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CHURCH PLANTING AND THE HEART OF GOD

Dave Earley 10/25/06

If you could cut the heart of God you would find that God bleeds church planting. Let me explain.

1. The Expansion of the Kingdom

God's passion is that His kingdom will spread to all peoples. His plan is that His kingdom increase through church planting. Fred Herron makes this case following a careful study of the Word of God.

God's heart for the expansion of his kingdom is revealed throughout the Old and New Testament. God intends the church to proclaim and demonstrate the kingdom so that his kingdom will spread to every people group on the earth. The passion in God's heart for the expansion of his kingdom is a desire for all nations to glorify God the eternal King. He has given the church a kingly commission to go into the entire world and make disciples who are loyal worshippers of the King. **The heart of God for kingdom expansion is the foundation for planting new churches.**¹

Authors David W. Shrenk and Ervin R. Stutzman also see the kingdom link with church planting. They have written, "**Church planting is thus the most urgent business of humankind.** It is through the creation (or planting) of churches that God's kingdom is extended into communities which have not been touched by the precious surprise of the presence of the kingdom of God in their midst."²

2. Missio Dei

Missio Dei is a Latin phrase that has been helpful in reminding the church that mission is not the invention, responsibility, or program of human origin, but flows from the character and purposes of God.³ Historically, the term "mission" was used to describe the acts of God, rather than the activities of churches. Mission is not something the church does for God. It is the church getting in sync with the heart of God and cooperating with the activity of God on Planet Earth. According to Tom Jones,

God's nature is at the root of mission. The living God portrayed in the Bible is a sending God. He sends because of His love for the world (John

¹Fred Herron, *Expanding God's Kingdom Through Church Planting* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003), 19.

²David W. Shrenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 23.

³Murray, 39.

3:16). He sent Abraham from his home into the unknown, promising to bless the world through him if he obeyed (Gen 12:1-3). God sent Joseph into Egypt to help preserve God's people during a time of famine (Gen 45:4-8). When the time had fully come, God sent His son. Later the Father and the Son sent the Spirit on Pentecost (Gal 4:4-6; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; acts 2:33). Finally Christ sends His church (Matt 28:19-20).⁴

Later Jones concludes, **“The most efficient way to fulfill the total mission of a sent church is the multiplication of local churches Every local church should consider itself a center for world mission.”**⁵

The church of God is to be on mission with God. It is the reason the church exists. When a church ceases to be on mission, in a real sense, it ceases. Emil Brunner has memorably stated, **“The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.”**⁶ David Borsh concurs, “. . . it is impossible to talk about church without at the same time talking about mission. Because God is a missionary God, God's people are missionary people. The church's mission is not secondary to its being: the church exists in being sent and building up itself for its mission.”⁷

Our God is the Missionary who sent His Word, His Son, and His Spirit into the world. God is the One who defines, directs, energizes, and accomplishes mission on planet Earth. Therefore, God must be the originator, catalyst, architect, and engineer of church planting. **Church planting is merely cooperating with Him in fulfilling His global mission initiative.**

3. Incarnation

The incarnation of God taking human flesh not merely *revealed* God to man, but also *modeled* evangelism to man. When the Word became flesh, believers learned the importance of enfolding proclamation into incarnation. It is not enough to merely tell the Gospel. It must be lived out with and before people in Christian communities. The New Testament way of doing this was through establishing new churches. A healthy church is the body of Christ on earth. **Establishing a new church brings the hands and heart of Jesus into the lives of needy people.**

4. The Principle of Multiplication and Reproduction

The very first command in the Bible is “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22). For plants that meant “reproduce plants.” For Adam and Eve that would mean

⁴Tom Jones, *Church Planting from the Ground Up* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 10.

⁵Ibid., 16

⁶Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1995), 87.

⁷David J. Borsch, *Believing in the Future* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1995), 32.

“bear children.” For churches it means to “plant new churches.” Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter write, “The Church is a living body. Just as everything that’s alive will grow and reproduce, so your church should be growing and reproducing itself by starting another new church. Just as God originally created all living things to reproduce, that is, ‘according to its kind’ (Gen. 1:11-12, 21), so your church can double its ministry by planting another church.”⁸

Conclusion

We fulfill the first command by multiplying churches. We take the hands and feet of Jesus into the lives of needy people by planting churches. We cooperate with God’s global initiative by planting churches. We expand God’s kingdom by planting churches. If God bleeds church planting, why shouldn’t we do the same?

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⁸Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter, *Churches That Multiply* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2003), 7.