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Review: Church Planting : Laying Foundations

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African-Americans celebrated the North's victory by exercising their new freedoms. They left their former white churches and started their own new churches. They even formed new denominational structures to support their new churches. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, they generally accepted opportunities to receive an education but were not especially interested in becoming like their northern brethren.

Rebuilding Zion is a welcome addition to southern religious historiography. Stowell studied an aspect of southern religion that has too long been neglected. By examining the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, as well as new African-American denominations, Stowell's overview is certainly comprehensive. The work's central problem, however, is that it tends to be somewhat "thesis driven." Stowell claims that his religionists were not monolithic in their thinking and then proceeds to treat them as if they were. For example, the black exodus from white churches precipitated mixed responses from whites. Some rejoiced. Others were saddened. Still others helped their former slaves find new meeting houses. Moreover, Stowell seems to accept the Lost Cause thesis a bit too uncritically. Were all white Southern evangelicals stuck in an antebellum time warp? Were all white Southerners dedicated only to restoring a religious version of *status quo antebellum*? Not likely.

These criticisms notwithstanding, *Rebuilding Zion* offers an excellent overview of religious Reconstruction's more problematic issues. America's costliest war to date left wounds that good intentions, no matter how they were motivated, could not salve. Stowell captures this aspect of postwar religion most effectively.

Keith Harper

Ministry Studies

Church Planting: Laying Foundations, by Stuart Murray. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 1998. Pp 302.

Stuart Murray serves as the Oasis Director of Church Planting and Evangelism at Spurgeon's College, London. He developed the first accredited university church planting and evangelism degree in the United Kingdom. Murray brings practical experience to his academic discipline. His church plant in East London has grown and birthed three congregations. Another of his church starts failed, giving Murray additional insights into church planting dynamics. As director, Murray supervises church planting students and serves as a church planting consultant.

Church Planting consists of eleven chapters and two appendices. Spurgeon College's principal, Michael Quicke, states in the foreword that the major contribution of the text is Murray's theological focus (p. x). Sound theology is essential to church planting. Murray operates from the conviction that "the kinds of churches we plant are more important than the numbers" (p. 179). According to Murray, the relationship between church planting and theology is symbiotic. Church planting must be anchored to sound theology. In turn, theologians require church planting in order to retain their ability to understand the mission of the church (pp. 48-51). Pragmatism and methodology dominate church planting works. The texts that include theological issues usually devote minimal attention to their examination. Murray expresses concern that the Church Planting Movement's fascination with methodology may actually contribute to church planting failures (pp. 4-5).

Church Planting brushes against methodological issues but remains focused on the theological and philosophical fields. Therefore, Murray's work is a valuable contribution to the body of church planting literature. Murray explores the theological, missiological, and ecclesiological issues encountered by church planters. If his work had a methodological purpose, its relevance for North American church planting would be limited. His British field of ministry shapes his church planting perspective, but the issues examined are cross-cultural in nature.

Murray begins by acknowledging and responding to criticisms of church planting. Though set in Britain, the objections are the same ones expressed by opponents in the United States: There are already enough churches; church planting weakens existing churches by dividing the resources; and church planting has become an end in itself rather than a means to an end.

Murray responds to the objection of "overchurching Britain" with several cogent observations. First, church planting is proactive and can aid in reversing national church decline. Second, the most important consideration is not the

number of churches in an area but their location. Murray faces the issue of terminally ill churches. In the section "Church Pruning," Murray states, "There are good reasons for closing churches. To regard this as always indicating failure or defeat is unhelpful. None of the churches established by the Apostle Paul exist today" (p. 13). Murray reiterates his conviction that existence of a church in and of itself is not positive. The quality of churches is more important than the quantity. He argues, "Simply planting *more* churches of the kind we already have is not the answer. . . . Planting more of these churches is not a mission strategy worth pursuing. But planting new kinds of churches may be a key to an effective mission and a catalyst for the renewal of existing churches" (p. 14).

More difficult to answer is the second objection, "Church planting weakens the ministry of the church." Murray presents examples of new churches drawing converts and unchurched Christians, but acknowledges a major problem. Church planting efforts are often targeted on areas of greatest receptivity. Churches are planted where churches do well. Murray confesses:

Most church planting currently is taking place in 'comfortable Britain.' Some of this is enabling the church to reach comfortable Britons more effectively; some of it is merely redistributing comfortable Christians. But the impact on the other Britain, where the church is already weak, is minimal and may even be counterproductive as the church increases its profile in comfortable Britain and so seems less relevant than ever to many urban and rural communities.

Murray's discussion of this objection is germane for Southern Baptist church planting efforts. If Atlanta or Dallas is the sole standard of success, Southern Baptists are doing well as church planters. However, the nation's metropolitan areas are a wasteland for Southern Baptist church plants. The success of Southern Baptist church planting efforts will be determined by the proliferation of healthy churches outside denominational strongholds.

Objection three, "Church planting has become an end in itself" is an objection receiving little discussion in church planting literature. Murray charges, "Church planting has the potential to be a significant hindrance to evangelism, social action and other aspects of the mission of the church" (p. 21). Much of Murray's text focuses on the issues related to this objection. Church planting that is not theologically sound affirms the objection. Church planting for church planting's sake is not advancing the kingdom of God.

Murray spends two chapters arguing that church planting must be set within a biblical and theological framework. He identifies three concepts central to a church planting theology. The three: *missio Dei*, Incarnation, and the Kingdom of God also provide a standard for evaluation (p. 47). According to Murray, the mission of God (*missio Dei*) is not limited to the activities of the church. The acts

of God embody the mission of God. Therefore, Murray asserts, "Church planting divorced from the broader mission context is simply ecclesiastical expansionism" (pp. 31-32). In turn, the church and the kingdom of God are related but distinct.

The kingdom of God is an activity versus the community of the church. The kingdom is dynamic; therefore, the church is sent out to the lost instead of waiting for them to come in. The kingdom is larger than the church. God is not limited to the church in his activities. The kingdom determines the scope of God's mission (pp. 39-47). The church is an agent of the kingdom "but no more" (p. 85).

Murray displays an appreciation for the local church and the history of church planting, but he clearly restricts the scope of the church. Murray contends that the focus given to the church "in church planting literature and practice" is problematic (p. 67). This inordinate amount of attention justifies the fascination with church planting because church planting is essential to the advancement of God's work. The attachment of the "biblical" label fends off serious examination of the church planting movement (p. 70).

In his text Murray brings a fresh perspective to the New Testament's applicability to church planting. Paul's epistles should be understood as church planting in genre (p. 76). The pastoral epistles also must be understood in the church planting context. First and Second Timothy and Titus "are even more directly related to church planting strategies" (p. 77). Many church planters begin building their biblical support for the movement at the Great Commission. Murray places major emphasis on the gospels. He argues that forgetting the Gospels has caused "church planting to become detached from the central theme of Jesus' teaching—the Kingdom of God" (p. 84).

A passage often used to cheer up church members when attendance is low—Matt. 18:20, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst"—is actually descriptive of a church community which is "of fundamental importance in church planting" (p. 85). The role of accountability and discipline is critical in church planting and growth (pp. 227-30).

In the fourth chapter Murray examines church planting history. He identifies and discusses the various phases of church planting. *Pioneer planting* involves establishing churches in regions never reached by the gospel. If those churches cease to exist due to persecution or decline, then *replacement planting* is needed. *Sectarian planting* and *saturation planting* refer to planting churches in areas already reached with the gospel. The former deals with advancing denominational or ecclesiological convictions, while the latter attempts to evangelize an area effectively.

The remaining chapters of the text addresses the cultural issues faced by contemporary church planters, church dynamics relating to congregational size, church structure, leadership, methods, and models. Murray contributes a balanced evaluation of Willow Creek, postmodernism, and the role of women in

church planting. His text is the first church planting work I have read that addresses the role of Emperor Constantine and the resultant Christendom. Church planters in the United Kingdom and Europe have been facing the residual effects of the demise of state churches. American church planters would benefit from our European counterparts' experience as we face a postmodern culture.

Murray's text is far ranging in the examination of models and practices. It does not deal with methodologies. It is not a "how-to" text, but it does deal with the "whys." Church planting has a plethora of methodological works. This text fills the gap in a church planter's library. The publisher has recently sold the rights to an American firm which will be releasing a North American edition in the Fall.

William Brown

Evangelism for the Fainthearted, by Floyd Schneider. 2d ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000. Pp. 220.

Today most denominational personal evangelism programs come packaged with scripted gospel presentations. Laypeople memorize these scripts and become dependent upon them for their proclamation and understanding of the gospel's content. Floyd Schneider directs Christians away from these scripts and back to the Bible for an effective proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers. His methodology for evangelism involves a believer stirring the curiosity of his or her lost friends and family members through conversation so they can read the Bible together over a period of weeks or months.

Schneider divides *Evangelism for the Fainthearted* into eighteen chapters. These chapters include more generalized topics such as: overcoming the fear of evangelism, establishing the need for friendship evangelism, preparation for engaging in friendship evangelism, directing conversations toward spiritual things, and motivating unsaved friends to read the Bible with you. Other helpful chapters include such tips as witnessing to cult members and suggestions when unbelieving friends will not read the Bible.

Schneider also includes chapters specifically detailing his proposal to faint-hearted believers who desire to evangelize. He offers enumerated principles of friendship evangelism modeled by Christ, witnessing to a friend and to a stranger, and beginning the discipleship process for unbelieving friends who become believers. In addition, he includes his personal commentary of John 1-6, the section of Scripture he suggests believers read with their friends. The remainder of the book consists of numerous responses to objections commonly given by

unbelievers. Drawing from personal situations and conversations in his life, Schneider presents retorts to virtually every excuse given in any conversation.

Of all the principles Schneider offers, the book centers on twelve. The first ten of these principles are found in chapter 7, explaining how to witness to a friend, while the other two appear in the next chapter on witnessing to a stranger. These twelve principles serve as the guideline for Schneider's evangelism model in which conversations between a believer and an unbeliever turn into their reading the Bible together. These principles include: become a friend before a preacher (p. 87), do not condemn your friend (p. 88), get to know your friend using his or her felt needs for conversation (p. 92), make others curious (p. 92), ask questions (p. 93), do not defend yourself (p. 93), do not attempt to prove the veracity of Scripture or your views (p.95), demonstrate the fallibility of your friend's thinking (p. 96), make your friend answer his own questions from the Bible (p. 100), ask your friend to read the Bible with you (p. 101), always be prepared to talk about your faith (p. 114), and do not begin your conversations mentioning God or the Bible unless they do (p. 114).

Evangelism for the Fainthearted offers its readers a most helpful guide to evangelize twenty-first century unbelievers. The accounts of his personal witnessing conversations offer readers an exhaustive number of ways to disarm objections given by unbelievers. Schneider's witty illustrations and engaging logic prove most helpful to readers who feel inadequate to respond to their friends' rejection of engaging in spiritual matters.

Schneider must also be applauded for his effort to prescribe both a biblically modeled and biblically centered method of evangelism. His method intentionally transfers the authority for presenting the gospel away from an individual believer's beliefs or interpretations and exclusively toward the Bible. He contends, "God's thoughts, as found in His Word, will do a far better job of convicting our unsaved friends than we can with our explanations of His Word" (p. 22). Such a technique eases fainthearted believers who either cannot memorize scripted gospel presentations or lack the confidence they might not say the "right" thing in a personal encounter.

In spite of this exhaustive content, the book contains some minor shortcomings. For example, Schneider could have included many more sources for his readers' reference than he did. He suggests ten exceptional sources but would have profited by including such books as Mark McCloskey's *Tell it Often—Tell It Well* and Wayne McDill's *Making Friends for Christ*, to name just a few.

Also, Schneider's purpose for writing the book rises out of his desire for believers to lead their friends to Christ by making the unbelievers curious enough to read the Bible with them. He states, "This method . . . with which this book deals emphasizes reading the Bible with a friend" (p. 20). While Schneider no doubt displays the proper focus upon reading the Bible with an unsaved friend, the book consists of more conversational examples to convince unbelievers to