

LET'S HAVE A BABY!

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“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Warning: reading this article may inflame your passions! Are you passionate? Do you have a passion for propagating new churches? You see, this is about ecclesiastical obstetrics – the birthing of new churches by existing churches. Has your church ever considered “mothering” a new church? Few passionately pursue the idea, most are impassive about the subject. The initial response of many at such a suggestion is, “Start new churches? Why, we’ve got more churches now than we need!” Perhaps such a response reveals, in addition to indifference, ignorance and/or impotency!

In his “Church Planter’s Manual”, Joe Miller writes, “There were 28 protestant churches in America per 10,000 people in 1900, 22 in 1950 and 12 in 1985. The Southern Baptists judge the present figure to be about 10.” From 28 churches per 10,000 in 1900 to 10 churches per 10,000 today is a loss of 18 churches per 10,000 population in 100 years!

America is desperately in need of a revival of the birthing of New Testament churches. There has been a proliferation of churches based upon the business model of Wall Street in the last couple of decades. Their market driven philosophy of ministry has distorted the biblical philosophy of ministry. We need a re-population of America with churches rooted in biblical principles. So, let’s have a baby boom of thoroughly Bible driven churches.

Not all churches can or should have a baby church because they are either immature and/or unhealthy. Immature and unhealthy churches do not reproduce except by default, splitting and splintering unintentionally. Healthy churches reproduce intentionally. How can we break out of an unhealthy, sterile syndrome? Minimally, there must be motivation and conception which results in reproduction.

MOTIVATION

Our motivation for propagation, in the spiritual realm as in the physical, should be love. Our love for and commitment to our Lord and His Word should motivate us to reproduction. Do we love Him and His Word enough to do His work His way or has our love been prostituted because we have left our first love and lost the vision for our mission? The scarcity of existing churches interested in mothering other churches is alarming. The average church that has reached minimal maturity, and many have not, isn’t interested in reproducing themselves.

There are churches that are mausoleums not maternity wards. What makes the difference? The answer: vibrant life and virile love – love for the Lord. The love-life of many Chris-

tians and churches is cold. Even frigid! “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” said the Lord Jesus (Matt. 24:12). And when we get to Rev. 3:15 He said of the church in Laodicea, “You are neither cold nor hot you are lukewarm.” What would He say of us today?

The normal, natural thing for a healthy couple in love to do is to get married and reproduce, which, in most cases, results in a family. The basis, we insist, for such a result is what? Love! Likewise, healthy churches in love with the Lord and His work will want to link up with Him in the great Divine-Human cooperative of proliferating new church families. What evidences of love exist in the church? Got any offsprings?

CONCEPTION

The idea for birthing new churches was conceived in the mind of God in ages past and articulated by the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He declared, “I will build my church.” (Matt. 16:18). He revealed how He would build the church when He issued marching orders to the disciples and to us in Matt. 28:18-20.

This seed-truth, called “the Great Commission” by us, is God’s program of Planned Parenthood for establishing churches. The Great Commission, if fully implemented, results in the establishment of new bodies of believers. The Great Commission is a systematic program for the establishing of growing and reproducing churches. Examine the Divine Obstetrician’s prescription for procreation:

First, evangelize - “go and make disciples”; Second, baptize - “baptizing them”; Third, stabilize – “teaching them”. Now, several questions: from where do disciple-makers come? Answer, from an existing church. In what context are converts baptized? Answer: in the context of the local church. Where are they to be taught? Answer: in the local church. These things are to be done by the local church and extended with the church’s authority.

It is obvious, in view of the larger teaching of the New Testament concerning the church, that embodied in the Great Commission passage, is the concept, the “how to”, of birthing new churches. The Great Commission is Church Planting, for part of the Master’s Mandate is “baptizing them.” They are not to be baptized and left to fare for themselves but are to be formed into a local assembly of believers!

Therefore, it is correct to say that the birthing of new churches is the goal of the Great Commission and every church, at some time in its history, should be motivated to conceive a baby by following the Divine Obstetrician’s prescription! If it doesn’t it is either immature, introverted and/or impotent unless it is located in a very small population center. In that case it should be assisting, by whatever means it can, to aid in establishing new churches elsewhere, usually through Church Planting mission agencies.

REPRODUCTION

The church is presented in Scripture as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-27) and the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). It is God's plan that the church be a reproductive agency. Is there a model of church reproduction that I can analyze? Yes, I can think of no better "delivery room" to visit that that recorded in Acts Chapters 13 and 14.

In Acts 13 the Antiochian church "mothered" other churches by sending out Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Acts 14 records that churches were born in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Afterward these two church planters reported back to the "mother" church in Antioch.

Note how their procedures paralleled the principles in Matthew 28:18-20: they preached the gospel – Acts 14:7 & 21; they made disciples – Acts 14:21; they consolidated the church and appointed leadership – Acts 14:23. All this was done under the authorization of the "mother church" in Antioch.

Why do churches today not follow the example of the apostolic assembly, those first fellowships, the early evangelicals? I have discovered, in my years of itinerate ministry, that there are at least three over-riding reasons: churches are under challenged, inner focused and/or misguided.

Under challenged. By that I mean that there are church leaders who are timid when it comes to "launching out into the deep and letting down the nets." The average congregation is dying for lack of a vision, goals and challenges. Consequently, Sunday after Sunday they sit, soak and sour!

We saw a "baby boom" of new churches back in the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's. Why? Bold leadership challenged churches to populate the countryside with new churches. I wonder where the theologically conservative church movement would be today if that had not been the case. We can and must do that again. God's people respond to sound, sensible, scriptural and visionary challenges.

Inner focused. Churches, like individuals, can and do become introverted. They can be "nearsighted and blind and have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their past sins." (II Peter 1:9). In this condition they not only sit, soak and sour but they spend their time picking "moats and beams" out of each other's eyes! In such situations the pastor becomes a referee keeping people apart rather than the captain leading his team toward the goal and victory! "Mothering" a new baby church is the farthest thing from their minds. They have no plans for "mothering" a new baby church because their first love has long since become cold, their vision limited and their mission aborted.

It was not so in the Book of Acts. Throughout the chapters following Acts 14 we see church after church coming into existence as the Lord-loving, apostolic assemblies of believers took seriously the sowing of the seed of the gospel into the womb of the fertile

soil of souls all about them. We are privileged to follow in their train. Let us write an “Acts of the Apostles of the 21st Century” by imitating their love and labor!

Misguided. Mega-itis has infected some churches. Their intention is to build a mega church. So they say, “if we start another church we’ll never have thousands in this one.” That strategy results in such excuses as: “We need all our leadership right here”; or “A branch church will cut down on our giving”; or “If we start another church it will be competing with us” etc. Careful examination of these objections will reveal a focus on objectives which are less than biblical and constitute a misguided emphasis. Statistics indicate that in the long run the multiplication principle will be more effective than the addition principle!

BIRTH CONTROL

Why do churches practice birth control? The term “birth control” applies to human reproduction for “birth control” is: “The voluntary limitation or regulation of the number of one’s children through the restriction of conception.” (The American Heritage Dictionary) The terms “voluntary”, “limitation”, “regulation”, “restriction” can be used to describe the practice of Bible believing churches that are not actively engaged in church reproduction. They are voluntarily limiting, regulating and restricting the dissemination of the Gospel and thereby are practicing spiritual birth control.

The keys to reversing this condition are:

- **Leadership that motivates to action.** Individual churches, led by visionary pastors, must become burdened for a particular geographical area adjacent to their own field of ministry and lead their churches to “mother” a “daughter” church or cooperate with regional churches to "cluster mother" a new church.
- **Discipleship that results in obedience to the Great Commission.** The propagation of churches is the thrust, task and test of the New Testament church and should be expedited post haste.
- **Stewardship that takes seriously that which has been entrusted to us – the Gospel.** The Great Commission mandate, when given its scriptural priority, dictates a dramatic agenda and dynamic action - it is evangelize or expire!

Pastors and churches must be innovative in order to accomplish their theologically driven missiological goals. What one church may not be able to do separately is accomplished through local cooperative partnerships with other regional churches. Local Pastor's Fellowships can generate a spirit of cooperation, enthusiasm and support for perpetuating the church planting vision.

It all begins with passion – a passion for the Lord and the lost. Do you have a passion for birthing new churches? Let's have a baby! Remember, it's easier to have a baby than it is to raise the dead!

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