

# Foundations

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# Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to

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## EDITORIAL

On 7 September 2014 my wife and I, along with 25 other believers, planted City Church in the centre of Manchester. It was the third church that we had been involved in planting (the other two were in Birmingham) over the course of fifteen years. It was no small matter for us to relocate our young family from Liverpool to Manchester (a divide that few cross!) but we did it because we were convinced that (in the words of Steve Timmis) church planting is both a *principle* and a *strategy*.

Church planting is a *principle* because the gospel demands it. In the third century AD, Cyprian famously claimed: "Outside the church there is no salvation". By the Middle Ages that statement had been used to assert that salvation was only to be found in the visible Church of Rome. In that sense, of course, it was utterly false. But there is a sense in which Cyprian's statement does hold true: There is no salvation outside of Christ and the church is the body of Christ. It is both the ordinary means by which people come to salvation and also the community into which people are saved. The New Testament makes clear that the church has been entrusted with the gospel (2 Tim 1:14), holds the keys to the Kingdom (Matt 16:19) and has been commissioned to take the good news of Jesus to all nations (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 9:16). Moreover, it is the body into which people are incorporated when they are saved. God does not intend for his people to live siloed lives in glorious isolation. Rather, his purpose in the gospel is to unite the redeemed into one new community in Christ (Eph 2:13-22) and through this community to display his glory to the heavenly realms (Eph 3:9-10). Local churches are not social clubs or teaching centres or even a good method for evangelism; they are an expression of God's glorious purposes in the gospel. Therefore, as a matter of principle, we should be committed to growing existing churches (both numerically and in maturity) and planting new churches. It is a biblical principle mandated by the gospel itself.

In addition, church planting is also a *strategy*. Missiologist Peter Wagner once said: "Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven". That is true and it was certainly a vision embraced by the early church. Following the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem the believers scattered (Acts 11:19). Most went to preach the gospel to fellow Jews but some went to Cyprus and Cyrene where they preached to Hellenists and a great number believed (Acts 11:21). Thus the church in Antioch was planted and the church in Jerusalem sent one of their best, Barnabas, to train them (Acts 11:22). Barnabas in turn travelled to Tarsus where he persuaded Saul to join him in leading the discipleship program at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Together they spent a whole year training the fledgling

church. By the time we get to Acts 13, the church in Antioch is already well established. It is led by a team of five prophets and teachers, drawn from a variety of races and backgrounds. Already the church has a radical impulse for mission and, as they worship and fast together, the Holy Spirit directs them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for further church planting work.

This is a pattern we see throughout the Book of Acts. Paul and his team focus on strategic commercial and intellectual centres (Corinth, Ephesus, Athens), preaching the gospel there in order to see the gospel go out and churches planted throughout the provinces. The Pastoral Epistles show us that a key means by which this objective was realised was through Paul leaving members of his team behind in regions to ensure that churches were planted with properly-appointed elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:1-2; Titus 1:5).

Church planting is a biblical strategy and it is a strategy that works. New churches really do reach new people. Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York has produced a church-planting manual. In it they collate research from numerous studies on the effectiveness of church planting. According to this research, the average new church gains most of its new members (60%-80%) from people not currently worshipping anywhere else. By comparison, churches that are 10-15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations. This means that the average new church congregation will bring 6 to 8 times more new people into the Body of Christ than on older congregation of the same size. Tim Keller posits the following explanation:

As a congregation ages, powerful internal institutional pressures lead it to allocate most of its resources and energy toward the concerns of its members and constituents, rather than toward those outside its walls. Older congregations, therefore, have a stability and steadiness that many people thrive on and need. Many non-Christians will only be reached by churches with long roots in the community and the trappings of stability and respectability. But new churches, of necessity, are forced to focus far more of their energies to the needs of their non-members and become much more sensitive to the sensibilities of non-believers. There is also a cumulative effect. In the first two years of our Christian walk, we have far more close, face-to-face relationships with non-Christians than we do later. Thus new Christians attract non-believers to services 5 to 10 times more than a long-time Christian. New believers beget new believers.

Church planting is a biblical principle rooted in the gospel and a biblical strategy driven by concern for the lost. Therefore, we have decided to dedicate the current issue of Foundations to a theological examination of church planting. We have four articles on the topic. The first, authored by Neil Powell (Chairman of City to City Europe) examines church planting movements and considers how they differ from both institutions and networks. The article addresses the nature of gospel partnership within movements and considers what these movements unite around. Common challenges are addressed and the argument is made that such movements

are necessary if we are to reach our cities and nations with the good news of Jesus Christ.

The second article by Philip Moore (Director of Acts 29 Europe) argues biblically and historically for the importance of doctrinal distinctives in church planting networks. He highlights the distinctives of Acts 29, with an emphasis on complementarianism and Reformed soteriology, seeking to show how they are rooted in biblical fidelity and gospel centrality, determinative for ministry and practice and the bedrock for collaboration and trust. As such, he contends that these distinctives are essential for a network that has the ambition of planting healthy, theologically robust churches throughout Europe.

In the third article, Neil MacMillan (Free Church of Scotland) considers how to create a church planting movement in a traditional denomination. He challenges the assumption that church planting movements are dependent upon a “house church” methodology and shows how the antithesis of movement and institution is unhelpful. The church is both an organisation and an organism and it is important that this be remembered. MacMillan then recounts the experience of the Free Church of Scotland over the past twelve years as it has sought to develop a church planting movement within the denomination. The various steps and challenges are outlined and MacMillan highlights the advantages of developing such a movement within a traditional denomination.

In the fourth article, Andy Paterson (FIEC Mission Director) examines multi-site church and considers how it might be used as a transition tool in the process of church planting. He begins by recounting his own experience as pastor of Kensington Baptist Church in Bristol. He then traces some of the American influences on the multi-site movement and outlines key criticisms of it. Having set out the arguments in favour of multi-site, Paterson suggests that it has a continuing role to play in facilitating church plants and church revitalisations.

The final article returns to the doctrine of creation from the previous issue of Foundations, and argues for “chronological creationism”, an approach to the creation-evolution debate which emphasises the importance of the Bible’s chronology, both relative and absolute. Stephen Lloyd argues that maintaining the relative chronology of the Bible allows us to develop a robust scientific approach to origins which is innovative and apologetically appealing.

The issue concludes with ten book reviews on various theological, ecclesiological and pastoral topics. As ever, we welcome correspondence and submissions for future issues, and trust that the current issue will be of benefit to the reader.

*Ralph Cunningham*  
*June 2017*

# THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENTS

*Neil Powell\**

This paper introduces church-planting movements and considers how they differ from both networks and institutions. It next addresses the nature of gospel partnership within such movements and the place theological vision plays in enabling and establishing a partnership. Further, the paper reflects on some of the challenges movements face, and how they may be overcome, including defining a biblical basis for such partnerships. Finally, it seeks to establish the claim that the development of church-planting movements is necessary to reach our cities and our nations for Christ.

Church planting has consistently featured in the church's attempt to reach the UK with the gospel. Yet a strong case can be made that for the first time in generations the evangelical church has become convinced of the strategic priority of church planting if it is to reach a post-Christian nation with the gospel of Christ. Reflecting this change, a growing body of literature has paid attention to the need for new forms of church and, in particular, missional community models of the church if we are to be effective in this task.<sup>1</sup> Considerably less attention has been given to the need for church multiplication movements if we are to see healthy and effective church planting happen at a pace, and to the extent that is necessary to reach our cities and our nation for Christ. Through the ministry of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and its sister church-planting organisation Redeemer City to City, Tim Keller has led the way in advocating the establishment not just of church-planting networks but movements. *Center Church* offers a paradigm for how this might be achieved.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Neil Powell serves as founding pastor of City Church Birmingham, Co-Director of 2020birmingham and Chair of the Executive Team of City to City Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Missional Church might be best summarised as “gospel community on mission with Jesus”. For an overview see Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 251-261. For a leading example in the literature, see Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, Section 3, 251-377. Also, published separately, Tim Keller, *Serving a movement: Doing balanced, Gospel-centered ministry in your city* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016). The content of this article is essentially a sustained reflection of things learned from the ministry of the organisation *Redeemer City to City* and its sister organisation *City to City Europe* and of the example and ministry of Tim Keller in particular.

## 1. *What do we mean by church-planting movements?*

In considering the place of movements for church multiplication, it is essential to distinguish a movement from both a denomination and a network. A degree of confusion arises from the fact that movements share some common characteristics with networks. They, in turn, share some of the dynamics observable in a movement. However, it is critical to our understanding that we grasp the fact that movements are not networks and they are quite unlike denominations.

A church-planting movement may be defined as a self-sustaining movement of church-planting churches, committed to working together through a shared vision for the planting of gospel-churches within a city, region or nation.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. *Attributes of church-planting movements*

Movements, by their very nature, are difficult to define.

*Movements are felt as much as they are understood.* They have a certain atmosphere. They exude a culture, and people sense the resulting “vibe”. These vibes cannot be objectively passed along and studied; they must be caught and experienced.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this difficulty, seven characteristics commonly recognised as belonging to church-planting movements will help highlight some essential differences between movements, networks and denominations.

#### (i) Open, rather than closed, membership

In his seminal essay “*Sets and Structures: A Study in Church Patterns*”<sup>5</sup> Paul Hiebert contrasts two approaches to issues of inclusion and belonging in a group; namely, centered-set thinking and bounded-set thinking.

Hiebert outlines four distinctives of a centred set. First, belonging is not defined in terms of the boundary but of the centre. Church-planting movements function as centred sets, in which churches are invited to gather

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<sup>3</sup> David Garrison has studied the global phenomenon of such movements and offers the following definition: “A Church Planting Movement is a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.” David V. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, Virginia: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Hirsch, “Reflections on Movement Dynamics” in Keller, *Serving a Movement*, 253 (emphasis his).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Hiebert, “Sets and Structures: A Study in Church Patterns”, in *New Horizons in World Missions: Evangelicals and the Christian Mission in the 1980s*, ed. David Hasselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 217-227.



around a centre of common ideas, values and goals – shared theological vision.<sup>6</sup> What matters in bounded-set thinking is defining and maintaining the boundary – that which is needed, as a minimum, for a church to be included within the set. Denominations would, therefore, be an obvious example of bounded sets. In some sense, it is appropriate to say in centred-set dynamics, “all are welcome” (within the bounds of orthodox Christian faith) as long as they are moving towards the vision and values at the centre of the set.

Secondly, Hiebert observes that in a centred set “a number of stages or levels of participation might be recognized”.<sup>7</sup> In other words, churches can journey towards the centre over time as they increasingly warm to the vision and values at the centre. Centred sets, such as movements, also allow for different levels of commitment and recognise that plants often have a primary affiliation with a network. For many planters, the movement may not be their primary network. For example, they are also part of a bounded set, such as A29, FIEC, New Frontiers or a denomination, but the vision and values of the movement serve to complement the training and resourcing they receive from their network. It could be said that the movement, therefore, serves the networks.

The third quality of a centred set is that leadership is defined not by position or authority; leaders lead by way of influence in a movement. It is those whose thinking most closely aligns with the centre who emerge as leaders. The idea is everything.

Finally, Hiebert argues that the church, or in our analysis the movement, is concerned to strengthen the centre “so that it might attract a following”.<sup>8</sup>

In this difference of philosophy, we readily identify a key distinction between movements and networks. Movements are centred sets; networks are more typically bounded sets. This difference is reflected in how membership functions. Typically, as a bounded set, you either belong or you do not. For movements, categories of inclusion and exclusion are less helpful. Such an open-handed approach ensures movements are very dynamic and have a fluid structure.

Frost and Hirsch, leaders within the missional church movement, affirm the centred-set approach in their work.

Everyone is in, and no one is out. Though some people are close to the center and others far from it, everyone is potentially part of the community in its broadest sense.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to the concept see Keller, *Center Church*, 17-25. See also Mark Pickett, “Review Article: *Constructing Theological Vision*”, 98-111 [accessed 22 February, 2017]. Online: <http://www.affinity.org.uk/foundations-issues/issue-64-article-5---review-article-constructing-theological-vision>. The term has its origins in Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Hiebert, 225.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

They notice that bounded sets are often hard at the edges but then soft at the centre, centred sets are soft at the edges but hard at the centre.<sup>10</sup> Bounded sets operate like a farmer who erects a fence to keep cattle from roaming too far. However, in an environment like the outback of Australia, where ranches are so large that fencing it impracticable, and where conditions are hot and dry, boring a water-well at the centre of the ranch is a far more effective way of ensuring that cattle will never stray far away. Just so, it is the vision at the heart of a movement that keeps churches in the movement.<sup>11</sup>

In a later work,<sup>12</sup> Hiebert develops his thinking on how set theory may inform our understanding of questions of inclusion and belonging. To the categories of centred sets and bounded sets, Hiebert introduces a second variable: well-formed or fuzzy boundaries. It should be recognised that centred sets may have sharp or fuzzy boundaries. A well-formed centred set, while having a focus on the centre, will, nevertheless, seek to separate out things inside the set from outside. By contrast, a fuzzy set has no boundary and could be described as “a loose collection of people with varying degrees of commitment”.<sup>13</sup> Such a model in the context of church partnership would inevitably lead to theological relativism.

This second variable brings a necessary clarity on what form centred sets should take within gospel movements. Such movements would, while concerned to focus on the centre, also recognise the need to protect the integrity of the movement through a clear boundary of theological orthodoxy. A true gospel movement must, however, be a centred set *with* a clear boundary.

Scripture affirms clear boundaries at several key points: Christ is declared to be the only way to God. In the end people will either be saved or lost, and sinners are called to turn radically away from their evil ways to righteousness and love. There is no *both-and* approach to these and other essential matters in the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

## (ii) Spontaneous rather than planned

Church-planting movements are also distinctive in their lack of any “prescribed formula or strategy for how or where these churches will exist

<sup>9</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2013), 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Hiebert, “The Category Christian in the Mission Task”, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 107-136.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

or function”.<sup>15</sup> What generates the planting of new churches is a shared culture and not a process.

Movements do not normally occur through large frameworks such as big budgets, big plans, big teams, or big organizations. Movemental Christianity does not seem to emerge from big-box programming... Movements occur through small units that are readily reproducible... Being nimble and flexible is all important.<sup>16</sup>

Keller also notes: “Movements spontaneously produce new ideas and leaders and grow from within.”<sup>17</sup>

### (iii) Organic rather than structured

Movements, like all living things, have the capacity to grow from inside. In that sense, it does not depend on an outside organisation. Rather it is self-propagating and self-sustaining, “the result of a set of forces that interact, support, sustain, and stimulate one another”.<sup>18</sup>

A church (or group of churches) with movement dynamics generates its own converts, ideas, leaders, and resources from within in order to realize its vision of being the church for its city and culture... In the language of missiologists, such a church is “self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting”.<sup>19</sup>

*2020birmingham* is a church-planting movement for the city of Birmingham, UK. Begun in 2010, it has helped to establish sixteen churches from across a variety of networks and denominations. From the outset, the movement has had no strategy for planting, nor any particular ideas as to how the movement would generate further planting. Churches and networks within the movement have raised up planters and opportunities for planting, but the movement itself has not been a co-ordinated programme for planting.

### (iv) Flat rather than hierarchical

Movements are also marked by the absence of hierarchical structures or chains of command. Leadership comes through influence rather than a voice of authority. Catalytic leaders provide vision, inspiration and influence to the

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<sup>15</sup> Danile Kewley and Sven Östring, “Can Church Planting Movements Emerge in the West? Case Studies of Three Church Planting Strategies in Western Australia.” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 2010, no.2, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters become Movement Makers* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass), 178-179.

<sup>17</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 340.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

movement. They also serve to strengthen the vision and serve as gate-keepers who protect the “DNA” or values of the movement.

The general rule in movements is that we structure just as much as is necessary to adequately empower and train every agent/agency in the movement so it can do its job.<sup>20</sup>

Movements are therefore nervous about the negative effect of institutionalisation. Hirsh concludes, “we must resist the tendency, innate to every organisation, to slow down and lose momentum”.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, going further, movements are by their nature bottom-up rather than top-down; a movement, by definition, comes from the grassroots. “Movements that spread rapidly usually proliferate within and across networks of relationships.”<sup>22</sup>

(v) Kingdom advancing rather than institution building

A further important distinctive of movements is that while there is strong ownership of a shared vision or goal, the movement itself makes no claim to own the churches within the movement. In movements, the principle of invisibility is at work as the movement exists simply to serve individual planters and networks through prayer, training, resourcing and so on.

All of which means that churches within a movement begin to spend considerable, time, energy and resources supporting and facilitating the church-planting of those outside of their tribe or network. “Movements make the what – the accomplishment of the vision – a higher value than how it gets done or who gets it done.”<sup>23</sup>

(vi) Highly innovative and risk taking

A culture of innovation also marks movements. When the goal is the rapid multiplication of churches across a city or a region, flexibility is critical, and churches that are highly-contextualised to their communities are most likely to achieve their goals. Planting is high-risk, dynamic and innovative; and new ideas and initiatives come from any direction and in ways that quickly impact the whole movement. Within 2020birmingham, innovation is evident in the sheer variety of church-planting models represented within the movement. All types of planting are encouraged and supported whether that be pioneer planting, multi-site, mother-daughter, or replant/revitalisation. And within these models of planting can be found various approaches to

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<sup>20</sup> Hirsch, *Reflections*, 256.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>22</sup> Stetzer & Bird, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 340.

church life and practice, from more traditional examples through to expressions of the missional community model.

Kewley and Östring observe this same phenomenon at work in their study of three church-planting movements, that they show both a strong commitment to mission and adaptive, flexible approaches to planting.<sup>24</sup>

(vii) Collaboration rather than isolation

The key to fast-growing city movements is a commitment to work across denominations, working together for a single, greater goal. The sum is very much greater than the parts. A compelling vision that is bigger than any one church or network can achieve trans-denominational partnership. Quite simply, “changing a city with the gospel takes a movement”.<sup>25</sup>

Such thinking requires planters and networks within a city to be deliberate and intentional in seeking out partnership. The vision compels planters to look for opportunity; to give time to building new relationships, driven by a conviction that so much more can be, and needs to be, done than can ever be done in isolation.

If you will begin to view cooperation as a joyful opportunity to cause someone else to succeed, then giving away all you have for the sake of a new or established network is worth the effort. Church multiplication movements will occur only so far as leaders are ready to cooperate for a cause that is far greater than themselves.<sup>26</sup>

The following table highlights similarities and differences between movements, networks and denominations according to the seven criteria considered above.

	Movement	Network	Institution or Denomination
Membership	Open	Closed	Closed
Strategy	Spontaneous	Spontaneous	Planned/Strategy
Organisation	Organic	Organic	Structured
Leadership	Influence	Influence and Authority	Authority
Ownership	Kingdom	Institution	Institution
Innovation / adaptation	Innovative	Innovative	Traditional
Cooperation / partnership	Collaborative	Tribal	Tribal

<sup>24</sup> Kewley and Östring, 33-34.

<sup>25</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 371.

<sup>26</sup> Stetzer and Bird, 81.

Church-planting movements and the dynamics here briefly considered should not be thought of as merely an alternative way for churches to work together, driven only by pragmatic considerations; such movements exhibit the same dynamics evident in the birth and global expansion of the church. Movements find their earliest expression in the Spirit-led, explosive growth of the church in the book of Acts.

Th[e] biblical language suggests there is an organic, self-propagating, dynamic power operating within the church. In Acts, we see it working essentially on its own, with little institutional support or embodiment – without strategic plans or the command and control of managers and other leaders.<sup>27</sup>

Church-planting movements are, therefore, in an important sense, a desire to see God work in our day and age in ways seen in the birth of the church.

## *II. How do church-planting movements work?*

### *1. A rich understanding of gospel partnership*

How are movements different from other forms of trans-denominational gospel fellowship that might exist across a city? Bruno & Dirks<sup>28</sup> draw our attention to the significant contrasts between gatherings of churches for fellowship and mutual encouragement on the one hand and the kind of kingdom partnership we recognise in movements on the other.

Gospel partnership is so much more than gospel fellowship. Fellowship gatherings tend to exist simply for encouragement or perhaps to share information or expertise – for example, to inspire and send leaders back to churches with new ideas and a refreshed vision. In movements, however, it is not ideas alone that are shared but more importantly goals – joint ownership of some tangible greater goal that far exceeds the expectations and plans of any individual church.

Ownership of these goals is truly a shared responsibility. Churches agree to pray, work and perhaps give finances or time to something bigger. All of this means that when the leaders of churches gather, there is not so much a focus on those individual churches but on the kingdom.

In a network, I help you accomplish your own goals, expecting you'll do the same for me. In a partnership, we work together to accomplish Kingdom goals that we couldn't achieve by ourselves.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 344.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together: Biblical Strategies for Fellowship, Evangelism, and Compassion* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

2020birmingham, from the outset, identified a shared goal: facilitating the planting of twenty new congregations over a ten-year period. That goal required a sustained commitment, mutual accountability and shared responsibility.

## 2. *Four conditions necessary for the development of a movement*

Four conditions are foundational to the development of a healthy movement.

### (i) A culture of planting amongst gospel churches

As has been already noted, the evangelical church across all denominations in the UK has increasingly recognised the urgent need to plant new churches. The missional agenda of the New Testament is shaping attitudes to outreach and evangelism.

The life of Paul and the action of the early church demonstrate that church planting was a primary activity. Any church wishing to rediscover the dynamic nature of the early church should consider planting new churches.<sup>30</sup>

Movements cannot occur unless this mind-set is active across a number of churches in a city or region. If the gospel is to reach our nation what is needed is a greater commitment to planting – additionally, that every gospel church would be intentional about planting. It requires that every church might affirm the statement “if we could, we would plant churches” and then embrace a second statement: “therefore when we can, we will plant churches”.

A natural church planting mind-set means church leaders will think of church planting as just one of the things the church does along with everything else... So church planting should be an ongoing, natural part of your ministry as worship, evangelism, fellowship, education, and service.<sup>31</sup>

Unless and until a critical number of churches in any one place share the conviction that new churches are necessary to reach our communities with the gospel, the dynamics necessary to birth a movement will be absent.

### (ii) A culture of disciple-making

If at the heart of a church-planting movement are churches that in turn plant more churches, then of necessity these must be disciple-making churches. In

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<sup>30</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016), 42.

<sup>31</sup> Keller, *Serving a movement*, 219-220.

short, the goal is to produce disciples who will go and make disciples, out of which new congregations are born. As such, these churches will have high expectations for members, along with a commitment to train and envision every one of them for ministry. This will include a high missional agenda where a concern is shared not just to prepare people for the gathered meetings of the church but to go “out there” with the gospel – sharing life with work colleagues and neighbours and to be present in the community.

When dealing with discipleship, and the related capacity to generate authentic followers of Jesus, we are dealing with the single most crucial factor that will in the end determine the quality of the whole – if we fail at this point we must fail in all the others.<sup>32</sup>

Neil Cole comments: “We want to lower the bar of how church is done and raise the bar of what it means to be a disciple.”<sup>33</sup>

### (iii) A culture of multiplication

While the vision is merely to plant churches on an occasional or ad-hoc basis, little will be achieved.

The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else – not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.<sup>34</sup>

When the vision is to reach a city the goal, of necessity, must be far, far bigger than any one church or network can achieve on its own. Kingdom co-operation between church-planting churches and networks is founded on a recognition that collaboration is necessary to achieve the aim. For a city the size of Birmingham, the need is significant. It is not just twenty new congregations that will be needed; the number is probably closer to a hundred. By beginning with the aim of working together, for twenty church-planting churches who, in turn, will plant more churches, this greater goal is perhaps achievable.

### (iv) Kingdom leader(s) and catalysts to pioneer the work

Movements of the gospel require movement leaders who will catalyse the planting of church-planting churches. These leaders establish the vision and

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<sup>32</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 102.

<sup>33</sup> In *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Tim Keller, “Why Plant Churches?” n.p. [accessed 3 January 2017]. Online: [http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why\\_Plant\\_Churches-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf).



seek to find and also envision potential partners. Crucial to this task is an ability to build the necessary trust and understanding to draw churches into partnership.

The first thing a multiplication movement has to do is to find (or rally around) a multiplication leader. Such a person will need to be a leader with spiritual, ecclesiological, and missional credibility.<sup>35</sup>

### *III. Theological vision as the uniting principle for church-planting movements*

Two things are essential for the long-term viability of healthy church-planting movements: a shared theological commitment and, alongside that, a shared theological vision. Clarity on the gospel can alone provide a solid basis for unity in mission. Shared *theological vision* provides the values that shape the vision for mission. Unless this is explicitly celebrated, then there is no common goal and, therefore, no obvious reason to work together.

#### *1. The priority of theological commitment*

Bruno and Dirks draw attention to these twin needs as they distinguish between foundation and focus.

Kingdom partnerships are usually focused on one specific gospel implication: assisting the poor locally or overseas; influencing one area of culture, such as the arts; or teaching biblical interpretation to rising church leaders. Gospel implications may be the focus of a partnership, but they cannot be the foundation. When a single implication of the gospel is all that's holding us together, rather than the gospel itself, the ministry will fall apart as soon as the money runs out or differences arise, as they always do. Kingdom partnerships must be built on the gospel alone. This means that there should be a direct line between the aims of the partnership and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.<sup>36</sup>

For any movement to be self-sustaining in the long run, it cannot afford to assume the gospel. The movement itself must be rooted in and empowered by the gospel. The engine for a movement cannot be anything other than the gospel: "The gospel unites leaders and churches in a way that no philosophy, tradition, task, or mission ever could."<sup>37</sup> Without that commitment to a vision of the gospel, the gospel will quickly be lost. "If we're not driven by the gospel, *none* of our efforts will have any reason to continue."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stetzer, 358.

<sup>36</sup> Bruno & Dirks, 33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 48 (emphasis his).

## 2. *Shared theological vision*

However central our grasp of the gospel is to both inspire and enable a movement of the gospel more, is necessary if churches are to come together in meaningful collaboration. Tim Keller has highlighted the place of theological vision as the focus of partnership.

Theological vision is neither our doctrinal foundations which express “what we believe” nor is it an alternative to ministry expressions, i.e. “what we do”. Theological vision sits in the middle. It is “how we see”. It is doctrine filtered and applied, or the gospel implications addressed in “what you are going to do with your doctrine in a particular time and place”.<sup>39</sup> As can be seen from such a definition, theological vision is not an attempt to re-write the gospel for a different age. Theological vision is rooted in unchanging truth, but it simply seeks to ask how we meaningfully live out the gospel in all its fullness in our situation.

It is critical, therefore, in every new generation and setting to find ways to communicate the gospel clearly and strikingly, distinguishing it from its opposites and counterfeits.<sup>40</sup>

While the language may be somewhat unfamiliar, the necessity of highly-contextualised churches can be found throughout Scripture. In the book of Acts, a sophisticated theological vision is at work in the preaching and life of the Apostle Paul, something summarised in his statement, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”<sup>41</sup>

As Hirsch observes, “movements are essentially DNA-based organizations”.<sup>42</sup> Movements are centre-set organisations founded on the gospel, focused around a shared theological vision.

### (i) Theological vision sets the priorities for ministry

Theological vision enables us to choose between the many potential priorities in ministry.

A Theological Vision helps you determine what you are going to do with what you believe within your cultural setting. With a Theological Vision in place, leaders and churches can make *better choices* about ministry expression that are *faithful to the Gospel* while at the same time are *meaningful to their ministry context*. That means a greater impact in Worship, Discipleship, Evangelism, Service and Cultural Engagement.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22 (NIV).

<sup>42</sup> Hirsch, *Reflections*, 262.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Felker, “Do You Have a Theological Vision,” n.p. [accessed 11 November 2016]. Online: <http://www.michealfelker.com/2012/12/13/do-you-have-a-theological-vision/>, (emphasis his).

To use a sporting analogy, a theological statement provides the “rules of the game”; theological vision suggests the tactics we employ by which we play the game.

Movements form when churches recognise the urgent need and priority of planting highly-contextualised churches for every community across a city – a vision so big that no one denomination, network or association of churches can possibly achieve.

(ii) Theological vision enables and encourages partnerships

Leaders from different denominations, with different temperaments, different theologies, if they share a vision, are able to work together in creative collaboration. It is a theological vision that creates what Keller calls a “bias for co-operation” without which movements rarely function.<sup>44</sup>

3. *Theological vision enables level 3 partnership*

The following model may prove useful in considering how an awareness of theological vision enables partnerships between gospel churches that might not have considered working together because of either different doctrinal distinctives or ministry expressions.



Level 1 partnerships refer to those that exist between churches of the same denomination or affiliation; partnership focuses on celebrating identical (or near-identical) shared doctrinal beliefs and convictions. That might, for example, include expressions of theological commitment to a certain ecclesiology, etc. However, it is evident that churches in the same denomination that share equally strong theological convictions, nevertheless, can look very different when it comes to ministry practice. How is such difference accounted for? At heart, although Level 1 churches share the same doctrinal beliefs, an implicit and unavoidable theological vision is also at work in addressing questions of ministry practice. So, one

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<sup>44</sup> Keller, *Serving a movement*, 236.

could and should expect two churches, which confess the same statement of faith but who exist in very different cultural settings, to arrive at quite different views as to what ministry should look like in their time and place.

Level 2 partnerships are broader and encompass churches outside of a single tradition. These partnerships are still rooted in doctrine, but level 2 partnerships tend to focus on a combination of shared theology and either theological vision or ministry expression. So, for example, churches with a commitment to Scripture expressed in a high view of expository preaching may choose to come together for training in Word-based ministry. A good example of such in a UK context would be Gospel Partnerships that bring together churches with similar convictions on expository preaching and Bible-handling. These churches could not come together to celebrate denominational distinctives but come together to train around shared ministry practices. Church-planting networks such as Acts 29 would also be an example of a level 2 partnership. Here it is the combination of shared theology and theological vision that brings churches from across denominations to partner together. However, it is clearly a level 2 partnership because membership is limited to those who can affirm five doctrinal distinctives of Acts 29.<sup>45</sup> These include a commitment to Reformed theology and a complementarian model of church leadership.

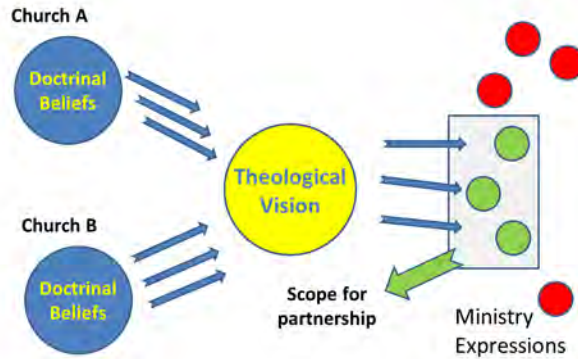
Level 3 partnerships focus neither on doctrinal belief nor ministry expression but a theological vision. A shared commitment to some core theological convictions are essential but what compels the partnership is a shared vision – a recognition and commitment to certain key ideas surrounding ministry.

So, church planters in a city may come from a variety of different tribes; Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Baptist, etc., because they share a very similar theological vision – the same vision and values, emphases and philosophy of ministry – that draw them into fruitful partnership. In the case of a church-planting movement, this is clearly a theological vision for highly-contextualised planting across a region or city.

Without a conscious awareness of how theological vision is at work in our thinking, it can be difficult to understand how level 3 partnerships are possible. How can churches, so different from one another on some doctrinal issues, and so different in ministry expressions work together fruitfully? Celebrating a shared theological vision is the answer. The following diagram represents something of how that works.

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<sup>45</sup> "Why our Doctrinal Distinctives are Important" n.p. [accessed 12 March 2017]. Online: <http://www.acts29.com/why-our-doctrinal-distinctives-are-important/>



Two churches can have different doctrinal frameworks and ministry expressions but the same theological vision – and they will feel like sister ministries. On the other hand, two churches can have similar doctrinal frameworks and ministry expressions but different theological visions – and they will feel distinct.<sup>46</sup>

Theological vision is the glue that holds a movement of quite diverse churches together: “Focusing on theological vision allows us truly to serve a movement rather than to just create or inspire churches in our own image.”<sup>47</sup>

The 2020birmingham movement is an example of a level 3 partnership. Church-planters from a wide variety of networks and denominations express their partnership by their shared concern to encourage and learn from one another as we share the questions of how to do effective pioneer ministry in the city of Birmingham. Our doctrinal beliefs, while essentially evangelical, are nevertheless somewhat different. Our expressions of ministry within our churches differ, and to such an extent that we could not honestly say that we would feel at home in each other’s churches. A shared theological vision provides both relational glue and drives the partnership forward – working together for the planting of twenty new churches or congregations between the years 2010 and 2020.

Level 3 partnerships are only possible where the churches are gathering together to focus their time and energy on questions of theological vision. That can, and in the case of the 2020birmingham partnership did, happen intuitively. In one sense, we discovered how a shared theological vision had enabled and empowered partnership retrospectively. But with a clear concept of theological vision, they become easier to understand and appreciate: “The quality of the theological vision often determines the vitality of the ministry, particularly in urban settings.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

An explicit theological vision is the centre for the set and enables movement leaders to seek out like-minded partners in ministry.

While we must continue to align ourselves in denominations that share our theological distinctives, at the local level our bias should be in the direction of cooperation with other congregations.<sup>49</sup>

When theological vision is grasped and how it functions is understood, churches are more willing to work together, putting to one side suspicions over working with those who do not share our same doctrinal distinctives and who look very different in ministry practice.

#### *IV. Challenges to developing church-planting movements*

##### *1. Co-operation without compromise?*

Arguably, the biggest obstacle to the development of church-planting movements within a city is not a lack of resources or finances but a reluctance on the part of gospel churches to partner at the third level. This could be for a variety of reasons. However, could it be that a sub-conscious culture within a church stands in the way of meaningful partnership? Often, and perhaps wrongly, attributed to Peter Drucker is the following truism: “organizational culture eats strategy for breakfast and dinner”. To overcome cultural inertia takes nothing less than a deep reflection on the gospel in all its implications. Where can we find in the Scriptures a biblical motivation for pursuing such partnership?

##### *(i) The gospel generosity in the ministry of the Apostle Paul*

Church-planting movements depend upon a radical generosity of spirit towards other believers. This is everywhere evident in the heart, life and ministry of the apostle Paul. Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the striking example set out in Philippians 1:15-18. Imprisoned for the gospel, Paul contrasts two groups of genuine preachers who preach Christ but from different motives:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Keller, *Serving a movement*, 236.

<sup>50</sup> Philippians 1:15-18 (NIV).

What can be learned from these verses? At least two principles stand out from this text that inform thinking on church partnership and compel us towards more generous collaboration.

First, Paul models an attitude of the heart in which he maintains that where the true gospel is preached, there is reason to rejoice, even if at a personal loss. What is so very striking about Paul's words here is that he can be so generous towards those whom he considers opponents. Only if they were preaching a true gospel would this be the case. There are plenty of examples in the writings of Paul in which he speaks out in the strongest terms against those whose preaching demonstrate that they are enemies of the gospel itself.<sup>51</sup>

However, despite the "envy" and "rivalry" demonstrated by those who oppose him in Rome, it does not seem that those Paul is addressing here preach another gospel. Rather, "these rivals to Paul instead seem to oppose the apostle for personal reasons and to have used Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to advance their personal agendas."<sup>52</sup> It is not clear quite how they were seeking to "stir up trouble" for Paul, but it seems unlikely that they are causing him physical harm or suffering, perhaps at the hand of his jailers for example. Bockmuehl offers the most persuasive explanation, suggesting they "stir up trouble" in the inner turmoil and pain Paul experiences as they pursue "naked self-advancement" and "their party's 'success' in numbers, prestige and influence within the Roman church".<sup>53</sup> In essence, while Paul is in prison they are free to promote their position in the Christian community.

Church-planting movements require churches to rejoice in the ministry success of others. The hard work of one church leader in facilitating the planting of new churches outside of his tradition will almost certainly have the consequence of benefitting other networks. They may even advance ahead of us.

Secondly, we learn that for Paul "the furtherance of the gospel is everything" and therefore self-interest must always give way to gospel concern. In v.18a Paul summarises his conclusion: "The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached."

It would be a mistake to think that Paul is indifferent to the motives of gospel preachers. Many examples in the New Testament testify to Paul's deep concern for the integrity of the gospel minister. But that is not his point here in the Philippians letter. What he wants to stress is that which is of paramount importance: that the gospel should advance, even if that is at personal cost to himself.

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<sup>51</sup> Galatians 1:6-10 offers the most striking example. See also Philippians 3:1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Frank S.; Thielman, *Philippians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 62.

<sup>53</sup> Marcus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians: Black's New Testament Commentaries* (London: A & C Black, 1997), 80.

In Paul's case it is his theological convictions that lead both to his theological narrowness, on the one hand, and to his large-heartedness within those convictions, on the other – precisely because he recognizes the gospel for what it is: God's thing, not his own.<sup>54</sup>

Sadly, such gospel generosity is often lacking, even when the charges are far less significant than here. "The fellowship of the modern church lies in tatters because of rivalry over turf, competition for money and influence, and petty theological disagreements."<sup>55</sup>

One wonders, therefore, if Paul is willing to find reasons to rejoice in gospel-advancement despite insincerity and false motives resulting in personal heartache, how much more should gospel churches be willing to extend generosity to those who are willing to be partners with us. Such a culture of generosity is essential if level 3 planting partnerships are to develop.

Such partnerships, by definition, require the taking of risks, investing considerable time and energy into building relationships with those who may have previously been viewed as rivals and about whom we have previously only held suspicions. Level 3 partnership requires us to work for the advancement of other churches and networks, even, at times, to prefer the interests of others to our own.

Gospel generosity, ultimately, is rooted in true gospel humility. Paul's own example in Philippians 1 leads on to his challenge to the Philippians in chapter 2: It is Christ's supreme example, as the one who surrendered self-interest for us that Paul uses to urge the Philippians to exemplify an extravagant gospel generosity, as God's people are called to prefer the interests of others to their own.

As the implications of what Jesus has done are worked out in our churches, we will be compelled to partner with other churches to make the gospel and its implications clear across our cities and around the world.<sup>56</sup>

## (ii) The gospel unity that overcomes from 1 Corinthians

A second passage of relevance to our considerations is Paul's rebuke of a divided church in Corinth:

My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: one of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ". Is Christ divided?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 125.

<sup>55</sup> Theilman, 66.

<sup>56</sup> Bruno & Dirks, 33-34.

<sup>57</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:11-13a, NIV.



It is not obvious whether there were actual factions or parties in the church. But what is evident is “a serious misunderstanding of the gospel itself, as well as of the church and its leaders; hence the energy expended, since for Paul everything else is subordinate to the gospel”.<sup>58</sup>

Here is a church divided and weakened by its refusal to come together in the name of Christ, expressing the unity won at the cross. Christ cannot be divided, so, therefore, the church must not be divided.

As in Philippians, Paul insists on gospel unity. Church-planting movements founded in the gospel, seek to live out, albeit in an incomplete way, this unity that is ours in Christ. They are a place where personal ambition may be seen to give way to gospel ministry, for to prefer personal interest to gospel ambition is at the very heart of sin:

This is the source of all evils, this is the most harmful of diseases, this is the deadly poison in all churches – when ministers devoted to their own interests rather than to Christ's. In short, the unity of the Church rests mainly on this one thing: that we all depend on Christ alone, and that men therefore take, and remain in, a lower place, so that nothing may detract from His position of pre-eminence.<sup>59</sup>

Christians across the city of Corinth were united to one another through their union with Christ; Paul calls on the church to live up to its calling.

It is a deep and rich appreciation of the gospel that enables the kind of partnership necessary for church-planting movements.

To build networks that effectively lead, mentor and support others in multiplication movements, everyone must pass what they know and what they do on to someone else. If you will begin to view cooperation as a joyful opportunity to cause someone else to succeed, then giving away all you have for the sake of a new or established network is worth the effort. Church multiplication movements will occur only so far as leaders are ready to cooperate for a cause that is far greater than themselves.<sup>60</sup>

Sadly, not only individual churches but some church-planting networks are unable to adopt the mindset necessary to birth a movement. As Gary Irby has noted, “We must be intentional about initiating relationships and even partnerships with tribes other than our own.”<sup>61</sup>

The 2020 Birmingham partnership was born out of a desire for highly-effective church-planting leaders to choose to collaborate with others, under a conviction that what was necessary for the city was far greater than that

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<sup>58</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014), 59, n56.

<sup>59</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Edited by David W. & Thomas F. Torrance. Translated by John W. Fraser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 28.

<sup>60</sup> Stetzer & Bird, 81.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

which could be achieved by individual churches or networks. To multiply, we must find new ways of co-operating.

The gospel alone has the power to unite Christians, churches and networks behind a vision to reach the lost. Sadly, whether as a result of tribalism or concerns over partnering with others at a third level, inertia is often the easier option. Once a movement is established, it is energising and exciting to see what can and does happen when God's people find ways to work together.

## 2. *Growing a movement*

However exciting and energising a kingdom partnership might be, it still requires considerable effort not only to begin a work, but then to scale-up the work as momentum builds:

Any vision that is compelling will be a big one, and big visions require long-term effort... In other words, a movement must eventually settle into a sustainable business model... A strong dynamic movement, then, occupies this difficult space in the center – the place of tension and balance between being a freewheeling organism and a disciplined organization.<sup>62</sup>

As has been noted, “the most difficult areas of creating a church planting movement is achieving reproducibility in the church plants.”<sup>63</sup> At least the following six factors are necessary to generating the movement dynamics needed to build a church-planting movement.<sup>64</sup>

*Prayer* – Urgent prayer which brings churches together to seek God for the cause of the gospel to the city builds unity and focuses attention on the lost. The more a movement prays, the more expectant it becomes.

*Recruitment* – For exponential growth, thought needs to be given to the continual raising up of new leaders. Attention must, therefore, be given to creating a pipeline into ministry. In Birmingham, much fruit has been borne from working intentionally with undergraduate students to identify those who demonstrate, early on, indicators of spiritual maturity and giftedness. A Ministry Training Scheme for young graduates provides an opportunity to work for a church-planting church. Further, the development of residency programmes to train potential planters “on the job” helps generate the next generation of planters.

*Training* – Church planters need to share a vision, and learn the skills necessary, for growing young churches and in turn to become church multipliers. “Development of leadership is an inescapable factor for church

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<sup>62</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 342.

<sup>63</sup> Kewley and Östring, 29.

<sup>64</sup> See Garrison, 172. Also Steve Addison, *Movements That Change the World: Five Keys to Spreading the Gospel* (Downers Grove, Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2009), 22-24.

multiplication movements.”<sup>65</sup> 2020birmingham seeks to provide this through monthly planters’ gatherings. This meeting enables planters to meet, share stories, pray together and offers a forum for peer-to-peer on-going planter training. The content of the training may focus on the planter (aspects of personal godliness, marriage, managing self, etc.), or the plant (everything from raising money, to casting vision and recruiting a core-group). On other occasions, training will consider the church-planting context (contextualisation, reaching the community, etc.). The viability of plants becoming established churches is significantly increased when local training continues to be provided. “The likelihood of church survivability increases by 135 per cent when the church planter meets at least monthly with a group of church-planting peers.”<sup>66</sup>

*Coaching* – Alongside residency training in advance of planting and access to peer-to-peer training along the way, planters very often benefit from access to a coach who is usually a more experienced planter to guide them through the challenges of planting. As a movement develops, the more experienced planters are encouraged to tithe their time, so maybe giving ten per cent of it to offering support, advice and counsel to the next generation of planters.

*Finances* – When church planting in a city reaches some exponential growth then financing the ever-growing numbers of plants does create a potential blockage to progress. Typically, a “multi-stream” approach to funding best serves to overcome this issue. Planters seek to raise start-up funds from a variety of sources including donors and trust funds who have entered into a partnership for planting with the movement. Encouragingly, studies suggest that lack of finances may not prove to be as great a problem to the development of movements as anticipated. “Surprisingly, it appears that most of the aggressive, reproducing churches provide less financial support than do less aggressive churches.”<sup>67</sup>

*Network* – Alongside support for the individual planters and their new congregations, some attention needs to be given to the development of the movement itself. With growth comes complexity and the challenges of “scaling up” the work. A movement may even need some staffing to facilitate the work.

## V. Conclusion or *Why do we need church planting movements?*

Ed Stetzer notes “The early church implemented the Great Commission mandate primarily by planting churches.”<sup>68</sup> The reality is that, given the

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<sup>65</sup> Stetzer & Bird, 134.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

extent of the challenge, it is a luxury the church in the West cannot afford to plant churches in isolation from other gospel churches.

It requires at least modest church planting in a city just to keep the body of Christ from steadily declining, and aggressive church planting is needed to grow the whole body – meaning ten to twenty relatively new churches in relation to every hundred existing churches.<sup>69</sup>

It is a sobering fact that in the West churches cannot be planted quickly enough to meet the gospel need. If churches within the same regions continue to plant in isolation from one another the challenge will remain insurmountable. Movements are not an alternative to networks or institutions, and this article is not written to discourage participation in such initiatives. The appeal is rather that, while necessary and desirable, they are not enough. Now that the church has rediscovered the place for planting it is time for churches to overcome their differences and work together in gospel movements that will multiply churches and maximise the spread of the gospel in this country.

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<sup>69</sup> Keller, *Serving a movement*, 229.

# DEFENDING SPECIFICITY ON DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES FOR A CHURCH PLANTING NETWORK: WHY REFORMED SOTERIOLOGY AND COMPLEMENTARIANISM ARE IMPORTANT

*Philip Moore*\*

Acts 29 is a church-planting network of over 630 churches from 18 different denominations in 30 countries. Acts 29, as well as subscribing to the Lausanne statement of faith, has five specific doctrinal distinctives which its members must accept whole-heartedly. Two of these are Reformed soteriology and complementarian relationships for men and women in the home and in the church. This article argues for the legitimacy of a network setting distinctives like these as boundaries for the network, describes how Acts 29 lives them out in its different constituencies and finally shows how they relate to the church-planting mission of the network.

## *Introduction*

### *1. An aspirational and increasingly actual description of our network*

Acts 29 describes itself as a diverse, global family of church-planting churches characterised by theological clarity, cultural engagement and missional engagement. That description is factual and aspirational. It is what I present to people in many countries as I travel around Europe. When people interact with the description, whether in fact or in principle, many things attract their attention, mostly positively: *Diversity* in terms of where and how churches get planted, and in terms of who plants them. *Global* in that our family comprises eleven networks across all continents (except Antarctica). *Church-planting* is generally well received, although some want to argue about the urgency of planting more churches when there are churches without pastors in desperate need of revitalisation (to which the answer is, we must do both – and church planting actually provides training

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grounds, experience, human and material resources for precisely those churches). At the other end of the tag-line *cultural engagement* and *missional innovation* are intriguing and, for the most part received positively. Evidently, some are used to traditional or mono-culturally defined forms of engagement or practice, and their reaction can be strongly against what some perceive to be *laxisme* or liberalism. However, in my experience as Director of Acts 29 Europe, the phrase in our factual, aspirational description that attracts the most attention and the most suspicion is 'theological clarity'.

## *2. Two objections to this vision for a network*

It is not that most people would say that they want to be theologically unclear. But they react against the idea that it is the prerogative of a network to define theology in the way that we do in Acts 29. Furthermore, people's reactions are coloured by past experience of an approach to theological clarity that has resulted in factionalism, superior and judgmental attitudes and in-fighting. These are two weighty considerations that need to be answered.

## *3. Can bounded-set networks be justified from a biblical and historical point of view?*

First the principle: is it the prerogative of a network to set clearly-defined theological markers in the way that Acts 29 does? For many, this is the domain of denominations, not of networks. This was the comment that a Russian pastor in charge of church planting for part of his denomination made: we leave the theology to the denomination and to the local church; we network for planting churches. This cannot, of course, be entirely true. People never network without any definition of the basis of the collaboration in question. And where this is assumed rather than spelled out, there can be confusion, misunderstandings and even a sense of betrayal.<sup>1</sup> So the first

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<sup>1</sup> Two cases in point spring to mind. In the first, a network in the US sponsored a church plant in another major city in the States where assumptions about the role of women in the church were never clarified. When the daughter church moved to ordain women, the mother church had to define retrospectively what the contours of their relationship were, which led to a breaking of the initial bond. The daughter church had assumed that the trajectory of the movement was away from complementarianism, whilst the mother church had assumed that the status quo would be the norm in both churches. The daughter church subsequently adopted an open and affirming approach to the question of LGBT sexualities. The second case was in a European network where a newsletter was sent out to the network and its supporters featuring a women church-planter in England. The leaders who had designed and distributed the newsletter email had a different assumption about what the network stood for than the leadership team as a whole, as a subsequent letter from the leader of the network spelled out.

question is, why does Acts 29 Europe feel the need to spell out doctrinal distinctives? Why these ones in particular? And what, in that case, is the difference between a network and a denomination?<sup>2</sup>

The rise of denominations in the wake of the magisterial Reformation had to do with unity of doctrine and uniformity of public worship in the context of the nation state. Exhaustive confessions of faith, prescriptive liturgies and orders of service were designed to describe and regulate public worship so that all the inhabitants of a particular geographically-defined locale could participate in true worship. This implies a particular view of the state and its covenant with God and therefore an understanding of how the Lord views, judges, blesses or curses states, regions or countries on the basis of their faithfulness (or otherwise) to him. It also implies a certain view of ecclesiology and how that gives rise to, or indeed inhibits, the missionary nature of the church. The subsequent proliferation of denominations within nation states and across borders, the relationship of these denominations to each other and how they interact with the world-wide establishment of free churches (often united in free associations of independent churches governed by elder boards) and the explosion of para-church organisations, is extremely complicated and beyond the remit and the expertise of this paper. Suffice to say that a network like Acts 29 has no ambition to be a denomination, but sees as legitimate and even biblical the existence of a network of local churches across national boundaries for the exclusive purpose of the planting of gospel-centred churches.

Indeed, when we look at the contours of the early church, what we see from the start looks like a burgeoning, diverse global network of church-planting churches. Clearly there were no denominations as we know them today, and it seems that there was no prescribed form of liturgy or public worship and no idea of a church denomination being attached to a people or country (even if those concepts were not the same then as they are today). But the churches were interconnected. Matthew 28:18-20 necessitates churches that were connected not just locally but across frontiers. How was the gospel to go to the ends of the earth without concerted efforts between churches to make it possible?

In the light of the Great Commission, it is no surprise to see that Acts is a story of how churches collaborated together for the spread of the gospel, the planting of new churches and the advancement of the kingdom. We see this exemplified in the generosity and vision of the church in Antioch sending out Paul and Barnabas. Even more tellingly, Luke gives us a beautiful picture of

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<sup>2</sup> In the paragraphs that follow, the use of the terms “centre” and “boundary” refer to the debate between centre-set and bounded-set networks. Acts 29 belongs in the bounded set network category.

the principle in Acts 20:4, with Paul returning to Jerusalem with a team of colleagues (the apostolic band, as it is sometimes called) from recent church-plants in Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe and Asia (maybe from the plants that started around Paul's work in Ephesus, including Colosse). In a casual way, Luke describes networked churches as part of the normal fabric of the early church.

The same picture emerges from the letters. Why did Paul write Romans? At least, in part, to get to Spain. And in Paul's logic, the church that should be responsible for the start of the church in Spain was the church in Rome. Philippians is a letter all about gospel partnership (chapters 1 and 4), both between Paul and the Philippians, and between the Philippians and other gospel churches. 1 Thessalonians 1 shows a church whose influence and testimony was felt across a network of churches in various provinces in Asia Minor and suggests that this happened naturally and infectiously. It would seem that when the scope and scale of the gospel were preached, they produced as a necessary consequence vital and intentional networks of church-planting churches.

The church as a whole, and the regional networks of churches in particular, were concerned not just with the centre, but with the boundaries (distinctives) of the set that they comprised. It would not be too difficult to demonstrate that the gospel of Jesus Christ was that centre. The council of Jerusalem was a test-case for the Jewish/Gentile unity of the church and the grounds of that unity. When the boundary question of circumcision was tabled, Peter (who had been rebuked by Paul in the Galatian controversy) makes the centrality of the gospel clear from the start: "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear *the word of the gospel and believe.*" (Acts 15:7) In the rest of his deeply Trinitarian discourse, Peter makes it plain that God the Father, who looks on the heart, makes no distinction, but grants the eschatological Spirit to all. He concludes that all will be saved *through the grace of the Lord Jesus*. The centre has been clearly defined.

The Jerusalem Council does not stop with defining the centre, however. The letter sent to the churches from the church also defines some boundaries: abstaining from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from strangled and bloody meat. Whether these boundaries were temporary and expedient in order to ease relations locally, or whether they reference the necessity for all Christians to "turn from idols to worship the true and living God" (1 Thessalonians 1:10) is a moot point. But in either case, having a clear centre does not preclude the setting of boundaries; and in both scenarios, the boundaries have everything to do with the centre. Gentile Christians will either refrain from practices which offend too ostentatiously their Jewish brothers, for the sake of the gospel, or will eschew idolatry entirely, for the sake of the gospel.



This atmosphere pervades the letters of the New Testament, too. Their very existence shows that the centre of the gospel was in constant need of definition in terms of the distinctives it implied. When Paul addresses the controversial topics of marriage, singleness and social status in 1 Corinthians 7:17, he says, “this is the rule I lay down in all the churches”. The gospel at the centre, which radically frees us from the norms and dictates of society, allows us to accept the sovereignty of God in any number of circumstances that the world rails against, and thus defines new, life-giving boundaries. Similarly for the question of how men and women exhibit the beautiful complementarity of gender in public worship, Paul states in 1 Cor 11:16, “If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God.” So far from undermining creation, the new creation of the gospel, in the resurrection body of Jesus, enhances and builds on it, so that orderly public worship that showcases the equality and difference of the sexes adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour (cf. Titus 2). Similar language is used in 1 Cor 14:33b-36. The peace, comprehensibility and orderliness of the gospel which edifies and saves is at stake, and so Paul states unambiguously that there is a practice in all the churches of the saints which is to be observed by all – because no church should have the pretension to think that the word of God originated from it. However we understand the limitation placed on women speaking in the church, what is clear is that Paul is providing apostolic boundaries for churches. In Paul’s mind the set of apostolic churches is clearly centred on the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that set has clear boundaries that flow out of the gospel at the centre.

In Acts and the letters we have seen that churches were networked together for the common mission of church planting. In the two examples of the Jerusalem Council and the Corinthian correspondence, we have seen that there is both a clear centre to the common identity of these churches in the apostolic teaching, namely the gospel. However, the apostles did not content themselves with defining the centre and let the boundaries look after themselves, but rather were at pains to spell out the gospel-centred contours for the boundaries of those churches who wished to belong to “all the churches”.

We have very little information about how exactly the churches organised or systematised their collaboration in mission or how they were held to the apostolic standards (either at the centre or on the boundaries). It might be argued that Paul and his apostolic band served as a kind of sodality with respect to the modality of the local church in terms of their joint mission. The picture that emerges from Acts 19-20, Titus, and to a lesser extent, from the Johannine epistles, is that elders were appointed and strengthened after being assessed and trained by members of the apostolic band. But in any case, the collaboration for mission was based on the reciprocal trust that agreement about both the centre and boundaries

created. Just as faithful leaders trained other faithful leaders (2 Tim 2:2), so faithful churches planted other faithful churches. In this respect, Acts 29 sees itself as an attempt to engage the reality of the local church and the urgency and priority of planting healthy local churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a way as analogous as possible to what we see in the New Testament.

*4. Do bounded-set networks inevitably create tension and disunity on the ground?*

One could too easily come away with the impression that because Acts 29 Europe holds these distinctives, and because we hold them passionately, that we would be divisive and ungenerous in our evangelical constituencies across Europe. This is, mercifully, not the case. In the UK, at an institutional level, Acts 29 has excellent relationships with FIEC, which does not define itself theologically in exactly the same way as Acts 29; in London, Co-mission and Acts 29 enjoy friendly and collaborative relationships. With both these entities Acts 29 makes up “The Planting Collective” – an annual conference and think-tank that works to promote and encourage church planting in the UK. With Oakhill Theological College, Acts 29 Europe has started an innovative and exciting academy, “Crosslands”, which offers gospel-centred training to people from all churches “when and where you need it”. At a local church or even at the level of the individual planter or pastor, Acts 29 members are active and generous in supporting and encouraging church plants both within and outside our family.

This picture emerges even more clearly in continental Europe. Acts 29 Europe Francophone enjoys excellent relationships with associations of local churches, training institutes and national boards. We offer our services in media, logistics and organisation to help run national conferences on church planting; we have consulted with other organisations who want to assess or coach planters outside our network. In Slovakia, plant.sk, a denominational church-planting board, has asked Acts 29 to get alongside them as they look for opportunities to launch new plants across the country. At our expense, we offer training to groups in Eastern Europe irrespective of whether they hold our distinctives and without making their future membership of the network a condition for friendship or training.

All of this is to illustrate that we aspire to be a family of networks, at the same time committed to our distinctives and generous and warm to those who may not agree with us. This mindset is often labelled “kingdom-minded” to indicate that what concerns us most is the growth of God’s kingdom on earth and not our personal fiefdom. That is true – and yet it would be disingenuous for us, or for any other network or group that has taken the trouble to define and organise itself, to pretend that its distinctive texture

and slant was not designed to be particularly effective at extending the kingdom as it truly is, as best we can tell from the Scriptures.

### *Acts 29 distinctives*

We set out what we believe, and what we ask all our member churches to embrace in five distinctives:<sup>3</sup>

1. We are passionate about gospel centrality.
2. We enthusiastically embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners.
3. We recognise and rest upon the necessity of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for all of life and ministry.
4. We are deeply committed to the fundamental spiritual and moral equality of male and female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in the home and church.
5. We embrace a missionary understanding of the local church and its role as the primary means by which God chooses to establish his kingdom on earth.<sup>4</sup>

1. Not all of these points elicit the same level of response or engagement from those who read or hear them. The centrality of the gospel seems, at least in the words the statement contains, to be banal in the extreme. Of course we are gospel centred! Yet I have experienced time and again in Europe the widening of the eyes in wonder and excitement as the true depth of what that wonderful phrase means. The Holy Spirit's empowering presence for all of life and ministry is again a mostly uncontroversial thing to say. Some ask about whether you can be Pentecostal or charismatic (of course, so long as nothing replaces the gospel as the centre) or about whether you can be a cessationist and be part of Acts 29 (you can) – but the necessity of the power and presence of the Spirit is obvious. Again, the real bite of this distinctive is not so much the statement but the practice – do we really depend on the Holy Spirit for life and ministry? Would to God that it were so. In a similar vein, our insistence on the missionary nature of the church, and the expectation of our churches to be continually in the movement of planting the next church is an attractive proposition, if sometimes honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

However, there are two distinctives which unsettle many people, namely the sovereignty of God in saving sinners and what is commonly known as a complementarian view of leadership in the church. It is worth setting out these in more detail, so that everyone knows what we are saying and what we are not saying. These paragraphs have been reflected on deeply and

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on our distinctives, <http://www.acts29.com/about/>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.acts29.com/joining-the-dots/> for a blog post on these five distinctives and how they hang together.

carefully crafted and appear on our website.<sup>5</sup> We ask our members to be able to sign, without harbouring any second thoughts, the following:

*1. We enthusiastically embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners.*

- We affirm that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, not on the basis of foreseen faith but unconditionally, according to his sovereign good pleasure and will.
- We believe that through the work of the Holy Spirit, God will draw the elect to faith in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, graciously and effectually overcoming their stubborn resistance to the gospel so that they will most assuredly and willingly believe.
- We also believe that these, the elect of God whom he gave to the Son, will persevere in belief and godly behaviour and be kept secure in their salvation by grace through faith.
- We believe that God's sovereignty in this salvation neither diminishes the responsibility of people to believe in Christ nor marginalises the necessity and power of prayer and evangelism, but rather reinforces and establishes them as the ordained means by which God accomplishes his ordained ends.

(John 1:12-13; 6:37-44; 10:25-30; Acts 13:48; 16:30-31; Romans 3:1-4:25; 8:1-17,31-39; 9:1-23; 10:8-10; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:7,9)

*2. We are deeply committed to the fundamental spiritual and moral equality of male and female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in the home and church.*

- Both men and women are together created in the divine image and are therefore equal before God as persons, possessing the same moral dignity and value, and have equal access to God through faith in Christ. Men and women are together the recipients of spiritual gifts designed to empower them for ministry in the local church and beyond. Therefore, women are to be encouraged, equipped and empowered to utilise their gifting in ministry, in service to the body of Christ, and through teaching in ways that are consistent with the Word of God.
- Both husbands and wives are responsible to God for spiritual nurture and vitality in the home, but God has given to the man primary responsibility to lead his wife and family in accordance with the servant-leadership and sacrificial love characterised by Jesus Christ. This principle of male headship should not be confused with, nor give any hint of, domineering control. Rather, it is to be the loving, tender and nurturing care of a godly man who is himself under the kind and gentle authority of Jesus Christ.
- The Elders/Pastors of each local church have been granted authority under the headship of Jesus Christ to provide oversight and to teach/preach the Word of God in corporate assembly for the building up of the body. The office of Elder/Pastor is restricted to men.

(Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-7; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

Even where one accepts the premise that a network can, or even should, have doctrinal distinctives, even quite specific ones like the five outlined

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<sup>5</sup> [www.acts29.com](http://www.acts29.com)

above, why these two in particular?<sup>6</sup> Have they anything to do with the stated aim of the network, that is the massive and intentional planting of new churches across Europe's 51 countries and 750 million population? These are the questions that we will answer in the following pages in respect of both the sovereignty of God and complementarianism.

We will see that the reason we hold to these distinctives is tightly connected to our desire to be a network that multiplies church plants across our continent, because these two distinctives have to do with:

1. Questions of biblical fidelity and gospel centrality
2. Questions of ministry and practice
3. Questions of collaboration and trust

We will look at each distinctive in turn and show how this is so.

*1. We enthusiastically embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners.*

- i. Questions of biblical fidelity and gospel centrality

By insisting on this distinctive, we are doing the same thing as John Owen in his "Death of Death in the Death of Christ", and as J.I. Packer in his magisterial introduction to that work. It is at the same time positive and polemical, because when it comes to this issue, the gospel is at stake. So whilst not forgetting a humble, kingdom-minded attitude, we nevertheless think that this distinctive has biblical fidelity and gospel-centredness. Whilst the issues that Owen and Packer described were not identical to ours, the stakes are the same.

Packer contends that Owen published his work to show that "universal redemption is unscriptural and destructive of the gospel".<sup>7</sup> And Packer follows this up by stating, of his own time, that "one of the most urgent tasks facing Evangelical Christendom today" is "the recovery of the gospel."<sup>8</sup> Let us listen to Packer as he builds his case, because ours is, *mutatis mutandis*, the same. He compares the new gospel and the old gospel (the one which "enthusiastically embraces the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation") and says that the difference is that the new gospel

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 29 deliberately holds no position on a good number of debated doctrines within evangelicalism. We subscribe to the Lausanne Statement of Faith and the Confession of the Evangelical Alliance.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.* 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem.*

is too exclusively concerned to be “helpful” to man – to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction – and too little concerned to glorify God. The old gospel was “helpful” too – more so, indeed, than is the new – but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom men depend for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its centre of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the centre of reference is man.

What follows is no arid defence of the five points of Calvinism, as Packer points out in Part II of his essay<sup>9</sup> but “just the biblical gospel”.

The contention of Calvin, Owen, Spurgeon,<sup>10</sup> Packer and of Acts 29 (not that we deserve to be mentioned in the same breath) is that enthusiastically embracing the sovereignty of God’s grace in saving sinners is just enthusiastically embracing the biblical gospel, the one that saves. Not to do so as a church planter is thus to present an unbiblical gospel, one that sells its hearers short and deprives them of the saving, life-giving power of the gospel.

The kind of churches we plant and the kind of gospel we preach are inextricably linked; because church planting is above all a theological enterprise, unless we pay close attention to our theology we are saying that we are unconcerned with the kind of church that ends up being planted. Our gospel either bears witness to the biblical gospel of the sovereign, free grace of God in saving sinners or it does not. The churches planted either reflect that truth or they do not.

It is easy to show how this gospel is a question of faithfulness to Scripture, not as a series of proof-texts but by paying attention to the sweep of the biblical narrative. Take the gospel of Matthew: The Jesus who offers rest to the weary in chapter 11 is the same Jesus who has just said that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and learned and that no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. The same Jesus in chapter 13 is the prolific, successful, serenely confident sower who knows he will be rejected by some, lightly believed in by others and yet who knows he will have his record harvest in the end. He will build his church on the gospel in chapter 16. He does not need to qualify that statement, as the writer of Psalm 127 did – he will do it. He is not wondering if God has abandoned him in chapter 27; he is stating that God has abandoned him in judgment but that he will certainly rescue and raise him so that the congregation and the ends of the earth bow down and worship (Ps 22). He sends his church-planting, disciple-making apostles into

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<sup>9</sup> “For to Calvinism there is really only one point to be made in the field of soteriology; the point that God saves sinners.” *Op. cit.* 6.

<sup>10</sup> “I do not believe we can preach the gospel unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah” *Op. cit.* 11.

the world not to try, but to do and gives as a guarantee his authority and presence. By enthusiastically embracing the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners, we align ourselves with Jesus and his mission.

When we come to the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's refrains show that the sovereign Lord was adding to the church daily through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Space does not permit an exhaustive treatment of these connected themes in Acts, but Acts 13:48-49 is a brilliant summary of the principle:

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

Acts 29 Europe, by its very name, sees itself in the continuity of the book of Acts. If we genuinely want to continue the same mission with the same methods as the Apostles, then we must enthusiastically embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners.

The letters – whether Paul, Peter, John, Jude, – are bathed in the same atmosphere. Ephesians 1:3-6, 1 Peter 1:1-3, 2 John 1, Jude 1 all address their readers as elect, predestined, chosen, called and kept. Hebrews, addressing a congregation sorely tried and tempted to return to Judaism, urges its hearers to embrace by faith the grace of God in Jesus and the author is confident that they will indeed be saved (6:9). Revelation promises that the called, chosen and faithful church of the Lamb (17:14), whose names are written in the book of Life from before the foundation of the world (3:5, 13:8, 20:12, 21:27; cf. Phil 4:3) will inherit all the promises of the gospel and reap all the benefits of the death of the Lamb. The New Testament in all its parts encourages us enthusiastically to embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners. It is the heart of the gospel. It is faithful to the Scriptures. It is the message we preach, the means by which we plant churches and it is non-negotiable.

## ii. Questions of ministry and practice

This brings us to questions of ministry and practice. There is a clear link between how we think people are saved and how we go about planting churches. Our ministry and practice are deeply affected by how we understand our role and God's role in salvation. It is difficult to write these points in a context where implicitly they will be read as both a defence of what we in Acts 29 Europe do and how we do it, and thus as a criticism of those who do differently. But I cannot see how we can avoid it, and I think it is absolutely vital for the health of the church in Europe moving forward that we measure the weight and importance of how practice flows out of theology. We will do this by observing how what we now refer to as

Reformed soteriology functions in the New Testament in relation to church-planting ministry.

Paul was a church planter. That is an uncontroversial statement. Through Acts and through his letters we can see how his convictions about the sovereign grace of God influenced every aspect of his ministry. His motivations were governed by the glory of God alone. Because salvation was the sovereign work of the grace of the faith-giving God, no one can boast (Eph 2), not the planter who preaches the gospel, nor the sinner who believes the gospel. When we disconnect our motivations from the sovereign grace of God, we open the door for man-pleasing motivations, either the planter as he seeks his own glory, or the seeker, who becomes the centre of our attentions.

His methods were prayer and proclamation. These are the God-ordained ways of saving people, making disciples and planting churches. If we believe that God sovereignly saves sinners through his ordained means, then we will trust those means and not try to substitute other methods.

His manner was bold, persevering, transparent and honest. Because he had received *this* ministry (2 Cor 3 - the ministry of the righteousness of the Spirit of life) he is confident and bold (3:4, 12). He does not lose heart (2 Cor 4:1), he renounces any manipulative strategy, any underhand ways. He is not cunning, neither does he tamper with the word because it is this very unadulterated word about the sovereign grace of God in Christ (4:3-6) that shines in the hearts of blind unbelievers to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This surpassing power of the saving gospel is God's, not Paul's (4:7). Another way to describe it is grace extending to more and more people, increasing thanksgiving to the glory of God (4:15). This gospel of sovereign grace is why Paul does not lose heart (4:16) and why he is always of good courage (5:6) and why he dares to persuade others of the glorious truth that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, all of which is from God (5:18) who in Christ was reconciling the world to himself (5:19). The reason I am dealing so extensively with these three chapters is that they make it abundantly clear that Paul's manner of doing ministry was inextricably bound up with the message at the heart of the ministry, namely the good news of the sovereign, sight-giving, reconciling, *ex nihilo* new creation of the triune God.

To state this negatively - unless we are convinced that God saves sinners only on the basis of his sovereign will and free, unmerited grace and only by the prayerful proclamation and demonstration of the gospel, then we will lack the essential fuel for being bold, persevering, transparent and honest. We will lack proper courage and true perseverance, we will be tempted to fall into manipulative ways of evangelising, we will falsify and tamper with the gospel and biblical truth, so that the culturally unpalatable truths and ethics of the gospel will be distorted and misrepresented, if not flatly denied.



My fear for church planting in Europe is that because much of it is being done in the absence of rigorous, robust theology, and in particular in the absence of a clear conviction about the nature of the gospel as the sovereign grace of God in saving sinners, we will end up with many churches being planted, with great efficiency and attention to detail in terms of teamwork and culture but lacking a solid anchor. These churches, as I look back at church history and around me in Europe today, will inevitably drift from orthodoxy in faith and in practice. In particular, in order to please man, who finds himself at the centre of our project, these churches will downplay sin and judgment in general, and will promote open and permissive ideas on homosexuality in particular.

We have only begun to scratch the surface of how a robust conviction about the sovereign grace of God in saving sinners flows into the ministry and practice of the church planter. We could add to the list an openness to takes risks, secure in the sovereignty of God; a beautiful balance between strategising and being open and flexible to the will of God; dealing with disappointment; enjoying peace and joy as we plant secure in the knowledge that God has many people in his world, and that he is calling them to himself through the gospel; humble ambition; good habits of deep rest and really hard work – these are the natural outworkings of a secure grasp of the sovereign grace of God in saving sinners. All of this, without mentioning the radically different view of pastoral care and soul cure that flows from the certainty that if God be for us in salvation, then who or what can be against us (Rom 8)? If God has sovereignly saved us and will keep us safe until that day, then suffering can really be light and momentary. If he has not and will not necessarily, then all of that, including “everything works together for the good” rings hollow and is of no use to us as planters as we not only make disciples, but grow disciples through the gospel.

### iii. Questions of collaboration and trust

It should be clear that because so much hangs on our enthusiastic embrace of the sovereign grace of God in saving sinners, then our churches are determined to partner with, collaborate with – what we call network with – churches and church plants that embrace these truths with equal enthusiasm.

Our network wants to support church plants elsewhere in the world. We all commit to giving 9% of our internal giving to church plants – not necessarily Acts 29 plants, although many of them will be. It would be inconceivable, in the light of what we have just said, to promote and support what is effectively the preaching of another gospel. We collaborate equally through the training of interns, the sending and receiving of teams, the sharing of resources and tools, the assessment of the suitability of planters to plant gospel-centred churches, coaching of planters in the early years of their

plant and so on. All of these activities and initiatives require trust at the level of theology and practice. Including this distinctive as clearly and as prominently as we do speaks eloquently to our desire to be transparent and honest. This is a non-negotiable for our network.

The second distinctive that raises people's eyebrows is the one on complementarian relationships between men and women in the home and the church.

*B. We are deeply committed to the fundamental spiritual and moral equality of male and female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in the home and church.<sup>11</sup>*

#### i. Questions of biblical fidelity and gospel centrality

Again, this seems to our network to be a question of biblical fidelity. We joyfully acknowledge that the Bible presents male and female as equal in creation (Genesis 1:26-28) and redemption (Galatians 3:28). But anyone reading the Bible seriously is also struck by the difference between male and female in creation (Gen 2) and in church life (apostles, pastors and elders are all exclusively male in the New Testament and restrictions are placed on the way in which women may exercise certain roles and as regards which roles are open to them).

The famous passage on marriage in Ephesians 5 is utterly asymmetrical and means nothing if the roles can be reversed. And as we know, this passage is ultimately about the gospel and only secondarily about marriage. This issue is not unconnected to how we understand the gospel, and therefore not unconnected to how the gospel is central in all that we do. To put it inter-rogatively – how can the gospel be at the centre of marriage relationships in any way that denies the assumptions and instructions of Ephesians 5? And similarly, if the strength of a man's marriage relationship and his leading of his household are to be determining factors in his eligibility for bearing the office of elder, how are we to assess that if we do not take the particularities of Ephesians 5 into account?

Our view of Scripture and our way of reading the Bible and of integrating all that Scripture says in a coherent biblical theology that bears witness to creation and redemption lead us to be deeply committed to this distinctive. It is not only as we look towards the Bible that we resolve to remain committed to this distinctive, but also as we look towards culture. In our European cultures, we are moving away massively from the biblical understanding of

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<sup>11</sup> For a full treatment of this question, see the two chapters on the issue in "Multiplying Churches" (ed. Timmis) by Steve Timmis and Ruth Woodrow.

gender, sexuality and human society. This move makes the church's response all the more urgent and important. Who will bear witness to the beauty of "the fundamental spiritual and moral equality of male and female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in the home and church" if we do not?

Another point should not be neglected, and it is in answer to an oft-cited reaction to our position, namely that culturally, we can't expect our churches to grow if we hold fast to this principle. Even if that were true, it would be an entirely pragmatic and therefore ultimately unconvincing argument. But in my observation, the church in Europe as a whole is already facing a challenge in attracting and keeping men. The pragmatic and culturally effective choice might just turn out to be what we see as the biblical path of complementarian relationships which give full honour to both sexes along God-ordained lines.

## ii. Questions of ministry and practice

Flowing out of this biblical conviction is the consequence that we assess, coach, train and support church-planters who would be biblically qualified for eldership on the basis of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, bearing in mind the instructions of 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 2 concerning women. This means in practice that we assess men to plant churches. We assess their wives and ask their wives to help us in assessing them so that the couple as a whole is encouraged to be actively involved in church planting. We cannot imagine a church-planting team that did not include women gospel workers, led by a godly man.

## iii. Questions of collaboration and trust

Our churches' convictions in these areas mean that, practically speaking, the works and the workers that we support are also deeply committed to this way of reading the Bible, this way of engaging culture and this way of bearing witness to God's plan for humanity in creation and redemption.

So when people who are interested in Acts 29 Europe ask me what we stand for in our distinctives as I travel around Europe, I show them the five distinctives from our website. And if they raise their eyebrows at our second or fourth distinctive, as they frequently do, this is the gist of what I tell them. Nevertheless, frequently I hear people say, "You should change that. Many people won't join Acts 29 Europe if you maintain that distinctive." Perhaps. But if we do not maintain it, then the ramifications for the planting of healthy, robustly theological churches in Europe are significant and negative. And if we do not maintain them, then I wonder if we really mean that we are gospel-centred, dependent on the Holy Spirit and committed to the missional nature of the church – because they are all connected.

# BUILDING A CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENT IN A TRADITIONAL DENOMINATION

*Neil MacMillan*<sup>\*</sup>

This article explores how we can have the best of both worlds. The dynamic growth of a church planting movement welded to the resources and depth of a traditional ecclesiastical setting. Because most European Christians belong to traditional denominations it is crucial that these institutions learn to embrace church-planting movement dynamics that can counter the decline of the church. The article begins with a definition and analysis of church-planting movements and contrasts these with the benefits of institutional environments. It is argued that movements and institutions cannot flourish without elements of the other and that it is possible to blend the best features of movement and institution in one organisation. This is followed by a case study of how the Free Church of Scotland has worked to foster a church-planting movement within its existing structures. I try to outline the processes necessary to allow this to happen and some of the challenges involved. The article concludes with a look to necessary future developments that might allow this movement to take root and mature.

## *I. Background*

The missional purpose of God, to gather a people to worship and glorify him, is unfolded across the whole of Scripture. From the call of Abraham in Genesis to be a blessing to the nations, to the worship of the Lamb who was slain in Revelation, God has given his church the great commission of calling the nations to worship him. Being true to this calling in a secular, post-Christian Britain, means we need to plant many more churches to declare the praises of God.

The Free Church of Scotland is a confessional Presbyterian denomination formed in 1843. In the twentieth century it became a predominantly Highland and rural church. Demographic change, secularisation and internal squabbles meant that it entered the twenty-first century in poor shape. In the previous twenty years we had declined from around a hundred to about eighty congregations. This precipitated a period of research and reflection which led, in 2008, to a renewed commitment to mission in Scotland. The

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focus of mission was recognised as the local church and the mode of mission was identified as church planting and church revitalisation.

Church revitalisation has been a steady and rewarding process over the last twenty years with some notable successes, including St Peter's Church, Dundee and St Columba's Free Church, Edinburgh. However, church planting efforts over recent decades had been piecemeal and were, in some cases, driven by a desire to extend the geographical spread of the denomination rather than a longing to see sinners turn to Christ in repentance and faith. This meant that the church-planting methodology used was not developed with the intention of reaching the unchurched or de-churched. The usual pattern was to start services that would connect with people who had a "Free Church connection" or who loved Reformed theology. These church plants usually plateaued at between 60 and 80 people. To plant these churches the denomination was purchasing a manse, a church building and paying up to ten years' salary. The costs were very high, the harvest very small and the denomination was not able to plant more than one new church every five years or so. More churches were closing than starting.

Mission through church planting meant we had to reconsider our ideas. The early Free Church of Scotland had been outstanding in its missionary and church-planting efforts. The challenge before the denomination today is to discover whether a traditional Reformed and evangelical denomination, operating in a Western European context, can nurture within itself a church-planting movement that will make a significant contribution to the re-evangelisation of Scotland.

## *II. Church-planting movements*

### *1. What is a church-planting movement?*

An initial definition could be as follows: a church-planting movement is a self-sustaining, indigenous movement of church-planting churches that experiences exponential growth in converts, leaders and congregations.

There are multiple definitions of such movements but they all tend to share the characteristics in the definition above. Original definitions of church-planting movements were drawn from experience of exponential church growth in non-Western countries. Later work has endeavoured to take these definitions and work out an application for them in North America and Europe.

David Garrison's book, "Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World", gives a descriptive definition based on observations from numerous situations in the non-Western world, as well as some historical church-planting movements from North America. Garrison also seeks to identify possible movements amongst immigrants in Holland

and travelling people in mainland Europe. For Garrison, a church-planting movement is “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweep through a people group or population segment.”<sup>1</sup> In the early 1990’s Garrison identified recent church-planting movements as having occurred in places such as India, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Kenya, Togo, Columbia and Guatemala. They had seen spectacular church growth. Here are a few of the examples that Garrison points us to: In the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh 4,000 churches were planted in seven years, and were home to around 50,000 Christians.<sup>2</sup> In the south of China, a movement produced 920 churches with 90,000 baptised believers in a period of eight years.<sup>3</sup> In Uganda, more than 400 new churches were planted amongst the Teso people over a fifteen-year period with some 20,000 new Christians.<sup>4</sup>

Garrison identified ten elements that were present in every church-planting movement he analysed: extraordinary prayer, abundant evangelism, intentional planting of reproducing churches, the authority of the Bible, local leadership, lay leadership, house churches, churches planting churches, rapid reproduction, healthy churches.<sup>5</sup>

In ecclesiological terms, Garrison defines church-planting movements as movements of house churches, so the rapid multiplication of churches in Singapore and Korea do not qualify. That in turn suggests that church-planting movements cannot occur in more traditional denominations.

An emphasis on the “organic”, spontaneous expansion of the church resonated deeply with many missiologists and church planters in the West. This was reflected in a revived interest in new forms of church that functioned with a simple, “organic” ecclesiology. It was argued that the structures, processes and biases of institutionalised forms of church needed to be stripped away as these were inhibiting the organism of the church from multiplying as it ought to. These ideas came to the fore through the work of people like Alan Hirsch, Neil Cole, Joel Comiskey and Thom Rainer. In “The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church”, Hirsch writes,

I have tried to learn what exactly it is that makes movements tick, and what makes them so effective in the spreading of their message (as opposed to the more static institution). It is by recovering a genuine movement ethos that we can restore something of the dynamism of significant Jesus movements of history.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Garrison, “Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming A Lost World” (Midlothian, VA: Wigtake Resources, 2004), 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch 11.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Hirsch, “The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church”, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 22.

Hirsch believes that the early church can be defined in the following way: a grassroots, decentralised, cellular movement. He compares this with the “Christendom mode” of church: institutional-hierarchical and a top-down notion of leadership and structure. What is needed is a return to the mode of the early church.<sup>7</sup>

The organizational structures of Christendom are in a real sense worlds away from that of the early church – something like comparing the United Nations to Al Qaeda (one being a thoroughgoing institution with centralized structures, policies, protocols and the other being a reticulated network operating around a simple structure with a focused cause).<sup>8</sup>

Joel Comiskey pointedly repudiates the Westminster Confession of Faith’s definition of the church in favour of a “simpler” ecclesiology. He writes,

Christ’s church does not require layers of hierarchy, added later by religious institutions... Paul and Barnabas focused on those minimal qualities that made up the church. They were intensely interested in gathering followers of Jesus together under leadership. The churches they planted were simple and reproducible.<sup>9</sup>

North American organisations sought to take the ideas of organic church-planting movements and apply them to denominations working in the North American context, seeking to create systems that would promote such movements. Ed Stetzer in “Planting Missional Churches”, highlights the system developed by Kevin Mannoia in “Church Planting: the Next Generation”, which was taken up by North American denominations. Stetzer lists the key features of these networks in the following way:

- Parent Church Network – a geographically-based network of churches with a shared vision for planting;
- Profile Assessment System – an objective assessment of potential church planters which is key to short-term impact;
- New Church Incubator – a peer-to-peer resource environment, to assist church planters in their work and including a coaching element;
- Recruitment Network – a network to create a pipeline of new planters;
- Pastor Factory – a training process for lay people to enable them to become founding pastors;
- Church Planter’s Summit – a regular event aimed at providing an induction process for new candidates;
- Maturing Church Cluster – providing new churches with support as they move beyond the first year of the new church;
- Strategic Planning Network – helping to maintain the movement dynamic and to avoid the problems of institutionalisation;

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Comiskey, “Planting Churches that Reproduce: Starting a Network of Simple Churches” (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2009), 42-43.

- Harvest 1000 – the effort that is focused on raising sufficient financial support for the creation of a church-planting movement – especially for starting new churches;
- Meta-Church Network – the commitment to churches that transform people through small-group ministries.<sup>10</sup>

My personal conviction is that the key feature shared by all such movements is the continuous multiplication of indigenous, church-planting churches. Once we have multiple local churches, spontaneously planting church-planting churches that plant churches that plant churches we have movement dynamics.

## *2. Why are church-planting movements important?*

In “Church Planting in the Secular West”, Stefan Paas identifies three motives for planting: confessional purity, church growth and innovation in a changed cultural context. Each of these motives has a degree of validity. In the United Kingdom planting is important for church growth and innovation. The rapid decline in attendance and the closure of thousands of churches over the last few decades creates a huge evangelistic need. Evangelism is the work of the local church. It is through the church that God’s mission in this world is carried forward. Local communities need local churches to be a gospel presence in their midst – salt and light, communities of grace that proclaim the goodness of the gospel. And right now, we need thousands of new local churches. They can innovate more easily in order to find better ways of doing evangelism in a fast-changing cultural context. The necessary planting of sufficient new churches can only be achieved with movement dynamics in place.

Most Christians are still part of traditional denominations with institutional features. So there is a massive need to help denominations take on movement dynamics. In “Center Church” Tim Keller writes,

A church (or group of churches) with movement dynamics generates its own converts, ideas, leaders and resources from within in order to realize its vision of the church for its city and culture.<sup>11</sup>

Over time, given the right conditions, the movement will grow steadily and even exponentially. If we have a vision for the United Kingdom, then to realise it we need our traditional denominations and networks to take on movement dynamics. This is the challenge for the Free Church of Scotland: Is it possible to blend the best features of both institution and movement in one organisation?

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<sup>10</sup> Ed Stetzer, “Planting Missional Churches”, 330-332.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller, “Center Church” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 337.



### *3. Institution and Movement together*

Some advocates of church-planting movements view all forms of institution as the enemy – an unbiblical intrusion on the church that has killed or stifled its organic expansion. Stefan Paas offers helpful observations on this issue. He critiques David Bosch's influential assertion that the early church failed when it transitioned from movement to institution in the post-Constantine era. Paas believes that recent evidence indicates that the early mission of the church was more ecclesiastical than previously thought.<sup>12</sup> We cannot frame the amazing growth of the early church against the decline and corruption of the medieval church as simply an organism v organisation paradigm shift.

Paas makes three criticisms of "absolutizing the difference between movement and structure".<sup>13</sup> First of all, "a drive towards affirming the universality, catholicity and objectivity of the church has characterized the Christian movement from its beginnings."<sup>14</sup> Secondly, "every movement will have to decide about the kind of structures it needs to survive its first few years and to maintain its integrity."<sup>15</sup> Defining key roles, shared routines and formulating values and convictions are "inevitable". Thirdly, it leads to a view of structure as a necessary evil:

On this view structure is not really part of church, or at best only a secondary part. Such an approach will preclude a thorough theological reflection on the kinds of structures the church needs, structures that more or less emerge from the fundamental convictions of the Christian movement in an organic way. Exactly this, however, is the core business of ecclesiology: theological reflection on the visible structures that adequately represent the nature of Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

There is no compelling evidence that the lay-led, house church model identified by Garrison as being essential to church-planting movements is more evangelistically effective in Western countries than other forms of church. What Garrison offered as a descriptive definition of the essentials of church-planting movements in the non-Western world cannot be simply cut and pasted into Western European secular societies. House churches can be effective in mission but so can other kinds of churches. And experience in Scotland shows that, in some contexts, house churches are unlikely to be as successful as more traditional church settings. This has been the experience of the church-planting organisation 20schemes which works in Scottish housing estates.

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<sup>12</sup> Stefan Paas, "Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience" (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

In “Center Church” Keller sets out how we can blend the best of movement with institution. He believes that we need to embrace the strengths of both institutions and movements. Institutions give stability over time and a limit on the pace and degree of change. Institutions preserve what is good and necessary for the inhabitants of the institution to navigate their way ahead: “Institutions bring order to life and establish many of the conditions for human flourishing and civilized society.”<sup>17</sup> They maintain what is useful and necessary from the past. Movements, by contrast, are more suited to bringing about what is needed for the future. Keller picks out certain important features of movement.

(i) *Vision*. Movements are marked by a clear vision of the future and its energies are all put towards realising that future. The vision is an expression of a strong commitment to particular values and beliefs. Others must be able to own the vision and run with it. This requires clear and compelling articulation of the vision. “The key to the success of the vision is its simplicity and availability, often in the form of content that transmits, expounds and applies the vision.”<sup>18</sup> Institutions are kept together by rules, movements by a shared vision.

(ii) *Sacrifice*. People will make massive sacrifices to get a movement underway, because they are so motivated by the vision and by intrinsic reward. A movement sees all those involved at every level making real sacrifice to achieve the vision rather than just the sacrifice of those at the top.

(iii) *Flexibility and Unity*. Vision means flexibility about who does what and how it is done. Achieving the goal is key. It makes allies of all who share the vision. Institutions can struggle to produce the same kind of unity.

(iv) *Spontaneity*. Movements produce new leaders and new ideas but institutions are more interested in durability and are more resistant to innovation. They tend to attract different types of leaders. Movements will brainstorm and experiment; they are flatter and less hierarchical. They generate new leaders better and are results orientated. They grow faster because they adapt to change more rapidly.

Keller argues for a view of church that is both organised and organic: for movements that are strengthened by institutions. His view is given credence by the fact that we are seeing the beginnings of church-planting movements that include more traditional models of church. We can point to New York as one of those places where movement dynamics are emerging in this way. From 1989 to 2016 the number of Christians in New York City grew from 1% to 5% of the population which, with a population of 8.5 million, works out as a growth from 85,000 to 425,000, an increase of 340,000. A church-planting movement is underway in New York and plans are in place to work towards

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<sup>17</sup> Tim Keller, “Center Church”, 339.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

a further increase from 5 to 15% of the population.<sup>19</sup> This is not a movement of lay-led house churches.

Movements amongst more traditional churches may take longer to ignite and to reach a tipping point of multiplication, but can be very effective over the longer term. They provide the intellectual and cultural resources to reach all sections of society in a sustainable way.

Keller reminds us that the Bible teaches that the church is both organised and organism; the books of Acts describes organic, spontaneous (from our point of view) church growth and Paul uses organic language about what is happening as the gospel bears fruit. It is worth noting that as this organic growth and multiplication takes place, Paul takes pains to organise it; there are institutional features present, such as agreed theological formulations and hierarchical consultations to resolve disputes (Acts 15). To flesh out the place of both organism and organisation in the church, Keller employs the idea of the General Office and the Special Office.

Every believer has a ministry – every believer is prophet, priest and king:

This Spirit-equipped calling and gifting of every believer to be a prophet, priest and king has been called the “general office”. This understanding of the general office helps prevent the church becoming a top-down, conservative, innovation-allergic bureaucracy. It helps us understand the church as an energetic, grass roots movement that produces life-changing and world-changing ministry – all without dependence on the control and planning of a hierarchy of leaders.<sup>20</sup>

But,

the growth and flourishing of spontaneous ministry depends on some institutional elements being in place. The special office represents the way God orders and governs his church by the Spirit...<sup>21</sup> The Holy Spirit, then, makes the church both an organism and an organization – a cauldron of spontaneously-generated spiritual life and ministry as well as an ordered, structured, community with rules and authority.<sup>22</sup>

Paas and Keller help to show that a naïve antithesis of movement and institution is unhelpful. Church-planting movements will always need institutional elements. And institutional denominations will always need church-planting movements. The loss of either element will lead to decline and disintegration. In the Free Church of Scotland we are trying to work out how our institution can embrace the dynamics of a church-planting movement. We need to do this urgently.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.christianitydaily.com/articles/8655/20161121/rapid-church-growth-witnessed-new-york-multiple-reports.htm> Accessed April 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Tim Keller, “Center Church”, 346.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

### *III. Building a Church-Planting Movement in the Free Church of Scotland*

#### *1. From maintenance to mission*

In 2005, the denomination began a process of self-analysis. Led by a Strategy Group this was a two-year process which involved facilitated discussions with laity and leadership across the denomination in multiple locations. Information was gathered on our perceived strengths and weaknesses. Work was done with numerous groups of people to ask what they wanted the denomination to look like in ten years' time. It was clear that there was a great hunger for change; people wanted to be part of a growing and thriving church, reaching out with the good news of Jesus to the people of Scotland.

The Strategy Group worked to analyse how to turn the denomination from a maintenance setting to a mission focus. This involved financial restructuring, a resetting of denominational priorities and a fresh emphasis on the local church as being the leading edge for mission. This led to a renewed commitment to church planting and church revitalisation. As the denominational leadership considered how the gospel could be shared broadly across the nation, the need to partner with other gospel-centred churches became clear. Our vision for Scotland was articulated as follows: "Individually and together, working with other believers, we will bring the gospel in word and action to all the people of Scotland." This led to three commitments:

1. To focus the mission of the church on the work of local congregations.
2. To equip leaders and members of local congregations for the task of mission and discipleship.
3. To become a missional church by ensuring that all the structures of the church support the mission of the church as expressed in the Great Commission.

These commitments were to be achieved by pursuing the following objectives:

1. To equip fifteen congregations for mission and discipleship by developing them in terms of preaching, prayer, vision development, team leadership and every-member ministry.
2. To enable these congregations to act as hubs for the resourcing of ministry across a broader area.
3. To investigate and implement new models of church planting.
4. To work for a change in values, attitudes and culture that will be reflected by growth in the areas of maturity, (body) ministry and mission in order that Christ might be more greatly glorified by the church.

This was a key moment for the denomination. It was a re-articulation of the missionary purposes of the church and reflected a determination to use our structures to support the work of local congregations doing local mission. This was when the seeds for a fresh impetus in church planting were first sown. In “Center Church”, Keller writes, “In movements the structure clearly serves the cause, whereas in institutions, the cause tends to serve the structure.”<sup>23</sup> This captures well the change that was occurring in the church. Before, local congregations were seen as a way of propping up a denomination that stood for a particular expression of the Reformed faith (and especially for unaccompanied psalm singing). Now the denomination was understood to exist in order to help local churches do the work of mission in a post-Christian Scotland.

## *2. Culture and organisation*

We began a process of trying to influence the culture of the denomination towards mission. We fed back to the groups we had consulted with to help them remain invested in the process of change. I was appointed, on a full-time basis, as Mission Development Officer with a remit to train and organise our leaders and members for mission. We began to organise ministers’ conferences and training in a way that helped to renew the focus on mission, inviting speakers who were seasoned missional thinkers and church planters. We used the annual General Assembly to showcase strategies for mission and to implement changes in legislation aimed at moving the institution towards mission. In a denomination that had seemed to be languishing there was a readiness for change and an eagerness to embrace a new agenda, based on the centrality of the gospel and mission. In 2010 this included a vote to change our worship practice away from exclusive, unaccompanied psalm singing – a change that would allow for much greater flexibility in church planting and mission. This was a clear sign that gospel priorities were taking precedence over denominational traditions.

## *3. Research and Learning*

The next step in the process was to research and learn as much as we could about church-planting movements. We needed to understand different models and methods so that we could do better plants, do them more quickly and do them without placing such a great financial strain on the denomination. Our own model was not working. We began to network with different church-planting organisations. We read literature, attended conferences and courses and received coaching. As we did so we began to

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Keller, “Center Church”, 352.

learn that we needed to focus our attention not just on planting more churches better, but on planting church-planting churches that would plant churches that would plant churches. We started to grasp the importance of movement dynamics. We tried to share these ideas and strategies as widely as we could throughout the denomination by writing articles, speaking at conferences and informal conversations.

#### *4. Building Partnerships and Catalysing*

Armed with the intent to see gospel-centred churches collaborating in mission to Scotland we sought to give concrete expression to this at a local level. This process began in Edinburgh. Attending an “Urban Plant Life Conference” in London in 2009, where Tim Keller was the keynote speaker, I noticed three other ministers from Edinburgh had come for the same purpose.

We created the East of Scotland Gospel Partnership, with a view to catalysing a church-planting movement in and around Edinburgh. Our hope for this was that together we would raise up a new generation of planters, train and resource them, and then send them out to plant church-planting churches. In 2010 we calculated that Edinburgh, a growing city with around 200 churches, saw less than 5% of the population attend church regularly; an optimistic figure was 24,000 regular churchgoers. There is an urgent need to plant many, many new gospel churches in the city. To date, progress has been slow with around seven new churches started in the last seven years. We anticipate, however, that the pace of planting will accelerate over the next few years.

#### *5. Raising the Profile*

One of the great difficulties in building a church-planting movement is to convince the existing Christian community that it is necessary. A situation of rapid secularisation and plummeting church attendance creates a defensive mind-set. Starting new churches when “we can’t even fill the churches we have” seems like a waste of resources to many. Moving church planting to the top of the agenda is necessary if we are to create movements. To this end we started an annual conference in Edinburgh that sought to put church planting on the map and to create a greater awareness of the possibilities and challenges that come with starting new churches. Alongside this we organised dinners for key lay leaders. Experienced planters and catalysts came to these dinners to share insights from different global contexts that would help lay leaders grasp the vision. We took the opportunity to visit local churches and also spoke in many different training and teaching venues about why and how we were planting churches.

### *6. Training lay people for mission*

Creating a church-planting movement in a traditional denomination requires planting new churches, revitalising dying ones and growing the ones that are already doing well. Training lay people for mission is critical to each of these pathways. We took a two-pronged approach to this. One was to offer training for lay people across a broad sweep of congregations. To achieve this, we took a pre-existing tool (Porterbrook Training) and created two training hubs, one in Edinburgh and one in Inverness. We were able to deliver Porterbrook Training to hundreds of people, including some key lay leaders. The second avenue of approach was to focus in on particular congregations. About six across the country were chosen to become “hubs” for mission. This had limited success. Training was given in these congregations that was intended to enable leaders to develop mission in their local context and to equip church members to engage in mission in the everyday situations of life.

### *7. Creating a model*

It became clear from an early stage that we needed to model the kind of ideas we were promoting. It was no good just talking about new ideas; we needed to model what we had in mind. Before we could begin to talk about it we had to plant some churches. We decided to focus most of our energy in Edinburgh. We entered a partnership with St Columba’s Free Church of Scotland in the city centre. We calculated that if St Columba’s could become an effective catalyst for church planting in the city then this would create an excellent model for similar city centre churches in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. To create an effective model we wanted to do three things: plant church-planting churches from St Columba’s; use its resources to help other churches church plant; and thirdly, to grow St Columba’s so that it could resource more mission.

Around 2011 Grace Church Leith was launched in Edinburgh. This was not a Free Church plant, but several of the ministers who were influential in getting Grace Church started later joined the Free Church and then Grace Church also joined the denomination. It has been an excellent and successful model of a parachute church plant. In 2012, I led the first church plant from St Columba’s, which was launched in 2014 as Cornerstone using a mother-daughter model. Cornerstone is situated in Morningside on the south of the city, in a high-income neighbourhood with the intention of becoming a resource church for further planting. In 2014 St Columba’s became the umbrella organisation to help start another new Free Church of Scotland – Christ Church Edinburgh. In 2016 St Columba’s launched another mother-daughter plant, Esk Valley Church, situated in a commuter town south of the city. In 2017, a further plant is planned for a commuter town to the east of

the city. In addition to this, St Columba's is in the early stages of planning a plant to the west of the city for 2018. In 2010 there were three Free Church of Scotland congregations in Edinburgh; currently there are seven and by 2020 we hope there will be ten.

During this same period St Columba's has grown from a church of around 120 people to over 300; Grace Church Leith has outgrown its current building which seats 100 people; Cornerstone has about 75 adults and 40 children; Esk Valley has around 60 people; Christ Church Edinburgh is also a congregation of over 100 people which is searching for larger premises. These are small beginnings but the trajectory is one of growth and, we hope, multiplication. Grace Church and Cornerstone are both looking ahead to future planting opportunities and Esk Valley church has a vision to plant a number of churches in the towns surrounding it. If, by 2020, we have ten congregations in the Edinburgh area, then we are aiming for those ten to plant ten more and for this to be the beginning of a true multiplication process using the knowledge, skills and resources gained from this initial phase of planting.

As church planting in Edinburgh has taken shape, other new plants have been initiated in other areas. Stirling Free Church appointed a full-time planter in 2016. Further north, Rosskeen Free Church began a new congregation in the town of Alness, about thirty miles from Inverness. In Glasgow, Govan Free Church began as a parachute plant in 2013.

As of 2017 the St Columba's model is beginning to be adopted and adapted by other city-centre congregations: Glasgow City Free Church is starting Hope Church, Helensburgh; St Peter's Free Church, Dundee is starting a new church in a city housing scheme called Charleston.

### *8. Planter pipeline*

One of our major challenges is to find enough planters to lead the new churches we want to start. This was one reason we began to hold church planting conferences with high profile Christian speakers – we wanted to attract young leaders. A second idea is that of Church Planting Bootcamps. This idea was shared with us by the Latvian Baptist Church at the European Leadership Forum. The Bootcamp is a three-year programme: young leaders attend once a week in each of the three years. The purpose is to develop exceptional young leaders of plants or to be part of a church-planting team.

Once a year we write to all the congregations in the denomination asking if they have any young adults with exceptional leadership potential aged between 17 and 25. Those recommended are then invited to Bootcamp. Each year has an intake of between 10 and 15 young adults. Bootcamp runs for a week with a programme of high-intensity physical challenges alongside in-depth theological teaching. In Year 1 the focus is on Theology of the Gospel.



In Year 2 the teaching is on Gospel Leadership. In Year 3 it is on Church Planting and Calling. Throughout the three years the Bootcampers are given a mentor and a reading programme. After Year 2 they are required to start and lead a project in their local church. Each year the Bootcampers are immersed in ideas of church planting: what it is, why it is needed and how it is done. Church planters are invited to come along and talk about what they do. So far each intake at Bootcamp has yielded two or three young leaders who want to become church planters. If this can be maintained then it will become the key pipeline for future recruitment.

### *9. Assessment*

Good assessment programmes are a trusted method of preventing the wrong people from becoming church planters and, in addition, helping to shape the training and preparation of those who are suitably gifted for the task. As we began to develop our own programme a couple of us went through church planter assessment with Acts 29. This helped us to understand the process from the inside out. We also looked at other church-planting assessment programmes. From this we have put together our own, designed as a two stage process – an initial, light assessment before formal theological training is begun and then an in-depth, thorough assessment over two days that is done in the final year of theological training. So far about eight potential planters have come through this programme.

### *10. Training*

Our denominational structures mean that potential planters need to progress along two tracks. In the first place they need be recognised as candidates for the Free Church Ministry. This involves interview and scrutiny by the local church and by the denomination. This is followed by three years of full-time theological education at Edinburgh Theological Seminary. Then finally there are the processes of examination and scrutiny before licensing and ordination. Alongside of this there is church planter assessment, usually accompanied by an internship in an early stage plant. Once a potential planter has been assessed and graduated from seminary we place them in a plant for twelve months to learn on the job as a “Church Planter in Training”.

From 2010 onwards we have run a curriculum for church planters and trainees. This is a peer-to-peer learning system with monthly seminars. Alongside this, time is set apart to pray for planters and their new churches. The curriculum looks at methods and models of church planting, research, evangelism, core group dynamics, training leaders, preparing for launch, discipleship, preaching, prayer and several other topics. These seminar days

are attended by a wide spread of people – from those who are preparing to plant to those who are several years into the process. I attended Redeemer City to City’s “Train the Trainer” in 2012 to help us deliver better training. In addition, several planters from Edinburgh have attended the City to City Intensive training in New York City.

### *11. Coaching*

Another critical component of creating a church-planting network is to have a good supply of coaches. A strong coaching relationship is a very helpful way of reducing the sense of isolation and stress that planters often encounter. A good coach can also help the planter clarify his plans and make him more effective at putting those plans into action. Good coaching leads to better planting. We have trained about twenty coaches through the “Gospel Coach” system and are working to establish an effective coaching system for all our church planters.

### *12. Funding*

Funding church planting is a tremendous challenge for us. This is because although we now have over one hundred churches in the denomination, we have very few large churches. Most have less than a hundred attendees and so are not able to finance much beyond their own needs.

At St Columba’s we have sought to mitigate the financial pressure by initially employing our church planters as staff members of the mother church. They have worked for St Columba’s for part of the week and used the rest of their time to begin to put together the church plant. When the plant is underway and appropriate funding is in place, the planter transitions out of St Columba’s to work full time at the new church. This has benefited both churches and meant there is a strong sense of connection between the sending church and the planters.

We have also been blessed with excellent funding relationships with donors and supporting churches in the USA and the UK. These funding relationships have allowed us to do much more than we could have previously. To create a church-planting movement we need to plant and grow sufficient churches in the denomination that will allow the movement to be financially self-sustaining.

### *13. Communication*

Creating and sharing a vision is a key aspect of church-planting movements. We have moved slowly in “vision casting” because too many visions for the future growth of the church in Scotland have been oversold. As we began to

work towards creating the conditions for a planting movement we decided that we first needed to get on with the work itself. Once we had planted a number of churches we could begin to talk about what we were doing and the potential for a movement. This is the stage we have now reached. We have stories to tell and church plants to point to.

We are currently in the process of working with a branding consultant to help us think through how we can capture what we are seeking to do and present it to various audiences within the denomination and outside. What is the name of our movement? What is the vision and purpose that we are pursuing? How can we talk about what we are doing in a way that helps others to get on board?

#### *14. Staff*

Until 2016 we had no full-time staff devoted to the creation of a church-planting movement. I worked to develop recruitment and training but did this alongside various other jobs. I was assisted by the denominational Mission Coordinator, but again this was not the main focus of her work. In 2016 we recruited a full-time (self-funded) worker to put together all the logistics of recruitment, assessment, training, coaching and funding. He is helping us to build capacity and to be more effective in delivering the different elements of our programme. As the movement takes shape and grows, more staff resources will be needed to help catalyse and organise the movement. The denomination's administrative and financial staff have played a key role in helping us to reach this point.

### *IV. What we have learnt and future challenges*

#### *1. Progress is possible*

In the thirty years before 2010 the Free Church of Scotland had successfully planted six congregations in Livingston, Falkirk, Inverness, St Andrews, Dunfermline and South Uist & Benbecula. Only two of these church plants have grown beyond 100 people. We planted slowly and we planted small. And crucially, none of these churches were in our major centres of populations: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen.

In the seven years since 2010 we have seen seven congregations started and, crucially, the majority of these are in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Three new congregations are in the process of being planted in 2017. We have shifted from one new church every four years (1980-2010), to one new church every year (2010-2016), to a phase which may see three new churches every year (2017 onwards). As a denomination of around a hundred congregations that would see a growth rate of 2-3% per annum.

At this point in time we have many, but not all, the features that are required for a church-planting movement: We have vision; we have sacrifice; we have a pipeline of planters. we have assessment tools and training incubators; we have an increased rate and effectiveness of planting; we have maturing churches. But we still lack some of the key features, in particular: we have no plants that are planting churches; we lack spontaneity and multiplication; and we are still financially dependent on external funders.

## *2. People want action before vision*

Christians do not want maintenance – they want a sense of adventure and purpose. When we began to re-emphasise the centrality of the gospel to the denomination and the priority of mission through the local church this was met with an overwhelmingly positive response. At the same time people are wary of big talk and empty talk; they want a sense of ambition but not one that seems utterly detached from reality. And above all else they need to have healthy change modelled and demonstrated to them by leaders they can trust.

## *3. Partnerships are challenging*

We have yet to break the code on creating thriving church-planting partnerships. Different organisations have not only differing theologies but different priorities and methodologies. We have not reached the level of catholicity, trust and generosity that will see Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Independent Evangelicals, Charismatics and Reformed collaborate well for church planting in Edinburgh and beyond.

## *4. You can do more than you think you can*

The Free Church of Scotland is not slick or fast moving. Overall it is both theologically and culturally conservative. We are not cool and we never will be. But putting our trust in the gospel and the provision of God we have already achieved more than we anticipated. As we have pushed forward in obedience, God has supplied church planters, core team members, training, coaching, funding, buildings, and much more besides.

## *5. Our ecclesiology and institution are strengths*

Having a strong Presbyterian ecclesiology has been a help. We know what kind of churches we want to plant. We believe in the Reformed marks of the church: the preaching of the word, the right administration of the sacraments, church discipline and care for the poor. We know that we are

planting churches that have ordained ministers and a plurality of leadership. We have long-standing, tried and tested procedures for the recognition of new congregations. Within that we have the flexibility to allow for different models and methods of planting; Stirling Free Church was started by a lay leader in his spare time. Only later did an ordained church planter take on the leadership of the new congregation. In Edinburgh we have planted churches with ministers who are part-time in the plant. In other situations full-time ordained planters have led from the start.

Creating a church-planting movement in a traditional denomination comes with a number of other benefits: We can draw on the resources of the larger institution; because of our denomination we already have processes for maintaining theological integrity; we have our own excellent theological training to postgraduate level; we have effective and efficient administrative and financial systems; we have thousands of members across Scotland offering a wide pool of talent, experience and expertise. In other words, many of the boundaries, processes and resources that an emerging church-planting movement would need to create for itself are already available to us. We have the best of both worlds.

We cannot do the fast-hatch, lay-led, house church movements that David Garrison and others observed in the non-Western world. But such movements have not been markedly more successful at reaching non-Christians in Europe than other forms of church. And when most Christians in Europe belong to denominations or older networks with institutional structures, the best missionary strategy is to see how these institutions can be shifted to embrace movement dynamics. Movements from within institutions may take much longer to incubate than the kind of movements that Garrison described, but in the longer term they ought to have the ability to keep planting new churches at an impressive rate. If traditional denominations can create a movement to plant enough new churches to grow by 2 or 3% each year then in a twenty-year period they can witness spectacular growth.

## *6. Barriers*

Life in an institution will always have its tensions and we have encountered some barriers: There has been some resistance from those who see church planting as a “fad”; others recognise the need for church planting in Scotland but worry that is drawing resources away from international mission; others want us to rescue dying churches instead of starting new ones; and at times we have been bogged down by bureaucratic processes. None of these challenges have been insurmountable and they certainly do not outweigh the advantages of being in a denomination.

### *7. Church planting is not the only game in town*

We cannot ignore the challenge of revitalising dying or declining churches. If we want to witness a genuine church-planting movement across Scotland we need our older congregations to thrive and to become centres of mission and church planting. Our church-planting efforts are diminished if we allow existing congregations to close whilst we are busy starting new ones. This means that we need to give renewed thought and energy to the work of church revitalisation. Lessons learned via the “innovations” of church planting need to be fed back to older congregations in order to help them re-engage in fruitful evangelism. New forms of ministry and mission need to be adopted in rural areas of declining population, and existing urban congregations need to be ready to adapt to demographic and cultural changes occurring in our towns and cities.

It is key to remember, though, that revitalisation requires not simply a new set of tactics or an updated philosophy of ministry. Spiritual vitality rests on union with Christ (John 15), and union with Christ requires the reality and power of the gospel not simply to be acknowledged but experienced. Undergirding the tactical elements of church revitalisation there needs to be a process of gospel renewal. Such renewal must begin with the church leadership and so revitalisation will mean helping church leaders to refocus on the gospel at a personal level. This accords with Stefan Paas’ belief that older churches can grow as well as new churches, if they have the right kind of leadership and the right location.<sup>24</sup>

### *8. Future challenges*

Consolidating the progress we have made and accelerating the development of a church-planting movement remain the major challenges. A key future step will be to persuade and enable the institution to allow the movement to develop in spontaneous ways that enables the true and swift multiplication of churches rather than simply adding a few churches each year. One way of doing this would be to appoint Church Planting Catalysts for each of our four main cities. These catalysts would be given the authority to create church-planting networks in their city. This authority would give them power to recruit, fund raise, train and deploy new planters and start as many new churches as they can without going through the usual procedure of getting denominational approval for each stage of this process. They could be given freedom to do this for a five-year period with the only condition being that they report annually to the denomination on progress and that they only appoint church planters and lay leaders who meet denominational

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<sup>24</sup> Stefan Paas, “Church Planting in the Secular West”, 180.

standards. These would be laboratories where the spontaneous incubation and multiplication of new churches is encouraged and fostered.

A further challenge is to begin to collect and analyse good data from the churches that we are planting. Are they evangelistically effective? Who is coming to them? How many of these people are new to church and how many are returnees? And research also needs to be done to determine where the best church-planting opportunities lie as well as the greatest church-planting needs.

### *Conclusion*

Institution and movement are not to be separated or opposed to each other. Rather they need each other – they live in a relationship of mutual dependence. In the United Kingdom we should be optimistic that church-planting movements can be fostered. And those of us who are in traditional denominations or networks have an opportunity to bring about the changes that will create the conditions for such movements to take root. This will take time, and resources from outside may be needed to give initial impetus. But our experience in the Free Church of Scotland is that by taking a few simple steps the conditions can emerge for a church-planting movement to take root. Pray for us that this might come to fruition.

# MULTI-SITE CHURCH

*Andy Paterson\**

Multi-site churches litter the American churchscape and are beginning to crop up on the British scene. This article examines what they are, how the multi-site movement arose and what biblical rationale there might be for their existence. Appeals have been made both to church history and to evangelistic success by their advocates whilst the critics major on the nature of church and its oversight. The paper investigates whether multi-site church is an end in itself, a dangerous distortion to be avoided or a pragmatic tool that might help structure a transitional phase for some church plants and mergers.

## *Our story*

In the summer of 2002 I realised we needed to do something. The Kensington Baptist Church family had been meeting at the Riverside Leisure Centre whilst the main church building, a ten-minute walk away, was being refurbished. The fourteen-month absence was going to conclude that September and the 400-strong congregation would be returning to their newly modernised building. But what of the location we would be leaving behind? Having worked hard to proclaim the gospel in that context, what should we do?

The answer was obvious. We needed to leave a congregation behind, and in God's goodness we had in membership a remarkably gifted planter who would be the leader. Church planting itself was not in vogue at that time, even the intentional "brand" planting of a number of Charismatic groupings seemed to have run out of steam at the turn of the century. And I was sure that this new fledgling congregation (that was to begin in January 2003) didn't fit those conventional church-planting categories. What we needed to do required a closer bond between "mother" church and the new congregation. But what was that to look like? There were no obvious parallels we were aware of in the UK, and news was only beginning to slowly seep out of the American scene about a multi-site movement that seemed to have begun with Randy Pope and the Perimeter Church in Atlanta, Georgia at the beginning of the 1980's.<sup>1</sup>

So we made it up as we went along – committed to Scripture but trying to work out how this new congregation could be tied in to the "mother" church for its own well-being and support. We certainly didn't want that new

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Nathaniel Frye, *The multi-site church phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010*, Doctoral dissertation, May 2011.



grouping of thirty adults to be faced immediately with issues of polity – its focus was evangelism, and so we planned that for its initial start-up phase it should remain under the oversight of the “mother” church.

As it turned out, my own church planting naivety was to be exposed in the three years that followed. I failed to properly take into consideration the location of this new plant, and although “Riverside Christian Fellowship” did remarkable work in trying to reach out with the good news of Christ, the changing social geography of the area inhibited any growth so that after three years we closed it down. The faithful, hard-working group remained more or less the same in number but few others would venture down the cul-de-sac to an industrial area increasingly frequented by hard drug users.

At the same time a church in south Bristol was coming to the end of its life. It occupied a strategic location in an unreached area but was down to the last dozen members with an average age in the late 70s. After careful approaches it was agreed that Kensington Baptist could come in to help, and so in January 2007 a group of 40 adults and 13 children (many of whom had been involved in the first plant) set out to revitalise and establish Headley Park Church under the leadership of Neil Todman. This time we felt it was appropriate that this church didn’t need to be tied in to the “mother” church (except for graduated salary payments), so “multi-site” disappeared from our thinking.

However, the gaps left at Kensington by the departing plant members were soon filled and the church building was again up to over 80% capacity. So what to do? Another service? A larger building? Neither of these options made sense to us so we returned to thinking about the multi-site model, and in September 2009 launched two new congregations into areas identified as being unreached. One plant of twenty people went into the centre of Bristol, meeting in a large function room attached to a Premier Inn – we called this BC3 (Bristol City Centre Church); and at the same time another plant of twenty adults and ten children went to the eastern sector of Emersons Green, a newer housing estate to the north of Bristol. This went under the name of The Village Church.

We called these “satellite” churches. They met on a Sunday morning and came back to the “mother” church building on a Sunday evening. Church membership was under the oversight of the “mother” church and, where possible, resources were shared. The same passage was preached on in each of the three locations by a different preacher, and joint prayer meetings across the congregations became an occasional feature.

At the start our expressed assumption was that each congregation would, in its own time, become an independent, self-governing church, especially so in the light of the rapid growth that was experienced in the first two years, when “non-Kensington” attendees began to far outnumber those who had been sent from the “mother” church.

Now why do I share these details of the church that I had pastored up until 2012? To demonstrate that we had to wrestle with many of the questions and caricatures that have come to be associated with the multi-site church model. I still worship at one of these satellite churches (The Village Church) and have been able to observe both the positives and negatives associated with this model.

### *The American influence*

What was most striking was how the multi-site literature had mushroomed in quantity between our faltering experiment in 2002 and the launch of our satellite churches in 2009.

Inevitably it was the American experience driving these innovations. Brian Frye, in a doctoral thesis, argues that three factors were pivotal to the rise of this movement in America: economic advancement, accelerated mobility, and technological innovation.<sup>2</sup>

Key to the promotion of multi-site churches was the involvement of the Leadership Network. Founded in 1984 the Leadership Network's aim was to help connect innovative programme leaders who were helping to develop the church. By the turn of the century the slow-burning, multi-site movement had gripped the imagination of this small network, and in 2002, Greg Ligon, a United Methodist student worker who had joined the Network back in 1997, somewhat reluctantly accepted the facilitator role for the first Multi-Site Leadership Community. Comprised of pastoral leaders from twelve early multi-site churches, this group gathered regularly over a two-year period to explore and develop multi-site understanding and methodology via a collaborative learning process.<sup>3</sup>

Out of this came the book that moved the multi-site movement into the American mainstream – *The Multi-Site Revolution*. Published in 2006 it was co-authored by Ligon, Geoff Surratt and Warren Bird. The three of them were to follow that up three years later with *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip* in which they reported on 15 different multi-site churches and the lessons they had learned. By this stage (2009) they described multi-site as “the new normal”<sup>4</sup> and reported that five million people in the United States and Canada attend a multi-site church.

In the same year LifeWay Research published the findings of Scott McConnell, an associate director, in a book covering similar ground to the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

“Road Trip” book, which continued the march of multi-site to centre stage<sup>5</sup> and a year later Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird wrote their ground-breaking and hugely influential book on church planting – *Viral Churches* – which included a chapter on “Multisite strategy: a fast growing trend that affects planting”.<sup>6</sup> (Although coming out as a Leadership Network Publication suggested that it should be no surprise that multi-site should receive such an affirmation.)

By 2014 it was reported that if multi-site churches were a Protestant denomination, they’d be the fourth largest in the USA. In that same year Leadership Network conducted the most extensive study ever on the multi-site phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> It surveyed 535 churches across 12 countries (91% USA, 4% Canada, 3% UK, 4% other) that together represented 1.8 million people in weekly worship.

They summarised their findings like this:

1. An impressive 85% of surveyed multi-site churches are growing – and at the strong rate of 14% per year.
2. Churches typically go multi-site in the 1,000 size range, though almost half say they could have become multi-site earlier.
3. Campus viability starts at 75-350 people, depending on the model.
4. The typical multi-site church is just four years into the process, and 57% plan to launch an additional campus in the next twelve months.
5. One in three (37%) churches started a multi-site campus as the result of a merger.
6. The vast majority (88%) of churches report that going multi-site increased the role of lay participation.
7. The vast majority (87%) of campus pastors are found internally – trained and hired from within the church.
8. Multi-site campuses grow far more than church plants, and likewise multi-site campuses have a greater evangelistic impact than church plants.
9. Nearly half (48%) of multi-site churches directly sponsor new churches.
10. The recommended distance between campuses is a travel time of 15-30 minutes.
11. In rating what campuses do well, spiritual growth and volunteering are near the top, and newer campuses do better at reaching the unchurched.<sup>8</sup>

So what are we to make of multi-site churches? It is clear that we cannot stand by without thought when such a movement has grown so rapidly, and although it is clearly an American phenomenon, we know well enough that such ideas will inevitably seek to take root in British soil. I was very conscious in talking to my British friends in the early days that many of them regarded multi-site with undisguised hostility. Their own exposure to it in the Christian press was one of two things. It either represented the attempts

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<sup>5</sup> Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation* (Nashville: B&H, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> <http://leadnet.org/available-now-the-leadership-networkgeneris-multisite-church-scorecard/>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

of a rock star/egomaniac pastor to video-cast his image in to as many outlets as possible, or it was associated with the pronouncements of Mark Driscoll, the ruggedly dynamic and eloquent leader of Acts29<sup>9</sup> and Mars Hill Church Seattle, which grew rapidly under his aggressive multi-site policy.

However, the passing of years gives an opportunity for reflection and definition and, although growing in number, the statistics of multi-site churches (as we compare research from 2009 and 2014) suggest the growth is beginning to plateau and that the movement itself is becoming more self-aware and self-critical.

Let's start by trying to define multi-site. Indeed, so much of the controversy that has been generated (certainly this side of the pond) seems to have arisen out of careless definitions and lazy generalisations. Probably the best place to start is the book that started the revolution, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*. They define a multi-site church as

one church meeting in multiple locations – different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.<sup>10</sup>

And within that definition the authors identify five different models:

1. Video-Venue Model: Creating one or more on-campus environments that use video-cast sermons (live or recorded), often varying the worship style.
2. Regional-Campus Model: Replicating the experience of the original campus at additional campuses in order to make church more accessible to other geographic communities.
3. Teaching-Team Model: Leveraging a strong teaching team across multiple locations at the original campus or an off-site campus.
4. Partnership Model: Partnering with a local business or non-profit organization to use its facility beyond a mere “renter” arrangement.
5. Low-Risk Model: Experimenting with new locations that have a low level of risk because of the simplicity of programming and low financial investment involved but that have the potential for high returns in terms of evangelism and growth.<sup>11</sup>

Major practitioners of the multi-site model, whose use of it gave credibility within the reformed evangelical world, were Tim Keller and John Piper. However, Keller's motives appeared more pragmatic whereas Piper sought theological justification for the changes they introduced at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis.

Keller wrote this in a Gospel Coalition Blog on 29 January 2010:

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<sup>9</sup> On 8 August, 2014, the board of Acts 29 removed both Driscoll and Mars Hill Church from membership.

<sup>10</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church... in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

So what were the reasons that we adopted the multi-site model?

First, we sent our services out into different locations so that people could worship closer to where they lived. People can become more deeply involved in the community and can more easily bring friends if they attend services in their neighborhood. This was an “anti-mega-church” move, since huge churches create a large body of commuters who travel long distances to attend church. We wanted to resist this tendency and root people more in their locales.

Second, the multi-site model is a transition design for us. Redeemer has a timetable for turning each site into a congregation in its own neighborhood, with its own pastoral leadership.

In fact, when Keller announced his retirement from Redeemer on 26 February 2017, Christianity Today covered the story with the following:

Keller, 66, announced at all eight Sunday services today that he will be stepping down from the pulpit. The move corresponds with a decades-long plan to transition the single Presbyterian Church in America congregation – which has grown to 5,000 members since it began 28 years ago – into three particular churches... Each of the three Redeemer churches will remain collegial and still partner together for programs, but will officially be their own congregations with their own leaders and elders (pending a May 20 congregational vote). They also each will plant churches in three more locations – resulting in nine total daughter churches – starting with Redeemer Lincoln Square, which is scheduled to launch on Easter Sunday.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas John Piper argued this back in 2007:

We are a multi-site church. As part of the Treasuring Christ Together Strategy, we aim to multiply campuses. Therefore, from our Downtown Minneapolis campus which was established in 1871, we have launched a North Campus in 2002 and a South Site in 2006. Unlike new church plants, the campuses are all part of Bethlehem with a single vision, a single strategy, a single theological foundation, a single eldership, a single constitution, a single band of missionaries, and a single budget... In Acts 11:22, Luke writes, “The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.” Not “churches” but “church”. And in Acts 15:4, Luke describes the welcome of Paul and Barnabas in Jerusalem: “When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders.” Not churches, but church.

So there is no evidence that the believers in Jerusalem were several churches. But consider the numbers. In Acts 2:41, “there were added that day about three thousand souls”. In Acts 4:4, Luke says, “Many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” And the word for “men” refers to males. So the real number of believers was at least double that, because it says in Acts 5:14, “More than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” So we have one church of at least ten thousand members. How did they do that? How were they structured? What did church look like?

Don’t misunderstand. We are not operating on the assumption that if we knew the exact structure of the Jerusalem church or the Philippian church or the Corinthian church we would have to structure ourselves just that way. We believe that where the New Testament commands us to do something or implies that it is right to do it in all times and all places, we obey. But there is no command in the New Testament that says, “Replicate all the structures that you see in the early church”. Some are commanded; some are not. Our aim was simply, Can we see some guidelines? Can we see mandates and prohibitions if there are any, and can we see opportunities and permissions?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-multi-site-model-thoughts>  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2017/february/tim-keller-stepping-down-nyc-redeemer-senior-pastor.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/treasuring-christ-together-as-a-church-on-multiple-campus>

One major American church leader stood apart from this and began to raise theological concerns about the direction this movement was heading in. Mark Dever is pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC, and in a now famous video discussion with Mark Driscoll and James McDonald, graciously probed the thinking behind their multi-site strategies. Although quite fiercely opposed by the other two, Dever's questions exposed some of the theological fault-lines in their reasoning. The video was put on the Gospel Coalition website in late 2010 but was deleted from the site in 2014 following the resignations of both Driscoll and McDonald. It can, however, still be found on alternative sites.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time the "9 Marks Journal" (published by Dever) dedicated its May/June 2010 issue to "Multi-Site Churches". In an even-handed approach it balanced warm commendations of multi-site church by Gregg Allison, J. D. Greear and Matt Chandler with serious questions from Grant Gaines, Jonathan Leeman, Bobby Jamieson and Thomas White.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, the criticisms offered then are substantially the same that have been repeated over following years and can be summarised as follows:

### *1. The nature of ekklesia*

When is a church not a church? When is a gathering of believers together in one place under Christ for worship and the word, not a true gathering of the church? If believers are meeting together then they are the *ekklesia* / church. The word was always used to denote a literal assembly of believers in the same place:

One should assume that a particular expression of the church is capable of being referred to as an *ekklesia* because its members are characterized by actually assembling together. Thus, even the possible non-literal (or abstract) use of the word would not be grounds for structuring a church in such a way that the members do not regularly, physically assemble, as multi-site structure does.<sup>16</sup>

Bobby Jamieson went on to examine the whole theme from the perspective of historical theology (or as he calls it – "dead guys"):

Baptist John Gill (1697-1771), a master of the biblical languages, wrote, "The word *ekklesia*, always used for church, signifies an assembly called and met together." J.L. Reynolds wrote, "The word Church (in the original Greek of the New Testament, *ekklesia*), means a congregation, or assembly." Baptist John Dagg (1794-1884) wrote, "But whenever the word *ekklesia* is used, we

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ukvHuwFzBA>

<sup>15</sup> <https://9marks.org/journal/multi-site-churches/> (There seems to be a mistake in the date titling of this journal online. It lists it as 2009, whereas the articles in it were written mostly in February 2010.)

<sup>16</sup> <https://9marks.org/article/exegetical-critique-multi-site-disassembling-church/>

are sure of an assembly; and the term is not applicable to bodies or societies of men that do not literally assemble.”

J.L. Reynolds wrote, “In its sacred use, [ekklesia] is confined to two meanings, referring either to a particular local society of Christians, or to the whole body of God’s redeemed people.” Congregationalist George Punchard (1806-1880), noting that ekklesia can also refer to a secular assembly, wrote, “The Greek word ekklesia... is used in the New Testament, for the most part, to designate either the whole body of Christians, or a single congregation of professed believers, united together for religious purposes.”

Baptist William B. Johnson (1782-1862) wrote concerning several texts about the church in Acts: “The first nine quotations relate to the church in Jerusalem, and very satisfactorily shew, that the term church indicates one church, one body of the Lord’s people, meeting together in one place, and not several congregations, forming one church.”

J.L. Reynolds wrote, “We read in the New Testament of ‘the Church’ in a particular city, village, and even house, and of ‘the Churches’ of certain regions; but never of a Church involving a plurality of congregations. *So, a local church is by definition – and therefore should only be – a single congregation.*”<sup>17</sup>

Andrew Wilson was a multi-site pastor within the Newfrontiers movement in 2012 when he wrote a blog expressing some of his reservations about the multi-site phenomenon. As he reflected upon the biblical definition of church he commented – “the phrase which has become almost a slogan in some quarters, namely “one church, many congregations”, doesn’t seem to me to make very much sense. In the New Testament sense, the congregation and the church are the same, and I presume it is this fact that led to the odd comment I heard at the multisite conference the other day: “these [that is, the gatherings of Christians governed by the same group of elders] are fully functioning congregations, or, as Mark Driscoll would say, churches.” When comments like this are made by leading experts, it indicates to me a substantial lack of clarity about what exactly a multisite “congregation” is, biblically speaking – since the very notion of “one church, many congregations” has become the (literally) nonsensical “one church, many churches” – and it also makes me think that large numbers of elders may effectively be governing multiple “churches” without ever being clear that they are. Care is needed here, methinks.”<sup>18</sup>

## *2. The understanding of 1 Cor 11:17-20; Acts 2:46; Rom 16:5*

The Scriptures listed above (along with a few others) have been cited as scriptural grounds for multi-site practice. It is significant that in the book that moved multi-site mainstream – *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* – no attention was given to the biblical justification for what was happening (except, perhaps for one paragraph on page 17<sup>19</sup> and a few paragraphs on

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<sup>17</sup> <https://9marks.org/article/historical-critique-multi-site-not-over-my-dead-body/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/some-concerns-about-multisite>

<sup>19</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church... in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), referring to an observation by

page 92 which suggested that the Antioch church was a multi-site extension from the Jerusalem church!) And in the follow up book by the same authors three years later – *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip* – there is a brief chapter (Chapter 14) revealingly entitled “Are you sure this isn’t a sin?” in which Bethlehem Baptist Church, pastored at that time by John Piper is quoted as the example, and five objections are briefly answered, although no biblical justification is provided.

Grant Gaines, arguing that the usage of *epi to auto* means “in the same place” and is used to describe the local church gathering in both 1 Corinthians and Acts, goes on to conclude under this point,

the claim by some proponents of the multi-site model that “Corinth and other first-century churches were multi-site, as a number of multi-site house churches were considered to be part of one citywide church”, clearly does not measure up to the evidence. In regard to passages such as Acts 2:46 (“breaking bread from house to house”) as well as the several references to “house-churches” (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philem 2), it should be noted that the former instance by no means supports a “one church in many locations” model, especially since verse 44 states that they were also meeting “in the same place” (*epi to auto*, my translation). Rather, it simply states that they broke bread together in various homes. In the instance of house-churches, it is significant that these are always considered “churches” and not mere “campuses”, “sites”, or any other word denoting a portion of a church. A citywide church consisting of multiple house-churches is not in view in Corinth and is never mentioned in Scripture.

Instances in Acts in which the whole church in a particular geographic location is designated as having come together in the same place by the phrase *epi to auto* include 1:15, 2:1, and 2:44. The latter two instances make it even more explicit that the entire church was in the same place by noting that “all” (*pantes*) were “in the same place” (*epi to auto*). Acts 5:12 and 15:22 are other instances in which “all” (*pantes*) or the “whole” (*holōs*) church in Jerusalem met together. Acts 14:27 and 15:30 reveal that there were times when the whole church in Antioch met together as well. These latter instances are probably not references to regular Lord’s Day assemblies, but they do show that the whole congregation in this city was capable of coming together in the same location.

The ease and frequency with which Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and the book of Acts speak of one church coming together “in the same place” suggests that this was the common practice of a New Testament ekklesia.

Some might object that all the members of a particular church in the New Testament would not have been able to fit together in the same place due to space limitations, but this is an argument from silence that it is contrary to the explicit scriptural examples given above. The text says that whole churches met together in one place, whether in a house or not. Besides, this objection contradicts the plain evidence of the text, at least for the church in Jerusalem, which we know numbered in the thousands and still managed to meet together: “And all those who had believed were together” (Acts 2:44); “And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico” (Acts 5:12); “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number... the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples” (ESV, Acts 6:1-2).<sup>20</sup>



### *3. The place of the pastor preacher*

Critics of multi-site point out that out-lying sites are likely to have an absentee pastor. This is especially the case when the senior pastor is regularly beamed in by video (a very rare occurrence in the much smaller British scene), but even when there is an associate pastor or “campus” pastor present it is not possible for the lead pastor / elder to be physically present all the time with the flock that he leads. Indeed, when we change the nomenclature and use other Biblical terms to refer to sites as the “family” or a “body” or “flock” rather than a congregation or an assembly then the absence becomes all the more significant. And for most examples of multi-site in the UK this also means that oversight is in the hands of a body of elders, some of whom may never have attended the “site” over which they have responsibility. How does this relate to the recognition of elders by members of the flock who have had no opportunity to know let alone view the example of their lives? Of course, this state of affairs might be due, in part, to the business model that helped grow the American multi-site movement in the first place and has been uncritically adopted this side of the Atlantic.

The absentee pastor also brings a disconnect between preaching and leading. It is so often as God’s word is ministered and applied in unique situations by local men that a body of believers is strengthened, emboldened and envisioned. If that preaching is not done by the leader of that group but by a representative, then leading and preaching are subtly separated. As Randy Pope, the founding father of multi-site, recognised, “If the leader isn’t preaching, and the preacher isn’t leading, there’s a serious disconnect.”<sup>21</sup>

### *4. Developing a consumer mind-set rather than a sacrificial heart*

Multi-site is predicated upon the idea of making church services more local and more convenient. Of course, this is not a bad thing in itself. Indeed, many a single-site church would do well to reconsider how they might better connect the gospel with their surrounding community rather than follow the whims and preferences of existing members. But in this mobile age the danger is that multi-site churches are developed to offer a range of styles that fit the preferences of their “consumers”. If you prefer a Getty / Townend experience go to Site A; if pre-1950 hymns are your thing go to Site B; or if electro-funk is your preference then go to Site C.

Instead of working hard at creating a multi-cultural church that demonstrates the barrier-busting power of the gospel, multi-site can tend to divide a “church” into separate cultural streams. Although widely critiqued,

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/summer-2015/3-reasons-we-stopped-doing-multisite-church.html>

the homogeneous unit principle of McGavran and Wagner, once popular in the 1980s, seems to be making a subtle comeback through a variety of culture-specific congregations.

Yet such gatherings can seem to deny the reconciling power of the gospel and the reconciled nature of the church. Part of Christian growth and discipleship involves working out, within a broad context, what it means to be part of the body of Christ in all its variety. It will not always be comfortable. It will challenge the racial and social beliefs I grew up with. It will force me back upon the message of grace. It will make me recognise that church revolves around the glory of Christ and not the personal, individualistic comfort of the believer. And of course, if a church is built around cultural preferences rather than cross-shaped living, then it can become an unwitting participant in ethnic, social or political conflict.

The writer knows from personal experience how hard (and well-nigh impossible) it is to build a *truly* multi-cultural church in a multi-cultural community. The reality is that one particular cultural, racial or linguistic group will tend to dominate. And therefore, even if we are opposed to the theory of the homogeneous unit principle, in practice we tend to identify around a particular worship-style, denominational allegiance, or theological emphasis. This in turn means that a largely middle-class evangelical constituency can be excluding of significant swathes of the population.

So we must be careful in our critique to ensure that single-site churches do not become guilty of the very same fault they see in the multi-site movement.

### *The case for the defence*

We need to be aware of what arguments are being put forward to justify a multi-site movement.

#### *Theological*

Although an argument from silence, the question raised by Piper and others needs consideration. If the church at Jerusalem was as large as numbers seem to suggest, how did that church meet? Did they break that one body down into more manageable units, especially for pastoral care and oversight?

#### *Historical*

The American scene was notably shaped in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century by the Methodist circuit riders who travelled between various churches to provide preaching and pastoral leadership. They were

responding to a fast-changing and mobile situation where the number of trained pastors was not keeping up with the growth of new churches.

In the UK, Gregg Allison cites the collaboration between Calvinistic Baptist churches in London in the seventeenth century and quotes from the First London Confession of Faith (1644):

And although the particular congregations are distinct and several bodies, everyone a compact and knit city in itself; yet they are all to walk by one and the same rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.<sup>22</sup>

(However one does wonder whether Allison has not scored a spectacular “own-goal” by referencing a clear association of independent churches rather than a multi-site model.)

And Hugh Wamble, in his doctoral dissertation, writes:

It was normal for a local church to have a scattered constituency and to be composed of several congregations. For convenience or protection, the membership was divided into several parts for worship.<sup>23</sup>

This arrangement was particularly prominent throughout Britain during times of persecution such as the Restoration. In rural areas also, the “conventicles” or small congregations were parts of the originating church. For example, the Ilston church (Wales) of John Miles consisted of widely scattered congregations: Abergavenny, Llanwenarth, Llangibby, Aberavon, Llanddewi, and Llanelly.<sup>24</sup> In many such cases, one pastor would preach at these various sites, engaging in itineration for the conventicles.<sup>25</sup> Occasionally, a number of capable preachers served multiple congregations.<sup>26</sup>

### *Ecclesiological*

There does seem to be a strong reaction to the fierce autonomy that has characterised a number of independent churches. Church leaders have been catching a vision for a unity and co-operation that stands in marked contrast to the bitterness and divisions that have marked other so-called gospel

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<sup>22</sup> William L. Lumpkin, “London Confession, 1644” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969), 168-169.

<sup>23</sup> Hugh Wamble, “The Concept and Practice of Christian Fellowship: The Connectional and Inter-Denominational Aspects Thereof, among Seventeenth Century English Baptists” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 1955), 255-73; Walter B. Shurden, “Associationalism among Baptists in America, 1707-1814” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967), 1-58.

<sup>24</sup> Wamble, 255-256.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-204.

works. And through the structures and connections inherent within a multi-site network, pastors have been working out what they see as more like the New Testament model of inter co-operation. Indeed, a number of practitioners regard multi-site as an antidote to the mega-church movement and as a means of growing smaller, more local congregations.

### *Missiological*

It works! The multi-site model is more effective at reaching people with the saving news of Jesus Christ. Or at least so its advocates declare. Thabiti Anyabwile, in a famous blog-post (*Multi-site churches are from the devil*) questioned the basis for this pragmatism:

...the claims to “it works” seem to me a bit myopic. Works in what way? Well, you begin to hear the statistics and numbers. We’ve increased attendance or grown membership or conducted x number of baptisms, for example. But these metrics are blunt. They’re not refined by numbers leaving other churches, or numbers becoming anonymous in these massive congregations, or numbers who once had a personal relationship with their pastors who now do not. As a social scientist, I’m not at all impressed with the pragmatic appeal to these gross numbers because, contrary to public opinion, these kinds of numbers do not “tell the story”. And I think the jury is still out on whether “it works”. That jury won’t be in with a verdict for another several decades, I’m afraid. And theologically, the pragmatic appeals to “it works” persuade very little. Too many other things we’re called to be faithful in doing are simply left undone in this approach. If that’s true, what exactly is this model “working” at?<sup>27</sup>

### *Sociological*

The availability of buildings for new churches to meet in is very limited and can be very costly. In addition, the political expectation to sign-up to the values expounded within equalities legislation, shrinks the market of suitable property further. Therefore it is argued that renting or leasing smaller properties makes more sense and is more acceptable within a “renting” generation, unable to afford their own accommodation. Therefore multi-sites can be more mobile and more cost-effective. And the decrease in size, away from the anonymity of worshipping in a mega-church auditorium, facilitates a greater sense of intimacy and community, which can be so missing for Generation Y.

## Conclusion

Randy Pope, the afore-mentioned multi-site pioneer, concluded his reflection upon the movement with these words:

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<sup>27</sup> <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2011/09/27/multi-site-churches-are-from-the-devil/>

I think the multi-campus model is a great means of planting churches. Why not use a leader's gifts and popularity to form new works which in time become churches with their own pastor-teachers? It's a great opportunity to develop new leadership, the hope of our future... I certainly wouldn't ask pastors of multi-campus churches to dismantle their structures. Instead, I'd ask them to consider why they're using that model and what is being produced. If any outcome other than healthy Kingdom advancement emerges, then use these sites to become healthy church plants with leaders prepared to build their local congregation for the community, and who are willing to say to their people, "Follow me as we storm the gates of hell in our community."<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, this is the overwhelming conclusion of those who have written upon the subject. Grant Gaines makes this suggestion in his article for 9Marks:

In view of the fact that multi-site churches are outside the bounds of Scripture, why not plant churches and maintain close cooperation with an associational type of model? This practice has the potential to preserve many of the "benefits" of the multi-site approach, while simultaneously respecting the biblical nature of the local church as assembly.<sup>29</sup>

Thabiti Anyabwile writes:

I think the multi-site, multi-campus strategy that is not speedily and intentionally moving to church planting unravels the local church with an absentee pastor model. Indeed, "church" becomes a strange moniker for this situation. A "church" is not just an assembly, it's an assembly that is also a "family" where the members do all the one anothers and also a "body" where the joints are connected to supply to one another and a "flock" kept in a corral where the shepherds feed, bind, lead, and guide in personal relationship.<sup>30</sup>

As someone who was responsible for helping launch two "satellite" churches in Bristol, and who for the last five years has worshipped within one, whilst retaining membership of the sending church, I can only concur with the conclusions recorded above. These churches would never had been established but for the multi-site model. But there comes a time in a congregation's growth when the multi-site congregation must be freed to own and develop the work the Lord has called them to and become a fully autonomous, self-governing church in its own right.

It may well be that such a church will decide to pursue an association with other churches locally as many do nationally within the FIEC. And it is at this local level that more thought, humility and imagination is required as to what such association will look like. Each church might determine that there will be a number of activities that can be carried out jointly (youth work, training, global mission) and various ways that fellowship between

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/summer-2015/3-reasons-we-stopped-doing-multisite-church.html>

<sup>29</sup> <https://9marks.org/article/exegetical-critique-multi-site-disassembling-church/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2011/09/27/multi-site-churches-are-from-the-devil/>

church leaders and church congregations can be strengthened. It may involve the newly independent church determining to financially support the original sending church for a while to help the transition (or vice-versa). We need more warm-hearted, clear-headed models of this on the ground.

But not only can multi-site be a helpful transition tool for churches as they plant other churches, it can also be used for the revitalisation of dying causes. One unforeseen consequence of the multi-site movement in America is that many a “dying” church looks to merge with a larger, thriving church who brings them into their orbit within a multi-site model.

The Gospel Coalition reported that Jim Tomberlin, a leading consultant within the multi-site movement, commented that he “has over the last 12 years, consulted on more than 100 mergers, a trend he says has “increased dramatically”:

Almost 40 percent of multisite campuses now come about as a result of a merger or acquisition... Most of the mergers we're seeing now are being initiated not by the lead church, but by the declining church. They know who is doing well in their community, and often times there are good relationships among the pastors as well.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst the American models of multi-site are plentiful, the UK scene is much smaller. The four main advocates (as far as I can discover) are Holy Trinity Brompton, Kings Church Catford, KingsGate Church Peterborough and City Church in Aberdeen. The literature that has emerged from these groups is not extensive either in quantity or in the depth of theological reflection (excepting some blogs from Andrew Wilson).<sup>32</sup>

Praise God for passionate gospel people who want to communicate the news about Jesus Christ as far and as effectively as they can, and many of us need to repent of our stupefying passivity which we can disguise behind a mean and critical spirit. And praise God for those who are able to help shape movement leaders with pertinent questions, insightful theological reflection and gracious comment. We need to work with both. May the Lord give us the ability to look and listen, and the vision to reach our communities and nation with the wonderful saving news of Jesus Christ. To *him* be the glory.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-unintended-consequence-thats-overtaking-the-multisite-church-movement>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.kingschurchlondon.org/downloads/Multiple%20Meetings.pdf>  
<http://www.kingschurchlondon.org/downloads/Multi-site.pdf>  
<https://www.htb.org>  
[http://kingsgateuk.com/Groups/249877/KingsGate\\_UK\\_Home.aspx#locations](http://kingsgateuk.com/Groups/249877/KingsGate_UK_Home.aspx#locations)  
<http://citychurchaberdeen.org>

# CHRONOLOGICAL CREATIONISM

*Stephen Lloyd\**

This paper coins a new term, “Chronological Creationism” to describe a nuanced approach to the creation-evolution debate which is theologically, apologetically and scientifically appealing. The importance of the Bible’s chronology, both relative and absolute, is introduced and then chronological considerations are applied to a series of doctrinal issues relating to origins: Adam and humanity, Noah’s flood and the relationship between Adam’s sin and death. It is concluded that if the Bible’s relative chronology in these doctrinal areas is maintained then it is impossible to reconcile the absolute chronology of the Bible with the dating used in evolutionary history. While this presents a formidable challenge, it is only if the relative chronology of the Bible is maintained that we are able to provide coherent responses to many contemporary attacks on Christianity. Starting with the relative chronology of the Bible also allows us to develop a robust scientific approach to origins that is innovative and enriching.

Evangelical reactions to creationism share similarities with people’s reactions to the crispbread, *Ryvita*. Enthusiasts find it delicious as well as nutritious and can’t understand why everyone else doesn’t share their passion. Others find it distasteful and wouldn’t go near it. But most, while accepting it may well be good for you, would prefer to find a more appetising alternative.

I’m no fan of *Ryvita*, but I am a creationist – a “young-earth creationist” – yet not everything that comes under the brand name *creationism* appeals. My aim in this paper is to set out a distinct methodology that leads to a creationism that is both essential and attractive. It is essential and attractive theologically because it centres on the gospel, attractive apologetically because it enables us to bring consistent, gospel answers to the most compelling contemporary challenges, and attractive scientifically because it gives a secure framework for original scientific research. In other words, when it comes to origins, Christians are not faced with a choice between something biblically questionable, but apologetically and scientifically appealing, and something biblically straightforward, but apologetically and scientifically untenable.

Before I make the theological, apologetic and scientific case I will begin by setting out a method that facilitates a new approach.

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## I. *Age of the earth and chronology: methodological considerations*

The previous issue of *Foundations* included a paper with the title, “The age of the earth: a plea for geo-chronological non-dogmatism”.<sup>1</sup> The author, John James, argued that there is not a single understanding of the “days” in Genesis 1 demanded by the text, a conclusion supported by the fact that a range of interpretations have been adopted throughout church history. Hence the “days” in Genesis 1 do not necessarily need to be understood as equivalent to modern, 24-hour, literal days. These arguments are not new and there is already a vast literature debating how the “days” should be understood to which I do not intend to add. But my main reason for not responding to these arguments is that they are largely irrelevant to the position I am advocating.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, I would suggest they are of marginal relevance to the position of “geo-chronological non-dogmatism” James advocates as well. How so?

The length of the “days”, in and of itself, doesn’t provide an age of the earth. For example, coming to the conclusion from the text that the “days” of Genesis 1 are literal days does not tell you *when* these days occurred – whether they were six thousand or 4.5 billion years ago. The fact that no one considers the latter scenario as a viable option shows us what the debate today is really about: it is not the “age of the earth” as a single datum in isolation, but a whole sequence of events describing the history of the planet. Hence a modern evolutionist would find a six-day creation (culminating in the creation of humans) completed 4.5 billion years ago just as ludicrous as one six thousand years ago, because in evolutionary history<sup>3</sup> human beings have not been present for 4.5 billion years. They would also dismiss an account of earth history stretching over 4.5 billion years in which the sequence of events is in the order they appear in the text of Genesis 1: the

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<sup>1</sup> *Foundations* 71 (November 2016), 39-51.

<sup>2</sup> For a more systematic statement of my position see Stephen Lloyd, “Christian Theology and Neo-Darwinism are Incompatible: An Argument from the Resurrection”, in Graeme Finlay, Stephen Lloyd, Stephen Pattemore & David Swift, *Debating Darwin* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 1-29. As I note in my response (69-78) my chapter made no mention of the “days” at all! In addition, I argue that the presence of literary structure and artifice in the early chapters of Genesis does not demand an a-historical interpretation. Hermeneutical uncertainty is minimised by my doctrinal approach based on numerous passages, representing differing literary genres across the whole story-line of the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term “evolutionary history” in this paper rather than the more ambiguous term “evolution” to make clear that the issue is not change (of unspecified degree) over time but the “amoeba to man” story of evolution referring to the whole history of life on earth. It is therefore about geology as much as biology in providing the time-line over which all the development of life occurs. Darwin himself built his ideas on the foundations of Charles Lyell and other geologists – he read and was greatly influenced by Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* during his voyage on *HMS Beagle*.



sun made after the earth and seed-bearing plants before marine life. Equally, I could find myself fundamentally disagreeing with someone who believed in a six-day creation, six thousand years ago, if they combined this with the evolutionary view that death was present from the beginning (a point that I will explain further later). All of which leads us to another irony: taken literally, the common creationist focus on “24-hour days” as a shibboleth of orthodoxy rather misses the point.

In other words when Christians today<sup>4</sup> debate “the age of the earth” or “the length of the days” these are phrases acting as a kind of shorthand for the underlying real question of whether the creation account of the Bible coheres with evolutionary history or not.<sup>5</sup> The central issue is therefore *chronology* in the sense of sequence of events – relative chronology – rather than a particular figure for age. For example, a Christian in Darwin’s time who believed the Bible was consistent with evolutionary history would have accepted an age of the earth much lower than the current consensus of 4.5 billion years.

### 1. *Chronology and the Bible*

Historically the church has been very interested in chronology seeing it as a central concern of the Bible. James Barr cites Martin Luther, Joseph Justus Scaliger, Sir Isaac Newton as well as James Ussher as examples of great scholars, representing a wide variety of theological positions (!) all of whom assumed the Bible provided an absolute chronology of the history of the world.<sup>6</sup> There were disagreements over the exact figures, but agreement that if various textual uncertainties could be resolved, exact dates for events in the Bible (the exodus, Noah’s flood, creation etc.) could in principle be found. This mattered, because as Barr notes, “the precision and detail of the chronological data of scripture was one major reason why the divine origin and authority of scripture should be accepted at all.”<sup>7</sup>

Although with a rather different doctrine of scripture, C. S. Lewis makes a similar point, at least about the Gospels: “As a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing.”<sup>8</sup> Building on this quote Glen Scrivener notes, “Legends

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<sup>4</sup> It is our *contemporary* concerns that are the focus of my paper. Whether the reasons that Christians in the past debated the age of the earth were different or the same is not at issue.

<sup>5</sup> As should be clear from note 3 above, “evolutionary history” therefore encompasses “old-earth creation” views as well as “theistic evolution”.

<sup>6</sup> James Barr, “Biblical Chronology: Legend or Science?” The Ethel M. Wood Lecture 1987 (London: University of London, 1987), 1-19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *God in the Dock*. Walter Hooper (ed.), (London: HarperCollins, 1979), 82.

are set *once upon a time*. You simply cannot answer the question ‘when?’ about any detail of a legend.”<sup>9</sup>

## 2. *Absolute Chronology*

Time and time again, the Bible provides the information that is needed to construct an absolute chronology (e.g. Arphaxad was born “two years after the flood” (Gen 11:10), Jacob was 130 years old when he went to Egypt (Gen 47:28)) yet absolute precision is not possible because of various textual uncertainties and also factors such as not knowing the birthdays of the various people mentioned.<sup>10</sup> The genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 provide the ages at which people begat successive generations, allowing an absolute chronology to be constructed. While it is not possible to prove there are *no* gaps in these genealogies there is scant evidence *for* gaps. Rather, the text clearly establishes direct father-son relationships for some names (e.g. Gen 4:25), and the possibility of gaps does not allow arbitrarily large periods of time to be added to the chronology.<sup>11</sup>

The New Testament uses the chronological information in the Old Testament, for example, Abraham’s age when he fathered Isaac (Rom 4:19).<sup>12</sup> In Galatians 3:17 Paul provides an absolute figure (430 years) for the time between the promise announced to Abraham and his descendants and the giving of the law to Moses. This is a figure not directly provided by the Old Testament but calculated from the information that is given,<sup>13</sup> supporting the conclusion that this information is provided to allow us to construct a chronology.

## 3. *Relative Chronology*

I have stressed the possibility of an *absolute* chronology above because it is a topic largely ignored today, but of even greater significance and theological importance is the *relative* chronology of the Bible. In Galatians 3 and Romans

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<sup>9</sup> *Love Story* (Leyland: 10Publishing, 2017), 5. Emphasis his.

<sup>10</sup> Pete J. Williams, “Some Remarks Preliminary to a Biblical Chronology”, *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 12/1 (1998), 98-106.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>12</sup> This raises another issue of direct relevance to the origins debate: the long life-spans of the patriarchs and those before. It is not just the major figures who seem to live a long time (Abraham 175, Isaac 180, Jacob 147 – interestingly Jacob regards his life as rather short compared to his ancestors (Gen 47:9)) but also people like Amram who lived to be 137 (Ex 6:20). In addition there is a systematic, exponential decrease in life-spans after the flood from those recorded in Genesis 5. That these ages should be understood as real life-spans is supported by the way events in their lives are also dated e.g. Noah has children aged 500, and the flood begins when he is 600 (Gen 5:32, 7:11).

<sup>13</sup> Harold W. Hoehner discusses different possibilities for how Paul arrived at this figure in “The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969), 306-316.

4 Paul bases his theological argument about the priority of faith on the *chronological* priority of Abraham over Moses. His theological point stands whether they are separated by 40 years or 400, but not if Moses existed before Abraham. Why is this relative chronology so important? Because the Bible has a story-line, that in its broadest strokes can be summarised as creation-fall-redemption-restoration. Stories have an internal logic that requires the correct relative sequence of events to remain coherent: causes precede effects, problems precede their solution. Christ's redemption, through dying and rising again, is the response to the problem introduced by Adam's sin. In other words, the coherence of the gospel rests on the story-line.

When it comes to questions of origins we therefore need to consider more than Genesis 1. To assess whether the Bible's teaching is compatible with evolutionary history or not we need to compare the sequence of events in the Bible's story-line with that in evolutionary history. Like Paul we want to keep the theological priority with the relative chronology, while recognising the Bible also provides an absolute chronology.

#### 4. *Dating and biblical chronology*

There is one more chronological issue that needs to be considered: the relationship between the Bible's chronology (both absolute and relative) and other extra-biblical chronologies. Put simply, the Bible contains no BC or AD dates. Any attempt to place a particular date on an event recorded in the Bible requires some correlation between that event (or another event in the biblical chronology) and some external historical event or artefact that is dated. So, for example, the Bible tells us that the final destruction of Jerusalem happened in the eleventh year of Zedekiah (2 Kgs 25:2) and the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 25:8). Records of Babylonian history enable us to date the event at 587/586 BC. But there is no *biblical* reason to object to a date of 577 BC or similar, in the event of some radical revision of our understanding of Babylonian history, so long as it still occurred in Zedekiah's and Nebuchadnezzar's eleventh and nineteenth years respectively. If that were not the case the new revised version of Babylonian history would reflect a challenge to the accuracy of the Bible's chronology. In other words as soon as an attempt is made to correlate the Bible's story-line with evidence outside the Bible there is the possibility of a challenge to the reliability of scripture. But equally it provides an opportunity: we can show the Bible is a book dealing with reality.

I want to adopt the same methodology when it comes to origins and science. The challenge is to correlate scientific evidence of events with the Bible's chronology. This is no different in principle to what we do in the example of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem above. If we believe the Bible provides true historical information about, say, the history of mankind,

then we cannot avoid the challenge of explaining where a set of hominin fossils, for example, fits within the chronology, the story-line of the Bible: are they before or after Adam? It is the chronology, not the age of the earth that is at issue. The answer matters because it impacts on the gospel itself.

It is for this reason that I question James' plea for "geo-chronological non-dogmatism" on the grounds that it distracts and diverts from the real battle against "reductionistic naturalism" and from hearing the "life-changing truth" of the creation account.<sup>14</sup> To avoid or play down the importance of the chronological issues I have cited actually hinders that task and robs us of opportunities to present the gospel.

In summary:

- Chronology is a major concern of the Bible, essential to its character as presenting a historical account of God's actions in the world.
- While the Bible allows, even encourages, us to produce an absolute (but not totally precise) chronology it is the relative chronology that has theological priority.
- As soon as we use the Bible to inform our understanding of historical evidence outside the Bible we need to correlate the Bible's chronology, both relative and absolute, with that evidence. To refuse to do so, or to see that task as unimportant is to keep the Bible hermetically sealed from the scrutiny of external evidence and, in practice, to deny its essential character as a book of history. The attraction of such an approach is that it removes the possibility of the Bible being disproved, but at the same time it allows people to dismiss Christian belief as something internal to the person and irrelevant to the real world they live in.

## *II. Theological attractiveness*

In this section I am providing a series of theological arguments based on the Bible's chronology to show that attempts to fit evolutionary history into the Bible end up messing with the relative chronology in a way that makes the gospel incoherent.

### *1. Humanity after Adam*

I am starting from the assumption that the Adam described by Paul as "the first man" (1 Cor 15:45, 47) was a particular person who really existed, and that his historical existence matters for the coherence of the gospel.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Geo-chronological Non-dogmatism", 51.

<sup>15</sup> See D. A. Carson, "Adam in the Epistles of Paul", in N. M. De S. Cameron (ed.), *In the Beginning: A Symposium on the Bible and Creation* (Glasgow: Biblical Creation Society, 1980), 28-43. Even among those who would deny a historical Adam (e.g. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*

However it is possible to believe in *a* historical Adam that is not the same as *the* biblical Adam.<sup>16</sup> The latter is not one among many but someone unique because he is the first human, from whom all others are descended. In other words *Adam had no parents*, Adam *precedes* the rest of humanity.<sup>17</sup> I will begin by setting out why this is the biblical Adam and therefore why it matters for the gospel before considering the chronological implications.

Modern science classifies all human beings existing today as the species *Homo sapiens*. In the Bible, what distinguishes humans from the other living creatures of day six is that they are made “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27), a categorisation that is assumed elsewhere to apply to all people in general (e.g. Jas 3:9). Paul says to the Corinthians that “we have borne the likeness of the earthly man [i.e. Adam]” (1 Cor 15:49). How is the “image /likeness” given to Adam shared with the rest of humanity? Genesis 5:1-3 provides the answer:

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female... When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

By this definition my human identity as the image of God is based on physical descent from Adam. That my identity should rest on physical descent is entirely consistent with the pattern we find in Scripture. Why is so much space given to genealogy? Because it mattered which family you belonged to. Descendants of Jacob were blessed, descendants of Esau were cursed (Mal 1:2-3). Within Israel, to serve in the temple you needed Levi as your ancestor, to be a Davidic king you needed to be in David’s line. Still for us today, so much of our identity is shaped by our family (our genes, our birthplace, our native language etc.)

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(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos, 2012), Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2008)) there is an acceptance that the Apostle Paul believed (in their view erroneously) that Adam was a historical individual.

<sup>16</sup> This distinction is made by Derek W. H. Thomas, “Differing Views on the Days of Creation”, in Richard D. Phillips (ed.), *God, Adam, and You* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2015), 131.

<sup>17</sup> I am therefore primarily contrasting my position with a range of views in which *Homo sapiens* arose as described by evolutionary history and then an individual member of the species (Adam) was given the special status of representing humanity (e.g. Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution. Do we have to Choose?*, Second ed., (Oxford: Monarch, 2014)). My arguments equally apply to a (somewhat *ad hoc*) scenario in which Adam is directly created by God but exists alongside other hominins (such as Neanderthals) who share similar physical, emotional and intellectual capabilities (e.g. Fazale Rana & Hugh Ross, *Who was Adam?*, Second Expanded Ed., (Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2015)). In both cases Adam is one among many, and there are other hominins aside from Adam from whom modern humans could, in principle, be descended.

If Adam is one among many, his *image-of-Godness* is something conferred upon him at some point, not intrinsic to him from the beginning. It is a status that is given *arbitrarily* by God in the sense that there is nothing that marks out Adam as unique among the other hominins existing alongside him. This creates a problem: who else bears the image of God? If it is those descended from Adam then it does not include his parents, who presumably would therefore have the status of animals (and whom he could therefore legitimately kill and eat). And what about Eve? Did Adam *marry* an animal? More importantly, it would also exclude people alive today who are not physically descended from Adam. If on the other hand, the image of God is given individually by divine decree how do I know if I, or my neighbour, shares that status? I am not privy to the decrees of God. Detached from the anchor of physical descent from Adam I am left in a frighteningly insecure position and prey to abuse from any who would want to question my true human status before God.

The same problems arise with Adam's position as the representative head of humanity.<sup>18</sup> If being "in Adam" (1 Cor 15:22) is not rooted in the ontological foundation of physical descent from him then how do I know who *is* included in the humanity that he represents? And who *is* the humanity that Jesus came to save? Jesus was born into the family line of Adam (Lk 3:23-37). Hebrews 2:14-17 explains that Jesus assumed the flesh he came to save. But if I am not a descendant of Adam, then the flesh, the humanity that Jesus assumed would be different to mine. He would not be my "kinsman redeemer" to use the imagery of the book of Ruth (2:20, 4:14). Surely the gospel rests on the reality that in the incarnation Jesus assumed *our* humanity, not *any* humanity.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in Genesis, it is from Eve, "the mother of all the living" (3:20) that the descendant will come to crush the serpent's head (3:15).

Chronological implications of our doctrine of Adam cannot be avoided once an attempt is made to correlate what the Bible says about human beings (a lot) with the vast amount of palaeontological and archaeological data concerning human existence and behaviour. Hominin fossils (of enormous variety) exist. Piltdown fraud aside, they are not some invention of an evolutionary conspiracy and they need to be explained. Are they fossils of creatures/humans that existed before or after Adam? Take Neanderthals. In the evolutionary chronology they died out around 25,000 years ago, but left evidence of a developed culture including clothing and burying their

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<sup>18</sup> Further implications for the doctrine of original sin are discussed in Hans Madueme & Michael Reeves (eds.), *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2014). My focus here is on the status of Adam as a representative, not all that this representation involves.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Reeves, "Adam and Eve" in Norman C. Nevin (ed.), *Should Christian Embrace Evolution?* (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 55.

dead with artefacts presumably for use in an afterlife.<sup>20</sup> They were therefore people not too dissimilar to us and DNA evidence indicates they interbred with our own species *Homo sapiens*.<sup>21</sup> If Adam existed *after* Neanderthals then how do we explain their apparent spiritual behaviour? What of their spiritual state – are they “in Adam” or not? What is the spiritual status of the offspring of the interbreeding, and of their descendants today – descendants that include most Europeans and most Asians?<sup>22</sup> If Neanderthals are not human these offspring are the fruit of bestiality. Such questions naturally push us to place Adam *before* Neanderthals (or at least before the later Neanderthals). Maybe Adam was part of the original *Homo sapiens* population around 200,000 years ago? (I say “part of” since recent research is interpreted to mean that the genetic diversity in modern humans could not have arisen from a single pair, but rather an initial population of the order of 10,000.<sup>23</sup> Hence even in this scenario Adam could not be the ancestor of all modern humans). But why stop at *Homo sapiens*? To define only this species as biblically human is arbitrary and also promotes the potentially divisive notion that being truly human means “people like us”.<sup>24</sup> Details of lifestyle are more sketchy for more distant hominins like *Homo erectus* and *Homo ergaster*, but anatomically they are not so different from us and evidence of sophisticated tool manufacture and the controlled use of fire suggest similar capabilities.<sup>25</sup> Was Adam before *Homo erectus*, two million years ago? Whichever of these scenarios you adopt because of the theological constraints brought by the *relative* chronology, the strain on the *absolute* chronology is severe if the dates associated with the evolutionary history are assumed.

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<sup>20</sup> Brian Hayden, “The cultural capacities of Neanderthals: a review and re-evaluation”, *J. Human Evolution* 24 (1993), 113-146.

<sup>21</sup> S. Pääbo, *Neanderthal Man: In Search of Lost Genomes* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 185-195.

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

<sup>23</sup> Dennis R. Venema, “Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Hominid Population Sizes”, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62/3 (2010), 166-178.

<sup>24</sup> This discussion demonstrates that it is actually rather important to be able to distinguish which hominins are biblically human by some method that moves beyond arbitrary assertion. For an example of the sort of rigorous approach that is required see: T. C. Wood, “Baraminological Analysis Places *Homo habilis*, *Homo rudolfensis*, and *Australopithecus sediba* in the Human Holobaramin”, *Answers Research Journal* 3 (2010), 71-90. More recently, this analysis was expanded with the addition of other hominin taxa in T. C. Wood, “An Evaluation of *Homo naledi* and “Early” *Homo* from a Young-Age Creationist Perspective”, *Journal of Creation Theology and Science Series B: Life Sciences* 6 (2016), 14-30. The implications of denying humanity to those “not like us” are considered briefly in T. C. Wood, “Psychological Considerations on the Recognition of the Human Holobaramin”, *Journal of Creation Theology and Science Series B: Life Sciences* 4 (2014), 30.

<sup>25</sup> R. Boyd & J. B. Silk, *How Humans Evolved*, Sixth Ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), esp. 274-281.

## 2. *Global flood after Adam*

Noah's flood is clearly a significant event in the early chapters of Genesis, but its theological importance to the wider biblical story is rarely considered.<sup>26</sup> What is its chronological importance in the Bible's story-line? Firstly, it functions as an anticipation of the judgment and re-creation at the second coming (2 Pet 3:3-10). The flood *de*-creates the world God has made (Gen 6:6-7, 7:4) which along with Peter's parallels suggests *both* are world-wide events. Or to put it the other way round, if the flood is regarded as a local, non-global event the account in Genesis 1 must also refer to the creation of only a small part of the world! The flood also results in a *re*-creation, a new world less susceptible to human self-destruction allowing a new era of grace to flourish (Gen 8:21). In other words, in the flood we discover that God's plan for redemption is not only about human souls: salvation is not merely spiritual but includes the physical world. Animals (Gen 9:10) and the earth itself (Gen 5:29) are included in God's post-flood blessing.

But there is another chronological datum that has even more important implications for the gospel today: Noah precedes Abraham. Why does this matter? God's promise to Abram is that through him blessing will come to all peoples on earth (Gen 12:3). Who are the "all peoples"? They are defined by the context as the nations that emerged from the confusion of Babel (Gen 11:9), people who are explicitly said to have descended from Noah's sons (Gen 9:19, 10:32). We see Abraham's promise fulfilled as we obey Christ's command to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). There is therefore a problem if the flood was local and wiped out only a portion of mankind outside the ark. Peoples today descended from the contemporaries of Noah not affected by the flood are not included in the post-flood promises (explicitly tied to Noah's descendants, Gen 9:9) or, by extension, in the promise to Abraham. On what basis, then, are they to be included in the great commission?

Considering the date of the flood highlights further problems. In the Bible its beginning is dated unusually precisely to the "seventeenth day of the second month" in the six hundredth year of Noah's life (Gen 7:11). How does that date correlate with external evidence such as the existence of humans in other parts of the world? With the dating accepted in evolutionary history aboriginals have been in Australia for at least 40,000 years. Did they arrive before or after the flood? If before, then the flood must have been a local event confined to some portion of the Ancient Near East so they could

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<sup>26</sup> Further reflection on Noah's flood can be found in Lloyd, "Christian Theology and Neo-Darwinism are Incompatible" and also my article "*Flood Theology: Why does Noah's Flood Matter?*" available for download from <http://biblicalcreationtrust.org/resources-origins-archive.html>.



survive, but it would lead to the problem that they are not included in the Noahic covenant or the blessing of Abraham. If after the flood, the theological problems are minimised because the aboriginals' existence is consistent with the relative chronology of the Bible, but it means the date for the flood needs to be pushed back to at least 40,000 years ago which would put the absolute chronology of the Bible under considerable strain.

The implications for the absolute chronology become insurmountable if the most obvious statement of relative chronology (used in the section heading) is considered: Adam preceded the flood. Evolutionary history contains evidence of many catastrophes of vast proportions and of continents having been submerged under water: but in the evolutionary chronology this was all long before humans appeared. To allow this evidence of continent-spanning catastrophe to correlate with Noah's flood, whilst maintaining the evolutionary dates, would require Adam to have existed hundreds of millions of years ago.

There is a pattern in my conclusions from these first two theological areas: if the relative chronology of the Bible is to be maintained (which has theological priority) while adopting the dates provided by evolutionary history then the Bible's absolute chronology is stretched beyond reasonable bounds. In other words there is a sizeable "dating problem" arising from the doctrines of Adam and Noah's flood even before the more wide-ranging implications in the following section are considered.

### 3. *Death after Adam's sin*

At the centre of the Bible's story is the death and resurrection of Jesus. How this central event is understood hinges on the chronology of death you adopt.

In evolutionary history (physical) death has always been present: indeed it is essential for the development of life. If that chronology is assumed then the death sentence announced on sin in Genesis 2:17 *cannot* include physical death, since it was already in existence. But that then raises the problem of why physical death is assumed (without comment) to be a consequence of sin throughout the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Sam 12:19) and, even more seriously, why Jesus had to *die* (physically) on the cross. If physical death is intrinsic to our humanity then the Lord's Supper (symbolising a physically broken body and shed blood) becomes a celebration of Jesus' incarnation, not his atonement. It also makes a nonsense of the resurrection as a *victory* over the enemy (physical) death (1 Cor 15:26). If physical death has always been present we find Jesus conquering what he himself made as an enemy at the beginning. That makes the story of the Bible, the gospel, incoherent.

My argument is not theological speculation, but based on the explicit teaching of the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> The physical suffering and death of Christ is repeatedly linked to payment for sin (Col 1:22, 1 Pet 2:24, Heb 10:10, 1 Cor 15:3). And this is explained in terms of the story-line in 1 Corinthians 15:21, “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.” Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (the solution) is linked to the problem of death through Adam’s sin. Given that the resurrection includes new *physical* life, Adam’s sin must have led to *physical* death.

The sentence of death includes the suffering and decay that leads to death. Our *bodies* (part of physical creation) need redemption (Rom 8:23), presumably because they too are affected by the curse on sin. Jesus speaks of needing to *suffer* and to die (Mk 8:31). His atoning death for sin is linked to the healing of *disease* (Mt 8:17) and his healing miracles were to undo the consequences of sin, rather than being the actions of a bad architect patching up what he had made in the beginning.

This argument centred on the cross requires that death and disease were absent from the original creation declared “very good” (Gen 1:31) *before* Adam’s sin.<sup>28</sup> It is *after* Adam’s sin that death and violence become a repeated feature of the narrative (Gen 3:19, 4:8, 15, 23, 5:5-31, 6:5-7).

How we understand the end of the Bible’s story is also shaped by our chronology of death. Despite its place in highly symbolic literature everyone interprets Revelation 21:4 as referring to the literal absence of physical death and suffering in the new creation. (No hermeneutical uncertainty or non-dogmatism there!) But if physical death has been present from the beginning then this new creation is not something purchased by Christ through his death. The renewal of creation then has nothing to do with redemption from sin and everything to do with God trying to make a better job of creation than he did at the beginning. Second time round, “very good” doesn’t include brain tumours or cancer.

The theological (and apologetic) consequences of our chosen chronology of death are immense. So are the implications for dating, even if only human death is considered. All the hominin fossils we find are, self-evidently, dead. If they are human then they must post-date Adam given a biblical relative chronology of death from sin. Hence if *Homo erectus* is human Adam’s sin in the garden would need to be at least two million years ago which is such a

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<sup>27</sup> The origins debate should therefore be as much a concern of New Testament scholars as Old Testament specialists.

<sup>28</sup> A “death-free” existence is not the same thing as intrinsic immortality. My point is that before the fall Adam was not subject to disease and decay processes that would inevitably lead to death. Neither was he intrinsically immortal (only God has “life in himself” (Jn 5:26)) – for example, he needed to eat in order to live.

stretch for the absolute chronology of the Bible that we have strong grounds to question the dating supplied by evolutionary history on this point alone.

To avoid this conundrum, imagine that you opt for an Adam around 10,000 years ago who is not subject to death. In this scenario the *Homo sapiens* around him (such as his parents) may suffer from a terminal disease. Since they are physically, emotionally and intellectually identical to Adam their suffering must be similar to what Adam would experience were he subject to death. Why would such suffering in Adam be a terrible evil caused by sin, whereas the identical suffering in his parents (who are animals) would be morally neutral? The same inconsistency will apply whatever date you choose for a death-free Adam: he will have physically identical contemporaries whose suffering is of no moral consequence.

For these reasons and others<sup>29</sup> I find a position that insists only human death has resulted from sin unworkable. Hence I am reassured that explicit biblical teaching linking animal death to human sin is actually rather easy to find. This is brought out most clearly in the judgment of the flood destroying "all flesh" (which includes animals as well as humans (Gen 7:15-16, 21) in part because of the violence in animals (Gen 6:11-13) as well as humans) but also in the judgment of the Passover (Ex 12: 12, 29) amongst other examples.<sup>30</sup> With animal death included as a consequence of human sin, the consequences for dating are inescapable. Depending on where you draw the line of which animals are included,<sup>31</sup> Adam's sin would have to have been hundreds of millions of years ago.

For that reason (not the length of the Genesis 1 "days") I have to challenge the dating provided by evolutionary history.<sup>32</sup> Multiple, independent theological arguments all point to a dogmatic conclusion that the chronology of evolutionary history (including the dating) is not consistent with the chronology (relative and absolute) of the Bible. If data are interpreted to preserve the relative chronology of the Bible a date for Adam is required (in the evolutionary chronology) that is impossible to reconcile with the Bible's absolute chronology. The doctrinal issues involved have

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<sup>29</sup> Nigel M. De S. Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), esp. 64-71.

<sup>30</sup> Lloyd, "Christian Theology and Neo-Darwinism are Incompatible", 18-23. Also see Marco T. Terreros, *Theistic Evolution and its Theological Implications* (PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> By "animal death" I am talking about higher animals, not microbes. "Cell death" is a modern scientific term that should not be equated with the biblical terminology of "death". Given that plants were eaten in the pre-fall world (Gen 1:30) cell "death" must have occurred.

<sup>32</sup> James, "Geo-chronological Non-dogmatism", 41 notes that his article does not attempt to address wider questions such as the existence of death before the fall. Limitations in what can be covered in one article are entirely understandable, but in not addressing this topic James has missed what is in my view the most significant argument impacting his chosen topic of geo-chronology and the Bible.

sufficient theological reach that we cannot afford to be non-dogmatic about them. Furthermore, attempts to reconcile the evolutionary and biblical chronology lead to very unattractive, incoherent and, in some cases, frankly bizarre theology. Although it is possible to survive on such a poor theological diet, the long-term consequences are deadly.

More positively, the gospel-relatedness of these biblical chronology doctrines creates a great opportunity. Questions about origins are no longer a distraction from the gospel but an entry point into it. For example, I have been on national television explaining my beliefs about origins on three occasions. Each time, despite not having long to speak, I have talked about the cross because it was integral to my beliefs about creation.

### *III. Apologetic attractiveness*

The reason many pastors find creationism unappetising, even if orthodox, is that it seems to be an apologetic liability. It is not something you want to serve up to non-Christian friends. In recent decades one of the quickest ways to be dismissed as someone inhabiting a different intellectual planet (dangerous as well as crazy) is to be intellectually “outed” as believing in a “young earth”. Hence in the Q&A at the end of an outreach event when the question of origins comes up there is a massive incentive to say, “It’s okay, the age of the earth isn’t an issue for me or the Bible. Next question.” I understand the problem,<sup>33</sup> but my argument in this section is that such a response creates a greater apologetic problem. It makes it harder to provide coherent answers to many other objections for the reasons set out in the previous section: attempts to accommodate evolutionary chronology distort the Bible’s own chronology and hence its theological coherence.<sup>34</sup> Overall, apologetics is a lot easier if a position of chronological creationism is adopted. This is how the evangelist Glen Scrivener put it to me in an email<sup>35</sup> providing the outline of a talk he was preparing:

I want to give them a *biblical* account of creation that is more evangelistically attractive than simply capitulating to evolution from the outset. So I want to do a proper theology of creation –

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<sup>33</sup> Although I wonder if we are too swayed by university settings and the reception of the élites. Amongst the public as a whole there is a significant degree of scepticism towards evolution and even its timescales. See Nick Spencer & Denis Alexander, *Rescuing Darwin. God and Evolution in Britain Today* (London: Theos, 2009). Available for download from: <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/RescuingDarwin.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> My approach is no different to what we readily adopt for other “defeater” beliefs. For example, a biblical understanding of homosexuality will not endear our message to many audiences yet we recognise that attempts to accommodate homosexual practice as non-sinful requires a distortion of key gospel themes. See Sam Allberry, “No Longer Taboo”, in “True to Form” *Primer*, issue 3 (Market Harborough: FIEC, 2016), 53.

<sup>35</sup> 29 April 2015, emphasis his.

a Good God, a Good Creation, a Real Adam, a Genuine Fall, a Physical Redemption, etc. Actually *this* is what we really want to be true when we're handling the question of questions which all evangelism actually revolves around: How can we believe in a good God in a suffering world?

### 1. *Suffering and the goodness of God*

Stephen Fry's much shared rant from 2015<sup>36</sup> captures the objection well: how can God be good if he makes a world in which children are afflicted with bone cancer? Even if his argument is incoherent (on what basis is he making his moral judgment?) it is still a potent attack on Christianity *if the evolutionary chronology is correct*. The problem is particularly acute because it is the *goodness* of creation that is emphasised through repetition in Genesis 1. The conclusion "it was very good" (Gen 1:31) followed by rest on day seven suggests a sense of satisfaction, even delight in all that God has made. If, for example, cancer was present from the beginning, as the evolutionary chronology requires, we are left with the choice of two unpalatable options: Either cancer is included in what is "very good" or, if it is actually something very bad yet created by God, then (as Stephen Fry understands) it is hard to explain how God can himself be good. Or to take a different example, if infertility has always been present, then God's competence as the craftsman of creation is called into question given that his expressed purpose for the creatures he made is that they multiply (Gen 1:22, 28).

Even some of the best modern Christian apologists don't appear to have appreciated the link between beliefs on origins and answers to the problem of natural evil. Tim Keller, who would certainly not describe himself as a "young-earth creationist", nevertheless adopts the chronology of creationism in this very explicit explanation for the suffering in the world:

Human beings are so integral to the fabric of things that when human beings turned from God the entire warp and woof of the world unravelled. Disease, genetic disorders, famine, natural disasters, ageing and death itself are as much the result of sin as are oppression, war, crime and violence.<sup>37</sup>

If this is the correct explanation for natural evil, evolutionary history is false.

The Intelligent Design pioneer William Dembski, who accepts an old earth, takes an alternative approach. He feels the force of the problem of natural evil so strongly he is ready to take the remarkable step of jettisoning the chronological coherence of the Bible's story in proposing that the punishment of Adam's sin preceded the crime.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> From an interview with Gay Byrne broadcast on 1 February 2015. Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-suvkwNYSQo>.

<sup>37</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), 170.

<sup>38</sup> William A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 2009).

## 2. *Sin and the goodness of God*

Evolutionary history is a story of violence and promiscuity. How does Adam (and other hominins) fit into that history? If Adam is one among many he has parents who are physically, emotionally and intellectually identical to him, yet, morally speaking, they are animals. Hence they can be violent and promiscuous without incurring the guilt or punishment of sin, as can Adam before his special status before God is conferred. However, once Adam is God's image-bearer he is an accountable, moral person. Assuming an initial period of perfection before he sins, his "fall" merely puts him back in the position he was in before he knew God, except that he is now held guilty. In these circumstances it would be understandable if Adam regarded bearing the image of God as more of a curse than a blessing. He would also have grounds to question God's justice and goodness: why is he being held accountable for behaviour (e.g. violence) that is intrinsic to how he has been made? As the *image of God* why is it wrong for Adam to *image* God's use of violence in creation? And we, represented by Adam, could ask the same: God's condemnation of violence as sinful seems arbitrary, even hypocritical.

What does this scenario do to the gospel message? The gospel is about answering the problem of sin, including the sin of violence. But if violence is intrinsic to my human identity, how I have been made, then in the gospel God is rescuing me from how he made me. In effect salvation has become God saving me from himself. That is an apologetic millstone I don't want round my neck.

## 3. *Destruction of the Canaanites and the goodness of God*

The destruction of the Canaanites is now one of the most common objections to Christianity cited today. I have discussed this in more detail elsewhere where I argue that it can be defended morally if their destruction is understood as an act of God's justice, using Israel as his agent.<sup>39</sup> But this argument is only coherent if death is understood to be a punishment for sin. If death existed before Adam then it is a natural part of life and the destruction of the Canaanites becomes an act of violence, which cannot easily be defended morally.

## 4. *Human identity and sexual identity*

The Bible's teaching on our human identity as the image of God is particularly pertinent today but it is undermined if Adam is one among

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen Lloyd, "Horrid histories?", *Evangelicals Now* (February 2013), 19 & (March 2013), 19.

many. In such a scenario God's image is something *added* to Adam after he has been made so it is not intrinsic to his identity from the beginning. Adam had a body, thought, sang, planned and worked long before he was the image of God. His existence was not bound up with being God's image, so how can it be fundamental to our identity today? It is a spiritual status unrelated to Adam's physical body since there were other physically, emotionally and intellectually identical hominins (such as his parents) who do not share that status. In addition, if we can't be sure *who* is the image of God our biblical arguments for human dignity (and equality) are undermined and people will be justified in seeing their identity as something fluid, and in attempting to find their significance in self-achieved ways.

There are also implications for our sexual identity. Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1 speak of being made or created as God's image and parallel language is used in both references for our sexual identity as male or female. If the former is understood as divine decree *subsequent* to the beginning of Adam's physical existence then the same must apply to his sexual identity as male. Human sexuality is not then rooted in how we have been made,<sup>40</sup> which undermines our apologetic against contemporary transgender claims that our gender identity is a matter of personal choice and feeling.

##### 5. *Historicity and physicality of Christianity*

Chronological creationism self-consciously connects the chronology of the Bible with evidence of events outside the Bible in the physical world. As such it emphasises the historical, real-life basis of Christian theology, which of course centres on God himself entering his own creation. That emphasis is sorely needed in an age which prefers to compartmentalise Christian truth as private and internal to the believer, with no purchase on reality. To avoid being dismissed as irrelevant we need to show how the Bible's chronology correlates with external events, and not be afraid of the challenge that will come when external evidence appears to be inconsistent with it.

Attempts to insulate the Bible from challenge inevitably end up retreating from the physicality of what God has done: human uniqueness is a purely spiritual quality, my relationship to Adam as the head of humanity is only spiritual, death from sin is only spiritual. When our theology is no longer grounded in ontological created reality we are left with a God who "pulls his theology out of thin air".<sup>41</sup> What is the attraction in that?

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<sup>40</sup> C. Everett Berry, SBJT Forum: "In the Beginning...", *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11/1 (2007), 89-90.

<sup>41</sup> Reeves, "Adam and Eve", 50.

#### IV. Scientific attractiveness

When it comes to the science much creationism is better described as “anti-evolutionism”. There is a place for this as there are real weaknesses in evolutionary explanations, especially when it comes to providing viable mechanisms by which the complexity of life can arise and develop.<sup>42</sup> Here the Intelligent Design movement is helpful in providing quantitative, strictly scientific criteria and arguments for design.<sup>43</sup> What Intelligent Design doesn’t provide is a chronology of earth history. Chronological creationism, on the other hand, frees us to move beyond taking pot-shots at evolution and evolutionists to develop a scientific account of earth history that is consistent with, and complements, the chronology provided by the Bible.<sup>44</sup> In this section I want to explain the methodology behind this approach which allows us to address the many existing scientific questions and objections and also those that will arise in the future. My argument is that this approach is more attractive and, while only pursued systematically relatively recently, it has proven scientifically fruitful.

##### 1. Scientific models

Too often approaches to the scientific questions betray a lack of understanding of how science works, with a focus on pieces of evidence in isolation as if they can act like “silver bullets” somehow proving or disproving a particular scientific idea. But science is not the same as arithmetic in which inputs into an arithmetical expression unambiguously produce *one* correct output. In science, a particular piece of evidence may be consistent with a whole variety of different scientific models, but would be *proof* of none. A scientific model is an explanatory framework that brings coherence to a variety of different data. For example, the genius of Newton’s theory or law (= model) of gravity was in showing that the motion of the

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<sup>42</sup>James A. Shapiro, *Evolution. A View from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: FT Press Science, 2011); Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos. Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Neither author doubts the chronology of evolutionary history but they do question the viability of neo-Darwinian mechanisms to bring it about. Nagel also questions the ability of strictly materialist theories to explain the mystery of consciousness.

<sup>43</sup>For example, William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), *Darwin’s Doubt* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).

<sup>44</sup>For examples of this approach see: Paul A. Garner, *The New Creationism* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2009), Kurt P. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2002), Todd Charles Wood and Megan J. Murray, *Understanding the Pattern of Life* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2003).



moon around the earth and the motion of an apple falling to the ground (two seemingly unrelated phenomena) fit the same mathematical equation.

When it comes to historical science, constructing a scientific model is closely analogous to the work of a detective in solving a crime. Suppose the detective finds the following piece of evidence: a knife coated with human blood. What story (model) fits this datum? Surely it is evidence for murder? Quite possibly, but it is not the only explanation (model) for why the knife is coated in blood. It could be the result of a kitchen accident, or a research project testing the corrosive effects of human blood on steel, or any number of other scenarios. The job of the detective (and the scientist) is to look for other pieces of evidence to test different explanations (models) of what happened. The best explanation will be the one that explains the most pieces of evidence in the most uncontrived, least *ad hoc* manner. However, the conclusion reached is only ever provisional since not *every* possible explanation has been thought of let alone tested, and not *every* relevant piece of evidence has been examined – such as the evidence we didn’t look for or the evidence we didn’t think relevant!<sup>45</sup> It is not uncommon for what seemed like watertight criminal convictions to be overturned as new evidence came to light and the history of science is littered with examples of cherished scientific models being discarded in the face of new data. What “everyone knows” can sometimes be wrong.

Put more simply, there can be lots of evidence for scientific models that are wrong. There was, *and is*, evidence for the phlogiston model of combustion.<sup>46</sup> However, no chemist accepts that model today because the oxygen model explains the same evidence, and much else besides, far better. In a similar way there is plenty of evidence supporting evolutionary history (that is, in the main, why so many scientists believe it!) but that doesn’t mean it is a *true* history of life on earth. There are plenty of data consistent with large amounts of decay of radioactive isotopes in earth history, data that *are* consistent with an “old earth” but that is not the *only* possible conclusion. Because (like Luther and Newton) I am confident in the truth of the Bible’s chronology I believe that a scientific model, consistent with the Bible’s chronology can be developed that explains the same data, and much else besides in a more convincing, satisfying and coherent manner. But like any other scientific model it will not be without problems. There are almost always some data that are unexplained or that do not fit the preferred model, but a model can be accepted on the strength of the weight of evidence it does explain.

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<sup>45</sup> Os Guinness makes a similar point in a different context drawing on a fictional story in *Fools Talk* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2015), 47-48.

<sup>46</sup> This is one of the examples discussed by Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Second Ed., Enlarged, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

## 2. *Is it science?*

The methodology of starting with the Bible in developing scientific models is open to challenge in at least two ways. First, the Bible contains accounts of the miraculous activity of God in which the normal workings of the world (what science describes) are disrupted. How can a scientific model include miracles, and what stops miracles being invoked to overcome problems in a particular model? Miracles, by definition, cannot be explained by science, but since they occur in a physical universe they can leave evidence. Thus it is possible to infer from evidence the occurrence of a miracle. We do this all the time in arguing for the resurrection. There is (historical) evidence of the miracle (an empty tomb and appearances of the risen Jesus) and this evidence is best explained, in the least contrived manner, in terms of the miracle of the resurrection. When it comes to creation models there can be evidence best explained through a miracle (even where the Bible does not explicitly tell us of a miracle) but they cannot (usefully) be invoked *ad hoc* to discount evidence.<sup>47</sup>

Second, how can a model be disproved if it is based on the inerrant chronology of Scripture? The answer is to distinguish the biblical teaching and the scientific model. For example, I believe in a global flood because of my trust in the truth-telling God who wrote scripture. However those scriptures do not teach a particular scientific model describing the detailed geological activities that occurred during the flood. A whole number of models may be consistent with the biblical teaching, so they have to be assessed on their *scientific* merits (i.e. how well they explain the data). If new scientific work discredits my preferred model I need to go away and do better science and come up with a better model. My belief in the flood is intact because it rests on scripture, *not* my particular scientific model. Ironically this approach to origins, where my fundamental epistemology comes from the Bible, allows me to be more dispassionate in assessing the merits of my preferred scientific theory than an atheist evolutionist whose basic beliefs are tied to the scientific models they adopt. Starting from the Bible allows me to be rightly non-dogmatic when it comes to scientific models.

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<sup>47</sup> The dangers of invoking miracles *ad hoc* are minimised if there are several independent streams of evidence consistent with a specific miracle hypothesis. An example would be the proposal of episodes of accelerated nuclear decay at one or more times in the past. See Garner, *New Creationism*, 96-104. However, it is possible that further research may reveal a non-miraculous explanation for these data. In short, the proposing of miraculous intervention is not a science show-stopper!

The model-building approach I propose is a relatively recent development<sup>48</sup> and one that isn't often reflected in popular creationist literature and talks (which tend to be characterised by anti-evolutionism). Despite its newness, it has been a fruitful research strategy increasingly deploying researchers who are experts in the fields in which their creation models are focused and as such cannot be quickly dismissed as the work of ignoramuses who don't understand the evidence.<sup>49</sup> None of this means their models are necessarily correct but they are undertaking real scientific work that in some cases is published in peer-reviewed secular literature.<sup>50</sup> Science is enriched as new discoveries are made because researchers are ready to work with an alternative model which prompts different questions for research.

### 3. *Is it plausible?*

The biggest barrier to chronological creationism being taken seriously scientifically is its apparent implausibility. However, our sense of implausibility is highly subjective and conditioned by presuppositions and unrecognised assumptions. When I have set out my scientific approach I have sometimes been met by a reaction of incredulity: "There is too much evidence against you." "It just doesn't work. "It can't be done." But how do we know "It doesn't work" or "It can't be done" until we try? We need to test a properly biblical model. For example, genetic studies have been cited as evidence against humanity being descended from a single original pair.<sup>51</sup> But to test the scientific coherence of the Bible's chronology the genetic studies need to test a consistently biblical model that includes Adam being created as a mature adult with a disease-free body, living 930 years, with successive generations living to similar ages, a flood that wipes out all humanity except

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<sup>48</sup> For a brief history see Paul Garner, "50 years of creationism", *Evangelical Times* (February 2017), 5, 13.

<sup>49</sup> A recent development is the formation of professional research networks hosting annual conferences including the Creation Biology Society and Creation Geology Society. The Creation Biology Society has a website at [www.creationbiology.org](http://www.creationbiology.org). These societies are led by people with PhD degrees in the respective natural sciences.

<sup>50</sup> Some are cited in this article. Also note the following two peer-reviewed guides to field excursions led by young-earth creationists at annual meetings of the Geological Society of America: S. A. Austin, "The Dynamic Landscape on the North Flank of Mount St. Helens", in: J. E. O'Connor, R. J. Dorsey, and I. P. Madin, (eds.), *Volcanoes to Vineyards: Geologic Field Trips through the Dynamic Landscape of the Pacific Northwest*. Geological Society of America Field Guide 15 (2009), 349-356. M. R. Ross, W. A. Hoesch, S. A. Austin, J. H. Whitmore & T. L. Clarey, "Garden of the Gods at Colorado Springs: Paleozoic and Mesozoic Sedimentation and Tectonics", in L. A. Morgan & S. L. Quane (eds.), *Through the Generations: Geologic and Anthropogenic Field Excursions in the Rocky Mountains from Modern to Ancient*. Geological Society of America Field Guide 18 (2010), 77-93.

<sup>51</sup> Venema, "Genesis and the Genome".

the eight people on the ark and a definition of humanity that includes more than *Homo sapiens*. Plausible or not, what I am proposing is more radical than often recognised!

Sometimes implausibility is based on false facts. Young and Stearley confidently assert (in line with the geological consensus) that the Coconino Sandstone, present in the Grand Canyon but outcropping over much of central and northern Arizona, is a wind-deposited desert sand.<sup>52</sup> As such it effectively disproves a flood model since this desert sand sits in the middle of the stack of rock layers that chronological creationists would attribute to the global flood. Young and Stearley cite the absence of the mineral mica and the well-sorted and well-rounded sand grains as proof of its desert origin. The problem is that both claims are false. While conventional geologists had no reason to reinvestigate the evidence for the origin of the Coconino Sandstone, chronological creationists did. Their research identified the presence of the mineral mica throughout the Coconino Sandstone, showed that the Coconino sand grains were only moderately to poorly sorted and rounded and documented many other independent lines of evidence pointing to the Coconino being laid down rapidly underwater.<sup>53</sup> In short, starting with a belief in the Bible's account of a global flood these researchers have made new discoveries, enriched science for everyone and even presented their results at the Geological Society of America conference and in mainstream geological journals.<sup>54</sup>

When it comes to the key issue of dating it is important that *all* the available evidence is considered. The reasons for thinking the earth was old in Darwin's time (e.g. estimates based on sedimentation rates, cooling of the earth or orbital physics) are now known to be wrongheaded.<sup>55</sup> Geological processes once thought to require vast lengths of time are increasingly

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<sup>52</sup> Davis A. Young & Ralph F. Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks and Time* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2008), 305.

<sup>53</sup> Two full-length technical papers have been published in the peer-reviewed creationist literature: J. H. Whitmore, R. Strom, S. Cheung & P. A. Garner, "The Petrology of the Coconino Sandstone (Permian), Arizona, USA", *Answers Research Journal* 7 (2014), 499-532. J. H. Whitmore, G. Forsythe & P. A. Garner, "Intraformational Parabolic Recumbent Folds in the Coconino Sandstone (Permian) and Two Other Formations in Sedona, Arizona (USA)", *Answers Research Journal* 8 (2015), 21-40.

<sup>54</sup> A partial list of abstracts reporting this research at annual meetings of the Geological Society of America can be found at <http://www.biblicalcreationtrust.org/research-projects-coconino.html>. In addition, some full-length papers have been published in peer-reviewed geology journals, including J. H. Whitmore & R. Strom, "Sand Injectites at the Base of the Coconino Sandstone, Grand Canyon, Arizona (USA)", *Sedimentary Geology* 230 (2010), 46-59. S. A. Maithel, P. A. Garner & J. H. Whitmore, "Preliminary Assessment of the Petrology of the Hopeman Sandstone (Permo-Triassic), Moray Firth Basin, Scotland", *Scottish Journal of Geology* 51 (2015), 177-184. C. J. Anderson, A. Struble & J. H. Whitmore, "Abrasion Resistance of Muscovite in Aeolian and Subaqueous Transport Experiments", *Aeolian Research* 24 (2017), 33-37.

<sup>55</sup> G. Brent Dalrymple, *The Age of the Earth* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 12-78.

understood by modern geologists as being consistent with very short periods of catastrophism.<sup>56</sup> Today, long ages are mostly inferred on the basis of the radioisotope evidence, which shows that lots of radioactive decay has occurred during the history of the earth. However, there is an enormous mismatch between the observational evidence favouring rapid formation of the rock strata and the radiometric dates that are assigned to the same rocks.<sup>57</sup> Proposals have been made for a model to explain both sets of data,<sup>58</sup> but plenty of questions remain.<sup>59</sup>

None of this is easy nor will it always yield immediate results, but it is attractive. What is more exciting as a scientist than to do something genuinely original: to ask new questions, to look at data in new ways and find new data – especially when that research effort leads to new models? As biologist Todd Wood says: “The more I dig, the more I work at it, the more insight I get, the more answers I get, it’s really exciting.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, doing science as a chronological creationist is not like eating *Ryvita*!

### *V. Conclusion: the right place for dogmatism*

In the origins debate there is one thing worse than misplaced dogmatism and non-dogmatism, and that is non-engagement. However well-intentioned such a strategy may be it will leave the church ill-equipped for the actual battles we are facing and with an overly spiritualised gospel message.

Polarisation around prominent individuals or organisations or slogans is equally unhelpful: “Do you support [prominent creationist speaker /organisation]? Do you believe in literal days?” Instead, on the biblical questions we need a *nuanced* dogmatism, nuanced to the specific doctrines of relative chronology tied to the gospel: humanity *after* Adam, death *after*

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<sup>56</sup> For example, granite formation, once considered to require timescales of millions of years, is now described as “geologically extremely rapid – perhaps even catastrophic”. See N. Petford, A. R. Cruden, K. J. W. McCaffrey & J.-L. Vigneresse, “Granite Magma Formation, Transport and Emplacement in the Earth’s Crust”, *Nature* 408 (2000), 669-673. J. D. Clemens, “Granites and Granitic Magmas: Strange Phenomena and New Perspectives on Some Old Problems”, *Proceedings of the Geologists’ Association* 116 (2005), 9-16. A. A. Snelling, “Catastrophic Granite Formation: Rapid Melting of Source Rocks, and Rapid Magma Intrusion and Cooling”, *Answers Research Journal* 1 (2008), 11-25.

<sup>57</sup> For a particular example published in the mainstream literature see Leonard R. Brand, Raul Esperante, Arthur V. Chadwick, Orlando Poma Porras & Merling Alomia, “Fossil whale preservation implies high diatom accumulation rate in the Miocene-Pliocene Pisco Formation of Peru”, *Geology* 32/2 (2004), 165-168. For a wider overview see Leonard Brand, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*. Second Ed., (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2009), 368-375.

<sup>58</sup> See Garner, *New Creationism*, 96-104.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 201-205.

<sup>60</sup> Blog post, “Is Genesis History Q&A”, 20 February 2017, <http://toddcwood.blogspot.co.uk/>. The quotation is from the film, *Is Genesis History?* that he is discussing.

Adam, a global flood *after* Adam etc. Such doctrines should also be the focus as we look for insights from theologians in church history.

These doctrines have implications for how we are to interpret scientific evidence concerning the earth's history such that some scientific models (e.g. those requiring death before Adam) must be rejected. However, there are any number of possible scientific models that could be adopted that are consistent with these doctrines and that attempt to explain the various pieces of evidence. Since no particular model can claim unique biblical endorsement non-dogmatism is necessary here. There may be strong *scientific* arguments to prefer one model over another (a *scientific* dogmatism) but these are not binding on the conscience of a Christian.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*

John V. Fesko, Christian Focus (Mentor), 2016, 436pp, £19.99

The stated goal of this book is to recover the doctrine of the covenant of redemption. Granted, this may come as something of a shock to readers who were not aware the covenant of redemption was in need of being retrieved. I must confess I reacted in that way myself initially. However, the preface to the book makes a rather startling statement when the writer points out that there have only been three monographs on the subject of the covenant of redemption in the past 325 years.

This book is the first in a project that envisions two further volumes to complete the set. The volumes to follow are to be on the “covenant of works” and the “covenant of grace”. This pattern instantly puts him on a collision course with several Reformed writers and schools of thought who have “either rejected or redefined the covenant of redemption and outright rejected the covenant of works” (Preface, *xviii*). However, he is happy to engage with these views and seeks to assert the validity of the three-fold scheme he refers to as the classic covenant theology.

The book splits into three uneven parts; historical, under fifty pages, exegetical, around seventy pages and dogmatic, well over two hundred pages.

Part 1, “Historical Origins and Development”, consists of an historical survey of the matter in an attempt to set the matter in the context of the church’s engagement with this doctrine. This involves two chapters. In the first he seeks to show that, rather than being the product of “gross speculation”(4), the covenant of redemption is the fruit of sound biblical exegesis. At the same time he asserts the consistent and orthodox Trinitarian nature of the doctrine, despite the claims of some that the covenant of redemption assumes a *sub-Trinitarian* or *tritheistic* (18) position.

The second chapter sees Fesko bringing out the importance of the covenant of redemption in relation to the matters of predestination, justification, the order of salvation and love. He ably defends the theology of the Westminster doctrine of predestination against the accusation of positing a “bald choice” from the likes of Karl Barth and J. B. Torrance. He shows that predestination was “always a decision made within the context of Christ’s covenantal appointment as mediator” (43). His section dealing with the covenant and its relation to love is both warm and persuasive, freeing the doctrine from the criticisms of its detractors (40-43).

Part 2, “Exegetical Foundations”, deals with a more extended exegesis of several of the key texts. He engages with Zechariah 6:13 first, as he sees this as unfairly targeted by opponents of the doctrine. He quotes Eichrodt

approvingly when he says, “God’s eternal kingdom and its future ruler were typified in Zechariah’s day by the crowning of Joshua the high-priest”. He then goes on to note that, “Zechariah not only points to the eschatological advent of Christ but also notes that He will sit and rule by Yahweh’s throne” (76).

He then concludes that,

Yahweh and the Messiah made a covenant in eternity, which was revealed in God’s temporal promise to David. And the typological crowning of Joshua the high priest points forward to the ultimate eschatological fulfilment of this intra-Trinitarian covenant (76-77).

Fesko then unpacks the covenantal content of Psalm 2:7 and 110:3. In Psalm 2:7 he asserts that “Christ’s inauguration and God’s decree is not a bald declaration but rather is enrobed in the covenant” (93). As he turns to Psalm 110 he affirms that,

it is one of the clearer pieces of evidence for the *pactum salutis*. Yahweh swears a covenant-oath to Christ in eternity which establishes His priestly office according to the order of Melchizedek and appoints Him the guarantor or surety of the new covenant (106).

He completes his exegetical section with a short overview of Ephesians 1 and 2 Timothy 1:9-10. Having sought to establish the exegetical legitimacy of the doctrine he proceeds to define the matter in the last part of the book.

Part 3, “Dogmatic Construction”, takes the remaining two thirds of the book to consider its subject. He opens with a chapter in which he sets forth a “Statement of the Doctrine”. Here we have a clear statement of the matter in the language of an intelligent but warm Calvinism:

At its most fundamental level, the covenant of redemption is the pre-temporal, intra-Trinitarian agreement among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to plan and execute the redemption of the elect (131).

He adds later that,

The covenant of redemption, therefore, is a manifestation of the intra-Trinitarian love that the triune God decreed to bestow upon sinful and fallen creatures in spite of their rebellion. The *pactum salutis* is the eternal love of the triune God for the elect, the Son’s bride (141).

The second chapter of this third part of the book deals the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with this subject. The author handles the subject well and takes the reader through the various theological ideas that have arisen since the Reformation on the matter of the Trinity. His assessment of these movements is made all the more powerful by his careful and measured approach:

The categories of covenant, love, and obedience find their origins in the *pactum salutis* in the Father’s command, the Son’s obedience, and the outpouring of the Spirit to redeem fallen



sinners. Far from a cold piece of business, moving numbers from one side of the ledger to the other, the Father sends the Son in love, and the Son obeys the Father in love, and the Spirit applies the Son's work in love (192-3).

The third chapter takes up the matter of predestination at length. He states that the doctrine of predestination is "one of the key elements of the *pactum salutis*, since it entails the election of the Son as covenant surety and His particular bride" (243). His dismantling of Barth's criticisms of the Reformed doctrine of election is most helpful, in particular Barth's reliance on the work of Heinrich Heppe:

Reading primary sources through Heppe distorted Barth's understanding. What some theologians connected in their own systems, such as predestination and the *pactum*, was separated in Heppe's presentation. One of the glaring effects of Barth's mediated access to the primary sources is his claim that Reformed orthodoxy posited an abstract doctrine of predestination devoid of Christ (206).

The fourth chapter of this part deals with imputation and its close connection to the Reformed understanding of the *pactum salutis*. Fesko takes up the various departures from the traditional Reformed view. Once again he provides an informative and careful analysis of these ideas. He confronts Kant, Schleiermacher and Bultmann initially. However, he then brings matters right up to date with critiques of the New Perspective on Paul advocated by N. T. Wright and the "Theo-Drama" of Von Balthasar. He looks at several Old Testament passages in order to consider this doctrine: Achan's sin (Joshua 7), David's numbering of Israel (2 Samuel 24), Daniel's son of man (Daniel 7) and the suffering servant (Isaiah 53) and follows with consideration of some New Testament passages.

The final chapter on the *Ordo Salutis* again emphasises "how the intra-Trinitarian processions and missions frame redemption" (353). He then goes on to assert that,

The *ordo salutis* is not, therefore, the foreign and alien imposition of logic upon an ineffable redemption but is rather a reflection of the biblical idea that God first loved us so that we might love Him in return (353).

Whatever the world imagines about ministers only working one day a week, those who are in the ministry know it is a very different story. Perhaps even more so those longsuffering wives and families of diligent ministers know how hard it can be to get quality time with them. The result is that when a minister takes time to read a book, he wants to be sure it will be of benefit to him and, hopefully, through him, to others.

Perhaps a book will spark the thoughts that will issue in a series of sermons that will enlighten his congregation in the truths of the word and bring them into a closer walk with God. Alternatively another book may help

to answer some knotty pastoral dilemmas, turning the lives of people under his care from troubled to triumphant. It may be by means of a practical volume an overstretched minister can start to work more efficiently and effectively. These aims are right and proper and we should take time to study books able to bring about such practical and laudable goals. Sadly, this book is unlikely to produce many of these results.

However, there are other things we need from our reading. Ministers need to delve deeply into the doctrines of the faith, and that includes things that rarely or only tangentially intrude into our sermons but that nevertheless underpin a sound biblical theology. We also need to clarify our thinking in areas of profound doctrinal and philosophical controversy to keep us careful and consistent in our thinking. As pastors we desperately need to deepen our understanding of scriptural doctrines that may seldom be of any great use in our pastoral visitation and counselling but that will stretch our minds and sharpen our reasoning, so increasing our overall usefulness in the ministry. It is in these areas that this book will be of great benefit to any careful reader. The interaction with current theological trends and writers makes this book essential reading for pastors keen to have an able and trustworthy guide through these debates. I heartily commend the book and thank the author for a most helpful addition to the literature on the covenant of redemption.

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*A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*

Miles V. Van Pelt (ed.), Crossway, 2016, HB, 610pp, £39.00 (currently only £6.71 on Kindle)

What a great joy this book is to read. Theologically solid, clear and faithful academic work, but most lucidly and helpfully opening the door to each book of the Old Testament. Here is a collection of articles, carefully edited by Miles V Van Pelt, that belongs on the shelf of any serious Bible student. This, and its sister volume, "A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament" are a thank you present for fifty years of Reformed Theological Seminary in the USA. The contributors are all past and present lecturers of the seminary. Van Pelt says the two volumes are an effort to pass on "world-class, faithful, consecrated scholarship to the next generation".

As the preface makes clear, "Preachers, ministry leaders, Bible teachers, students and others engaged in Christian discipleship are in view" in the preparation of the text. You need to be ready to engage with a significant

amount of academic discussion of authors, archaeology, etc. if you are going to get everything out of this book. Having said that, it is not a difficult book to read. The contributors have written in an easy-to-read style and they take you on a journey through the sweep of the Old Testament and into some of the detail in a way that is not simply academic, but that lifts up Christ and warms the heart. The whole volume does not have to be read in a couple of sittings; it can be dipped in and out of and selected parts chosen with great profit, especially if you are about to embark on preaching an Old Testament book.

The introduction sets the trajectory for all the contributions that follow: In making clear the shared convictions of the contributors, Van Pelt has given a wonderful introduction to Biblical Theology and how it is worked out across the entire Old Testament. The heart of those convictions is the straight outworking of the New Testament's use of the Old. As Van Pelt says,

The New Testament provides the final, authoritative context from which God's people can rightly understand the message and design of the Old Testament... Jesus constitutes the sum and substance of the biblical message. He is God's gospel and the theological center for the whole of the Christian Bible.

With Christ as the theological centre, Van Pelt describes the thematic framework of Scripture as the kingdom of God and this framework, centred on Christ, is organised in a covenantal structure in both Testaments. He does a good job of showing how these three elements interact with one another and do so in a way that will greatly bless your reading and teaching of Scripture. In my view, the book is worth the price tag for the introduction alone!

With the theological direction and purpose of the book set, various contributors then take the reader through each book of the Old Testament (taking the twelve minor prophets in one chunk). Each section is divided up into Introduction, Background Issues, Structure and Outline, Message and Theology, Approaching the New Testament and finally a Selected Bibliography. This organisational structure is helpful, giving each chapter of the book a sense of unity. It means the engagement with different academic approaches to each book can be dealt with carefully and up front, leaving room for a substantial summary treatment of the text of God's word. The style of the different contributors is distinct, which is not a surprise, however the quality of the material is excellent all the way through.

I greatly appreciated reading a proper treatment of each book in its Old Testament context. As a Bible teacher the constant temptation is to run to Christ as fast you can. But in doing so we may miss the richness and depth of the theology, and often the punch of the text, as the original context still has so much to speak into our lives today. As the apostle says, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us..."

(1 Corinthians 10:11). So this book is a reminder that Biblical Theology works backwards as well as forwards. Each chapter does an excellent job of locating the book in the canon and tracing the biblical-theological lines to see more clearly how all the promises of God are yes in Christ Jesus.

There are one or two points where I needed a little more convincing as I read. For instance, John Scott Redd, who writes on Deuteronomy, suggests a structure to the book, argued for by Stephen Kaufman among others, based on the ten commandments. I need to read and think a little more about that before I am entirely convinced. But even wondering about a specific issue here or there, there is no doubting the quality and usefulness of this volume. So often we read the Old Testament and find ourselves a little lost, knowing that it links to Christ but unsure exactly how. This book is an enormous help in seeing him in all of Scripture, not in a trite or crowbar kind of way, but so that the theology of the Old Testament is made clear. Time and again I found myself praising God for our great Saviour.

RTS has put together a real gem in this book. They have done us a great service in passing on “world-class, faithful, consecrated scholarship” to us in this volume. It will prove to be a great companion in Bible reading and invaluable to preacher and Sunday School teacher alike. Whenever I come to look at a particular Old Testament book, this will be an ever-present companion from now on.

*Chris Hawthorne*

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*The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*

D. A. Carson (ed.), Apollos, 2016, 1240 pp, HB, £44.99

The question of Satan, “Has God said?” launched the attack upon the veracity of God’s word. It has raged ever since, and continues today with many books being published, either questioning or defending the authority of the Bible. Therefore, one could justifiably query the need for yet another book on the doctrine of scripture. But this is not just “another” book; it is a significant book, because of the theological standing of its editor, D. A. Carson, and of its contributors and also because of the sheer breadth of this volume in its subject matter.

Carson provides the opening chapter entitled “The Many Facets Of The Current Discussion”, which consists of a 40-page sweep through the material published since around 1980. This serves as a detailed overview of all the various elements of the debate, and it is worth reading in itself in order to get a clearer perspective on contemporary scholarship and issues that bear upon the issue at hand, namely Biblical authority.

At the time of publication Carson was interviewed by Fred Zaspel, who asks the questions “Why this book? Why now?” Carson responded by saying that behind all the varying sections of the book, there is the question: “What authority does the Bible have?” Carson goes on to say,

And the notion of the enduring authority focuses on the fact that some people think that notions like authority of Scripture is passé, while others say that the present configuration of the doctrine of inerrancy is a late addition. And to both we want to say, No we’re talking about the enduring authority of Scripture, grounded first and foremost in its revelatory status, something given by God and utterly reliable, and that this is the enduring conviction of the central confessionalism of the Church of Jesus Christ across 20 centuries in virtually all denominations and it is not to be overturned. It’s tied finally to what Jesus himself thinks of the Scriptures that were already present in his own day and if we bow to his Lordship that we must bow also to his view of Holy Scripture.

With this in mind, Carson has brought together some thirty-six authors, each writing substantial chapters on their particular area of expertise as it bears upon the authority of scripture. In fact, I suspect that it is even an eye-opener to many well-read Christian leaders to see how wide-ranging the issues now are. The chapters are grouped under four main topics – Historical, Biblical and Theological, Philosophical and Epistemological, and Comparative Religions.

The opening section on historical issues include nine chapters. Charles E. Hill presents a fascinating overview of the authority of Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine, while Robert Kolb looks at “The Bible in the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy”. In “Natural Philosophy and Biblical Authority in the Seventeenth Century”, Rodney L. Stiling provides an enlightening (no pun intended) insight into the approach taken by Copernicus, Kepler, Boyle and others, and the growing emphasis on the authority of Natural Philosophy as “a valuable resource for Scripture interpretation”, no doubt heralding the century to follow. John D. Woodbridge next writes on “German Pietism and Scriptural Authority: The Question of Biblical Inerrancy”, which is particularly helpful.

I was particularly interested to see the chapter on “The Answering Speech of Men: Karl Barth on Holy Scripture”. Some 33 years ago, as a fairly new Christian feeling called to the pastoral ministry, I was duly sent for interview to a theologically liberal denominational college. I had been helped by reading books such as “Authority” by D. M. Lloyd-Jones. When I asked the Principal what the position of the College was on the doctrine of Scripture, he rebuked me by saying “Some people would have Christ imprisoned in the scriptures”. I did not understand a great deal, but I understood this to be Barthian, and have had an aversion to Barth ever since. For this reason, I cannot agree with the author that Barth has “no modern peers” as an exegetical dogmatician. I do, however, concur with his perception of the problem with Barth: “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that some of the

material he considers is commandeered too quickly toward his own dogmatic ends.”

The second section, “Biblical and Theological Topics” contains fourteen chapters – too many to mention individually. There are some notable offerings. For example, Peter J. Williams writes on Bart Ehrman’s “Equivocation and the Inerrancy of the Original Text”, which is timely. Graham A. Cole considers the canon of scripture and addresses the questions “Why a Book? Why This Book? Why the Particular Order within This Book?” There is a superb and important chapter by Peter F. Jensen, “God and the Bible”. Henri K. Blocher contributes “God and the Scripture Writers: The Question of Double Authorship”, while Bruce K. Waltke gives a clear-headed explanation of what we mean by “myth” in “Myth, History and the Bible”. Craig Blomberg and also Douglas Moo and Andrew David Naselli discuss the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, an area of continuing challenge from biblical critics.

The third section, “Philosophical and Epistemological Topics”, includes a wonderful chapter by Paul Helm on “The Idea of Inerrancy”. Potentially one of the most debated chapters (and I would say rightly so), within Reformed evangelicalism at least, would be the inclusion of Kirsten Birkett’s “Science and Scripture”.

The fourth and final section on comparative religions is much needed in the present global village in which we live and move and have our being. Once again, there are excellent contributions by the likes of Timothy C. Tennent on current challenges from Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The whole work is brought to a satisfying conclusion with Carson’s own response to some “FAQs”. With a work of this size, running to some 1,200 pages, it is useful to be able to reflect with Don Carson on just a few of the many questions that arise in response to the authority of Scripture .

For those in ministry or theological education, this book is essential, albeit disciplined, reading over a long period of time. And for those like myself, who have been in Christian ministry a good length of time, it is helpful to grasp the much wider breadth of the discussion.

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*The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*

Peter Harrison, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 313pp, £30.99

“Science” – that short but big word. Christians – I mean everyday, ordinary, evangelical Christians among whom I happily belong, including many who are in Christian ministry of one kind or another – sometimes feel themselves on the defensive: The apparent size and age of earth, humanity and the

universe; the barely disguised religious sub-text of the work of some scientists; the possible undue readiness of some scientific Christians to concede the authority of all or most of contemporary mainstream science; the suspicion that the foundations of modern science were laid more on Greek philosophy than Christian and biblical positions on human nature and capacity.

It is on this last thought that Peter Harrison's work on "The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science" enables us to take pause. A decade old it may be but, guessing it may not have crossed the paths of *Foundations* readers, a familiarisation with this scholarly but readable argument by an eminent historian of science and western religion may pay dividends.

The Introduction sets out his case in a (fairly large) nutshell. He takes us to a sermon by Robert South in 1662 at St. Pauls on "those intellectual perfections that attended our nature in its time of innocence" (1). The Royal Society was founded the same year and had high beliefs in humanity's capacity to regain the knowledge Adam lost. South did not share this optimism. "Indeed one of the major themes of South's sermon was the disparity between the ease with which Adam had acquired knowledge and the difficulties encountered by his latter day progeny" (2). But all were agreed that those seeking the advancement of knowledge "needed to reckon with Adam and what befell him as a consequence of his sin" (2). The different strategies for this "can be accounted for largely in terms of different assessments of the Fall and its impact on the human mind" (3).

Harrison sets out four aspects. First, in the realm of epistemology, error was often equated with sin.

The priority accorded to proposed sources of knowledge – be it reason and innate principles; the senses, observation, and experimentation; or divine revelation through the scriptures or personal inspiration – were intimately related to analyses of the specific effects of original sin (6).

Second, the solutions were closely related to beliefs about the exact physical and cognitive depredations of the Fall. If one believed the Fall had effaced the divine image,

if knowledge were possible at all, it would be painstakingly accumulated through much labour, through trials and the testing of nature, and would give rise to a modest knowledge that did not penetrate to the essences of things and was at best probable rather than certain [leading to] mitigated scepticism (6f).

Third, solutions were related to the religious positions held by their advocates. Reformation positions led to "mitigated scepticism"; Catholics held Thomist relative optimism regarding human nature, though there were exceptions on both sides. Scholastic Puritanism grew up as did Jansenism in Catholicism. It was the Jansenist Pascal who said "We desire truth, and find

within ourselves only uncertainty... This desire is left to us to punish us, partly to make us perceive from whence we have fallen" (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*). Francis Bacon "raised as he was in a Calvinist environment, thought that knowledge would be accumulated gradually and only with meticulous care" (7).

It may be worth borrowing a set of distinctions Francis Schaeffer used in a different context when talking about "Art and the Bible" (*Art and the Bible*, InterVarsity Press, 2006). Indeed, he also cites Francis Bacon saying "Man by the Fall fell at the same time from his state of innocence and from his dominion over nature. Both of these losses, however, can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences" (Schaeffer, 18). "Christian" is used by Schaeffer in two senses: First, someone who has accepted Christ as Saviour. But if there are a number of such Christians in any one period and place, there may emerge a kind of Christian framework and consensus such that non-Christians write and paint within it. Thus, he says, there are four kinds of people in the realm of art:

1. The born-again person who writes and paints with a Christian worldview.
2. The non-Christian who paints/writes with his non-Christian worldview.
3. Someone who is not personally a Christian but who works within a Christian consensus.
4. The born-again Christian who does not understand the Christian worldview and produces work that represents a non-Christian worldview.

Harrison, while not carrying over these distinctions to the history of science, may be speaking at any one time of Christians in either of senses 1 or 3 and perhaps 4. This digression is important for weighing especially the work of Francis Bacon. Bacon had a Puritan mother (Anne Bacon)<sup>1</sup> though was not a Puritan himself. But his "Confession of Faith" (1602) closely mirrors the "Institutes" despite him being critical of some aspects of Puritanism. He attacked Aristotelian university culture, for having "given the first place to Logic, supposing that the surest helps to the sciences were found in that". He saw this as a "remedy... altogether too weak for the disease" (173). "The root cause of nearly all evils in the sciences" is that "we falsely admire and extol the powers of the human mind" (173). But for him the "inherent infirmities" of the mind "have their foundation in human nature itself" (174). For him "by far the greatest hindrances and aberration of the human mind proceeds from the dullness, incompetency, and deceptions of the senses." They fail in two ways in that "sometimes they provide no information, sometimes they provide false information" (174). He saw the answer as lying in "experimentation", "For the subtlety of experiments is far greater than that of the sense itself, even when assisted by exquisite instruments" (176), by which he meant telescopes and microscopes.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne\\_Bacon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Bacon)



The fourth aspect Harrison pursues is how the major philosophical projects of the 17<sup>th</sup> century can be seen as developments of different aspects of Augustinianism. In contrast to some scholars, Harrison suggests how Augustinian and Calvinist views of human nature and original sin point towards an experimental position in science. Hence epistemology was secondary to anthropology.

The main body of the book is given to substantiating this argument and to dealing both with arguments to the contrary and to the gradual writing out of the narrative of the Fall as a justification for scientific practice in the work of Boyle, Locke and Newton. As the 17<sup>th</sup> century went on, “increasingly the Bible ceased to be regarded as a significant repository of scientific information” (137).

The argument starts from the contemporary weight placed on arguments about Adam’s original wisdom – a point that rarely appears in current Reformed or evangelical argument. From passages such as Gen 1:26, 28; 2:19 and Ezek 28:13-15, the naming of animals was seen to reflect an understanding of the nature of things. Bacon linked knowledge and power/authority – “whenever he shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them” (27).<sup>2</sup> Paul’s teaching on the Fall’s effect on human nature in Romans 5 was drawn on but also how Paul also speaks of its epistemological consequences (Rom 1:18-22).

By contrast the early church fathers took a mild view of the Fall – as a “cause for regret rather than extravagant self-condemnation” (29), later perpetuated in the minimalist view taken by the Council of Trent. In Calvin’s words on Genesis, “The corruption of our nature was unknown to the philosophers who, in other respects, were sufficiently, and more than sufficiently, acute” (52). Richard Baxter was later to allude to “that opinion wherein the Papists differ from our Divines; viz that Grace was supernatural to *Adam*; and original sin being nothing but the privation of that Grace or Rectitude” (1675, here 142). It fell to Augustine to emphasise the fact that

Adam’s lapse was not merely a moral loss but one that had plunged the human race into irremediable epistemological confusion. As a consequence of original sin, individuals not only habitually make wrong moral choices but consistently confuse error for truth (32).

But Augustine did not fall into radical scepticism. Harrison quotes Augustine (on “The Trinity”) saying: “Nobody surely doubts... that he lives and remembers and understands and wills and thinks and knows and judges... You may have your doubts about anything else, but you should have no doubts about these; if they were not certain, you would not be able to doubt anything” (37-8).

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<sup>2</sup> Forgive me for wondering if this same thought is echoed in the lyrics of Bob Dylan’s “Man gave names to all the animals”. <https://bobdylan.com/songs/man-gave-names-all-animals/>

The capacity to doubt and question can only stand if vestiges of the divine image still remain in the fallen mind. Augustine's position stands in contrast to Aquinas who believed the capacity for natural reason was a natural gift and "is never forfeit from the soul" (43), taking his anthropology more from Aristotle than from the Bible. Calvin saw Aristotle as "a man of genius and learning" yet also a "heathen whose heart was perverse and depraved" (63). The Reformation witnessed the revival of Augustinianism. Harrison repeats the famous words of Warfield that "the Reformation inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church" (52). The seventeenth century was "the age of Augustine" (53) especially among English Calvinists.

Calvinists differed in not regarding human ignorance as our natural condition. Hence Luther and Calvin criticised sceptics for seeing "human ignorance as essentially incorrigible" (81). Whether Adam's knowledge was natural or supernatural was an issue of great significance. "The contemporary significance of this recondite theological issue should not be underestimated" (158). If supernatural, then the prospects for its recovery would be slight. If natural, then ignorance is the result of corruption of human nature (this is the Lutheran v Tridentine difference). From this perspective,

if the flaw of Aristotle had been an uncritical assumption of the reliability of the human mind, scepticism was equally deficient in assuming that the natural condition of the human mind was ignorance (81).

Pascal nicely captures (the) dual aspect in his assertion that "men are at once... unworthy through their corruption, capable through their original nature". It follows for him that we are "incapable of certain knowledge or absolute ignorance" (84).

Harrison takes us through the ideas of Melanchthon, Kepler, Galileo and the search in Geneva for a Christian philosophy from a basis of Calvinist scepticism regarding natural light. What was needed was a reformation of natural philosophy that would complement a Reformed theology. Calvin compared scripture to spectacles that augment the dim remains of natural light.

There was much talk in the seventeenth century of the loss of Solomon's works of natural history and whether he drew on a lost antediluvian science of Noah, Seth, Enoch and Adam. Bacon referred to the "house of Salomon" (i.e. Solomon) for the ideal institution of knowledge, though he retained ambivalence towards knowledge – "an admiration of the wonders of nature and a reputation for intimate familiarity with its workings, combined with counsels concerning the ultimate vanity of human learning" (122). Later it was Newton who became seen as heir to the wisdom of the ancients. Something Harrison wryly remarks was "entirely in keeping with Newton's own conception of his achievements" (124)! He suggests

there were plausible links between experimental religion and experimental natural philosophy, e.g. in the Calvinist refusal to accept the authority of the church compared with the Royal Society's motto "*Nullius in Verba*" ("On no man's word"). So belief in the role of divine inspiration is "not... completely inimical to the spirit of scientific investigation" (134). Hence "virtually everyone who made knowledge claims in the early modern period took pains to attribute at least some of their achievement to the grace of God" (134). Examples of this can be seen in the life of Galileo (D. Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter*, Bloomsbury, 2011).

In sum,

(a) premise of the experimental approach to natural philosophy that developed in England over the course of the seventeenth century was the idea that certainty could never be achieved in the sciences, and that investigators of nature needed to lower their sights (138).

Science in the Baconian tradition "was to be a long-term and probabilistic enterprise" (138).

The seventeenth-century quest to re-establish human dominion over the natural world – often associated with that exploitative stance thought to typify the modern West's attitude towards nature – was thus originally conceived as a restorative project designed to return the world to its prelapsarian perfection (183).

It is the Reformation position that this is always unachievable. But "the key feature of this approach is that it strikes a balance between scepticism on the one hand, and, on the other, the optimistic assumption that the acquisition of knowledge is simple and unproblematic" (184).

With Robert Boyle, John Locke and Isaac Newton the biblical rationale gradually faded.

With Locke, two of the fundamental characteristics of Calvinist and Lutheran versions of Christianity – the principle of *sola scripture* and a strong commitment to the doctrine of original sin – became disengaged (231f).

In Newton's writings, unlike Locke, there are almost no references to the Fall, original sin, or in any detail to the limitations of human knowledge. It is well known he was passionately opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. As such philosophies carried over to other fields such as economics, in Adam Smith the Fall becomes a "fortunate flaw" (255).

'The twentieth century witnessed the final stages of the secularisation of scientific knowledge, along with the development of a degree of historical amnesia about the role of religion in its early modern origins' (245).

Though he knows that "faint reverberations of these early modern ideas about the debilitation of reason by original sin have persisted in the thinking

of some influenced by Reformation theology even in the twentieth century” (246). He cites Abraham Kuyper and Alvin Plantinga as instances and says it is significant that “the only surviving traces of the early modern doctrine of epistemic impairment are to be found in some present-day manifestations of the Dutch Reformed tradition” (253).

In Calvinist thinking an “apparently pessimistic assessment was combined with a remarkable optimism about what could be achieved if limited human capabilities were acknowledged... It is thus the recognition of the radically circumscribed nature of human knowledge that has made possible the advances of modern science” (249).

He brings together his convictions as follows:

The birth of modern experimental science was not attended with a new awareness of the powers and capacities of human reason, but rather the opposite – a consciousness of the manifold deficiencies of the intellect, of the misery of the human condition, and of the limited scope of scientific achievement... Science, for many of its seventeenth proponents... was devoted to the generation of a makeshift knowledge that would alleviate some of the burdens of the human condition in the hope of a better future in both the present world and that which was to come (258).

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### *Knowing Christ*

Mark Jones, Banner of Truth, 2015, 256pp, £8.25

Nearly fifty years ago the great evangelical theologian J. I. Packer wrote “Knowing God”. That book, thanks to the grace of the God it honours, has had a profound and wide influence. It is with an awareness of that, then, that I begin my review of a new book, by an emerging new voice in evangelical theology, which has a foreword by Packer. “Knowing Christ” by Mark Jones seeks to carefully explore what it might mean to *know* Christ, through the lens of the New Testament and with assistance from the Puritans of the Reformed tradition. Whilst this may come across as an over-technical proposition for a popular level paperback, it is in fact a tour-de-force, with some surprises, that offers a heart-nourishing feast of exposition and inspiration.

At the outset of this review, it is worth noting the scope and style of book. Jones is keen to honour the legacy of Packer’s “Knowing God”, but with a particular focus on Jesus, one of the three persons of the Trinity. Lest accusations be levelled at the author and publisher for ignoring the Trinity, it is this reviewer’s opinion that “Knowing Christ” is a thoroughly Trinitarian piece of historical, devotional and biblical theology. This is a book that

weaves together a deep engagement with Scripture (Both Old and New Testaments, echoing a proper understanding of Christ and the Trinity) with a robust and careful reading of key Puritan and Reformed voices. In the former, the book echoes the author's present pastoral ministry, and in the latter it showcases some of his academic interests. In the bringing together of these two strands, the reader is richly fed.

In his generous foreword, J. I. Packer writes: "Have we ever, up to now, worked our way through any book that fully displays our Saviour as the brightest lights in the historic Reformed firmament have viewed him? Here is such a book" (ix). This question accurately reflects the way that Jones "uses" the Puritans and other Reformed voices. As the author explores what the Scriptures say about Christ, he invites us into a library, pointing at particularly well-observed expositions from the past. Jones engages with what the Puritans and others are saying – and this reviewer has now found many rich seams of devotional gold to pursue at a later date.

A book like this, of course, cannot fully ignore some of the contentious issues raised around discussion of the person and work of Christ. Three areas of particular interest stand out for this reviewer: Christological orthodoxy, the miracles of Jesus, and the treatment of emotions. This book stands firmly within the stream of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, providing a helpful riposte to some understandings of the person of Christ that emerge, in every age, like weeds. Further, this book surprised this Reformed Charismatic reviewer in its treatment of Jesus' miraculous ministry. The emphasis is thoroughly on Christ himself, as Jones notes in his treatment of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1): "Christ's role at this wedding reflects his role in history – indeed, even into eternity. He showed his glory by taking centre stage... The miracle was the announcement of a new age" (136).

The Resurrection is discussed, with the real impact of that miracle on the life of the believer discussed powerfully. The topic of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ raises a range of questions, not least among them the place of emotions in his life. Jones deals sensitively with this, challenging the reader that "one of the problems in the church today is not that we are too emotionally driven, but that we are not sufficiently such after the pattern of Christ" (70). The emphasis here, on the church today following the pattern of Christ, is exactly right, and part of what makes this book so helpful.

The title of this book, the foreword by Packer, and the study questions (found at the back – an editorial choice I have mixed feelings about, as it made the book flow beautifully, but may be less helpful for regular study) all point to the pastoral focus of this book. Rooted in the academy – Jones' work on the Puritans is helpful, and partnered with careful and informed exegesis – but aimed at the heart of the regular believer in the local church, this is a very helpful book. I foresee a few potential key usages, however. Firstly, for personal discipleship, the readability and depth of this book would lend itself

to personal study or one-to-one ministry. Secondly, and particularly of interest to this reviewer, is the strength and emotional intelligence of the presentation of Christ. This would make the book invaluable for those seeking to pastor people coming to Christ from hyper-Charismatic, Roman Catholic, and other backgrounds where the gospel invites the individual into a real and transforming personal encounter with the Christ of Scripture. Thirdly, this is a book for more mature Christians whose beatific vision can be ever expanded, as Jones covers topics like the Wrath of Christ.

A particular strength of this book is that it engages carefully and without sensation with the important but complex issue of the present state of Christ. Much of our focus, echoing the majority of the narrative of the Gospels, is on Jesus' ministry and the Easter weekend – Jones encourages us in a number of chapters to consider and enjoy the truth of knowing where Christ is now, and what he is doing for us. Christ now sits, exalted, enthroned at the right hand of the Father. And here, as Jones rightly and forcefully reminds us, Christ is at work. Indeed,

We must remember that Jesus is not seated in glory only as king, but as prophet and priest as well. His enthronement speaks not only of his power and majesty, but also of his grace and willingness to bless his people" (173).

One of the primary ways that Christ is presently at the work of blessing his people is through his intercession, to which Jones devotes a particularly powerful chapter. This chapter is one of the shortest in the book, yet utterly rich. The tension of the present age is illustrated in beautifully Trinitarian language: "By interceding, he not only draws our names up before his Father, but also sends down his Spirit in order to bless us" (183).

In conclusion, this book is a feast. Robust in its exegesis and synthesising a range of notable Puritans and Reformed theologians, it combines a pastors heart with a scholar's mind in a way that is both readable and deep. The structure of the book, building as it does through a large number of relatively short chapters, is tied together by the author's obvious passion for the Christ of Scripture, and his appreciation of the Puritans as particularly helpful guides. I noted earlier in my review a number of particular uses I could imagine for this book – as well as the way the author engages with some contentious subjects. Overall, I would commend this book to those in pastoral ministry as both nourishing food for themselves and a helpful tool for discipleship. I hope that this book receives the wide readership it deserves.

*Thomas Creedy*  
*South West London Vineyard*

*Catching the Wave: Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric*

Tim MacBride, IVP, 2016, 192pp, £11.99

Expository preaching is driven more by convictions regarding the biblical text than by a commitment to a certain sermonic style. Those convictions revolve around the authorial intent of the biblical text. To put it another way, the expository preacher is concerned to both understand and communicate what God intended us to hear from the preaching text.

Understanding any biblical text involves wrestling not only with its content, but also with its form. God inspired not only the content of the Bible, but also the human author's choices relating to genre and form. The more we are convinced of God's intentionality in inspiring the Bible, the more concerned we will be to not only say what a text says, but also seek to do what a text does. That is the concern of this book by Tim MacBride.

The subtitle is "Preaching the New Testament as rhetoric" although it should really be more specific – preaching New Testament *epistles* as rhetoric. MacBride legitimately views the epistles essentially as written speeches and demonstrates throughout how effective analysis of the rhetorical intent of the author can lead to more effective explanation and application by the contemporary preacher.

The book is not really seeking to convince the reader of the benefits of rhetorical analysis – this is assumed throughout – but it is consistently demonstrated nonetheless. The book is not focused on the "should we" question, but rather, how can we use rhetorical analysis to more effectively understand and communicate the epistles?

Classic Graeco-Roman rhetoric was a staple of education for centuries, but today many are as likely to identify Ethos, Pathos and Logos as the three musketeers rather than the modes of rhetorical persuasion. Nevertheless, MacBride explains terminology as he progresses and it is not difficult to track with his presentation throughout.

### *Overview*

The book is broken down into three sections. The first section addresses the broad goals of the three genres of rhetorical speech: the courtroom speech of attack and defence, the festival speech of praise and blame, and the democratic speech used to give persuasive advice. Identifying the type of speech used in an epistle enables the preacher to keep the purpose of the sermon in line with the purpose of the epistle. This leads to helpful preaching insights such as,

Many sermons on epideictic texts begin with the assumption that their hearers are *not* displaying the value being discussed in the text. They then proceed with a tone of chastisement

rather than celebration. In other words, they run counter to Paul's rhetorical strategy right from the beginning. (43)

The second section of the book focuses on rhetorical form, engaging with the specific elements within a speech. MacBride consistently explains the form, not as a straitjacket restricting the biblical authors, but as a guide that gives the contemporary preacher insight into the all-important intent of the original author. The introductory remarks, the circumstances of the author, the central thesis, the main argument, the overcoming of objections, and the closing argument are all considered with numerous examples from various New Testament epistles throughout. Just one example of a helpful insight comes in relation to the circumstances of the author (the *narratio*, such as in Philippians 1:12-26). MacBride urges the preacher to preach the *narratio*, not as a moral object lesson (as Old Testament narratives are often preached), but by recognising the rhetorical need of the original audience as compared to ours, and by understanding the importance of the *narratio* in light of the *propositio*, the central thesis of the book (67-68). MacBride covers most elements of a speech, but the main argument of the epistles is withheld until the third and final section.

In the third section MacBride zeroes in on the three types of proof that are used in the main argument of epistles. Here we find the classic persuasive modes of Ethos, Pathos and Logos. MacBride rightly identifies the complexities in each area and offers helpful suggestions. How are we to preach a text that seems to primarily establish the apostolic authority of a man who has long since been promoted to glory? Since "the New Testament model is to engage the heart as well as the head" (108), how should a contemporary preacher aim at the emotions of the listener without crossing the line into manipulation? And we may be most comfortable with rational arguments, but are we able to offer reasoned support for biblical instruction that will effectively connect with our audience rather than simply restating what was intended to persuade a very different original audience?

The book concludes with some helpful appendices, including a guide to the rhetorical genre of each New Testament epistle and some suggested commentaries that utilise rhetorical analysis.

In the Q&A section of the book, MacBride offers a helpful suggested path to applying the book to one's preaching. We can start by matching the function of the rhetorical genre of the epistle to the function of the sermon. The next step would be to identify the central thesis of the epistle and preach every section in light of it. After that would come the identification of each part of the speech and allow the function of that part to inform each specific sermon in a series. The final step would be to ponder and apply the more technical challenges relating to ethos, pathos and logos. The author rightly



suggests that these lessons are best learned in the trenches, week-by-week, rather than just by reading a book and pondering the theory.

### *Evaluation and Conclusion*

MacBride writes with consistent focus on his purpose throughout the book – it will help any preacher to consistently preach specific texts in line with the purpose of the book in which each text is located. He shows good sensitivity not only to biblical texts, but also to contemporary audiences, a vital ingredient in effective communication. The author's sometimes subtle humour is very welcome in a book of this nature.

Perhaps the most difficult element in writing any book on preaching is the inclusion of sample sermons. It is always easy to pick holes in a sample sermon since no sermon can equally demonstrate every lesson being taught in a book. I found some of the sermons more helpful than others, but the notes throughout each sermon certainly help the reader understand how the points in the book could make a difference in both explaining and applying epistle texts.

This book does a specific job and it does it well. It would not be fair to criticise the book for not engaging with issues such as preaching Christ, how the gospel changes people, how to deliver sermons effectively, or whatever else the reader might be seeking. There are good books for those needs. "Catching the Wave" is about how to apply rhetorical analysis to the preaching of New Testament epistles, and MacBride achieves that goal admirably.

*Peter Mead*

*Elder, Trinity Chippenham*

### *Satisfaction Guaranteed*

Jonathan Berry and Rob Wood, IVP, 2016, 192pp, £9.99

I'll tell you something encouraging. It has taken a long time, but the evangelical church has finally begun to get to grips with the sexual revolution. For many years, the only response we seemed to be able to find was moral outrage. We knew the gospel, but somehow we did not know how to speak it into the new situation. Thankfully there are now models, ministries and resources that can help us to engage much more constructively. This book is one of those resources.

I like this book. I like it a lot. I think you should read it. The style is easy, informal and conversational. It blends together relevant autobiography,

popular culture references, good biblical exposition, accessible theological reflection, and wise, practical, pastoral counsel. It does a lot with a light touch.

That pastoral focus is central. The book is aimed at helping same-sex attracted believers to hold on to a biblical, orthodox view of sexuality, and to walk that narrow way. The book does this by showing that Christ is our greatest treasure and that no life lived with him is a half-life, or a lonely life, or an impossible life. The way may be narrow, but he walks with us, and it leads to abundant life.

The first half of the book sets out the “narrow way”. It is a good exposition of sanctification contextualised to this specific issue. It goes deep; getting under the surface to address the issues of the heart. It is real; addressing our fears that maybe we have sinned too much to be restored. It is wise; sharing pastoral instruction on living by grace in the midst of ongoing temptation and failure. It is uncompromising; sensitively making the case that God really does say “no” to same sex relationships. It is Christ-centred; giving us a vision of the sufficiency of Christ in his divinity and humanity and redeeming grace, and, crucially, emphasising our union with Christ and our new identity in him.

The second half of the book picks up several ways in which we can enter into abundant life even while we are on the “narrow road”. There are liberating things said about body image and about God using us in our weakness. There are powerful things said about pursuing intimacy with God, and important things said about friendship. An especially important chapter for every church to take to heart is the one on singleness entitled “the gift of being unmarried”. The final chapter is an important reality check that manages our expectations for the “here and now”. It is about the fact we live in the “now” and the “not yet” of 1 John 3:2. It warns of the dangers of an over-realised eschatology.

My favourite aspect of the book is the autobiography and testimony that runs through it. Both authors have struggled with same-sex attraction and been involved in same-sex relationships. They write with honesty, insight, humility, wisdom, power and courage. Their stories give us a lot that is helpful, but that is not the best thing about them. They are also modelling something: being so secure in Christ that you are able to make yourself vulnerable before others, for their good, and for his glory. That is a powerful thing to be able to do. It would good if we learned from them how to go and do likewise.

*Ian Parry*

*Mission Director, European Mission Fellowship*

*For the Glory: The Life of Eric Liddell, from Olympic Champion to Modern Martyr*  
Duncan Hamilton, Doubleday, 2016, 372 pp, £9.99

Any well-written biography of Eric Liddell is to be welcomed, and Duncan Hamilton's contribution adds helpfully to the already fine set of biographies that have been produced to date. The subject is compelling, especially for those who have an interest in sport (particularly athletics and rugby union) and a desire to read of an exemplary Christian life. Into the mix can be added the dynamics and practices of early twentieth-century Christian mission, as well as the recent history of the Far East, and the ups and downs of real Christian lives (and a loving family), lived out under the severe strains and stresses of war. These and other themes emerge in this biography.

Perhaps a word regarding my own context: my first full-time employment was as a teacher of Science and Games at a boys' secondary school, the Games being mainly rugby union and athletics. Sports Day was traditionally held in the Oval Sports Stadium (on the Wirral), the stadium used in the film, *Chariots of Fire*, to represent the 1924 Olympic Stadium in Paris, in which Eric Liddell ran. I began teaching in September 1980, just after the filming of *Chariots of Fire* had finished; parents of boys I taught helped to make up the crowd! It was of enormous help to me when I told the Games department that I would rather not participate in sports activities on a Sunday that they already had the precedent of Eric Liddell. In an unusual sort of way, I am indebted to him for the stand he famously took not to run in the Olympics on the Lord's Day and also for the challenge his life has consistently presented to me since.

Sally Magnusson's *The Flying Scotsman*, makes an excellent introductory biography to the life of Eric Liddell. David McCasland's *Eric Liddell: Pure Gold* is beautifully written, a very human biography, and a must read for all Liddell "aficionados". The best volume for those who like sports details has to be John W. Keddie's *Running the Race*, probably the definitive work on the earlier part of Liddell's life. And so, in addition to D. P. Thomson's and others' accounts of the life of Eric Liddell, we come to Hamilton's contribution.

Hamilton's book is well presented. Its 320 pages are divided roughly into three equal-length sections. The first concentrates on Liddell's birth, early life and athletic achievements. The second describes his marriage and missionary labours in China before and during China's conflict with Japan. The third depicts the forced separation from his family and his internment in Weih sien, and premature death. The book closes with a time-line of Liddell's life and substantial notes (for a popular biography).

Hamilton begins the book vividly describing an event that took place near the end of Liddell's life and unravels the significance of that event towards the close of the book. He ends by describing the impact his own visit

had upon him when he visited Liddell's memorial stone in Weih sien. His near final conclusion is

[Liddell]... grasped only for the things that mattered to him: worthwhile work and the care of his family. He'd once – on that hot July evening in Paris – grasped for an Olympic title as well, knowing nonetheless even as he won it that the glory of gold was nothing in his world compared to the glory of God (321).

The book is full of accurately-recorded detail. But the author writes clearly and from within the twenty-first century. The book scores highest in its chronicling and description of Liddell's life in his last years, that is, in the Weih sien labour/concentration camp in which he died in 1945 from a long-undiagnosed brain tumour. Hamilton conveys intensely what life can be like for missionaries in times of severe conflict. This section occupies about half the book. The author's respect for Liddell at this phase of his life is tangible. His descriptions of life in the growing Liddell family through this period convey real and appropriate emotion.

Hamilton seems to want to write a critical biography, leaving no stone unturned, and yet he is honest enough to admit that he can barely find a thing in his subject to comment negatively about. And he is not afraid to criticise, not least the London Missionary Society and certain governmental practices during the time of Liddell's missionary labours. For me, Hamilton's negatives here look too filtered through a twenty-first century grid, over-stretched from their original context. And Hamilton does not put D. P. Thompson (a mentor of Liddell) in a particularly positive light either. Thomson has had a varied press, but Hamilton's assessment feels a bit over-psycho-analysed. One line in the whole book – the only one – conveys shock (and it was not about Liddell); it adds no substance to the work, and would have been better left out. But these are details, and the picture of the main subject remains clear; the book is worth reading.

The blurb on the back of the book makes a big claim: "The Definitive Biography of the Hero of *Chariots of Fire*". Compared with the other writings to date, this may be true for the latter years of Liddell's life. But it is not true for the earlier part of his life. Playing Rugby Union for Scotland's national side, for example, receives a cursory mention, glossed over in a couple of pages. And, then, the most important issue... If we proceed on the premise that "it takes grace to see grace": that is, it takes the grace of God in one person to see the grace of God in another, Hamilton falls somewhat short. He exalts Liddell's life and lifestyle, he stresses the consistency of Liddell's beliefs and principles worked out in practice, and he links Liddell's outward integrity with his core Christian values, all highly appropriately, but he fails largely to attribute Liddell's many virtues to Liddell's God. He does not convey sufficiently that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ enables a believer to attribute the glory of a life lived for Christ to Christ Himself. In fact,

Christ's name is mentioned relatively infrequently in the book. Perhaps the general audience at which this biography is aimed would prefer to attribute Liddell's virtues solely to Liddell himself. So, for a secular audience, the work may be deemed definitive, but if the source of Liddell's motivation (the Lord Jesus Christ) is partly air-brushed from the picture, the Christian reader will detect the vacuum and find themselves saying, "but there's more!", leaving in question the epithet "definitive".

One has sympathy with Hamilton; of course, he's not writing an overtly *Christian* biography (which we may think he should have done) but a book that will be read by many and reveal to many some of the praiseworthy qualities and sources of inspiration possessed by an iconic sporting individual. It probably would not have helped the book's sales for Hamilton to have given much space to Liddell's theological position! Certainly Hamilton presents Liddell as a man of principle and faith, with a robust conscience, and depicts well Liddell's desire to serve people. The Christian, however, would like to have read more of Liddell's devotion to God, of his "surrender to the will of God", of his love for 1 Corinthians 13 and the Sermon on the Mount, which gave practical shape to his missionary service. Liddell wrote "The Disciplines of the Christian Life", a practical guide to helping Christians grow through the daily practice of prayer, Bible study and Bible reading structured around key topics he believed to be basic for every Christian (though the work may lack – or presume – the priority of "grace"). Hamilton speaks of Liddell being influenced by E. Stanley Jones (227-228, 231), an American Methodist missionary (who sought to contextualise Christianity into India through "indigenisation"; the process of opening up nations to receive Christ in their own framework), and the relatively "unorthodox" Frank Buchman (50, 156), founder of the Oxford (or Moral Re-Armament) Group (someone also drawn to inter-faith dialogue and cross-cultural mission). Liddell believed that Buchman's four absolutes – honesty, purity, unselfishness and love – "clarified the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount" (156), but we are not told *how* Liddell construed this. Maybe this only serves to show that overtly *Christian* biographies are not for today's mass market!

Hamilton's book brings a helpful realism to those of us who become misty-eyed when reading the biographies of yesteryear's inspirational saints. It communicates the truth that here we have no lasting city, that the work of missionaries is not easy and that they need prayer support from many. So, a good book; highly informative, worth reading, but yet leaving the Christian reader with a sense that there's something more. I would sooner give one of the above mentioned other books to either an unbeliever or a young believer, and this one, perhaps, to a more mature believer who is able to reflect thoughtfully upon it.

Gareth E Williams

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*Zeal without Burnout*

Christopher Ash, Good Book Company, 2016, 130pp, £7.99

The subject of burnout amongst Christian leaders and workers is emotive and difficult to address. Many have been through painful and humbling experiences where they “hit the wall”, and were unable to cope, needing rest from, and perhaps even to withdraw altogether from ministry. Many know what is to be on a ministry treadmill, aware that overwork is taking its toll but just not sure what to do about it. Still others may be concerned about the tendency to overreact to the stresses of ministry and try and make a “safe” version of it, where they end up not committing or caring. Whatever stage you are in Christian service, you will inevitably need to address this subject, either in your own life or the lives of others. To that end, Christopher Ash has done us a great service in providing an accessible and thoughtful book, which is a great conversation partner as we grapple with what fruitful and sustainable ministry looks like.

Ash’s contention is that there is a different way to do ministry than just one that hurtles towards inevitable burnout: “one that combines passionate zeal for Jesus with plodding faithfully year after year” (14). The first chapter outlines the scale of the problem of burnout, drawing heavily from Ash’s own experience and that of others. Throughout the book there are helpful personal testimonies from men and women in a variety of ministry settings. Ash emphasises that none of us can neglect this issue of self-care: “none of us thinks we are on the path to burnout until we are nearly burnt out; it is precisely those of us who are sure we are safe, who are most in danger” (19). In the second chapter Ash seeks to clarify what the difference between godly sacrifice and needless burnout is. He is careful to emphasise he is not peddling a “soft” option and wants to encourage wholehearted sacrificial living: “It is a great mistake if you get to the end of this book and resolve to live an easy life!” (27). The book is more concerned with unnecessary burnout that has a harmful effect on others: spouse, family, church and colleagues.

The centre of the book’s content is a rediscovery of the biblical doctrine of humanity – that we are embodied creatures; dust. Ash wants to avoid a false spirituality that separates our spiritual lives from who we are as frail and finite physical creatures. From this humbling perspective, Ash proceeds to give us seven keys that draw the distinction between who we are as finite creatures and who God is as our infinite Creator. Sleep, rest, friendship and inward renewal are all dealt with. Ash also warns of the dangers of an inflated view of ourselves, invites us to celebrate the grace of God more than our own achievements, and encourage us that our “labour in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

I liked the book for its brevity and simplicity. One can imagine someone on the verge of exhaustion being able to read without being intimidated. I appreciated Ash's handling of Scripture, particularly the way he applies the house building and city watching in Psalm 127 to kingdom work. I found the tone of the book to be measured and thoughtful, and found the muted and unsensational applications very helpful. A couple of friends in the ministry have spoken of the help the book has been to them, and I have heard of a large church whose leadership team read it through together. Perhaps the highest commendation I can give is that when I came to review it, I found that I had given my copy away!

*Pete Campbell*

*Pastor, Capel Fron Evangelical Church, Penrhyndeudraeth*

*I shall not die, but live: facing death with gospel hope*

Douglas Taylor, Banner of Truth, 2017, HB, 360pp, £13.00

We live in the age of the blog (or weblog). A popular form of website, all sorts of things, good and bad, get blogged on the worldwide web. When Douglas Taylor was told in 2011 that he had incurable cancer he began a blog. You can still access it today (<http://worksworthdeclaring.blogspot.co.uk>).

Douglas worked as an assistant editor for the Banner of Truth Trust from 1997 until 2011. Following his death in June 2014 his Banner colleagues felt it worth disseminating Douglas's blogs in printed form and so have assembled a large number of them (about 250) with a brief foreword by Walter Chantry and a short autobiographical entry penned by Douglas himself in 2013.

This beautifully-produced hardback book would make an excellent present for any Christian, especially one facing something similar to the author. Each entry has a heading and date and is somewhere between 300 and 600 words. It is especially useful for someone unable to read for long.

You may get the flavour from these quotes. One entry begins with a reference to the "Diary of Kenneth MacRae":

Mr MacRae is described, during his last illness, as dreading the night, with its sleeplessness and loneliness. "Oh, the night, the night", he said wearily on one occasion. His wife Cathie tried to comfort him: "There are songs for the night, too, my dear. He will compass you about with songs of deliverance". I can very much identify with this. During sleepless periods lately, I have dreaded the night too. I think Mrs MacRae must have had in mind such scriptures as Psalm 42:8: "In the night his song shall be with me." Or perhaps Psalm 77:6, or Job 35:10...

He goes on to recommend songs of gratitude, confidence and praise for salvation for those in such a position.

Elsewhere he writes,

It would be interesting to know when the expression, “the intermediate state”, was introduced, and by whom. It certainly seems inadequate to express the ideas of paradise (Luke 23:43), of being with Christ, which is far better (Philippians 1:23), of being absent from the body and present [or, “at home”] with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6), or of being received to glory (Psalm 73:25). Not to mention the very clear testimony of Calvin, of the Reformed confessions and the Shorter Catechism, and of some of the best Reformed writers, like Rutherford and Boston, which are far removed from the concept we are considering.

*Gary Brady*

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