

Indigenous Churches



The Biblical Goal Of Missions

Bob C. Green

INDIGENOUS CHURCHES

THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL MISSIONS

By

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FOREWORD

Writing a book is no easy task. I can assure you that I have agonized much in prayer whether to even attempt to do so. I certainly do not presume to know all there is to know about planting indigenous churches, but the Lord Jesus Christ has graciously allowed me to gain what knowledge I possess through forty-seven years of observation and personal church planting experience both on the foreign field and in the USA.

I owe a great debt to the Lord for salvation and His all-sufficient grace in my life. As is generally the case, He has used me in the ministry in spite of myself. I am also indebted to the second most important person (the Lord being first) in my life, my wonderful wife of 50 years, Patsy. She is truly a gift from God.

The list of people to whom I am indebted must include missionary Bruce Bell for the influence that he had in my life and ministry. Much of what I learned about planting indigenous churches while in Central America came from serving as his assistant in the Bible Institute "IBERO" and as Co-founding pastor of the Miramonte Baptist Church in San Salvador, El Salvador. The Lord brought Bruce and Karen Bell into our lives very early in our ministry. I admit that at that time I was floundering as a church planter.

There are many precious people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, pastors, missionaries, friends, prayer warriors, family members, etc., but none are more special to me than the Hispanic nationals with whom Patsy and I have had the privilege of serving. The national preachers and pastors that serve in the churches, that we either started or that have grown out of churches which we were involved in starting, have been used greatly of the Lord. Their success in the ministry glorifies the Lord and is a source of great blessing to us. I am so thankful to God for them and their families.

I count it a great privilege to have been called of God to serve in the ministry of His Word but I am especially thankful that He has assigned me to serve in missions in church planting. "Missions" is

the heartbeat of God, the central theme of the Bible and the mission of the church. The purposes of the believer and the local church begin with the glorification and exaltation of the LORD. We exist for His glory. As is said in John 15, He is glorified when we bring forth "much fruit." Fulfilling our mission will bring fulfillment of our main purpose – to glorify HIM. Each servant of God stands or falls according to God's standard, not man's. It can be said:

"A missionary's success should not be measured by how much is being accomplished while he is on the field but by what fruit remains when he is gone."

Dr. Bob C. Green
July, 2015

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FRUIT THAT REMAINS

In John 15 the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to His disciples concerning fruit bearing. He speaks of bearing **fruit, more fruit, and much fruit**. He says that His Father is glorified when the believer, who is referred to as the "branch," bears **much fruit**. The believer is only able to bear much fruit as he abides in the Lord, the Vine, and His Word abides in him. Obviously, the "abiding" necessary to fruit bearing refers to **intimate fellowship and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ**. In spite of this obvious truth many Christians fail to maintain the abiding relationship necessary to glorify the Father. Failure in this area destines the servant of God to live and minister in the weakness of the flesh.

In John 12:24 the Lord states, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." The ability to be productive and bring forth "much fruit" also requires the church planter to "die daily to self" (Galatians 2:20, I Corinthians 15:31). The missionary church planter may have to "die" to his preferences, likes, rights, comforts, etc. if he is to accomplish the will of God. This is another way of saying that one, "lives for God and not himself" (I Corinthians 5:15).

The Lord's desire for us is not only the fullness of joy that comes as a by-product of the "abiding relationship" but the *abundant fruit bearing* that glorifies HIM. In addition to **much fruit** He desires "**abiding fruit**, fruit that He calls "**fruit that remains**" (John 15:16). If the missionary church planter is to produce **fruit that remains** he must live daily abiding in the Lord. The Word of God must also abide in the missionary (vs. 7). The church planter's ministry must be biblical in **purpose**, in **principle** and in **practice**.

The best guarantee we can have that our efforts in church planting will produce *fruit that remains* is to establish *indigenous churches*.

A divinity school graduate wrote:

“If you want to grow something to last a season, plant flowers;
If you want to grow something to last a lifetime, plant trees;
If you want to grow something to last through eternity,
plant churches.”

SAMPLE

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PREFACE

Because the planting of *indigenous* churches is of such great importance to the continuing work of missions I feel it good to provide a practical guide, written from the independent Baptist perspective. There is benefit that can be gained from the materials written by non-Baptists but there is really no reason why we should have to depend on those of a different doctrinal persuasion on this subject. I believe the historical Baptist position in doctrine and practice to be the closest to that of the New Testament teaching, and so, without apology, I seek to set forth the information necessary to the establishment of *indigenous or autonomous*, independent Baptist churches.

I propose to provide the missionary church planter a written point of reference by recording the New Testament principles, methods, and procedures for planting indigenous or autonomous Baptist churches. My prayer is that the materials contained in this book will be a valuable resource for those seeking to prepare themselves and others as church planters.

There are many reasons why *indigenous* churches are not being planted. Very often the church planter is tempted by a course of action that brings some immediate good but that ultimately hinders the establishment of *indigenous* churches. I propose to point out some of the dangers and pitfalls associated with church planting.

The church planting missionary is in a constant spiritual battle. It is a very demanding task. It is probable that every church planter has or will experience the heartache of seeing a congregation he has planted led away by a hireling. People, over whom the missionary has wept, those for which he has interceded before a Holy God, will leave him. He went to them with the good news of the life changing gospel when they were slaves in sin, when their lives were in shambles, their marriages were falling apart and they seemingly had no hope, but this does not keep them from turning on him or going back into the world. Because the missionary loves the people to whom he ministers the wounds caused by those who would turn

from him or The WAY, cut deep. In the midst of these trials the missionary could very well lose sight of God's calling and purpose. There are great church planters that have retreated into a comfort zone away from the front lines. They have found a haven in other aspects of the ministry. If even one of these special men can be challenged to renewed commitment to church planting or if just one young church planter can be forewarned, I will feel the effort worthwhile.

I am also motivated to write because I believe it important for the church planting missionary to see the national church leaders for what they can be, fellow-laborers in Christ. Worthy national pastors and other national church leaders should be considered as equals in the Lord and at times more than equals. If a truly *indigenous* church is to be planted it will require nationals of exceptional Christian character, with firm biblical convictions and God given leadership ability. The time and effort invested by the missionary in the lives of the national leaders can contribute greatly to their development. Fortunate is the missionary that recognizes this. There is no reason for the missionary to be intimidated by the emergence of national leaders. I can say that one of my greatest joys as a missionary church planter has been to have "disciples" not only equal me in the ministry, but surpass me as they have become outstanding national leaders (Philippians 4:1).

God's work done God's way will bring God's blessings. Where He is working an *indigenous* New Testament Baptist church can be established.

As missionaries are sent out by local churches to cross cultural boundaries with the gospel, the priority objective or goal should be to plant and establish viable churches that are able to cultivate a natural appearance and form a New Testament, yet culturally relevant growth pattern.

INTRODUCTION

Defining the Indigenous Church:

The word “indigenous” is a biological term. It is used to describe a plant that thrives in a specific location. The ability of the plant to flourish is directly related to the type of soil in which it is rooted and the specific climate of the location. The metaphorical correspondence between the biological and missiological use of the term is easily seen. The goal of missions should be to plant viable New Testament churches that are able to not only exist but to flourish in the various cultural environments of the world. Indigenous churches reflect a practical and functional autonomy.

“Indigenous churches are generally understood to be churches that are *self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating.*” (“Missiology, An introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions,” edited by Terry, Smith and Anderson, Broadman & Holman Publishers)

“The New Testament church then was first, **self-propagating**; that is, it had within it sufficient vitality so that it could extend throughout the region and neighboring regions by its own efforts. It produced its own workers and the work was spread abroad by the effort of the Christians themselves. Second, it was **self-governing**; that is it was governed by men who were raised up by the Holy Spirit from among the converts of the locality. Third, it was **self-supporting**; it did not depend on foreign money in order to meet the expenses of the work.” (“The Indigenous Church” by Melvin L. Hodges, Gospel Publishing House)

An indigenous church is one that is self-governing. Just as the apostles trained and ordained local leaders (Acts 14:23) to oversee the ministry of the churches they planted, so too modern church planters should train nationals to govern themselves according to the Scripture and the direction of the Holy Spirit. **The indigenous church is also self-propagating.** The churches on the field should be motivated to evangelize the lost, locally, and worldwide. A healthy church will be reproducing itself by continually winning new converts. As the need arises new churches will be

planted. **The indigenous church is self-supporting in that the expenses of the local ministry are met by the tithes and offerings of the local church members.**

We have no evidence in the New Testament that the apostles requested funds from the churches in Jerusalem or Antioch to support the ministry or workers of the churches they established. To the contrary we find them raising funds from the churches they established in Macedonia to assist, not the pastors, but the needy saints in Jerusalem. The churches Paul and others established such as in Philippi actually sent funds to support Paul in his missionary ministry (Philippians 4:14-15). The words of Philippians 4:10-19 were written in the context of "a missionary church planter encouraging a church he planted to continue to give to the work of missions." Those who would claim the promise of Philippians 4:19 would do well to remember that Paul was confident that God would supply their needs because they were giving to missions.

Indigenous vs. American

An indigenous church on a foreign field may not necessarily reflect the pattern or model as found in the average middle class American church. The affluence of Christians in the United States allows many benefits that are simply not practical on many fields of the world. The church planter should be cautious about seeking to impose on foreign churches an American form of Christianity. Not everything about foreign culture is wrong. Not everything American is biblically right. The Scripture should be our standard, our measuring rod for determining what cultural changes are needed, if any.

The indigenous church in a country officially *closed to the* gospel may not require a public meeting place. Persecution may force the believers to meet behind closed doors or underground. These churches do not have the same external form as churches in America but neither did the churches found in the "house churches" in Rome in Paul's day (Romans 16: 10-16).

CHAPTER ONE

WHY ESTABLISH INDIGENOUS CHURCHES?

- A. It is biblical to plant indigenous churches.** Each of the churches established in the first century existed as an autonomous entity with its own elders, leaders, etc. (Acts 14:21-28). There was no hierarchy, no subsidy, and no looking to others to extend the ministry.
- B. It is Christ's will.** In Matthew 16:18 He *promised* to "build His church." The church is His *possession*. He guarantees by His resurrection that the church shall *prevail* in victory against the gates of Hell.
- C. Indigenous churches should be established because:**
1. Christ has not changed **His command** (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20)
 2. The lost are **still condemned** (Luke 19:10; Romans 3:23)
 3. The Gospel has universal power to **convert sinners** (II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 1:16)
- D. The establishment of indigenous churches on the field honors the power of the Holy Ghost and the efficaciousness of the Word of God.** The Holy Spirit is all powerful and capable, through the application of biblical truth of accomplishing in the lives of believers in any and every cultural setting that which He has accomplished in the lives of faithful Christians in the USA. He can transform people of any nationality into dedicated, fruitful believers.
- E. The establishment of indigenous churches is also respectful of the nationals.** We should never consider nationals as inferior or beyond the total transforming power of Christ. There are national Christians that put many American Christians to shame by their commitments to the Lord and the ministry. Many nationals pay a great price to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

- F. There are very real political and social implications that make it wise to plant indigenous churches.** In many parts of the world, especially in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, there is the emergence of a critical issue -- new governments are being established at an alarming rate. With the rise to power of these new governments comes the question, "What is the role of the foreign resident (American missionaries, etc) and is their presence recommendable, justifiable, and advantageous to the new government?" You and I would argue, "Most definitely." Ours is a divine mission. At times these new governments are guided by constitutions that provide for a "state religion." Islam or Catholicism is elevated to the role of the officially recognized religion for all the people of that country. At times the new government depends on these state religions to validate their authority and right to rule. This creates a situation that gives the state religion great influence. This influence may result in the secular government limiting the number of foreign religious workers or even result in their expulsion. If the missionary has not established an indigenous church... what fruit will remain when he leaves?
- G. The establishment of truly indigenous churches adds to the number of churches participating in world evangelization.** National churches should be involved in planting churches. Many of the modern day missionaries are from national churches in under-developed countries. Indigenous churches can join the ranks of the "givers" because they are self-supporting and no longer needful of foreign financial aid.
- H. Indigenous churches draw on the unlimited resources of God (Philippians 4:19) as opposed to those which look to man and his limited resources.** Even the best funded missions organizations have limited resources. The members of indigenous churches learn the joy of giving by faith and seeing God provide through

INTRODUCTION

A church in a tribal village may not have more than a thatched roof hut for a meeting place -- no electric lights, no air conditioning, no Sunday school rooms, no piano or organ, etc. A church in a metropolitan area such as New York City or Tokyo may find the cost of owning a multi-acre church facility, as the ones that are so common in many areas of the USA, prohibitive and impractical.

The biblical goal of the church planting missionary should be to plant churches that are able to prosper in the "cultural soil" where they are located. Churches that require a form of "spiritual hot house" or artificial environment to survive are not *indigenous*. Truly *indigenous* churches do not need the continual influence of foreign leadership or infusion of foreign funds.

If the missionary has done his job well he can "commend the national church to the Lord" and move on to plant another church.

Before proceeding from this point it seems prudent to mention that not all missionaries are led of the Lord to develop the same ministry pattern...starting a church, establishing it and then moving on to start and establish another church. Some missionaries, like BIMBI missionary, Dr. Rick Martin serving in the Philippines, have been led of the Lord to plant one central church on the field and remain as missionary pastor for many years. Men like Dr. Martin have seen the Lord bless their efforts. Through the ministry of the "central church" many hundreds of daughter churches have been planted. The church planter must find God's will in this matter.

"The mission of the church is missions and the mission of missions is church planting" Dr. Ray Thompson

Modern missionaries and local churches alike would do well to remember this fact and concentrate their efforts in starting and establishing new local churches patterned after New Testament principles.

SAMPLE

PAGES

them. National Christians, thus, add to their account in Heaven (Phil 4:17).

- I. **Indigenous churches are a permanent instrument for evangelism and ministry on the fields of the world.** *The presence of indigenous churches diminishes the need for foreign involvement through funds and personnel.*

SAMPLE

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