

MINISTERING IN TURKISH CONTEXT: PROPOSING A FIVE-STAGE MODEL FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Enoch Wan and John Mark
(pseudonym of a Christian worker serving in Turkish context)

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is an act of faith to attempt to start churches in a land where there are few followers of Christ and few national churches. Our understanding and passion for evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, and church planting greatly impact the church planting task and yet there are a variety of ways that these concepts are understood. This paper will define these concepts and apply their understanding into the Turkish context followed by a proposed five-stage approach in the church planting process in urban Turkey. Resources for further investigation and relevant issues to church planting will be introduced.

II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING

The following is a brief review of relevant literature focusing on that which help us better understand the biblical church and theological foundation of church planting. The sixty-six books of the Bible provide us theological understanding of God and His purpose, evangelism, discipleship, the church, and church planting. Stuart Murray, in his book *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*, provides an insightful analysis of the theological framework for church planting which he centers on the concepts of the *missio Dei*, the incarnation of the Son, and the kingdom of God.

The *missio Dei*, or mission of God, is something that flows from the very character of God. He is the One who sent His Son to accomplish the purposes that He designed (Murray 2001:39). Stuart says that the incarnation is the focal point of the *missio Dei*. The mission of Jesus in the incarnation is the inspiration for church planting (Murray 2001:42). Stuart states that the kingdom of God was the central theme of Jesus’ teaching and emphasizes that churches need

to properly understand their relationship to the kingdom of God. Churches are agents of the kingdom but not synonymous with the kingdom (Murray 2001:47).

The birth of the church began with the indwelling of believers on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The earliest descriptions of the church were of believers being together in the temple and in houses, breaking bread together, praying, devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, sharing their possessions with those in need, sharing meals, and praising God (Acts 2:42-47).

Del Birkey writes that the house church experience “goes far to explain why there is so much emphasis in the New Testament on family life and interpersonal relationships” (Birkey 2007:65) which leads us to Enoch Wan’s relational realism paradigm.¹ He proposes this as an alternative conceptual model to the critical realism articulated by Paul Hiebert and as being more relevant in relational cultures. Wan writes this about relational realism:

Ontologically, relational realism is defined as the systematic understanding that reality is primarily based on the vertical relationship between God and the created order and secondarily horizontal relationship within the created order.

Epistemologically, relational realism is to be defined as the systematic understanding that God is the absolute Truth and the Perfect Knowledge, and only in relationship to HIM is there the possibility of human knowledge and understanding of truth and reality (Wan 2006).

The emphasis in relational realism is that the created order only exists in relationship to God and “human understanding is best comprehended and experienced in relational networks of God and the created order” (Wan 2006). This is a foundational paradigm in Christian faith and practice (Wan 2008), which greatly influences systematic and practical theologies. Wan contrasts relational realism to the objective and impersonal attitude required of the “scientific” paradigms. Stated in another way, the source of human understanding and being *is* relationship, and the key of Christian doctrine *is* relationship (Wan 2008). Wan highlights the relational nature of the gospel by emphasizing how it begins with God’s grace extended to mankind and requires a faith response back to God (Wan 2010).

The modern house church movement is quick to point out that the early expressions of the church were small groups of people meeting in homes, not in dedicated buildings. Rad Zdero

¹ The “relational realism paradigm” should not be confused with the “relational theology” associated with the emergent church.

emphasizes the spontaneity or unplannedness of the house church meeting in his article “The Nature and Function of the Early House Churches.” Zdero says there are four main characteristics that describe the open format of house church meetings. The meetings are participatory, interactive, spontaneous, and Spirit-led. In “A Survey of the New Testament House Churches,” Birkey writes, “The house church contributed to the experiential understanding of the church’s essence” (Birkey 2007:64). Later he writes that the house church experience “goes far to explain why there is so much emphasis in the New Testament on family life and interpersonal relationships” (Birkey 2007:65).

Tony and Felicity Dale in *The Rabbit and the Elephant* (2009), define the church to be “God’s people coming together in His presence in various ways” or “small multiplying groups of believers” (Dale 2009:9). Essentially they view church as vibrant communities of believers led by God. They refer to this concept as simple church (Dale 2009:10). Like Zdero, they also emphasize the participatory, interactive, spontaneous, and Spirit-led aspects of the house church.

George Patterson says the church is simply a body of believers who do what Jesus commands because they love him (O’Connor 2006:10). John Calvin says the church is “wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution” (quoted in Driscoll & Breshears 2008:52).

J.D. Payne emphasizes the importance of relationships and writes that “The essence of the church comes from the citizens of the kingdom, indwelt and empowered by God, living according to a kingdom ethic that clearly establishes their relationship with God, each other, and the world” (Payne 2009:40). He writes that the church is about relationships with God and other kingdom citizens (Payne 2009:42). The local church is the people of God living as a family in relation to one another (Payne 2009:54).

Daniel Sinclair says a church is a society of believers (Sinclair 2006:27) entered into by faith and baptism whose members meet and are under the leadership, teaching and shepherding of elders (Sinclair 2006:28). Christ’s followers are to be together in community, in unity, and in service to one another as they grow in Him (Sinclair 2006:29).

Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears in their book *Vintage Church* (2008) give us a more detailed definition of church when they write:

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical sacraments of baptism and Communion,

are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy (2008:38).

The house church movement has focused its attention on early church history to explain its call to be the church in homes rather than in institutional buildings. The emphasis in the movement is on realizing the community experienced when a group meets as the church in a house. Rad Zdero in "True Community: Doing Life Together as a House Church" writes,

"The idea of community is inherent in the triune nature of God, where there is a mutual and eternal flow of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This serves as the primary model for us in understanding how we are to relate with one another. We have been designed by God with the deep awareness of our need for connection with others (Zdero 2007:401).

In Ephesians 4:11-16, we learn that God gives spiritual gifts to the church for equipping believers to build up the church. The five gifts listed in verse eleven are referred to as the "five-fold ministry" gifts. The word apostle means someone sent on a mission with authority, prophet refers to one speaking forth the word of God, an evangelist communicates the gospel to non-believers, a pastor is a shepherd who cares for the flock, and a teacher is one who is effectively able to communicate ideas and concepts (Joubert 2007:111). These gifts are given to build the very church that is being planted and therefore need to be exercised accordingly. House church advocates who emphasize the participatory nature of the house church explain that participation in the meetings is one of the main ways these gifts are exercised. George Patterson also states that believers need to have a vital ministry and exercise their God-given gifts (O'Connor 2006:95ff).

Evangelism is the proclamation of the "evangel" or good news of Christ; i.e. that Son of God died as atonement for our sins and rose from the dead to give us new life, thus reconciling us with God and empowering us to be His ambassadors on earth. Proclamation of the gospel is understood to be the beginning of the Great Commission for Jesus commands his disciples to go make more disciples and teach them to observe his commands (Matthew 28:19-20). J.D. Payne understands biblical evangelism to be the making of disciples and teaching obedience (Payne 2009:7). Patterson points out that "evangelism is not simply soul winning but the birth and growth of congregations (O'Connor 2006:238).

III. VARIOUS APPROACHES IN CHURCH PLANTING

In his book, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting*, J.D. Payne understands biblical evangelism to be the making of disciples and teaching obedience (Payne 2009:7) and defines biblical church planting simply as “evangelism that results in churches” (Payne 2009:4). He goes on to explain that our focus is not on creating church planting movements but in developing disciple making movements (Payne 2009:9).

Christian Schwarz published the results of research across thirty-two countries and one-thousand churches. He identifies the eight essential qualities of healthy churches as 1) empowered leadership, 2) gift oriented ministry, 3) passionate spirituality, 4) functional structures, 5) inspiring worship services, 6) holistic small groups, 7) need-oriented evangelism, and 8) loving relationships. If a church reaches a quality index of sixty-five in all quality characteristics, it is almost one-hundred percent certain to grow.

Schwarz also finds six biotic principles, or growth forces,² which describe the biotic potential as key to the eight quality characteristics (Schwarz 1996:61). These biotic principles are interdependence, multiplication, energy transformation, multi-usage, symbiosis, and functionality.

In explaining these terms Schwarz states that interdependent thinking should result in interdependent church structures (Schwarz 1996:66). Not every form of interdependence is healthy. “It is essential to fashion a kind of interdependence that provides for the formation of sub-systems with a potential for ongoing multiplication” (Schwarz 1996:66).

His research found that churches with small groups that had a goal of multiplication by division had a significantly higher quality index. He notes that if a church is organic, its life cycle could culminate in death which is normal for living organisms.

“Where multiplication processes are functioning, straightforward talk about “death” is also permitted. Why should groups or even whole churches not be allowed to die after they have run their course?”(Schwarz 1996:69).

Energy transformation is the biotic principle of taking the energy of a situation and steering it to serve God’s purposes. An example is involving new converts in evangelism. The

² The “growth forces” term was used in a summary of a Natural Church Growth training seminar for a church. <<http://www.skylinechurch.net/pdf/NCD%20Notes%202007.pdf>> 12 October 2010.

multi-usage principle refers to investing energy in a way that has multiple outcomes. Rather than a leader leading a group then also running a separate program for training new leaders, he leads the group with a trainer for on the job training, doing both at the same time. The fruitfulness of symbiotic cooperation is best seen in a gift-oriented approach to ministry. The needs of the congregation and of the individual complement rather than compete with each other. The biotic principle of functionality refers to the idea that organisms serve a function and all living things bear fruit. It is completely legitimate and biblical to ask this question of the church (Schwarz 1996:77).

Mikel Neumann researched churches with home group ministries in five different cultures around the globe; West Africa, India, Russia, Venezuela, and the United States. His personal experiences had shown him that commonalities and differences across cultures existed but he lacked the structured research with which to draw conclusions. *Home Groups for Urban Cultures* is the result of his research to find the commonalities and differences of small group ministry across cultures.

In the explanation of his theoretical framework he discusses network theory and describes formal and informal network structures. A congregational gathering of a church would be considered a formal structure because it has rules for members, designated leaders and purposeful action. An informal structure like a home group has casual rules for membership, if any, and less formal leadership (Neumann 1999:43). He also talks about a person's core network where people have strong ties to one another. It is within this core network that a person's felt needs are expressed and met. Core networks are linked to other core networks by weak ties which serve as communication bridges. New ideas enter a core network via the "weak ties" but a new idea is not necessarily accepted (Neumann 1999:40). This decision power comes from within the core network (Neumann 1999:41).

In the five home group-focused ministries that were researched, eight commonalities found were 1) a clear vision by the church leadership, 2) a structure that provided the means to implement the vision, 3) leadership development for the home group ministry to succeed, 4) applying God's word to life, 5) evangelism to fuel growth, 6) prayer, 7) caring, and 8) worship. Each of these might take on different forms or emphasized in varying degrees according to their cultural context but all were present in the five cultural contexts studied.

A ministry's structure provides the means to implement the vision (61). While the goals come from the vision it is the organizational structure that shows how the goals can be reached. The structure deals with home group ministry on three levels: within the home group, between home groups, and between large group and home groups (Neumann 1999:61). Mikel Neumann points out that biblically there is a connection between the home group and the large group. It is not enough to have only cell or home groups. In the Bible, these groups are found as part of a larger group, a congregation meeting for worship. In the churches he studied, "the large group is extremely important to the vitality of the small group" (Neumann 1999:61). A definition of biblical church must take these both into account.

Neumann found that good leadership is needed for home groups to succeed (Neumann 1999:77).

"It is not outstanding speaking gifts that bring a new home group into existence. Caring and prayer... are the keys to starting new groups. These leaders allowed other people to participate, recognizing that others had gifts that needed to be used" (Neumann 1999:82).

Another item of note is that Neumann's research survey asked people to list three qualities of a good home group leader. Caring, compassionate, sensitivity to people came out as the overall number one category. He also found that each of the churches researched exists in a culture that focuses on the place of worship, yet almost none owned their own building nor is a building their focus.

David Garrison studied church planting movements which he defines as "a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment" (Garrison 1999:8) and found ten universal elements common to these movements. The chart below compares the common characteristics from Garrison with the lists that Schwarz and Neumann devised in their church and small group research. Of course there is overlap and some blurring of categories yet we can see that all three researchers found the following six characteristics whether in the church, the small group, or in the movement: 1) enabled lay leadership, 2) scriptural authority, 3) prayer, 4) evangelism, 5) intentional structures, and 6) caring small groups.

Figure 1 – Comparison of three models of church planting

Schwarz		Neumann		Garrison CPM	
	N/A	0	Clear vision by leaders		N/A
1	Empowering leadership	1	Leadership development	1	Local leadership
				2	Lay leadership
2	Passionate Spirituality	2	Applying God's word	3	Scriptural Authority
				3	Prayer
3	Need oriented evangelism	4	Evangelism	5	Abundant Gospel sowing
				4	Prayer
4	Effective Structures	5	Structures to implement vision	6	Intentional Church planting
5	Inspiring worship	6	Worship	7	Healthy Churches: worship, outreach, discipleship, ministry, fellowship
6	Holistic small groups				
7	Loving relationships				
8	Gift based ministry	7	Caring		
	N/A		N/A	8	Cell/House Churches
	N/A		N/A	9	Churches planting churches
	N/A		N/A	10	Rapid Reproduction

Patrick O'Connor's edited compilation of George Patterson's sixty-eight church planting guidelines demonstrate Patterson's practical methods and how he strongly encourages obedience oriented discipleship as well as apprentice style training. Obedience to the commands of Christ is so important in Patterson's approach that he endorses not training those who will not obey (O'Connor 2006:70), even stating that God prohibits teaching passive hearers (O'Connor 2006:60).

O'Connor's *Reproducible Pastoral Training* is full of useful insights and is a handy tool for church planters. Even though phases or stages of church planting are not mentioned in the book, the division of the sixty-eight guidelines into chapters does suggest five stages: gather new flocks, develop healthy body life, let flocks multiply, train leaders in Jesus' way, and pass on a light baton.

Dick Scoggins has produced a church planting manual, "Planting House Churches in Networks" as well as "Building Effective Church Planting Teams." Scoggins takes care to

distinguish the difference between a church planter and a pastor, between the church planting team and a group of elders. In “Building Effective Church Planting Teams” he emphasizes that church planting team’s task...

“is to plant a reproducing church. Whereas the church has a responsibility to follow up on all interested persons and find ways to win resistant groups in their locality to the gospel, the team is responsible to follow up only on those people through whom a church will likely be planted” (Scoggins 2010:23).

In *A Vision of the Possible*, Daniel Sinclair draws on years of personal experience as a church planter then as a supervisor of church planters to provide one of the most useful resources to date for planting churches in pioneer contexts. He starts by challenging the reader to consider the subject of apostleship as a model for the church planter followed by the importance of working in teams which he refers to as apostolic bands. He gives some practical guidelines for language learning, residency, evangelism, discipleship, and leadership.

Sinclair says there are two kinds of evangelism that directly leads to church planting (Sinclair 2006:119). One of these is friendship evangelism and the other is what he calls “apostolic evangelism” (Sinclair 2006:120). Sinclair provides seventeen helpful pointers to improve the church planter’s friendship evangelism efforts. One of those helpful pointers is to share the gospel within the first thirty minutes of conversation with every new acquaintance. The logic behind this is that sociologists claim that people share almost all that is personally important with another person within the first thirty minutes of total talk time (Sinclair 2006:130). Apostolic evangelism is “exposing many to the gospel to find a few who are responsive” (Sinclair 2006:133). This is different than the typical “mass evangelism” approach in that there are church planters on location to personally follow-up responsive contacts.

Sinclair and Scoggins use the same seven phase model to guide the church planting process.³ This model came into use in 1994 and Sinclair is careful to point out that these phases are not necessarily sequential (Sinclair 2006:55). The seven phases are 1) launching the team, 2) language and culture learning, 3) evangelism, 4) discipling believers, 5) developing the body, 6) empowering leaders, 7) reproduction.

³ Pioneer Church Planting Phases < <http://www.churchplantingphases.com/page.php/id/114>> Online 12 December 2010.

Christar in Turkey developed a church planting strategy in the early 1990s and revised in 2007 that describes a five step church planting process. The steps described in the strategy are 1) Establishing a Presence, 2) Proclaiming, 3) Establishing a Church, 4) Training, and 5) Transition.

SOME KEY CONCEPTS IN CHURCH PLANTING

The following concepts are particularly important for church planting and need special attention.

A. Person of Peace

The person of peace concept comes from Luke chapter 10 in which Jesus sends the seventy out ahead to places he was going to go. When the disciples arrived in a new town they were to look for a “man of peace” who would show them hospitality. Men and women of peace are considered to be honorable, respectable people in the community who open their network to the church planter (Scoggins 2001:43). The person of peace normally offers hospitality before conversion to Christ. He may not ever convert to Christ and could simply act as a gateway into the community (O’Connor 2006:33). A few biblical examples of this are Zacchaeus (Luke 19), Cornelius (Acts 10), and Lydia (Acts 16).

By accepting the messenger of the gospel, the person of peace adds credibility to his message. The messenger is given access to a network and the message is allowed to flow along the lines of natural relationships within the person of peace’s network (O’Connor 2006:33). An acquaintance that is unwilling to introduce the messenger to his friends or family has blocked the messenger’s access to that network and would not be considered a person of peace.

B. Evangelism and Discipleship

Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and will primarily occur by means of a person’s social networks. However, this does not necessarily mean through a primary network, or, what Mikel Neumann refers to as the core network. Often new ideas are introduced into a network through weak social ties rather than through the strong ties of a core network (Neumann 1999:40). In other words, a believer may find a more receptive audience among her casual friends and contacts than from her family.

Mass evangelism methods can provide an opportunity to come in contact with those whose networks have not overlapped with a believer and therefore have not had opportunity to

hear the gospel. The mass evangelism of the internet, concerts, television, radio, or literature distribution can provide contacts to help set up small group evangelism.

Discipleship is teaching people to obey the commands of Christ (O'Connor 2006:55ff). Teaching people to walk with Christ or abide in Christ are similar terms. The difference is that obedience to the commands of Christ is a more tangible definition.

It can be argued that putting faith in Christ is part of the discipleship process. It can also be said that evangelism is incomplete without teaching obedience. Both statements are true and it is acknowledged that evangelism and discipleship are integrally intertwined.

C. Small Groups

Small groups are clusters of two or more people meeting regularly and are the main vehicle for evangelism and discipleship. The makeup and content of the small group will vary depending on the participants and the purpose. A small group formed around a new believer and some of his friends to study the life of Jesus will look different than a small group of women believers meeting for prayer and encouragement. The underlying goal of the small groups is to foster love for Christ and obedience to Him. As a result, small groups will grow or multiply as people are added or new groups are started. New believers and new small groups are the fruit of disciples loving and obeying Christ.

D. The Church

A local church is a group of regenerated people who recognize themselves to be the local body of Christ and intentionally behave as His body through regular fellowship, learning from the Word of God, observing the sacraments, loving one another, and making disciples who do the same. A local church could be a handful of believers meeting in a house or thousands meeting in an arena.

For our church planting purposes, we understand the house church to be a group of believers comprised of a cluster of small groups which meets together regularly for worship, teaching, prayer, and fellowship. The size of the house fellowship is limited by the host's context. Limiting factors include the physical size of the home, the social liberty the host has to

sponsor such a gathering, the availability of the home, and the social propriety of having mixed gender groups or married singles.⁴

The house fellowship understands itself to be a church and is ideally networked together with other churches for fellowship and encouragement. As Neumann points out, this can be very important to the vitality of a small group (Neumann 1999:61).

E. Church Planting

Church planting is the evangelism, discipleship and intentional activity that results in the establishment of a local church. Evangelism and discipleship are vital ministries of a church but in isolation they are not church planting.

F. Leadership Development

For the purposes of this paper we have two categories of leadership development; training for small group leaders and training for elders of the church. Leadership training occurs through a combination of knowledge and application along the lines of a master-apprentice model.

Small group leaders-in-training begin under the tutelage of a more experienced leader who discipled, trains and mentors. Elders-in-training are men who have proven themselves capable in the small group. They also are trained under the guiding of one who discipled and mentors. All elders-in-training should also be small group leaders but not all small group leaders-in-training are being trained as elders.

A leader-in-training in a small group could very well be a young believer who is leading three non-believers in a Bible study of John. He is learning to lead others to faith and into obedience to Christ. This young believer is being helped in this endeavor by a more experienced believer.

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE TURKISH CONTEXT

The following sections place church planting within the Turkish historical, cultural, and ministry context.

⁴ A “married single” is a married person who attends without the spouse. In Turkey, it could be considered socially suspect for a married single to participate in a mixed gender home gathering.

A. Historical Context⁵

The nomadic Turkish tribes came out of the Central Asian steppes into Asia Minor beginning in the eleventh century. Many were organized under the Selcuk tribe which expanded its borders over much of Anatolia and the Middle East in a relatively short time at the expense of the Byzantine Empire. The Selcuk rulers restricted pilgrim travel to the Holy Land which sparked the era of the crusades. The Mongol invaders put an end to the Selcuk Empire in the thirteenth century which then opened the door for the rise of the Ottomans, a small Turkish clan on the western frontier with the contracting Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman tribe became an empire which existed for five hundred years. Its power and influence dominated North Africa and the Middle East for the better part of three hundred years. Nevertheless, after years of decline, this empire ended at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Republic of Turkey was formed out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire which had been devastated by its alliance with the Central Powers during World War I.

Modern Turks are very proud of their rich Turkish history. They attribute the decline of the Ottoman Empire to three main factors. First, was to the incompetence and corruption of the imperial court, specifically the sultans. Second, was the interference of foreign powers who were instrumental in inciting Ottoman subjects to rebel against the empire because they were jealous of her power. The examples given of this recurring problem are the Greeks, the Arabs, the Serbs, and the Armenians. Turks claim that the third main factor contributing to the decline of the Ottoman Empire was the fickle loyalty of Ottoman subjects who treacherously rebelled against their benevolent Ottoman overlords.

The nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was in a tumultuous period of contraction and reform. As its power and influence waned, the Empire found itself in between British, French, and Russian rivalries and interests (Salt 2002:8). It was during this period that the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) was sending their missionaries into Ottoman lands. Their mission was to evangelize the nominal Christian populations and influence the Muslims through their teaching. From their letters we learn that the missionaries were opposed to Islam and spoke of occupying enemy territory (Salt 2002:3). However, since the missionaries primarily worked among the traditional eastern churches, mainly Armenian, their

⁵ This section was taken from a paper by this author titled "Internet Outreach in an Urban District in Turkey" December 2007 written for DIS721.

biggest opponents turned out to be the Armenian clergy who ordered people not to interact with the missionaries or be ostracized from the community.

The Ottoman government saw that the missionaries worked with Christian Ottoman subjects and made little distinction between Protestant and Armenian communities. European governments actively pressured the Ottoman government to grant special rights to their citizens, and eventually, Christian subjects also benefited from these privileges as if they too were foreign citizens (Zurcher 1998:13). The British even sought to set up independent administrative region in six eastern Anatolian provinces, separated by ethno-religious distinctions (Kurds, Turks, Armenians) (Salt 2). The ethnic revolutionary groups saw the European sympathies toward their people and sought to use this to their advantage. The American missionaries, because of their education and proclamation ministries and because of their identification with the Armenians were suspected of being pawns if not outright agents of foreign governments seeking to wrest land from the Empire. Quoting Andrew Terrell the U.S. Minister Plenipotentiary at Istanbul during this period “it certainly seemed to be the case that Ottoman ministers and Muslims alike believed that ‘the revolutionary societies in and out of Turkey had their origin in missionary instruction and that of all foreigners ours are the most dangerous to social order’” (Salt 8).

The ABCFM’s most active years were from 1820 until 1920 during which there were hundreds of missionaries and tens of thousands of people who were impacted by their ministries. Yet in the eyes of the government and majority religion, the missionaries were often seen to have similar motives as the European powers which sought the “domination and control of minds as well as territory and resources” (Salt 12). They did indeed bring education to the uneducated and taught free thought which itself can be considered dangerous by those in authority. It is thought that the ABCFM’s educational legacy is secular ideas rather than religious truths.

During the end of the Ottoman period at the beginning of the 20th century, nearly one third of the population of what is now Turkey, had a Christian heritage dating back to the early centuries of Christianity. However, due to the chaos of the collapsing Ottoman Empire and population upheavals brought on by massacre, exile, and population exchanges, the ethnic Christian population was devastated and became a small percentage of the total population by the time the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923. The ethnic Christian population has continued to dwindle through immigration throughout the 20th century.

Today's Republic of Turkey literally bridges Asia and Europe, stretching from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria in the east to Bulgaria, Greece and the Aegean Sea in the west. Turkey has a population of over 70 million which is considered to be 99% Muslim. The Republic has a constitution that explicitly articulates a citizen's freedom of religion and conscience. The Republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, established a secular government and abolished the Caliphate which had been in Ottoman hands since 1517. Yet to Ataturk, secularism wasn't an issue of separation of state and religion as much as it was an issue of control. In other words, does the religious authority control the state or does the state control the religious authority? Thus, in modern Turkey today, there is a Ministry of Religious Affairs through which all Islamic clergy are hired and accountable. Other recognized religions include Judaism and the traditional ethnic versions of Turkey's small minorities; e.g. Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Syrian. Other faiths and sects that are outside of Sunni Islam or not officially recognized are often viewed as unsanctioned, illegitimate, or even non-existent by the state.

B. Cultural Context⁶

A Turkish worldview's major themes are group-person, blessing and curse, Islam, animism, fear, and honor. These worldview themes form the basis for the presuppositions Turks have about the world about them. Turkish culture is very relational and puts a high value on primary social groups. These groups vary widely in tolerating diverse thought, opinion, and behavior by its members. When a member is perceived to step outside the tolerated boundaries, the group will often seek to bring the wayward member back within the accepted zone. Rejection by a primary group brings on great social and emotional hardship. Church planting and evangelism strategies need to be sensitive to a Turk's deep need for belongingness within their group, helping them stand firm with a minority view inside their group, and transition to a believing community that can become their primary group.

Using Geert Hofstede's cultural taxonomy, a comparison of Turkish culture to a generalized North American culture shows that Turkish culture has a higher power distance between social roles than that found in North America. This means that it is expected that power is distributed unequally among members of the society. For a Turk, the power distance helps

⁶ This section was taken from a paper by the author titled "A Turkish Worldview Analysis: A Missiological Approach" December 2009 written for DIS780IS.

people understand appropriate behavior in context. North American culture seeks to minimize power distance which is disconcerting for those expecting defined roles and distance. Turkish culture is more collectivistic while North American culture is defined by its individualism. Turks care and are concerned about the views and values of their group(s). Their identity is wrapped up in their group and even defined by the group. Members of Turkish culture are higher on the uncertainty avoidance scale than North Americans. This means they are more likely to feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations (Hofstede 2001:113). They can say that *different* is dangerous, while North Americans might say that *different* is interesting.

One of the challenges of upholding unique minority values within a society is that each group defines honorable conduct according to its own set of values and beliefs. Some of these values overlap but they can also clash. Among Muslims, changing one's allegiance away from their prophet and book to another belief system is very dishonorable to one's self and family. In a similar vein, a way of honoring one's parents is to follow in their path or the path they chose for you. A follower of Christ must either accept the disdain of the Muslim community or negotiate his commitments and appearances so as to not be perceived as having abandoned a deeply held value of the community. The Christian community must develop strategies to keep themselves sensitive to their own Christ-centered definitions of the honorable while distancing themselves from non-Christian judgments on their values (deSilva 2000:39).

Turks today actively seek blessing in many ways and forms. Some may understand their activities as actually provoking a blessing, while others may see themselves as positioning themselves to receive blessing. Some of the common methods for receiving blessing are obedience to the rituals of orthodox Islam, performing acts of charity, visiting a sacred place, fulfilling a vow, beseeching a saint, obeying the instructions of a holy man, and helping deceased family members by reciting Quran verses and doing good works in their name. For many, the ideal is heartfelt spontaneous acts of charity and careful obedience to God's laws which result in God's blessing and protection.

Orthodox Islam believes in the oneness of God, the prophets, the Holy Books, angels and jinn, and Final Judgment. Its cosmology is strongly monotheistic and believes in God who created all things. God communicates with humanity through his prophets by means of his angels. Jinn are creatures created from fire to test mankind. The four Holy Books of Islam are the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, and the Quran. Each book was brought down by the angel Gabriel

and dictated to a prophet. Another revelation came when the preceding book had been ignored or changed. Each successive book replaced the previous one rather than complement or complete it. Muhammad is the final prophet and the Quran is the final revelation from God. There will be a final judgment brought in by Jesus and Muhammad when everyone will realize Islam is the true faith. Everyone will be judged by their works. All will be penalized for their sins. Those who believed in Islam and did good works will offset their sin in the judgment.

Fatalism is a belief in a preordained order of the world that has been determined by an impersonal force, be it natural or supernatural. In modern Turkey there are many ways that people refer to the concept of fate. Some of the most common terms are “God willing” (*insallah*), “it is destiny” or “it is fate” (*nasip, kismet, kader, alinyazisi*) which are used in response to making future plans or the failure of a plan. Fate is impersonal and removes the idea of mind and purpose. If there is an impersonal God behind all things, then His purpose cannot be known. Those who hold a fatalistic attitude believe that they are what they are and that they cannot fight against fate. Orthodox Islam itself is fatalistic and reinforces this idea of fate. Extreme fatalistic views among Turks excuse immoral and criminal behavior as being “appointed by God.” Fatalism can make some passive regarding their daily activities.

In Turkish thinking, there is “this world” and the “other world,” which is where heaven and hell exist. Turks believe there are beings coexisting with them in a surrounding unseen aspect of “this world.” Their cosmology incorporates pre-Islamic beliefs under an Islamic covering. Thus Muslim prayers are said for the dead and used in ceremonies to bring rain. Quranic verses are used at the graves of holy men which have become shrines where people seek blessings from the saint. A plethora of unseen beings have become known by the Quranic word *jinn*. Fortunetelling is sought after by using a veneer of Islamic terminology. Quranic verses are used as magic spells which provide a means to manipulate a desired outcome like cursing an opponent or seeking protection from unseen powers. Magic is also used to appropriate a blessing or to bind a relationship. Turkish Muslims, who are aware of orthodox Islamic teaching, speak against many of the folk beliefs and practices of other Turks, yet they remain common.

In Turkish folk belief, the term *jinn* has become a generic category for many supernatural beings. Fairies, ogres, trolls, dwarfs and giants are now types of *jinn*. *Jinn* can take on human and animal form. *Jinn* have their own society, can marry one another and have children (Duvarci

132). Jinn can even inter-marry with humans and have children. It is believed that jinn directly or indirectly interact with people (Cobanoglu 2003:83).

There are two categories of jinn in Turkish culture; one group of jinn has accepted Islam and they behave well towards Muslims. Those jinn that are not Muslims are called “satan” and these try to pull people off God’s path, harass them, and penalize them. In Islam, it is thought jinn are created from fire, male and female, with personality, and able to be more exalted than mankind or angels. However, *Iblis* who is the father of the *jinn*, rejected God’s command to bow before Adam which resulted in the jinn becoming a condemned group (Cobanoglu 2003:83).

Saints, holy or blessed people are able to help the living after they die. Their power or their blessing can be received by making a request at their tomb, by praying to them directly, or by obeying something they ordered by tradition or in a dream. Often this takes the form of a vow and sacrifice to this saint. A prominent saint known as *Hizir* has a corpus of belief that surrounds him. He is immortal because he drank from the eternal waters in paradise. He is known for helping those in time of need and testing people’s intentions in order to bless those who are pure.

Holy objects or places are physical objects that have the power of blessing. A holy place could be a tomb to an unknown person or to a saint. A holy place could be a mountain, a high place, a tree, a spring, or a river. A holy object could be a stone, an amulet, a necklace, a bead, or a bone.

According to folk beliefs, the dead are with the living for a period of time after they die. Various activities by the living can affect the dead. There are certain times when the dead are most in need of help from the living. During these times, food is given to and on behalf of the dead. Prayers are said for the dead. Works of charity are done in the name of the dead. All of this is to ease their suffering on their way to heavenly bliss.

Dreams and fortunetelling provide glimpses into the realms of secret knowledge. Saints can communicate through dreams to warn and correct people. Dreams can foretell the future. Fortunetelling helps one know what will happen or find something that has been lost. *Hodjas* (religious teachers) are recognized to be able to manipulate the powers of blessing and curse. Their prayers and curses have been proven to be effective on behalf of the petitioner.

For further reading on folk Islam Rick Love’s *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God* is highly recommended. On the topic of shame and honor, David deSilva’s insights in *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity* are very helpful and applicable.

C. Ministry Context⁷

In the 1960s, Western Christian workers began a variety of evangelistic outreaches into several of Turkey's metropolitan cities. In the mid-1980s, there were under 100 national believers and 200 expatriate Christian workers. In 1995, there were said to be 500 Turkish believers and about as many expatriate workers. By 2010, these numbers have increased to 3,500 nationals and 1,000 expatriate workers. Yet, Turkey still remains one of the largest unevangelized countries of the world, with roughly 1 evangelical Christian per 25,000 people.⁸

The Republic of Turkey does not issue missionary visas. A missionary is generally viewed as a religious propagandist who comes to deceive the young, naïve, and needy. Missionaries are thought to offer money, jobs, and wives as tactics for proselytizing. Missionaries are supposedly employees or agents of foreign governments who come to spread the influence of imperialistic Western culture.⁹ Discussion in the press about modern missionaries, their motives and their activities, often refer back to the missionaries of nineteenth century Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Anne Poorta summarizes the societal attitude toward Christians in general and missionaries in particular when she writes:

A nearly ubiquitous feature of Turkish society is the amount of conspiracy theories and distrust directed towards Christians and the Western world in general. These conspiracy theories are largely shaped by the Turkish media. The Turkish public in general lacks in depth knowledge of Christianity and the West. Entrenched in society is a strong suspicion towards the West, which is perceived as homogeneously Christian. Christianity is seen as a political force with hegemonic aspirations, rather than only as a religious conviction (8).

When people encounter what they perceive as a missionary or missionary activity, their heads are filled with notions of foreign government involvement and personal opportunity for money or employment.

⁷ This section was taken from a paper by this author titled "Internet Outreach in an Urban District in Turkey" December 2007 written for DIS721.

⁸ LAC (Leadership Advisory Council), "Silas 2009 Survey Statistical Report," E-mail to the author, 25 Mar 2010.

⁹ Tarik Isik and Ismail Saymaz, "Both Rightists and Leftists are Sounding the Missionary Alarm: Ten Thousand Have Become Christians, Turkey is Afraid," 20 Apr 2007. Online 12 Dec 2010.

<<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=218964>>.

¹⁰ Gurkan Oztan, "Xenophobia and Missionary Work in Turkey,"

<<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=219435&tarih=26/04/2007>> 26 Apr 2007. Online 12 Dec 2010.

Expatriate Christian work¹¹ in Turkey today is varied. Work permits can be received by working for an established company, a school, or some sort of recognized institution. Educational and extended tourist visas are also granted on a case by case basis. Many Christian workers feel that it is important to develop a credible non-missionary identity within the culture. Some do this around a professional role rather than try to re-educate people with a biblical definition of a missionary.

A cursory assessment of Turkish Muslim-background believers (MBB) indicates the majority of them gained information about the gospel through means of mass media literature; that is, newspaper advertisements, scripture distribution, or the internet. As a result, they eventually received a personal contact by a believer. A disproportionate number of Turkish MBBs come from a heterodox Islamic group known as the Alevi. The Alevis' openness to the gospel is attributed to their sub-culture which is less conservative in its outlook to the world, more accommodating to different ideas, and has been persecuted by mainstream Sunni Islam for generations. Some claim that Alevi beliefs are a syncretism of Islam, shamanism, and Christianity (Clarke 1999:13-14).

V. PROPOSAL: A FIVE-STAGE APPROACH IN TURKISH CONTEXT

Church planting is simple in concept but difficult in application. Starting a “group of believers who meet together regularly under the leadership, teaching, and shepherding of elders” (Sinclair 2006:29) sounds simple, but getting there is not. I will cautiously put forward the stages of church planting in a pioneer context. However, these stages do not mean to communicate that church planting is sequential or linear. It is not. This is simply a tool to help understand the general process one might go through in starting a church in a pioneer context in Turkey. Some of these stages could take years, others might be passed through quickly. Many will be, and should be, done simultaneously. Stages will overlap and activities of previous stages should continue as part of the ongoing ministry of the body. Perhaps a better conceptual model would be to have each stage representing a circle of activity. The subsequent stage or circle is

¹¹ Due to the deeply entrenched misconceptions about missionaries, I will refer to modern missionaries as Christian workers.

smaller yet within the previous one to emphasize that many of the previous activities continue but their success has created a new circle of activity as well.

Assumptions regarding the following church planting stages:

- a) This is a pioneer context where there are very few if any followers of Christ. As a result there is not a larger Christian community from which to draw spiritual, emotional, and material resources.
- b) The pioneer context is likely to have mild to severe hostility towards evangelism and church planting.
- c) In a pioneer context, it is usually better to work in teams rather than alone.
- d) Team members have already attained acceptable functionality in the language and culture. For most expatriates this takes at least two years of full time effort.
- e) The team members develop and maintain a vital relationship with the Lord through prayer, study of His word, and loving obedience to His commands. The team looks to Him for wisdom and guidance in all that it does.

A. Stage 1: Going

Preparing and placing oneself in order to proclaim the gospel

Planting a church requires some sort of direction from the Lord that answers the question of who, where, and when. A target area needs to be chosen. Some semblance of a strategy and teammates needs to be formed. Even if itinerate, a physical presence needs to be established.

Once in the target community, individual teammates seek to establish themselves as respectable people. One does this by showing love, mercy, honor, and respect in culturally appropriate ways. Teammates should have honest, credible, and respectable responses to questions regarding their identity and purpose for being there. Although they should never hide their Christian identity, they need to be discerning about the information they give concerning their church planting goals and strategies.

“Going” activities place the team in position to begin planting the church. Positioning oneself within the community is an ongoing task. The church planter is continually placing herself among the lost, cultivating relationships and looking for seekers. Placing oneself within the target community helps provide seekers access to the church planter.

Even after being in the same city for years, church planters can still position themselves among new groups by moving an office or home to a new building, getting involved in the school parent association, joining a health club, or frequenting a different tea house.

B. Stage 2: Sowing

Evangelism with individuals and networks through many means and methods

Church planters need to be involved in all kinds of evangelism directed at their target community. Church planting evangelism comes in two general categories; friendship and cp-mass evangelism. A church planting team should be involved with both forms.

The gospel will be shared with friends and hopefully within the networks of friends. The evangelist is always looking for the person of peace who opens up his network to the messenger of the gospel. There will be opportunities to proclaim the gospel with acquaintances with whom you are friendly but who are not necessarily close friends. Friendship evangelism means sharing the gospel of Christ face to face with those whom you know, whether considered friends or acquaintances. The evangelist should seek to share the gospel within the first thirty minutes of talk time with a new acquaintance (Sinclair 2006:130).

Cp-mass evangelism is evangelism that connects mass evangelistic efforts to face to face contact with church planters. David Garrison refers to this as “response filtering” (Garrison 2010:35). Daniel Sinclair calls it apostolic evangelism (Sinclair 2006:133). Examples of cp-mass evangelism are national level evangelistic campaigns or media broadcasts that allow personal follow-up of contacts by the church planters, web sites that produce seekers who will meet with someone, special campaigns for Christian books that produce people who want to talk about Christianity, and literature distribution that connects the church planter to someone who wants to know more about the gospel. Mass evangelistic efforts by themselves are much less effective if the seeker does not have personal contact with a believer who can help lead them to Christ. Church planters should network with the mass evangelism ministries in order to follow-up on local contacts in the target community.

The team as a whole should be involved in different means and methods of evangelism. However, team members may specialize in certain types of evangelism based on their gifts and personality.

C. Stage 3: Cultivating

Discipling believers individually and in small groups

A sprout needs to be cultivated in order to grow. Discipleship is learning to walk in obedience to Christ and is done through learning and applying God's word to daily life. The discipler need to focus on helping the disciple learn to walk in humble obedience to Christ out of love for Him rather than out of religious obligation.

Discipleship occurs in many ways but should result in a life being transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship occurs one on one and in small groups. The disciple needs people in order to obey and practice the commands of Christ. As appropriate, the church planter will try to get believers together. Sometimes they will be strangers to one another and will need to work through initial issues of trust and transparency. Sometimes the disciples will have a history or be related to one another which will present other issues to work through. Social and gender issues will need to be carefully considered as team members try to bring diverse people together for discipleship.

Part of the discipleship process is for the believer to be actively involved in evangelism. The believer will pray for the salvation of unsaved family and friends. He will seek to share the gospel with them and engage them in Bible study. As he exhibits his walk with Christ, studies the Bible and responds to objections or questions, the disciple grows in his own faith and devotion to Christ.

D. Stage 4: Gathering

Bringing individuals and small groups together

Believers meet together to be the body of Christ. The groups of disciples come together to meet in someone's house as the church. A clear articulation of a biblical church is very important throughout these stages. The church planter must confront the cultural misconception of a church being a place or building. The time may come that the gathered believers decide to meet outside of a home but this should be done to complement sound theology and thoughtful strategy rather than driven by social pressure or misconception.

A sense of community identity needs to be developed without losing the importance of the small groups and personal discipleship. Leaders and potential leaders must be actively involved in discipleship and evangelism as they set the tone for the group.

The six common characteristics in the lists from Schwarz, Neumann, and Garrison are a useful guide to help develop the church's community. These characteristics are 1) enabled lay leadership, 2) scriptural authority, 3) prayer, 4) evangelism, 5) intentional structures, and 6) caring small groups.

This group of believers is seeking to be knit together as the body of Christ with each person actively exercising spiritual gifts. This group is attempting to become one of the primary social networks for each believer. They are becoming an extended family of faith, whose Christ-centered values and purposes deeply influence each member.

E. Stage 5: Empowering

Enabling believers to minister and lead

Enabling believers to minister should begin from the first time he hears the gospel, in that he shares what he is learning with his circle of friends. As a new believer, he prays for and shares the gospel with people, responding to their questions and objections. As he obeys Christ, he also has opportunity to teach others to obey and follow Christ like he has. Those with the qualities of elder will have additional opportunities to lead in small groups and in larger meetings.

The church planters intentionally train, enable and mentor potential leaders. A balance needs to be found between challenging believers to lead while not allowing them to be overwhelmed. The goal is to train and disciple men who can shepherd the flock after the church planters leave.

Church planters, by nature, have a temporary assignment and will eventually depart. They are not elders or pastors even though they may fulfill some of these functions. They need to step back and allow those God has provided to lead the church. An ongoing relationship of coaching and mentoring should be maintained as the church planting team moves on to other tasks. It is quite possible that a relocation of the church planters' homes is required in order to keep the necessary distance from the church and its members. In a relational culture, physical proximity without personal involvement can communicate a broken relationship.

VI. CONCLUSION

Church planting is comparable to farming. A field is chosen, the ground is cultivated, the seed is planted, and watered. But even the best farmer cannot cause the seed to germinate. When they do sprout, the farmer responds to the shoots by caring and providing for them. He can protect them from competing weeds or trampling animals. He tries to save them from freezing in the cold or burning under a blazing sun. But he still cannot make them grow, he cannot make them strong, nor can he cause them to reproduce.

Church planters can do many things to prepare themselves and prepare the field. They can help and protect sprouts in many ways. But the faith that germinates the seed of the gospel is out of the church planters hands. Sometimes, in a direct connection to a church planter's activities, a person becomes a follower of Christ. Other times, *in spite of* what the church planter does, a person becomes a follower of Christ. Church planters must approach the task with great humility and faith as they look to the Lord of the harvest for the increase.

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