

Excerpt: Cross-cultural Church Planting, by Glenn Rogers

Introduction

The results of a recent study of religion in America conducted by the Barna Group indicates that the *unchurched* population in America (that is, those who have not attended a church service or function in the past six months) is nearing 100 million (2007). This makes America one of the most unchurched nations in the world. America is a mission field. Many of those nearly 100 million people are not Anglos, that is, not white folks. They are foreign-born immigrants who have made America their new home. How to reach them with the Gospel by planting churches in their communities is the subject of this book.

God's Mission and the Church's Mission

The church is a missional institution. It is, by God's design, a missionary agency design to participate with him in his mission in the world—the reconciliation of all people (Hesselgrave 1980:20; Rogers 2002:89). Jesus' last instructions to his followers were for them to go and make disciples of all the nations, that is, of all the ethnic groups, teaching and baptizing them. They began doing that first in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, then increased their efforts to include Samaria and eventually, after further prompting from God, began telling the story of Jesus throughout the Hellenistic world. From Antioch, Paul and his mission teams planted churches in dozens of locations (Sanchez 1998:467-468). The book of Acts is, in part, a history of church planting in the first century. The early church was a missional church. Jesus' followers were church planting people.

Church Planting as Mission—Far and Near

When Jesus told his followers to *go, teach, and baptize*, he was, in fact, telling them to go plant churches. Wherever believers are, the church is. Going, teaching, and baptizing people in places where there is no local community of faith is planting the church (Murray 2001:44). Intentionally going, teaching, and baptizing the people of a specific ethnic group is ethnic-specific church planting. Planting churches is participating with God in his mission in the world. One of the lessons in the book of Acts is that the *mission Dei* (the mission of God) is accomplished by planting churches (Stetzer 2006:37-52).

The Lord's church has been planting churches throughout the world for 2000 years. Jesus' faithful followers have sacrificed to go (or to help those who can go) to far away places to plant churches, impacting communities around the world. We have worked with God in accomplishing his mission around the world. Is it possible that with our missiological eyes focused so intently on the far away places that we have missed the needs that exist in our own communities here in America? It is not my intention to

minimize foreign missions. But America is a mission field too and we should not be guilty of failing to see the forest because of the trees.

In March of 2007, the population of the United States reached 300 million. As noted earlier, nearly one third of those people are unchurched. Many of those unchurched people are immigrants who have come to America from far away places. They did not know the Lord when they came to America and they still do not. We need to remember that Jesus' instructions to go, teach, and baptize certainly includes going to far away places, but is not limited to far away places. God's church planting mission needs to be accomplished right here in North America (McNamara and Davis 2005: 43-64).

The church in America must focus its attention on the people in our nation who do not yet know the Lord. A significant percentage of those nearly 100 million unchurched people (perhaps 20 percent or more) are non-Anglo people who have been in America only a short time. American Christians must engage in intentional, concerted efforts to cross the cultural expanses that separate Anglo and non-Anglo people so the story of Jesus and renewed relationship with God can be shared in culturally appropriate, relevant ways with people who are not part of mainstream Anglo culture. The American church must engage in *cross-cultural church planting*.

What is Cross-cultural Church Planting

Cross-cultural church planting involves the intentional crossing of cultural boundaries to plant a church that is culturally appropriate and relevant for the specific ethnic group under consideration. America is a predominantly Anglo society. The term *Anglo* refers to white people of European descent. Approximately 70 percent of the American population is Anglo. The dominant, mainstream culture of America is Anglo. Planting a church in America among people who are not Anglo is *cross-cultural church planting*. Planting a church that does not have the look and feel of the dominant cultural group is cross-cultural church planting.

Why Do Cross-cultural Church Planting in America

Why do cross-cultural church planting in America? Because tens of millions of people need us to. Why do they need us to? Why can't they just worship in Anglo churches?

People who come to America from other cultures arrive with their cultural habits and perspectives in place. Culturally speaking, they are the people they have always been. They want to live in America and enjoy the freedoms and opportunities that exist here, but they do not necessarily want to be Anglos (Anglos must understand the distinction between being American and being Anglo).

Some immigrants to this country will want to be assimilated into mainstream Anglo-dominant culture, some will not. Those who embrace the idea of assimilation will find that the process is a lengthy, complicated, and challenging process, taking years (not months) to accomplish, *if* it is undertaken in an assertive, positive manner.

Because assimilation is such a complex process, most people who come here from other cultures cannot experience meaningful worship and spiritual formation in an Anglo-dominant church context. They need an ethnic-specific, culturally appropriate context in which to worship and grow spiritually. They need an ethnic-specific church. That means that the American church, which is predominantly Anglo, needs to cross cultural boundaries and plant ethnic-specific churches to meet the spiritual needs of non-Anglo people.

This book is meant to help churches accomplish that goal.

Note to the Reader: Throughout this book I refer to church planters and ministers in the masculine, he or him. I do this for the sake of simplicity and ease of writing and reading. It gets tiresome to continually write (and to read) *him or her* and *he or she*. Readers should understand that throughout this study it is assumed that church planters may be female. Women played an important role in the first century church as house church hosts and leaders. Some of the most effective missionaries in the modern mission movement have been dedicated, godly women. Please do not assume that my use of masculine pronouns is meant to minimize the role of women in missions, church planting, and ministry. It is not.

Reflection and Discussion Activities

1. Reflect on the church as a missional institution and the challenge of a evangelizing a multicultural society. List five specific challenges of cross-cultural outreach.
2. Discuss the Great Commission and cross-cultural church planting as a way of carrying out the command to go and make disciples. How does church planting facilitate the making of disciples?
3. Discuss the idea that planting non-Anglo churches in America is *cross-cultural church planting*. Discuss Anglo-dominant culture and non-Anglo churches.