Multi-site Churches: A Dozen of the Most Significant Findings,” (Leadership Network, 2004), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Warren Bird and Kristen Walters, “Multisite Is Multiplying: Survey Identifies Leading Practices and Confirms New Developments in the Movement’s Expansion,” (Leadership Network, 2010), 10.

<sup>44</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, (2006). *The Multi-site Church Revolution: Being One Church—in Many Locations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 18. In 2004 and 2007 surveys of multi-site churches, “evangelistic outreach” was by far the most selected motivator for going multi-site. Bird (2004), 3; Stephen Shields, “Survey of 1,000 Multi-site Churches: Latest Insights on a Growing Movement,” (Leadership Network, 2007), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Bird and Walters, 17.

<sup>46</sup> See Chaves (2006) as well as Carroll and Swaminathan (2000).

<sup>47</sup> Bird and Walters, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, (University of California Press, 2000), 197.

<sup>49</sup> Jason Wollschleger and Jeremy Porter, “A “WalMartization” of Religion? The Ecological Impact of Megachurches on the Local and Extra-Local Religious Economy,” *Review of Religious Research*, 53 (2011), 283.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>52</sup> [www.c4so.org/hear-the-story](http://www.c4so.org/hear-the-story)

<sup>53</sup> Todd Hunter, *The Accidental Anglican: The Surprising Appeal of the Liturgical Church* (IVP Books, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> This is something Todd Hunter mentioned at a retreat for C4SO leaders which I attended as a guest in 2010.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Doornenbal, R.J.A. *Crossroads: An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and Its Challenges for Theological Education*. Delft, The Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publisher, 2012. xix, 420 pages.

Reviewed by George R. Hunsberger

Robert Doornenbal mapped out for himself a rather monumental research task—and achieved it in remarkable fashion! At the beginning, he intended a full exploration of the literature pertaining to the Emerging Church Movement, but soon recognized how pervasively the discourse in that movement and the discourse in the Missional Church Movement showed overlap and intertwining, particularly in the areas that most concerned him: modes of discourse and views of leadership. The result was a fairly comprehensive and nuanced portrait of what he has termed the “Emerging-Missional Conversation” (EMC), a conversation taking place in published works within the “emerging-missional milieu” (as he will sometimes call it).

The result is a book that shows the marks of a well-ordered, yet very readable, Ph.D. dissertation (completed in this case at the Theological Faculty of the Free University in Amsterdam). Doornenbal demonstrates a mastery of the relevant literature of the primary field (EMC). In similar fashion, he possesses a critical grasp of the most relevant literature in major fields of scholarship touched upon by EMC discourse (including the notion of paradigm, the function of metaphor in discourse, the historical-cultural assessment of so-called postmodern and post-Christendom developments in Western

societies, complexity theory and organizational systems, adaptive leadership theory, and recent developments in theological education). He is well-versed in theological matters that are at stake in the EMC literature. He follows a carefully laid out and well-executed research path (a series of questions he seeks to answer, detailed and defended in Chapter 1). Documentation is precise and complete. Footnotes are not only informative but more often than not provide interesting extensions of the argument. The Bibliography is a major contribution, running to 52 pages. The lack of an Index is regrettable, but a full outline in the nine-page Table of Contents compensates a bit for that.

The book is laid out in three movements, beginning with a nuanced interpretation of the EMC discourse, focusing next on notions of leadership, and coming finally to implications for leadership education in pastoral training institutions (particularly in the Low Countries, the author's own context).

The first movement teases out critical features evident across the literature of the conversation, beginning in Chapter 2 with a preliminary discussion of the "historical roots and theological characteristics" of the EMC and the two movements the conversation represents. In the four chapters that follow (Chapters 3-6), the analysis takes what may be for some readers unexpected turns. Here, he does not enter the fray by waging theological war or battling over the relative merits of competing strategic proposals. Rather, Doornenbal gives primary attention to rhetorical styles employed and hermeneutical moves made, looking not to differentiate between

dissonant voices so much as to note broadly sweeping trends in the literature.

In Chapter 3, the author interprets the pervasive use of the idea of ‘paradigm’ in the conversation, variously used for macro, meso, or micro cultural and/or ecclesial shifts. A key concern is for more clarity in the use of the term, but another is for caution that the rhetorical use of paradigm language not tilt toward becoming ideology. Next (in chapter 4), there follows an examination of two terms (and their associated variants) prevalent in the EMC for describing the church’s context in Western societies: ‘Postmodern’ and ‘Post-Christendom.’ The author helpfully brings each term into dialogue with historical and sociological disciplines that seek to interpret the realities the terms intend to describe. He opens for the reader lines along which there may be developed a more nuanced analytic frame for using these terms beyond their immediate rhetorical value.

The preference for metaphor and the manner in which it functions in the EMC is addressed in Chapter 5. Communication theory, epistemology, and ethics are lenses by which the author encourages more thoughtfulness, intentionality and care in the use of metaphors. Chapter 6 moves on to engage the fascination of key opinion-leaders in the EMC with ‘complexity theory,’ particularly in its relationship to church organizational structures and dynamics of leadership. The author expresses concern that popularized versions of complexity theory—in some secular as well as emerging-missional literature—fail to take account of the differences between the more mathematical and physical science of emergence and the nature of human social

organizations. Further, too often popularized use of the vocabulary of complexity theory is, in his judgment, “loose, vague, oversimplified, or even incorrect.” He calls for greater “conceptual rigor and realism” (160).

In the book’s second movement, Doornenbal looks more particularly at EMC views of leadership (Chapters 7-8). This is the climactic center of the book’s contribution! Chapter 7 gathers and examines what is being said in the EMC literature about leadership, navigating the dizzying array of images and labels for the kind of leadership that is commended: “As to labels, we encounter – in alphabetical order – *adaptive* leadership, *apostolic* leadership, *authentic* leadership, *catalytic* leadership, *collaborative* leadership, *community-led* leadership, *connective* leadership, *cultivating* leadership, *curating* leadership...” and so on through the alphabet (171-173; fifty in all!). Teasing out what he finds to be valuable insights in the EMC, he argues that the Organic paradigm of leadership as expounded by Gayle Avery “matches the main perspectives on leadership within the EMC” and that “framing EMC visions on leadership within [it] is pertinent and illuminating” (185-197). Yet, he laments that this paradigm is “rather abstract, complex, and—as such—without theological content.” (197)

Thus, he turns in Chapter 8 to his most critical research question: “*How may perspectives on leadership within the EMC be conceptualized in a definition of ‘missional leadership’—and what does this stand for?*” Such a definition, he argues, “is not yet available in the literature.” (199) His aim is “not just for a functionalist

definition...but for a proactive and intentionally normative one as well. This is why the adjective ‘missional’ is chosen instead of—for example—emerging, organic, participative, servant, transformational, or adaptive. Speaking of *missional* leadership directs the attention to the focus on mission and the Triune God of mission, which we have found to be especially emphasized within the EMC.” (199) The chapter goes on to explicate the various details of his proposed definition:

Missional leadership refers to the conversational processes of envisioning, cultural and social formation, and structuring within a Christian community that enable individual participants, groups, and the community as a whole to respond to challenging situations and engage in transformative changes that are necessary to become, or remain, oriented to God’s mission in the local context. (200)

The final movement of the book uses this definition to frame research questions for examining EMC perspectives about leader formation, in light of the broader literature regarding theological education and informed by the practices of a number of ‘missional leadership’-oriented institutions in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the united Kingdom, and the united States (Chapter 9). The same questions are used to frame a research project regarding the state of leader education in three theological institutes in the Netherlands and Belgium and to develop proposals for meeting challenges they face with respect to institutional purposes and teaching practices (Chapters 10 and 11).

A concluding Chapter (12) provides a succinct summation of the findings of previous chapters, organized around the initial research

questions that guided the whole. Reflections at the end of each section include “suggestions for further research.” These are an effective map for the way forward in the continuing EMC, and where collaborative work along these lines is developed, both the emerging and missional movements will be much enriched.

This book is state of the art, almost encyclopedic in its portraits of key elements in the EMC. Regarding its epicenter—missional leadership—it provides a critical appraisal and points the way forward.

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Johnson, Jeffery. *Got Style? Personality-based Evangelism*. Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, 2009. 168 pages.

Reviewed by Riddick Weber

Jeffery Johnson’s *Got Style? Personality-Based Evangelism* offers a very useful approach to helping Christians understand the evangelizers they already are. That terminology is very important to Johnson’s thesis. Johnson argues that there are six basic evangelism styles: assertive, analytical, storytelling, relational, invitational, and incarnational. There are also three ways that Christians may do evangelism: as an evangelist, as one with the gift of evangelism or as an evangelizer. All Christians have a basic, predominant style, and some are comfortable in several styles. A very small percentage of Christians score very highly in each of the styles (Johnson argues the number may be as low as 3%), and to these he gives the label evangelists. A slightly larger number have the gift of evangelism.

Johnson argues that many books and programs are written by and for evangelists and those with the gift of evangelism and are often geared toward the assertive evangelism style. The difficulty is that over 90% of Christians are evangelizers who often feel guilty or inept compared to evangelists or when trying to follow a program written for another style.

Johnson's approach is very different. After offering an overview of the various styles, including a helpful chart with Biblical and modern examples and key scripture passages, he then describes each of the different styles in greater depth. These descriptions are a great contribution. Since many people only know about the assertive evangelism style, which often has negative stereotypes associated with it, they therefore often have negative perceptions of evangelism in general. Johnson shows that not only does the Bible show many other styles, these styles are a better fit for a larger number of people. He includes a simple assessment tool to help people determine their style(s) and their strengths in them. The author then offers practical guidelines to help congregational leaders work with the variety of styles found to be within a congregation after members answer the questionnaire.

Johnson's approach greatly enriched the seminary evangelism course in which it was required reading. Only one student in the course came into it feeling that she was gifted in evangelism. The vast majority had predominantly negative associations with the word. All found the book transformative. Reading about the different styles, especially the Biblical examples for each style, helped students see

models for how they could share the Good News being the person God created them to be. All found the questionnaire easy to use. During the course, two seminary students were able to use it on a retreat for high school and college students that they were leading. The students on retreat found it very helpful and began using the terminology over the weekend. As other students became more comfortable with their own evangelism style, they began to talk with members in their congregation. Conversations with these congregants lessened the anxiety the congregants were feeling about their own perceived lack of evangelism.

The length of the book, 168 pages, makes it a manageable size for coursework or for use in the local congregation. The book is divided into several different sections, meaning that in congregational settings, not everyone needs to read the entire book in order to benefit from it. However, the sections may also make the book seem disjointed, especially at the beginning.

This concern is minor compared to the gifts this book offers. Watching mainline Protestant seminary students, generally fearful of evangelism, become excited about being evangelizers was quite rewarding. It was also good to note that students found the concepts of the book applicable to real church life. I will continue to use this in my seminary level courses concerning evangelism and in my work with local congregation leaders interested in evangelism.

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Johnston, Thomas P., ed. *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest: Voices and Views from the Southern Baptist Professors of Evangelism Fellowship*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011, 218 pages.

Reviewed by Matt Friedeman

*Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest* showcases various vantage points of evangelism by nineteen Southern Baptist professors. Lay people could easily digest the contents, but one suspects that a number of Southern Baptist college/seminary classes are currently absorbing its lessons. While any evangelical will appreciate the general direction of the volume, it is obviously written with a Southern Baptist audience in mind.

The work is, refreshingly, bookended by countering perspectives. Thomas Johnston struggles mightily in the first chapter trying to convince the reader that Matthew's Great Commission declaration (Mt. 28:16-20) to "make disciples" means to "win disciples to and for Christ." Timothy Beougher of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in the final chapter of the book, states otherwise when he takes on the typical evangelical approach to this passage by suggesting that Jesus "does not command us to 'make decisions,' or to 'make converts,' but to 'make disciples.'" This disagreement brought to my attention the novelty and potential of such an approach. Instead of nineteen free-standing chapters on an assigned topic in evangelism, why not present half as many topics, point/counterpoint?

For instance, Josef Solc of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary writes on "Sports Evangelism." As a former NCAA athlete and Athletes in Action (Campus Crusade) discus thrower, I would

cherish the opportunity to debate that issue; when do we finally get around to discussing the appropriateness of a sports-crazed church? Baylor professor Shirl James Hoffman, in his book *Good Game*, asserts, “When religion runs up against sport, it is usually religion that gets shoved out of the way.” Sports Illustrated Frank DeFord is quoted in the same book: “The bad things about athletics have rubbed off on religion. Religion is like the tar baby – it’s gotten stuck and the more it struggles, the more tar gets on it.” Hoffman again: Once fundamentalism was among sport’s worst enemies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now the church and sports are best friends, even canceling services to watch the Super Bowl and including hurrahs for our favorite college teams in the worship announcements.

Worth talking about?

Adam Greenway addresses apologetics and evangelism. Good enough, but perhaps a more interesting approach would include within the chapter on the counter-proposal: that relatively few come to faith in Christ through argumentation. Typically, relationships are the catalyst to conversion and the bond that ensures continued church involvement.

Charles Lawless discusses building a Great Commission Church, but no contributor addresses at length the concern raised by many prominent Southern Baptists that their denomination—long a standard-bearer in evangelism and missions—has lost ground in this area. That is not necessary to a good volume on evangelism, of course, but it would add a different layer of interest to the matter. At any rate, other

chapters by various authors include the role of the pastor in church evangelism, revitalizing pulpit evangelism, invitations with integrity, spiritual warfare, servant evangelism and mobilizing students. One interesting omission is a chapter on race and the church—both its past history (particularly in the Deep South) and strategies for the future. There is, and should be, a growing interest in such matters among the Baptists and the broader evangelical community.

This volume is good, as far as it goes. It contains little serious depth and few memorable insights, nor would such be anticipated, when the average chapter length is around ten pages. Even so, my copy is marked with enough potential lecture material to merit the cost of the volume. Overall, it provides a fitting reminder of why the Southern Baptists have traditionally been hungry for souls and what they have done, and some of them want to continue to do, about it.

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Kim, Elijah J.F. *The Rise of the Global South: the Decline of Western Christendom and the Rise of Majority World Christianity.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011, 487 pages.

Reviewed by Robert G. Tuttle, Jr.

Just as Elijah the prophet spoke to his generation, Elijah Kim has written a prophetic word for our own generation. Christianity is alive and well in the majority world. Dr. Kim tells us why in a book that is exhaustive yet easy to read. According to Kim majority world Christians believe that God is still a God who can make a difference

and who makes power available to those who trust and obey. Some years ago Phillip Jenkins' "The Next Christendom" pointed us in the right direction. Kim, however, takes that seminal work to a new level.

For those who value global perspective (something most Americans seem to lack) this is an important read (I almost said a "must" read). Dr. Kim knows both East and West; he knows both the minority world and the majority world. Interestingly his insights could well help both. He has balance, perspective and passion. I've worked with him in the Philippines where he has founded a university so I have seen his work first hand. He practices ministry hands on but has an incredible overview that draws our attention to the future. He knows and understands the Church Universal. He knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows that our strengths can lead to increasing strength. He knows that our weaknesses need not lead to despair.

Dr. Kim understands history from the first century Jewish diaspora to the present. He understands theology and articulates his own commitments (Pentecostal/Charismatic) in dialog with other perspectives without a whisper of self-righteousness. He understands the challenges from other religions (specifically Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and the folk religions within the 10/40 window) and discusses approaches that engage those religions on their own turf. He knows the literature and has not only read it but absorbed it in such a way that his insights have the ring of truth.

Dr. Kim has a way of being both clinical and passionate. The book is lengthy. I was tempted to blitz it but I found myself reading

and sometimes rereading every word. The charts, graphs and maps alone are worth the price of the book.

What have I learned by reading this timely book? First of all it is terribly important for East and West to learn from each other and to unite our resources. Thomas Paine once said, “If we don’t learn to love each other they will hang us one by one.” Kim’s witness is at once winsome and intelligent. Be encouraged by a world that is increasingly open and receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I personally believe that we had best heed Elijah Kim’s conclusions and begin to think in terms of what the majority world can teach us about our own churches. If not the world may well pass us by but we cannot say we have not been warned.

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Knapp, John C. *How the Church Fails Business People (and What Can Be Done About It)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012, 192 pages.

Reviewed by Andrew Kinsey

John Knapp’s opening two paragraphs of questions set the tone for the ways in which he explores the problems facing church and business today: What comes to mind *first* upon hearing words like business, or finance, or place of employment? Next: what comes to mind *immediately* upon considering words like God, or faith, or church? Knapp suggests our minds go in two directions at once, exposing a huge gap between these two very different worlds (3).

In *How the Church Fails Business People*, John Knapp, Director of the Frances Marlin Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership at Samford University, explains how this gap between faith and work can be addressed and overcome. Based on interviews with business and church leaders throughout the country, Knapp's book reveals how business people are often discouraged from bringing their faith into the business sphere, while church leaders are often out of touch with the challenges facing the business world (23). Such a "disconnect," Knapp argues, only serves to fragment an already divided society, distorting even more the false dichotomies within it, like sacred and secular, eternal and temporal, public and private (27). Therefore, one of the critical missional tasks of the church is to realize how this disconnect runs counter to the Christian's moral vocation. According to Knapp, theology and not only economics and law must also enter into the church-business conversation.

This is an important aspect of Knapp's research in the book: How would things be different if believers at work learned to tap into the wellspring of Christian wisdom (xiii)? It is a significant question as it points to two of Knapp's primary conclusions about the relationship between church and business: First, Christians across a broad spectrum of occupations have little difficulty recalling ethical challenges in their work lives (xii); i.e., how are moral problems faced? And second, there is an overwhelming number of Christians who report that the church has done little to nothing to equip them for faithful living at work (xii); i.e., how are pastors fostering in persons the skills and knowledge of the gospel? As Knapp indicates, there is a

“business world” that encourages “moral relativism” seeing faith as irrelevant, but there is also a “church world” that fails to comprehend the complexities of the business world viewing that world as obscure (xiii). Knapp’s two-pronged answer to this dilemma is to help Christians rethink issues pertaining to Christian vocation while grounding these issues in a vibrant moral framework of loving kindness, showing mercy, and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

Knapp divides his book into eight chapters, with study questions at the end of each chapter, a suggested guide to further reading at the end of the book, and four appendices outlining areas of research from interviews. Indexes of names, subjects, and biblical references also compliment this easily accessible and well-written work. Both church and business leaders alike will benefit from reading it together, not to mention seminary students. In light of the growing literature in the missional movement, this work will also provide another venue of discussion as the church navigates new waters in outreach.

But what does Knapp’s work mean to evangelism? Two answers are worth sharing. First, all evangelism has a moral component. Knapp’s book begins a much needed conversation as to how that moral component can be cultivated practically in local churches and businesses. To those who carry out the work of evangelism, Knapp’s insights can serve to build bridges between these two seemingly disparate worlds. Perhaps some of our cross-cultural studies in seminary may also need to include studies of business culture and practices too! And second, Knapp’s discussion of vocation is also a good place to begin the conversation about addressing the

fragmentation of people's spiritual lives in a postmodern world. Here, issues of initiation and discipleship converge practically as the church discerns how the gospel impacts all of life, thus providing a framework for grounding persons in the vision of God's reign. As Knapp stipulates, this vision is a life-giving vision, and it is fundamental to the church's transformative mission, a mission that includes all parts of society, including and especially business.

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McKnight, Scot. *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. 184 pages.

Reviewed by Matt Elofson

A few primary questions should inform any Christian efforts to engage in evangelism in a theologically reflective manner as opposed to being driven by the whims and practices of a particular context. These questions include: How should we understand conversion? What implications does the Christian faith have for the way in which Christians live their lives? How do we understand the roles of God and humans in salvation? What is the gospel? Scot McKnight seeks to address this last question in his book, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited*. In doing so, McKnight offers a much-needed critique of a common perception amongst evangelicals regarding the nature of the gospel and outlines a biblically informed understanding of it.

A couple of strengths inherent in McKnight's writing that mandate further discussion include his discussion of the contrasting perceptions regarding the nature of the gospel and the thoroughly biblical nature of the argument he constructs. His critique begins by differentiating between a "gospel" culture that emphasizes an indissoluble link between the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the larger story of Israel and the Bible. He asserts that one can only truly understand the significance of the proclamation of the good news concerning Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and continued work, when one situates it in the context of him as the Messiah fulfilling the larger story of Israel and the Bible. He juxtaposes this perception with that arising from a "salvation" culture. When the gospel is interpreted primarily as a "plan of salvation," it often becomes individualized, detached from the story of Jesus, and becomes thoroughly "unbiblical" (p. 62). McKnight's description of these contrasting "cultures" reveals a significant disconnect between a common contemporary understanding of the gospel and a more biblical one.

In addition, McKnight masterfully constructs his argument concerning the nature of the gospel around a "four-legged chair" that includes the apostolic tradition as represented in I Corinthians 15, the gospel as related in the four Gospels, the gospel Jesus conveyed, and the "gospeling" reflected in the various evangelistic sermons recorded in the book of Acts. In each of these instances, the author demonstrates how the various biblical figures explained the gospel in terms of the story of Jesus fulfilling the story of Israel and the Bible. While not diminishing its salvific quality, each figure presented a

gospel that focused primarily upon the story of what Jesus had done and continues to do in the world as opposed to fixating on one's own individual salvation.

Although McKnight makes a convincing argument, he could have developed it further in at least two key areas. The first concerns his discussion regarding the significance of Jesus' life in understanding the gospel. He repeatedly comments concerning how problematic it becomes when Christians focus too much on Jesus' death and resurrection at the expense of considering the role of his life and the weaving of the gospel story towards the consummation of all things. While he adequately fleshes out his understanding of the continued work of Christ, he needed to more intentionally and thoroughly articulate what he perceives as the significance of Jesus' life for understanding the gospel.

Additionally, the author primarily attributes the genesis of the shift from a "gospel" culture to a "salvation" culture to two documents originating in the Reformation (the Augsburg Confession and the Genevan Confession). While he makes his case for the role that both of these documents played, he only briefly alludes to other crucial theological and cultural changes that have also profoundly contributed to this metamorphosis. By not addressing these other influences thoroughly, McKnight obscures the actual events to which he refers and unnecessarily reduces their perceived influence to any reader who is not well versed in "American revivalism" and the cultural war occurring between fundamentalists and modernists.

Despite these minor issues, McKnight clearly constructs a convincing critique that challenges his readers to reconsider their understanding of the gospel and its implications for shaping their evangelistic practice. Additionally, his writing style makes the text easily accessible for people with a broad range of theological education. This contributes to it being an excellent resource for those who have a sense of the deficiencies inherent in the “salvation” culture that engrosses much of evangelicalism.

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Moriah, Lionel M. *The Thirteenth Discipline: Formative and Reformatory Discipline in Congregational Life*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011. 142 pages.

Reviewed by Kwasi Kena

At first glance the term “Christian discipline” seems anachronistic when juxtaposed to common buzz words like healthy churches or vital congregations. After reading Lionel Moriah’s book, *The Thirteen Discipline: Formative and Reformatory Discipline in Congregational Life*, however, readers will recognize the currency of Christian discipline and its capacity for promoting covenant community and relationship through spiritual formation and restoration of estranged members. As stated in the forward, Moriah promotes Christian discipline as “central to the modus operandi of a healthy church” (p. vii).

The book title, *The Thirteenth Discipline*, intentionally references Richard Foster’s classic *Celebration of Discipline*, in which Foster

names twelve “classical disciplines” as “essential to experiential Christianity.” Moriah aims to persuade readers to add Christian discipline to Foster’s twelve creating a thirteenth essential discipline. In addition, he hopes to satisfy the current need for resources that support sound practice of Christian discipline, stimulate further research on the exercise of discipline, and assist those who struggle to minister amid “a culture of fear of giving offense” (p. x).

The book highlights the evolution of prevailing attitudes toward the Christian discipline. For example, the third-century church’s mark of distinction as a people of God was its practice of Christian discipline within its ranks. Moriah highlights echoes of this sentiment during the Reformation among Protestant churches and later among nineteenth-century congregations belonging to the Free Church tradition. By the twenty-first century, negative attitudes predominate toward discipline due largely to Western culture’s idolatry of individualism and widespread biblical illiteracy.

In the introduction, Moriah grabs readers by the collar with a gripping modern-day parable about a new pastor who soon discovers the *laissez faire* attitude among church leaders toward a member involved in an adulterous relationship. The new pastor admonishes the offending party and seeks to apply church discipline, but leaders prefer to protect the stability of the congregation. Ultimately, leaders favored resignation of the new pastor to applying church discipline.

With the parable as a reference point, Moriah then invites readers along a journey through biblical, historical, and contemporary records to gain a panoramic view of church discipline from its inception to the

present. This examination of biblical, historical, and contemporary records provides compelling evidence to support the book's thesis: through the formative and reformatory power of Christian discipline churches can demonstrate to the world the wonder of God's transforming grace.

Moriah presents clear conclusions: discipline emerges from covenant relationship, formative Christian discipline develops spiritual maturity, the only valid motivation for reformatory discipline is *agapé*. Even excommunication, must be done with the ultimate hope of restoration.

The next portions of the book follow predictable paths: word studies on biblical terms for covenant and exegesis of passages demonstrating the practice of discipline. Included among the examples are Jesus and the adulterous woman (John 8) and Achan's plunder of items devoted to idols (Joshua 7). In each case, Moriah offers thoughtful commentary and arrives at reasonable conclusions. Jesus demonstrated a balanced approach between truth (condemnation of sin) and grace (withholds condemnation of the sinner). In cases of extreme discipline, Achan, Moriah extracts this principle, "discipline is only legitimately applied where there has been adequate teaching or instruction as well as voluntary commitment to the principle and intent of the command" (p. 19).

Last, Moriah points readers toward a sobering civil law case in Canada, *The Cairns Decision* in which the court, despite its lack of expertise, engaged in exegesis of Scripture and determined that a church had wrongfully applied a biblical principle from Matthew 18 to

a case of sexual assault. The issues raised by this court case and the subsequent discussions about creating process and protocol for application of discipline, make *The Thirteen Discipline* a must read for all clergy and church leaders who desire to foster spiritual maturity through formative and restorative Christian discipline.

In summary, Moriah offers concise arguments sure to stimulate rigorous discussion about why and how Christian discipline may be exercised in our twenty-first century context. Each chapter concludes with devotional material and questions making it suitable for personal or group study.

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Tizon, Al. *Missional Preaching: Engage □ Embrace □ Transform*.  
Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012. 164 pages.

Reviewed by Thomas Rawlinson

As a brand new, wet-behind-the-ears, rookie pastor, I am continually seeking resources to help me become a better preacher. The problem is not a lack of books on preaching, but just the opposite—so many books have been written on the subject that it is hard to know where to start. So I was delighted to come across Al Tizon’s *Missional Preaching*, a book combining two subjects of great interest to me.

However, Tizon is quick to mention that the book is not really a “how-to” manual for preaching, but rather a theology of mission to help preachers shape vital, energetic, and purposeful congregations by

developing a new hermeneutic, one that sees “mission as the interpretive framework within which all of Scripture derives its meaning”(2). A bold claim indeed, but one for which Tizon makes a compelling case.

The book is structured into two parts: the first presents what Tizon calls the “essentials” of missional preaching; the second presents seven goals for missional preaching, together with a sample sermon for each goal. Given the breadth of the field of missiology, the book necessarily paints with broad-brush strokes rather than treating topics in-depth.

To begin, the unruly morass of “mission” is succinctly presented and defined, meaning “to join God’s mission to transform the world, as the church strives in the Spirit to be authentically relational, intellectually and theologically grounded, culturally and socio-economically diverse, and radically committed to both God and neighbor, especially the poor” (*xxiii*). Over the course of the book, these themes are explored in turn and applied to the preacher’s task, lest the “feast of the gospel results in spiritual malnourishment and dehydration” (*xv-xvi*).

First and foremost, it is *God’s* mission in which we participate. God, by nature, is a *sending* God (Jn. 17:18), and although the church is “both the fruit of and the primary instrument for the work of the gospel” (8), it is not an end in itself. Congregations may claim to be friendly, but when such friendliness turns in upon itself and ceases to engage the surrounding culture in God’s work of compassion and justice, such congregations cease to *be* the church.

Instead, Tizon calls us to “kingdom-shaped” preaching, which includes understanding God’s desire for worldwide *shalom*, developing relationships motivated by love, and building communities that realize and practice hope. Achieving this requires the unity of mission and worship, two aspects of congregational life that are frequently seen as separate, but are ultimately bound together, each one causing the other. It follows that we cannot love God without loving neighbor (through mission); nor can we love neighbor without loving God (through worship).

Part Two of the book defines the goals of missional preaching and presents selected sermons as examples. These goals include “inculturation,” which “summons us to understand, be a part of, suffer, rejoice, and fall in love with the culture we seek to transform” (40), quite a different vision than simply “us” helping “them.” While such inculturation speaks to being *in* the world, missional preaching aims to develop alternative communities that are not *of* the world, and serve as counterculture to the dominant values of a society.

Other goals include holistic ministry, which seeks to provide healing for body, mind, spirit, social relationships, and ultimately all of creation; ministries of compassion and justice, both of which come from “the heart of God that aches in the face of human suffering” (86); seeking reconciliation within a framework of biblical justice; whole-life stewardship; preaching life and peace; and showing respect for other faiths while maintaining the unique “scandal” of Jesus Christ.

If I have one bone to pick with the book, it would be its downplay of the role of Sacrament in forming disciples equipped for mission.

Granted, the book is entitled *Missional Preaching* and not *Missional Sacramentology*, but I simply cannot agree with the statement, “An excellently preached word articulates—makes clear—God’s intentions like no song, ritual, or prayer could” (31). This ignores centuries of tradition that holistically incorporate both Word and Table in Christian liturgy. Furthermore, by grouping Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Eastern Orthodox traditions together as sacrament-centered, as opposed to those Protestant traditions that are Word-centered, Tizon implies that Protestants do liturgy right and the other traditions do not. This can hardly be helpful to ecumenical dialogue that seeks to bridge the gaps between traditions and strengthen our common ties as the same Church, engaged in the same mission of the same God, reflected in the life and teachings of the same Jesus Christ.

But setting aside my penchant for emphasizing both Word and Sacrament in Christian worship, I believe Tizon successfully presents a holistic understanding of mission and the important role of the preacher in engaging congregations with sermons inspired by the Living Word, calling us all to action and participation in the *missio Dei*, all for the glory of our Triune God and transformation of the world.

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Weems, Lovett H. Focus: *The Real Challenges That Face the United Methodist Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012. 98 pages.

Reviewed by Michael J. Gehring

Lovett Weems, in this brief work, has painted a vivid portrait of the crisis which affects the United Methodist Church in the United States. Though the denomination has been declining since the mid-1960's, the full force of the financial implications were softened as fewer people gave more money. He argues that this practice will not be sustainable as the membership of the American UMC is aging and will soon face an increasing member death rate. He refers to this approaching storm as a "Death Tsunami." This tsunami will rage for years, and what lies on the other side, will be a far different denominational reality than the current one.

Weems states that the UMC needs to reduce the financial baseline of congregations, annual conferences, and the General Church. He contends that the resetting is not done for institutional survival, but to free the church from its financial preoccupations so that it can focus on its mission of "spreading scriptural holiness and reform of the nation" (12). The sad truth that the 2012 General Conference demonstrated is that the UMC is not currently capable of reforming itself, much less such a laudable and ambitious goal as the nation. Weems is right in his assessment that mainline denominations "...have often been fundamentalists of structure rather than of doctrine" (36).

In response to the decline of the Mainline denominations, some clergy, bishops, executive presbyters, and denominational executives looked earnestly in the 1980's and the 1990's to the church growth

movement with the hope that we could grow ourselves out of this storm, or at least build bigger ships so that we could withstand larger waves. But for over half-a-century the American Church has been confronting winds of a cultural storm which seem to be growing in intensity rather than lessening. The Crystal Cathedral bankruptcy brought to light how precarious the financial footing is of some megachurches, and the toll the recession exacted. Churches of all sizes are facing the possibility of similar situations in the not too distant future. This book would be a helpful resource to aid congregations to understand the need to build reserves and endowments. It would also be of benefit not only for clergy but also for divinity students who are preparing for parish ministry. Weems argues that what lies ahead for us institutionally will be unlike anything we have seen thus far, and only those churches which face and address the challenges will successfully navigate this tsunami.

Joseph's words to Pharaoh were that they needed to prepare in the seven years of abundance for the seven years of famine. Pharaoh's great fortune was that the words of wisdom came to him before the beginning of the seven years of abundance. We have been in this crisis, this storm for some time, and the forecast is for menacing and troubled waters ahead.

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