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Dissertation For M.A.T.R.

Church Planting.

**An examination of the theological rationale and
methods described in church planting literature
since 1975.**

By John Richard Claydon

Submitted in June 1999.

M.A. in Theological Research

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Introduction

In this dissertation I will examine the church planting literature which has been published since 1975 in order to consider the rationale presented for church planting, the models used, and the way opportunities are identified. Much of this literature is of a popular and practical nature, aimed at laity, offering practical guidelines for church planting rather than explicit theological reflection. The primary focus will relate to Church life in England.

The first section will consider the theological rationale for church planting. This will involve examining different theological categories as they relate to church planting, and questioning the adequacy, appropriateness, and implications of the rationale.

The second section will consider the models of church planting that are described, identify the various models, the overlap and relation between them, and consider their relationship to the theological rationale.

The third section will examine the factors underlying the process of identifying potential opportunities for church planting.

Examining the theological basis for church planting, the opportunities for planting and the ways in which it is undertaken will help identify issues of principle and pragmatism: doctrine and churchmanship.

1. Theological rationale for church planting.

1.1 Renewed interest in church planting

Church planting is an area of practical and pastoral theology. Practised in various ways since New Testament times there have been periods of increased activity especially at times of population growth, social upheaval, increased missionary activity, or spiritual revival. Present renewed interest in church planting may be attributable to the influence of the Church Growth Movement, and also to what Christine describes as the recent experience of the Holy Spirit¹. Missiologically, and sociologically, there is a concern to relate the gospel into western secularised society, and reverse the trend of church decline by establishing culturally relevant mission-minded churches.²

Church planting is the sending out of people, by a church, churches, or mission agency, in order to establish a new congregation, revive a struggling one, or even replace a closed one.³ The result may be separate independent churches, congregations responsible to a “mother church”, or congregations which are part of a network with sister congregations.

1.2 The apologetic for church planting

Church planting advocates recognise and respond to supposed objections arising from theological, ethical, and pragmatic concerns, and thereby supply an apologetic to assumed, unnamed, detractors. Theologically, some consider evangelism and church planting to be inappropriate, others have ecumenical concerns and reservations about denominational or independent initiatives,

¹ Robinson, Martin, and Christine, Stuart, *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1992) p37.

² Christine, *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today* p141.

³ cf. Hopkins, Bob, *Church Planting: 1. Models for Mission in the Church of England* (Nottingham: Grove Booklets, 1988-89) p5.

whilst others fear that church planting can become an end in itself.

Ethically, if a new church undermines the work of existing ones it may be regarded as unloving and a hindrance to the unity of the Church.⁴ Wagner, for example, responds polemically to this emphasising that unity which aids evangelism, rather than hinders, is in accord with the Jesus' prayer in John 17.⁵

Pragmatically, some assume that there are too many churches and energy should be expended on improving existing ones. A planting church may face objections from its own members arising from a "maintenance mentality", a focus on cosy fellowship rather than on mission, fears of the risks and costs involved, and accusations of dissipated resources.⁶ Years of decline and the closure of churches has also created negative expectations.

Wagner gives five reasons for church planting: it (i) is biblical, (ii) facilitates denominational survival, (iii) develops new leadership, (iv) stimulates existing churches, and (v) is efficient.⁷ He identifies three imperatives for church planting: the biblical imperative, the demographic imperative of reaching people without a "viable, evangelizing church in their culture," and the practical imperative inherent in the evangelistic effectiveness of church planting.⁸ A number of "secondary reasons" include making a new start, relieving pressure on a full building, catering for those who commute to worship, reaching a new estate, and responding to a sense of call and a commitment to growth. However,

⁴ Wagner, C. Peter, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura: Regal, 1990) p40.

⁵ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p42.

⁶ Murray, Stuart, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) p3. and p7f. and Licence, Graham, *Rural Church Planting?* (Bedford: British Church Growth Association, 1992) p34f.

⁷ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p20.

⁸ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p21.

these “reasons” may also result in forms of mission other than church planting.⁹

Both the reasons for and the objections to church planting beg the question of what theological foundations underlie such considerations. Whilst first reviewing the biblical precedents for church planting, I shall go on to examine contemporary church planting literature in relation to the Kingdom of God and the Church, Missiology, Incarnation, Ecclesiology, and finally Pragmatism.

1.3 Biblical precedents

Acts presents the early Church developing new patterns for its life with meetings in homes (Acts 2 v42), evolving structures and forms which led to more effective evangelism (Acts 6),¹⁰ establishing new churches in Samaria (Acts 8), beginning a gentile house church (Acts 10), nurturing the new church in Antioch (Acts 11 v19ff), and commending missionaries who plant churches (Acts 13ff). Acts gives extended accounts of the churches being established at Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus (Acts 16. 6-40, 18,19, and 20.17-38).

The gospel spread both geographically and culturally and Peter and Paul divided their work in terms of cultures / people groups.¹¹ Bruce suggests that Paul’s journeys are presented as a programme of church planting, and that Paul appointed elders and taught others to plant churches.¹²

Church planting authors draw principles from the New Testament in a biblicist manner, presenting proof texts, but giving little attention to the New Testament context. The underlying assumption is that the New Testament precedent of

⁹ Robinson, Martin, and Spriggs, David, *Church Planting - The Training Manual* (Oxford: Lynx, 1995) p15.

¹⁰ Hopkins, *Church Planting: 1*, p11.

¹¹ Gal 2.8-10.

¹² Bruce, Andy, *To Build and to Plant* (Birmingham: West Midland Baptist Association, 1997) p2f.

church planting is sufficient warrant for church planting today, and that contemporary understandings of church planting are similar to those in Acts and the epistles. This is primarily because much of the material is written by Evangelicals seeking to promote church planting as a biblical practice. Murray seeks to move away from “proof-texting”, believing that church planting is a valid “contemporary expression of mission,” with or without a biblical precedent.¹³ Acts, he says, provides “a source of inspiration, encouragement, warning and reflection, rather than of blueprints and unwarranted conclusions.”¹⁴

The contextual differences between the first and late twentieth century need to be recognised as insights are drawn from the New Testament accounts. The biblical writers do not provide schemes and plans for establishing new churches, but principles can be drawn. For example, Paul’s concern to preach in new areas, to enlist support in order to visit Spain, and the way he viewed his ministry as priestly offering¹⁵. Generally the writers are responding to pressing issues which newly planted churches are facing. Church planting provides the context for much of the New Testament.

1.4 The Kingdom of God and the Church

Since Weiss, and Schweitzer, New Testament scholars have taken renewed interest in the eschatological nature of the “Kingdom of God,” agreeing that it was a distinctive feature of Jesus’ ministry. Dodd argued for the present reality of the kingdom¹⁶, whilst Kummel sought a synthesis of realised and future eschatology and, like Beasley-Murray¹⁷ and Ladd,¹⁸ drew a distinction between

¹³ *Laying Foundations* p62.

¹⁴ *Laying Foundations* p75.

¹⁵ Rom.15.16, 20, and 24.

¹⁶ Dodd, C.H., *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1936).

¹⁷ Beasley-Murray, G.R., *Jesus and the Future* (London: Macmillan, 1954).

¹⁸ Ladd, G.E. *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

the Kingdom's arrival and its consummation.¹⁹ The "Kingdom", according to Perin²⁰ is a "tensive symbol" serving to evoke a wide range of ideas. Recent debate has focused on the nature of the God who reigns. Meyer²¹ writes of the reign of God as signifying God as Jesus knows him, and Chilton,²² combining both present and future aspects, writes of the Kingdom as "God in strength".²³ Recently, Borg²⁴ and Horsley²⁵ have suggested that Jesus was a social and political reformer focused on the present, and Sanders suggests that Jesus expected God to bring in the Kingdom through a restoration of Israel,²⁶ and terms Jesus as "viceroy" of the Kingdom.²⁷

France asserts that "kingdom" in both Old and New Testaments refers primarily to the abstract concept of "Kingship" or "rule". God is creator and king and his kingship is both a present reality and a future hope.²⁸ Caragounis notes that it is universal in scope, imminent and potentially present in Jesus, and "inextricably connected with his own person and mission."²⁹

Church planting authors are principally concerned about the nature of the

¹⁹ Caragounis, C.C., "Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven" in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) p422.

²⁰ Perin, Norman, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

²¹ Meyer, B.F., *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979).

²² Chilton, B.D., *God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the kingdom* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

²³ France, Richard T., "Kingdom Of God: New Testament" in Alister McGrath (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: 1993) p303.

²⁴ Borg, Marcus, J., *Jesus, A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

²⁵ Horsley, Richard, A., *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

²⁶ Sanders, E.P., *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: The Penguin Press, 1993) p175f.

²⁷ *The Historical Figure of Jesus* p248.

²⁸ "Kingdom Of God: New Testament" pp301-304.

²⁹ "Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven" p417.

Kingdom and its relationship to the Church, there is a reaction to ecclesiocentric views of the Kingdom. Like many church planting advocates, Lings describes the Kingdom of God as “the rule and order of God”.³⁰ The Church is a manifestation of the Kingdom, according to Shenk and Stutzman, made visible “wherever a cluster of people gather in Jesus’ name.”³¹ The Kingdom is greater than the Church. The Church, suggests Wagner, is an instrument of the Kingdom.³²

Recognising that the Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’ teaching and the integrating paradigm for mission Murray characterised the Church as community, and the Kingdom as activity.³³ The Kingdom is broader than the Church and defines the scope of God’s mission.³⁴ Therefore, the Church serves the purposes of God in the extension of his kingdom.

Shenk and Stutzman, and Wagner see church planting as an expression of spiritual warfare, with the Kingdom of God engaged in confrontation with evil spirits, evil governments, evil institutions and people given over to evil. This assumes a broader and more active spiritual conflict with a cosmic dimension than traditional Evangelicalism’s dualism of saved and unsaved. It is a confrontation of the Kingdom of God with the kingdom of darkness.³⁵ Such a view presupposes a radical distinction between the Church, as God’s redeemed community, and the world in need of redemption. It is strongly dualistic, positing two spiritual “spheres”, the “world and the “Church”, as diametrically opposed to each other.

³⁰ Lings, George, *Church Planting in Theory and Practice* (Unpublished lecture notes).

³¹ Shenk, David, and Stutzman, Ervin, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1988) p23.

³² *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p37.

³³ *Laying Foundations* p40f.

³⁴ *Laying Foundations* p41f.

³⁵ Shenk and Stutzman, *Creating Communities* p72.

There are two views of this conflict of kingdoms. The first sees it as a struggle against unseen spiritual forces that are combated by prayer, fasting, worship, and exorcism. Wagner, cites 2 Cor. 4.4 seeing Satan as the “god of this age” who has usurped God’s authority and set up his Kingdom on earth. He suggests the reference to the “blinding of unbelievers” may refer to particular territories, and people groups, as well as individuals, and to resistance caused by “demonic forces.” He propounds a demonic hierarchy headed by Satan with “principalities” and “powers” having powerful positions and certain demonic influence being connected to particular localities.³⁶

The second view sees the conflict as the struggle against injustice. Wright follows Yoder in suggesting that the “basic principles of the world” (cf. Gal. 4.3 and Col 2.8 and 20) may also refer to “the basic structures of human life. ... the forces which make for the regularity, system and order of human society and history.”³⁷ Created by God and still subject to him these structures are fallen and rebellious and areas in which demonic influence can be exercised.³⁸ Shenk and Stutzman combine these spiritual and social models of this confrontation seeing it as against spiritual forces, and against those who misuse power to exploit the poor and obstruct human rights.³⁹

Reading “Kingdom” language as spiritual conflict may originate from a sense of insecurity prompted by belonging to a Christian minority in a secular society. Some espouse a theology that grants prominence to demons, whilst others

³⁶ cf. Wagner, C. Peter, *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders* (Chichester: Sovereign, 1991) ch’s 1 and 3.

³⁷ Wright, Nigel, *The Radical Kingdom* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1986) p68.

³⁸ Wright, *The Radical Kingdom* p70, and Yoder, John Howard, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1982) p145, quoted in Wright, *The Radical Kingdom* p68.

³⁹ *Creating Communities* p81.

emphasise the struggle against injustice. A negative view of the world and its institutions often accompany these beliefs. This is particularly so for those whose ecclesiology is “Gathered Church” rather than for state churches who may be enmeshed the institutions of society. Most write from a “Believers’ Church” perspective which views the Church as composed of committed believers, standing distinct from the surrounding culture.

The primary concern is the Kingdom of God: the Church is a sign, an instrument, and an agent of that Kingdom. Historically, many have seen the Church as synonymous with the Kingdom, but recent thinking has seen the Church as a sign of the Kingdom. Church planting writers, wanting to redress the balance against restrictive church structures, view the Church as both an expression of the Kingdom, and also its agent. They want to subordinate the Church to the purpose of the Kingdom, whose mission is to be worked out in the life of the Church. The work of the Kingdom is much broader than the Church, the Church is subordinate to the Kingdom.⁴⁰ The authors are therefore subordinating ecclesiology to missiology.

⁴⁰ cf. Murray, *Laying Foundations* p39ff.

1.5 Missiology

Church planting should be seen within the wider context of mission. Church planting writers find little explicit reference to church planting in the gospels, but focus on the way Jesus called and discipled the twelve, and look to Acts and the epistles for the way Paul's ministry led to the establishing of congregations. Writers tend to look for passages to support their viewpoints rather than undertake a systematic investigation. Like Shenk and Stutzman, they focus strongly on Acts, but Murray urges further investigation of other New Testament writings recognising that much of it was written to young churches.⁴¹

Missiologists have used the term “*Missio Dei*”, according to Murray, to expresses the conviction that mission “flows from the character and purposes of God”.⁴² Barth's view of mission as an activity of God himself has influenced missionary thinking, especially during the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council, and led to the understanding of mission as being derived from the nature of God.⁴³ The Church is called to work in partnership with the Trinitarian God whose whole person is involved in mission to the world. The Father sent the Son who sends the Church in the power of the Spirit. Therefore, mission will embody the character of God and reflect his nature and activity. Church planting is an expression of this mission.

An essential element of mission is to announce the εὐαγγέλιον, the good news. Much writing about church planting focuses on this aspect of mission. Hopkins sees church planting as both the goal and tool of evangelism,⁴⁴ whereas Wagner boldly asserts that church planting is the “single most effective evangelistic

⁴¹ *Laying Foundations* p75.

⁴² *Laying Foundations* p31.

⁴³ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) p389f.

⁴⁴ *Church Planting: 1*, 6f.

methodology under heaven.”⁴⁵ Wagner’s two basic theological reasons for church planting are relevant proclamation to each generation and re-evangelising the lapsed in culturally appropriate ways.⁴⁶

The literature presents church planting as both narrower and broader than evangelism. Narrower in that it is a particular strategy. Broader because as planting takes place it does so as a result of other expressions of mission and will lead to further aspects of mission being realised. Church planting will reflect the wider mission purposes of God if it has a focus that is broader than evangelism and expresses God’s love in serving the community, and seeking the community’s well-being, as well as announcing God’s saving message.

1.6 Incarnation

Murray’s second category in his theological framework for church planting is “Incarnation” which he describes as “the focal point” of the *Missio Dei*.⁴⁷ Nazir-Ali cites Gore as an example of a nineteenth century theologian who emphasised the incarnation in terms of presence and self-emptying: both aspects provide paradigms for mission. Liberation theologians use incarnational theology to refer to Christ who is amongst the poor sharing their suffering.⁴⁸ The distinction between the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity born in Bethlehem and Christian engagement in the world should not be confused. Christians embody the presence of the Kingdom bear its message, and live out its principles in the power of the Spirit.

The implication is that individual Christians, and the Church are to incarnate the gospel. Taking incarnational mission seriously means a church plant will be

⁴⁵ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p11.

⁴⁶ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p23ff.

⁴⁷ *Laying Foundations* p35.

⁴⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission* p512f.

ready to meet the cost of addressing the needs of the surrounding community in creative and relevant ways. The church needs to retain Christian distinctiveness, but Carey emphasises church culture at the expense of culturally relevant mission when he calls for characteristics, such as the liturgy, of the planting denomination to be apparent.⁴⁹

Anglicanism's parochial system presents an incarnational view of the Church with every locality having a church as an expression of the Kingdom of God,⁵⁰ which Nazir-Ali describes as having created a meaningful Christian presence making the Church approachable and familiar.⁵¹ However, this only works on a geographical basis and assumes that every community is homogeneous, responding in a uniform way. This raises the question of whether the gospel needs not only to be incarnated in geographical localities, but also in particular cultures or social networks, as implied by the so called "homogeneous unit" principle.

Incarnation suggests the way mission should be done, indicating the importance of presence in society, the cost of mission, the need for humility, and self-emptying sacrificial service (cf. Phil 2 .5ff). The biblical pattern of ministry is of dying before the production of fruit (Jn. 12.24).

⁴⁹ Carey, George (et al), *Planting New Churches* (Guildford: Eagle, 1991). p28f.

⁵⁰ *Planting New Churches* p25.

⁵¹ Nazir-Ali, Michael, *From Everywhere to Everywhere* (London: Collins Flame, 1991) p67.

1.7 Ecclesiology

Most New Testament uses of the word ἐκκλησία, indicate a local body of believers sharing together in the life of the church and engaging in mission.⁵² However, Wright argues that this local emphasis needs to be balanced with a wider awareness that brings the enrichment of the whole.⁵³ Partnership with the wider Church is to be expressed for the sake of unity, sharing of resources, guidance, support, and mutual accountability.

Moltmann notes the traditional marks of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic as acknowledged in the historic creeds.⁵⁴ He describes them as statements of faith, hope, and action, which have not restricted the Church in its thinking but have been seen as “pointers to the essentials.”⁵⁵ Lings sees “apostolic” not in terms of “apostolic succession” or merely as faithfulness to the “apostolic teaching”, but in terms of its root meaning “to be sent”. The apostolic Church is a “sent” Church.⁵⁶ Church planting is therefore a characteristic application of this and is also congruent with the marks of the Reformers such as the preaching of the Word and the observance of Sacraments. Church planting brings a missiological emphasis to ecclesiology.

1.8 Ministry

Church planting literature focuses more on “leadership roles” than on the traditional categories of ministry. Writing about ministry reflects two starting points; one based on the social model of the trinity, and the other grounded explicitly on biblical text. Some, such as Shenk and Stutzman, find the

⁵² cf. Mullins, E.Y., *Baptist Beliefs* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1977) p64 quoted by Denton Lotz “The Holy Spirit and Establishing Churches” in *Five Till Midnight* p3.

⁵³ Wright, Nigel, *Challenge to Change* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991) p135.

⁵⁴ Moltmann, Jurgen, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977) p337f.

⁵⁵ *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* p340.

⁵⁶ *Church Planting in Theory and Practice*.

foundations for their concepts of team ministry in the doctrine of the Trinity as a fellowship of love and harmony. A team provides mutual assistance and encouragement which produces a “synergy” between the members.⁵⁷ Spriggs and Robinson, looking directly to the biblical texts, consider Adam and Eve as the first team which existed for mutual support, that engaged in the task of multiplication, and their example shows how the failure of one affects whole team (Gen. 1.28; 2.15,18,24. and 3.6-17).⁵⁸ Both sets of authors are seeking to ground their concepts of team ministry; one in the nature of God which will be reflected in his work, the other looking to the particular example of Adam and Eve and considering how similar principles may be worked out in the life of the Church.

The Mennonites, Shenk and Stutzman, view the planter as being called by and accountable to the church, which has the responsibility to pray for and support the planter,⁵⁹ whose call is confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the church.⁶⁰ They acknowledge that Gotherd, Fortune, and Keith and Marion Yoder consider all seven gifts listed in Romans 12 as necessary for church planting teams, whilst others look to the five-fold ministries of Ephesians 4.11.⁶¹ Lings sees a developmental significance in the order of those listed in Ephesians 4. Churches are planted because apostles are sent, they grow because God speaks through his prophets and evangelists, and they mature through the work of the pastors and teachers.⁶² New churches increase the opportunity for the laity to use their gifts, create new leadership roles, and so are a fuller expression of every member ministry.⁶³ Many, like Christine and Robinson, place strong emphasis upon the

⁵⁷ *Creating Communities* ch3.

⁵⁸ *The Training Manual* p68.

⁵⁹ *Creating Communities* p32ff.

⁶⁰ *Creating Communities* p34.

⁶¹ *Creating Communities* p52.

⁶² Lings *Church Planting in Theory and Practice*.

⁶³ Allan, Derek, *Planted to Grow* (Didcot: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1994) p10.

importance of the whole team as sharing responsibility, complementing each other's abilities and providing mutual support.⁶⁴

The concerns of traditional denominations relate to the proper authorisation of leaders, whether lay or ordained, and their relationship with those of neighbouring parishes, circuits, and churches. Liturgical questions are also important, raising issues like of patterns of worship, administration of the sacraments, and licensing of buildings. New denominations tend to think in terms of accountability, either to the congregation or to someone recognised as having "apostolic oversight". Such issues may restrain church planting activity, but they may also safeguard standards of practice and theology.

1.9 Pragmatism

Warner and Licence both indicate that new churches provide a key means of evangelistic activity, especially if they are a means of incarnating the gospel to a new culture. Church planting enables cognisance to be given to the micro communities of modern living whether defined geographically, ethnically or culturally, and facilitates response to demographic changes. It helps overcome prejudice, transforms traditions, brings faster growth, promotes growth in both the new and sending congregations.⁶⁵ Awareness of the serious decline of the Church accompanied by a clear desire to reverse this trend has encouraged an emphasis upon church planting.

Wagner contends that the denominations which plant churches are also growing, and conversely those that do not plant churches are declining.⁶⁶ However, the "salvation" of our denominations, in itself, is not an adequate motivation for

⁶⁴ *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today* p211.

⁶⁵ cf. *Rural Church Planting* p36f. and *21st. Century Church* p144ff.

⁶⁶ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p12.

church planting.

Many, like Christine and Arn, view church planting as a needed and effective means of mission.⁶⁷ This effectiveness arises because it increases involvement in the work of mission, new congregations create an atmosphere of welcome and openness, and a new congregation may be more culturally attuned. Church planting often stimulates clarity of vision and purpose, increases motivation, and sacrificial use of time, money and other resources. The smaller group of a church plant, or planting team, often increases the sense of ownership, responsibility and accountability.

Warner saw the need to be convinced in three ways about church planting. “Firstly, that this policy has a strong biblical basis. Secondly, that it makes good strategic sense in our cultural context. Thirdly, that it represents part of the Holy Spirit’s purposes for today’s church.”⁶⁸ These correlate to the theological, socio-demographic, and pneumatological grounds for church planting. Shenk and Stutzman’s concern for church planting is stimulated by their “Believers’ Church” ecclesiology, and an eschatology that sees universal evangelism as a prerequisite to the parousia. Wagner is influenced by the “commercial culture of competition” of the US context where competition is seen to bring commercial health and he therefore suggests that competition between churches will bring spiritual health. Mission becomes his main criteria: if the work of evangelism is helped then it is right to do it.⁶⁹ Church Planting is one means of evangelism and engaging in the mission of God that has significant New Testament precedents. It fits with the New Testament concept of the Church as a mission agency concerned for communities as well as territories. Churches are to incarnate the

⁶⁷ *Planting Tomorrow’s Churches Today* p35. and *Five Till Midnight* p19.

⁶⁸ *21st. Century Church* p148.

⁶⁹ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p42.

Kingdom in ways relevant to specific communities, as well as for particular localities. It is a means of reorienting ecclesiology towards a more comprehensive missiology without losing the ecclesiological emphasis.

Most church planting authors are activists and pragmatists whose principles are based on their inherent missiology. They look to the Bible for precedents and their writings reflect the theological themes of the Kingdom of God, Mission, Incarnation, and Ecclesiology.

The nature and purpose of the Kingdom of God is prioritised and so becomes a theological focal point that enables them to go beyond denominational practice and prejudice. Emphasising the Kingdom enables them to challenge denominations to plant churches as an expression of the mission of the Kingdom of God rather than extending their particular church. This focus places the cause of the Kingdom above the Church and enables them to appeal to a higher authority and purpose than the Church, and to challenge the structures, customs, and traditions of church life which inhibit evangelism. In this way they both respect church culture, but also break free from its restraints.

Missiologically, the material emphasises church planting as an important aspect of mission. Detractors are contested and church planting is presented as evangelistically effective. A major concern must be that if it is not evangelistically effective it only results in dispersing the same number of Christians across more churches. Whilst having a strong emphasis upon evangelism this can be seen as a narrow focus. An emphasis upon the broader mission agenda will bring a more balanced approach.

As an expression of incarnational mission church planting is presented as a means of contextualising the Christian Faith in a particular community.

Incarnation points to Christ identifying with lost humanity, entering human history, and of his sacrifice and service. Incarnational mission will take each situation seriously in terms of identification and presence and sacrifice. For the Church it reinforces the theme of missionary service to the world for the sake of the Kingdom. The writers consider the cost of church planting to a church, but less of the cost to individuals. What costs the church will also cost individuals.

The Church is called to be holy, separate and distinctive from the world. It is not to be seen as a building or an institution, but as a fellowship of believers. Church planting is not presented as erecting more buildings for people to attend, but the establishing of Christian communities who will engage in the missionary work of the Kingdom. The emphasis upon community is a response to the disintegration of conversion and discipleship and a recognition of the need for supportive communities to sustain people in their faith whilst living in a post-Christian society. If the Church is to reflect the holiness of God then clear teaching about discipleship is called for. The strong emphasis upon evangelism and conversion correlates with the fact that most write from a “Believers’ Church” perspective strongly emphasising the local church and the role of the laity, rather than denominational institutions and clericalism. In this way they aspire to a liberty from what they consider to be overburdening structures, restrictive practices, and denominational bureaucracy. Even amongst Anglicans, who consider issues of formal liturgy and licensing as particularly important, the authors distance themselves from their particular denominational ecclesiology.

The greater emphasis upon lay involvement is a corrective to the traditional church reliance upon the clergy. However, some leaders are perceived in strongly authoritarian ways. It is recognised that leadership needs to be accountable, for some this is naturally worked out according to their denominational practice, but independent fellowships need an ecclesiology that

reminds them of the catholicity of the Church and mutual dependence and accountability. Leadership without accountability becomes a dangerous situation. Some find accountability in the episcopal structures which speaks of apostolic authority. Some new churches recognise the role of an apostle who exercises oversight over a number of churches. Lings, an Anglican, helpfully reminds us that being apostolic means being sent. Churches and church leaders are to exercise accountability in faithfulness to the commission to mission implicit in the Church being apostolic.

The writers are driven by a combination of an evangelistically centred missiology, and pragmatism. As activists they are concerned for effective and efficient action. The dangers inherent in this is that they will view their success merely in terms of numbers of churches and converts, rather than the faithful demonstration of the compassion of Christ and the proclamation of his message.

2. Contemporary models of church planting

2.1 Situations and contexts

Social and demographic changes since 1945 have produced a greater emphasis upon individualism and a loss of social cohesion. Old authority structures have declined, commitment to political parties and trade unions has decreased, political involvement is often issue based, marriage and family life has undergone enormous changes producing greater fragmentation as seen in the rise of single occupancy. Church planting in the 1950's was a response to the post-war housing boom, working with old assumptions about society. Recent church planting is a mission response seeking to address the new situation of a post-Christian, post-modern society.

Church planting authors have taken cognisance of the influence of post-

modernity upon popular culture and its effect on people's values. Murray, in particular, has noted that it includes a commitment to relativism, a recognition of spiritual values and the importance of the imagination, the interpretation of the world through a biological rather than a mechanistic model, concern for the environment, distrust of institutions, rejection of male dominance, lack of respect for received tradition, emphasis on the chaotic and fragmentary rather than order and harmony, readiness to hold contradictory views, commitment to choice, and deep scepticism.⁷⁰

Recognition of these changes has produced creative thinking about church planting. New churches may be aimed to reach people via social networks as well as on the basis of a geographical locality. Some may be intended to serve a community that is defined in terms of age and culture as with "youth churches", and "ethnic churches".

2.2 New styles of church

The writers call for more churches to be planted which exercise greater mission effectiveness, relevant to the communities they serve. Warner calls for creative "church planting that discovers new ways of being the Body of Christ in a changing world" that will "counter the tendency to ecclesiological ossification that turns structures into strictures."⁷¹

New styles being developed include "seeker services", "network churches", and "cell churches". However, it should be recognised that many writers still seek to take what is culturally recognisable as "church" and attempt to give it a new content assuming that churches will take the familiar shape of their particular tradition and be Sunday and congregation based.

⁷⁰ *Laying Foundations* p159.

⁷¹ *21st. Century Church* p56 & 78.

Seeker services are orientated to the needs of the unbeliever, and include more “presentation” than “participation”. The chief theological difference is the “priority given to non-members over church members,” and seeking to establish “a church for the unchurched.”⁷²

“Network churches” emphasise networks of relationship and shared cultural factors.⁷³ In the British context the main examples are “youth churches” and “ethnic churches”. Such churches tend to be regarded with suspicion as they fit uneasily with the heterogeneous examples of the New Testament,⁷⁴ and the unity in diversity which Paul wrote about in Gal. 3.28.

“Cell churches” practice the main church activities of worship, teaching, sacraments, and pastoral care in home-based groups which then link together for certain functions. The main components are the *cell* and the larger gathering of cells, the *celebration*, and sometimes an intermediate level called *congregation*. They are lay led with a clear evangelistic focus and groups are expected to grow and divide to create yet more cells.⁷⁵

2.3 Ways of categorising church planting models

The influences behind the different models of church planting include: (i) denominational ecclesiology, (ii) whether a church or mission agency is doing the planting, (iii) the ethos of the planting body, (iv) the theological and spiritual outlook of the planting body, (v) factors relating directly to the context including a sociological understanding of the area /community to be planted in, and (vi) the size of the planting team.

⁷² Murray, *Laying Foundations* p141.

⁷³ *Laying Foundations* p142.

⁷⁴ *Laying Foundations* p147.

⁷⁵ *Laying Foundations* p150f.

There is a divergence of terminology used to describe the different models of planting, and there is no standardisation of definition. Many terms are drawn from the worlds of horticulture or obstetrics, but there are also those from the nautical, astronomical and military worlds.⁷⁶ Most advocates teach and use their own preferred categories.

Christine categorises models of planting according to the sponsoring body, be it a church, agency or other group.⁷⁷ Murray identifies four basic categories of church planting in history:⁷⁸ (i) “Pioneer planting” in areas with no Christian witness, (ii) “Replacement planting” in areas of church closure, (iii) “Sectarian Planting” in order to establish a Christian presence of a particular theological outlook or churchmanship, and (vi) “Saturation Planting” which is concerned to ensure that every identifiable “people group” has access to a church which is contextually relevant.”⁷⁹

Murray then categorises the models with reference to the agency planting, the motivation for planting, and the resulting relationship of the new congregation to congregations. Nodding categorises church plants according to their relationship with other congregations, especially the planting church.⁸⁰ Wagner lists twelve models in two categories: “modality models”; which are categorised by their congregational structure, and “sodality models” which are characterised by their link to mission agencies and other para-church structures.⁸¹ John Collins, an Anglican, has analysed plants according to their church administrative

⁷⁶ *Laying Foundations* p260.

⁷⁷ *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today* p126.

⁷⁸ *Laying Foundations* p88ff.

⁷⁹ *Laying Foundations* p102.

⁸⁰ Nodding, Peter, *Local Church Planting* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994) p108.

⁸¹ *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p59.

location and categorised them into “P-type plants”: those planted within the parish, and “D-type plants”: those affecting parish boundaries and so involving the Deanery or Diocese.⁸²

I have categorised them as autonomous daughter congregations, networked congregations, planting by groups, planting by key individuals, planting by event, and planting by social action. The models are given in a number of publications.⁸³

2.3.i. Autonomous / Semi-autonomous daughter congregations

The mother-daughter plant is one church planting a daughter congregation, and is the most widely used model. A plant at a considerable distance from the mother church is called Colonisation. Sometimes a church will Adopt a struggling local small church, to work in partnership with it, giving stimulus, resources and support. The plant remains responsible to the mother church.

Another expression of mother/daughter is that of Schism. They usually arise from differences in theology, styles of worship, personalities, unresolved tensions, unrestrained enthusiasm, or even personality conflicts. A new church may be established with positive results, but there will be much pain and heartache on the way.

2.3.ii. Networked congregations

⁸² *Church Planting: 1*. p15.

⁸³ *Church Planting - The Training Manual*. p39ff.
Laying Foundations p259ff.

Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today p100ff.

Church Planting: 1. p14f.

Board of Mission, *Breaking New Ground* (London: Church House, 1994) p6f.

Weatherley, Harry, *Gaining the Ground* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1994) p8f and p31ff.

Planting New Churches p15ff.

Strawberry runner congregations are an adaptation of the mother/daughter relationship. The new congregations have some independence within an ongoing relationship with the sending church and sister congregations. The separate congregations also meet together for worship. This model may enable a church to adopt a homogeneous approach in its congregations and be inclusive in the larger gathering . Cell churches are another expression of networked churches, the focus of church life is the small group which is supplemented by larger meetings of congregation and celebration.

2.3.iii. Planting by groups

Mission teams are often used by mission agencies or denominational bodies to plant a church. Teams may find it difficult adjusting to the local context, and there may be problems of continuity when they have finished their work.

2.3.iv. Planting by key individuals

Three types of church planting entrepreneur have been identified. (i) The independent church planter who, usually working independently of denominational structures, plants one congregation and then moves on to plant others. (ii) The founding pastor who has plants a church, remains and whose role changes to be more akin to the traditional minister. (iii) The apostolic planter who establishes new churches and leads others to plant. He exercises leadership over the all the churches established.⁸⁴

2.3.v. Planting by event

This rarely used model involves a denominational group, working with a small existing group of believers to engage in a period of intense evangelistic mission activity as a prelude to establishing a church.

⁸⁴ Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* p70.

On a smaller scale Nuclear Fusion⁸⁵ occurs when those of similar theology and churchmanship become aware of each other's existence and begin to meet and plan to establish a church of their particular hue.

2.4 Planting or cloning?

Robinson, Warner and Murray are critical of "cloning", the indiscriminating replication of present church structures, style and ethos.⁸⁶ Such replication may draw on the strengths of the planting church, but it may also restrict creativity and relevance to the target community. Considering ecclesiological issues in the light of an incarnational missiology will enable church planters to be more flexible and creative, freeing them from more traditional patterns which are merely one cultural expression of the Church.

There is generally a lack of historical perspective within church planting literature. Writers tend to overlook the historical precedents the models they propound may have. Recent centuries have seen churches started in houses, others had their initial meetings in public buildings, larger churches have planted daughter congregations and some became small networks analogous to the present day multi-congregational model.

Most models reflect a strong sense of mission and commitment to express the Kingdom of God and incarnate the Gospel. Where churches are in relationship, leadership tensions will arise and with them ecclesiological issues. It should be noted that some semi-autonomous plants intend to remain in that state whilst for others it will be a stage on the way to becoming autonomous or independent within a wider denominational structure. Fundamental issues to be addressed include the transition from church plant to church, the degree to which a

⁸⁵ Weatherley, *Gaining the Ground* p34.

⁸⁶ Murray, *Laying Foundations* p124f and 265.

worshipping congregation is a church, and the nature of independency and accountability. There is a strong desire to relate practice to Scripture and, with the older denominations, to church tradition. The underlying ecclesiology of most authors, even Anglican, does seem to be that of a “Gathered Church”, although for Anglicans this is compounded with understandings of the parish. Church planting that reflects an adequate missiology will include more than evangelism, and true to an understanding of incarnation, it will be costly for individuals and churches.

The new congregation is able to address the needs of the area, develop new patterns of worship with relevance to the surrounding community, and be guided and equipped by the mother church. However, the attractive factors of the mother church are not always easily replicated, the new endeavour may not result in imaginative approaches to mission, friendships are divided, it can be demanding of energy and resources, and it may weaken the sending church.

The models are categorised according to the planting body, the new congregation’s relationships to the planting body, or the underlying motivation. In articulating the models the authors demonstrate possibilities, and illustrate what can be achieved. The models give freedom within a relationship of accountability, and indicate the steps to full independency, and most of the models give the opportunity to regroup if the plant fails. They are reorienting the focus away from church as a building or institution, from church planting as erecting new buildings, to the establishing of a new congregation of believers presenting a Christian witness in a given community. They present possibilities for obtaining freedom from the institutional restraints of traditional churches, yet remaining within the overall “sphere” of their particular denomination.

The models present examples of good practice, but also present the dangers of

mere unimaginative replication. The writers' underlying missiology takes precedence over their ecclesiology. Their concern is mission focused, they want an increase in effective mission-minded congregations, not just more churches.

Missiologically, the different models demonstrate the possibilities for incarnating the gospel in society. However, the strong emphasis upon evangelism may produce congregations that over emphasise one aspect of mission and fail to engage in the broader expression of God's mission with resultant lost opportunities for social concern, and even for evangelism that may accompany such practical acts of Christian compassion.

The models present helpful modes of working, but it is not always clear whether a particular model is meant to be a transient phase or the terminus on the journey of church planting. There is an inherent danger that a congregation's development may be hampered by this uncertainty. It is at this point that greater attention to ecclesiology would prove beneficial, to establish the principles guiding the work, to discern the nature of the church as it is to be worked out in a particular plant, including the relationship between mother and daughter churches, and the leadership in each congregation. The missiological imperative to plant often overrides ecclesiological considerations when the plant is first established. They are left until relationships become strained and ecclesiological issues surface. This is not only the issues of presiding over the sacraments, but taking initiatives in leadership, the general direction and development of the new congregation, the issues of accountability to, or over reliance upon the mother church. Anglicans face the constraints of the parish system and formal liturgical requirements. Planting outside of the parish can produce suspicion within neighbouring parishes, as well as administrative difficulties. Liturgical requirements will safeguard certain aspects of worship but may also limit the ability to respond to the culture being reached, although current liturgical

reforms are attempting to address this. Ecclesiological issues may hinder the mission of the Church. Those of a more congregational approach are often concerned with the practicalities of establishing a “lively Christian” presence which is usually defined in terms of being Evangelical or Charismatic, or both. This may effectively unchurch the church of another denomination. Missiological concerns may override the ecclesiological and, in particular, the ecumenical.

New styles of church raise ecclesiological issues of what is a church and what are the marks of an authentic church. Church planting authors place evangelistic mission as a key authentic mark of the Church. However, a church is more than a witnessing community, or mission agency. Issues of size, congregational competence, wholistic mission, fully rounded church life, pastoral and teaching ministries need to be given attention. New styles of church like seeker congregations, cell churches, and network churches may well prove effective at attracting sections of the population not currently attracted by the Church, but whether they adequately reflect what it means to be church may prove to be another question. Seeker congregations may so limit the experience of worship that it will detract from its witness to the power of God encountered in corporate worship. Cell churches may become inward looking and lose its focus on growth and multiplication. Network churches may become so locked into their own culture that they may fail to be welcoming to others or even adjust to changes with their own culture outside their church, as is happening with some ethnic churches where talk of their homeland is “foreign” to their children born and raised in Britain. A fresh emphasis on a more comprehensive ecclesiology would help to overcome these concerns.

3. Identifying opportunities for church planting

Having considered the theological rationale and the models of church planting we now turn to consider some factors underlying the decision to plant.

3.1 Vision

The importance of vision for motivation is widely recognised, as Shenk and Stutzman indicate. They present Paul's pattern at Philippi, of vision, plan and opportunity, as one to emulate.⁸⁷

In the Bible "vision" is an experience, given by the Spirit, involving a vivid personal visual experience that can be lucidly recounted to others but which may require interpretation. Visions played a significant role in the life of the early church in Acts, being seen as manifestations of the Spirit, and were instrumental in the development of the churches life. Acts 2, 9,10, 16.9-10, and 18.9).⁸⁸

Writing from a commercial perspective, Dunn, citing the AV translation of Prov. 29.18, equates vision with a strong sense of purpose which is clear, specific, shared with others and commonly owned.⁸⁹ Similarly, Brierley articulates the characteristics of vision as being personable, clear, shareable, realistic, beyond oneself, energising, and humbling.⁹⁰ Vision, in this sense, is a creative way of perceiving future possibilities.

Church planting authors use biblical references to the word "vision", but their definition owes more to the world of management. "Vision" is used to define aims and purposes. However, as with the biblical form of vision, it is considered to be divinely given, but rather than a picture received, it is more about a purpose

⁸⁷ *Creating Communities* p57.

⁸⁸ cf. deSilva, D.A., 'Visions, Ecstatic Experience', in Ralph Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds. *Dictionary of the New Testament and its Later Developments* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1997) pp1194-1198.

⁸⁹ Dunn, James, *The Effective Leader* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1995) p135f.

⁹⁰ Brierley, Peter, *Vision Building* (Eltham: Christian Research, 1989) p28f.

discerned. As Christine suggests, vision “is a perception of God’s possibilities.” It is a Spirit inspired awareness of what “God’s future for a church, organisation or person could be.”⁹¹

Church planters use of the word “vision” may attribute divine inspiration to plans which may merely be the product of creative minds. It is used to indicate that a certain proposition is God’s will and to motivate church members. The word carries both a sense of divine revelation, and that of goals to be achieved.

3.2 The power of information

The D.A.W.N. (Discipling A Whole Nation) Movement, which has had a significant influence upon church planting in recent years, has placed considerable emphasis upon the power of information. The movement developed from the experience of James Montgomery in the Philippines during the 1960’s and 1970’s and is strongly influenced by Evangelical / Charismatic Theology and the Church Growth Movement. The basic strategy of D.A.W.N. includes identifying key individuals who have a deep concern for their nation, gathering data which is seen to speak prophetically, drawing together denominations and parachurch organisations in a national forum to prayerfully examine the data, and setting challenging and realistic goals. Montgomery emphasises information as a stimulus to mission activity and identifies two strands of data; “contextual” information about the area to be evangelised, and “institutional” data regarding the resources available within the churches.⁹² The processed information facilitates the discovery of the “prophetic message” for an area, especially in relation to evangelism and church planting.⁹³ The message of God is “drawn from their situation,”⁹⁴ which enables “optimum goals” to be established.⁹⁵ This

⁹¹ *Planting Tomorrow’s Churches Today* p158.

⁹² *DAWN 2000* p114 and 124f..

⁹³ *DAWN 2000* p133.

⁹⁴ *DAWN 2000* p136.

view of prophecy integrates a typically Neo- Pentecostal view of prophecy with good managerial practice.

Others have drawn attention to the gathering of information through mission audits. Robinson and Christine call for an assessment of the mission possibility, vision, need, and receptivity of an area.⁹⁶ Information can be obtained which will help to identify the geographical features which shape the community, the community's demographic profile, needs, resources, existing Christian presence, and the opportunities to serve the community.⁹⁷ Understanding what this information means will enable a church to understand the area in terms of its needs and potential, and will help them to engage in mission in the most appropriate way. However, Montgomery's understanding moves beyond the interpretation of data to suggest that God speaks through information and circumstance and that it can contain a revelation of God's purposes. To give biblical support for this he cites the response of Nehemiah to the news he heard of Jerusalem.⁹⁸ Whilst information does stimulate and equip, and the Spirit may use it to inspire, Montgomery goes further than most in suggesting that it reveals God's prophetic message.

Consideration of information will lead to examining possibilities for planting. I shall identify three types of opportunities that may be presented.

3.3 The opportunities for planting

3.3.i. Demographic opportunities

Demographic studies analyse target audiences, ascertain the receptivity to the

⁹⁵ *DAWN 2000* p137.

⁹⁶ *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today* p157.

⁹⁷ cf. *Breaking New Ground* p9f.

⁹⁸ *DAWN 2000* p116f.

Christian message, and discover people's needs. Demographic opportunities for planting arise, says Christine, because a mobile population has changed the demographic and social landscape.⁹⁹ Demographic opportunities are those presented by a sizeable community that has no, or little Christian / Church, presence within it. Some qualify this in terms of their theology or churchmanship, and would see an opportunity for planting if there was no church of their particular denomination or tradition. Allan suggests that many of the churches he surveyed were planted to fill "an evangelical vacuum."¹⁰⁰

3.3.ii. Cultural opportunities

Culture diversity has increased over recent years, not only as a result of immigration, but other social and cultural developments, particularly in youth culture, and in the identification of other culture or sub-culture groups, often determined by age, social background, employment, social networks, etc. Therefore, discovering the main cultural groups is an important sociological issue with missiological import prompting the corresponding concern for relevant mission to a given group. However, Allan's survey indicates that churches predominantly plant amongst their own cultural type, middle class suburbia, rather than embracing the mission opportunities of the inner city or of cultural groups that are not presently effectively reached by the Church. He questions whether planting takes place as a result of strategic thinking or as a pragmatic response to "a vocal nucleus of relatively isolated believers" which may simply have the effect of "reinforcing the denomination's [Baptist] middle-class profile."¹⁰¹

Consideration of a community in cultural rather than geographical terms presents

⁹⁹ *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today* p39.

¹⁰⁰ *Planted to Grow* p4.

¹⁰¹ *Planted to Grow* p8f.

opportunities that may heretofore not have been considered. Cultural considerations will enable a more appropriate incarnating of the Christian message and will shape the form of Christian community expressed by the church plant. The dangers inherent in this approach are that the Gospel may become too closely connected with a particular cultural expression, others in the community may feel distanced from it, and forms of apartheid may be developed.

3.3.iii Stylistic opportunities

Some authors question whether present churches and their styles are best placed to reach contemporary society. Warner,¹⁰² for instance, advocates new styles and forms of church to reach the unchurched. New church plants have adopted a range of styles of worship including traditional, charismatic, relaxed / informal, highly liturgical, and seeker focused. However, only two of the churches Allan surveyed wanted to form a church of a significantly different ethos.¹⁰³ If this is representative it suggests that few are actually discovering and expressing new ways of “being church”, which begs the question of whether planters are free to be creative or are bound by their past traditions.

Seeker orientated churches, cell churches, and youth churches are seeking to be innovative, but all raise questions of ecclesiology such as whether the agenda for church life is set by believers or seekers, whether cell churches with their prime focus on small groups produce detachment from the wider Church despite “celebration” meetings, and whether churches aimed exclusively at one culture group is a denial of the gospel of reconciliation and unity in Christ.

The emphasis upon practical missiology is akin to, and influenced by, the Church

¹⁰² *21st. Century Church* p147.

¹⁰³ *Planted to Grow* p5.

Growth Movement which presents a strong emphasis upon the need for a clear sense of purpose, a vision of what is to be achieved, and the setting of goals and objectives in order for the purpose to be realised. This emphasis is to be welcomed in terms of enabling mission, but if it reduces the mission of God to the mere employment of management practices, devoid of pneumatology, then it become incompatible with biblical missiology which is Spirit driven. Goal setting has does have biblical precedent as seen in the ministry of Paul (Rom. 15.22-28), but there were times when his ambition was restrained by the Spirit (Acts 16.6).

In modern Britain cultural boundaries are no longer synonymous with geographical ones. Therefore demographic, cultural and stylistic opportunities each enable the missiological purpose to be focused with particular intent. Church planting becomes a positive expression of incarnational mission as the new church identifies with a particular community, and articulates an appropriate cultural expression of the Christian Faith.

However addressing the needs of homogeneous communities may result in a reduced missiological focus that fails to express the broader agenda of the mission of God. Whilst being an expression of incarnation they can also become patronising to those they seek to reach.

This approach raises the contentious issue of homogeneity. The Church Growth Movement has claimed that unbelievers are more likely to be attracted to a congregation of a similar cultural ethos to themselves and therefore churches should target their mission to people of their own social group. This is in conflict with the biblical principle of reconciliation and unity in Christ. Paul recognised the need to adapt his lifestyle and preaching to appeal to different audiences (1 Cor. 9.19-23), but he also appealed for unity (1 Cor. 1.10ff). Similarly the need

to contextualise the gospel to a segment of the population needs to be balanced with consideration of the unity and catholicity of the Church. Whilst a cultural focus may be appropriate, and is frequently inherent, to be exclusive would be a denial of missiology.

Ecclesiology, these opportunities raise issues regarding the nature of the Church, vis-à-vis its expression. A territorial mind-set is not the preserve of national churches. Parish-type thinking has permeated most denominations. The identification of opportunities in relation to demographic, culture and style raises the question of “non-geographic” parishes. Recognising the complexities of modern life, the mobility of the population, the compartmentalisation of leisure, employment, and church attendance, the authors have called for the recognition of planting opportunities presented by the networks of relationships that people operate within. Such an approach suggests a form of cross-cultural mission which calls for a clear ecclesiology that is able to distinguish between that which is of the essence of Christianity and that which are changeable cultural expressions.

Conclusion

Most writers are also practitioners whose priority is to provide practical guidance to would-be church planters, but they also seek biblical and theological endorsement and foundation for church planting. Often intensely pragmatic, their theological understandings of the Kingdom of God, Missiology, Incarnation and Ecclesiology are largely hidden, subsumed under the practicalities of the processes of church planting. Missiologically, their main emphasis is that of sharing in God’s evangelistic mission to a lost world. It is this sharing in the work of the Kingdom that they see as resulting in new churches being planted. These new churches are to incarnate the gospel in their particular community locations. Therefore their ecclesiology is submitted to serving this purpose. Their

theology of the Kingdom of God determines the nature of their ecclesiology which is also shaped by their missiology.

However, whilst these themes are represented in church planting literature a more comprehensive consideration of them would be particularly helpful. It would facilitate four things: (i) a better evaluation of present church planting, (ii) an understanding of the Church within the broader perspective of the Kingdom, (iii) a recognition that genuine mission involves the good news of Jesus being incarnated in the most appropriate way, and (iv) a perception of ecclesiological issues in the light of the mission of God. In the light of such theological reflection church planting could be seen as a genuine drawing together of the implicit priorities of missiology and ecclesiology in the service of the Kingdom.

Word Count = 9937

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