

The Biblical Vision for Church Planting

Does the New Testament present a clear theology of church planting? Should we categorize church planting under missiology or ecclesiology? Is church planting something that only concerns those who have a special gifting and place in their hearts for it, or should it be on the heart of pastors of established churches? Is there any practical insight in the New Testament into how to plant churches? In this seminar, we will consider these critical questions as we examine the theological-biblical basis for church planting.

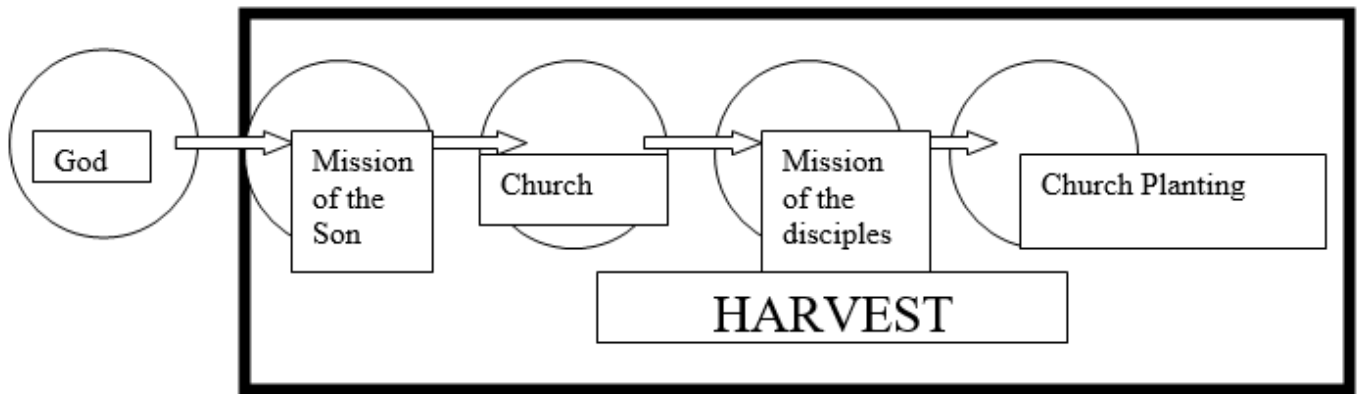
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1. Critical questions with which to start

- Is a “Theology of Church Planting” in the NT apparent, or are practicing church planters trying to find a biblical basis for something that is not there?
- Do we categorize church planting under missiology or ecclesiology?
- The status of church planting: is church planting something that only concerns those who have a special gifting and place in their hearts for it, or should it be on the heart of pastors of established churches?
- The practical side of church planting: does the NT give us practical insight into how to plant churches?

2. Theological Reflexion

Nowhere in the Bible do we find a “Theology of Church Planting”. However, what we do find are theological perspectives concerning church planting in the Bible. The starting point for a theological perspective on church planting is the triune God. He lives with Himself in unclouded fellowship. Every theology emanates from Him and flows back to Him. Should we misunderstand God as the source of greatest and fullest joy, then we will have misunderstood the goal of church planting.



Conviction: Theology leads to missiology from which emanates ecclesiology. A church that is not extending to people living without God has lost sight of its reason for existing.

3. Theological Perspectives on Church Planting

3.1 Missio Dei

Missions is not a discovery of man, but flows out of the being, character and goal of God. God is the missionary who sent His Son and Spirit into the world, in order to win back those who are enemies of His, to save them and live with them in unclouded “Shalom”. Missions is triune and not anthroposopic in its foundation. Missions is defined, led, empowered and fulfilled by God. “As you have sent me into the world, so I also send you into the world” (John 17:18). “As my Father has sent me, so I also send you” (John 20:21).

3.12 Missio Dei and the church

The term “missional” (sending) describes the church in its being as a called and sent people of God. As a result, missions is not a part of the church. Much more, it is its basis and direction. South African missiologist, David Bosch, writes, “Because God is a missionary God, God’s people are a missionary people. The church’s mission is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for mission.”¹ Darrell Guder completes this perspective: “The classical doctrine of the missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”² Combining these viewpoints, we acknowledge that the starting point of the church is not the church but God’s mission. The church is not static as if she would live for herself alone. She is much more a body covered with God’s grace, and exists to gift this grace to others.

¹ David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 32. Because God is an evangelistic God, His people are an evangelistic people. The mission of the church is not secondary to its being; the church exists for missions in its sending and planting.

² Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 5. The classic teaching of missio Dei understands God as Father sending His Son, and God Father and Son sending His Spirit, which is expanded to include: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.

3.13 The direction is outward toward the world and not inward toward the church

3.14 In its entirety *Missio Dei* cannot be limited to evangelization or church planting. Church planting finds its authority in the wider horizon of God's mission.

3.15 Church planting is dependent on God for her direction and power. The danger in successful church planting is that one relies on his methods or strategies, and not on the living God. The methodology can absolutely suppress the spiritual components. This is why the spiritual life of the church planter plays such a superior role.

3.16 Church planting reflects the character of our missionary-minded God.

3.17 God wants to reach lost people through the planting of new churches.

3.2 Incarnation

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word“ (Heb 1:1-3).

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

God speaks most loudly and clearly through Jesus Christ. God's Son incarnates the importance of missions in His becoming man. He left his home, clothed himself in flesh and blood, and “camped” among lost people. This behavior has great meaning for the church planter.

For one thing, Jesus - and not the early church – is the source of inspiration of movement toward the lost.³ The church planter has to be fired up, driven by and based on Jesus, and must fight against letting the church be his orientation.

For another thing, preaching and living among the people have to be paired together. Incarnation is an expression for seeking the nearness of people.

Too many church plants are *attractional* and not *incarnational* in their focus. What are the signs of an attractional in comparison to an incarnational church plant? *Attractional* church plants emphasize a building as the place where the lost people can come in order to be saved. They put value on events, like church services or evangelistic meetings, where people can be reached. In addition, they let themselves be influenced by the wishes and ideas of those already saved, but who do not live the message among non-Christians, instead of acting in accordance with Jesus' words and actions. Churches who don't live out the message among non-Christians live apart from God's worthy mandate. Churches should be measured according to how many of their members live in the harvest in contrast to those who spend their time in the barn.

³ Stuart Murray, *Foundations*, p. 42.

3.3 Worship and church planting

An attribute of the community of believers is their worshipful stance in relation to their Father and Savior, Jesus Christ. Followers of Jesus worship Him with their actions (obedience) and their speech. In God's new world, worship plays a great part (Rev. 7:9-12; 15: 2-4, 12-14). "Jesus Christ is LORD" will be the confession on the lips of all peoples, whether they were convinced before His second coming or not (Phil 2:9-11).

The first missionary trip of the Apostle Paul was born during the worship time in the believing church. "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Missions and church planting were decreed by God because lost people cannot worship God. Worship leads to missions, and missions takes on form in church planting.

3.4 God's Kingdom

A. *Different Starting Positions*

1. Emphasis on the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)
Rationale: Evangelization precedes making disciples, and occurs in the context of the church. Church planting is an outgrowth of evangelization and discipleship.
2. Emphasis on the church
Rationale: The NT emphasizes the church as a place through which God works. A missionally-minded and -driven church will by nature produce new churches.
3. Emphasis on evangelization
Rationale: Because church planting in the NT was linked with evangelization, it should also be linked together today.

B. *Goals for a Church Plant*

1. Preliminary note: God seeks access to people
 - a. God wants to live among people
 - Tabernacle (Ex 25:8)
 - Temple (1Ki 6:13)
 - Future (Rev 21:3)
 - Jesus (John 1:14 „camped“)
 - Today He is present in His church (Matt 16:18; 1Cor 3:16)
 - b. God wants growth, and this through His church (Col 1:16)

C. *Church planting defined*

1. "The reproduction of a dynamic community with God in Christ that is steered by a gifted leadership who generates the connection to Christ and Christians, who carry out the sending in word and deed" (Schindler).

D. The intermediate goal: A church is “planted“, when...

1. the Gospel is preached
2. people bow under the Lordship of Christ (Church: they belong to the Lord)
3. Christians grow in their trust to Jesus and live committed to one another
4. Leadership is set in place

E. The goal: church multiplication

1. A characteristic of a healthy church is a church that is healthy enough to reproduce itself.
2. Acts 16: 4-5

F. The four self-definitions of the independent church plant

1. Venn and Anderson
 - Self-Perpetuating - Evangelization und Mission
 - Self-Administrating - Leadership
 - Self-Carrying – Finances and Support
 - Self-Theologizing – Contextualization