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Perhaps, on the contrary, Christians are being called to exercise a minority role on the margins of society from positions of weakness alongside others in critical solidarity. God's kingdom is not to be measured solely by the number of churches or even of those who bear the name Christian.

Dr Dunn Wilson concludes that the focus of the training of ministers needs to shift from 'maintenance' to 'mission'. The distinction is a false one unless maintenance refers to a directionless, survival mentality. The danger is of depicting the support and nurture of those who seek faithfully to live out the gospel as being other than mission and of depicting mission as numerical growth and spectacular development alone. Ministers need to be trained to be open to what God is doing in every situation and to be facilitators of others, not those who arrive with a map of the territory and techniques for colonising it. This is the true contextualisation that Christians in 'decolonised' churches are challenging the western church to explore. It calls for ministers who can be imaginative and innovative, who see God's mission as larger than established churches with their traditional patterns and will explore what a Christian presence might mean in every section of society, institution and community. This will take a variety of forms depending on the 'soil' and environment and the One who gives both seed and the mystery of growth and who has been active there long since. And the wheat and the tares grow together so that it is often hard to distinguish them, let alone separate them. If that is what is meant by church planting, count me in.

## Response by DAVID HORRELL

AN attempt 'to consider reflectively the theological principles underlying the concept of church planting' is surely to be welcomed. The Church must reflect carefully, critically, and above all theologically and biblically, upon all areas of her life and practice.

However it must be questioned whether an approach which seeks to establish the 'biblical pedigree' of the two words, 'plant' and 'church', is not in danger of adopting a largely discredited 'word-study' method of biblical study. Biblical resources and theological reflection must, I think, be combined in rather more adequate ways if the selection of terms is not to appear arbitrary, if the biblical sources are to be used with integrity, and if theological principles are truly to inform the discussion. None of the references to planting, for example, actually speaks of a group of people deliberately being moved from one location to another for the purpose of mission. The 'remarkable' oracle concerning Egypt in Isaiah 19 does indeed speak of the Lord making himself known to the Egyptians (v.21), of the witness of an altar and pillar to the Lord (v.19), of God's judgement and salvation of the Egyptians. But it does not speak of God's planting of 'colonies' of Jews there to act as representative and missionary communities; this idea is simply not there. What is remarkable about the oracle is its ending, which asserts that Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will all be blessed by God, and be 'a blessing in the midst of the earth' (vv.23-24). The oracle, if anything, challenges the idea that only a particular people will be the recipients or the source of God's blessing.

The Jewish roots of the early Christian communities are certainly to be stressed, but the choice of the word *ekklēsia* does not in itself declare a

'continuity with Judaism'; for both the word itself and the form of early church organisation also owe much to other models of association present in the Graeco-Roman environment. Paul does not speak of a universal *ekklesiā* – even his reference to 'the whole church' means the gathering of the various congregations in the Corinthian area (Rom 16.23) – and I think it is misleading and theologically unhelpful to speak (at least with reference to Paul) of the local church as an 'incarnation' of the universal Church. The *ekklesiā* is the assembly or congregation of Christians in a particular place (hence Paul's use of the plural form), each congregation, or indeed the church as a whole, may be understood as 'the body of Christ'. Phil 3.20 (and 1.27) uses the language of citizenship, which would indeed have made sense within the context of the Roman empire, but this is not necessarily to say that Christians are to regard themselves as a 'colony'. Certainly their values and lifestyles are to be conformed to the Gospel and not to the world (Phil 1.27; 3.20; Rom 12.2 etc.), but the image of colonisation, it seems to me, is hardly developed either in Paul or in Isaiah.

There is in fact little if any biblical precedent for the idea of deliberately 'planting' a community of believers among non-believers, though this does not mean it may not be a valid strategy for the contemporary Church. In the New Testament churches there were individuals like Paul who travelled around for the purposes of mission and pastoral care (Paul's example alone should be enough to end the idea that there is an opposition between mission and maintenance) but mostly the believers met where they lived. People did move, and when they did so they took their faith with them, but they moved because of persecution (Acts 8.1), imperial edict (Acts 18.2), business or trade, and so on. These reasons for moving became opportunities; wherever they found themselves the early Christians met for worship and were prepared to witness.

Wilson acknowledges briefly the problems with the language of colonialism but proceeds to use the imagery nonetheless. In my view the problems with the imagery are rather more fundamental (*and* theological) than Wilson believes. It reinforces the idea of the church as the sole repository of kingdom values and practice and contributes to a sharp division between the church and the world – seen as 'hostile territory'. To talk of Christian community in this context may reinforce the idea of separation. There is certainly 'sectarian' language used in the New Testament (e.g. 'sons of light . . . not of darkness'; 1 Thess 5.5) but it must surely be questioned whether this is helpful or appropriate language to develop in the contemporary context. I would maintain that Christians are to live in and relate to the various communities of which they are a part, and are not to be a 'sect' or a community of 'expatriates'. They will meet with other Christians for worship, and to develop and share a Christian view of the world which may both affirm and challenge the culture in which they live. Their faith and worship will be a witness, and they will seek to encourage others also to recognise the grace of God in Christ. But they must not be encouraged to believe that they somehow bring God to an area, nor even that the Christian community is a unique location of kingdom values. They should seek rather to discern God in the world, to discover the kingdom already surprisingly and secretly present, wherever people seek justice, mercy and love, and try to serve their neighbours (cf. Matt 7.21-27; 25.31-45). Such a view of the Church's mission in the world could also be undergirded theologically and biblically by beginning with God the creator, redeemer and reconciler, everywhere present and at work in the world. Christians are called to embody, proclaim and discern

the values and practice of the kingdom (though the language of 'kingdom' is not without its problems). But to encourage Christians to view themselves as a 'colony of the kingdom' is in my view to encourage the kind of religious superiority and separatism that Jesus so vehemently condemned.

## Response by GRAHAM HORSLEY

'COLONIES of the Kingdom' provides a welcome theological exposition of Church Planting. Dr Dunn Wilson's observation that much of the church planting literature is overly pragmatic and does not show sufficient theological reflection undoubtedly has a measure of truth in it. However it is also true that church-planting is essentially a practical activity. Speculative theology may be interesting, but it must be applicable in a local Christian community if it is to be truly effective. The following comments on 'Colonies of the Kingdom' seek to explore two of its themes in an unashamedly practical way, whilst attempting to wrestle with some of the theological implications.

The two issues to be considered are: God as the divine planter, and the tension between continuity and novelty.

It is a pity that 'Colonies of the Kingdom' does not explore the idea of the 'Divine Planter' in more detail in New Testament terms. A reading of Acts and the letters of Paul and others gives an unclear picture as to the methodology of planting new churches. Sometimes it seems to be almost accidental,<sup>1</sup> sometimes providential,<sup>2</sup> sometimes a result of human reason and planning,<sup>3</sup> and often a combination of any or all of the above. For instance in Acts 16: 1-15 Paul travels to Macedonia as a result of a vision. In Macedonia he seeks out the principal city, Philippi, and in Philippi he seeks out the place where Jewish worshippers gather to worship – reason and good methodology. Here he meets Lydia, whom God had already prepared to be responsive to the Good News – the divine activity.

This last event is perhaps more important than it might first appear. Throughout Acts, missionaries go to 'hostile' territory and meet people who are already thirsty for the Good News of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> This may be a 'man of peace'<sup>5</sup> who is simply open to the things of God, but the church-planter is greatly helped by finding those people whom the Holy Spirit has already prepared to receive the Good News of Jesus.

Often it seems that these people have an ability to relate cross-culturally. The 'Homogeneous Unit Principle' has been much criticised, but it is difficult to argue against the fact that few people are able to communicate the Good News to people in a different cultural context, whereas most can (although not necessarily will) communicate their faith within their own cultural group. As we seek to understand the Divine activity of church-planting in a diverse cultural setting (such as Britain today), then the recognising and releasing of these people becomes of prime importance.

As more local churches begin to think, pray and plan seriously about establishing new congregations, they may do so for a number of reasons:

1. Church planting is one of the most effective methods of evangelism;
2. There is an obvious unchurched area or social group which research shows will support a worshipping community;