

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CHURCH PLANTING

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## PREFACE

Christianity will always be a mission minded religion. To the Christian, eternity is at stake. Therefore, it is imperative that all nations and all people receive access to the gospel of Christ. Missions, however, is not the anchor given by God to secure, maintain, and propagate Christianity. This responsibility is given to the church. Missions is a tool whose primary purpose is to plant churches.

Inherent in the word "mission" is the notion of objective. When a person says, "I have a mission," another will respond by asking, "What is that mission?" This is a legitimate question.

God ordains all believers with a mission. What is this mission? It is to go throughout the nations, make disciples, baptize them, teach them to obey Christ, and to encourage these nations that Christ is here (Matthew 28:18-22). Through the years this mission has been fulfilled by one method-planting churches. Only the church has the authority to Baptize in Jesus' name. Therefore, the Great Commission is a mission to plant churches.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus does not say "I will build my mission," but "I will build my church." Without exception the New Testament Epistles address churches and not

missions. The book of Revelations addresses seven churches, not missions.

Unfortunately, Christian History has subordinated church planting by showing more interest in the concept of missions. Today's libraries are filled with books on missions. However, it is extremely difficult to find works which focus on the history of church planting.

Fortunately, there is now a growing interest in church planting. Increasingly, missions societies determine the success of their work not by the number of baptisms, but by the number of new congregation starts. Today, the phrase "church planting movements" is quickly replacing the phrase "people movements." Mission organizations are realizing that the only way people groups can be impacted (with the gospel) for a consistent and extended period is by planting local indigenous contextual churches.

The phrase "church planting movement," defines a somewhat new concept. Nevertheless, Christians have always planted churches. However, only recently have mission societies intentionally trained and challenged their missionaries to fuel people movements by saturating an area with local contextualized churches. Today, the ideal missionary is the individual who is able to enter a foreign culture and impact it by planting indigenous contextual churches. Church planting is quickly becoming the heartbeat of missions.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest problems in correctly establishing a Historical overview of church planting is the same problem that plagues every serious student of History. No full picture of any past civilization exists. Therefore, one must use available pieces and fragments and fill in the blanks with educated, but creative guesses.

Kenneth Scott Latourette has this to say about our understanding of early Christianity:

What all the varieties of this early Christianity were we do not know. We hear much of certain strains, but of others we have only tantalizing hints and from them can conjecture that still others existed of which no traces survive. For a few, however, our records are sufficiently full to enable us to determine their outline. They are the ones which entered in to the main stream of what came to be the faith of the majority. To these, then, we must now turn (Latourette 1970, 61).

The Scriptures are no different. The gospel of John concludes by saying that if all of Jesus' works "should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25 KJV).

Church planting is biblical, however, one must be careful and not read into the Scriptures when they are silent. According to Stuart Murray, there is a New Testament basis for church planting however:

it is more modest than is sometimes assumed. Acceptance of this does not undercut the contemporary practice of church planting, but rather undergirds it with a more responsible hermeneutical foundation (Murray 74).

Murray fears that an over prioritization of church planting will diminish a "wholistic approach to Christian

ministry." He thus warns his readers not to ascribe "unwarranted status" to church planting:

Church planting is one component in a much broader mission agenda, that includes evangelism, discipleship, social action, cultural engagement political involvement, environmental concern, and much else. Located within this broader agenda, church planting has been throughout history of crucial importance, but extracted from this setting, it has been a distraction from wholistic mission (Murray 87).

Murray goes too far in diminishing the importance of church planting. Without the church there would be no avenue for "wholistic ministry." All of the components in the "much broader mission agenda" are carried out through and sanctioned by local churches. Church planting is not merely "crucial" in the economy and spread of God's kingdom, it is essential.

Church planting is paramount to the survival of Christianity. Without church planting there would be no churches. Without churches Christianity would not survive. It is therefore extraordinary that no effort has been made to produce a systematic study of church planting, and or church planting movements.

Church planting is important not only for the survival of the church, but because it is biblical. The disciples and apostles planted churches. Jesus declared he would build his church. The Great Commission commands all believers to make disciples and baptize them.

When Luke recorded the amazing expansion of the New Testament churches he spoke not only of the increasing number of converts but also of the multiplication of

congregations (Acts 9:31). Scott Moreau in *The Evangelical Dictionary Of World Missions* writes that "the Bible, in both direct teaching and overall principles, includes teaching on both the why and the hows of church planting" (Moreau 202).

This research does not intend to offer any propositions. Its sole focus is on a Historical overview of church planting. The unfortunate difficulty of this research lies with the fact that within Christianity there is a significant lacuna surrounding church planting. No one has written on it. Today, there is growing interest in church planting, however, the majority of attention centers on recent history and methodology.

The writer here attempts to address this lack of attention. This paper is divided into five major sections. They are Examples Of Church Planting In The New Testament, Examples Of Church Planting During The First Five Hundred Years, Examples Of Church Planting In The Middle Ages, Examples Of Church Planting In The Reformation and Examples Of Church Planting In The Modern Era.

Only a brief overview of church planting will be presented. There are two reasons for this. First, there is very little written about church planting. One must therefore surmise that the existence of missionary ventures and established churches mitigates that church planting took place. This work therefore assumes that if a mission was established there must have been churches planted.

Second, despite sparse historical attention to church planting, two thousand years represents an incredibly

large block of history through which to sift. Thus, this paper addresses movements. Personalities are addressed only in context of those movements. Some movements such as the Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church, Montanists, Nestorians, Cathars, Albigensians, Waldensians etc, have been passed over. The primary focus will be on the Western Church.

#### EXAMPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus proclaimed to his disciples that he would build his Church. Following Jesus' resurrection, the book of Acts offered a detailed account of both church life and church planting. Paul wrote all of his letters (with the exception of Philemon) either to established churches, or to his disciples who were commissioned to edify and equip established churches. Peter wrote to believers who were scattered throughout the churches of Asia Minor. Revelations mentions seven churches in Asia Minor.

That there are churches in the present implies that Christians planted churches in the past. The very fact that there are local churches addressed in the New Testament suggests that there was church planting in the New Testament. Therefore, the question is not whether there were churches planted in New Testament times. The question to ask is whether or not church planting was a primary focus or a bi-product of New Testament Christianity? Though history demonstrates the latter, Scripture mandates the former.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build my Church." In Matthew 28:18-22, Jesus commanded all believers to make disciples, baptize them and then train them. This can only be done in the context of a local church. When Christians spread out in the great diaspora they planted churches. When Paul went on missionary journeys he planted churches. Whenever there are biblical missions there is always church planting. Whenever Christian people groups are relocated, or dislocated they plant churches. Christians plant churches because church planting is both biblical and essential.

Arthur G. Patzia, compared the expansion of the early church to the rippling effect caused by throwing a pebble into water. The church spread out from Jerusalem in concentric circles until it had reached beyond the borders of the Roman Empire (Patzia 79). The book of Acts offers the best biblical example of New Testament Church planting. One can trace the geographical expansion of the church through the book of Acts:

Acts 1:15-8:3: Jerusalem

Acts 8:4-11:18: Judea, Samaria, Galilee and the costal regions

Acts 11:19-14:28: Antioch and Paul's first missionary journey

Acts 15:36-21:16: Lands around the Aegean

Acts 21:17-28:31: Jerusalem to Rome (Patzia 79)

According to Patzia, the expansion of the early church mirrored very closely the command given by Jesus in Acts 8:1; "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all

Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Patzia 80).

The book of Acts opens with 120 believers crowded and hiding in an upper room fearing for their lives. Their Messiah had been killed. Their hopes had been dashed. Their lives appeared to be forfeit. Yet, within a generation, this feeble fearful band of disheartened disciples saw the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire. As J. Herbert Kane states, by the end of the first century there was a:

thriving Christian church in almost every city of significance in the eastern part of the empire. What began as a Jewish sect in A.D. 30 had grown into a world religion by A.D. 60 (Kane 7).

This was an amazing accomplishment. When considering the obstacles that faced this fledgling movement called Christianity one can only reflect with awe that it survived at all. Yet, it not only survived, but it thrived. Kane further elaborates on this monumental achievement:

The Christian task was formidable; their chances of success almost nil. They had no central organization, no financial resources, no influential friends, no political machine. Arrayed against them was the ecclesiastical power of the Sanhedrin, the political and military might of the Roman Empire, and the religious fanaticism of the Jews. Moreover, their Leader, whose life and teachings were to constitute their message, was unknown outside His small circle of friends. He had written no books, erected no monuments, endowed no institutions. The task was hopeless (Kane 7).

Nevertheless, when all hope seemed gone God promised the Christian that all things were possible with Him. For *"if God be for us who can be against us."* With the evidence of Christ's resurrection, the command of his Great

Commission and the promise of his return, the feeble disheartened disciples arose and preached with a confidence and passion that was unstoppable. The church exploded on the day of Pentecost. History had been penetrated by His-Story.

#### Church Planting As A Result Of The Diaspora

One will realize when studying Jewish History that the word "diaspora" does not so much define an event as it does a way of life. After the conquest of Ancient Babylon the Jews experienced a diaspora. After the conquest of the Persians the Jews experienced a diaspora. In 70 A.D. when the third temple was destroyed the Jews experienced a diaspora. There were also other dispersions within Jewish history.

In *The Story Of Christianity*, Justo L. Gonzales does not speak of the "Jewish Diaspora." He speaks of "Diaspora Judaism." This distinction is important. It speaks more of the evolution of culture than it does the displacement of civilization. Through the years Israel experienced a series of diasporas. In time there would be more Jews living away from Israel than those who lived in the country.

This diaspora was of crucial importance to the spread of Christianity. Diaspora Judaism offered the church an avenue of ministry which, according to Gonzales, "unwittingly provided the Church with one of the most useful tools of its missionary expansion" (Gonzalez 1984, 12). This tool was the Septuagint.

Jews were not the only people to experience the sting of dispersion. In A.D. 70 Christianity experienced its own diaspora. After the destruction of the temple both Christians and Jews were forced out of Israel. However, long before this, many Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem because of the growing persecution.

Williston Walker in his book *A History Of The Christian Church* asserts that Stephen's martyrdom "started the movement which planted Christianity throughout the cities of the Jewish Diaspora" (Walker et al. 25). Patzia also argues that after the martyrdom of Stephen, the believers who were driven out of Jerusalem were responsible for the expansion of Christianity. Through this dispersion churches such as the one in Antioch were planted (Patzia 85).

Wherever Christians settled they planted churches. The best biblical example of church planting by way of the diaspora is the church of Antioch. There is no conclusive evidence that the Antioch church was started by diaspora Christians. Still, many theologians and historians believe that it was. According to A. T. Robertson, Antioch is very significant in that it "was a work that had sprung up independently and the brethren felt no need of help from Jerusalem" (Robertson 95). He further postulates that the concept of an independent local church has its historical roots in the "difference of conditions between Antioch and Jerusalem" (Roberston 97).

Robert E. Picirilli in his book *Paul the Apostle*

also attributes the planting of the Antioch church to the diaspora. He suggests that believers who were scattered early by persecution proclaimed the gospel as they went abroad:

One such migration was northward, down the coastal area through Phoenicia, out in the Mediterranean to Cyprus, and on to the Syrian capital, Antioch... In Antioch special success was met with, and some, themselves Greek-speaking Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene, were so bold as to begin preaching the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles... The results were good, and the community of believers in Antioch, Jew and Gentile, grew so much that news of its happening was soon heard of in Jerusalem (Pecirilli 61-62).

Church planting as a result of the diaspora was in no way intentional church planting. It was a reaction to circumstances. Such planting was not fueled by missionary zeal, but by the need to survive.

By the end of the first century Christians were living throughout the Roman Empire. Wherever they went they brought the gospel with them. Wherever they located they planted churches. Though it is important to recognize that churches were planted because of the diaspora, such models cannot serve as biblical examples of intentional church planting.

#### Church Planting As An Intentional Mission Strategy

Did Paul plant churches?

The book of Acts records Paul's three missionary journeys. However, only a few details are given. The fact that Paul went from city to city preaching and baptizing strongly implies that he planted churches as he traveled.

Simply by reading the events as recorded by Luke, it is possible to not only construct a chronology of Paul's journey, but also to learn which cities and regions were the most responsive to the gospel. Some cities received Paul well. Others wanted to kill him. Some cities Paul visited already had a Christian presence. Others did not. Paul traveled quickly through some cities while he stayed and preached in others.

Were Paul simply a traveling evangelist his missionary journeys would have been ends in themselves. But they were not. For the rest of his life, Paul maintained a personal and intimate relationship with the churches within the cities he visited.

The Bible contains thirteen letters written by Paul. Of these letters, he wrote seven to churches located in cities he visited during his three missionary journeys (I & II Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, I & II Thess). Three were written to disciples who accompanied him on parts of his journeys (I & II Tim, Tit,). One was written to a Church that was born as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Colossians). He then wrote to Philemon who was a Christian living in Colossae whom Paul personally led to the Lord. The only letter written by Paul that is not linked directly to his missionary journeys is Romans. However, even this letter was written when Paul was on one of his journeys.

Throughout his epistles, Paul used intimate terminology which suggests a relationship with the respective churches that goes far deeper than a mere casual

influence. In I Corinthians 4:14 and Galatians 4:19 he referred to his recipients as "my children." He used other forms of address which were equally personal. He spoke of fellow-citizens (Eph 2:19), Fellow-heirs (Eph 3:6), Fellow helpers (II Cor 8:23), Fellow-laborers (I Thes 3:2; Ph'm 24), Fellow-prisoners (Col 4:10; Ph'm 23), Fellow-servants (Col 1:7; 4:7), Fellow-soldiers (Phil 2:25; Ph'm 2), Beloved sons (I Cor 4:14), and Beloved brothers (I Cor 15:58). The letters of Paul not only show an in-depth knowledge of personalities and situations facing the churches he addressed, but they display a passionate love as a parent would reveal to a child.

Kane says this of Paul's missionary journeys:

His three missionary journeys, which lasted less than fifteen years, took him into four populous provinces of the empire: Galatia and Asia in Asia, and Macedonia and Achaia in Europe. Following the great Roman roads, he planted churches in all the important cities along the way. By the end of his third journey he could report '...that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ' (Rom 15:19). 'Having no more place in these parts,' He set out for Spain (Kane 9).

The Apostle Paul was not some fire breathing itinerant evangelist who traveled from city to city preaching and then moving on. When Paul entered a city he preached the gospel. When Paul left a city, it usually had a church. Only as a true missionary could, Paul poured out his heart to the people he wanted to reach. Each time he exited a city he left a piece of his heart with it. The passion of his epistles suggests no less.

Ruth A. Tucker demonstrates that through Paul's

missionary journeys He traveled throughout the Mediterranean world, "where he effectively established indigenous churches" (Tucker 29). She further asserts that Paul planted independent churches, not mission stations. She emphatically states that Paul "did not gather congregations, he planted churches" (Tucker 30).

#### Paul's First Missionary Journey

During his first missionary journey, Paul visited nine cities. They were Selucia, Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Attalia. He neither stayed nor preached in Selucia or Attalia. These were merely port cities used as passages to other destinations. He visited Lystrina, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia and Perga twice.

On his first journey Paul did not encounter much success until he entered Antioch of Pisidia. There, upon hearing the gospel, the Gentiles "*began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region*" (Acts 13:48-49).

Paul's next stop was Iconium. There also he encountered a great harvest. In Iconium, both Jews and Greeks believed (Acts 14:1).

The next responsive city was Derbe. Acts 14:21 records "*After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystrina and to*

*Iconium and to Antioch."*

Paul's return to the cities of Lystris, Iconium and Antioch was no mistake. It was intentional. His return visit was as crucial as his first. During his first visit to these cities, Paul preached the gospel and witnessed the conversion of large numbers of people. His second visit was not to preach the gospel but to organize churches. Acts 14:22-23 records that Paul was

*strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith... And when he had appointed elders for them in every church... they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

Thus, Paul's first missionary journey ended with the successful planting of churches throughout many of the cities where he ministered.

It is impossible to determine how much time Paul spent on his first missionary journey. According to Picirilli it could have been anywhere between one and four years (Picirilli 1986, 76). What Luke does record is that after this first journey Paul and his followers returned to Antioch of Syria where they "*spent a long time with the disciples*" (Acts 14:28).

#### Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Paul's second missionary journey was much more extensive than his first. Paul traveled through the areas of Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Asia Minor, Bithynia, Troas, Samothracia, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Caesarea (Picirilli 97-114).

According to the record in Acts 16, Paul's visit to the cities of Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, and Lystra focused mainly on strengthening existing churches. However, once in Troas, he received a vision to go to the district of Macedonia. It is in this region where Paul's second missionary journey started its focus on a church planting ministry.

The account in Acts 16:11-15 records that Paul met a woman named Lydia. Paul was able to see her whole family respond to the gospel. After their conversion he stayed in their home where he ministered for "many days" (v. 17).

During their ministry in Macedonia, Paul and Silas were arrested and imprisoned. While there they witnessed to the jailer. He and his family responded to the gospel. That very night the jailer's whole family was baptized.

The next day Paul and Silas left the jailer's home and returned to Lydia's. Acts 16:40 records that "they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed."

Next, they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and on to Thessalonica. Through their synagogue preaching some "were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women" (Acts 17:4). The success of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica inspired the Jews to form a mob. Thus, Paul and Silas escaped by night to Berea.

Paul's ministry in Berea was much more fruitful than in Thessalonica. Acts 17:12 records that "many of them

therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."

After leaving Berea, Paul's group arrived at Athens. There he waited for the coming of Timothy and Silas. In the city of Athens, Paul preached both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. There was considerable resistance to Paul's message. However, "some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34).

From Athens, Paul left for Corinth. There he stayed in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. Despite Paul's frustration (recorded in Acts 18:6) he enjoyed great response to the gospel. After leaving the synagogue he went into the home of a man named Titius Justus. There "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized" (Acts 18:7). Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and six months "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

After a lengthy stay in Corinth, Paul left for Ephesus, He ministered there for only a brief period. He then departed, but left Aquila and Priscilla. Leaving Ephesus he went to the Church in Caesarea. Next, he headed back to Antioch. The period starting Paul's second missionary journey is thought to have been approximately A.D. 48-50. The duration was three at least years, or longer (Picirilli 70).

### Paul's Third Missionary Journey

On his third missionary journey Paul ministered in the areas of Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Philippi, Troas, Miletus, Tyre, Caesarea, and Jerusalem (Picirilli 125-135).

Paul's first destination appears to be Ephesus. However, before arriving there he "passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). Once in Ephesus, Paul built upon the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla by starting a congregation with a group of men baptized after the manner of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7).

After this, he entered the synagogue there and spent three months preaching the gospel. Because of the hardness of the Jews there, Paul left the synagogue and preached in a school run by an individual named Tyrannus. There is no evidence that he entered another synagogue during his third missionary journey.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years. Whether or not he did any traveling during this period is uncertain. Yet it is very probable that he orchestrated evangelistic and church planting endeavors throughout Asia Minor. During his stay in Ephesus, Paul experienced his most fruitful ministry. Picirilli writes that there is no doubt "the churches in Colossa, Hierapolis, and Laodocia were founded during this period and probably all the seven churches of Asia addressed in Revelation 2-3" (Picirilli 127).

Paul wanted to go to Jerusalem, but he was not eager

to leave Ephesus. Acts 19:21 reports that he sent Timothy and Erastus on to Macedonia while he stayed in Asia for a while longer. Eventually, Paul also departed for Macedonia and then onto Greece where he stayed for three months. During this time he "revisited Athens and spent the larger portion of three months in Corinth" (Picirilli 130). He also wrote Romans during this time.

After leaving Greece, Paul briefly revisited the believers at Macedonia, then Philippi and Troas. On his way to Jerusalem he stopped in Miletus and sent for the elders of the Ephesian church. After a teary departure, Paul traveled through several port cities. He stayed one week in Tyre where he met with Christians. He then stopped at Ptolemais and spent one day with believers there. The next day he went to Caesarea where he ministered until finally departing for Jerusalem where "the brethren received" them gladly.

#### A Brief Synopsis of Paul's Missionary Journeys

After Paul's first missionary journey, Acts 15:28 says that "they spent a long time with the disciples." However, in Acts 18:23 it is recorded that they only "spent some time" in Antioch. There is no explanation to the reason for Paul's haste. In his commentary on Acts, Richard Longenecker writes that Paul's second sabbatical in Antioch only lasted from the Summer of 52 to the Spring of 53 (Longenecker 489).

During his second missionary journey Paul declared

that he was finished with the Jews and would only minister to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). This moment of frustration on Paul's part obviously left a lasting impact. On his third and last missionary journey, Acts records only one synagogue visited by Paul (Acts 19:8). This represents a fundamental break in Paul's customary ministry methods. The primary focus of Paul's third missionary journey shifted from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Perhaps Paul's eagerness to venture on his third missionary journey was fueled by a fresh and narrowed focus of ministry. By shaking "out his garments" and going "to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6), Paul's focus fell to one passion—the proclamation of the Gospel to the unreached Gentiles of the Roman Empire.

By the end of Paul's three missionary journeys the church was firmly established in four provinces of the Roman Empire; Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. Roland Allen in his book *Missionary Methods: Paul's Or Ours* states:

Before AD 47 there were no churches in these provinces; in AD 57 St. Paul could speak as if his work there was done, and could plan extensive tours into the far west without anxiety lest the churches which he had founded might perish in his absence for want of his guidance and support (Allen 3).

Paul stated in I Corinthians 9:22 that he was all things to all people so that he could bring them to Christ. He preached to anyone who would listen. However, when there was too much resistance he moved on. Paul employed a systematic and effective ministry. Though systematic, he was always resourceful and creative. Throughout all his

missionary journeys he employed a similar ministry format and adapted it to his surrounding context. He entered cities. He preached in the synagogues. He accepted all who repented. He met converts in their homes. He baptized them. He equipped them. He appointed elders and then moved on. He planted churches.

#### EXAMPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING DURING THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES

Paul was not the only one planting churches. While Paul was working in Asia Minor and Greece others were planting churches throughout the Roman Empire. "Our records," writes Latourette "unsatisfactory though they are, suffice to show that by A.D. 180 Christians were in all the provinces of the Empire and in Mesopotamia" (Latourette 1970, 85). The fact that churches were planted everywhere Christianity spread indicates the importance the early church placed on church planting.

Despite periods of intense persecution, government interventions, heresy and internal conflicts the forward progress of the Church continued. However, the Church was indeed changing. For example, Tucker speaks of how "elaborate structures replaced the simple house churches and creeds replaced the spontaneous testimonies and prayers" (Tucker 28).

The explosive growth experienced by the church in the first two centuries began to slow in the early fourth century. This occurred during the reign of Constantine (Tucker 28). Latourette suggests that from its conception

to the reign of Constantine the church experienced three separate periods. The first period included the first generation after Jesus—the Apostolic age. Christianity spread mainly “among Jews and those Gentiles who had some touch with Judaism.” The ministers were primarily the apostles and their disciples. The second period extended from the end of the first century until the close of the second. Christians had all but abandoned their mission to the Jews and ministered almost entirely among non-Jews. Most work was urban. Christians were still such a minority that they attracted little notice. The third period lasted from the close of the second century until the death of Marcus Aurelius and the accession of his son Commodus (A.D. 280). The chaos, pestilence, wars, fear, pessimism and weakening institutions caused many to turn to Christianity. This produced rapid growth. Thus, “by Constantine the Church had become the chief internal rival of the state, and next to the state the most powerful institution in the Empire” (Latourette 1970, 68).

By the sixth century churches were planted as far north as Scandinavia, as far south as Ethiopia, as far West as Spain and as far East as Russia and India. Virtually all of the Western and Near-Eastern world had either embraced, or at least capitulated to Christianity. The Christianization of all these regions commenced about the same time. Christianity in Europe progressed very differently than in the other Roman provinces, and will therefore be addressed separately in the next section.

## North Africa

### Egypt

Though Egypt has been the site for the discovery of thousands of Christian manuscripts and fragments, to date, no manuscript has been unearthed that defines the exact time when Christianity entered the country (Griggs 13). Even the formation of the "highly influential Church in Alexandria" (Latourette 1970, 69). is shrouded in mystery.

Nevertheless, by the end of the second century Egypt hosted a very strong and diverse church (Latourette 1970, 91). The church in Egypt mainly grew "among the indigenous populations" (Latourette 1970, 91). The Church in Alexandria, however, was Greek while the churches that permeated the North and South regions of Egypt were Coptic. To this day the Coptic church of Egypt remains a distinct expression of Christianity.

### Ethiopia

In Acts 8:26-40 is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who was converted by Philip. This eunuch was treasurer to Queen Candace of Ethiopia. There is no documented history of his actions after conversion. Nevertheless, it is probable he brought the gospel back to his country.

In the early fourth century Meropius, a Christian philosopher traveled by ship from Palestine to India. He brought with him two pupils named Frumentius and Edesius. During this journey the ship landed in Ethiopia's port on

the Red Sea. The Ethiopians regarded the ship as an enemy and killed every-body aboard. Meropius' two students, however, were not on board. They were captured and taken prisoner by the Ethiopian king. In time, the king appointed Frumentius as his secretary. Edesius became his cup bearer. When the king died the Queen appointed both to be regents to the king's son who was too young to rule. At one point in his life, Frumentius traveled to Alexandria and requested that Athanasius appoint a Bishop for Ethiopia "for the many Christians gathered and churches built in this foreign land." He was appointed. Thus, by the early fourth century Ethiopia had a Christian king and was becoming a Christian nation. In his book *Church History 1 A.D. 29-500: The First Advance*, John Foster claims that "Ethiopia can claim to be the oldest continuing Christian country in the world (Foster 106-107).

### The Middle East

#### Edessa

Legend has it that the apostle Thomas sent Thaddaeus to Edessa where he healed and converted King Abgur. The evidence available suggests a different story. Edessa was indeed the first kingdom to have a Christian king. However, this king was almost certainly Abgar VIII of the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century and not king Abgar of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Foster 85).

Abgar VIII was Edessa's first documented Christian king. Edessa was the first kingdom to construct a church building. It was also the first to translate the Greek New

Testament into another language. According to Foster:

The Syriac language, as developed in Edessa, is important because it became the ecclesiastical language of the eastward-advancing part of the Church and was carried, in Scriptures and Liturgy, rightly across Asia to the China Sea (Foster 85).

#### Armenia

In the year 224 a child from an Armenian noble family was taken by Rome and placed in Cappadocia where he received the name Gregory. He was raised a Christian. In 286 he returned to Armenia to serve under king Tirdat. Eventually, Gregory converted Tirdat from paganism to Christianity. After conversion Tirdat destroyed idols, and consecrated temples as churches. In 294 Gregory was appointed as Armenia's first Bishop (Foster 90).

Whereas Edessa can boast of having the first Christian king, Armenia can boast of becoming the first Christian kingdom (Foster 89).

#### Parthia/Persia

The Parthian Empire was a loose federation of peoples in the area known today as Iran. The earliest known Christian community there was in a region called Abiadene. It is estimated that there were Christians in this area as early as 100 (Foster 92).

Arbil was the capitol of this region. The *Chronicle of Arbil* contains a history of the church there from AD 99 to 540. This chronicle speaks of the first converts, the first martyr, highly placed Christians, persecution, Churches being built and the extent of the Church in the

year 225 (Foster 92).

The Chronicle records the existence of church buildings in 135 and 179. By 225 this region had seventeen sees. There were actually more Bishops than sees. Churches extended throughout Mesopotamia all the way to the Persian Gulf (Foster 95).

#### Arabia

During the first five centuries after Christ, Arabia had no central ruling power (Foster 107). Thus Christianity could not sweep through this region as it did in the Roman provinces. Yet, it did penetrate.

Around the year 370 the widow of an Arab Chieftain invited a Christian Ascetic named Moses to be her chaplain. Through him many Arabs were converted to the Christian faith. Through the ministry of other "holy men," entire Arab tribes converted to Christianity (Foster 107).

As early as 354 there are records of an Indian named Theophilus who lived probably on Socotra an Arabian island. During the Synod of Antioch in 364 the list of Bishops contained "Theotinus, Bishop of the Arabs" (Foster 108).

#### India

The earliest records of Christianity in India come from the Syrian Orthodox Church. Legend has it that the disciple Thomas went to India where king Gudnaphar and his brother Gad were converted and baptized (Foster 112).

According to Eusebius, Pantaneus of Alexandria traveled to India as a missionary-philosopher. A Syriac

document of the seventh century records that David the Bishop of Basra went to India at the beginning of the fourth century to evangelize the people. The list of Bishops signed during the Council of Nicea 325 contains the name of John the Persian who came "on behalf of the churches in the whole of Persia and in the great India" (Foster 113).

#### A Brief Synopsis of Church Planting During the First Five Centuries

During its first five centuries Christianity experienced phenomenal expansion. Churches were planted throughout the Roman Empire, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Every province of the Roman Empire and beyond had established churches.

Documents recording the initial phase of missions and church planting in these regions are extremely rare. Nevertheless, within its first five hundred years the Christian faith grew from an obscure group of disciples into a world religion. By the sixth century it was the dominant faith in the Roman Empire.

There appears to be no fifth century documents recording intentional church planting. However, the ever growing number of established churches and bishops prove beyond a reasonable doubt that church planting was present and wide spread throughout the Roman world.

On the following page is a table representing all the countries where churches were planted during the first six hundred years of Christianity.

**From Pentecost to the Birth of Islam**  
The Spread of Christianity through A.D. 600

**A.D. 33**

**Regions represented in Jerusalem on day of Pentecost**

Arabia	Italy
Asia Minor	Mesopotamia
Cyprus	North Africa
Macedonia/Greece	Persia

**A.D. 100**

**The end of the apostolic period**

Asia Minor	Mesopotamia
Costal North Africa	Palestine
(Alexandria, Carthage, Cyrene)	South Italy, Rome
Eastern shore, Adriatic Sea	Syria
Hispania (Spain)	Possibly India
Macedonia/Greece	Persia

**A.D. 200**

**Expansion under persecution**

Arabia	Palestine
Armenia	Persia
Asia Minor	Rhineland
Iberian Peninsula (Spain)	Roman North Africa
Illyricum	Southern Britain
Italy/Rome	Southern Gaul
Macedonia/Greece	Syria
Mesopotamia (Edessa)	India

**A.D. 325**

**The church of the Council of Nicea**

Arabian Peninsula	India
Armenia	Italy
Asia Minor	Lower Nile Basin
Britain	Macedonia/Greece
Ceylon	Mesopotamia
Gaul	Palestine
Germanic tribes	Persia and Gulf
Iberian Peninsula (Spain)	Roman North Africa
Illyricum	Syria

**A.D. 600**

Arabia	Ireland
Armenia	Italy
Asia Minor	Macedonia/Greece
Britain	Mesopotamia
Ceylon	Netherlands
Eastern Africa	North Africa
Gaul	Palestine
Hess	Persia
Hispania (Spain)	Saxony
Illyricum	Scandinavia
India	Syria

As the church progressed through the first five centuries focus gradually shifted from the tangible strategy of church planting to the theoretical debates in theology and ecclesiology.

The early church fathers were prolific writers, however, their works focused on theology and not methodology. There was a good deal of discussion regarding planted churches, but not regarding planting churches. Church planting was still important. Yet, it does not appear to have been a driving force within the Christian community.

#### EXAMPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE MIDDLE AGES

To this point all discussion about missions and church planting has focused around the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East. During this period there was also much missionary activity throughout Europe. Recently revealed archaeological evidence reveals that by the years 312-323 there were strong Christian communities as far north as Lyons, Cologne, London, Dorchester, Canterbury and York (Strayer 1983, 439). However, as will be demonstrated, the Christianization of Europe progressed much differently than in any other part of the Christian world.

#### A New Paradigm For Christianity

During the first five hundred years of Christianity the Church spread throughout the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, the Near East, Europe and into Scandinavia. New Churches were being planted throughout the

Western world. However, the Church that entered into the sixth century was very different from the Church that exited the first century.

In time, the authority wielded by the Bishops replaced the authority of Apostles. The council replaced the canon. Tradition replaced doctrine. Penance replaced repentance. Sacramentalism replaced the pious pursuit of righteousness. Large ostentatious cathedrals replaced the simple and utilitarian meeting places. The emphasis on monasticism replaced an emphasis on church planting. Instead of focusing on the people of all nations, the Church focused on the leaders of all nations. Nations no longer converted to Christianity, but were declared Christian. Salvation was no longer received, but conferred. Christianity transitioned from a faith that built bridges to reach the world to a sect that built walls to keep the world out.

An unfortunate result of this transition was the virtual abandonment of Church planting. Monasteries, which eventually proliferated the Western world's landscapes, became the preferred missionary tool. The desire to plant New Testament Churches would disappear for over 1,000 years.

Nevertheless, the influence of Christianity continued to endure. This period, known as the Middle Ages, has been negatively labeled the "Dark Ages." Christianity had indeed lost its focus, but unlike today, medieval society considered it to be the foundation and center of a civilized world. The Christian World continually sought to

civilize the barbarian nations. This Christian world knew that the only hope for the barbarian nations was Christianity.

#### Medieval Monasticism: A Replacement for Church Planting

Through monasticism monks converted the barbarian nations and spread Christianity. Monasticism became the preferred tool because it was effective. In *The Medieval Missionary*, James Addison offered this defense for the monastic movement:

The conditions, moreover, under which they worked were so different from those which surrounded the missionaries of earlier and of later times that their methods are equally unfamiliar. In an era when the religion of the ruler determined the religion of his people, when the power of the papacy was increasing, and when monasteries were the stimulating centers of education and of religious zeal, missionary activity was inevitably guided and controlled by these factors. None of them was present in the first centuries of Christian expansion and none exists today in its original strength. For that reason the methods of medieval missions, taken as a whole, are in a class by themselves (Addison 3).

For over 1,000 years the monastic model effectively served Catholic Christianity as the primary (perhaps only) tool for the propagation of Christianity. This research found no literature during the Middle Ages which addressed church planting. Churches were built and by the thousands. However, during this period, the identity of the local church was inextricably linked to which ever monastic order built it.

The most famous missionaries of the Middle Ages were all monks. The four selected for this particular work are St. Martin of Tours (missionary in Gaul), St. Columba

(missionary in Ireland), Augustine (Missionary in Briton), and St. Wilfrid of York (missionary in Germany). John T. McNeil in his *Celtic Churches* wrote that "for centuries these (Celtic monasteries) were to constitute the abiding-places and centers of energy of Christianity in the West" (McNeill 35). The same rule applies for medieval monasticism throughout the Christian world.

### The Spread Of European Christianity Through Monasticism

#### Gaul

Christianity came early to Gaul. It is believed to have entered with the Roman army. By the end of the second century (during the time of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons) priests and missionaries moved outside the military and began evangelizing and proselytizing the people of Gaul.

By the fourth century Christianity in Gaul became well established. St. Martin of Tours (ca. 316-397), a former Roman soldier, founded the monastery of Liguge, the first in Gaul. In 371 he became Bishop of Tours. Ultimately the monastery in Liguge became the center of evangelism throughout the region (Strayer 1983, 439).

#### Britain

A. Plummer, in his book *The Churches In Briton Before A.D. 1000*, emphasized the essential role of monasticism in the Christianization of Britain. He stated that "it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the English nation owes its Christianity entirely" to monasticism. He

wrote that to the "Saxons and Angles monasticism must have seemed an essential feature in Christianity" (Plummer 161). Apart from monasteries and monks the first generation converts of England had no concept of Christianity.

When news reached Rome that Ethelebert, king of Kent married the Christian Frankish princess Bertha, Pope Gregory wasted no time dispatching missionaries to Britain (Walker et al. 215, 284). In 596 he sent Augustine, with forty companions, to convert the heathen Anglo-Saxons. Within a year Ethelbert and supposedly 10,000 of his followers converted and received baptism. The king allowed Augustine to settle in his capital, Canterbury. Augustine consecrated the already existing Roman basilica and named it the cathedral church of Christ. It became the first arch episcopal see in England (Strayer 1983, 440).

In 601 Pope Gregory sent a letter to Augustine. In this letter he articulated a strategy to be employed for the "assimilation and accommodation" of the heathens. This letter ultimately served as the official church policy throughout Europe:

We have been giving careful thought to the affair of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way. we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God. And since they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to demons, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place, such as a day of Dedication or the

Festivals of the holy martyrs whose relics are enshrined there... For it is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb to a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap (Strayer 1983, 440).

One sees with this letter that Rome desired to accommodate the culture and ethos of the missionary's targeted people. Unfortunately, the answer was not contextualization, but syncretization.

#### Ireland

Christianity entered Ireland from Britain in the early fifth century. As with the rest of Europe, it entered by way of monasticism. The role of monasticism was more dominant in Ireland than elsewhere. According to Addison, "There is not one name of eminence in the history of Celtic Christianity that is not closely connected with monastic life." He further writes that "the Celtic Church was organized almost wholly on monastic lines. All the missionaries were monks and all their bases monasteries" (Addison 75).

Through the efforts of St. Patrick (ca. 389-461), northern Ireland gradually converted. After the conversion of several members of the royal family St. Patrick secured toleration for Christianity. He established his headquarters at Armagh. From there he planted churches and monasteries in Connaught, Leinstre, and Meath (Strayer 1983, 440).

The most famous missionary to Ireland was St. Patrick (Latourette 1965, 37), however, St. Columba is

probably a better representative of the "Irish-Celtic missionary zeal" (Strayer 1983, 440). St. Columba's efforts firmly established the monastic rule in Ireland. Also, his disciples founded monasteries throughout the British isles and parts of the European continent.

During the Middle Ages monasticism was the primary evangelistic tool. The following statement by Joseph R. Strayer reveals how Irish monasticism in particular epitomized the way in which monasticism (as opposed to church planting) was utilized:

St. Columba... founded the monasteries of Durrow and Londonderry in Ireland; then in 563 he and twelve companions established on Iona, an island in the Inner Hebrides, a monastery which served as his central base for converting the pagan Picts of Scotland. From Iona, Celtic monk-missionaries went to northern England. The most famous of these was St. Aidan (d. 651), who established the abbey of Lindisfarne on a peninsula that at high tide becomes an island off the coast of Northumbria; Aidan played a crucial role in the conversion of northern England (Strayer 1983, 440).

The disciples of Columba ultimately established monasteries in Ireland, Scotland, Britain, France, Gaul, Italy and Switzerland (Strayer 1983, 440). They accomplished this by the early seventh century.

#### Germany

Strayer claims that "St. Boniface, also known as Wynfrith or Winfrid" was "the greatest missionary of the early Middle Ages" (Strayer 1983, 441). In 678 Wilfrid of York was blown off course on a voyage to the Continent where he landed in Frisia. There he seized the opportunity and preached to the heathen but with little success (Strayer

1983, 344-345).

From 680-755 he returned to minister in Frisia. While there he preached and "enhanced the administrative and organizational effectiveness of the existing churches." He also brought the churches into a closer relationship with Rome (Strayer 1983, 344-345).

Boniface preached in the Rhineland, Thuringia, and Bavaria, founding churches, monasteries, schools, and dioceses (Strayer 1983, 344-345). In 722, Pope Gregory II consecrated him a bishop over the German frontier. Boniface then "organized the bishoprics of Freising, Regensburg, and Salzburg; became the first archbishop of Mainz; and founded the abbey of Fulda" (Strayer 1983, 441).

In conjunction to his vigorous monastery planting, he also fought against heresy and non-conformity. Whenever he encountered monasteries using Celtic practices he brought them into closer conformity with Rome (Strayer 1983, 344-345).

In a letter regarding the foundation of Fulda (751), Boniface had this to say to Pope St. Zacharias:

There is a wooded place in the midst of a vast wilderness (Fulda) situated among the peoples to whom I am preaching. There I have placed a group of monks living under the rule of Saint Benedict who are building a monastery... It is my desire... To remain in your service among the German people... And to follow your directions as it is written: "Hear the judgement of your father, O my children, and so act that you may be saved... In deed and word honor thy father that a blessing may come to thee from him, for a blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children (Barry 276-277).

In this letter Boniface also lauded the strategic

position of this new monastery. As a missionary center he said:

For four peoples [Hessians, Thuringians, Bavarians, and Saxons] to whom by the grace of God we have spoken the word of Christ are severally known to dwell around this place, to whom so long as I live and have my faculties I can with your intercession be useful (Addison 90).

Boniface recognized people groups. He also realized the need to establish mission posts in the heart of pagan societies. However, the only model available to him was monasticism.

According to Phillip Schaff it would require two centuries to bring the territories of Germany under the sway of the Church. He wrote that "the measures employed were the instructions of the missionary, the sword.,, colonization ...with German colonists, the sacraments and ritual of the Church" (Schaff n.d.). Such methods represented the quintessential thinking of Roman Catholic Christianization-one essential element being the monastery.

#### A Brief Synopsis of Medieval Monasticism

In his *History of Medieval Europe*, R. H. C. Davis noted that "religion in the Middle Ages was usually taken to be synonymous with monasticism." When someone claimed to be converted the meaning was not "that he had been baptized but that he had become a monk" (Davis 260).

Medieval monasticism was a profoundly effective tool through which the Roman Catholic Church eventually gained unquestioned authority over the whole of western Europe. With it the Catholic Church was able to disperse a somewhat

cohesive faith among a diverse population. Will Durant in *The Story of Civilization* notes that the Roman Catholic Church developed within Europe "a unity of mind and morals such as it has never known again." He further writes that "Nowhere else in history has an organization wielded so profound an influence over so many men for so long a time" (Durant 1950, 817).

This research has addressed monasticism only in the regions of Gaul, Britain, Ireland and Germany. However, By the sixth century monasticism with its "live force full of spiritual power and missionary zeal" was sweeping virtually all of western Europe.

Not only was monasticism far reaching in its geographical expansion, but also in its ability to influence entire regions. Monasticism was able to do this by embracing a wholistic ministry. In *The Medieval Missionary* James Thayer Addison speaks of the multifaceted nature of Medieval monasticism:

The monastery was everywhere the home and seminary of Christian learning, the center of Christian work, and everywhere, as it were, the military base of operations against the powers of heathendom (Addison 75).

Monasticism was never designed to replace church planting. Nevertheless, for a millennium it did just that. In most instances the monastery was the local church.

Throughout the Middle Ages Europe experienced continuous waves of political instability and barbarian invasions. Without the protection of the Roman Empire, outlying villages (and even highly populated regions) were

often at the mercy of the encroaching barbarians. It therefore made good sense to build a fortified mission post.

From the sixth century, as Durant notes, Europe found itself deluged with a "flotsam of migratory barbarians, a babel of tongues and creeds, a chaos of unwritten and incalculable laws" (Durant 1950, 818). The monastery provided not only a base for launching ministry endeavors, but also served as a good source for the distribution of law, art, education and all that Latin culture had to offer. In the following quote one may see how Durant interprets medieval Catholicism and monasticism in a very positive light:

She gave it a moral code buttressed with supernatural sanctions strong enough to check the unsocial impulses of violent men; she offered it monastic retreats for men, women, and classic manuscripts... She was beyond question, the greatest civilizing force in medieval European history (Durant 1950, 818).

Monasticism ruled at the expense of church planting. One may say that the mission zeal of the church of the Middle Ages was so focused on monasticism that it completely disregarded (perhaps forgot) the need for church planting. Catholicism found what it perceived to be a better way.

#### EXAMPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE REFORMATION

For over one thousand years the Christian Church had lost both its focus and purpose. By the end of the fifteenth century the label "Christian" meant little more than having a cultural affinity with a nation that proclaimed to adhere to the tenants of the Catholic faith.

For years the Catholic Church exerted a strangling

control and influence over the affairs of peasants, kings and nations. However, from as early as 1300, ripples of dissent started to emanate throughout the "Christian" world. A new day was dawning and the Church was about to experience a fresh wind of change. The "Universal" Church was about to discover the limits of its influence, power and control.

The Reformation developed and flourished under Catholicism for several reasons. First, the invention of the printing press allowed reformers to print and distribute their works in large quantities. Second, the rapid embrace of the reformation by the people suggests that a large portion of the population was disenchanted by the Catholic Church and ready for a change. A third reason was that nationalism started to take precedence over Catholicism. The nation/state emerged.

The forces in place made it possible for the thousand year old Catholic Church to be sidestepped by individuals who saw a better way. Yet, for the purpose of this paper, the question must be asked: During the Reformation, did anyone plant churches?

### The Protestant Church of the Reformation

#### The Church under Martin Luther

When Martin Luther nailed his now famous *Ninety Five Theses* on the door at the Wittenburg Castle Church he could not have predicted the firestorm he would ignite. The immediate reaction of the people suggests that many shared his indignation with regard to indulgences.

The Catholic Church was thoroughly corrupted and the people wanted a religion they could relate to. Many citizens sided with Luther because he offered a faith that appeared to be genuine and sincere. This was a fresh alternative to the sophistry and corruption of the Catholic church.

Once Luther planted the seeds of reform, like dominoes, cities throughout Germany pushed for changes. For example, on January 25, 1522 Wittenberg's town council adopted new a Church order. Late in 1524 the old Latin mass was replaced by a German mass (Cameron 214).

In the city of Magdeburg, the members of St. Ulrich's parish followed Wittenburg. In 1524 they also administered "the Lord's Supper in the Lutheran mode" (Durant 1957, 438).

In his book *Luther the Reformer*, James M. Kittelson writes that beginning in the 1530s and continuing until his death, "Luther became ever more insistent on building the church in order to ensure the survival of his vision of the gospel" (Kittelson 243). Luther was extremely effective with his reforms. Kittleson elaborates on this by stating:

Prince after prince and town after town decided to act... They passed what they called *Kirchenordnungen* (church ordinances), in which they sought to reorder the affairs of the church in a way that would be faithful to what they understood of Luther's teachings (Kittelson 245).

By 1559 some fifty German cities had embraced various elements of the reformation (Cameron 214-219). In the beginning, Martin desired nothing more than the

purification of the Catholic Church. He considered himself a good and faithful Catholic. In time, however, it would be the Catholic Church that forced Luther into the role of reformer. By the end of his life, Luther so despised the Catholic Church that in 1545 he wrote *Against the Papacy at Rome, Founded by the Devil*.

At first, Luther saw it as his responsibility to reform the existing church and bring it back to orthodoxy. Ultimately, he completely abandoned any notion of reforming the Church he accused of being "founded by the devil."

#### The Church under John Calvin

Without a doubt, John Calvin was the most important systematizer of protestant theology in the sixteenth century. Though he admired the reformers, he did not desire to become one. Gonzalez writes that Calvin was "convinced that his gifts were not those of the pastor or the leader, but rather those of the scholar and author" (Gonzalez 64).

Yet, he spent twenty years in Geneva as a protestant reformer. Calvin first visited Geneva when he was just passing through. However a man named William Farel threatened Calvin with judgement from God if he did not stay. So he stayed only to be later expelled. In 1541, he returned to stay.

When Calvin returned to Geneva he was determined to succeed in implementing the model church which had failed several years earlier. He had just spent two years in Strasbourg where he was able to outline and clarify his

understanding of a biblical church. Wendel suggests that Calvin returned to Geneva because:

he had a glimpse of the possibility of translating into concrete reality the conception of the Church which he had outlined during his previous period in that town (Wendel 69).

Calvin's goal was not to build a church. It was certainly not to plant one. It was to build a Christian society. In November 20, 1541 Calvin realized his dream when he issued his Ecclesiastical Ordinances to the Church and community of Geneva (Wendel 75). Two months later he implemented them.

Calvin successfully saw the transformation of Geneva. However, according to Wendel, Calvin's passion was not Geneva for it had always been France:

It was neither Geneva nor the far-distant Churches now acknowledging his name, which had been at the center of his preoccupations: He had left France in order to evangelize it from without, to organize his new communities from afar (Wendel 106-107).

His reformed theology and city/church model spread throughout Europe and into England and Scotland. He was also able to group "the reformed communities into a confederacy of coherent Churches unified under the same doctrine and the same discipline" (Wendel 106-107).

#### The Church under Anabaptism

Historians date the birth of Anabaptism to the night of January 21, 1525. On this day about a dozen men entered the home of Felix Manz. In *The Anabaptist Story*, Willam R. Estep conveys the events of this meeting as recorded by George Blaurock in *The Large Chronicle of the Hutterian*

*Brethren:*

After the prayer, George of the House of Jacob stood up and besought Conrad Grebel for God's sake to baptize him with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with such a request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained minister to perform such work (Estep 13-14).

After George Blaurock was baptized, he then baptized all the others present. They pledged themselves as the true disciples of Christ, to live separate from the world, to preach the gospel and hold the faith. Thus, the Anabaptist Church was born. After recounting this event, Estep wrote:

This was clearly the most revolutionary act of the Reformation. No other event so completely symbolized the break with Rome. Here, for the first time in the course of the Reformation, a group of Christians dared to form a church after what was conceived to be the New Testament pattern (Estep 14).

Less than a month after the formation of the Swiss Brethren Church Grebel and Manz went house to house sharing the gospel. They were "witnessing, baptizing, and conducting the Lord's supper after the order of the Swiss Brethren" (Estep 38).

April 9, 1525, three months after the formation of the first Swiss Brethren Church, Grebel baptized a large group in the Sitter River. "Some 500 persons are said to have been baptized by the Brethren during the initial stages of the movement in St. Gall" (Estep 39).

This very same month, a man named Wilhelm Reublin was driven out of Zurich. Estep records that:

He sought refuge in Waldshut where he baptized Balthazar Hubmaier and about sixty others. On Easter Sunday Hubmaier baptized over 300 people.... In the following days many others were baptized (Estep 88).

After persecution, imprisonment and further harrassment, in 1526, Hubmaier fled to Nikolsburg (a tolerant city) which was under the jurisdiction of a Moravian nobleman. In the following year "it has been conservatively estimated that at least six thousand were baptized" (Estep 94).

In 1529 the Anabaptist church in the Adige Valley lost its pastor to martyrdom. George Blaurock became the next pastor. Through his preaching, Blaurock impacted communities "from Klausen to Neumarkt" where his preaching "was accompanied by great crowds." Estep records how "believers were baptized and congregations were formed up and down the Inn and Etsch river valleys" (Estep 52).

In June of 1530, Melchior Hofmann (in the Netherlands) founded a congregation. His success was "immediate and phenomenal." Obbe Philips, one of the earliest of the Dutch Anabaptist leaders said this of Hofmann:

Melchior Hofmann stood out. He came from upper Germany to Emden to baptize around three hundred persons publicly in the church in Emden, both burgher and peasant, lord and servant (Estep 152).

#### A Brief Synopsis of Church Planting in the Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was as unique to history as it was different from the preceding Middle Ages. It is astounding that the Christian landscape of sixteenth century Europe (which had been solely Roman Catholic for a millennia) changed so dramatically and permanently within the span of thirty years.

The Leaders within the Protestant Reformation such as Martin Luther and John Calvin wanted to reform the existing church. They wanted to clean up the existing church; not plant new ones.

This Reformation re-discovered the Bible, but it did not re-discover church planting. What is interesting is that this new Protestant Church existed without any mission interest while the Church it left "was carrying out extensive missions in the Orient, and a little later in America" (Hodgkins 161).

The Reformation came out from within the Latin Church. The successful parting from the Catholic church ultimately opened the door for more freedom in faith. Schaff states that the reformation "prepared the way for a higher spiritual unity on the basis of freedom and the full development of every phase of truth" (Schaff 1996, 43).

This represented a shift into the right direction. With the Bible once again ensconced in the hands and hearts of believers it would only be a matter of time before their eyes look onto the horizon and their vision of Christianity expanded to the world.

Initially, the Reformation was a re-formation of the existing church. Ultimately, what occurred was a total severance from the Catholic Church. Through the Reformation a number of distinct national protestant churches, confessions and denominations were established (Schaff 1996, 43).

The Lutheran Church was born out of Luther's

ministry. The Presbyterian Church was born out of Calvin's ministry. Yet, they themselves did not plant churches.

The only protestant group that systematically planted churches during the Reformation was the Anabaptist. Like Christians in the first five centuries, the Anabaptists wandered from region to region planting churches wherever they traveled.

Yet, this church planting was not necessarily intentional. The Anabaptists were mercilessly persecuted by both the Catholics and the other Protestants. For this reason they were forced into total separation. They planted churches out of necessity. Nevertheless, after a 1,000 year vacuum, a group of believers instigated a church planting movement. The Anabaptists finally raised church planting from obscurity. It once again became important.

#### EXAMPLES OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE MODERN ERA

Other than the Anabaptists, the churches of the Reformation did not focus on planting new congregations. Nevertheless, these new protestant churches did experience a geographical expansion. This time of transition came as Europe expanded its influence through colonialism. Just as the ancient church spread using the roads carved out by the Roman Empire so too would the Christian church of the sixteenth century expand into the distant lands opened through commerce and trade. The Bible was now free to be read and the world was now open to be reached. Latourette writes that "in the sixteenth and succeeding centuries

Christians had the opportunity to influence with their faith a larger proportion of the earth's surface than at any previous time" (Latourette 1975, 695).

The Protestant Reformation represented a vast movement that established churches throughout Europe. Unlike other dissenting groups of the Middle Ages, the protestant churches did not disappear. They grew both in numbers and influence. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they would "display a far greater proportionate and numerical geographic expansion than the rapidly spreading Roman Catholic Church" (Latourette 1975, 836).

The church that emerged in the modern era embraced this new challenge. By the early 1600's missions was growing in the hearts of Christians. Europe received a chance to reform. Now it was the world's opportunity to repent. This new growing mission zeal will be addressed through a survey of four religious movements. These movements are the Pietists, the Moravians, American Methodism and the Southern Baptists.

#### The Pietists

According to Kane, the "Modern missionary enterprise, had its "direct outcome" in the German Pietist movement. Kane states that:

As the Protestant Reformation was a revolt against the false doctrines and corrupt morals of the Church of Rome, so the Pietist movement was a revolt against the barren orthodoxy and dead formalism of the state churches of Protestant Europe (Kane 76).

According to Robert Hall Glover's *The Progress of*

*World-Wide Missions*, the pietists craved for a Christianity filled with passion. They wanted to "raise the standards of Christian life." This "revival movement sowed seed in some hearts which eventually bore a great harvest" (Glover 47).

Philip Spener is considered by most to be the father of pietism, but it was his "even more distinguished follower, August Francke" who would provide the greatest impact in this new movement. Like the reformers, these pietists first attempted to work through existing religions and institutions.

However, they were appalled by the lack of passion and piety espoused by the universities, Catholicism and much of Protestantism. Also, many of these institutions shut their doors to "the new sect." For this reason, the pietists opened their own university at Halle. This was done in 1694. By the eighteenth century, "Halle was the educational center of Pietism and the fountainhead of the missionary enterprise" (Kane 77). It "became a center of the strongest missionary influence and the birthplace of the first organized foreign missionary effort" (Glover 47).

The first recorded Protestant mission—the Danish-Halle Mission grew out of Halle University. In 1620 Denmark established a trading colony at Tranquebar. This city was set on the east coast of India. The Danish-Halle mission sent chaplains "to minister to the spiritual needs of the colonists." A century later, "missionary work was initiated among the indigenous population" (Kane 77).

In 1706 Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau

reached Tranquebar. Plutschau left the field in 1711 because of health. Ziegenbalg died on the field in 1719. They left behind over 350 believers, a missionary seminary, a lexicon and a Bible written in the Tamil language (Glover 48).

The focus of the sixteenth century reformers centered around doctrine. Within a hundred years of the Reformation Protestants sent out their first missionaries. Within two hundred years they started sending missionaries to the unreached peoples of the world. Once again, however, the primary focus was not church planting. Nevertheless, one can see that century by century, the church was gradually moving towards a church planting passion.

#### The Moravians

The Moravian church sprang out from seventeenth century German pietism. Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, considered the father of the Moravian missionary movement, was "greatly influenced" by Heinrich Pluschau, the former student of Halle and a missionary from Tranquebar" (Kane 78).

In 1737 Count Zinzendorf became bishop of the Moravian Church. For thirty years he inspired and guided its worldwide missionary activities (Kane 79).

The Moravian missionary movement officially started in 1732 when Moravian missionaries ministered to the Negro slaves on the Danish island of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. February 1, 1750 Friedrich Martin, a missionary on

St. Thomas, died leaving behind a church with 425 members (Hamilton and Hamilton 51).

Between 1732 and 1760, two hundred and twenty six (Kane 79) Moravians entered Twelve foreign countries. Below is a list of these countries impacted by Moravian missionaries:

- 1733: in Greenland
- 1734: in St. Croix of the Virgin islands
- 1734: in Sweden 1735 in Surinam
- 1735: in the Gold Coast
- 1737: in South Africa
- 1737: in Arctic Russia
- 1740: with the North American Indian
- 1740: in Algeria 1740 in Ceylon
- 1754: in Jamaica
- 1756: in Antigua (Kane 79, and Hamilton et. al. 52-59)

The result of these missions endeavors was the conversion of thousands of people and the planting of dozens of churches. In his *History of Christian Missions*, Charles Henry Robinson, the Moravian Brethren started more missionary works within twenty years than all the Anglicans and Protestants would start in the two preceding centuries. He further states:

Their marvelous success was largely due to the fact that from the first they recognized that the evangelization of the world was the most pressing of all the obligations that rested upon the Christian Church, and that the carrying out of this obligation was the "common affair" of the community. Up to the present time (1930) the Moravians have sent out nearly 3,000 missionaries, the proportion of missionaries to their communicant members being one in twelve (Robinson 1915, 50).

#### American Methodism

In 1734 the Moravian Brethren established a mission in Georgia. The following year John and Charles Wesley accompanied a group of Moravian missionaries who traveled to

Georgia to strengthen the mission (Langton 98).

October 14, 1735, the Wesley's left Georgia for England. They booked passage on the ship *Simmonds*. Already on board were twenty six Moravians. During the voyage home the ship encountered a terrible storm. John Wesley was astounded by the calm spirit of the Moravians. Regarding the peace of the Moravians during the violent storm, he would later recount in his journal, "This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen" (Langton 100).

From 1735 until his conversion on May 24, 1738, John was in constant contact with Moravians. Though John was converted during an afternoon service at St. Paul's Cathedral, (Langton 104) it was the continual witness of the Moravians that brought him to a readiness for conversion.

Immediately after his conversion, John Wesley engaged in ministry. His "organizational genius resulted in the formation of the great Methodist Church, first in England and later in America." According to Kane, John Wesley laid the foundations for the modern missionary movement launched by William Carey" (Kane 81).

There developed two strands of Methodism-European and American. Hardon records three independent beginnings for American Methodism:

In 1760, the Irish Robert Strawbridge from Ulster organized a group of Methodist preachers in Maryland; the following year another group of Irish immigrants from County Limerick founded the first Methodist meeting house in New York; and finally between 1769 and 1772, Wesley personally appointed and sent chosen missionaries from England to the colonies (Hardon 1957, 155).

The core of the American Methodist movement

developed around the itinerant evangelist. Through Methodism the itinerant evangelist transformed from a "self-directed individual coming and going as the spirit led into a disciplined way of life." These itinerant evangelists traveled along circuits preaching mainly to the unchurched. Within twenty five years these Methodist itinerant evangelists penetrated "every populated region of the country" bringing with them "means to sustain interest and to increase personal involvement in the movement" (Hatch 87).

The result was a spectacular expansion of the Methodist Church. Methodism swept America with a nation wide church planting movement.

In 1800 the total membership of the Methodist Church was 64,894. By 1850 the total membership was an astounding 1,259,906 (Norwood 154). At the dawn of the twentieth century the Methodist church was the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. It is estimated that they had about five and a half million members" (Gaustad 242). By 1956 the Methodist Church had 39,801 congregations with a total membership of 13,391,034 (Hardon 177).

#### The Southern Baptists

In 1700 Baptists in America had only twenty four churches with 839 members. In 1740 they had sixty churches with 3,142 members. By 1790 they had 979 churches with 67,490 members grouped into at least forty two associations (McBeth 200, 206).

This explosive growth was not accidental. After 1700, "Baptists gave themselves to evangelism and the struggle for religious liberty." The "Matterhorn of the eighteenth century" for Baptist was the Great Awakening. "The waves of revival that swept the colonies" affected all denominations. (McBeth 201).

According to Douglas C. Beggs, European immigration and the migration of Baptists to the west was the "greatest reason for the increase in the number of churches in this period." Both church planting and church organization was impacted by this immigration and migration:

The development of Southern Baptist churches, associations, and state conventions followed the vast migration of Southerners into Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Florida (Beggs 69).

The geographical expansion, the increase in churches and membership moved Baptists towards mission mindedness. McBeth discusses an event in May of 1845 in which a "delegation of Southern Baptists met in Augusta, Georgia to discuss the formation of separate mission agencies." During this meeting these Southern Baptist delegates formed the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). They also established missions boards and immediately began work (McBeth 381). During this time the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) was formed.

In 1845 the board opened missionary work in China in Liberia, 1846; in Nigeria, 1850; in Brazil, 1859; in Italy, 1870; in Mexico, 1880; and in Japan, 1889 (McBeth 414).

By 1900, Mexico reported 1232 members in 32 churches; Brazil reported 1922 members in 27 churches; Japan

reported seventy-five converts and two churches. In total, by 1900 The SBC reported 6,753 members in 113 churches in six nations with a total of 94 foreign missionaries (McBeth 421-423).

In 1983 the FMB reported 12,170 Baptist churches overseas. These churches had a total membership of 1,568,098 (McBeth 635). Like the FMB, the Home Mission Board (HMB) was very active in planting churches. Between 1845-1900, 671 home missionaries baptized 5,696 converts and started or improved 258 churches (McBeth 432).

By 1900 records show that the SBC had a total of 1,586,709 members in 18,873 churches. By 1983 the membership had grown to 14,208,226 and the number of churches had increased to 36,500 (McBeth 623). As of 1982, Southern Baptists had churches in every state of the United States (McBeth 629).

During the 2001 Southern Baptist Convention the numbers of missions, and churches both locally and internationally were stated as follows:

Just four years ago, missionaries reported 283,000 baptisms and 2,304 new churches begun on missions fields. In 1999 these numbers had increased to 363,000 baptisms and 4,748 new churches started. However, the year 2000 saw 451,000 new believers baptized, a 24% increase, and 6,525 new churches were planted, 37% more than the previous year. The growth potential will obviously continue, as the number of missions not yet organized into churches increased from 22,000 three years ago to more than 38,000 by the end of 2000... Planting healthy, reproducing churches with evangelistic passion continues to be one of the great methodologies for evangelizing North America. As part of the '20/20 Vision for the 21st Century," the Church Planting group worked cooperatively with state, associational and

church partners to plant over 1,700 new congregations in Year 2000. The projected number of church plants reflects the second highest year of new congregations for Southern Baptists (Yates 145, 208).

Over the past century the passion of the Southern Baptist Convention has been missions. Today, the focus of Southern Baptist Convention is to plant churches.

#### A Brief Synopsis of Church Planting in the Modern Era

The church of the fifteen hundreds experienced a reformation of theology and ecclesiology. Over the next three hundred years the church would experience a revolution in methodology and scope.

The German pietists revolted against barren orthodoxy and dead formalism. Their passion led them to build a university and start a missionary movement. However, this was only the beginning of the revolution.

The Moravians would take this missionary zeal and extend it to the whole world. However, the primary focus was not church planting, but world evangelism.

The Methodists built upon the Moravian mission strategy. However, they moved their focus more towards church planting. The itinerant evangelists traveled throughout the United States with the intention of planting churches among the unchurched.

When the Baptists appeared on the scene they too traveled throughout the United States planting churches. However, by 1845 their focus turned to the world. Like the Pietists and Moravians they had a passion to reach the world. Like the Methodists they started doing it through

planting local churches.

Today Christianity is finally coming full circle. After 2,000 years church planting is receiving its proper focus. Missions organizations around the world are realizing that without planting local New Testament churches any missions endeavor will be nothing more than a clanging brass or a tinkling cymbal. It will be short lived and unbiblical.

#### CONCLUSION

The phrase "History repeats itself" is a well known saying. When looking at the history of church planting one cannot miss the pattern. This paper recognizes five periods for church planting:

1. New Testament Times: Church planting as an intentional strategy played an essential role in the expansion of the first century church.
2. The first five centuries: Church planting as an intentional strategy played an important role in the expansion of Church from the second to the fifth centuries.
3. The Middle Ages: Church planting as an intentional strategy played virtually no role in the expansion of the Church from the sixth century through the fifteenth century.
4. The Reformation: From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century Church planting developed into an important role in the expansion of the Church. Church planting was not an as an intentional strategy
5. The modern era: Church planting as an intentional strategy is now playing an essential role in the expansion of the Church in the modern era.

This paper has surveyed the long history of church planting. The first century Christians considered Church planting as an integral aspect of the Great Commission. There could be no Great Commission without church planting.

The Apostle Paul could not have conceived missions without church planting.

The Second century Christians continued to plant churches. The church rapidly spread throughout the Roman Empire. However, the importance of church planting diminished as an intentional strategy.

By the third century early forms of monasticism started developing. It would be years before this movement matured into full blown medieval monasticism. Church planting was evident, however, it fell even further towards insignificance.

Between the years 400 and 600 the Church underwent a thorough transformation. Persecution had stopped. The Roman Empire eventually declared her to be the official state religion. Bishops grew in power in both the religious and political arena. The church transitioned from a poor heavenly focused missions minded organism to a powerful earthly focused empire minded organization. By the end of the seventh century the church had lost both its focus and purpose.

During the Middle Ages, church planting was practically forgotten. Christianity continued to spread over the continent of Europe. However, during this time all missions were channeled through the great monasteries. For the next 1,000 years there would be no clear representation of a Christ centered, gospel preaching, church planting Christianity. Any effort by individuals, or congregations to break loose from the grips of either the Catholic Church

or the Orthodox Church met with swift and often violently brutal reprisals.

Between the years 1500 and 1700 the Church went through a reformation. In the West, the Catholic Church was not able to maintain its absolute control. Throughout Europe hundreds of congregations declared their independence from the Catholic Church and re-formed into various denominations. Though the progress was positive, the period known as the Protestant Reformation experienced little in the way of church planting.

During the nineteenth century individuals such as Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson and John Nevius emphasized the importance of church planting. However, the primary focus was still on the mission station. Though this differed much from Catholic monasticism, ministry still revolved around an established compound.

The twentieth century church finally grasped the importance of church planting. Yet, church planting has only recently taken center stage. Finally, after two thousand years, and the entrance into the twenty first century is church planting considered an essential element of the Great Commission. Below is a chaotic diagram that illustrates the history of church planting Through The Ages:

Church planting essential	1 <sup>st</sup> century
Church planting important	2 <sup>nd</sup> century
Mission station	3 <sup>rd</sup> century
Transformation	4 <sup>th</sup> - 6 <sup>th</sup> century
Middle Ages	7 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> century
Reformation	16 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> century
Mission station	19 <sup>th</sup> century
Church planting important	20 <sup>th</sup> century
Church planting essential	21 <sup>st</sup> century

Christians today are realizing more and more that the world can be reached only through a proliferation of local contextual indigenous churches. If the past is an accurate indicator for the future then there is a good probability that the twenty first century will embrace church planting as an essential element of the Christian world mission. For the world's sake, it better be!

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